

THE CHURCH

IN THE

GLORY OF GOD.



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W. B. HORNER, 93, BLOOMSBURY, OXFORD ROAD.

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R. L. ALLAN, 15, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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The substance of a Lecture on Rev. xxi. 9-27, xxii. 1-5.

YOU must not suppose, beloved brethren, that I am going to speak of something very difficult, because I have taken up this symbolic part of God's Word. It is the description of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, as displayed in the Millennium, in the glory of God.

There are few things which strike one more in Scripture, as soon as redemption is accomplished, and our souls are clear before God, than the fact of the frequency with which the glory of God is brought before us in its present sanctifying power. Our meanness for heaven cannot grow; it depends on what the blessed Son of God has accomplished, and He has done it perfectly. The grace of God comes and meets us in our ruin as poor lost sinners; then, as soon as He has cleansed us, He brings before our souls the glory, that our hearts may dwell in it.

I wish to trace, first, in a few passages, how God presses the glory upon us. Our capacities for enjoying heaven by-and-by will not grow when we are there. Our capacity depends upon the diligence of our hearts now in growing up to Christ, just as our fitness for the scene depends upon Christ alone.

I think we shall find, too, that the character of a

person's conversion gives a tone to his walk, as his walk determines his place in the glory; while of course it is given to those for whom it is prepared by the Father. You will find, too, that when Christ is before the eye at the first fresh moments of the converted soul, a fruitful walk of discipleship generally follows. John the Apostle was converted by the last lovely note of John Baptist's preaching. It had begun with tremendous threats of judgment; the last strain but one was, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" then came the last lovely note, "Behold the Lamb of God." The beauty of the Lamb of God drew the souls of the two disciples to Jesus, as the needle to the magnet; and the Lord had never from that moment to say to John (who doubtless was one of them), "Follow me." Then we find that the other, Andrew, seeks for his own brother Simon; he tells him that they had "found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; and he brought him to Jesus." How different was the conversion of the two men!—how their walk was characterised by their conversion! How often had the Lord to say to Peter, "Follow me:" never to John! See, too, how their ministry was characterised by what they first learned of the Lord. John carried the person of Christ in his heart, and ministered Him by his pen. He was a true Kohathite. Peter's ministry always savoured of the "Messiah, which is called Christ!"

This is important and striking, and especially so in preaching Christ. Of course you cannot know Him without His work; still the person of Christ is the magnet to attract the heart, and no conversion is like that in which Christ is first.

To return. All the present sanctifying work of Christ in His people comes out in this scene (Rev. xxi). Every line—even the most faint—which He has written on our hearts (though now blotted and almost apparently effaced), comes out in this scene of glory. See a photograph as at first taken by the artist on the glass. What a dull-looking thing it is ; but let the light of the sun print it on the paper, and every line is there. See, too, a garden of flowers in the night season ; they are colourless to the eye. You cannot discern a single touch of God's Almighty hand. All you can detect is the perfume of the flowers in the darkness of the scene. Still every line of beauty, every delicate touch His hand has imprinted and traced is there. Let the first ray of sunlight from the horizon strike upon those flowers, and every heavenly colour, every line and tracery which the darkness had hidden, comes to light, and displays the hand of Him who had inscribed them in all their living grace.

So it is with Christians now, during the long dark night of their history. Christ is inscribing the characters of His own blessed hand upon your hearts, faintly seen here below ; still the perfume of His graces should be discerned. When the moment comes, and He appears, the work is complete. " When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is " (1 John iii. 2).

We will now trace, in a few passages, how God brings the glory and the power of it to bear upon our hearts when His grace has met our condition as sinners. It is the consummation of His grace to us. See Rom. v. 2. Here it enters into the question of our hope. After unfolding how God has cleared us, and set us at

rest and peace before Him, he says, "Rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God."

See 2 Cor. iii. 18. "We all [the common privilege of every child of God], with unveiled face mirroring the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." Here it is the transforming power of the glory of God which he unfolds; a power which—as we are occupied with Him who is there—transforms us into His image from glory to glory, until He appears and absorbs in us that which is mortal. Then "mortality" is "swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. v. 4).

