

(Edwards, Absent From the Body. part 2)  
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saints in heaven are partakers with Christ in the joy and glory of the advancement and prosperity of his kingdom of grace on earth, and success of his gospel here, which he looks on as the peculiar glory of his reign.

The good shepherd rejoices when he finds but one sheep that was lost; and his friends and neighbors in heaven rejoice with him on that occasion. That part of the family that is in heaven is surely not unacquainted with the affairs of that part of the same family that is on earth. They that are with the King and are next to him, the royal family, that dwell in his palace, are not kept in ignorance of the affairs of his kingdom. The saints in heaven are with the angels, the King's ministers, by which he manages the affairs of his kingdom, and who are continually ascending and descending from heaven to the earth, and one or other of them daily employed as ministering spirits to each individual member of the church below: besides the continual ascending of the souls of departed saints from all parts of the militant church. On these accounts the saints in heaven must needs be under a thousand times greater advantage than we here for a full view of the state of the church on earth, and a speedy, direct, and certain acquaintance with all its affairs in every part. And that which gives them much greater advantage for such an acquaintance than the things already mentioned, is their being constantly in the immediate presence of Christ, and in the enjoyment of the most perfect intercourse with him, who is the King who manages all these affairs, and has an absolutely perfect knowledge of them. Christ is the head of the whole glorified assembly; they are mystically his glorified body: and what the head sees, it sees for the information of the whole body, according to its capacity: and what the head enjoys, is for the joy of the whole body.

The saints, in leaving this world, and ascending to heaven, do not go out of sight of things appertaining to Christ's kingdom on earth; but, on the contrary, they go out of a state of obscurity, and ascend above the mists and clouds into the clearest light: to a pinnacle in the very centre of light, where every thing appears in clear view. They have as much greater advantage to view the state of Christ's kingdom, and the works of the new creation here, than while they were in this world, as a man that ascends to the top of a high mountain has a greater advantage to view the face of the earth, than he had while he was in a deep valley, or thick forest below, surrounded on every side with those things that impeded and limited his sight. Nor do they view as indifferent or unconcerned spectators, any more than Christ himself is an unconcerned spectator.

The happiness of the saints in heaven consists very much in beholding the glory of God appearing in the work of redemption: for it is by this chiefly that God manifests his glory, the glory of his wisdom, holiness, grace, and other perfections, to both saints and angels; as is apparent by many Scriptures. And therefore undoubtedly their happiness consists very much in beholding the progress of this work in its application and success, and the steps by which infinite power and wisdom bring it to its consummation. And the saints in heaven are under unspeakably greater advantage to take the pleasure of beholding the progress of this work on earth than we are that are here; as they are under greater advantages to see and understand the marvellous steps that Divine Wisdom takes in all that is done, and

