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The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 1—February 25, 2024

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8)

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (1 Cor 13:12)

“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:3-5)

1. Introduction

2. Only the sight of God can satisfy: Psalm 17

3. Five good reasons for studying the beatific vision

(a) It is a blessed promise.

(b) It is a compelling metaphor.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3:18)

“The oftener a believer beholds [the Lord Jesus] in spirit, the more clearly he knows his perfections, of which his holiness is the ornament. The more clearly he knows them the more ardently he loves them. The more ardently he loves them, the more like to them he desires to become. . . Moreover, the more ardently he loves God, he will both the more frequently, the more willingly and attentively behold him; and thus often running round that circle of beholding and loving, for ever returning into itself, he gains by every act a new feature of this most glorious image.” (Herman Witsius)

(c) It is connected to many other truths of the Christian faith.

(d) It is God-centered.

(e) It leads us to marvel at the goodness of God.

“For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.” (Ps 36:9)

4. One bad reason for studying the beatific vision

5. Conclusion

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Lesson 2—March 3, 2024

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn 3:1–3)

1. Introduction

2. One thing: Psalm 27

“And let us know what our souls were made for. What are our souls more for than to dwell in the meditation of the beauty of God? What are our souls made for, but for excellent things? and what is excellent but in God’s ordinances? ... [Our souls] are for union and communion with God in his ordinances, to grow in nearer communion with God by his Spirit, to have more knowledge and affection, more love and joy and delight in the best things daily. Our souls are for these things that will make us gracious here, and glorious for ever after in heaven.” (Richard Sibbes)

3. Vision and fruition: WLC 90

Q: What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment?

A: At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, **but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity.** And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

4. Glorify and enjoy God: WLC 1

Q: What is the chief and highest end of man?

A: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.

“No man is truly Reformed in his thought, then, unless he conceives of man not merely as destined to be the instrument of the Divine glory, but also as destined to reflect the glory of God in his own consciousness, to exult in God: nay, unless he himself delights in God as the all-glorious One.” (B. B. Warfield)

5. Conclusion

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Lesson 3—March 10, 2024

1. Introduction

“The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man is the vision of God.”
(Irenaeus)

2. None else: Psalm 73

3. God is invisible

Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:13-16; Heb 11:27

4. Fruition by way of covenant

WCF 7.1

“The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”

5. Seeing God in the Old Testament

Ex 33:18-23, 34:5-9, 29-35; Nu 12:6-8

6. Incarnation: God made visible

Jn 1:14-18

“Though He be infinite, incomprehensible, and invisible, yet has He made Himself visible, comprehensible, and finite to those who believe in Him, that as they receive and see Him by faith He may give them life.” (Irenaeus)

7. Conclusion

“There is a far greater distance between the vision of heaven and the sight which we have now by faith, than is between the sight which we now have and what they had under the Old Testament. Heaven does more excel the Gospel state than that state does the Law. . . If, then, they longed to be freed from their state of types and shadows, to enjoy the representation of the glory of Christ in that image of it which is given us in the Gospel; much more ought we to breathe and pant after our deliverance from beholding it in the image of it, that we may enjoy the substance itself. For, whatever can be manifest of Christ on this side heaven, it is granted unto us for this end, that we may the more fervently desire to be present with him.” (John Owen)

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Lesson 4—March 17, 2024

1. Introduction

“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:3-5)

2. The incarnation of the Son: God made visible

Jn 1:1-18; 5:37-38; 6:40, 46; 8:56-58; 12:45; 14:6-11; 17:24

“Though He be infinite, incomprehensible, and invisible, yet has He made Himself visible, comprehensible, and finite to those who believe in Him, that as they receive and see Him by faith He may give them life.” (Irenaeus)

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (Jn 17:24)