How do you seek for this conformity to Christ? God has "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. viii. 29): how is it to be brought about? "I seek to reduce myself to order," says one. "I study Christ as He walked on earth," says another. These efforts will not bring it about. What will then? Gazing on a glorified Christ, in a scene into which self and flesh can never come. Look at Stephen. He is filled with the Spirit, and consequently is engrossed with an object—Christ in the glory; the result is that his occupation with a glorified Christ throws him back into the place of a humbled Christ. This produced conformity. It is not putting forth efforts to be conformed, but his heart being thus engaged with Jesus, conformity to Jesus is the result; and the light of the glory shining down into his heart, is emitted from the vessel when broken to pieces by the stones of his murderers.

"Ah," you say, "there is no chance of my being a Stephen; the stones of the multitude will never reach me." I reply, the circumstances of life—the

sorrows, the trials of the way, all these do for you what the stones of the multitude did for Stephen. The stones smashed the poor earthen vessel, in his case; but the beauteous graces of a humbled Jesus on the cross were emitted from the broken vessel: Christ was seen, and Stephen was not seen!

I may remark, in passing, a striking feature with reference to this. It has frequently been noted how the words are almost the very same as those spoken by the Lord on the cross (compare Luke xxiii. 34, 46, with Acts vii. 59, 60); but it has not, I think, before been observed that the order is reversed, in the case of Stephen, from that seen in Luke xxiii., for "In all things he [Jesus] must have the pre-eminence." Stephen *first* says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and *then* he adds, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The Lord *first* says, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and *lastly*, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." One was man, however blessed martyr he might be; Jesus was God as well!

Thus it is the proper, normal work of the Holy Ghost to fill your eye with Christ; and with this simple and steadfast occupation with Him, you will find things withered up in your heart which have no place in the glory; and also you will find the impossibility of falling into sin with the Lord before the soul. When this is so, Christ is the governing motive; the spring and power of every act of your lives. In the case of a Christian thus occupied with Him, you find him walking through this world, with his heart in another scene, and he insensibly drops into the place of a humbled Christ—seeking not his own things as he passes along. If this were the constant state of His

people, what glory it would bring to Him: how little would be found in our hearts but Christ! Suppose God were to take out of our hearts *now* what was not of Christ, how large a gap would He find! It is good thus to test our hearts, beloved brethren.

Take a passage in Colossians (i. 11); which epistle, I may remark in passing, never takes you to heaven as Ephesians. Colossians takes your "affections" where you are yourself, "in Christ," in Ephesians. Well, "strengthened with all might according to the power of his glory" (not "glorious power"). As you traverse the wilderness of this world, in all its tryings and testings, you are "strengthened with all might according to the power of his glory." To what are you strengthened? Do you suppose you are going to get on with great effects? No! It is "strengthened . . . to all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness." Will you ever be irritable again, when the power of the glory is your strength? It was the very plea of Moses, in Numbers xiv., with the Lord, that He would use His *power* in *long-suffering*: "Let the power of my Lord be great" in "long-suffering." So Paul looks that you may be strengthened to be like God!

James says, "My brethren have not the faith of glory with respect to persons" (ii. 1, &c.). If you have the faith of glory, the spirit and ways of the world will be broken in you; you cannot go on with its ways, which put the poor man at the footstool, and the man with a purse and a gold ring in the seat of honour.

Peter, too, who looks on us as pilgrims traversing the desert, presses in his way, the glory. He says, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you:

on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (iv. 14). There are few true believers who do not, in some measure, know what the reproach of Christ is. What comes into my heart often, when I have endured it for myself, or seen it in others? Well, it is the *skirts of the glory* where Christ is—the spirit of the glory, that have touched that person!

So that, however you take it, beloved brethren—as entering into your hope, or with reference to conformity to Christ, or the needed patience by the way, or the spirit of the world, or the reproach of Christ—it is the glory all the same.

Now, as to the glory to which we are wending our way. God brings it in very marked power before us. He reveals to us the glory prepared from everlasting, where He purposes we should be. But the glory does not touch the heart. Therefore He gives us an object in the glory, which is Christ: the Lamb of God is there, the centre of it all. Is that enough? No! Then He gives us the Holy Ghost to dwell in us, to take the things of Christ who is in the glory down into our hearts, and to take our hearts up to the glory, and to unfold the things of that scene that we may know them.

In 1 Cor. ii., Paul quotes Isaiah: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him." Thus far Isaiah. "But," continues Paul, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." Is not that an advance beyond Isaiah?

There is an earthly Jerusalem by-and-by, as well as this heavenly Jerusalem now before us. But the principles of the two scenes are exactly opposite, the one to

the other. The principle of the one is heavenly grace ; that of the other is earthly justice. We never can combine the two things.