the glorious ends he obtains, the opposition Satan makes, and how he is baffled and overthrown. They can better see the connection of one event with another, and the beautiful order of all things that come to pass in the church in different ages that to us appear like confusion. Nor do they only view these things, and rejoice in them, as a glorious and beautiful sight, but as persons interested, as Christ is interested; as possessing these things in Christ, and reigning with him, in this kingdom. Christ's success in his work of redemption, in bringing home souls to himself, applying his saving benefits by his Spirit, and the advancement of the kingdom of grace in the world, is the reward especially promised to him by his Father in the covenant of redemption, for the hard and difficult service he performed while in the form of a servant; as is manifest by Isai. liii. 10, 11, 12. But the saints shall be rewarded with him: they shall partake with him in the joy of this reward; for this obedience that is thus rewarded is reckoned to them as they are his members, as was before observed. This was especially the joy that was set before Christ, for the sake of which he endured the cross and despised the shame. And his joy is the joy of all heaven. They that are with him in heaven are under much the greatest advantages to partake with him in this joy; for they have a perfect communion with him through whom, and in fellowship with whom, they enjoy and possess their whole inheritance, all their heavenly happiness; as much as the whole body has all its pleasure of music by the ear, and all the pleasure of its food by the mouth and stomach; and all the benefit and refreshment of the air by the lungs. The saints while on earth pray and labor for the same thing that Christ labored for, viz., the advancement of the kingdom of God among men, the promoting of the prosperity of Zion, and flourishing of religion in this world; and most of them have suffered for that end as Christ did, have been made partakers with their head in his sufferings, and "filled up (as the apostle expresses it) that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ:" and therefore they shall partake with him of the glory and joy of the end obtained. Rom. viii. 17, "We are joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." 2 Tim. ii. 12, "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Christ, when his sufferings were past, and he left the earth and ascended into heaven, was so far from having done with kingdom in this world, that it was as it were but then begun: and he ascended for that very end, that he might more fully possess and enjoy this kingdom, that he might reign in it, and be under the best advantages for it; as much as a king ascends a throne in order to reign over his people, and receive the honor and glory of his dominion. No more have the saints done with Christ's kingdom on earth, when they leave the earth and ascend into heaven. "Christ came (i.e., ascended) with clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and was brought near before him, to the very end, that he might receive dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him," Dan. vii. 13, 14. Which shall be eminently fulfilled after the ruin of Antichrist, which is especially the time of Christ's kingdom. And the same is the time when "the kingdom and dominion, and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High God;" as verse 27, in the same chapter. It is because they shall reign in and with Christ, the Most High, as seems intimated in the words that follow; "whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." This verse is true, not only of the saints on earth, but also the saints in

heaven. Hence the saints in heaven, having respect to this time, do sing, in Rev. v. 10, "We shall reign on the earth." And agreeably hereto, it is afterwards represented, that when the forementioned time comes, the souls of them that in former ages had suffered with Christ do reign with Christ; having as it were given to them new life and joy, in that spiritual blessed resurrection, which shall then be of the church of God on earth; and thus it is that it is said, Matt. v. 5, "The meek (those that meekly and patiently suffer with Christ, and for his sake) shall inherit the earth:" they shall inherit it, and reign on earth with Christ. Christ is the heir of the world; and when the appointed time of his kingdom comes, his inheritance shall be given him, and then the meek, who are joint heirs, shall inherit the earth. The place in the Old Testament whence the words are taken, leads to a true interpretation of them. Psal. xxxvii. 11, "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." That there is reference in these latter words, "the abundance of peace," to the peace and blessedness of the latter days, we may be satisfied by comparing these words with Psal. lxxii. 7, "In his days shall be abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth:" and Jer. xxxiii. 6, "I will reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth:" also Isai. ii. 4, Micah iv. 3, Isai. xi. 6--9, and many other parallel places. The saints in heaven will be as much with Christ in reigning over the nations, and in the glory of his dominion at that time, as they will be with him in the honor of judging the world at the last day. That promise of Christ to his disciples, Matt. xix. 28, 29, seems to have a special respect to the former of these. In verse 28, Christ promises to the disciples, that hereafter, "when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, they shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The saints in heaven reigning on earth in the glorious latter day, is described in language accommodated to this promise of Christ, Rev. xx. 4: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them; and judgment was given them. And they reigned with Christ." And the promise in the next verse, in that sixth of Matthew, seems to have its fulfillment at the same time: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or fathers, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life;" i.e., in the time when the saints shall inherit the earth and reign on earth, the earth, with all its blessings and good things, shall be given in great abundance to the church, to be possessed by the saints. This shall they receive in this present world, and in the time to come everlasting life. The saints in heaven shall partake with Christ in the triumph and glory of those victories that he shall obtain in that future glorious time, over the kings and nations of the world, that are sometimes represented by his ruling them with a rod of iron, and dashing them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Which doubtless there is respect to in Rev. ii. 26, 27: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: (and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessel of a potter shall they be broken to shivers:) even as I received of my Father." And Psal. cxlix. 5, to the end: "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds;" i.e., in their separate state after death; compare Isai. lvii. 1, 2. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand: to execute vengeance upon the Heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgment written: this

honor have all the saints." Accordingly when Christ appears riding forth to his victory over Antichrist, Rev. xix., the hosts of heaven appear going forth with him in robes of triumph, verse 14. And when Antichrist is destroyed, the inhabitants of heaven, and the holy apostles and prophets, are called upon to rejoice, chap. xviii. 20. And accordingly the whole multitude of the inhabitants of heaven, on that occasion, do appear to exult and praise God with exceeding joy, chap. xix. 108, and chap. xi. 15; and are also represented as greatly rejoicing on occasion of the ruin of the heathen empire, in the days of Constantine, chap xii. 10.

