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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Bodies, Minds, and Hearts Prepared for Eternal Glory

In June of 1734, Jonathan Edwards began a sermon with these powerful words:

“It is the manner of God, before he bestows any signal mercy on the people, first to prepare them for it.” The context of that sermon was a season of revival that God was about to pour out, a revival that came to be known as “The Great Awakening.”

So also, infinitely more, when it comes to HEAVEN... God must “fit us for eternity”. Our present bodies, minds, and hearts are NOT YET READY for the glory that will be revealed to us and in us!

Randy Alcorn begins his book, *Heaven*, with a section entitled “Our Unbiblical View of Heaven.” In it, he catalogs a number of negative reactions to the topic of heaven by Christians. Here are some of the examples:

- John Eldredge in *The Journey of Desire*: “Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service.... We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. *Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news?* And then we sigh and feel more guilty that we're not more 'spiritual.' We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can.”

- Gary Larson, *Far Side*:



- Huckleberry Finn: “[Miss Watson] went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.... Well, I couldn’t see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn’t try for it.”

Such views show how unprepared we can be for heaven... especially since we understand that heaven will last for eternity. There seems to be nothing we enjoy doing here on earth that we would enjoy doing THAT LONG in heaven! And when (in this class) we are talking about STUDYING HISTORY for all eternity, it seems extremely tiresome!

But we are forgetting how much of a transformation we will undergo at the resurrection of the dead! That transformation will EQUIP US to enjoy the revelation of God’s glory that will be the center of our joy and experience in Heaven!

I. Looking Steadily at a Light Brighter Than the Sun

A. August 21, 2017: Lessons from a Partial Solar Eclipse

1. The Experience of Looking at the Sun

On August 21, 2017, a total solar eclipse made its way across the southeastern United States, coming very close to Durham, North Carolina. Where the eclipse was total, residents could see stars as though it were night. However, in Durham, the eclipse was “only” 93%. Health officials warned that we would need special glasses in order to view it, and Andy Winn had had the foresight to acquire such glasses from NASA. At 2:45 in the afternoon, we went up on the flat roof of our church and took turns using the dark glasses to view the eclipse. The sight was remarkable, as the moon blocked almost all of the sun, leaving just a sliver outside the outline of the moon to light our city. Amazingly, however, the daylight was not noticeably reduced; it just seemed like a normal sunny afternoon. Moreover, a few of us foolishly risked glimpsing the sun unaided only for a split second... and instantly regretted it. We are so used to the presence of the sun in the sky, but we are all instinctively aware of the danger of looking directly at it, and we simply never do it. The brilliance of the sun, 93 million miles away, is absolutely overpowering.

2. The Sun is a Creature... God is the Creator

a. If the sun is so dangerous to look at, how much more the infinitely glorious God!

b. Heaven will be illuminated with the glory of God

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

B. “A Light Brighter Than the Sun”

the Sun... a raging inferno, 93 million miles away; surface of the sun is 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit; the center of the sun is estimated by physicists at 27 million degrees F!!

God dwells in “unapproachable light” like the sun exists in unapproachable heat!

Ancient Greek myth: Icarus, an arrogant human being, wanted to escape his imprisonment on Crete and built wings with wax and feathers; ignoring his father’s warning, he flew too close to the sun; the wax melted and Icarus plummeted to his death

Until recently, the closest a NASA probe has been able to get to the sun is 32 million miles; a recent probe can get 8 times closer – but still 4 million miles away! Even at 4 million miles away, the temperature is 2600 degrees F!

