

Hope of Glory

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Date: 06 February 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you Bill for your introduction. As always, it eases the tension, promotes relaxation, and indeed gives us a warm feeling inside, which I suppose will last the whole session, and for which we shall continue to be grateful after the session is over. Yes, Bill, you're a treasure. Keep it up. Okay, now to business, and I would ask you to pray with me, please. Gracious Heavenly Father, we are met in your presence in the name of Jesus our Lord, looking for the guidance of your Holy Spirit to give us understanding of your Holy Word. We want to know what, in your mercy, you have set before us as the object of our hope as Christians, and we pray that you will give us light at this point through this study this morning. And through that light, give us strength and give us joy. Through

Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. Why this topic, the hope of glory? Well, that's a good question, and it isn't hard to answer. I reply, I take this topic because hope is a key issue for everyone's life.

Yes, everyone's life. This is true on the spiritual level. It's true on the natural level also. God made us hoping creatures, living very much in our own future as we anticipated. And if we haven't anything to look forward to, well, life becomes a mere existence, existence in semi-darkness or complete darkness, a foot-dragging sort of existence. We go on existing from one day to another, but it's a bore and it's a pain and it's a burden. And we find ourselves from time to time wishing that it was all over. Am I exaggerating? No, I don't think I am. All of us, in fact, as Christian people, are living right now, more or less intensely in terms of the future that we hope for.

And so we are shielded from that experience of living with no hope, which you do sometimes find amongst elderly people who have no faith. And it's a painful thing to see. And I expect that all of us have seen it and shuddered.

I say it again. God made us hoping creatures who live very much in the future that we look forward to, whatever that is. And to have nothing to look forward to would be supreme misery.

[4 : 1 2] All right. So hope is important. And in fact, if you just think about the way we live from infancy onwards, this becomes as plain as a pike staff, we say. Something that you can't miss.

When you hold out before a young child, the prospect of something delightful that's going to happen tomorrow or next week or next month, whatever, well, you know how the child responds to it.

I can hardly wait. You've heard those words. They express the child's feeling. Something to look forward to. Wonderful. You ask a child, a little older perhaps, what he or she wants to be when they grow up.

And some children already have ambitions which they've begun to focus. And they too will say, yes, and I'm looking forward to it. That's the adolescent equivalent of I can hardly wait.

And when we're adults, well, there are things that we want, things that we hope to gain, things that we hope to do, sites that we hope to see, places that we hope to go.

[5 : 46] And we look forward to the experience. And we feel impoverished if at the end of the day we find that, well, it can't be done. And it's a hope that I shall, you will, whoever it is, will have to give up.

These are just chronic, not chronic, these are just regular all-age experiences.

We know them well, surely. And in a group like this, where a number of us are aging, I have learned better than to say that I'm the oldest person in the room, but I guess I'm not far off.

And most of us are past our best before date, I think you would all agree with that. We know that one day we shall be leaving this world, death, dying, transition from this order of things to a different order of things. That will have to be faced. And, well, then the question arises, what lies beyond? And the question of hope arises once more in that form. And we do need to think about it and have our own answer to it. It was put as a question by the philosopher Kant at the beginning of the 19th century as one of life's three great questions. Where do I come from? What am I here for?

And question number three, what can I hope for? And I think the philosopher Kant was hitting the nail on the head, in a way may I say that he didn't always do, but to hitting the nail on the head when he said, that is the third great question. It is. And so, members of the human race have always wondered and speculated about what lies beyond. We want a hope. Sheila introduced us some time ago to some of the ideas that different groups have had about life after death. You may remember that. But all the ideas, when you stand back and look for them, look at them, I should say, all that is, except the Christian idea, are ideas which embody a measure of gloom and the expectation of the human being. And the expectation of being diminished rather than enriched, so that people everywhere want to hang on to this life just because they are sure that what lies beyond won't be as good as it is here.

[9 : 00] So, well, let me just remind you what some of the options are. There are, to start with, the people like the philosopher Plato, who believe in what we call the immortality of the soul, where the essence of the hope is that we shall leave this body behind. Well, of course, the older you get, the more conscious you become that your body is wearing out.

