

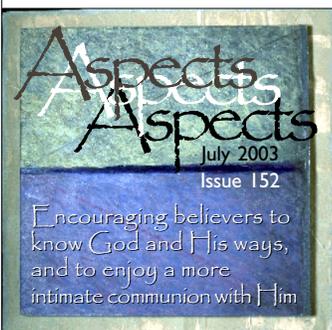


YOU ARE ADMITTED TO ENJOY THE BLESSING BECAUSE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WAS HIS IS NOW TRANSFERRED TO YOU THAT YOU MAY BE BLESSED OF THE LORD WORLD WITHOUT END. DO LET US TRIUMPH AND REJOICE IN THIS EVERMORE. WHY SHOULD WE NOT? AND YET SOME OF GOD'S PEOPLE GET UNDER THE LAW AS TO THEIR FEELINGS, AND BEGIN TO FEAR THAT BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSCIOUS OF SIN THEY ARE NOT SAVED, WHEREAS IT IS WRITTEN, "HE JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY." FOR MYSELF, I LOVE TO LIVE NEAR A SINNER'S SAVIOUR. IF MY STANDING BEFORE THE LORD DEPENDED UPON WHAT I AM IN MYSELF AND WHAT GOOD WORKS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS I COULD BRING, SURELY I SHOULD HAVE TO CONDEMN MYSELF A THOUSAND TIMES A DAY. BUT TO GET AWAY FROM THAT AND TO SAY, "I HAVE BELIEVED IN JESUS CHRIST AND THEREFORE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MINE," THIS IS PEACE, REST, JOY, AND THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN!

(CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON)

The Beginning of Heaven

IT IS REALLY UP TO US, YOU SEE. Not the collective "we," not the fettered mass of humanity all lumped together atop this orb we call home, but each one of us as free individuals. We are free to choose our path, free to choose our friends, and unmistakably free to choose the perspective from which we will view and experience this life. It is really up to each one of us what we will gain from the remainder of our time on this earth.



Some people think that this world, as it is right now, is as good as it gets. Bound to the soil, they see bad events and bad people as only transient hiccups along the inevitable destination—a point somewhere in the future at which essentially good man will have evolved into his intended utopian state, a point when mankind will have finally realized the condition it has deserved all along. These individuals cling to the strata and structure of this world like a drowning man clings to the slippery boulder that affords only tenuous salvation from being rushed downstream toward the cataract, falls, and eventual death. This world is their preferred home, and they have invested all that they are in the hope of its redemption.

Some people, on the other hand, can't see very much good in this world at all, and, as they wait longingly for the next, stiffen their resolve and live one miserable day after another, toughing it out like the good and righteous scouts that they are. Every connection they have with the here and now is held lightly, vaporously, as

something that just may—*please*, God!—be vaporized tomorrow. By choice they have few friends outside of their local congregation for, you see, those miscreants all belong to the “world”—sinners all, damned to eternal hellfire, every one of them—and just don't quite measure up to the blessed standards of those awaiting Their Returning Lord (*please*, God, let it be *today!*).

Jesus, too, chose His path—and He chose neither of the two extremes described above. Say what you will about Him, Jesus was no fool. As the agent-creator of this world, He believed no false propaganda about it or its inhabitants. He knew that it was not perfect, but was redeemable; He knew it was no longer good, but that good still existed; He knew that this world was not heaven—but that heaven would one day be populated by its souls. And He knew that the Father had placed here, in profuse abundance, sufficient resources for anyone to experience—even while still earth-bound—the beginning of heaven.

The Launch Pad of our Hope

HERE IS NO DENYING THAT FOR THE BELIEVER there is an awkward and inelastic tension between his physical and his eternal world. Far worse it would be if there were none, for the believer is not meant to be at home here; it is not his home.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Hebrews 11:13

Something happens within the believer at the point of conversion. Because it is associated more with sanctification (progressive) than justification (immediate), it very often seeps into the consciousness over time—a gradual realization that she is dwelling in a foreign land, homesick for a place she has never seen. The conversation of her old friends begins to sound tinny, and strange; activities to which she was once drawn begin to interest her less; practices and concepts that were once utterly foreign, even comical in their strangeness, begin to seem comfortable—the start of new habits.

