

“The City Yet to Come”

εξεδεχετο γαρ την τους θεμελιους εχουσαν πολιν ης τεχνητης και δημιουργος ο θεος (Hebrews 11:10).

Hebrews 11:8-10 ¹

Imagine for a moment that you’ve been selected for the NASA Mission to Mars to which President Obama alluded in his State of the Union Address last week. After what will probably be years of training, the launch date finally arrives. Just before the rocket lifts off, one of your fellow astronauts asks you, “So what do you know about Mars?”

You shrug your shoulders and respond, “I really don’t know much at all about Mars. We never talked about it in our training. I guess we’ll find out when we get there.”

That scenario is pretty unthinkable, isn’t it? Yet the truth of the matter is that you and I are on a somewhat similar mission with rather similar lack of preparation.² Consider today’s spiritual, “The Poor, Wayfaring Stranger”:

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
While trav’ling through this world below;
There is no sickness, toil nor danger
In that bright world to which I go.
I’m going there to meet my father,
I’m going there no more to roam;
I am just going over Jordan,
I am just going over home.

I know dark clouds will gather o’er me,
I know my pathway’s rough and steep;
But golden fields lie out before me,
Where weary eyes no more shall weep.
I’m going there to see my mother,
She said she’d meet me when I come;
I am just going over Jordan,
I am just going over home.

I want to sing salvation’s story
In concert with the blood-washed band;
I want to wear a crown of glory
When I get home to that good land.
I’m going there to see my loved ones
Who passed before me one by one;
I am just going over Jordan,
I am just going over home.

I’ll soon be free from ev’ry trial,
This form will rest beneath the sod;
I’ll drop the cross of self-denial
And enter in my home with God.
I’m going there to see my Savior,
Who shed for me His precious blood;
I am just going over Jordan,
I am just going over home.

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship of Columbia, Maryland on February 1, 2015.

² Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), pp. 9-10.

Nearly every one of these images has to do with the destination of our journey—Heaven—but I wonder how seriously we really take them?

Randy Alcorn, in his fascinating book, *Heaven*, points out that we're often told how to get to Heaven, and that it's a better destination than Hell, but we're generally taught very little about Heaven itself. Our problem, he says, is not that the Bible doesn't tell us much about Heaven, but that we don't pay attention to what it does tell us.³

Alcorn argues that a key resource for learning about Heaven is to pay attention to our own longings: "What God made us to desire, and therefore what we *do* desire if we admit it, is exactly what He promises to those who follow Jesus Christ: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth. Our desires correspond precisely to God's plans. It's not that we want something, so we engage in wishful thinking that what we want exists. It's the opposite—the reason we want it is precisely because God has planned for it to exist. Resurrected people living in a resurrected universe is not our idea – it's God's."⁴

C. S. Lewis made the same argument in a sermon during World War II: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. [Humans] feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex.

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.

"If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; **I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.**"⁵

And that, my friends, is the other country toward which the Wayfaring Stranger's yearning was directed. It was also the country toward which Abraham's longing was directed some 4,000 years ago: "*he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11:10).

Just a few verses after this morning's text, Hebrews goes on to say that the faithful ancients "*were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them*" (Hebrews 11:16). Notice that Scripture does not say that God *will* prepare a city, or even that God *is* preparing a city. The Bible says that God *has* prepared it. It exists at this very moment. And we know more about it than you may think.

We've seen over and over that the Kingdom of God—that realm where the reign of God is fully accomplished—was the central theme of Jesus' teaching and His ministry. That realm began in the Garden of Eden, and you may be interested to know that Eden was not destroyed by Adam and Eve's sin. What was destroyed was our human ability to live in Eden. The Bible indicates that Eden still exists, though it is not accessible to us, and that the Tree of Life still grows there (Revelation 2:7).

³ Alcorn, pp. 10, 79.

⁴ Alcorn, pp. 7-8.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins eBooks).

