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## OUR PRESENT HEAVEN THROUGH THE CROSS.

BY REV. HOWARD CROSBY, D.D.

Delivered in the 4th Avenue Presbyterian Church.

*“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”—COL. i. 12—16.*

PAUL urges the Colossian Christians, and through them *all* Christians, to give thanks to their Heavenly Father for mercies already in hand. The wonders described in the text are *present* wonders wrought already in their experience. It is very true that the fulness of Christ's work for us will not be displayed until this earthly life is all over, and the heavenly life, freed from all that pollutes or contracts, is reached; when the processes are ended, and the result is achieved of a complete salvation; when the final overthrow and banishment of sin, the great disturbing cause, ensures the unhindered recipiency of grace and glory. And so we ought to look forward to heaven, if not with impatience, at least with longing, because of the triumph of Divine love that there awaits the ransomed soul. But with all this Christ's salvation is not a future salvation.

Its *consummation* is future—the head-stone will then be brought forth with the shouting of “Grace, grace unto it!” but the mighty foundation is laid here—its walls have risen here story above story, and the heavenly glory shines from its growing structure. It is a very common mistake of Christ's people to forget their present comforts in their thoughts of comforts laid up in store for the other world. They live in faith that the Son of God

*will* save and glorify them, rather than that he *has* saved and glorified them. Their faith is like an old man's sight—they can see things afar off, but they cannot see things close by; and they need to become little children in faith, so as to see things just at hand, the *very present* salvation and abundant gifts of the Lord Jesus. The grace of gratitude would be certainly cultivated—would receive a wonderful impulse—if we should take into the hands and use those blessings of Christ's love which we are in the habit of seeing as a part of an indefinite future. The more of heaven we discount here the more grateful shall we be. And the power to discount heaven is far greater with us than we often suppose. Heaven is more state than place, and more heart than body, although eventually it will include all. The state and the heart are effected here by God's Word, and the right reception of that Word is the condition on which is based a more or less heavenly experience of the soul. Salvation is planted here and grows here, and we can, if we will, have here too some of its lower branches laden with rich fruit, although the higher may be only reached in the beautiful hereafter.

Our text summons us to the consideration of our present heaven, while it embraces within its scope the work of grace which has given us so priceless a possession.

First: *A present heaven.* Let us see what is said of it. "Which *hath* made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light—who *hath* delivered us and *hath* translated us—in whom we *have* redemption.

These past tenses show a work already performed—an end already attained. Our meetness, our deliverance, our translation, our redemption are accomplished facts. But what do these terms refer to? A work accomplished?

Yes, but *what* work? What meetness, and for what? A deliverance *from* what? A translation *to* what? A redemption how explained? Let us look at these thoughts in their order.

First: "Meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light," or, as I would render it, "fitted us to be partakers of the saint portion in the light." The saints of God are

to the unregenerate in this world as the Israelites were to the Egyptians. While every Egyptian household was shrouded in darkness, every Israelitish home was bathed in the light of heaven. The same fact exists in the spiritual condition of things now. A darkness far more deadly is now resting on every unconverted heart, and a light more heavenly is dwelling in every Christ-dwelling heart. In the midst of a physical darkness you can sit down and patiently wait in safety, but in a spiritual darkness this is impossible. The mind must ever be moving; it is going over new ground every minute, and if spiritual things are not discerned by it, if its spiritual eyesight is useless, its spiritual surroundings are to it as though they were not, then it is in imminent danger every minute of pitfalls and fatal surprises. The mind is not apt to be aware of its constant activity—its continual progressive movement. As on an easy railway you can scarcely believe you are moving along with the speed of a bird—indeed habit, added to the ease of the motion, makes you forget that you are moving at all—so our mental movements are so natural, that we are generally unaware of our perpetual movement in the spiritual world at a rate that may at any time, with conducing circumstances, produce a crash.

It is this which makes spiritual darkness—ignorance of God and things Divine, of grace and salvation, of Jesus and the Cross—a very dangerous thing. You are rushing like a steamer with a full head of steam through a rocky sea in the depths of a moonless, starless, cloud-covered midnight, and with an inestimable freight on board. Under such conditions darkness is terrible. If the conviction of this truth should seize upon you, my Christless hearer, you would cry for light, and forget everything else. The Christian heart is in the light, and so can understand your darkness. You, being in the darkness, cannot understand the Christian's light. We see your danger; you do *not*, neither do you see our safety. The light which we enjoy is the light of God's truth in Jesus Christ, accepted by our faith, and made greater or less according to the measure of that faith.

