

## In Heaven

Rev. 4; 2 Cor. 12.

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There are only two men, mortal men, who have been in heaven since the day of Pentecost. Paul was caught up to the third heaven, and the other was John. There is much instruction and profit to be drawn from the two accounts. In Rev. 2, 3 we have the messages sent to the churches from the Son of man, who appears in chap. 1. Then we find John invited up to heaven; and he saw the One who sat on the throne, the Lord God Almighty. He had a reserved book in His hand; and the challenge is sent out, "Who is worthy?" None was found; John weeps; the Lord takes the book, and worship immediately begins; this peculiar glory that is found in the Lord cannot be passed by, nothing is kept back from Him. He has a right and title to all the secrets of God. What is in the book when the seal is open? A certain governmental dealing is going on from the throne above, where the Lord is seen to be checking and overruling everything on earth; where Satan is acting in every varied form; where the flesh is rampant, and man in all his wickedness is developed. John is thus allowed to see what is going on on the earth. All sorts of horrid wickedness meet his eye; but he sees it all under the governmental power of God and the Lamb. The scene gives a lesson in connection with evil; we see the repose of the heart of the Christian amid it all; let everything else be shaken, such is the state of acceptance in which the believer now stands, that God can throw the gates of heaven open and bring us into His presence, even in our mortal bodies; as with John, our standing is in such complete acceptance in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may be weak, the weakness is allowed to come out. John weeps when he sees the great master of wickedness at work; but he sees too that all is kept in check by Him who is above it all: in the midst of this ocean of wickedness he is in repose. Let the devil, let the flesh, do their worst, God is above it.

This is an important principle for the present time. Everything seems to be loosening. There is not a single ecclesiastical body on the earth but admits the need of reform, whether it be the Pope himself, the Greek church, etc. They are like barrels without hoops, no strength. If we look around we see many crowned heads without kingdoms. Such are the principles at work that the manifestation of any character of wickedness should not astonish us; we should be prepared for anything. But it is not to be with us, "Lo here, or to there;" like John, we are to look at it all in the counsel of God in connection with His government. All we have to do is to leave all alone, all with God; to say to one another, We are clean out of the world, we belong not to it. If you are not clean out of the world, you are in a wrong place. All you have to do is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. John is thus privileged in seeing the glory of the Lamb; he is occupied with the Lamb, he is at home in His presence. All that Christians have to do is to take care they are in the place the Lord held when He was on earth — the place of rejection. Do we know this place? An individual with whom I was speaking the other day said, "I have just discovered that the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected on earth, and that I have not held this place; do not let me hear anything but what would lead me to this place." Let us ask one another, Are we holding the place of the rejected One down here?

Paul was caught up to heaven. (2 Cor. 12.) A different thing is taught here; it is more heart-searching. What is the principle by which Paul is to regulate himself in passing through the wilderness, and doing the work the Lord Jesus had given him to do? We get, too, here blessed instruction as to the intermediate state. Paul was perfectly conscious of the presence of the Lord; whether in or out of the

body, he could not tell. When up there, he sees and hears most blessed things; but he is not allowed to speak of them. How often are passages which speak of peculiarity of communion passed by; and when this deep communion is spoken of, it seems some strange thing to them. If I were to give the character of my conversion, I should expect to see faces, the expression of which tells me they know what it is I am speaking of. When we speak about dealing with God, whether about ourselves or fetching out of heaven what others are needing for them, I should look for the faces of others to be saying, "I know what that is."

The things of God need to be tasted to be understood. When the Lord looked into the heart of Saul of Tarsus, he could not question that there was a Man in heaven who knew all about him, and who was occupied with him. (v. 7.) Paul saw the glory of the Lord, and he saw what belonged exclusively to the Lord. He came down; but was this bright light the portion that belonged to him? No; the portion was the love of the heart of the Lord acting in His perfect wisdom for him. He had been up in the third heaven. The thought of the Lord was about His servant; of the danger he was exposed to through these revelations; that he had a law of sin in his members which needed *crippling*; and the Lord showed out the love of His heart in *crippling* His servant. The Lord kept all in His control — all in His own hand. Satan could not touch a hair of his head without His permission, just as we see in the case of Job. All self-complacency was spoiled in Paul. It was not, I am the man who has been where no one else has been; I have seen and heard unutterable things. Who are you, Paul? A poor cripple, with a thorn in my flesh. I am weakness itself.

The Lord thus gave Paul the sense that, while he remained down here, he could not go through anything without the everlasting arms underneath him. You must have such a sense of your weakness, Paul, that you cannot go forward in *anything* unless my arm is underneath you, my strength thus made perfect in weakness. This was a very blessed character of love towards His servant. We are never called to go to warfare at our own charges; but it is ours to know there is One close to us whose arm will support us. What a contrast! On the one hand, a man taken up to Paradise; on the other, the thorn in the flesh, drawn into the flesh, perfect weakness; Christ in heaven, Satan down here; glory up there, flesh put to torture down here.