1. Sunlight is a small emanation of the glory of God

[Paul's testimony] Acts 26:13 *About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.*

2. The sun is "ashamed" compared to God

Isaiah 24:23 *The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.*

3. God is a consuming fire

Hebrews 12:29 *our "God is a consuming fire."*

4. Who of us can dwell with him??

Isaiah 33:14-15 *"Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" ¹⁵ He who walks righteously and speaks what is right*

C. Approaching the "Unapproachable Light"

1 Timothy 6:15-16 *God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.*

D. "No One Can See Me and Live"

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." ²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."*

E. YET... the Promise

Revelation 22:3-4 *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*

Matthew 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

1 Corinthians 13:12 *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.*

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

F. The Question Before Us:

How can the servants of God in heaven survive what no man on earth could survive? What kind of transformation must occur to enable the redeemed to survive and even delight in the full revelation of the glory of God that will illuminate the New Jerusalem? All of our senses in this present age can get overwhelmed – light can be too bright, sound can be too loud. In those cases we say that the light was blinding or the sound was deafening. And yet our resurrection bodies will have perfected capabilities – infinitely far from blindness and deafness. How can this be? How can we dwell in an overwhelming place with continually overwhelming revelations of the glory of God and survive and thrive and take into ourselves all that God is revealing to us? The answer to that question is the task of this lesson

G. The Answer: Glorification

1. Radical transformation is needed

1 Corinthians 15:50-52 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

⁵¹ *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--*

⁵² *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.*

2. Glorification

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

II. Massive Strengthening Required

A. The Hebrew Word for Glory is Related to MASSIVENESS

The Hebrew word for “glory” (*cabod*) is related to the word for “heaviness” or “weight.” Thus the analogy of the sun serves us well again, as it did concerning brilliance. Cosmologists tell us that the sun contains 99.8% of the cumulative mass of the Solar System. The sun is over 700 times more massive than all the mass of the planets – including Jupiter and Saturn, and the tiny Earth, of course. The largest planet, Jupiter, is only 0.09% of the mass of the sun. The Earth is about one three-millionths as massive as the sun. As Isaiah said poignantly, “Behold, the nations are like a drop

from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales.” (Isa. 40:15)
 Dust on the scales! Like nothing! It is the mass of the sun that generates the gravitational pull needed to keep all the planets spinning in orderly orbit around the sun year after year. No planet or anything else in the Solar System has the necessary mass to hold it all together. So it is with the glory of God compared with that of all idols – created things that posture to take God’s central place in the universe. In heaven, the centrality of the glory of God will be obvious to all, since the sun itself will no longer exist. God himself will give all the light and gravitational pull needed to hold all things together.

B. Strengthened to Receive the Eternal Shipment of Glory

But God will want all his redeemed to experience progressively sheer massiveness of his glory. He will want us to feel the weight of his glory. The largest known repository of gold in the world is the Federal Reserve Bank in Manhattan, New York City. It holds approximately 7700 short tons of gold bullion, worth approximately \$317 billion at today’s market rate. Much of the gold is in bars weighing 28 pounds, and the workers who are empowered to move them must wear special steel-toed footwear in order to protect their feet from damage if even one of them is dropped. The bank itself was constructed in the 1920s, with its gold vault wisely constructed in the basement, resting on the bedrock of Manhattan Island 80 feet below street level and 50 feet below sea level. 98% of the gold stored in the Fed belongs to other nations, who delivered their gold to the vault for safekeeping during and after World War II. This massively heavy vault is a symbol of the heavenly storehouse of a truly massive treasure: the glory of God in the redemption of his saints from every nation on earth. God desires to move this treasure golden bar by golden bar from his own memory to the minds of his people. At present, our very beings would collapse under the massive weight he intends to deliver. Imagine if the New York Federal Reserve Bank wanted to deliver one thousand gold bars to your living room next month. There is no way your house’s structure could handle the delivery. You would welcome the gift, but you need to make preparations for it, lest your house come down on top of your head. Some strengthening will most certainly be required. So it will be with the bodies, hearts, and minds of the redeemed. God will be delivering gold bars of his glory to their souls for all eternity. And it will accumulate... nothing that was glorious the first day of heaven will be any less glorious “when we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun.” It’s going to get heavier and heavier and heavier. But God will strengthen us to accept the continual shipments

