

See His Face

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0 : 00] Would you please have open in front of you the passage from Revelation that was read to us earlier, page 241 in the New Testament section of our church Bibles.

If anyone said to me, our group is going to study one of your books, of course I should be pleased. And I should say, which one? If they then said, well, we're going to study the top paragraph of the last page of such and such a book, my feelings would be mixed.

And if John had thought of people only doing that with the first paragraph of the last chapter of the book of Revelation, he too, I think, would have had mixed feelings.

Because the book is a unity, and the Lord Jesus is at the center of it from start to finish. You remember, I guess, it starts with Jesus calling John to be his secretary, first in writing by dictation seven letters from the Lord to seven churches in Asia.

[1 : 33] And then to write what he sees and hears in the visionary appendix to those letters, which is actually the rest of the book, chapters four through 22.

And there are all kinds of wonderful things there. The scenario cuts between war on earth, the war of the word, and worship in heaven, the praise of angels and the redeemed.

And in this 22nd chapter of Revelation, that first paragraph sets before us a string of wonderful things, which are presented, let me say, in the way that the scholars call apocalyptic, that is, using visuals to convey ideas.

The throne of God and of the Lamb gives us the idea of God as sovereign, everything coming to us from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The picture of the river of the water of life gives us the thought of all desires being satisfied, just as a drink of water on a hot day like this satisfies thirst.

[3 : 17] And the picture of the tree of life confirms that with the thought of fruit which awakens desire, being then eaten to fulfill the desire, just as you and I would if we were confronted, as I was yesterday, by a box of peaches and apricots.

I hope you were as lucky. And so it goes on. This is all part of the picture of the glory of heaven, the life beyond.

And at the heart of this account of the life beyond, we read that the servants of the Lord Jesus are there, and they worship, and they see their Lord's face, and they have his name written in their foreheads.

Well, our Hindu friends, when they've done their worship, put a red spot in their foreheads to indicate that fact.

And Harry Potter had a sort of scar on his forehead to indicate that he was a distinguished wizard. And we Christians, so says the writer of Revelation, using a visual to express an idea, we Christians, as it were, have the name of the Lord who owns us.

[5 : 01] We're his slave and slaves, and he owns us. And that name is there on our foreheads like a tattoo mark. And it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

It's our glory. Well, that's what's going on in this paragraph, and right at the center of it, you have this glorious promise, they will see his face.

Verse 4. And that's the thought that my sermon title, Set Me by our Rector, requires me to dwell on. Let me then attempt to do just that. It is the phrase, see his face, fits with things that are said elsewhere in the New Testament.

Do you remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, saying, actually, what Neil picked up when he was talking to the children. Here we see dimly in a mirror.

[6 : 14] Then, in glory, we shall see face to face. We shall see his face, and then we shall know and understand as fully as we are known and understood right now by the Lord who searches our

hearts.

We shall see his face as already he sees ours, you might say. So let's zoom in on this thought and see just what it implies.

Three things at least, I think. First, that there will be a welcome for us in our Lord's home.

Did he not say to the disciples in that farewell discourse, which we have in John chapter 14, in my Father's house are many rooms, places of rest.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

[7 : 44] Yes, the Savior said that. And it's a word to each disciple. And he means it. So whatever feelings of uncertainty we may have about what it will mean when the time of our departure comes, Paul, you remember, we looked at this last week.

Paul talks about the time of our departure from this world. That's his way of looking at dying. Our dying will happen and then we shan't anymore be living through this body.

And we shan't anymore be perceiving things through our five senses. And we, our minds won't anymore be sustained by the physical organ of the brain.

And for sure, it will be strange and new. We're told we're going to be re-embodied at some stage in that process beyond the grave.

But even so, it's going to be strange and new. But this thought surely reassures and makes us realize that it's not something to be frightened of.

[9 : 04] As so many who have no faith in Jesus, frankly, are frightened of death. But for us as disciples, the truth to hold on to is that there is, there will be, a welcome for us in Jesus' home.

And I think that's what we're seeing in one detail of the New Testament story where people, I think, often miss the full significance of what we're being told.

Stephen, when he was being stoned to death, looked up to heaven and what he saw was what he said he saw.

Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. And ordinarily in the New Testament we are told that Jesus, having ascended to glory, sits on a throne of his own at the right hand of the Father.

But here he is standing. Well, don't you and I stand to welcome honored guests into our home? that's what it means.

[10 : 23] And that's what awaits us who are his. It's a wonderful thought, isn't it? And then, second thought. We shall see his face.

That means there will be an opening to us of his heart. heart. We say, and we say truly, the face is the transcript of the heart.

Yes. If it's a child who's trying to deceive you, if it's somebody who has seen something admirable in you, if it's a person who's startled to the roots of their being by what has just happened to them, it will be written on their face, on your face and mine.

Well, that's the thought. we see his face. There's an opening to us of his heart. That's what it means.

Yes, we shall see him in his glory every way, but the face is the transcript of the heart and as we gaze on his glory, we shall know the fullness of his love, all his thoughts concerning us, all his purposes with regard to us, for there are purposes of glory which we shall enter into.

[12 : 01] And that too, you will agree, will be marvelous. That's what we're promised. It's the fullest intimacy of fellowship.