There is another thing to be remarked as to the elaborate description of this city, that it is all *displayed* glory. This is why you never find in Scripture a *description* of the Father's house. The reason is simple. The Lord says it is that place where He is—"my Father's house," "where I am ;" and He pre-supposes that that is enough for our souls. God expects that your hearts will find a satisfaction in the fact that His Son is there, and that consequently, no further description is needed of that place of rest and holy joy. The display of this heavenly city is that "the world may know that thou [the Father] hast loved them as thou hast loved" Jesus.

We shall find, too, that what Christ was *personally*, what the saints are *relatively* by His grace, and what the church is *absolutely*, as displayed in the glory, all come out in the scene. For example, the Lord says, when on earth, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Personally, He was the source of blessing. Then the church on earth takes up the strain : "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." She has drunk the stream, and knows that her thirst is quenched ; and she invites others to partake of what she has tasted. Then out of the city flow the rivers of living water, in the day of glory.

The feature which most of all arrests our attention is the way in which the *glory* of God is such a marked feature in this display. Whether in actual words or symbols, it enfolds, underlies, encircles, and lights the scene, as we shall see.

One of the seven angels comes to John, to bring him to see this heavenly Jerusalem from "a mountain great and high, descending out of heaven from God." Her character, both heavenly and divine. She is the convoy of the glory towards the millennial earth, over which she is seen.

"Having the glory of God." She has it, yet it is called "her light." This is God's way. Suppose He has produced some precious grace in your heart, surely enough grace has done it (for in ourselves there is nothing good), yet God has reckoned it to you in grace. More, too: God can delight Himself in the very grace that He has wrought in our hearts. (Take the little self-denials of to-day, exercised when no one saw them but Him; God has produced them, and counted them to you.) You will see an example of this in the Syrophenician woman. The Lord turns round and admires and delights in the very thing that He had produced in her soul: "Oh woman, great is thy faith," &c.

"The city had twelve gates." Here you have the side of human administration: we have had the divine and heavenly side as well. You see those lovely touches of what is human and what is divine in the Lord Himself. See Him putting His hand on the leper. Where is his leprosy? Gone! When God touches evil or defilement, He withers and dispels it; when man does so, he sympathises with it and becomes defiled. But it is gone at His touch in a moment. Next verse you see Him on His knees in prayer: the human side. See Him at the gate of Nain; His "Weep not," comes from the tender, sympathising human heart; His "Young man, I say unto thee, arise"—the voice of God that quickens the dead. Again, in His delivering

“him to his mother, the human heart once more. You almost cannot tell which is human and which divine, those scintillations of the moral glory of Jesus.

“And had a wall great and high and twelve foundations.” In the wall we have thoughts of *security*; as in the foundations, *stability*. Test your own hearts for a moment. Is there any feeling of insecurity or uncertainty there? I can tell you from whence it comes: from hearkening to one that will never be anything but an unbeliever! To whom do you refer? you say. The “old man, which is corrupt” I mean. Then you say, I will make a good resolve, and hearken to him no more.

The names of the tribes of Israel are written on the gates. Wherever you find anything *written* thus, it is not indigenous to the place, as I may say. Israel does not belong to this heavenly city, though those who were at first apostles to Israel govern them from their heavenly peculiar place: “Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. xix. 28). But they are also in the foundations of the city on high: “Ye are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone” (Eph. ii. 20). The “gate” was the place of judgment and government. Lot “sat in the gate” when he became a citizen of the world.

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and the glory of God is in both wall and foundations; the stability and security of our rest is His glory. I ask, Will you have your salvation without it? Will any

true heart tell me that he will receive his salvation on the terms that God's glory has lost its brightness? Not one! All such would refuse it. How blessed to find that God never had such glory as by that very scene when our salvation was wrought, on the cross, long ago! Then the display of God's moral being came out, as even this heavenly city will not unfold. The Lord spoke of it thus: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again." It presented a fresh motive to the Father to love His Son. God's glory had been compromised, and His first thought was to make it good, and to establish all that His holy being required as to sin. He came for this, and to bear our sins as well, that He might bring us into all the results of it, while God was glorified at the same time.

If you have read Ezekiel, you will find that the angel measures the earthly Jerusalem with a line of *flax*. The line denotes His taking possession of what He measures. But here it is display: He is about to display that which is the fruit of the travail of the soul of Christ! Can human admeasurement measure this? Impossible. It requires a *golden* reed, one of divine righteousness, as symbolised by the gold, to measure that which God alone can measure as it should be.