C. Scripture’s Strengthening Language

Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

D. Why Strengthening Is Needed

1. John Calvin's summary of people's experience's in the presence of God

"Hence that dread and wonder with which Scripture commonly represents the saints as stricken and overcome whenever they felt the presence of God. Thus it comes about that we see men who in his absence normally remained firm and constant, but who, when he manifests his glory, are so shaken and struck dumb as to be laid low by the dread of death — are in fact overwhelmed by it and almost annihilated." [John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.3]

1 Kings 18:38-39 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!"

Matthew 17:5-6 a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

2. Daniel's experience with a single angel

Daniel 10:5-9 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. ⁶ His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. ⁷ I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

Daniel 10:15-19 I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. ¹⁶ Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. 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."

3. The experiences of others

Jonathan Edwards's testimony: "to be emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone."

Sarah Edwards's night of pure pleasure, as though she were a dust speck floating in a beam of sunlight, with the love of Christ flowing and reflowing, of which she said "It seemed to be all that my feeble frame could sustain, of that fullness of joy which is felt by those who behold the face of Christ, and share his love in the heavenly world."

D.L Moody, who said that the sacred experience of the love of God which God poured directly into his soul was so overwhelming, "I had to ask him to stay his hand."

4. The Lord knows our frame... and his massive glory

Psalm 103:14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

"Frame" = interior structure... we are WEAK!! We cannot handle the truth:

John 16:12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

5. If these people needed strengthening to see SOME of God's glory, how much more will we need strengthening to see ALL of God's glory over a period lasting ETERNITY!

III. Prepared to See Glory... and Be Glory

- A. The Redeemed will See an Endless Stream of Glory... Comprehend It and Delight In It
- B. The Redeemed will Themselves Be Glorious

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

IV. The Glorious Resurrection Body

- A. The Body Described

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

1. From perishable to imperishable

2. From dishonor to glory
3. From weakness to power
4. From natural to spiritual

Summary: Our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual

Example of power:

Isaiah 40:30-31 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

B. The Body Necessary for Heavenly Life

1. Eternity is ... a long time!

James Joyce, in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, gives us some sense of eternity:

“You have often seen the sand on the seashore. How fine are its tiny grains! And how many of those tiny little grains go to make up the small handful which a child grasps in its play. Now imagine a mountain of that sand, a million miles high, reaching from the earth to the farthest heavens, and a million miles broad, extending to remotest space, and a million miles in thickness; and imagine such an enormous mass of countless particles of sand multiplied as often as there are leaves in the forest, drops of water in the mighty ocean, feathers on birds, scales on fish, hairs on animals, atoms in the vast expanse of the air: and imagine that at the end of every million years a little bird came to that mountain and carried away in its beak a tiny grain of that sand. How many millions upon millions of centuries would pass before that bird had carried away even a square foot of that mountain, how many eons upon eons of ages before it had carried away all? Yet at the end of that immense stretch of time not even one instant of eternity could be said to have ended. At the end of all those billions and trillions of years eternity would have scarcely begun.”

2. A vast new universe to explore and (perhaps) develop... the New Heavens and New Earth

V. Resurrected Minds & Hearts, Not Just Bodies

A. Present Minds Limited by Corruption and Sin

Ephesians 4:17-18 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are

darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Disease and aging and physical corruption affects our thinking processes...
Alzheimer's Disease merely one manifestation of the breakdown of our thinking processes

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay

B. Present Hearts Twisted by Corruption and Sin

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Romans 7:15-18 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ...