Different bits of you wear out before other bits. The experience varies from one to another, but in one shape or another, it does come to everybody.

And I can understand humanly why Plato thought that for the soul, that is the person of self, the I that I am and that knows myself as me, the self, which is self-conscious in this unique way, will be happier without the body attached because the body has become such a burden.

Well, all right, that's Plato, but think what you can do with the body that God gave you that you won't be able to do when you're separated from it.

What am I talking about? Well, talking about the fact that the body is for experience. There are many sorts of experiences that come through the body and which we'd never know apart from our bodies.

[10 : 50] And the body is for expression also. I mean, expression of our mind and our heart towards other people. We use our body for expressive purposes. When we haven't got a body, we shan't be able to do that.

So, on the whole, bottom line, the Platonic idea is one of significant diminishing, however happy the soul may be, when it hasn't got bodily discomfort attaching to it day after day.

And then there's Eastern religions which put their money on reincarnation. But when you think about that and the way in which it's expressed, you realize that this too is a prospect not of enrichment, but of being diminished.

You will be reincarnated, they say. This is Hinduism, this is Buddhism. You will be reincarnated according to what you've deserved. And most of us don't deserve better than to be reincarnated at a lower level of life than the human.

So, we may be reincarnated as tortoises or, well, maybe butterflies, maybe monkeys. Don't be too optimistic about how it's going to be.

[12 : 28] And, you know, right at the end of the road for Eastern religions is the hope that in one of our lives, one of the series, we shall do so well that we shan't be reincarnated, but will be absorbed after death into the, what is it, the great ocean of being, in which we shall vanish without trace.

There'll be no personal selfhood remaining. In other words, we shall be off the wheel of karma. As long as we're on the wheel of karma, well, we must expect grim experiences.

Karma brings grim experiences. So that being off the wheel of karma by not existing anymore, that's the best we can hope for. See, it's a hope of being diminished, actually, rather than enriched.

And then there's the widespread notion of a twilight existence following life in this world, just as twilight in ordinary daily experience impresses us as the, we call it, the dying of the day.

Up comes the gloom. Up comes the limitation on movement and enjoyment. If you've got artificial life, you can turn your back on the twilight and forget it.

[14 : 10] Otherwise, you just exist in the twilight until the twilight becomes darkness. I'm talking about ideas of the underworld, which are quite widespread.

The ancient Egyptians, I suppose, were the supreme examples of this expectation of life after death.

Distinguished persons, as you know, they were buried in grand tombs. And all sorts of artifacts and, how can I say it, apparatus, which they've used in this life, gets buried with them.

Because it's assumed that in that twilight existence that's coming, they'll still need what they used and enjoyed here.

It's a continuance, in other words, of the sort of life that they've been living here, only diminished, diluted.

[15 : 20] I call it a twilight existence. It's an existence in which there's no such thing as achievement. You just go on in the underworld simply existing.

On balance, that is a prospect of gloom rather than delight. All right, now set in, right away, set in contrast with all of that, what Christianity unveiled in this world.

The one word which sets Christian faith apart from all these expectations about life after death is the one word, better.

See? Outside the realm of Christian faith, everything is a little bit worse. Or at least, not so good, as we've seen.

But in Christian faith, we discover that what awaits believers after leaving this world is something better than they knew in this world.

[16 : 40] Christians believe in the forgiveness of sins. That's to start with. And that really is a very fundamental distinctive of Christian faith.

Let that be said. None of the rest of the world's religions believe in the forgiveness of sins as Christians do. There's a story told about C.S. Lewis in a meeting of learned men who were discussing at length how, if at all, Christianity differs from the rest of the world's religions.

When it came to Lewis's moment to speak, when he was asked what he thought, he said, well, it's easy.

Christianity believes in the forgiveness of sins. Easy is, well, that's Lewis. Easy means, I think, in this case, obvious once you've thought about it.