And it is observable all along in the visions of that book, the hosts of heaven appear as much concerned and interested in the events appertaining to the kingdom of Christ here below, as the saints on earth. The day of the commencement of the church's latter day glory is eminently "the day of Christ's espousals; the day of the gladness of his heart, when as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so he will rejoice over his church." And then will all heaven exceedingly rejoice with him. And therefore they say at that time, Rev. xix. 7, "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give glory to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come."

Thus Abraham enjoys these things when they come to pass, that were of old promised to him, and that he saw beforehand, and rejoiced in. He will enjoy the fulfilment of the promise of all the families of the earth being blessed in his seed, when it shall be accomplished. And all the ancient patriarchs, who died in faith of promises of glorious things that should be accomplished in this world, "who had not received the promises, but saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them," do actually enjoy them when fulfilled. David actually saw and enjoyed the fulfilment of that promise, in its due time, which was made to him many hundred years before, and was all his salvation and all his desire. Thus Daniel shall stand in his lot at the end of the days pointed out by his own prophecy. Thus the saints of old that died in faith, not having received the promises, are made perfect, and have their faith crowned by the better things accomplished in these latter days of the gospel, Heb. xi. 39, 40, which they see and enjoy in their time.

3. The departed souls of saints have fellowship with Christ, in his blessed and eternal employment of glorifying the Father.

The happiness of heaven consists not only in contemplation, and a mere passive enjoyment, but consists very much in action. And particularly in actively serving and glorifying God. This is expressly mentioned as a great part of the blessedness of the saints in their most perfect state, Rev. xxii. 3: "And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." The angels are as a flame of fire in their ardor and activity in God's service: the four animals, Rev. iv. (which are generally supposed to signify the angels), are represented as continually giving praise and glory to God, and are said not to rest day nor night, verse 8. The souls of departed saints are, doubtless, become as the angels of God in heaven in this respect. And Jesus Christ is the head of the whole glorious assembly; as in other things appertaining to their blessed state, so in this of their praising and glorifying the Father. When Christ, the night before he was crucified, prayed for his exaltation to glory, it was that he might glorify the Father: John xvii. 1, "These words spake Jesus, and lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." And this he doubtless does, now he is in heaven; not only in fulfilling the Father's will, in what he

does as head of the church and ruler of the universe, but also in leading the heavenly assembly in their praises. When Christ instituted the Supper, and ate and drank with his disciples at his table (giving them therein a representation and pledge of their future feasting with him, and drinking new wine in his heavenly Father's kingdom), he at that time led them in their praises to God, in that hymn that they sang. And so doubtless he leads his glorified disciples in heaven. David was the sweet psalmist of Israel, and he led the great congregation of God's people in their songs of praise. Herein, as well as in innumerable other things, he was a type of Christ, who is often spoken of in Scripture by the name of David. And many of the psalms that David penned, were songs of praise, that he, by the spirit of prophecy, uttered in the name of Christ, as Head of the church, and leading the saints in their praises. Christ in heaven leads the glorious assembly in their praises to God, as Moses did the congregation of Israel at the Red Sea; which is implied in its being said, that "they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb," Rev. xv. 2, 3. In Rev. xix. 5, John tells us, that "he heard a voice come out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great." Who can it be that utters this voice out of the throne, but the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne, calling on the glorious assembly of saints to praise his Father and their Father, his God and their God? And what the consequence of this voice is, we have an account in the next words: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