Although “*that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray*” (Revelation 12:9) succeeded in marring God’s Creation—both humankind and the world we inhabit—“God doesn’t throw away his handiwork and start from scratch—instead, he uses the same canvas to repair and make more beautiful the painting marred by the vandal. The vandal doesn’t get the satisfaction of destroying his rival’s masterpiece. On the contrary, God makes an even greater masterpiece out of what his enemy sought to destroy.”⁶

The Good News is that God’s Eternal Plan is still underway, and Peter affirmed that a time is coming when God will restore *everything* (Acts 3:21), an event that Jesus called “**the renewal of all things**” (Matthew 19:28). Here’s how God characterized that event through the prophet Isaiah:

- “**See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.** *The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more*” (Isaiah 65:17-19).
- “**As the new heavens and new earth that I make will endure before me,**” declares the LORD, “*so will your name and descendants endure*” (Isaiah 66:22).

Referring to this prophecy, Peter wrote, “*That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells*” (2 Peter 3:12b-13). And when Paul referred to this renewal, he didn’t talk about it in terms of death and destruction. He talked about it in terms of childbirth (Romans 8:22).

My friends, God has never given up on the Creation. Yet somehow we manage to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point over and over: **Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect.** Each of these biblical words suggests a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost.”⁷ The symmetry is too remarkable to be accidental:

- In Genesis, God plants the Garden on Earth; in Revelation, he brings down the New Jerusalem, with a garden at its center, to the New Earth.
- In Eden, there’s no sin, death, or Curse; on the New Earth, there’s no *more* sin, death, or Curse.
- In Genesis, the Redeemer is promised; in Revelation, the Redeemer returns.
- Genesis tells the story of Paradise lost; Revelation tells the story of Paradise regained.
- In Genesis, humanity’s stewardship is squandered; in Revelation, humanity’s stewardship is triumphant, empowered by the human and divine King Jesus. . . .
- We live in the in-between time, hearing both echoes of Eden and the approaching glory of the New Earth.”⁸

Not only is our life on Earth currently in this in-between time, but those who have already died are in an in-between time of a different sort. Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we are surrounded even at this moment by “*a great cloud of witnesses*” who watch and encourage us from “paradise.”⁹

⁶ Alcorn, p. 100.

⁷ Alcorn, p. 88.

⁸ Alcorn, p. 85. Whatever one believes about the Millennium, that need not affect our understanding of the New Creation. Regardless of when and how the present Earth ends, the main point is that the New Creation will then begin.

⁹ Alcorn, p. 69. See 1 Samuel 28:16-19. I’ll post with the online version of this sermon some interesting inferences that Randy Alcorn offers based on Revelation 6:9-11.

As best I can put the pieces together, when you and I die, we will face a judgment that is sometimes called **the Judgment of Faith**. We come to this judgment one-by-one, and the outcome of this judgment determines whether we go to the intermediate or in-between Heaven or the intermediate or in-between Hell. This initial judgment depends not on our works but on our faith. It's not about what we've done during our lives on earth but about what Christ has done for us.

If we've accepted Christ's death on our behalf and placed our faith in Him, then when God judges us after we die, God sees Jesus' sacrifice for us, not our sin. Salvation is first and forever a free gift, to which we can contribute absolutely nothing (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).¹⁰

There will also be a second, final, universal judgment, which is sometimes called **the Judgment of Works**. Both believers and unbelievers face this final judgment. The Bible indicates that even believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their lives. Our works don't have *anything* to do with our salvation, but they have *everything* to do with our reward.¹¹

Once the Final Judgment has been completed, then, and only then, do the New Heaven and New Earth finally appear. God allowed John, the last of the Apostles, to see a vision of how that renewal will take place: "**Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,'** for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eye. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'" (Revelation 21:1-4).

