

## We Shall Be Like Him

### Murdoch Campbell

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Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifeth himself even as He is pure. (I John III: v. 2, 3).

Without waiting to give these words an extended introduction we may go on to consider:

#### **I. The Present Privilege of God's People: "How are we the sons of God..."**

Literally there are two ways in which we may enjoy membership in a family. The one is by birth and the other is by adoption. By human law it is, of course, unnecessary to be adopted into the family into which we are born. Our birth into the family entitles us to the privileges which belong to it. But within the family of God both are necessary. God in His Word declares that without a new spiritual birth we can have no place within this family. This is one of the great requirements of Heaven. Nicodemus, for example, was a religious man. He followed the pattern of a formal, traditional religion. He was, by modern standards, a college professor. His outward life was morally correct. In his own eyes he was already within God's Kingdom. He was by birth an Israelite, and therefore a member of God's Church. When, however, he stood before Christ, and when he asked Him a question with regard to His power and miracles, our Lord simply said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, ye must be born again." This was not an irrelevant answer to his question. Our Lord knew that the natural man, however learned or however religious, can never receive or understand the things of God. They are indeed, foolishness to him. Without, for example, being born into the world of nature we would know nothing of that world. We would, in fact, have no real existence at all. The same, and in a deeper sense, is true spiritually. There can be no apprehension or understanding of the spiritual world — which belongs to another dimension entirely — unless we are born into it. "How can these things be?" was the question which exposed Nicodemus for what he was in a state of spiritual death or blindness. He was ignorant of the very beginnings of the true Christian life, and of the experience which God's people value because it marks their entrance into God's kingdom and into communion with,

and knowledge of, the only living and true God. Men are by nature dead in their trespass and in their sin, and as such they cannot know or have any fellowship with Him Who is “the God of the living.”

We heard once of two men who met each other in the way. They had never seen one another before. “What,” said the one to the other, “is that which never was, which never is, and which never shall be?” The answer was — “That which never was, which never is, and which never shall be is that a child not reborn should be in my Father’s house.” The question and the answer were spiritual, for they were both spiritually-minded men.

The Church in heaven is known as “the Church of the first born.” The names of God’s elect were in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world was, but just as our names are registered by law in the books of the nation when we are naturally born, God also has our names written in that heavenly Book in which is recorded our entrance into His Kingdom. The Book of Life is the Book of the Living.

**“And it of Zion shall be said  
This man and that man there  
Was born and he that is Most High  
Himself shall stablish her**

**When God the people writes  
He’ll count that this man born was there . . .”**

In the realm of grace our rebirth and adoption go together. Both, as we said, are necessary. Although the people of God were chosen and loved in Christ from all eternity they were, in their fallen state, “strangers and foreigners to God”. They were the children of wrath even as others. They were darkness, in a kingdom of darkness and under the sway and dominion of the prince of darkness. In a state of sin they were the children of the wicked one But God translated them and adopted them out of that state into His own Kingdom and family. This was an act of sovereign grace, a wonder beyond all knowledge.

In these acts of grace there is a manifestation both of God’s power and of God’s love In the epistle to the Ephesians Paul ascribes the spiritual resurrection or conversion of believers to “the exceeding greatness” of God’s power. They were held by a power which they could never break or overcome. Satan and Death held them in their grasp. Only God Himself could open their prison door, break the chains which bound them, and give them to know the glorious liberty of the children of God. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.” The new birth then is a display of the effectual working of the Holy Spirit in bringing the soul from death to life. But there is also a revelation of God’s love. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.” How wonderful to all the people of God is this love. David in speaking of Jonathan’s love to him placed it in this category. “Thy love to me was wonderful.” But that love was but a small reflection of Christ’s love to His people in making them all, by this act of adoption, His sons and daughters. If Paul prayed that his

Ephesian converts might know the exceeding greatness of God's power in their conversion he also prayed that they might, with all the saints, be able to comprehend that love which passeth knowledge. It was this love which made them fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

We knew a man who, after he had tasted that the Lord is gracious, was so filled with amazement that God should love and embrace such a vile creature as he was, and that He would give to such an one a right to all the privileges and blessings of His redeemed people, that he felt that when he entered heaven he would "for a thousand years" bow his head at the wonder that such an one should be there. And this truly is a wonder that shall ever lodge in the breast of all His people.

The evidence of this change, both of our nature and of our relationship to God, is two-fold. The one is inward and the other is outward. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." In the new born soul there is a love for holiness and an aversion to sin. Sin is what gives grief to the believer. The good that he would do he cannot do because evil is present with him. This conflict between grace and sin, or between the law of God inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the renewed soul, and the law of sin remains while we are in this tabernacle.