What the forgiveness of sins means is that, as we know, our sins have been atoned for by the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross.

[17 : 58] And when we believe, when we put faith in him, and in the Father's promise of forgiveness through him, well, sins are forgiven, sins are blotted out, so that our destiny is not going to be shaped by our track record at all.

It's going to be shaped, first and foremost and decisively, by what our Lord has achieved for us, forgiveness of sins, and then new life in fellowship with himself.

And this, we're told, is the work of God restoring his messed up creation and ourselves as part of it, restoring us and it to the glory which he always had in view for it, but which sin has blocked ever since the fall.

So, as to use the Christian technical term now, the gospel sets us down in the realm of grace. grace, you know the Sunday school acronym for it, G-R-A-C-E, God's riches at Christ's expense.

I love that, and I use it often in teaching. I don't know a better way of expressing the reality of grace. That's what we're going to get. God's riches at Christ's expense.

[19 : 45] Impoverishing is no part of the story at all. Things are going to be better. Paul says it that way, you remember, in one place, Philippians chapter 1, he's in prison.

He knows that one possibility awaiting him is summary execution. You know, a jailer comes to the door of his cell, or wherever it is, that he's being kept, and says, well, Paul, in your absence, they've decided your case, you're for the high jump.

Well, says Paul, to depart and be with Christ, which is what it will mean for me, is far better. Far better than staying in this world.

That's just breathtaking. how few ordinary Christians would ever think in those terms if they were suddenly told, okay, you're a believer, you've offended against the government, or whatever, you are going to be executed.

But, Paul envisages that happening and says, to go and be with Christ is far better.

[21 : 07] And that's something that we all of us should hold on to. However, we're going to leave this world, and of course, it may be an extended illness, it may be a road accident, something sudden, for which we're not prepared prepared in any sort of detail.

There are many, many ways in which the reality of dying comes to us. But the certainty is that we transition out of this world into something better.

To be with Christ is far better, says Paul. And one asks for details and one finds the New Testament celebrating the hope of resurrection.

We shall be re-embodied with bodies that will not in any sense be a burden to us or a block on anything that we hoped to do or experience.

bodies they will be bodies like Christ's risen body. Bodies which will perfectly do whatever we ask them to do.

[22 : 30] There isn't going to be any tension between desire and our physical limitations. No, as I say, we shall be re-embodied and through our new bodies we shall be experiencing and we shall be expressing just as through the bodies we have at the moment we've been experiencing and expressing.

and we're told we shall see God blessed to the pure in heart said the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount they will see God and we shall be with Christ we depart to be with Christ and we shall be with Christians what we look forward to is a glorified society it's it's not what some poet called the flight of the alone to the alone when we leave this world no we move into a society of love it's hardly imaginable actually everybody loves everybody else who's there and the essence of love is always seeking the best for the one who's the object of your love so life in heaven whatever else it is will be as Charles

Williams used to say a riot of courtesy everybody considered the best for everybody saints as a saint hardly conceivable because in this fallen world it simply doesn't happen that way but my favorite puritan Richard Baxter in a long devotional work 800 and something large quarto pages called the saint's everlasting rest he wrote at length about heaven as a world of love and the 18th century evangelical pundit Jonathan Edwards published a whole volume of sermons titled heaven a world of love and when we think then about what awaits us well this is a thought to anchor in our minds and review often heaven is going to be a riot of love endless and glorious with Christ in the midst and we can trust

God we can trust the Lord Jesus Son of God to make himself personally present to each single one of the hundreds and thousands of folk in heaven I don't know how he will do it but then he's God God God is doing that already there are millions of Christians on the face of the earth today and God Father Son and Holy Spirit are or shall I say is personally present to each single one of us you knew that the basis of our prayer life is the confidence that it's so when we pray we ask for God's attention and we get it yeah and it will be the same in heaven with our Lord though we can't imagine how and it will be a world of beauty just as it will be a world of love