My friends, if we listen to our hearts, you and I long for a return to Paradise—to a perfect world, without the corruption of sin, where God walks with us and talks with us in the cool of the day as it was in the beginning in Eden. And that is exactly what God promises us—a home that will not be destroyed, a kingdom that will not fade, an incorruptible inheritance, a city with unshakable foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

It was in the writings of C. S. Lewis many years ago that I first encountered the idea that the New Heaven and the New Earth might be physical realities very much like the world in which we now live, only without sin and death and suffering and corruption. As the years pass, I am increasingly impressed with the enormous amount of Scripture that must be ignored or "spiritualized" in order to escape that conclusion.

For me, the pieces are beginning to come together; but it is not at all necessary that you put the pieces together in the same way. We walk together in agreement, not around our eschatology, but around the affirmations that Jesus is "*the way and the truth and the life*" and that His Name is above every other name "*in heaven and on earth and under the earth*" (John 14:6; Philippians 2:9-10). Beyond this, most theological points have room for disagreement.

¹⁰ We do well to be reminded that **Heaven is not our default destination**. The Bible tells us that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23); and Jesus warned us to "*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it*" (Matthew 7:13-14).

All roads do not lead to Heaven, my friend. Only one does: the path that begins with faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). **No one deserves God's forgiveness. If we deserved it, we wouldn't need it.** But "*if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). If we fail to begin here, we'll not enter that Great City at all.

¹¹ Alcorn, p. 47. See Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

And, today, as we begin Black History Month, I join my voice with that unknown bard of old whose heart cried out,

I want to sing salvation's story
In concert with the blood-washed band;
I want to wear a crown of glory
When I get home to that good land.
I'm going there to see my loved ones
Who passed before me one by one;
I am just going over Jordan,
I am just going over home.

Until Jesus comes, my friends, we can take both courage and comfort from the Bible's affirmations that our loved ones who have Crossed Over in Christ are with Him *right now* in unimaginable glory, AND that there is greater wonder still to come, on that great and glorious morning when the dead in Christ shall rise (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)!

And all God's people said, AMEN!

WHAT WE ASSUME ABOUT HEAVEN	WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HEAVEN
Non-Earth	New Earth
Unfamiliar & Otherworldly	Familiar & Earthly
Disembodied	Resurrected & Embodied
Foreign	Home (All the comforts of home with all the innovations of an infinitely creative God)
Leaving Favorite Things Behind	Retaining the Good; Finding the Best Ahead
No Time & Space	Time & Space
Static	Dynamic
Neither Old (like Eden) Nor New & Earthly; Just Strange & Unknown	Both Old & New
Nothing to Do but Float on Clouds	A God to Worship & Serve; A Universe to Rule; Purposeful Work to Accomplish; Friends to Enjoy
No Learning or Discovery; Instant & Complete Knowledge	An Eternity of Learning & Discovering
Boring	Fascinating
Loss of Desire	Continuous Fulfillment of Desire
Absence of the Terrible (but having little we desire)	Presence of the Wonderful (everything we desire & nothing we don't)

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), p. 155.

Pondering the Intermediate Heaven

Revelation 6:9-11 (NIV2011)