There was another thing that was humbling to Paul; he puts himself boldly forward, and says, "Take away this thorn, take away this thorn, take away this thorn; I know thou art the giver; I know thou hast an ear, and a heart to care; take away this thorn." There was no answer save, "No; *my grace is sufficient for thee.*" Who sent the thorn? The Lord Himself. Who limited too what Satan was to do with the thorn? The Lord Himself. Who wants to direct the Lord, to show God what He is to do? Paul. I can't hear thee; my grace is sufficient for thee. I can't take away something of *yours*, but I will give thee something of *mine*. I am never tired of caring for you, of giving out from myself all you need. I am always ready to *give*. I'll give, give, as much as you need; grace filling all your circumstances, whatever they are. I am left to you; I am sufficient for you; my strength shall be made perfect in weakness. Paul is not allowed his own way, walls are built up across his road. When Paul finds he cannot do as he will, when he becomes a prisoner, and is led whither he would not, before kings, and the great Emperor of the whole earth, we see the testimony he is permitted to bear for his Lord; he went in as bound, but proved what strength made perfect in weakness is.

This principle is beautifully brought out in Jacob's history. Jacob walked for a number of years through the circumstances of his path, but he had never been crippled till this time. The peculiar feature of Jacob's walk was that he was always trying to carry out God's plan for Him. In the energy of his nature he always went forward to carry out God's purposes, as though God wanted help (this is the principle of the Roman Catholics); but we see everything fails. We come to Genesis 38; there we see,

from the time Jacob was made to halt, he can go forward and face anything. There is no difficulty; from this time he goes in the strength of the presence of the Lord, and finds His strength made perfect in weakness. Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed," etc.; he is a man who trusts to prayer, and not to his own wits. When God makes strength perfect in weakness, the question comes, Who is the doer of everything? This took place in Paul when he was first converted; this was the principle he was first put on: You are not to trust, Paul, to your own strength, or wisdom, or anything; but you are to trust *me*. Paul got locked up in prison, and despaired of life, but it was not God's thought that His apostle should be stopped. When he was quietly conning over it all, he says, "I had sentence of death in myself," etc. Paul had before him the God that raised up the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 1: 9.)

Was it a great thing for the God who had raised the Lord Jesus, who had shone down into Paul's heart, to open his prison doors? Christ was crucified by weakness; He liveth by the power of God: strength made perfect in weakness. The expression at the close of verse 9 is "tabernacle upon me;" the thought conveyed to my soul is a reference to God dwelling in a pillar of fire, and the cloud keeping company with people all through their journey. Paul was to go forth as one who had no strength, but as one whose weakness is used of God for the display of His glory; and there we find Paul singing a song over Satan. I glory in my infirmities; he finds he can bear nothing of himself, perfect weakness; but now he has got the secret of victory from the Lord, and he can sing a song over his weakness and over Satan; and he finds Satan's work has been turned into his good. The Lord has allowed it, all for his blessing. Now the question is, Will Christ's arm be, always underneath me? Will He ever tabernacle over me? Will He never fail me? Shall I be always able to sing this song? This is the principle of resurrection which quiets and gives peace. Paul was to wear it inside him all day long, through his whole course. Resurrection must be applied to our every circumstance. "Crucified together, quickened us together, raised us up together, seated us in," etc. Through all your life, Paul, you are to take this principle into your bosom: *resurrection, strength made perfect in weakness.*

One word, and it is not a strained word: I have often thought of the wilderness through which God brought Israel. His eye was on the wilderness. He prepared it. "I have made the place for a particular purpose in connection with my people. I have arranged it long ago." The wilderness was no accident, it was the very place He had prepared. No *resources* to nature; *absolute dependence* on God there. And God has made and marked out your circumstances, and has so made them that you cannot go through them without Himself. Some may say in reference to their path, "This thing came upon me through the sin of some one else." Never mind that, it *came from God*. Neither divine wisdom nor power could have added anything to the wilderness to have made it more impassable to nature or more easy to God. He allows a quantity of things in our circumstances to make us feel we cannot go through them without Him. What an immense difference in saying, "This thing comes from God; He has put it there;" and, "All this is against me." If it is *I and God*, there is no difficulty; if we leave out Him, the way is impassable. Which would you rather have, a life without difficulty, or a life so full of difficulty that the blessed Lord Jesus is obliged to show His face every day, yes, every minute, obliged to keep close to me all day long? God so ordered the course of the apostle that it was impossible to get on without the Lord Jesus who raiseth the dead; and this does not merely apply to moral difficulties, but to *everything*. There is some one sick in the house; who do you turn to first, God or the doctor? When the doctor thinks it a serious case you take it as a decision; but the question is not what the doctor says, but what is God's purpose? Means may be used; but the Christian is not to use *anything apart from God*: the *Lord first* in everything. I don't think praise ever comes forth from us so purely as in connection with what is disagreeable. When we give thanks for mercies, it is not so pure as when able to praise for what we do not like: we should be dropping the sweet into the disagreeable. When we think of the *Lord's love in it*, it sweetens what is bitter. A man is thus taken up into heaven to show him every step

of his way down here, from first to last - *weakness* in himself, but Christ's strength *perfected* in *weakness* — *death* and *resurrection*. The life of Paul was a wonderful life. "To me to live is Christ." The way he did run his course brought out the fellowship of the life of Christ; he had in Caesar's court the very life the Lord Jesus had on the Father's throne. It is wonderful, and all on the principle, "My grace is sufficient for thee."