#### APPLICATION.

The use that I would make of what has been said on this subject is of EXHORTATION. Let us all be exhorted hence earnestly to seek after that great privilege that has been spoken of, that when "we are absent from the body, we may be present with the Lord." We cannot continue always in these earthly tabernacles: they are very frail, and will soon decay and fall; and are continually liable to be overthrown by innumerable means: our souls must soon leave them, and go into the eternal world. O, how infinitely great will the privilege and happiness of such be, who at that time shall go to be with Christ in his glory, in the manner that has been represented! The privilege of the twelve disciples was great, in being so constantly with Christ as his family, in his state of humiliation. The privilege of those three disciples was great, who were with him in the mount of his transfiguration; where was exhibited to them some little semblance of his future glory in heaven, such as they might behold in the present frail, feeble, and sinful state: they were greatly entertained and delighted with what they saw; and were for making tabernacles to dwell there, and return no more down the mount. And great was the privilege of Moses when he was with Christ in Mount Sinai, and besought him to show him his glory, and he saw his back parts as he passed by, and proclaimed his name. But is not that privilege infinitely greater, that has now been spoken of, the privilege of being with Christ in heaven, where he sits on the right hand of God, in the glory of the King and God of angels, and of the whole universe, shining forth as the great light, the bright sun of that world of glory; there to dwell in the full, constant and everlasting view of his beauty and brightness; there most freely and intimately to

converse with him, and fully to enjoy his love, as his friends and spouse; there to have fellowship with him in the infinite pleasure and joy he has in the enjoyment of his Father; there to sit with him on his throne, and reign with him in the possession of all things, and partake with him in the joy and glory of his victory over his enemies, and the advancement of his kingdom in the world, and to join with him in joyful songs of praise to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God, forever and ever? Is not such a privilege worth the seeking after?

But here, as a special enforcement of this exhortation, I would improve that dispensation of God's holy providence, that is the sorrowful occasion of our coming together at this time, viz., the death of that eminent servant of Jesus Christ, in the work of the gospel ministry, whose funeral is this day to be attended; together with what was observable in him, living and dying.

In this dispensation of Providence, God puts us in mind of our mortality, and forewarns us that the time is approaching when we must be absent from the body, and "must all appear (as the apostle observes in the next verse but one to my text) before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one of us may receive the things done in the body, according to what we have done, whether it be good or bad."

And in him, whose death we are now called to consider and improve, we have not only an instance of mortality, but an instance of one that, being absent from the body, is present with the Lord; as we have all imaginable reason to conclude. And that, whether we consider the nature of the operations he was under, about the time whence he dates his conversion, or the nature and course of his inward exercises from that time forward, or his outward conversation and long space wherein he looked death in the face.

His convictions of sin, preceding his first consolations in Christ (as appears by a written account he has left of his inward exercises and experiences), were exceeding deep and thorough: his trouble and exercise of mind, through a sense of guilt and misery, very great and long continued, but yet sound and solid; consisting in no unsteady, violent and unaccountable hurries and frights, and strange perturbations of mind; but arising from the most serious consideration, and proper illumination of the conscience to discern and consider the true state of things. And the light let into his mind at conversion, and the influences and exercises that his mind was subject to at that time, appear very agreeable to reason and the gospel of Jesus Christ; the change very great and remarkable, without any appearance of strong impressions on the imagination, sudden flights and pangs of the affections, and vehement emotions in animal nature; but attended with proper intellectual views of the supreme glory of the divine Being, consisting in the infinite dignity and beauty of the perfections of his nature, and of the transcendent excellency of the way of salvation by Christ. This was about eight years ago, when he was about twenty-one years of age.

Thus God sanctified and made meet for his use, that vessel that he intended to make eminently a vessel of honor in his house, and which he had made of large capacity, having endowed him with very uncommon abilities and gifts of nature. He was a singular instance of a ready invention, natural eloquence, easy flowing expression, sprightly apprehension, quick discerning, and a very strong memory; and yet of a very penetrating genius, close and clear thought, and piercing judgment. He had an exact taste: his understanding was (if I may so express it) of a quick, strong and

distinguishing scent.

