

Revivals And Church History :: Next Door To Heaven by Ron Bailey

Next Door To Heaven by Ron Bailey - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/10/12 9:59

The Throne

The original governor of Pennsylvania wrote a book called 'No Cross, No Crown'. It is a fascinating glimpse into the deep spiritual experience of the early Quakers. William Penn's intention was primarily to expound this truth in the experience of the believer, but in the earthly history of Son of God the title is even more true; His voluntary humanity was not a temporary experiment, but a permanent fact. The incarnation made God, man. Paul, the apostle, later opened out this truth. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (1)

Crucifixion was not only the death penalty but the ultimate humiliation and judgment of the worth of an individual; it was the final rejection of a member of society who died in disgrace. When the Romans adopted crucifixion they reserved it for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery, provided that they were also slaves, foreigners, or other non-persons (2). The coming of Jesus as the Son of God in flesh was a condescension beyond our imagination, but to die even the death on a cross was a scandal. The distance from the Throne of heaven to the Cross at Calvary is the longest journey in all history. But there could be no shortcuts; this is why He came.

The normal and logical destination for the bodies of the crucified was the city dump just outside Jerusalem. There in the continual burning of the valley of Hinnom the rejects were finally erased from history. One of his more influential disciples made a special formal request to be allowed to take away the corpse for 'burial'. His bruised and battered body was laid in the quietness of a rock tomb, and his followers wandered off nursing their broken hearts and shattered dreams. The pain is witnessed later in the gospel according to Luke; "...Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel..." (3) Is anything more poignant than the phrase 'but we were hoping'...? The enthusiasm of the earlier years was gone now; their world is in ruins.

To understand the special ignominy of these events we should dip into the gospel according to Matthew. Matthew introduces the subject of his account using two key phrases; The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (4) These are two glorious titles; Son of David, Son of Abraham. They tell us the whole purpose of Matthew's gospel. This is the gospel of the King, the gospel of the Promised Seed. Matthew's gospel is conspicuous for its use of phrases like; ...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying...(5) It is the gospel, which more than any other, reveals Christ as the fulfilment of ancient prophecy and promise; prophecies which have their clearest expression in promises given to Abraham, and prophecies which promised a 'new' David. I can't think of better words to excite the imagination and hope of the ancient Israelite. We hear them again in the words of Philip spoken to Nathaniel at the very beginning of John's gospel; Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (6) After 2000 years we can still hear the excitement; we have found him! And we see Nathaniel's understanding of such words; 'Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel.' (7)

But if it not been Joseph of Arimathea's successful request the body of their promised Messiah and King would have been smouldering to oblivion in the valley of Hinnom. If the journey from Heaven's Throne to Calvary's Hill was beyond our understanding, what shall we say of the return journey? Sometimes we need to set history's events into a wider context to see their real significance. How about this for a summary of Christ's Mission? And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (8) In that single sentence the scripture captures the whole picture. It covers the 'round trip'; incarnation and enthronement. In between the two mountain peaks of this revelation there lies a hidden valley; Calvary and a rock tomb.

For the vast majority of the human race Calvary was the last sight they had of Jesus. His followers interned His body; the guard sealed the stone against interference. It was all over. It would never have touched even the footnotes of history

but for one thing. "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (9) The testimony of the witnesses of course is vital and God took care to ensure that their number was as large (10) , although Peter explained to Cornelius that it was a select group (11) . There was an event, however, which was much more public which occurred some 50 days after the crucifixion and interment.

For forty days Christ appeared and disappeared. The appearances are recorded in the gospel and this time was a vital part of the preparation for the future. During this time the disciples' hopeless disappointment was transformed into glorious hope. During this time Christ 'breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit' (12) . Again, this was to all the people but seems to have been a unique authorising of those who would continue His work. Back in Old Testament times God had taken the 'spirit' that marked Moses' unique authority and 'put' it upon 70 elders of Israel (13) . The focus in Numbers is not so much of the personality of the Spirit but of His unique equipping ministry. Jesus breathed 'Holy Spirit' on them. Luke records this same resurrection appearance but does not mention this specific detail. Luke concentrates on other aspects of that same visit to the upper room; Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. (14) I would have loved to have been at that Bible study! He interpreted the Old Testament (15) in the dawning light of the New, and one of His key themes was the Kingdom of God (16) .