Though some may try, this metamorphosis is not from conscious effort. In fact, it doesn't work very well to mechanically speed the process along. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of flesh, and is best left up to Him.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:16-18a niv

Yet the believer is not left in limbo. On the surface it may seem unkind of God to leave us down here, stuck between two worlds—an alien in one, without residence in the other. But in fact the *terra firma* (upon which we so often feel *persona non grata*) is less a gulag than a launch pad. Rather than wasting the hours in each day regretting the place of his residence, the believer should consider his earth-home, instead, the “first step up toward heaven.”¹

Many serious scientists remain in creative pursuit of the colonization of the earth's moon. They have devised fantastic means by which man might live there—not out of an unnatural desire to dwell in the gray dust that comprises its surface, but because the moon would supply a launch platform from which our kind could more efficiently explore the outer reaches of space. With its more modest gravitational pull, it would be far less expensive to initiate flights of discovery from the moon than it has always been from earth.

The Christian should not be in love with earth for its own sake, but should look upon it as—by the creative ministry of the Spirit—a new opportunity to begin the migration up to heaven. This world is not a dismal substitution for heaven, nor is it a barrier to it. This world is merely the physical path we take to get there. Mind you, earth is not the *means by which we attain heaven*. Far from it. There is only one way to reach heaven—and this world isn't it.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” John 14:6



But this earth is the footpath of our trek. As much as is salvation through Christ, our journey on this globe is part of the Father's design—part of the process of sanctification. As such, it contains parts of Him. Look around; God and His handiwork are everywhere. More than that, however, this world can be a convenient place of transition: Finding reflections of heaven (dim though

they may be) here on earth, and consciously beginning the transformation from earth-soiled believer to resurrected saint (not, as some believe, an angel), we are able to enjoy some of the actual benefits of that glorified state while still caught in the clutches of this world's leaden gravity.

Through a Glass, Darkly

THE VENERABLE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE uses the word "mansions" to describe the Christian's dwelling in heaven:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. John 14:1-3 kjv

But the Greek word (*mone*) can refer to just about any kind of an abode—from a shack, or a hut in a field, to an apartment or house. There is no guarantee that the believer in heaven will be living in a 100-room manor house. On the other hand, a "hut" by heavenly standards just may be the equivalent of an earthly mansion! I have a feeling that none of it will matter anyway. There is nothing at all to indicate that in our heavenly state we will be the least bit interested in the socio-economic level of our neighborhood. We will have other more pressing matters with which to occupy our time.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper...

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:10-11, 22-27

When I was a child, the minutia of life was an endless fascination. In detail I knew the texture of the bark of the hackberry tree that bore my tree house. The nooks and crannies of our garage's

attic were a catacomb of discovery and imagination, in which I fashioned forts and caves, and secret dwellings. I knew the aroma of the first day of spring, and the excruciating cold of a winter's eve while delivering newspapers. I was familiar with every bend, every tide pool and miniature cataract of the tiny creek that meandered behind Franklin School.

As I grew older, the objects of my fascination changed. I discovered cars, and sports—and girls. But I still had the time and luxury to know them all in lingering detail: It was important that I knew the various models and types of cars. I read books about baseball, played in Little League, and knew the rich, leathery smell of my glove's palm, and the comfortable feel of swinging my own bat. And, of course, by a certain age the fairer sex became a powerful distraction from just about everything else. Suddenly my clothing, the cut of my hair, the scented liquid I applied after a shower, the popular songs playing on the radio—all became very important to me.