3. The mission of the Holy Spirit: transforming us into the image of the Lord

Jn 14:19, 26; 15:26; 16:4-15; 2 Cor 3-4

4. Psalm 16: the Holy One full of joy with God’s countenance

Ac 2:22-32

5. Conclusion

“There is a far greater distance between the vision of heaven and the sight which we have now by faith, than is between the sight which we now have and what they had under the Old Testament. Heaven does more excel the Gospel state than that state does the Law. . . If, then, they longed to be freed from their state of types and shadows, to enjoy the representation of the glory of Christ in that image of it which is given us in the Gospel; much more ought we to breathe and pant after our deliverance from beholding it in the image of it, that we may enjoy the substance itself. For, whatever can be manifest of Christ on this side heaven, it is granted unto us for this end, that we may the more fervently desire to be present with him.” (John Owen)

The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 5—March 24, 2024

1. Introduction

“As doctrine is ordered to living, so living is ordered to seeing—and being satisfied in—God himself: the ‘one thing’ we seek (Ps 27:4; Tit 2:11-13; Heb 12:14).” (Scott Swain)

“Consider that looking unto Jesus is the work of heaven; ‘it is begun in this life (saith Bernard), but it is perfected in that life to come.’ Not only angels, but the saints in glory do ever behold the face of God and Christ. If then we like not this work, how will we live in heaven? The dislike of this duty is a bar against our entrance, for the life of blessedness is a life of vision. Surely if we take no delight in this, heaven is no place for us.” (Isaac Ambrose)

2. Seeing God in public worship

Heb 12:18-24, Eph 4:11-13

3. Reflections

Rom 1:20; 1 Jn 4:12, 20-21; Heb 12:1-2

4. Psalm 63: meditation and satisfaction

5. Conclusion

“As the enjoyment of a friend in his picture, letters, tokens, is short of what we enjoy when we have his personal presence. . . , even so all the enjoyments of God in the use of means, graces, blessings, ordinances are infinitely inferior to that enjoyment of God which shall be without all means; all the [delights] of our spirit in prayer, hearing, reading, and meditating, is but a sip of those rivers which we shall have in heaven.” (Isaac Ambrose)

The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 6—March 31, 2024

1. Introduction

“There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end.” (Augustine)

2. Psalm 63: meditation and satisfaction

3. Vision and holiness

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8)

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14)

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn 3:2–3)

“As the simple dealers are mocked for their so-called lack of caution, for not looking out for themselves as they should, Christ raises their vision: if they are not so sharp-sighted on earth, they shall enjoy the sight of God in heaven.” (John Calvin)

“As purity of heart doth make us fit to see God, so the sight of God will make us more clean and more pure in heart daily...” (Jeremiah Burroughs)

4. Seek those things which are above

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom 12:1–2)

Col 3:1–5

“If Christ has provided for believers eternal glory, then let not the trivial employments of the present life hinder you from laboring about the great important affairs of the life to come. . . If Jesus Christ is the author and cause of this glorious life, this should teach you to be ever longing and panting after this glorified condition. . . There is but a little enjoyment of God here, but there you shall enjoy God above measure. Here you have the fullness of a bucket; there you shall have the fullness of an ocean.” (Christopher Love)

5. Conclusion

“Begin your sight of God here. Let the eye of your faith be still upon God. Moses by faith ‘saw him who is invisible’ (Heb 11:27). Often look upon him with believing eyes, whom you hope to see with glorified eyes. . . While others are looking towards the earth as if they would fetch all their comforts thence, let us look up to heaven. There is the best prospect.” (Thomas Watson)

The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 7—April 7, 2024

1. Introduction

2. Glorification and glorifying

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Rom 8:28–30)

3. Final steps of our pilgrimage

(a) Seeing the face of God upon death

“The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies...” (WCF 32.1)

(b) Resurrection and transformation

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 Jn 3:2)

Php 3:20–21

“God must make us able to bear it. We can no more endure a sight of glory than a sight of wrath. But the saints after this life shall have their capacities enlarged, and they shall be qualified and made fit to receive the penetrating beams of glory.” (Thomas Watson)

