

A Foretaste of Heaven

In my previous article I referenced two important lessons that Jesus taught his disciples after his resurrection from John 21: We've seen that Jesus demands our total allegiance, i.e., genuine disciples of Jesus are devoted to living lives for his glory. Secondly, Jesus commands our *dependent* obedience. Our obedience is to be guided by the Scriptures and dependent upon the Holy Spirit. We can do nothing—in and of ourselves—that truly honors God. Today we'll be reminded that:

—Jesus Cares for Our Needs

We see in John 21:11-12 that Jesus, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, already has a meal prepared and bids his disciples, “Come and have breakfast.” Notice the phrase translated, “Now none of the disciples *dared* ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.” (vs. 12) For 21st century Christians who know and believe the truth about the resurrection, it may not be easy to wrap our minds around how hard all of this still must have been for these first century disciples. They're in the place of, on the one hand, knowing that it's impossible to refute the evidence of Jesus sitting right in front of them and yet, on the other hand, still struggling to make sense of it all. So, “none of them dared ask him.”

The disciples took the bread and fish and had a wonderful breakfast with Jesus. Jesus knows and provides for their needs. It's the same for us, isn't it? Jesus cares for us and for the things that we need for our *earthly* lives, not least, his wonderful fellowship with us. He speaks to us in his word, and he hears our hearts as we cry out to him in prayer. We should be continually thankful for our *earthly* blessings and the good things of life including regular fellowship with Jesus. But are you aware that—not only do we daily receive *earthly* blessings but—we're invited to regularly experience *heavenly* blessings? I want to look briefly in the New Testament book of Hebrews in order to show us another important way in which Jesus shows his special care for our needs.

In chapter 2 of Hebrews, we learn that Jesus Christ, although unseen, leads us in corporate worship every time we gather on the Lord's Day. We see this initially in 2:12 where Jesus quotes Psalm 22:22: “I will tell of your (God's) name to my brothers; *in the midst of the congregation*, I will sing your praise.” But there's more! Later, in chapter 12 of Hebrews, we get a glimpse of the *amazing* worship that's taking place in the heavenly city *that we participate in by faith!* There's mystery here to be sure, but this truth is meant to be a wonderful encouragement to God's people.

Beginning in 12:18 we're reminded of what happened in the Old Testament when Moses, and the children of Israel, were encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai. The imagery of the Lord descending upon the mountain shown in “blazing fire, darkness and gloom” was frightening. “Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’” (Hebrews 12:21) The writer of Hebrews now replaces the terrifying imagery of the earthly Mt. Sinai during the time of Moses with a beautiful picture of what's *presently* happening in heaven where the worship of God is taking place. “But you have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly (the church) of the

firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. . . .” (Heb. 12:22-23) At this point our author is identifying Christians who, although still here on earth (the church *militant*), their names are already written in the heavenly book. Notice that, along with these are the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” (the church *triumphant*).

This is an amazing truth! When we gather for worship here on earth, we’re also worshipping our triune God with the angels as well as those Christians who’ve died and gone on to heaven! The author of Hebrews is describing something wonderful, which we, mysteriously, participate in! As we worship here on earth, we feast on the Word as well as *spiritually* feasting on Christ crucified in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. And yet, there’s so much more going on when we gather with God’s people that we don’t often think about. The words of the hymn writer capture this truth. Speaking of the Church he writes, “Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.” If you find yourself believing that worship is boring, you haven’t really contemplated what’s actually taking place. The writer of Hebrews has reminded us that, Lord’s Day corporate worship—regulated by God’s word—is truly a foretaste of heaven.

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