

Spring 2020 Sunday School: Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

Lesson 8 - Synthesis & Conclusion

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if 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. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” John 14:1-7*

Introduction

The passage above gives us a glimpse into the consummate eternal fellowship among Jesus and his disciples. At this point in Jesus’ movement towards the cross, he has shared bits about what is going to happen over the coming hours and the events are not cheerful. One of the disciples will betray Jesus. Jesus foretells Peter’s denial. Most strikingly, Jesus is troubled in soul as he explains the type of death he will face. The disciples must have been unsettled and sensed the ominous nature of what was to follow.

So Jesus gives them comforting words, *“Let not your hearts be troubled...”* There is a place where they are heading, a *telos*, the knowledge of which can sustain them in the midst of this difficulty. It is a place where they will all be together.

But, even after three or so years of living life in the presence of Jesus and hearing him teach constantly, the disciples have questions. They have not mastered the facts. They do not put on a smug smirk, squint their eyes, and nod their heads, pretending that they know what Jesus is talking about. This Man continues to be mysterious and a little elusive in how he speaks. They just want it straight and clear. “Where are you going Jesus? Can you get us a Google map?”

We find ourselves sometimes in this same situation. Is eight weeks of studying who Jesus is enough to get our heads around him? What about decades of walking with him, talking with him, and reading about him? Can we search the Bible enough to not have any more questions? Even in human relationships, it is highly unlikely that we’ll ever come to a place where we can say that we fully know

another human. How much more must we realize that eternity is not enough to plumb the depths of the glory of our divine king, Jesus Christ?

All revelation of Christ is a gift. *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6) and *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* (John 6:44). The unveiling of the true nature of Christ to our hearts, minds, and soul is a supernatural revelation that is granted in accordance with the Father’s good purposes.

As we receive any revelation regarding Jesus, it must be synthesized in our hearts and minds into love for an actual person and trust in all that he says regarding himself. These things cannot be facts filed away in the cabinets of our brain. They must animate our lives and affect our actions. As we get initial revelation, we desire to press in more and have the bounds of our conceptions of reality stretched to get more of Christ in our hearts and minds. A writer once said that the brain is not a shoebox to collect information, but a muscle that gets stronger as it is worked. This is true of our faith, hope, and love as well. As we discussed in the first lesson of this study, this must be how we come to something like a study on the person of Christ. We are training our minds, hearts, and souls to be stronger as they are shaped by love for and understanding of the One who is most worthy of our affection, thoughts, and strength.

By God’s grace and initiative that love grows and is enlivened through a dynamic relationship with a real person. This is the key relationship that must define our lives, for it is the relationship with our Maker. It gives us boundaries and markers of our true purpose which we cannot find apart from this relationship. The way a relationship works is that understanding and affection grow over time through shared experiences and conversation. When a relationship starts, you don’t fill out a questionnaire with pertinent information about your background, demographic information, socioeconomic status, hobbies, etc. This is acquired through time spent together with the other person.

Time spent with Jesus and life lived with him is what we must seek in order to know Jesus more and be filled by him. Shared experiences...knowing that he is always with us to the very end of the age. Conversations...hearing him speak in his Word and mulling over the power of his words, striving to know him as he revealed himself in his teachings and actions. Then responding in prayer, knowing that he moves us to pray by his Spirit and hears every one of our prayers. Offering genuine prayers that come from the heart that implore him to work in us that which is good and pleasing in the

Father's sight. This is the type of dynamic, transformative relationship we can have with Jesus by his grace.

As I reflected on the past eight weeks of study and efforts to articulate divine mysteries of eternal significance, I wrote down some meditations on how I, personally, want to move from this spot into a more rich, robust, and intimate walk with Jesus and, through that, with His people. I apologize in advance for the rambling, scattered nature of the thoughts below, but I wanted to share them in the hopes that you are encouraged to write down your own reflections, questions, desires, and wonders at who Jesus is.

Can I talk to you like a friend? Are we able to have fun together? How do I worship you with my highest esteem while also knowing you as a person? A real person. That I can talk to. Not a topic to be investigated. Not a theory to be pondered. Not an abstract truth be proposed. Not a spirit to be conjured. A real person. That I can walk with. A glorious King. A fellow human. A sympathetic brother.

Does this bring down your glory? To speak of you this way? Or does this magnify your glory? As God who is a friend.

Let me not lack reverence, but let me not stay distant. Respectfully and awe-filled, yet close and personal. Let my heart be true in my desire to be known by you and to receive your counsel. To be taught by you. A real person. You can show me things beyond my own imaginings. Things that are really real. Unveiled dimensions of life and meaning. I can honor you by seeking. Letting you wash my feet and washing others in your Name.