Even when I went off to serve in the navy, I became intimately acquainted with the mirror-like shine on my shoes, the perfect crease in my trousers, the brevity of my haircut. During my stint as a mess cook, I memorized the smell of a walk-in reefer filled with vegetables, and the wilting steam coming off a serving table. Overseas I knew the cloying aromas of a Hong Kong marketplace, the smell of gray paint on a steel deck, and the sweet feeling of freedom on liberty after a month at sea.

Life, during my youth, consisted of all these small things—absorbed and memorized, pigeon-holed, categorized—that became the catalogue of what was important. Small things were important because youth experience life by minutes and hours. Time passes slowly for the young.

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11

Time for adults, on the other hand, passes at breakneck speed. During some hazy, unrecorded point in my adult life, small things became less important—almost invisible. Youth experience their life through a microscope, down to every tiny detail, while adults experience life through a wide-angle lens. The teenage girl knows the eating and grooming habits of the very latest musical (?)

heartthrob, but the adult woman already has her attention filled to capacity with the raising of her children, management of house and husband, or the daily rigors of the workplace.

I no longer have the luxury of studying the bark on each tree; I must do my work, then move on to the next. The vehicle I drive is no longer selected for its appeal to others, but for its low price, and its reliability in moving me from Point A to Point B. I no longer listen to the popular music of the day; I listen to the news and the weather.

Time and its activities change between, childhood and adulthood, from the necessary maturity of responsibilities. Most adults have had the opportunity to sift out of their life the inconsequential; adults have prioritized out of their lives much of the nonessentials of childhood to make room for the essentials of surviving in a hard world. Much of the contrast, therefore, can be explained by the need for basic time-management. But that does not explain it all.

Once we are born, we immediately begin our journey to the eternity of our choice—we begin



the journey to whatever lies on the other side of our ultimate earthly demise. The only difference between the youth and the adult, is that the adult knows this; the misguided youth considers himself immortal.

The unbeliever shrugs off eternity as either myth, or an inevitable fate outside his capacity to change. In either case it becomes something to disregard. The believer, too, has a choice in how he reacts to what (for him) will be a more pleasant end. Many a Christian thinks of heaven with the same disregard as unbelievers: it is out there; it is inevitable; it is a good thing, but there is nothing I can do about it; I will not think about it.

Other Christians, however, have taken the next transitional step. Just as they left behind the minutia of childhood, in favor of the substantial of adulthood, they are now leaving behind the inconsequential of this world, in favor of the eternal of the next. They have already taken that “first step up toward heaven.”

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.
1 Corinthians 13:12*

A Wider View

HOW DO WE LIVE THIS WAY? How do we live as though our today—in this earthly place and time—is actually the beginning of heaven?

The key is in the use of that wide-angled lens we have employed as adults. Heaven (by which I mean the God-driven philosophy and occupation of that perfect dwelling) focuses in like an electron microscope on only one thing: the Godhead itself. With only one thing are the inhabitants of heaven, like immortal youth with all the time in the world, free to invest themselves fully: the blissful adoration of God the Father, and the Lamb.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5:11-14

Those who actually live in the continual presence of God do so with an intense, single-minded purpose. They study nothing as much as they study God; they love nothing as much as they love God. It is His dwelling place, the place of His throne, and not one of them wishes to be anywhere else. Everything else within their consciousness—and, as most of heaven is still a mystery to earth-dwellers, we cannot know what all that may be—is viewed by them through a wide-angled lens. Objects are rendered smaller, when viewed by this means. They are perceived as less significant, and become so in the viewer’s mind. Because they are less significant, these objects become less of a distraction from the true object of the heaven-dweller’s desire.

The earth-dweller, by contrast, has a few other things with which he must contend. For he is still of earth-bound flesh, not yet the glorified flesh which Jesus demonstrated during His final forty days on earth.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” But they were

startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them. Luke 24:36-43

Like his Lord, the resurrected saint will be able to walk through walls, yet eat solid food. The saint still on earth, however, must make his entrance into a room through an opened door, and sometimes he gets indigestion.

But it is not too early for the "unglorified" saint to employ the same heavenly vision used by its inhabitants. It is possible for the mere human to view his life and surroundings through the clarifying wide-angled lens that diminishes all things—both good and bad—in comparison to the magnified image and presence of God.