I think that C.S. Lewis whom I mentioned before is though he's a modern he is the supreme Christian exponent of heaven as a world of beauty I don't think anyone over the two millennia of the faith has ever done as well as he has done in writing really some achingly beautiful stuff about heaven think well can you think I wonder who knows the last battle the last of the Narnia books not all of you you've missed something right at the end of of the last battle you've got one of these well I have to say it again achingly beautiful scenes of everyone moving into deep heaven as Lewis called it and there's a scene like that actually not going quite so far but at the end of the voyage of the dawn treader the crew of the dawn treader including the children in

[28 : 08] Narnia they get very close to heaven and again it's achingly beautiful the way that he writes it again who knows the voyage of the dawn treader that's interesting to me you know item three in his Narnia series you don't know item seven okay you have unsuspected pleasures waiting for you then brothers and sisters you really do well anyway beauty which is there particularly in the Psalms where the worshippers praising God are very conscious of God's beauty and the beauty of things that he's created and well the texts proclaim it and we evangelicals don't make anything like as much of it as I think we ought to do one of the reasons why we find it difficult to tune in christianly to the world of the arts is that we think so little about beauty as part of the glorious destination to which

God is leading us and of which we're already having foretastes here and now in this world the theme yes the theme here is as I'm implying art as a pointer to glory and I think I say it again we really need to do a lot of homework on that because we've neglected the thought so consistently over the centuries and well you see the reflection of that christians so often are found celebrating the ugly in well in the various arts and in church buildings and so on furnishing churches furnishing rooms we simply haven't got a sense of awakenedness to beauty but in heaven we are going to get a full ration of the beautiful and it will be part of the glory of heaven but that's what we're confronted by and appreciating all the time well I say these things simply to point the contrast between what christian christian offers proclaims in terms of the destiny which is appointed for all of us and I want to highlight the contrast between this and what all the other religions of the world point to even the religion let me just mention it

I didn't mention it before the religion of Islam which did very well for beauty actually in the cultures which were islamically controlled cultures in Spain after about 1000 AD and cultures well oh last night wasn't it yes last night I was watching on the telly and perhaps you were a program about the very beautiful dome on the mount in Jerusalem lovely Islam had a very Islamic artists had a very keen sense of beauty but in Islamic thought about the world to come beauty simply doesn't enter into it Islam at that point as at so many points just isn't there well

Christianity then stands alone in the wonderful things that are being prepared for those who love the Lord who have put faith in Jesus as their saviour who are living the life of repentance repentance for our self-centeredness and service loving service to the Lord who has loved and saved us and I don't think we can overstress the unique I have to use the word glory of this vision of glory and as I said I take this as my topic this morning because a number of us are relatively close to the transition which will according to God's promise bring us into the glory that awaits us and a broader more solemn fact is that for the last hundred years the church all denominations has been very weak on the glory of glory if I may put it that way the church has been so preoccupied with stressing the reality and the riches of grace in this life that the

Christian hope has been relatively marginalized as compared at least with the way that it was in earlier centuries when life in this world was harder and therefore the place and the blessing of the hope of glory was well how shall I say it more glorious to contemplate because of the contrast between life then with the Lord and life here in dealing with all sorts of hardships and limitations which we with our technology don't have to endure these days well with those thoughts in my mind I found myself very much wanting to talk about the hope of glory and now

[34 : 55] I propose to do it in terms of how the New Testament presents the matter so that you'll when you think of it you'll know where to turn in the scriptures and you can leave the bumbling thoughts of Packer behind for the Bible is better at putting these things than I can ever be so to the New Testament the hope of glory in the New Testament what are we talking about well first of all that word glory let us be precise and take note that the word glory has a double use in scripture and in Christian life actually first of all it refers to God and it means God on display God one way or another being made visible discernible so that one is aware that he's there and one is aware of something about him which prompts praise

God is wonderful and when his glory is shown well the sense of wonder wonder at it comes with the demonstration what am I talking about well in the wilderness wanderings and then in the tabernacle and later in the temple God showed his glory in the form of a dazzling bright light and it's clear from the way that those who saw it spoke of it that although it generated all kinds of feelings the central feeling was of wonder and adoration at the greatness and the resourcefulness of God one goes on from the temple into the prophets