We are now partakers of that light. It is called the Saint's portion. It is God's gracious gift to those who will receive it, and they, by receiving it, are made saints, partakers of the Holy Ghost. Grace on God's side, faith on ours—these are the piers of the arch of salvation.

But what is meant by our being made *meet* to be partakers? Does this look to a human preparation for salvation and holiness? Does this respond to the heart's self-righteousness, and mark out a series of good works as the price of gaining the Saint's portion in the light? "*Meet* to be partakers."

Surely the meetness comes first before the partaking. Yes, but look at the words: "The *Father*, which hath made us meet to be partakers." There is no room for self-righteousness there. It is God's work. But how God's work? Let us look at the only other passage in the New Testament where the word is used, and learn from that. It is in 2 Cor. iii. 6. Our English version has it: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." Let me read it literally: "Who also hath fitted us to be ministers of the New Covenant."

Was the Apostle fitted for his ministerial work by natural goodness, virtue, or such like? He who calls himself the chief of sinners refuses such a suggestion. No, he was fitted for his work by toils, disappointments, trials, and providences of all kinds. Just so the Christian is fitted for the light by the kind action of God in his daily providence, cutting off worldly hopes by losses and bereavements, hedging us in from the world, and directing us through the force of Divinely ordered circumstances to the higher life and the things of God, His word and His spirit acting upon us *with* His providence to win our souls to Himself. This is God's fitting us to be partakers of the saint's portion in the light.

2. But God has done more than this: He has not only thus prepared the way for us, but He has accomplished the rescue: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness." There has been a conflict and a victory. Darkness is a power. From its iron grasp we have been rescued.

Who has fought and conquered? Not the poor prisoner of darkness. The intervention of a Divine power is clearly necessary, and is here expressly asserted. I do not care how this intervention is psychologically expressed. I do not care at all for the philosophical question of God's sovereignty and man's free agency. It is enough for me to know that God has done the work, and that my chains were stricken off by no power of my own.

The voice of the men freed from sin is this: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." It is God's sovereign grace which I rejoice in and which I magnify; and you, my unregenerate hearers, are well aware that you are free agents enough to call on God for His mercy upon you. In practice these metaphysics need not trouble either of us; it is only in speculation that they are puzzles, and the best way to avoid the puzzle is to quit speculation and attend to practice. We are finite intelligences, and speculations about the infinite will soon carry us beyond the limits of our mental equilibrium. God *has delivered* us from the power of darkness. Christian friends, the deliverance is complete. It is not a deliverance from *darkness*; we are not, though in the light, absolutely free from shadows; the text does not assert that we are delivered from darkness, but from the *power* of darkness. The tyranny which enslaved us is destroyed. Darkness is not our master, though it may be still our *troubler*. We recognize a superior master and protector, even while we may have some gloom fall upon us from the old sources. God's part is completely done. He has set us free from the power of darkness. Now, if after being set free we are foolish enough to go back and expose ourselves to insults and injuries from an old master, that's *our* fault, and not God's. The light shines on us, and we can enjoy as much of it as we will. Communion with God in prayer and the word and the intercourse of saints is open to us at all times. The amount of it which we use is a test of the amount of our desire to be utterly rid of the darkness. This darkness from whose dominating power God has freed us, and yet with whose molesting influences we tamper in our worldliness—

this darkness is not a darkness of the intelligence. If it were we might bear it; we might say, "Ignorance is bliss," without ever finding out the fallacy. But this darkness is one that *can be felt*; it will make itself known in the end by piercing the soul at the very nerve; it is a darkness of the moral nature, of the affections and will, which lie at the very citadel of being, which form the very core of personality. Disease here is disease in a vital; it cannot be shaken off by neglecting it, nor can you cauterize or amputate it. Spiritual darkness is disease, and if God's cure is rejected, it must have its course and destroy the soul. The reason you may not feel the agony now is that you are in a stupor—the world's opiate is taking effect—but when you are aroused from your dream, and see things as they are, the full conviction of your situation, with a heart estranged from God, will be a ceaseless and unmeasurable woe.