Worship is the means by which we refresh our perspective. In worship we slough off the built-up scales of earth-vision, rinse away the accumulated residue of our myopia, and see once again through clean, sharply focused eyes the truth of our position with respect to God's. In worship we set God on His throne, and thus remove ourselves from its lofty environs. That is the whole truth of it, but the message of this world—the message with which we are bombarded every waking moment—is that *we* belong on the throne, not God. Worship reorders that lie.

There is an authentic *event* of worship—regularly practiced, often corporate—during which we intentionally and specifically adore the Lord upon His throne. Sunday mornings have become institutionalized for this purpose, with protestant churches in the United States and around the world throwing open their doors to worshipping Christians. Most believers realize that there is nothing magical or ordained about the typical Sunday morning process; corporate worship can be just as authentic on Wednesday evenings, Monday mornings, or Saturday nights. But some have not learned that worship can also be for the individual a steady, continual way of life. Authentic worship, in whatever form, places God upon His rightful throne, and when worship is a way of life (rather than limited to an event), that worship becomes a way for the individual to continually set God before everything else *by seeing Him in everything*.

The seventeenth century monk, Brother Lawrence, described it this way:

*When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awaking cries:
May Jesus Christ be praised;
Alike at work or prayer
To Jesus I repair:
May Jesus Christ be praised.*

*In heaven's eternal bliss
The loveliest strain is this,
May Jesus Christ be praised;
The powers of darkness fear,
When this sweet chant they hear:
May Jesus Christ be praised.*

*Be this, while life is mine,
My canticle divine,
May Jesus Christ be praised;
Be this th' eternal song,
Through all the ages long:
May Jesus Christ be praised.*

THIS MADE ME RESOLVE TO GIVE THE ALL FOR THE ALL: SO AFTER HAVING GIVEN MYSELF WHOLLY TO GOD, TO MAKE ALL THE SATISFACTION I COULD FOR MY SINS, I RENOUNCED, FOR THE LOVE OF HIM, EVERYTHING THAT WAS NOT HE; AND I BEGAN TO LIVE AS IF THERE WAS NONE BUT HE AND I IN THE WORLD. SOMETIMES I CONSIDERED MYSELF BEFORE HIM AS A POOR CRIMINAL AT THE FEET OF HIS JUDGE; AT OTHER TIMES I BEHELD HIM IN MY HEART AS MY FATHER, AS MY GOD: I WORSHIPPED HIM THE OFTENEST THAT I COULD, KEEPING MY MIND IN HIS HOLY PRESENCE, AND RECALLING IT AS OFTEN AS I FOUND IT WANDERED FROM HIM. I FOUND NO SMALL PAIN IN THIS EXERCISE, AND YET I CONTINUED IT, NOTWITHSTANDING ALL THE DIFFICULTIES THAT OCCURRED, WITHOUT TROUBLING OR DISQUIETING MYSELF WHEN MY MIND HAD WANDERED INVOLUNTARILY. I MADE THIS MY BUSINESS, AS MUCH ALL THE DAY LONG AS AT THE APPOINTED TIMES OF PRAYER; FOR AT ALL TIMES, EVERY HOUR, EVERY MINUTE, EVEN IN THE HEIGHT OF MY BUSINESS, I DROVE AWAY FROM MY MIND EVERYTHING THAT WAS CAPABLE OF INTERRUPTING MY THOUGHT OF GOD. SUCH HAS BEEN MY COMMON PRACTICE EVER SINCE I ENTERED INTO RELIGION; AND THOUGH I HAVE DONE IT VERY IMPERFECTLY, YET I HAVE FOUND GREAT ADVANTAGES BY IT. THESE, I WELL KNOW, ARE TO BE IMPUTED TO THE MERE MERCY AND GOODNESS OF GOD, BECAUSE WE CAN DO NOTHING WITHOUT HIM; AND I STILL LESS THAN ANY. BUT WHEN WE ARE FAITHFUL TO KEEP OURSELVES IN HIS HOLY PRESENCE, AND SET HIM ALWAYS BEFORE US, THIS NOT ONLY HINDERS OUR OFFENDING HIM, AND DOING ANYTHING THAT MAY DISPLEASE HIM, AT LEAST WILLFULLY, BUT IT ALSO BEGETS IN US A HOLY FREEDOM, AND IF I MAY SO SPEAK, A FAMILIARITY WITH GOD, WHEREWITH WE ASK, AND THAT SUCCESSFULLY, THE GRACES WE STAND IN NEED OF. IN FINE, BY OFTEN REPEATING THESE ACTS, THEY BECOME HABITUAL, AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS RENDERED AS IT WERE NATURAL TO US. GIVE HIM THANKS, IF YOU PLEASE, WITH ME, FOR HIS GREAT GOODNESS TOWARDS ME, WHICH I CAN NEVER SUFFICIENTLY ADMIRE, FOR THE MANY FAVORS HE HAS DONE TO SO MISERABLE A SINNER AS I AM. MAY ALL THINGS PRAISE HIM. AMEN.