His learning was very considerable: he had a great taste for learning; and applied himself to his studies in so close a manner when he was at college, that he much injured his health; and was obliged on that account for a while to leave the college, throw by his studies and return home. He was esteemed one that excelled in learning in that society.

He had an extraordinary knowledge of men, as well as things. Had a great insight into human nature, and excelled most that ever I knew in a communicative faculty: he had a peculiar talent at accommodating himself to the capacities, tempers and circumstances, of those that he would instruct or counsel.

He had extraordinary gifts for the pulpit: I never had opportunity to hear him preach, but have often heard him pray: and I think his manner of addressing himself to God, and expressing himself before him, in that duty, almost inimitable; such (so far as I may judge) as I have very rarely known equalled. He expressed himself with that exact propriety and pertinency, in such significant, weighty, pungent expressions; with that decent appearance of sincerity, reverence, and solemnity, and great distance from all affectation, as forgetting the presence of men, and as being in the immediate presence of a great and holy God, that I have scarcely ever known paralleled. And his manner of preaching, by what I have often heard of it from good judges, was no less excellent; being clear and instructive, natural, nervous, forcible, and moving, and very searching and convincing. He nauseated an affected noisiness, and violent boisterousness in the pulpit; and yet much disrelished a flat, cold delivery, when the subject of discourse, and matter delivered, required affection and earnestness.

Not only had he excellent talents for the study and the pulpit, but also for conversation. He was of a sociable disposition; and was remarkably free, entertaining, and profitable in ordinary discourse; and had much of a faculty of disputing, defending truth and confuting error.

As he excelled in his judgment and knowledge of things in general, so especially in divinity. He was truly, for one of his standing, an extraordinary divine. But above all, in matters relating to experimental religion. In this, I know I have the concurring opinion of some that have had a name for persons of the best judgment. And according to what ability I have to judge things of this nature, and according to my opportunities, which of late have been very great, I never knew his equal, of his age and standing, for clear, accurate notions of the nature and essence of true religion, and its distinctions from its various false appearances; which I suppose to be owing to these three things meeting together in him;--the strength of his natural genius, and the great opportunities he had of observation of others, in various parts, both white people and Indians, and his own great experience.

His experiences of the holy influences of God's Spirit were not only great at his first conversion, but they were so, in a continued course, from that time forward; as appears by a record, or private journal, he kept of his daily inward exercises, from the time of his conversion, until he was disabled by the failing of his strength, a few days before his death. The change which he looked upon as his conversion, was not only a great change of the present views, affections, and frame of his mind; but was evidently the beginning of that work of God on his heart, which God carried on, in a very wonderful manner, from that time to his

dying day. He greatly abhorred the way of such, as live on their first work, as though they had now got through their work, and are thence forward, by degrees, settled in a cold, lifeless, negligent, worldly frame; he had an ill opinion of such persons' religion.[2]

Oh that the things that were seen and heard in this extraordinary person, his holiness, heavenliness, labor and self-denial in life, his so remarkably devoting himself and his all, in heart and practice, to the glory of God, and the wonderful frame of mind manifested, in so steadfast a manner, under the expectation of death, and the pains and agonies that brought it on, may excite in us all, both ministers and people, a due sense of the greatness of the work we have to do in the world, the excellency and amiableness of thorough religion in experience and practice, and the blessedness of the end of such, whose death finishes such a life, and the infinite value of their eternal reward, when absent from the body and present with the Lord; and effectually stir us up to endeavors, that in the way of such a holy life we may at least come to so blessed an end. AMEN.

#### NOTES

[1] Preached on the day of the funeral of the Rev. Mr. David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians, from the Honorable Society in Scotland for the propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Pastor of a Church of Christian Indians in New Jersey; who died at Northampton, in New England, October 9, 1747, in the 30th year of his age, and was interred on the 12th following.

[2] We have omitted a few pages which follow here of this discourse, because what the author communicates, respecting Mr. Brainerd, is to be found almost in the same words in the Memoirs of his life, and in his Reflections upon it, which he afterwards published.

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