There is also a love to Christ and to all His people. They say that when a child is born into the natural world he brings with him into that world a natural, or instinctive, love for his parents and also for those who make up the family. Be that as it may, we know that love to God and to all His people is in every renewed heart. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." It begins with Christ, "the Elder Brother" in heaven, and extends to all the mystical body both in heaven and on earth. The true believer embraces in his or in her affections all the people of God. They say with Ruth — "Thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God."

And as new born babes they desire the sincere milk of the Word. This is another evidence of their being His. Their mouth is open to receive God's Word. By faith they receive of the fulness which is in Christ. They are a people who hunger and thirst after righteousness and who therefore have the promise that God shall supply all their needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. By the spirit of adoption they cry "Abba, Father" and say, "Give us this day our daily bread". And in His house there is bread enough and to spare. His table is furnished with good things, which all His children are invited to enjoy.

Do they not also prove themselves to be God's children by receiving and enduring the Lord's chastisement when that is needed? "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." It is in his chastisements that we often see His love, His faithfulness and wisdom. In these also we often discover our own follies. "Before I was afflicted I went astray."

But there is the **outward evidence** of their sonship as well. As the child may bring a natural love for his family into the world, family likeness may also be imprinted on his

very face. This is often, as we know, a fact of nature. And the new creature in Christ bears the image of the heavenly. "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." They are epistles of Christ that may be known and read of all men. The question was asked of old, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, clear as the sun, fair as the moon and terrible as an army with banners?" Who but the children of the day of whom Christ said, "Ye are the light of the world." Their light is derived or borrowed from the Sun of Righteousness. God's people answer to the description which the Lord gives of them in His Word. They abstain from all appearance of evil while, at the same time, they are in the footsteps of the flock. The Lord's people see but little of His likeness in themselves. Mercy and Christiana, in the "Pilgrim's Progress", could not discern in themselves what the one could see in the other. We say, "my spot is not the spot of thy children." Ruth said to Boaz that she was not, either in grace or beauty, like his handmaids, but he saw a loveliness in her which she could not see in herself. It is good to reflect in our life and conversation the unconscious image of Him who hath begotten us unto a lively hope. Moses wist not that his face shone. It was he who prayed: "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

Now notice, in the second place:

## II. Their Future Hope

"We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." In the words of Thomas Manton there is a mist on eternity. The future state of the redeemed within the veil, and the kingdom which they are to inherit, they can only see through a glass darkly. It is God's glory to hide a thing. We know something of what we were, where we were and how we were. We know our present infirmities, our crosses and burdens, our fears and conflicts. We mourn over our leanness and the years which the locusts have eaten. Our sins are ever before us. **But we know not what we shall be.**

Needless to say our relationship with Christ through our regeneration and justification is the same now as it shall be in heaven; but with regard to the glory that shall be revealed in God's redeemed, we know only in part. Who can envisage a world, or a state of existence, without sin, without sorrow, without temptation or without weakness of mind or body? Heaven is the place where the inhabitant shall not say "I am sick". Christ shall present His people to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. When John gazed upon the great multitude which no man could number he knew not who they were. Their glory, happiness and songs made them a great wonder even in Heaven. Surely that great multitude did not belong to this fallen world. But they did. In that multitude there were some whom he knew on earth, and who had passed through great tribulation, but they were now, in the light of God's face, shining as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever. How inconceivable is the change that shall take place in our translation from grace on earth to glory in Heaven!

**Though ye have lien among the pots  
Like doves ye shall appear  
Whose wings with silver, and with gold  
Whose feathers covered are.**

**And we know not what we shall have.** In this life we have but the **earnest** of good things to come. The Lord, indeed, gives His people here a foretaste of all the blessings which they are to enjoy in Heaven. The supreme joy of Heaven has its source in the full and everlasting enjoyment of God. In this life their fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. The love of Christ is also shed abroad in their hearts. But here these enjoyments come and go. Their brook often dries. Seasons there are when they mourn over the absence of the Beloved and when their hearts feel empty and cold. Although they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, they speak of themselves as poor and needy. But when they shall come of age they shall possess the unsearchable riches of Christ reserved in Heaven for them. This is all their desire, and there is no desire implanted by the Spirit of God in their hearts but God shall satisfy. In that day "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb who is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The sweet "crumbs" which now fall from His hand and which sustain them on their wilderness journey, only increase their longings for the fullness prepared for them above.