"The city lieth foursquare." This indicates the perfection of that which is formed, as a circle does eternity. "The building of the wall was of jasper;" that is the supreme glory of God (see iv. 2). "And the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass:" gold is divine righteousness, and clear glass is the fixed purity of truth—transparency. It presents to you what the Lord was Himself personally—what the new man, created in

righteousness and holiness of truth (*marg.*), is in you as produced by Him (Eph. iv. 24). With Christ it was so in its perfection; His words bespoke Himself. With us it is so in the measure the new man is in action. But oh, how double-minded we are! I challenge you all to say "no" to this charge. You know you do not tell me all that is in your heart; and in a certain sense it would do me no good to know it. The world would be a worse place than ever if we were all to know what is in each other's hearts. But what was Jesus? He was all He said. The words came forth from a heart of which they were but the living index—pure and holy truth—and He was God as well. In the city I shall know what is in your heart; you will know what is in mine: all shall know then. But there is nothing to conceal; nothing unsuited to the purity of that scene: all shall be like Him, who only is what He says He is.

Coloured stones are three times mentioned in scripture. They occur when God displays Himself, and are used as symbols of this display. You find them in creation, in grace, and in glory. If you have seen the pure light of the sun shining through the tears of a rain-cloud, it produces a rainbow. Thus God, who is light, when He displays Himself even in a lowly Man on earth: "He could not be hid." The pure light within proves its power, by piercing the cloud that concealed it from human eyes. See the Lord weeping at Lazarus' grave: the tears fell from the human eyes, yet they came from the heart of God. Thus in your sorrows and tears, God displays that heavenly life which He has given you, and brings forth the heavenly colours suited to His heart. God is thus carried down into

the circumstances of life—a far more wonderful thing than to have our hearts carried out of the circumstances up to glory. God come to us where we are, is more wonderful than for us to be carried to where God is.

Now we come to the external beauty again. Here we find the fulness of that moral beauty which Christ saw in the “one pearl of great price.” “Every several gate was one pearl.” Angels, too, are looking at it there. Are they not doing so now? Righteousness and holiness within, and comeliness and loveliness without; just what Christ was here below, and what you see by His grace in a lowly, true-hearted saint. He has a divine nature within, and moral comeliness without: nothing too prominent, but like his Master (yet who is ever like Him?), who was the fine flour mingled with oil.

What dissatisfaction one finds in one's own heart as this scene unfolds itself in its moral beauty! (I use “moral,” in contrast to “physical.”) Be assured of this, however, that every note of dissatisfaction you find in your heart, it is a note of sympathy with that heavenly scene!

“The street of the city”—that with which our feet come into contact—“was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” What a contrast to that which we walk on now! Here, if we do not watch and pray, the heart contracts defilement; and if we weary in watching, and we contract the soil, we weary with ourselves the more. What rest to let the heart go! What relief to find we want no conscience there! Everything we come in contact with is suited to God, and suited to the nature He has caused to spring up in your heart.

“I saw no temple therein.” The great object in the earthly Jerusalem is a great temple, which Ezekiel

elaborately unfolds. And here I would remark, how strikingly fitted is each instrument God uses in the ministration or revelation of His thoughts. His vessels are chosen happily and well for the work they have to do. Who would be the most fitting instrument to unfold in great Gentile empires in their rise and fall? Of course, a Prime Minister. Therefore we have a Daniel, "greatly beloved," doing his work well. The capability of the vessel and its suitability is recognised and employed, but kept from human infirmity by God's over-ruling hand, while it never loses its individuality, its identity, or its moral features, even in the things of God. See the "Herdman," Amos. Who could use better the figures he does? Who could so speak of the cow going out of the breach that was before her? (iv. 3) or of Jehovah's being pressed under His people as a cart is pressed under sheaves? (ii. 13) or of the impossibility of ploughing on a rock with oxen? (vi. 12) or of the sifting of the corn in a sieve? (ix. 9) &c. Ezekiel, too, the priest, is the man chosen of God to tell us of this Temple in the holy city of the day of glory, when the Lord will be there. We might instance Paul, and Peter, and John, in their respective lines of work, in the New Testament, also. But so it is. God sees to the preparation of the vessel; the school and college of God is not man's way; then, when the time comes, the vessel is called—then broken—then used for His glory. This is God's ordination!

