



HG267: Amazing Grace (Verse 5)
Yes, When This Heart And Flesh Shall Fail

Psalm 73:23-18

Home Group Study Notes

5 November 2023 - James van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Hammer, ice pick, karate, drop it on the floor. Which,
in your opinion, is best?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Yes, When This Heart And Flesh Shall Fail

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Home Group Sermon Notes

5 November 2023 - James van Cleeef

***Yea, when this flesh and
Heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.***

John Newton

***Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth
That I desire other than you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart
And my portion forever.***

Psalm 73.25-26 (NRSV)

Have you ever noticed that when singing verses in hymns or songs that mention death there is a tendency to do so in a hushed volume? So, verse five of Newton's hymn will begin in sombre tone, only to rise with a triumphant finish to lead us to the usual next verse of 'When we've been there ten thousand years...' which will be sung with strength and great joy. I think the reason hymns are sung in this way is because there is among people, even Christians who trust that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, a tendency to ignore or seek to defer death. Western society fears death. And yet it is something we know happens, but we'd better speak of it quietly, as we wouldn't want to tempt fate...

With regard to death, as Christians, of what are we afraid? 'For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.38-39 NRSV). Or, 'living is Christ and dying is gain' (Philippians 1.21 NRSV).

Here's another thought: You've heard the phrase 'so heavenly minded they're of no earthly good.' It is used of those whose heads are in the clouds, almost entirely detached from what is happening on earth because their focus is pie in the sky when they die... Some 'Christian' thinking has no time for earth, no time for the 'here and now.'

Both Newton's verse five and the reading from the Psalm are correctives to both a fear of death and detachment from the here and now. There are two ways we will think about these words: 1) To see the promise and hope of eternity, of being perfectly in the presence of the Father, Son and Spirit. 2) To connect these words—both hymn and Scripture—to the blessed life of discipleship on earth, living in the here and now in the presence of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Can you win THIS mansion with Omaze (+ a Porsche and £100,000)?

One of the best known verses in Scripture says, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3.16 NRSV). Further on in John's Gospel Jesus says, in old money, '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' (John 14.2 AV). Who wouldn't love a mansion! And in Revelation 21.3, the prophecy of Ezekiel is fulfilled: 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them' (NRSV). In such a place we will know God in his fullness, and ourselves in our total transformation through Jesus Christ. We will receive our inheritance, we will be wholly reconciled, we will know in complete truth our adoption in Christ.

Death and Taxes

We have very little certainty in this world, apart from taxes and...death. So, I am certain this corruptible body will end, yet my hope remains in the certainty of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead, and that dying with him I will be raised in him! And if resurrection and heaven are not real, then as Paul reminds us, 'we are of all people most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15.19 NRSV).

So, why the fear? Will we miss out? Is it not part of our plan? Do we forget that we are aliens in this land, that we are in the world but not of it? Or simply do we not like the unknown? The embrace of our physical death is surely an indication of our trust in God. Will he keep us? Are we his? Does the Father truly love us? You see, resurrection and our presence in heaven is all of one with God's purpose for us in Christ before the creation of the world that we should live in the communion and fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit. It is the perfection and culmination of God's heart. Hear again the mystery and wonder of Jesus' words:

'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11.25-26 NRSV). Maybe we need to sing with more gusto when we sing about death, for in Christ we are alive!

Armageddon? I'm-a-gettin-outta-here!

Now, there is no problem with heaven. There is nothing wrong with our hope in Christ. A problem arises when we can think of nothing else other than our eternal abode and are unmoved by the plight of people lost in darkness, not knowing their true identity in Christ, or believing that we are not to be concerned with what goes on in the world. After all, 'I've got my gospel train ticket! Armageddon? I'm-a-gettin-outta-here!'

Yet the truth is that though we are followers of Jesus Christ, we are not magically transported out of a world corrupted by sin, nor are we immune from the uncertainties of life. But we still are here, and in being here we have the task of living out the truth of the Kingdom of God amidst the morass and decay of this age.

To help us let's reflect on Psalm 73. The Psalmist begins with an affirmation of faith, that God is good to the upright and pure in heart. And he includes a confession: 'I knew of God's goodness, but when I looked at the wicked, I was envious of their prosperity' (vv. 1-3). In other words, where is the pay-off for being faithful? I am faithful, yet 'suffer'. They are not faithful, and prosper!