Scripture, invariably more succinct, puts it this way:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36

An Eternal Perspective

ALL BELIEVERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE CAPACITY TO KNOW GOD, and the inclination to worship Him. We are people set apart, each individual given his or her own umbilical to heaven: the Holy Spirit. The Comforter—among His many other qualities—shares with us the ability to do two things of critical importance to our relationship with the Father:

- to focus our attention on God, to the diminution of everything else;
- to find God (or evidence of Him) in all elements of our earthly experience.

There is no shortage of evidence on this earth for the existence of and truth about God. Even the unregenerate know it is here.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...

Romans 1:18-22

So long as we remain on this world—so long as we remain “not-yet-glorified”—those of this world who have chosen to disregard God will make every effort to cloud our vision. Their goal is to validate their own myopia by spreading its contagion to others, so that all will be as miserable as they. But by the ministry and unbounded power of the Holy Spirit, the believer not only can know God while he remains on earth, but he can revel in Him—to the extent that this rather ungainly existence can be transformed into the beginning of heaven itself.

It is a great presumption of the Christian to claim that he knows with certainty what it will be like in heaven, for, in truth, we have scant information on that topic. Based on the character and behavior of its inhabitants, however, the Christian can certainly guess what it may be like.

The impression left by God’s word is that heaven is all of Him. His presence is everywhere; His “person” is the focus of everyone’s attention; His worship is the principal occupation of heaven’s

Evensong

I don’t remember listening to the birds while growing up. I suppose I did; living in a small town during the ’50s and ’60s, in the fertile heartland of America, doubtless there were many times when the winged filled the air with song. But it is not a prominent memory.

The stuff of pleasure and delight changes over the years. As a child I took delight in things I could play with: a favorite stuffed animal, a metal toy truck, my tricycle. I found pleasure in my tree house, the many inventions dreamed up down in the basement of our house, and the stories of adventure and conquest read under the covers at night. These were the pleasures of my childhood, and I remember them well. I still know what they felt like to touch; I can still taste the joy they brought to my life.

Adults experience life at a pace that does not encourage such small pleasures. Even those of us who live outside the accelerated pace of the big city—who live with the company of nature rather than the company of concrete, asphalt, and honking traffic—know living that flies by too fast for such innocent contemplation.

Which makes the evensong of the birds so precious. Springtime evenings—as the sun is setting behind the distant hills, leaving in its wake swirls of pinks and purples, and fading whites to paint the darkening sky—is the time (after the similar dawn) when the bird minions are at fullest voice. Stepping out into the evensong chorus is the stuff of pleasure and delight for one encrusted with the insulation of years. The songs of the brown thrashers and cardinals, diminutive wrens and red-winged blackbirds reawaken joy, and revive a muted holiness lying dormant in the breast.

