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Sermon Notes

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The Glory of God in Our Heavenly Memories

Earthly Kings Love to Show Off Their Glories

- Caesar Augustus: "I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble." Massive building projects designed to impress visitors with the overpowering grandeur of Rome.

To show off his life's achievement, he built a network of roads, all of which led to Rome. When visitors would enter the "Eternal City," Augustus saw to it that lavish civic buildings would dazzle their eyes and take their breath away with the "glory of Rome": massive aqueducts, many spectacular temples, the *Forum of Augustus*, the *Baths of Agrippa*, and the imposing *Arch of Augustus* (three-bayed and almost sixty feet high). Augustus desired visitors to his city to succumb to a "trance-like state of blind obedience" to his power.

- Kublai Khan: the successor to the great Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan, established Xanadu as the center of his glorious empire. It was located in what is now Inner Mongolia about 220 miles north of modern-day Beijing.

Sometime around 1275, the Venetian merchant Marco Polo visited this magnificent city and was given a tour. He reported its massive size and lavish glory, including a marble palace covered with gold, and a natural park with a lush forest filled with exotic animals and birds. According to Marco Polo, the main hall where Kublai Khan would entertain his guests was so large that it could easily have seated over six thousand. "Its roof is vermilion, yellow, green, and blue, and the tiles fixed with a varnish so fine that they shine like crystal and can be seen from a great distance." Such a display was meant to overwhelm guests with the power and majesty of Mongol rule, and to fill them with a sense of awe at the greatness of the Emperor.

- Biblical examples:

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba:

And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her. ⁶ And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, ⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard." (1 Kings 10:4-7)

Hezekiah and the Emissaries from Babylon:

2 Kings 20:13 Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses-- the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil-- his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire:

Daniel 4:30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

King Xerxes of the Persian Empire:

He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days. ⁵ At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. ⁶ White and violet linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. ⁷ Beverages were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. (Esther 1:4-7)

- Amazingly... God desires to do the same thing for his "guests" ... his adopted, redeemed children. And not just for a short visit, or for 180 days but forever and ever. He wants to put his glory on display in the New Jerusalem, and in the New Heavens and New Earth, for all eternity.

Revelation 21:9-11 One of the seven angels ... came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:22-26 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The

nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

- And God's glory will be on display not in the medium of marble (like Augustus) or polished crystal tiles colored vermilion, like Kublai Khan
- God's greatest displays of his glory will be in his people, redeemed from a sin-cursed world and made radiantly glorious.
- His incredible works in making that happen are almost limitless, and every one of them is worth studying

Book Thesis: A great part of the glory of God in heaven will consist in looking backward, in God revealing his mighty acts of redemptive history by which he redeemed a countless multitude from every tribe, language, people, and nation. This revelation of history will be for the amazement and joy of his redeemed and for the praise of his glory.

I. Meditation on the Heavenly Life

A. The Purpose of the Book of Revelation

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

B. Heavenly Meditation Commanded by God

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

C. Displayed in *Pilgrim's Progress*: Beulah Land... the "Suburbs of Heaven"

"NOW I saw in my dream that by this time the pilgrims, having traversed the Enchanted Ground, then entered into the country of Beulah [Married]. With the way passing directly through it, the air in that place was found to be very sweet and pleasant, so they rested and took comfort there for a time. ... Here the pilgrims were in sight of the Celestial City to which they were going; here also they were able to meet some of the inhabitants of that place. For in this land some of the Shining Ones walked quite frequently, because it was located upon the very borders of Heaven."

Bunyan wrote: "As a man must have much of the Spirit that sees much of God and his goodly matters, so he must be also carried away with it; he must by it be taken off from things carnal and earthly, and taken up into the glory of things that are spiritual and heavenly." [Works, vol. 3, p. 400]

D. Commended by John Calvin, but with a warning

"If Jacob saw that he was a pilgrim in the land which had been promised to him for a perpetual inheritance, it is clear that his mind was not fixed on this world but was raised above the heavens. The apostle infers that in so speaking the fathers have plainly shown that they had a better country in heaven, for if they were pilgrims here in their fatherland, their permanent home is elsewhere. **If [the patriarchs] in spirit took flight through the clouds of darkness to a heavenly country, what must we do today when Christ stretches forth His hand to us clearly from heaven to draw us to Himself?** If the land of Canaan did not hold them back how much more ought we to be unhindered when no firm resting place in the world is shown to us?" [Commentary on Heb. 11:13]

But... avoid speculation:

