

# How to be Heavenly

Philippians 3.

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## Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

What was the power to the converts of early days to be heavenly? It is one thing to see what the heavenly calling is, and another to know the spring of power that makes a people heavenly. We looked at three things last time — the transfer of the person of Christ from the midst of His disciples to heaven; the coming down of the Holy Ghost; the eternal power of God taking possession of their hearts; and the mystery, or what came out in consequence of the martyrdom of Stephen. The twelve had had the personal experience of what Christ was for three years and a half of intimacy. All that time their thoughts were set on His taking the place of King on earth, and even after His resurrection their thoughts went on beating round that same idea. He was with them forty days as a risen Man, His thoughts flowing out according to God's plans. Then they saw Him go up, but even then they did not know that He would not return at that time to Jerusalem to reign, for God meant to make the people one more offer. But He was gone! The magnet that had drawn their hearts had gone off to heaven, and it was impossible not to feel, in thought and affection, that heaven was the scene for them. When He was on earth, Peter, James and John could not, ought not, to have had their thoughts in heaven where their Lord was not. He was to be the centre of their hearts, and their thoughts and affections were to follow Him. That lies at the bottom of the question — How am I to get heavenly? Get firm hold of the fact that Christ has gone up into heaven, and has not come back. Aye, Christ is gone into heaven, and I can afford to be discovering whatever in me is not like Him. Do not say, "There is no hope, now that things are so low and worldly everywhere," or I shall think you do not love Christ. What do you possess if you have not Christ? Where have you got Him? In heaven. Look to it, that whatever in you is inconsistent with Him there is judged.

The Holy Ghost is the power in the children of God. He is called the Spirit of God. All power is centred in Him as such. He is called also the Spirit of Christ, and as such the expression of His mind and ways. Do you say, "My leanness, my leanness"? Why do you expect anything but leanness and weakness in yourself? But the Spirit of God has come down to you from Christ; and He has brought power and the mind of Christ down into you. Samson, blind, standing between the pillars, might have said, "Yes, I have sinned against the God of Israel, and therefore is judgment come on me; but yet the strength of the living God is with me, and He will vindicate Himself." There was the Nazarite vow, and a vow recorded before, and by God; and it was such a vow as could not be broken on the one side any more than on the other. If the locks were shorn off, his strength, could not remain on the one hand; and on the other, it could not be that when they grew again it should not return.

The living and eternal God showed forth more grace to the Marys, the Elizabeths, the Simeons, and the Annas than when He came in promise to a David. The people that walked with God in a cloudy and dark day had His strength with them; and they are ever more marked from contrast with the rest. Take Daniel as an instance: all the wisdom of the court found with a captive Hebrew. If you have not the Holy Ghost, you are not a Christian; but if you have Him, you know the power of God in yourself, and you must then not speak of your weakness.

Stephen saw the Lord as the Son of man. The first effect of the glory on Saul of Tarsus was to enable him to preach the Son of God. The epistle to the Hebrews is the opening out of the scene of Stephen's martyrdom. That might have been the vignette to illustrate Hebrews. We do not get the apostle's mind occupied with what Christ had been down here. There were a certain number of believing Hebrews who were letting the faith slip, and he is bidding them, "Look up, and there you will see a Person in whom all the things you want are secured to you," and all the things given them are contrasted with the tabernacle, etc. In chap. 1 it is "that holy thing which shall be born of thee" — a series of the highest glories of Christ.

Christians do not feel the solemnity of the subject that they are robbing God of His glory. The thought "I want peace," will not give solemnity like, "How dare I question what Christ has done?" Levity does not become us in the presence of the Son of man in heaven. God has rolled the curtain right back, and shown us what is in heaven. His Son having made purgation, sat down there. (Heb. 3) Nothing is lost when Christ is Head of the house; but He outshines and pales all the rest, though fulfilling all in Himself. (Heb. 4) There is a solemn word which I should like to see put home on all our hearts. To Israel it was one thing to leave Egypt, and another for that generation to fall in the wilderness. We cannot get through the place without God, and we do not want to do without Him. God knows how, not only to show bright visions of glory, but to bring the heart of a man into that position where nothing but Abba will do for him down here, as well as up there. It is not merely that you must go through the wilderness, but that God has so formed it that man may have the opportunity of saying deliberately, "I will have nothing but from God and Christ." He brings us into circumstances in which He is our Servant. The word of God searches you, and will tear everything open. If you give yourself credit for the least bit of will or power, you will go down from that point.

What sort of hearts does the Lord find when He reads yours and mine? Will He see that all the springs of evil are judged? Will He turn away? No; but He will bring in His own deepest experience to bear on our weakness, as He did, in Rev. 1, with John, who fell at His feet as dead. Christ looks at the dirtiest thing He can find — the soiled heart of a poor sinner, and makes it fit for the presence of God. There is nothing between you and God now, any more than between God and Christ. Take care what you are about as to eternal realities. It is in heaven your portion is; take care your interests are eternal now. Look at Paul, and see if you are like him in this respect.