



If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at heaven and you will get earth “thrown in”; aim at earth and you will get neither.

C. S. Lewis

SO 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 the 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.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Revelation 7:9-12

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.

Even so, 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.

A WAY OF LIFE

Worship is the means by which we refresh this 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 magnify God before everything else—by discovering Him everywhere he looks. The seventeenth century monk, Brother Lawrence, described it this way:

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.

*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.*

from the 19th Century German