We could also say that **we know not where we shall be.** Heaven is the eternal home of the redeemed. They are born from above and for that reason God has created a longing in their souls for that city which they are seeking. Heaven in the highest sense of the word is God Himself. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Not only has He been their home in this world of time, but "from everlasting to everlasting". They had a place in His heart and in His purpose of grace from all eternity. Their life is now hid with Christ in God. At Bethel, Jacob said "The Lord is in this place . . . this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven."

But Heaven is also a place. It is the city of the Great King. "I go," said our Lord, "to prepare a **place** for you." It is the land wherein dwelleth righteousness. There are moments in the life of God's people when they get a glimpse not only of the King in His beauty, but also of this land of far distances. Moses saw the good land from the top of Pisgah. We also see it by faith. We look at the things which are unseen and eternal. And what they see by faith detaches them from things seen. They have the heart and walk of pilgrims and strangers on the earth. They are on the way Home. But how little we know of that glorious abode! Not till we cross the river shall we know the glory and the bliss of that Kingdom which is "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." It is not sweet to think that although we are still in the world of time, each one of His people may enjoy a little heaven here under His wings. Under His wings we have protection, we have nearness to Him, we have warmth and fellowship, we have unspeakable joy.

**“In shadow of thy wings I’ll joy  
For thou my help hast been.”**

Although, dear friends, we know not yet what we shall be, **“we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.”** This is the great hope of the people of God — that they shall see His face in righteousness. “I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.” Before He left this world He gladdened the hearts of His people by giving them all a great promise. “And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” When Job was in great depths of sorrow this was the one bright star in his sky. “Whom I shall see for myself and not another.” And they shall see Him **as He is**. Not as He was. John and many of his contemporaries saw Him in a state of humiliation and grief. They saw Him in the likeness of sinful flesh. They saw Him bearing a crown of thorns. They saw Him rejected and despised of men, and a homeless Wanderer in this cold world. But there **we shall see Him as He is** in all His exalted glory. We shall see Him at God’s Right Hand “crowned with many crowns”. In that happy world their sun shall no more go down. No cloud shall ever come between them and Christ, the bright and morning Star.

Let me say this one word. Would you go to a Christless heaven? If you would you will never be in heaven. If the Church, who is Christ’s bride, were to get the mansions and riches of the heavenly world, and Christ absent, do you think she would be happy? No! Her cry would be, “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” This, needless to say, cannot happen. We simply want to stress again the truth that all the well-springs of the people of God are in Christ. Their love rests on Him “Whom having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” We rejoice in the hope of seeing Him as He is.

Now the fulfilment of this promise is not something remote or far away. “When He shall appear.” He is to appear to each of His people when they leave this scene of time. Then their souls immediately pass into glory. Absent from the body they are present with the Lord. He shall appear on the last day when their bodies shall also be redeemed, and when all His people shall be gathered to Him. Meantime let us watch, pray and wait, till the day break and the shadows flee away. “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they who watch for the morning.”

Finally notice:

### **III. The Constant Exercise of God’s People**

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.” Heaven is a place of infinite purity. Nothing shall enter there “that loveth and maketh a lie.” God’s people know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. They are therefore at the Throne of grace asking the Lord to wash them with hyssop and to create in them a clean heart. “Having, therefore, these promises dearly beloved, let us cleanse

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The Church here is like a bride who is preparing herself to enter into Her Lord’s presence in the mansions above. “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.” This is their desire — to be like Him. Long ago I sat down in a church and listened to a faithful minister of Christ as he spoke about the longing after true and perfect holiness which is in the heart of God’s people. “This is a people,” he said, “who would make their bed in hell rather than entertain the hope that they could enter heaven with one sin in their soul.” He who has His fire in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem shall refine His people as gold till His own image is perfectly reflected in each one of them. In the heavenly world they shall be like little mirrors in which Christ may see His own image perfectly reflected. The blood of sprinkling is also ever available. “They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

My dear fellow sinners who are still in darkness, “without God and without hope in the world”, there is also an eternity of woe of which you know but little. As there is a wise concealment on the part of God with regard to the glorious destiny awaiting His people, what our Lord says of the terrors of a lost eternity should alarm us and stir us into a state of spiritual concern. Those who are in hell knew but little on earth of what hell is like. May none of us here, who are still in the room of mercy, enter into those dungeons of everlasting despair. Listen to what He says — “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” If you come to Christ, and embrace Him as your own, then you also shall have a good hope through grace and shall know the good of His chosen people. And if you come let me assure you that a welcome awaits you, for “This Man receiveth sinners.”

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