Ezekiel saw the glory of God in that extraordinary vision of God on a throne with moving wheels like a dynamo or a steam engine he saw that vision a number of times it was a vision of the glory of God well the New Testament against that background says and we see the glory of God now in the person of Jesus Christ the man who is God the man who is the Son of God the man in whom the perfection of God is displayed the man in whom God is on display and of course there's more to it than that in the Bible in the communion service we use words in which the two senses of the term glory actually are brought together holy holy holy is the

Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory this is God on display in power in beauty in the natural order and I guess we all of us know something about that we've all of us seen sunsets and views that have made us draw our breath they're so lovely the whole earth is full of his glory and then glory be to thee oh Lord glory be to God on high that's glory in the second sense which is praise to God for the praise worthiness of God which this display of God has laid before us see and I find it helpful to remember that remember the words in that form God's glory is the display of his praise worthiness and then the glory that we give him is praise for that praise worthiness adoration celebration delight enjoyment glory be to

God on high now in Colossians chapter 1 verses 25 through 28 which is where I'm going to start we read about the glory of God on display in the person of the Lord Jesus and Paul celebrates it like this he says I became a minister of the church according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you that is Paul thinking of the Colossians and other non-Jewish communities to which he's privileged to take the gospel stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints to whom

[40 : 44] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are wait for it the riches of the glory this divine display the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory that's a phrase that takes some unpacking the Lord Jesus came from heaven to save us whom the father had given to him for that purpose he died on the cross for us he rose again by dying on the cross he cancelled our sin he already said that this morning by rising from the dead he laid the foundation for us us humans not to become persons distinct from the persons we were before personal identity goes on but within ongoing personal identity to start a new life altogether a new life in which the

Holy Spirit is in our hearts and he unites us to the risen Christ so that you and I are in Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ is in us and that's as much truth about us as is the statement that we are sitting together in room 100 in the St.

John's premises trying to think together to some purpose about the glory of God we are in Christ and Christ is in us and it's the Holy Spirit indwelling us who generated and sustains that union of course there's mystery here it's a union beyond our understanding just actually as heaven is beyond our understanding there is a sense in which living this new life in Christ we are in heaven already heaven in the New Testament is pictured and spoken of in the manner of a place but it's a unique sort of place heaven is a the heavenlies as it's sometimes said is it's a realm of reality that interpenetrates the realm of reality of which we're aware that is the three dimensional reality that physicists work with breadth and length and height and the world that we see and that we hear the world that we're in touch with by our senses and interpenetrating all of that yes here in this room as much as anywhere else is the reality of heaven heaven heaven is where

God is where the father is where the son is on the throne and heaven is not far away heaven is close Christ is with us the father is with us the holy spirit is in us and so Christ is in us yes it's unimaginable and however much we meditate on it we shall end up where we are at the moment not understanding it but seeing reason to give God praise for it that's the way in which the Christian mind settles for this aspect of the glory of God in as much as Christ is in us by the Holy Spirit and his resurrection life transmitted by the

Holy Spirit is animating us the glory of God is already beginning to appear in us 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18 says that specifically it says that we who have faith in Christ we are being changed from glory to glory and the modern versions agree pretty much in rendering that we are being changed from one degree of glory to another glory means God on display people should be seeing Christ in us there's a hymn which says let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me well yes that's the right prayer for each single one of us we are living in Christ let the life of Christ express itself in us in love in wisdom in ambition to please and honour

[46 : 21] God every way and in hope of the glory that's promised yes this is all of it these thoughts are all of them contained in in the glory of this mystery mystery here is a word that as so often in Paul means God's plan kept secret until the moment for its revelation but now revealed to us because that moment of revelation has come yes this is what it's all about when you read the word mystery in the New Testament that's the thought to think here is God telling us what it's all about and the phrase here is this I'm just reading it is that God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is