The body you took on was not some inanimate vehicle for impersonal action. It was the whole deal. All the sensations, emotions, limitations, jubilation, and sorrows of being in a beautiful, yet cursed, existence. You have personal characteristics and attributes that make up your personality. I want to know you more.

Can I tell you how I think and feel? Can you tell me how I really feel? Can you help me see more clearly the motivations behind my own thoughts and actions? Will you be shocked or walk away uninterested? Can you help me bear sorrows and griefs? Will you share your own experience and encourage me? I don't know what it is really like to be a good friend, a faithful brother, a brave warrior. Can you show me? Can I get myself

out of the way to really see and hear you? Can I come needy but not solely focused on myself? Is there an appropriate give-and-take? How can I relate to you well? As priest, brother, friend, LORD? All at once.

The movement of the stars proclaimed your birth as you slept in a barn. Angels fill the sky to glorify you and wild men in the desert prepare your way. You prepare eternal homes of glory for your people, but you had no place to rest. Most glorious Son of God cooking fish on the beach. Sometimes walking on water, others asleep in the boat. Mind-blowing wisdom from before the ages alongside intimate knowledge of my own heart. Miraculously multiplying loaves and fishes while also being hungry. Craftsman from whom came the idea of a tree, sawing and hammering. Eternally existent speaker of galaxies bleeding under a crown of thorns. Son of Abraham, son of David, son of Joseph...Son of God.

How did you comfort those who were hurting? How were you patient with those who were slow? How did you show grace in the face of betrayal? How did you reconcile? How did you discern the time for justice and the time for mercy? Are those different things? Where have you gone now in your resurrection life? What's it like there? What are you doing? What do you want me to be doing?

I have questions. Help me to see. Thank you. I love you.

Implications - The Best Is Yet to Come

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw...Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, **“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”** Revelation 1:1-2, 12-18*

In this life, it seems that this relationship is characterized by longing. We get tastes of the intimacy and nearness of our Savior, but there is still much shadow, dark glass, and veil. We desire a better relationship, greater insight, more stability, and steadfast, lasting vision. The world, our flesh, and the devil strive to separate and cast doubt. Our existence now is one of faith mixed with doubt, not sight. But it will not always be this way!

The dissent we feel in our own members will be fully resolved when we look upon the face of the One who we long to see. The uncertainty that lingers even as we are transformed by the working of the Spirit in this life will not remain forever. We must lay hold of this promise by faith. A faith that looks to Jesus as the firstborn from the dead and trusts that a way through death has been walked and we can follow.

Faith is not always hard...faith leads to rapturous and solid joys of deep fellowship with Jesus. Beholding Jesus is transformative. A main way that we behold Jesus now is in his Word. We search the Scriptures, to know the incarnate Word more and to set our eyes of faith on Him. This attention to God’s Word eases the distractions and dissensions in our life. It is a means of grace and we should not neglect it.

John Owen said, *“no man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight hereafter, who does not in some measure behold it by faith here in this world.”* And, adding mystery to mystery, somehow as we

behold Him by faith, our hearts are taken up with him in glory and we get foretastes of the feasts to come. As we mentioned last lesson in our discussion about the Lord's Supper, Jesus' personal presence is not limited to his bodily presence. The Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, assures our hearts by his nearness and lifts the eyes of our hearts. By faith, our sojourn is graced with vistas of the homeland and our King encourages us with the refreshing presence of his Spirit, which is his own presence.

As we walk by faith now, we see in the Scriptures that our sight of Jesus will someday become direct. With our resurrected bodies and resurrected eyes, we will behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as we never have before. We will behold him with actual vision and, with resurrected minds, we will behold truths about him that we have never before grasped. And it will be glory upon glory.

But for now, we are buffeted by faith. Direct sight of Jesus would devastate us in our current state. Consider how John fell down as though dead when he saw Jesus on the island of Patmos. Consider what happened to Saul when he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. Faith is a gift that prepares us for sight.

The shadowy lack of clarity around how we can be close to God as our hearts long to be will suddenly flee as the brightest day we've ever known shines forth. In *Knowing Christ*, Mark Jones writes, *"Augustine said that 'faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.' Christ, as the object of our faith, will be the reward of our faith, so that we will see what we have believed on earth."* This is the destiny of all those who long to know Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Friend. Faith will become sight.

The hope of this sight has lessons for us while we sojourn in this life. Again, Mark Jones in his book *Knowing Christ*, captures it well,

"Christians are rightly told that they will not sin in heaven. Yet this is not so much because we are holy, but because we will be unable to take our eyes off Jesus. We are commanded to fix our eyes on Jesus in this life (Heb. 12:2) because that is how we will live in eternity. When we look to him, we do no sin; when we look away, we place ourselves in grave danger. In heaven, our perpetual sight of him will remove such a peril forever."