The Psalmist loses his sight when he is focussed on the arrogant, and this loss of vision causes a bitter heart and lack of wisdom (see vv. 21-22). For the Psalmist this loss of sight almost caused him to stumble... (v. 2) Almost. With his focus on 'earth' he lost sight of 'heaven.' And with his focus on 'earth' his attitude toward God changed. And how long would it have been until his behaviour and character changed? What saved him? 'But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God...' (vv. 16-17 NRSV).

In the sanctuary of God. Where is that? It is in the Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, the most Holy Place, wherein the high priest enters but once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people, where he communes with God Almighty at the mercy seat where the glory of God descends. Within the veil...

If Church is so great, why do I feel so bad?

Have you ever found the Christian life difficult? Is there any here who has felt useless as a disciple? There is a whole list of things that can make you feel unworthy. Neglecting a chance to talk about Jesus. Ignoring the need of a friend. Laughing at something that was cruel. Putting yourself in a compromising situation. Facing your 'demons' and failing. Again. And then you come to worship on Sunday, and you look around at everybody else who 'has it together' and you carry a burden of guilt and shame that push you to the ground.

Here's the good news: the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. The glory of incarnation is that Jesus took upon himself our fallen flesh, our weakness, and chose to subject himself to all the brokenness of Adam's race in order to reconcile fallen humanity. He lived as human in a world of Adam's fall, but did not live according to Adam's fall. His eyes were fixed on the Father. Our adoption as God's children has always been the point, but if in our blindness we cannot see the glory of the Father, what hope do we have? In Jesus, therefore, the Word of God becomes flesh, and 'tabernacled' with us in order to heal human existence. He endured the cross, died, and was raised again. And now is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Jesus Christ has brought heaven to us, and takes us into heaven.

Doesn't 'sufficient' hint there's more?

What is the solution to when, in the here and now, 'this heart and flesh shall fail?' What choice do we have when the sinful flesh, as Paul calls it, seems to win the day? His answer was, '[the Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me...for whenever I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12.9-10 NRSV). John Newton's answer: 'I shall possess within the veil...' What's behind the veil? We already know: The Holy of Holies where God communes with the high priest. Why does this matter? It matters because we—with failed flesh—have the incarnate, crucified, resurrected and ascended Jesus bringing us into the presence of the Almighty.

'Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.' (Hebrews 4.14-16 NRSV)

‘Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.’ (Romans 8.34 NRSV) ‘...he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.’ (Isaiah 53.12 NRSV)

The Psalmist, as we know, was embittered in soul, stupid and arrogant because he took his eyes off God. But his encounter with God in the sanctuary transformed his vision. What on earth will transform your vision? Nothing. But in heaven there is One without whom we would not have life! In heaven is Jesus Christ who heals our flesh and strengthens us so that our hearts do not fail. What is required of us? Simply that we come into his presence, unafraid, knowing that he is for us. And the more of him that we receive, the less of us gets in the way, for our ego always obstructs our vision of the God who saves.

Psalm 73 reinforces the union that already exists between heaven and earth—something we pray every week, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’—and this is enough.

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*
Psalm 73.25-26 (NRSV)

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*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Even though 100% of us will die, death is not a hot topic of conversation, particularly ours (though we often discuss the death of others). But Scripture does remind us that death has been defeated (see 1 Corinthians 15). So, as Christians, how should we talk about death? Or do we simply get on with living?

2. What do you imagine heaven to be like? Are there caricatures of heaven that are unhelpful (i.e., how it may be portrayed in literature, or on TV or cinema)?

3. Jesus reminds us that we are in this world, but not of this world (see John 15.18-19). How do we engage with the 'world' without being conformed to the 'world'? How can we help fellow believers to stand firm in faith?

4. When coming to worship, do we ever act as if we've got it all together, when in fact our interior life is unsettled or in turmoil?

5. We pray every week that God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Has this phrase become empty liturgy, or does it frame how we live as followers of Christ here and now?

6. The writer to the Hebrews emphasises the need for perseverance in the Faith—going on going on. How are we to fulfil this?

What are the key supports that must be in place when the going is hard?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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