Christ in you the hope of glory he himself then is our hope actually Paul says that you know in the opening phrase of one of his letters Christ Jesus our hope is the phrase and the thought there is that the Lord Jesus has hold of us and he's going to bring us to enjoy all that is his and we are going to enjoy it in the fullness of fellowship with himself that then is the sense in which he is our hope and is the hope of every believer yes Christ in you the hope of glory him we proclaim Paul goes on warning everyone teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in

Christ hope of glory is Christ in us the purpose of ministry is maturity in Christ two thoughts that belong together well the clock is beating me as it usually does let me hurry on to 1st Peter chapter 1 verses 3 through 9 Peter I think has read Paul's letter to the Ephesians and it's given him a lot of ideas for what he wants to write in the letter that here he does write to the Jewish dispersion those who were elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus Galatia Cappadocia Asia and Bithynia what does he say in his first paragraph he says this blessed be the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy he's caused us to be born again that's risen the same thought as being risen with Christ which is the way that Paul expresses it born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time salvation is the perfecting of us in the image of Christ which will be ours when we've got our risen bodies and when we've transitioned from this world into that world and we're enjoying what God had in store for us in his mercy from the start and Peter goes on in this vein in this you rejoice he says though now for a little while as was necessary you've been grieved by various trials well yes it comes to us all various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it's tested by fire the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory that's glory in the sense of praise and adoration praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus

Christ yes I haven't spoken yet about the revelation of Jesus Christ as his second coming there's going to be of course a generation of Christians on the face of this earth whose human life will be impacted by the appearing of the Lord for judgment and we can only suppose that the way it will come to those people is that suddenly the context of their life as it was will be gone and the company that they were in will be gone and each of us it might be us you never know each person finds themselves in the presence of the Lord Jesus the judge those who've been forgiven for

[52 : 30] Christ's sake need not fear judgments as the New Testament because for you for us the judgment will be a confirming of the verdict that God originally passed when we first put faith in Christ and the verdict is guilty as charged but not penally liable at all guilty as charged but privileged to go free the punishment for our sins was diverted onto the shoulders of Jesus our Lord and our Saviour and so it's not something it is something we can leave behind us it's not something that we have to carry as a burden for all eternity a burden that bears on the sort of eternity we're going to have no the eternity we're going to have as we've already seen depends on the promise of God and the purpose of Christ and on nothing else marvelous isn't it there is

I think a qualification to be made here each of us will receive as much in the way of enjoyment of God as we're capable of receiving and I think that's what Paul is after when he talks about a judgment according to works you find it in this life think of classical music for instance at least that's what I think of some people enjoy it so enormously that great classical music really takes them out of themselves marvelous if you're into this you know what I'm talking about Beethoven will have done it for you or Mozart or Bach or even Wagner Wagner has done it for me and he'll doubtless do it again for me but there are people who can't appreciate classical music and so sadly one has to leave them behind in the enjoyment stakes at that point well

I think that when the Lord the Lord Jesus judges some of us will be capable of receiving more joy than others some of us will have shall I say souls a sense of identity that's been enlarged by the labor and exercise of godliness in this world to an extent that others haven't been so exercised they'll be if I can put it this way the big souls and the smaller souls everyone will receive as much as we're capable of receiving and I think that's what Paul means when he says well if a life has been lived irresponsibly it's like wood hay stubble the day will declare it it'll be burned up but the person in question nonetheless will be saved even though the salvation is something like a person coming through the fire having to leave everything behind you know and there will be persons whose life in retrospect is more of the quality of gold silver precious stones wholehearted commitment and labor in praise and prayer and service and love and the Lord will know though as I say we shan't know we shan't know in relation to each other the Lord will know which are the bigger souls and which are the smaller souls but that's his knowledge not ours what we know is that every one of us will receive as much as we're capable of receiving and how much we're capable of receiving will depend on the way that we've lived in this world okay and having said that we leave the matter there meantime