4. Knowing: the beatific vision by the light of glory

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (1 Cor 13:12)

Ps 36

5. Conclusion

“These things we here admire, but cannot comprehend. We know not well what we say when we speak of them: yet is there in true believers a foresight and foretaste of this glorious condition. There enters sometimes, by the Word and Spirit, into their hearts such a sense of the uncreated glory of God, shining forth in Christ, as affects and [satisfies to the full] their souls with ineffable joy.” (John Owen)

The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 8—April 14, 2024

1. Introduction

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” (Tit 2:11–14)

2. Historical discussions about what it means to see God

3. Sight, love, joy, glory

Jn 17:26, Ps 16:11, Mt 25:21, Rom 5:1–2, 2 Cor 4:17–18

“Sight contemplates God as the supreme good; love is carried out towards him, and is most closely united with him; and joy enjoys and acquiesces in him. . . God cannot be seen without being loved; love draws joy after it because he cannot be possessed without filling with joy.” (Francis Turretin)

“He will pour out of his goodness eternally into their souls: then shall they have a most lively sensation, in the innermost part of their souls, of all that goodness they heard of, and believed to be in him, and of what they see in him by the light of glory. This will be an everlasting practical exposition of that word, which men and angels cannot sufficiently unfold, namely, ‘God himself shall be their God’ (Rev 21:3).” (Thomas Boston)

“It is now our highest happiness to have some glimpses of his glory shining on us, and some drops of his favour distilled into us: oh! but when God shall be our all in all [1 Cor 15:28], we shall have as much of God as our souls can hold, we shall have the glory of God so poured in, till we shall be able to receive no more. And here is that which gives the soul a full satisfaction; never would it be satisfied till it came to this.” (Isaac Ambrose)

4. Reflections

5. Conclusion

“The whole life of a good Christian is an holy desire. Now what you long for, you do not yet see: howbeit by longing, you are made capable, so that when that has come which you may see, you shall be filled. For just as, if you would fill a bag, and know how great the thing is that shall be given, you stretch the opening. . . ; you know how much you would put in, and see that the bag is narrow; by stretching you make it capable of holding more: so God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious. Let us desire therefore, my brethren, for we shall be filled.” (Augustine)

The Beatific Vision: Walking by Faith with the End in Sight

Lesson 9—April 21, 2024

1. Introduction

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.” (2 Pet 1:16–18)

Mt 16:28–17:9, Mk 9:1–10, Lk 9:27–36

2. The transfiguration: a revelation of the glory of Christ

(a) Context

(b) God the Son incarnate

(c) Glory, fear, and comfort

“Christ raises them up when they had fallen, and by so doing performs his office; for he came down to us for this very purpose, that by his guidance believers might boldly enter into the presence of God, and that his majesty, which otherwise would swallow up all flesh, might no longer fill them with terror. Nor is it only by his words that he comforts, but by touching also that he encourages them.” (John Calvin)

3. Our transfiguration

Rom 12:2, 2 Cor 3:18

“Be transformed that you may be transfigured.” (Thomas Manton)

“So here on the Mount of Transfiguration the glory of the Lord is being revealed in glorified humanity. Here is human nature, capable of bearing the weight of the divine glory or the light of divine splendour. It is Jesus the man who is transfigured and that demonstrates that human nature is capable of bearing the divine glory. It also assures Christians that they too will be able to do so as the apostle Paul wrote [1 Cor 15:49]. Jesus transfigured is the guarantee of every Christian’s transformation.” (Hywel R. Jones)

4. Conclusion

“When our Saviour was upon the holy mount, and one vanishing beam of glory appeared in his transfiguration, Peter was so transported at the sight that he forgot the world and himself; how ravishing then will the sight of him in his triumphant majesty be, when we shall be transfigured ourselves?” (William Bates)