The third fact of our present heaven is this: "Hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." We are already delivered from the power of darkness—that is the negative side; we are also translated into Christ's kingdom—this is the positive side. There is no negation of sin except in Christ. There is no opposition to sin in the universe except that of Christ. There are those who think they are contending against some of sin's consequences, some of the miseries that sin has caused. The worldly philanthropist wishes to have men *happy*, the Christian philanthropist wishes to have men *holy*. Sin's dominion is called "the *power* of darkness," but Christ's dominion is called a "kingdom." Sin's power is tumultuous, chaotic, wild, unorganized. It is like the rushing of the conflicting winds or the meeting of the foaming billows. The soul that is under sin's power is beaten about of a tempest, but Christ's power is that of a well-ordered and peaceful kingdom, whose working is in Divine symmetry and beauty, in which the soul is satisfied and at ease. As it is the Father's dear Son, or "Son of his love," who sits upon the throne of this kingdom, so Divine love is the principle which binds all parts of this kingdom together, and forms it a kingdom of bliss.



4. Our text tells us that "we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins." The root of all our trouble has been removed—to wit, the condemning power of sin. The actual and overt commissions, the sinful words, the wicked and depraved thoughts, that have made up so much of our past history, are forgiven. As the word denotes, they are remitted, let go, discharged; they are utterly removed from us as accusers: in this sense they are remembered no more. In this complete forgiveness we understand *free grace*. In coming now before God, we come as sinners, but not as *condemned* sinners; we are *saved* sinners. With the love of Christ in our hearts, our sins cannot keep us from Him and His salvation.

We have now briefly glanced at the fact which causes us to stand on a rock—that God has already prepared the way, and then actually accomplished our rescue from the dark power of sin, and has made us happy subjects of the kingdom of Jesus, freely and fully remitting all our sins. This great fact gives us on earth even now a present heaven.

II. We have but a few minutes to note the *character of the working of that grace* which has given us so heavenly a possession. It is noted in the text by the words "redemption through his blood." The word "redemption" means a deliverance by the payment of a ransom, and the ransom is here stated to be the blood of God's dear Son, as it is again stated by the Apostle Peter: "Ye were redeemed not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." If there is any fact of revelation more conspicuous than another, more prophesied, more typified, more chronicled, more urged upon the believer's heart, it is the pouring out of Christ's blood as the price of our release from eternal death. The Old Testament proclaims from the very gate of lost Paradise that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. We may not fully comprehend the rationale of substitution in its details; we may not see why actual death was necessary, besides the living agony of our Lord; but with all this ignorance on our part we cannot deny that God's word teaches substitution, and the necessity

of Christ's actual death, in letters of light. "Christ *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures," says Paul. And again, "For this cause he is the mediator of the new covenant, that *by means of death* for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." It is for this reason that the Apostle wishes to know nothing but Jesus and *him crucified*. It is not the *life* of Jesus, glorious as that was; it is not the *sympathy* of Jesus, penetrating as that was and is; but it is the *death* of Jesus, which bears our sins and leaves us, who believe, free from their condemning load. That freedom we *now* have in the present kingdom of God's dear Son, the same Jesus risen as victor over death and ascended to his heavenly throne. Without that death of Christ there is no freedom either here or hereafter. Look, my hearer, on that strange scene at Golgotha; consider the mighty fact, the God-man dying in agony of body and soul, and then surely you cannot say, "*That* death is of no importance to me," and suppose that you can expect a pardon of your sin on the mere general principle of the Divine love. Oh! if you are right, why, *why* did Jesus have to shed his blood? Will you set up your little philosophy against the spoken and enacted revelation of God? Will you make light of all Christ's agonies? Will you in this way be guilty of the blood of the Lord? Will you thus count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing? You draw back from the Cross, and you have no heaven. *We* have found *our* heaven at the Cross. It is just there where our sins are forgiven and remitted, driven away by the Lamb of God who taketh away sin; it is just there we have found God's preparation consummated, and our deliverance effected from the fearful power of darkness.

Dear hearer, will you come with us into this light which shines from the Cross? or will you wrap your darkness around you as an eternal pall?