There'll be total honesty, you might say, total transparency in the Lord as we see him in glory. No secrets, no enigmas, everything clear.

We shall know as we are known. Of course, there is a flip side to that. In glory, as here in this world, fellowship is a two-way street.

And the Lord, who faces us as we face him, is the searcher of hearts, and no pretense can stand before him, either here or there.

sin. And I think it's important to say this because we so often deceive ourselves with our pretenses. We pretend before each other to be what we aren't, and then it becomes a habit to pretend in our dealings with the Lord that we are what we aren't.

[13 : 30] Sinners pretend to be righteous and they have to be disabused of that. And in all sorts of ways, we are less than honest to God.

Well, in glory, it won't be like that. Do you know, I wonder, C.S. Lewis' book, Till We Have Faces, it's a kind of a novel, it's a kind of an allegory, he calls it a myth retold.

It's the story of an ugly queen who thought that she loved someone, but in fact, she has to learn at the end of the story that her love was simply a greedy possessiveness, nothing more.

She'd been fooling herself all the time about that, just as in her role as queen, top person, she tried to fool her subjects by always going veiled so that they never saw her face.

Something happens to her and she has to learn honesty before the gods, yes, it's the gods because the setting is the pagan world before Christ, and writing about what has happened to her, she says, and this is where the title of the book comes from, till words can be dug out of us, why should they, the gods, heed the babble that we think we mean?

[15:17] Talking and kidding ourselves, though we can't kid them. How can they meet us face to face until we have faces?

Until, that is, we know and face who and what we are, and pretense comes to an end, and at last we are honest to our God, honest to our Savior.

Well, this is something that we have to begin to learn in this world, and we are learning it in fact all our days. The depths of self-deception, the ways in which we fool ourselves about who and what we are, seem to be endless, and as they come to light, we have to repent and ask the Lord to forgive and go on a little more honestly than we did before.

Yes, but in glory, the process will be complete. There will be no tension there, there will be no deception. The Lord, who knows us as we really are, will let us know Him as He really is, and that will be glory, endless glory.

And that's the third thought. When we see His face, says the text, we shall worship Him. There will be an adoring by us of our Lord's holiness.

[17:03] holiness. I use that word holiness, not just because it alliterates with the Savior welcoming us into His home, and opening to us His heart.

I choose it because, in fact, holiness is a quality of the Lord Jesus, which not all readers of the Gospels, where you see it in Him, actually appreciate.

We see as in a mirror, dimly, we don't always see what we're looking at. What is holiness? Perfect purity, perfect uprightness, and awesomeness in everything that one does.

That is the holiness of God, that is the holiness of the Lord Jesus. We shall be very conscious of it, as in His presence we see Him face to face.

What will it do to us? The sense of His awesomeness will stay with us, and we shall adore. there are awesome glories in this world which give us perhaps the idea the beauty of a scene that we see, the beauty of a person on whom we fix our eyes, the beauty of a work of art or a piece of music.

[18:47] Whenever we are awed by beauty, we want to say something about it. And that's the spirit of worship, appreciation of the glory of what's there before our eyes.

Here in this world, because we don't fully see the awesome holiness holiness of the love of our Lord and His Father, we sometimes find that worship, any form of worship, liturgical worship as we do here, more informal worship, the worship of our own personal prayers, sometimes it seems a drag. We should ask the Lord to show us something of His beauty every time. Something of the purity, something of the uprightness, something of the excellence.

And when we see it, worship won't be a drag anymore. That's how it will be in glory. That, please God, is how it will be more and more for us here.

Well, these are wonderful thoughts, you'll agree. what are we to do with them? Think them, brothers and sisters, just that.

[20:21] Think them. Get familiar with them. Run them through your mind over and over again. Brood on them.

What do we do? We think think of Jesus Christ in the glory and the beauty of his love which took him to the cross and which keeps him walking patiently with us now, ministering to us and supporting us according to our need.

Think of him in his beauty, in his glory, coming with us until the day when he says, now you come to me.

Welcome home. It's coming for all of us. Think ahead to it. Get used to the idea and rejoice and think of heaven where the reality of personal fellowship with the Saviour, which is the secret, you

know, of all Christian experience in this world and which I trust we all know something of right now. That personal experience of fellowship with the Saviour will be brought to its highest peak, consummated to use the words that we like to use.

[21 : 59] We shall know it in its fullness. We shall see his face. Get used to the thought. Get used to the prospect, brothers and sisters, and rejoice at the hope that is set before those who to Jesus have fled and in Jesus and with Jesus live their lives today.

Our first hymn got it right, remember? To God the word on high, the hosts of angels cry, that's what's going on in heaven today.

They cry, may Jesus Christ be praised. Let mortals too up raise their voice in hymns of praise. May Jesus Christ be praised.

And then this, be this while life is mine, my canticle divine. May Jesus Christ be praised.

May that be what I'm singing all the time. Be this the eternal song, yes for me and for you. Be this the eternal song through all the ages long.

[23 : 15] May Jesus Christ be praised. Friends, that's what Christianity is all about. God make it ours in its fullness.

God give us the hope of glory with Christ and may it glow in our heart every day for the rest of our lives. We shall see his face.

If I use the phrase the big thrill, it might sound trite, and yet it's the phrase that fits. It will be the biggest thrill we've ever had.

God bless us all. Amen. God bless you.