"And although we have advanced considerably in this meditation, let us nevertheless acknowledge that, if our mental capacity be compared with the height of this mystery, we still remain at the very lowest roots. In this matter, we must all the more, then, keep sobriety, lest forgetful of our limitations we should soar aloft with the greater boldness, and be overcome by the brightness of the heavenly glory. We also feel how we are titillated by an immoderate desire to know more than is lawful. From this, trifling and harmful questions repeatedly flow forth – trifling, I say, for from them no profit can be derived. But this second kind is worse because those who indulge in them entangle themselves in dangerous

speculations; accordingly, I call these questions ‘harmful.’” [*Institutes*, 3.25.11]

E. Randy Alcorn’s *Heaven*

1. Alcorn wrote because people tend to think of heaven as boring... like spending eternity sitting on a cloud strumming a harp

“What we need is a biblically inspired imagination... The moment we say that we can’t imagine Heaven, we dump cold water on all that God has revealed to us about our eternal home. If we can’t envision it, we can’t look forward to it. If Heaven is unimaginable, why even try?” [*Heaven*, 17]

F. My Method

1. Try to support everything I assert by both scripture texts and careful logical deductions from these texts (this is the usual procedure with all theology)

Westminster Confession of Faith: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or **by good and necessary consequence may be deduced** from Scripture.” 1.6.

2. Where I feel led to speculate (go beyond clear textual assertions), state it as speculation, but be willing to present it for consideration

II. Introductory Chapter: Heaven Illuminated by the Glory of God—Past, Present and Future

A. God’s glory will illuminate heaven

Revelation 21:23-24 **The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.**

God’s glory = the radiant display of his attributes

B. God’s glory will be seen and savored by the redeemed

Isaiah 43:6-7 **Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.**

The redeemed will both *see glory* and *be glory*.

C. God will not have the slightest beam of his glory lost

D. In heaven: God’s glory in three senses: Past, Present, Future

1. Earthly Past, remembered in Heaven: the glory God deserves for his actions in this present age, especially in assembling the redeemed from every tribe, language, people, and nation
2. Heavenly Present: God's glory on display in himself and in the New Creation
 - a. By "present," I mean the world we will inhabit in eternity
 - b. Greatest display of God's glory will be in God himself; the redeemed will see the face of God

Revelation 22:3-5 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

- c. In his new creation: the redeemed will see the glory of God shining in the New Heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem, and the Bride of Christ
3. Heavenly Future: God's glory on display in the unfolding history of events the redeemed will do in the New Heaven and New Earth
 - a. We know very little about this
 - b. But it stands to reason that there will be works for us to do commensurate with our glorified abilities
 - c. Why give us tireless bodies, perfect minds, Christ-like hearts and nothing to build or achieve?

E. A Dynamic Heaven: Continual Education for the Redeemed

1. The redeemed will have perfect minds and hearts, including perfect memories
2. BUT they will not be omniscient... they will always be learning more and more of the details of God's glories—past, present, future

"Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end" (Isa. 9:7)

F. Learning History in Heaven

1. No religion in the world so dependent on, interested in history
2. The limitations of human history
 - a. Not everything was recorded: John 20-21

- b. Many peoples had no written histories and their oral histories became extinct when the people died out
 - c. Many hidden moments known only to God
 - d. Human histories are biased, and often based on lies (Winston Churchill: “History is written by the victors”; Adolph Hitler: “the victor will never be asked if he told the truth.”)
 - e. “Fog of war”; what really happened at Gettysburg, at the Peach Orchard and Little Round Top?
 - f. Humanity has systematically destroyed its history... the “Dark Ages”
 - g. History is exceedingly complex... you could write a multivolume history of a single day; “With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years”
 - h. AND ESPECIALLY: Most of God’s people over two thousand have almost no knowledge of redemptive history, other than what was recorded in the Bible; most have had all they could do to survive, to keep themselves alive; to work hard with their own hands and had no leisure for academic pursuits
3. Therefore, God is robbed of his glory in his mighty acts in history

III. Our Perfected Heavenly Capacities

Hebrews 12:23 Spirits of righteous men made perfect

Perfect Minds: able to remember, track, focus, understand... attention span

Perfect Hearts: “heaven is a world of love” ... loving what God loves, hating what God hates; delighting proportionately to the thing

Perfect Bodies: strength, energy, endurance, eyesight, hearing... able to “gaze at the sun” and live

- a. The “Circuit Breaker”: we can’t handle the full display!