Peter goes on saying this you're looking forward he says to the tested the proven testedness of your life may being found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ whom though you haven't seen him you love and though you don't now see him you believe in him and you rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory glory with which the joy is filled is I think first and foremost the joy of appreciating God on display for which you give praise God on display as creator God on display in providence where marvelous things happen the world calls them coincidences

Christians know better and supremely of course there's the marvel of God on display in redemption the father the son and the spirit working together to bring us to the glory for which human beings were made and for which sin is keeping us until God touches our lives and things are transformed yes you rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory obtaining as you do so the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls again Peter is thinking of salvation as the whole process of transformation for us from the moment that we're born again which is life beginning you see right up to the time when we're perfected in glory yes and then we shall be receiving in its fullness the outcome of our faith the salvation of ourselves

[59 : 25] I have to leave it there I was going to deal with the witness of our Lord Jesus to this in John's Gospel but time's gone and so that will have to go so how do I round all this off well I beg that we all of us make conscience of practicing the hope of glory as part of our Christian thinking our thinking I mean about life life in the present and life in the future as we look forward to what may be let's face it frankly the messy and painful business of transition dying as we call it but keep the hope of glory clear before your minds friends I beg praise God for it often thank him endlessly for his gift of the hope of glory and look forward to the day when the glory will be fully ours because we shall be gloriously with Christ meantime as Peter again says

I'm looking at verse 13 now of 1st Peter chapter 1 therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded this is now the test of sober mindedness here it comes being sober minded set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ set your hope fully on the fullness of that hope of glory which is certainty based on God's promise and purpose and will be ours in its fullness one day John in his first letter says beloved we are now the children of God it doesn't yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he appears in the day when we finally meet our

Lord Jesus Christ and he meets us we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is that's a thought to conjure with brothers and sisters hold on to it think it daily never let go now I'm beginning to overrun so I must stop and I will stop and give you a chance to move from listening to my monologue to engaging in dialogue your move brothers and sisters what should we talk about yeah a couple years ago now I had a near death experience a number of people here heard my story and the miraculous recovery and healing after that I became a couple of books came into my hand there were accounts of

Baptist ministers who had been pronounced dead and had gone to heaven experienced a number of things came back and had quite a story to tell I just wonder what your reading is on those kind of experiences and what should we do with them well my reading for what it's worth is as follows first of all we know now through the researches of the modern medical science that death involves more than what I used to talk about and think of as the moment of death namely heart stop day the heart stop moment if the if the electrical sorry say it the other way the electrical impulses in the brain don't cease to be until ordinarily 20 to 30 minutes after the heart has stopped beating and with modern medical science it is sometimes possible to bring people back

I mean to get their heart going again and then the person comes back before those electrical impulses are finally shut down I believe that when the electrical impulses finally have shut down then the person is fully dead in the sense of gone I mean he or she won't come back the body like a shell so to speak remains the person is gone and gone we trust gone as Christians we trust for good I believe that these near death experiences that are narrated in the way that you've described and yes there are quite a number of books containing this sort of testimony they are experiences that come during the period when the heart has stopped but the electrical impulses in the brain are still working so that there's still a measure of conscious personal life now here

[65 : 24] I don't know what to say and I don't think anyone else knows what to say either I would suppose that it's comparable to the way in which dreams happen when we are asleep as you know dreams are uncontrollable but they do happen and they're always strange and sometimes they're significant well alright and here is spiritual experience which is somehow significant and because the heart is restarted the person comes back into this world to tell the tale what those experiences don't tell us is how it will be for the narrator and of course for everybody else among us what it will be like for the narrator and the rest of us when the electrical impulses in the brain have ceased to be and body and soul or body and self are permanently separated and on that these narratives

I think give us no information at all what's in the visions that people experience is a reality I mean a reality of experience made up of thoughts and pictures and images that were in their minds already as Christians and then these images get shuffled and a story emerges from the shuffling rather as in those vivid dreams of ours and having said that I say all that I think I know and I finally declare I'm only guessing because guessing is all that we can do but you asked me how I approach these stories and that's how come on if this is dialogue time yeah right right at the back sorry you mentioned about how the church in the last century has not really taught the people about heaven about the world of heaven and the secular this world