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

1. When these people died on Earth, they relocated to Heaven (v. 9).
2. These people in Heaven were the same ones killed for Christ while on Earth (v. 9). This demonstrates direct continuity between our identity on Earth and our identity in Heaven. The martyrs’ personal history extends directly back to their lives on Earth. Those in the intermediate Heaven are not different people; they are the same people relocated—“righteous men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23).
3. People in Heaven will be remembered for their lives on Earth. These were known and identified as ones slain “because of . . . the testimony they had maintained” (v. 9).
4. “They called out” (v. 10) means they are able to express themselves audibly. This could suggest they exist in physical form, with vocal cords or other tangible means to express themselves.
5. People in the intermediate Heaven can raise their voices (v. 10). This indicates that they are rational, communicative, and emotional—even passionate—beings, like people on Earth.
6. They called out in “a loud voice,” not “loud voices.” Individuals speaking with one voice indicate that Heaven is a place of unity and shared perspective.
7. The martyrs are fully conscious, rational, and aware of each other, God, and the situation on Earth.
8. They ask God to intervene on Earth and to act on their behalf: “How long . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (v. 10).
9. Those in Heaven are free to ask God questions, which means they have an audience with God. It also means they need to learn. In Heaven, people desire understanding and pursue it.
10. People in the intermediate Heaven know what’s happening on Earth (v. 10). The martyrs know enough to realize that those who killed them have not yet been judged.
11. Heaven dwellers have a deep concern for justice and retribution (v. 10). When we go to Heaven, we won’t adopt a passive disinterest in what happens on the earth. On the contrary, our concerns will be more passionate and our thirst for justice greater. Neither God nor we will be satisfied until his enemies are judges, our bodies raised, sin and Satan defeated, Earth restored, and Christ exalted over all.
12. The martyrs clearly remember their lives on Earth (v. 10). They even remember that they were *murdered*.
13. The martyrs in Heaven pray for judgment on their persecutors who are still at work hurting others. They are acting in solidarity with, and in effect interceding for, the suffering saints on Earth. This suggests that saints in Heaven are both seeing and praying for saints on Earth.
14. Those in Heaven see God’s attributes (“Sovereign . . . holy and true”) in a way that makes his judgment of sin more understandable.
15. Those in Heaven are distinct individuals: “Then each of them was given a white robe” (v. 11). There isn’t one merged identity that obliterates uniqueness, but a distinct “each of them.”
16. The martyrs’ wearing white robes suggests the possibility of actual physical forms, because disembodied spirits presumable don’t wear robes. The robes may well have symbolic

meaning, but it doesn't mean they couldn't also be physical. The martyrs appear to have physical forms that John could actually see.

17. God answers their question (v. 11), indicating communication and process in Heaven. It also demonstrates that we won't know everything in Heaven—if we did, we would have no questions. The martyrs knew more after God answered their question than before they asked it. There is learning in the present Heaven.
18. God promises to fulfill the martyrs' requests, but says they will have to "wait a little longer" (v. 11). Those in the intermediate Heaven live in anticipation of the future fulfillment of God's promises. Unlike the eternal Heaven—where there will be no more sin, Curse, or suffering on the New Earth (Revelation 21:4)—the present Heaven coexists with and watches over an Earth under sin, the Curse, and suffering.
19. There is time in the intermediate Heaven (vv. 10-11). The white-robed martyrs ask God a time-dependent question: "How long, Sovereign Lord . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (v. 10). They are aware of time's passing and are eager for the coming day of the Lord's judgment. God answers that they must "wait a little longer" until certain events transpire on Earth. Waiting requires the passage of time.
20. The people of God in Heaven have a strong familial connection with those on Earth, who are called their "fellow servants and brothers" (v. 11). We share the same Father, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Ephesians 3:15). There is not a wall of separation within the bride of Christ. We are one family with those who've gone to Heaven ahead of us. After we go to Heaven, we'll still be one family with those yet on Earth. These verses demonstrate a vital connection between the events and people in Heaven and the events and people on Earth.
21. Our sovereign God knows down to the last detail all that is happening and will happen on Earth (v. 11), including every drop of blood shed and every bit of suffering undergone by his children. Voice of the Martyrs estimates that more than 150,000 people die for Christ each year, an average of more than 400 per day. God knows the name and story of each one. He knows exactly how many martyrs there will be, and he is prepared to return and set up his Kingdom when the final martyr dies (pp.65-67).

"I've made these observations on the intermediate Heaven based only on three versus. Unless there is some reason to believe that the realities of this passage apply only to one group of markers and to no one else in Heaven – and I see no such indication – then we should assume that what is true of them is also true of our loved ones already there, be true of us when we die" (67).