No temple is there—no temple now. It is all the "holiest" with His people, now as then. His people are all priests now, and all go into the holiest now to worship God. They have been brought nigh by sacrifice, and they bring in their hands that which brought

them nigh. Now, in Judaism He had a great temple with a veil; and He will have it again; and he will hang up the veil again; shutting Himself in, and shutting them out. In this heavenly city "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it:" all is worship there.

"The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Thus you have the glory of God in the *security*, the *stability*, the *foundation*, and the *light* of our rest! The tabernacle of old needed no light from without, but it had no *seat*; the priest's work was never done, consequently he never sat down. But glory never fixes the eye; it cannot draw out the affections of the heart. It dazzles, but does not fix the gaze. But here you have the spring and centre of the glory. The fountain of the light is the Lamb of God. So that, if the glory fills the scene, the Lamb is the attraction for the heart. When Paul carries our souls into that sphere where there is neither length, nor breadth, nor depth, nor height—a boundless ocean of glory without a shore—he recalls our hearts and makes them at home in the scene by "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." Ah, you say that is enough—I feel I am at home.

In verse 21 we have worship; in verse 24 we have testimony. So it is now in measure. In 1 Peter ii. 5, we are "a *holy* priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;" that is worship. In verse 9 of the same chapter we are a *royal* priesthood to "show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light;" that is testimony. The only place where there is a gleam of

light in this dark world, so full of the habitations of cruelty, is the church of God.

The day is coming when the Beast will own that the "heavens do rule," and the nations "bring their glory and honour to it" (not "into it").

"The gates shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there." When you throw open your doors, you say there is no feeling of insecurity, even here below, in the little measure it is in some places enjoyed. What do we learn by those open doors, and no night there? That uncertainty and insecurity, and doubts and fears, are things of the past, and the darkness, which is (with John) ignorance of God, are gone for ever.

How sad to see in the saints of God doubting and uncertainty! Some will tell you that doubting and uncertainty is a healthy state in a Christian. How dishonouring to the grace that has set us free! Saints in time past used to doubt, and suppose it was the right state too. But shall I tell you what they did?—the dear people! They doubted, and doubted, and doubted, till they found themselves in heaven, and then they could doubt no more!

"And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," A touching and beautiful verse. Our hearts can feel how much that defiles enters them now. Look at a young Christian—bright and happy: an older Christian looks on, and is glad to see that young heart fresh in the love of Christ—that bright joy springing up there. But a mournful thought crosses his soul when he thinks how soon something may

creep in if Christ is not completely its object. So also with a company of Christians walking together; the sharp corners that scratch each other arise, and jealousies enter, if Christ is not all. Ah, I say, take care; man's evil is still in the scene and Satan's lie. Here in the church of God on high, nothing enters but those who are the objects of the love of Christ.

In xxii. 1-5, you have her relative condition; that is, what she is towards the world below—the vessel of grace. What she is personally had been told. The river of full blessing from God takes its rise in the city from the throne of God and the Lamb: only one tree—the tree of life—is there. The tree of responsibility is gone for ever. Have you any responsibilities as children of Adam? Not one! Christ united in His own person the principles of the two trees—life and responsibility. He took up and bore the latter for us, as poor sinners, and having done so He became our life. Have I no responsibilities then? you say. You never had so many, but they are on another footing;—to be what you are—a child of God; to show your parentage as you pass through the world.

The leaves were for the healing of the nations: the droppings from the tree of life; but its fruits for the redeemed on high. The church is thus the vessel of divine grace towards the renewed earth, while it needs the healing grace of heaven; when the sun of righteousness arises with healing in His wings.

“There shall be no more curse, for the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him.” How poor our service now! Questioned perhaps by those you seek to serve—questioned

by the world. Here is a scene where His servants shall serve Him ; a scene of the happy rest of activity and service to Him who was a toil-worn, weary Man—the missionary of God's love to earth in days gone by.

“There shall be no night there,” no darkness ; and hence no need of borrowed light. I may have more than you, you may have more than I ; and what light we have is often borrowed light. Here “the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.” To serve and wait is their occupation now ; there, to serve and reign for ever.

May we have the power of this scene working more deeply by His grace in our hearts. May we be able to put aside, to drop every burden that we cannot carry into that scene of endless joy. Test your hearts, beloved brethren. Have you anything in them, any unnecessary burdens that you cannot bring in with you there ? If so, they are checks to your progress. Much better to throw them aside, that you may run the course with vigour that ends there ! Amen.

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