For the beasts of the field remain one of our connections to God. Their song—no matter what they are really saying—to the ear of man is a sampling of pleasure and joy sent down by the Father of a higher kingdom. To pass along, beneath their lofty neighborhood, is to pass beneath the vicinity of God’s throne, where angels and elders sing out His praise in unending song.

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion in the far north,
The city of the great King.
God, in her palaces,
Has made Himself known as a stronghold.
Psalm 48:1-3*

citizens. If there are any other activities in that lofty realm, they are surely of minor importance, and infrequent.

So here is our template for living while we remain rooted to the soil of earth. Since God, or His fingerprints, are everywhere, His reality and purpose are to be the focus of our attention. Meanwhile, His worship, in its many and varied forms, is to be our principal occupation.

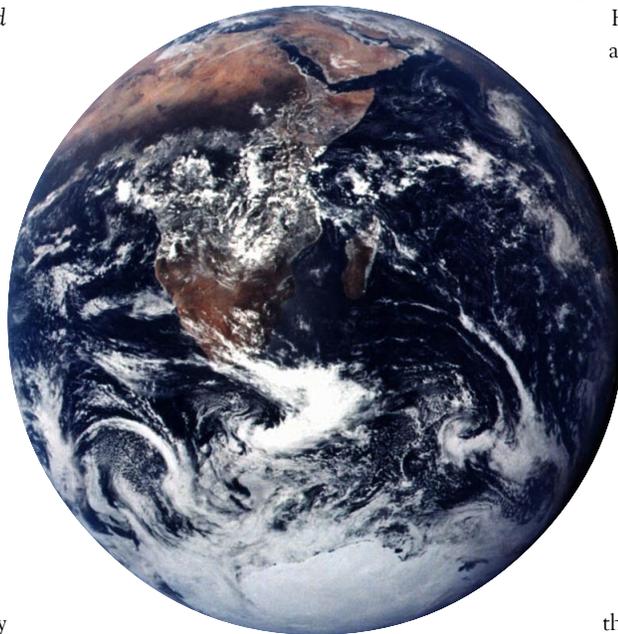
Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

Matthew 22:34-38 niv

All other activities—admittedly of some importance to our temporal well-being—are to be incorporated into our pursuit of Him. This does not necessarily mean a change in our activities, but it certainly means a change in the outlook and intentions of our heart. And it means a change, developed by practice, in our responses to everything around us.

Everyone in heaven knows that God is the source and arbiter of all things. Down here we must repeatedly remind ourselves of that truth. Through practice we train ourselves to have a response of gratitude and joy to beauty, to bounty, to pure love, to all those small occurrences that add texture and depth to our lives. God is the source; He is due the gratitude and praise. Like children we rediscover the small delights of living on earth, but like adults we learn to enjoy them as blessings from the hand of a gracious Father.



We train ourselves, until the practice becomes a reflexive habit, first to notice, then to enjoy, and finally to give thanks to God for all the good things of this life: family, security, beauty, home—even possessions, for they, too, are from Him. This is the easy part, and the habit is developed quickly.

More difficult is the habit of gratitude for the hard times, the times when our belly twists into a knot, and every part of our being wants to raise a fist of anger towards a God who would do such a thing. Everyone in heaven knows that God is the author of both the pleasant and the unpleasant. Those of us still on earth, however, find ourselves choking on words of praise for flood and famine, for war and death. Our flesh is never so strong as when we muster a response to pain. It is hard for our small minds to accept that it, too, is from a loving God.

Here we, again, must employ the wide-angled lens—the perspective of heaven.

Resentment and disbelief come easy when we linger with magnifying microscope upon every uncomfortable event—even those occurring to others, but especially those that come *our* way. But when we widen our perspective, placing the immediate event within not only a global scale, but within the context of history and God's word, it is easier to perceive the contemporary pain as only one small thread in the larger tapestry of humanity dwelling on earth.