Romans 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

C. Perfectly Free from Sin... Forever

1. Fleshly pride is all about fanatical commitment to SELF

Pride is very closely associated with idolatry. Actually, it is the most prevalent form of idolatry, for it is self-worship. From infancy, our sin nature made us fanatically committed to self-interest. In his *Confessions*, Augustine spoke of the sins he committed even as a newborn infant at his mother's breast, howling and demanding his food regardless of the circumstances of his mother. I remember years ago seeing a humorous ad on TV for the Yellow Pages (that dates me!) It depicted eccentric egotists at some cocktail party saying very arrogant things. At one point, an elegant woman said languorously to a man who's barely listening to her, "Let's talk about you, darling! What do you think of my dress?!" This self-interest dominates our minds and hearts throughout our lives here on earth, even after we have been converted to Christ. Self-interest screams for attention at every moment. We are always thinking, "What's in it for me?" If we achieve anything for God, our flesh demands to be noticed and celebrated. If we are ignored, our flesh howls in indignation. If we see our brothers or sisters honored ahead of us, we are secretly jealous and

enraged. Think of Joseph's brothers, who saw their father bestow the many-colored robe of an heir on him and burned with envy. They "hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms." (Gen. 37:4, NASB) In heaven, we will see far more lavish honors than that heaped on others for their great deeds and we will be so delivered from jealousy that we will truly celebrate them as though they were our own. There will be fulfilled Paul's words concerning the unity of the Body of Christ: "If one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Cor. 12:26) This glorified perspective will enable us to be totally enthralled by other people's stories, no matter how obscure or ordinary those stories might be. Our brothers and sisters will be worthy of our fullest attention, and they will receive it from us with love.

2. Glorification will free us AT LAST from sinfully caring about ourselves

D. Resurrected Minds Ready to Learn Forever

E. Resurrected Hearts Ready to Delight in God's Glory Properly

VI. Heaven is a World of Love

A. Jonathan Edwards's Final Sermon on 1 Corinthians 13

B. "Heaven is a World of Love"

C. Basic Point

Jonathan Edwards: "Heaven a world of love; for God is the fountain of love, as the sun is the fountain of light. And therefore the glorious presence of God in heaven, fills heaven with love, as the sun, placed in the midst of the visible heavens in a clear day, fills the world with light. The apostle tells us that "God is love;" and therefore, seeing he is an infinite being, it follows that he is an infinite fountain of love. Seeing he is an all-sufficient being, it follows that he is a full and over-flowing, and inexhaustible fountain of love. And in that he is an unchangeable and eternal being, he is an unchangeable and eternal fountain of love. There, even in heaven, dwells the God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is, or ever was, proceeds."

D. Amazing Insights: Varying Levels of Glory

1 Corinthians 15:41-42 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. ⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead.

Jonathan Edwards: “Not the least remainder of any principle of envy shall exist to be exercised toward angels or other beings who are **superior in glory**; nor shall there be aught like contempt or slighting of those who are **inferiors**. Those that have a lower station in glory than others, suffer no diminution of their own happiness by seeing others above them in glory. On the contrary, all the members of that blessed society rejoice in each other’s happiness, for the love of benevolence is perfect in them all. ...

The saints that are highest in glory will be the lowest in humbleness of mind, for their superior humility is part of their superior holiness. Though all are perfectly free from pride, yet, as some will have greater degrees of divine knowledge than others, and **larger capacities to see more of the divine perfections**, so they will see more of their own comparative littleness and nothingness, and therefore will be lowest and most abased in humility. ...

And, besides, the inferior in glory will have no temptation to envy those that are higher than themselves, for those that are highest will not only be more loved by the lower for their higher holiness, but they will also have more of the spirit of love to others, and so will love those that are below them more than if their own capacity and elevation were less. They that are highest in degree in glory, will be of the highest capacity; and so having the greatest knowledge, will see most of God’s loveliness, and consequently will have love to God and love to the saints most abounding in their hearts.”

“... **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.”

E. Two Great Commandments Fulfilled

Matthew 22:37-39 **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** ³⁸ **This is the first and greatest commandment.** ³⁹ **And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**

1. Perfect Love for God
2. Perfect Love for Others

VII. The Limits to Our Perfection

- A. Perfect Humanity is Infinitely Short of Deity
- B. Perfect Memory and Comprehension is NOT Omniscience
- C. Linear Thinking... But Improved Capacity for Several Trains of Thought

D. Foreground and Background Thinking

VIII. Ready for an Eternity of Learning