The Weight of Glory

by C.S. Lewis

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Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford,
on June 8, 1942: published in
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If you asked twenty good men to-day what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the

unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the

proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation. There is also a third case, which is more complicated. An enjoyment of Greek poetry is certainly a proper, and not a mercenary, reward for learning Greek; but only those who have reached the stage of enjoying Greek poetry can tell from their own experience that this is so. The schoolboy beginning Greek grammar cannot look forward to his adult enjoyment of Sophocles as a lover looks forward to marriage or a general to victory. He has to begin by working for marks, or to escape punishment, or to please his parents, or, at best, in the hope of a future good which he cannot at present imagine or desire. His position, therefore, bears a certain resemblance to that of the mercenary; the reward he is going to get will, in actual fact, be a natural or proper reward, but he will not know that till he has got it. Of course, he gets it gradually; enjoyment creeps in upon the mere drudgery, and nobody could point to a day or an hour when the one ceased and the other began. But it is just in so far as he approaches the reward that he becomes able to desire it for its own sake; indeed, the power of so desiring it is itself a preliminary reward.

The Christian, in relation to heaven, is in much the same position as this schoolboy. Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same

way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire the ultimate reward. Just in proportion as the desire grows, our fear lest it should be a mercenary desire will die away and finally be recognized as an absurdity. But probably this will not, for most of us, happen in a day; poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.

But there is one other important similarity between the schoolboy and ourselves. If he is an imaginative boy he will, quite probably, be revelling in the English poets and romancers suitable to his age some time before he begins to suspect that Greek grammar is going to lead him to more and more enjoyments of this same sort. He may even be neglecting his Greek to read Shelley and Swinburne in secret. In other words, the desire which Greek is really going to gratify already exists in him and is attached to objects which seem to him quite unconnected with Xenophon and the verbs in $\mu\iota$. Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object. And this, I think, is just what we find. No doubt there is one point in which my analogy of the schoolboy breaks down. The English poetry which he reads when he ought to be doing Greek exercises may be just as good as the Greek poetry to which the exercises are leading him, so that in fixing on Milton instead of journeying on to Aeschylus his desire is not embracing a

false object. But our case is very different. If a transtemporal, transfinite good is our real destiny, then any other good on which our desire fixes must be in some degree fallacious, must bear at best only a symbolical relation to what will truly satisfy.

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them,

and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies of Progress or Creative Evolution themselves bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere. When they want to convince you that earth is your home, notice how they set about it. They begin by trying to persuade you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile in earth as it is. Next, they tell you that this fortunate event is still a good way off in the future, thus giving a sop to your knowledge that the fatherland is not here and now. Finally, lest your longing for the transtemporal should awake and spoil the whole affair, they use any rhetoric that comes to hand to keep out of your mind the recollection that even if all the happiness they promised

could come to man on earth, yet still each generation would lose it by death, including the last generation of all, and the whole story would be nothing, not even a story, for ever and ever. Hence all the nonsense that Mr. Shaw puts into the final speech of Lilith, and Bergson's remark that the *élan vital* is capable of surmounting all obstacles, perhaps even death—as if we could believe that any social or biological development on this planet will delay the senility of the sun or reverse the second law of thermodynamics.

Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. But is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any satisfaction to it? “Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread.” But I think it may be urged that this misses the point. A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.

Here, then, is the desire, still wandering and uncertain of its object and still largely unable to see that object in the direction where it really lies. Our sacred books give us some account of the object. It is, of

course, a symbolical account. Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience. The scriptural picture of heaven is therefore just as symbolical as the picture which our desire, unaided, invents for itself; heaven is not really full of jewelry any more than it is really the beauty of Nature, or a fine piece of music. The difference is that the scriptural imagery has authority. It comes to us from writers who were closer to God than we, and it has stood the test of Christian experience down the centuries. The natural appeal of this authoritative imagery is to me, at first, very small. At first sight it chills, rather than awakes, my desire. And that is just what I ought to expect. If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I must expect it to be less immediately attractive than “my own stuff.” Sophocles at first seems dull and cold to the boy who has only reached Shelley. If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.