Widened even more, seen as if from the edge of heaven, our disaster—real as it is—becomes smaller still, and almost imperceptibly we begin to interpret *all* events, both pleasant and unpleasant, from a timeless, eternal perspective. God's perspective.

And only then can this fragile and muddy platform upon which we dwell become for us the beginning of heaven.

*The thought of God, the thought of Thee,
Who liest in my heart,
And yet beyond imagined space
Outstretched and present art,—*

*The thought of Thee, above, below,
Around me and within,
Is more to me than health and wealth,
Or love of kith and kin.*

*It is a thought which ever makes
Life's sweetest smiles from tears,
And is a daybreak to our hopes,
A sunset to our fears;*

*Within a thought so great, our souls
Little and modest grow,
And, by its vastness awed, we learn
The art of walking slow.*

*To think of Thee is almost prayer,
And is outspoken praise;
And pain can even passive thoughts
To actual worship raise.*

*All murmurs lie inside Thy Will
Which are to Thee addressed;
To suffer for Thee is our work,
To think of Thee our rest.*

(Frederick William Faber)

The Beginning of Heaven

Notes:

1. Attributed to Bruce Barton, author of *The Man Nobody Knows* (a biography of Jesus), cited by Adela Rogers St. Johns in her book, *First Step Up Toward Heaven: Hubert Eaton and Forest Lawn* (Prentice Hall, 1960), p.xx.

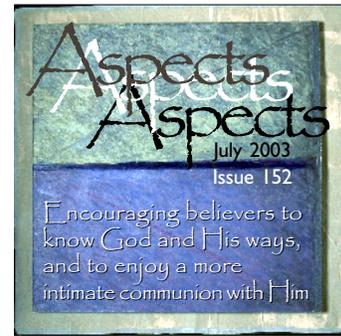
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Aspects is distributed free-of-charge. If you wish to contribute financially toward this ministry, then we want you to know that your contribution will be an encouragement to us, and will be applied toward the expenses of postage and materials. To select your Thank-you Gift, visit our web site contribution page at [HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/CONTRIB.PHP](http://DLAMPEL.COM/CONTRIB.PHP).

Meanwhile, you are cordially invited to discover the many Christian resources available at our Internet site.

At [HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/](http://DLAMPEL.COM/) you will find periodicals, e-mail list subscriptions, dramatic resources and completed projects. You may also review all of our His Company scripts, or download them for immediate use. All resources and publications are made available free of charge.

Periodicals

Aspects is our monthly devotional journal. This multi-page publication has been published since 1990—via the Internet since 1994.

Frequency: Monthly

Editions: Print, Pdf, Ascii

Seeds of Encouragement is published every Monday and Friday mornings as a brief, simple reminder of God's presence in our lives.

Frequency: Twice-weekly

Editions: HTML (e-mail only)

Reflections by the Pond offers thoughtful considerations of life, nature, and the world in which we live from a Spiritual perspective. It is published every Wednesday.

Frequency: Weekly

Editions: HTML (e-mail only)

Dramatic Resources

At the His Company web site visitors will find a complete catalogue of dramatic and musical resources that both illustrate Scripture and proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

All scripts and worship resources are included in their entirety, ready for immediate download.

Editions: Ascii, Pdf

Download Center

Our Download Center is a one-stop location for archives of all of our publications: *Reflections* booklets, the *In Unison* series, *His Company* scripts—and back issues of *Aspects*. The Download Center can be accessed from our main page—[HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/](http://DLAMPEL.COM/)—or you can go directly there by entering the following URL in your web browser: [HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP](http://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP). Optionally, for year 2002 back issues, go directly to [HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP?ACTION=CATEGORY&ID=10](http://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP?ACTION=CATEGORY&ID=10); for year 2001 back issues, go to [HTTP://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP?ACTION=CATEGORY&ID=11](http://DLAMPEL.COM/PAFILEDB3/PAFILEDB.PHP?ACTION=CATEGORY&ID=11). We continue to add earlier years, so check back often. And, of course, browse through all categories at our Download Center for more of our resources.

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