Exodus 33:18-23 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Daniel 10:16-19 I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." ¹⁸ ¶

Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

B. Radical Christ-Centeredness...

1. Loss of fanatical commitment to self which plagues us FROM INFANCY
2. Fanatical commitment to self: staring at a mirror while visiting the Grand Canyon
3. To be SET FREE! Piper: "God's love is not shown in making much of you. It is shown in him freeing you from yourself in order that you may make much of HIM!"

C. Heaven is a World of Love

Jonathan Edwards, "Heaven is a World of Love":

"There is undoubtedly an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory; and that love is **in proportion to** the perfection and amiableness of the objects beloved, and therefore it must necessarily cause delight in them when they see that the happiness and glory of others are in proportion to their amiableness, and so in proportion to their love to them.

Those that are highest in glory, are those that are highest in holiness, and therefore are those that are most beloved by all the saints; for they most love those that are most holy, and so they will all rejoice in their being the most happy. And it will not be a grief to any of the saints to see those that are higher than themselves in holiness and likeness to God, more loved also than themselves, for **all shall have as much love as they desire, and as great manifestations of love as they can bear; and so all shall be fully satisfied;** and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no reason for envy."

1 Corinthians 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

Not everyone is equally glorious in heaven, or equally honored in heaven... every saint in heaven will be fully satisfied in God but not equally satisfied in God... some vessels will have a "larger diameter" in heaven, but all vessels will be submerged in the infinite oceans of God's glory.

D. Proportional Reactions to Various Levels of Glory

E. Other People's Rewards Will Bring Us Delight as though they were our own

1 Corinthians 12:26 if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

IV. Against Heavenly Amnesia

A. Why people often recoil from the idea that God will reveal earthly history in heaven

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

1. Shameful and painful memories
 - a. Our sins
 - b. Our sufferings
 - c. Our lost loved ones, damned to hell for eternity
2. Revelation 21:4 seems difficult to harmonize with perfect, full, detailed memories of this present age
3. Specifically with our sins, God has openly promised to remember them no more

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

4. Scriptures that imply looking backward will be obsolete

Isaiah 65:17-18 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create

B. Ten Scriptural Evidences That We Will Remember Earth's History in Heaven

1. The God of Abraham... The Feast with Abraham

Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

2. The covenant promise to Abraham concerning the land; Hebrews 11... they died not receiving the promises

Genesis 13:14-15 *The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.*

Hebrews 11:13 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*

3. Ephesians 2:7... Continual display of grace

Ephesians 2:6-7 *God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

4. Rewards

a. All rewards in heaven are based on works done on earth

Matthew 5:11-12 *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Matthew 10:42 *And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.*

Luke 14:13-14 *But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*

b. If there's no story, there's no glory!!

5. The Words of Christ

Matthew 24:35 *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

6. The Wounds of the Lamb: Christ's redeeming works will be known and celebrated eternally

Revelation 5:12 *In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"*

7. The Consistent pattern of studying the works of the Lord now must not end in heaven (Ps. 111:1-2)... "Come and see what God has done" (Psalm 66:5) "Come and see the desolations" (Ps. 46:8)

Psalm 150:1-2 Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!

[Note: Psalm 150 shows the two great ways God shows us his glory: 1) direct revelation of his person... by seeing his face; 2) indirect revelation of his nature by his actions (deeds) in history. In heaven the saints will “see his face”, and soak in his glory directly. But in heaven, the saints and angels also praise God for his mighty deeds as well.]

Psalm 9:11 Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!

Psalm 40:5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

Psalm 66:1-4 Shout for joy to God, all the earth; ² sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! ³ Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. ⁴ All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”

Psalm 77:11-14 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. ¹³ Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? ¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.

Psalm 111:1-4 Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. ² Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. ³ Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴ He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

8. The Makeup of the redeemed in Revelation 7... their stories travelled with them; ethnicity retained; “Who are they, where did they come from?” (Rev. 7:14)

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 7:13-14 Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?” ¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.” And

he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

9. "In Memory of Her": why would it stop in heaven? Mary in Bethany who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume

Matthew 26:13 "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

10. Thanksgiving consummated in heaven... Revelation 4 (living creatures give thanks); Ps. 103 "forget not ALL his benefits"; Jas 1:17 EVERY good gift; the Samaritan leper came back and thanked the Lord

Psalm 103:2-3 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases

Luke 17:15-18 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

11. Romans 9 and the full display of the reprobate

Romans 9:22-24 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-- ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Job 21:7-13 Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? ⁸ They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. ⁹ Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. ¹⁰ Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. ¹¹ They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. ¹² They sing to the music of tambourine and harp; they make merry to the sound of the flute. ¹³ They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace.

So... when does God display his power over the reprobate?

The Eternally Glorious Backward Look

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