The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like Him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have “glory”; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally,

that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple. The first question I ask about these promises is: “Why any of them except the first?” Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only. I think the answer turns again on the nature of symbols. For though it may escape our notice at first glance, yet it is true that any conception of being with Christ which most of us can now form will be not very much less symbolical than the other promises; for it will smuggle in ideas of proximity in space and loving conversation as we now understand conversation, and it will probably concentrate on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity. And, in fact, we find that those Christians who attend solely to this first promise always do fill it up with very earthly imagery indeed—in fact, with hymeneal or erotic imagery. I am not for a moment condemning such imagery. I heartily wish I could enter into it more deeply than I do, and pray that I yet shall. But my point is that this also is only a symbol, like the reality in some respects, but unlike it in others, and therefore needs correction from the different symbols in the other promises. The variation of the promises does not mean that anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a Person, and lest we should imagine the joy of His presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and monotony, a

dozen changing images, correcting and relieving each other, are supplied.

I turn next to the idea of glory. There is no getting away from the fact that this idea is very prominent in the New Testament and in early Christian writings. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendour like the sun and stars. All this makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy I am a typical modern. Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

When I began to look into this matter I was stocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation’ by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but in a good child—as its great and undisguised

pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; "it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign." I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud

misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

And now notice what is happening. If I had rejected the authoritative and scriptural image of glory and stuck obstinately to the vague desire which was, at the outset, my only pointer to heaven, I could have seen no connexion at all between that desire and the Christian promise. But now, having followed up what seemed puzzling and repellent in the sacred books, I find, to my great surprise, looking back, that the connexion is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity

teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed. By ceasing for a moment to consider my own wants I have begun to learn better what I really wanted. When I attempted, a few minutes ago, to describe our spiritual longings, I was omitting one of their most curious characteristics. We usually notice it just as the moment of vision dies away, as the music ends or as the landscape loses the celestial light. What we feel then has been well described by Keats as "the journey homeward to habitual self." You know what I mean. For a few minutes we have had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that it is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken into the dance. We may go when we please, we may stay if we can: "Nobody marks us." A scientist may reply that since most of the things we call beautiful are inanimate, it is not very surprising that they take no notice of us. That, of course, is true. It is not the physical objects that I am speaking of, but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment the messengers. And part of the bitterness which mixes with the sweetness of that message is due to the fact that it so seldom seems to be a message intended for us but rather something we have overheard. By bitterness I mean pain, not resentment. We should hardly dare to ask that any notice be taken of ourselves. But we pine. The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some

response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being "noticed" by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St. Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him (I Cor. viii. 3). It is a strange promise. Does not God know all things at all times? But it is dreadfully re-echoed in another passage of the New Testament. There we are warned that it may happen to any one of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: "I never knew you. Depart from Me." In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely *outside*—repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored. On the other hand, we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged. We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities. Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of

some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.

And this brings me to the other sense of glory—glory as brightness, splendour, luminosity. We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. I think I begin to see what it means. In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty grace, and power of which Nature is the image. That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that “beauty born of murmuring sound” will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on*

the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.

And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life. At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind, and still more the body, receives life from Him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to

taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will “flow over” into the glorified body. In the light of our present specialized and depraved appetites we cannot imagine this *torrens voluptatis*, and I warn everyone seriously not to try. But it must be mentioned, to drive out thoughts even more misleading—thoughts that what is saved is a mere ghost, or that the risen body lives in numb insensibility. The body was made for the Lord, and these dismal fancies are wide of the mark.

Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside. The following Him is, of course, the essential point. That being so, it may be asked what practical use there is in the speculations which I have been indulging. I can think of at least one such use. It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted

to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.