I'm wondering whether or not you think it's partly to do with the kind of pressure that's put on by secular thinking I don't think that that that view is veridical I mean it doesn't match the truth that's the kind of thing that people who are not Christians have been saying about the church for two or three hundred years you know pie in the sky when you die so here in this world you don't try to improve things you don't ask that anything be made better because you're looking forward to that future life in which things will be better anyway no

I think that the problem in the church has been simple preoccupation I mean preachers teachers Christian thinkers they know as we all know that the promises for this life I mean promises of peace joy hope strength and progressive transformation into Christ's image those promises in themselves are rich and they're wonderful and the need of the world has been to hear them in an era an era like ours in which the secular people have been making such a song and dance about the improvements in the human condition which they hope to bring in I think Christians have felt well they're talking about improvements all the time we should be talking about improvements all the time improvements for life down here and show people that the gospel guarantees improvements glorious improvements for those who have faith in

Christ but it seems to me that this is a case of this you ought to have done and not left the other undone you know the teaching should be both and not either or so that's what I offer you in response to your comment any more yes sir your comment in the beginning about how it's a rather dismal situation when we don't have any hope in this world I wonder if that's limited to this world that applies to the heavenly world as well I would think that we don't hope for anything once we get there we're already in glory can't get any better comment well for those who are in glory the hope is that this will never stop you know the feeling we get it at moments of intense enjoyment of something

[71 : 42] I don't want this ever to stop you know that feeling well in heaven it won't stop and hope and experience will coincide at that point and we shall know that it will never stop and that will be part of the joy of it I haven't said a word about hell not this morning one of the essential realities or essential aspects of hell as Christian thinkers have always talked about it and indeed as the New Testament talks about it is that there's no hope there nothing will ever get better I actually this is something that I picture and teach to my classes imagine there's a vertical line and there are two cross lines like a tic-tac-toe diagram above the top cross line there is on the one side of the vertical line good that's the

Christian life and on the other side of the vertical line bad that's the life of the unbeliever between the two cross lines is what they call the intermediate state that is the condition between the person leaving the body and the person being re-embodied on resurrection day when Christ comes again I didn't have time to say anything about that but the New Testament witness I believe is simply better good to better to depart and be with Christ see it's far better and that's how it will be from the moment of the transition I think actually that what a Christian may hope for is that Christ will personally draw near to see us over when dying time comes and I suppose then that he will be the first person that we see and recognize when we're on the other side so I can't prove it but he did say and if I go to prepare a place for you

I'll come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also there I think he's talking about the death day of every believer it isn't just the day of those who are alive at his second coming yes I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am you may be also well as I say that's that I think is one of the things we have to look forward to part of the hope they were very strong and clear on that incidentally in the 17th and 18th centuries at least amongst the puritans and the evangelicals they were and they they made a good deal of death beds the whole family would be gathered around the death bed of course those were days before modern medical technology took over and people didn't die with pipes and bits of apparatus sticking out of them as they do nowadays they just died and the hope always was that as they moved closer to the moment where body and soul would part company they would see and be able to testify to something special about the

Lord who was coming for them famous last words is a Christian notion I think probably they overdid it but that was what families hoped for when Christians were on their death beds well I'm not saying that it can't happen I believe that it has happened and it will no doubt happen again though I can't of course predict that it will happen to any particular person any particular one of us but well that's that's all part of the process of transition which we all of us have to face and I think it's well to be realistic about that think about it before it actually takes place you will tell me

Bill when I will stop I want to use a collect as a prayer for us all to go home with so to speak before you finally bring down the chopper of your magisterial declaration that it's all over join me please in this prayer it's the collect for the fourth Sunday after Easter resurrection day according to the prayer book now this is a prayer I believe for all of us O Almighty God who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men grant unto thy people that they may love the thing which thou commandest and desire that which thou dost promise that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found through Jesus

[78 : 20] Christ our Lord Amen Amen Thank you for listening