We are in training for holiness. We don't work up holiness by our own initiative. We grow stronger by beholding the face of Jesus Christ by the faith given to us by the Father through the work of the Spirit. As we realize the grandeur of what awaits us past the grave, death loses its sting because we know that we will have our deepest desire fulfilled. Joys will never end as we live in the new heavens and the new earth with our Savior Friend.

This is beyond an intellectual exercise. To grasp it, we must be moved deeply in our souls and have our hearts softened to truly believe that the promises given to us of eternal life are all "Yes!" and "Amen!" in Jesus. Doctrinal studies can give us the framework to see how this glory will be worked out, but art (stories, poems, songs, etc.) are means that God has given us to draw out longings and more deeply *feel* these truths. Stories which awaken our imagination and stir our deepest emotions can help us long for the truth behind all good stories.

So we turn to a children's story to help us better see this truth. C.S. Lewis captures this concept beautifully at the end of *The Last Battle*, his final book in the Narnia series. The Pevensie children have finished their sojourn in Narnia and they are worried that they will be going back to their normal world, but in their conversation with Aslan, they come to understand that they died in a train accident in their real world and they will not be going back. With this stage set, below is how Lewis quickly paints a picture of eternity:

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and your mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands - dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning." As he spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Lastly, we see that the rapture of these truths can be sprinkled throughout our day to day lives even on this side of glory. Paul demonstrates this when he moves into poetic, euphoric language in the midst of a letter instructing the church on its life together.

*“...we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence...So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us **an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**, as we look not to the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:13-14, 16-18)*

Walk in this hope, Christian...we will see Jesus face to face and the glory will not end.

Prayer

Father, you are glorious and your design is perfect. I see your majesty, grace, and self-giving justice in what you have ordained. It is far beyond anything a mere mortal could conceive and gloriously done. I praise you. I worship you above all. All I have is you. Forgive me for my rebellion, my hard-heartedness, and my lack. Thank you for ransoming me, giving me a new heart, and filling me up.

Jesus, thank you for willingly obeying by walking this path and giving yourself for me in love. I can't imagine. You gave your life for me while I was betraying you, reveling in dishonorable things, and hurting others. I was not lovable. Your love and who you are has changed me. I believe you are the Lord. I want to worship you well because you are worthy. I want to be united to you because you are the only hope of true life. I give you my life and my allegiance. Grant me to be a servant in your kingdom and work in me. Be gentle and patient, I struggle and am weak. Help me to look to you unashamed and ready to be shaped by you. Grant me clarity and boldness to resist the lure of worldly things. Show me your way of selfless love and intense focus on glorifying the Father. Send your Spirit to live in me and to work out this life according to your desires.

Spirit, could my frail, tainted body actually be a place where you would dwell? I have been washed by the blood of the Lamb. I am no longer my own, but I belong, body and soul, to you. Take up your dwelling in me, fill me completely. I pray that you would occupy this place with power to make it pure, to make it fruitful. I desire, as you desire, to honor the Father. Produce fruit in me to glorify his name. Protect me from temptation. Give me faith and wisdom. Let the light of your being shine through me.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are all that I need and all that I want. By your gracious love, continue your threefold work in me. Amen.

Songs of the Week...Deluxe Edition!

We Shall Sing by Nathan Partain (lyrics below!):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNQzMDJ907M>

What a Friend we Have in Jesus! by The Sing Team:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs4LFT59xNE>

Great High Priest by Rivers & Robots:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DrwdqdgJVw>

One Thing I Have Asked (Psalm 27) by Nathan Partain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrMFWbEE9JQ>

Christ is Mine Forevermore by CityAlight:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roQovDZeAWE>

We Shall Sing by Nathan Partain

We shall sing with hearts on fire. We shall rise and not be ashamed.

We shall look and all be radiant. We shall see him face to face.

Though we wait, the garden groaning,

Cut down by greed, used up, bereft.

What death has taken, or curse has ruined,

Jesus has turned, upon its head.

We shall sing with hearts on fire. Yes, we shall rise and not be ashamed.

We shall look and all be radiant. For we shall see him face to face.

The whole world of despair is not worth being compared

To what we shall see.

*Though we outwardly seem, to be wasting away,
Instead inwardly we are more new day by day.*

Though we don't see Him now, yet our hearts still believe.

And our hope cannot die, til our joy is complete.

And so we wait, the children hunger,

The weak enslaved, the voiceless poor.

Though weeping lasts, throughout this long night,

Jesus shall come, like joyous morn.

The whole world of despair is not worth being compared,

As we tremble with love when we meet in the air,

The whole world of despair is not worth being compared,

To what we shall see,

What we shall see.