He also instructed them to 'remain in Jerusalem until a further event took place'. (17) They were not to begin their 'witness' until this event. The King James version has the phrase 'tarry ye in Jerusalem'; the word is 'sit down'. They were not to enter into their labours prior to this event; they must 'sit and wait'. Let's not be coy any longer, He called the coming event 'the sending of My Father's promise'. They had needed and received a work of the Holy Spirit which 'opened their understanding' but they were still commanded to wait until He had fulfilled His promise to them. Everything would be coming together in their understanding now. When they had protested at the thought of His absence He had encouraged them with this promise; "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." (18) More profitable to have the Spirit than to have the Son? So He said! The word behind 'Helper' is a multi-faceted word which means supporter, advocate, encourager, strengthener; one called alongside to help another, and a legal representative. The 'coming One' would be all that they could possibly need.

He also tied in His leaving with the Spirit's coming; this was cause and effect. Without the 'leaving' there could be no 'coming'. No doubt they were much helped during those 40 days; The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. (19) It was through the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit that those 40 days were filled with increasing revelation and expectation, but they were still to await His personal arrival.

Calvary + 40 and Christ's work on earth was done. He assembled the believers together on the Mount of Olives (20) and as He was blessing them He parted from them and was carried up beyond their mortal vision. What a thrilling picture it is? Christ with hands uplifted in blessing leaving the scene of His passion and triumph. He is the conquering hero, going home to receive the honour due to Him. No Roman 'triumph' was ever like this one; when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive. (21) The believers lingered to catch their last glimpse and two angels appeared to assure them that He would return. (22)

The believers returned to Jerusalem... to wait. Their days were spent either in the upper room in prayer or in the Temple courts. What a transformation of despair to hope; And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. (23) They spent their days in growing excitement and anticipation. Did they know how long they must wait? Almost certainly; there is the feeling of a countdown in the opening verse of Acts 2; when the Day of Pentecost was fully come... (24) Why wait until the Day of Pentecost? We must leave that until the next chapter.

He had gone; but where had He gone? They had known that His atoning work was complete by the fact that He was raised from the dead, but now He had gone from their sight; how could they know what was happening? That little verse in Revelation with its great sweep of history will put it all into context for us; And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (25) He had come from the T

throne over 30 years earlier; now He was returning. The culmination of the account of Christ's manhood is not reached until He who left the Throne as God, had returned to it as both God and Man. Of course, eternity is a mystery and we can never really get our heads around it, but in straight-line time something happened in heaven that had never happened in the whole of eternity past; something happened at the level of the Throne. There is something that we can now say about the Throne that we could not say before His ascension; it has a new name, the Throne of God and of the Lamb. The old psalmist had written; Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting. (26) The ancient Israelites had been schooled with the truth that God was Eternal and Immutable; never beginning, never ending and never changing. But something happened in the Throne which has changed things. It is captured in a little phrase scattered through the writings of Paul; 'but now'.

Let's see how John expresses this truth. The Throne is the central reference point of the book of the Revelation. The list of prepositions used in connection with the Throne is almost endless; things are 'in' or 'around' or 'above' or 'before' or 'on' or 'out of' the Throne. For John, in his vision, it was the ultimate fact of life. It is not hard to see the significance for the man who recorded the vision. His world was in ruins. The religious system in which he had grown up had been swept away by the Roman legions and the symbols of that religion were all gone; the city, the temple, the priesthood... all gone. He had witnessed the new beginnings of the Church but by the time of his writing of the Revelation he is an old man, and the churches are under various attacks from within and without. It seemed as though they were in danger of being swept away too. Now, to make matters worse, he had been exiled to a penal colony on Patmos. Every thing was running out of control... or was it? In the midst of John's personal experience of traumatic change and decay he is given a vision of the Throne. The overriding message of the book of the Revelation is that history is not in the hands of the conquerors, but in the hands of God. His vision begins with the Throne; his message proper begins John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before his throne; (27)

After this starting point to the vision the Throne is not mentioned until John relays the message to the church in Laodicea; Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (28) The first verse of this couplet is well known but the second is very significant. It tells us that Christ was able to take up His place again in the Throne because He had overcome or prevailed. He had accomplished His mission and had ascended the Throne. You can read the 'Coronation' hymn in Psalm 24. He is the victorious, warrior, Son who has accomplished His Father's will and returned to the place of His inherent glory.

This truth of Christ's accession to the throne is now relived in John's vision. He is lifted up in the Spirit and sees a Throne. (29) He sees the Throne before he sees the One who sits upon it; the title of this part of the vision should be The Throne; there are 17 references to the Throne in these next two chapters. He sees that the Throne is occupied. That must have been a great comfort to John's own circumstances; however things seemed from the earthly elevation, the heavenly vision showed that God was still on the Throne. It seems that John is watching a heavenly tableau. It culminates in the song of creation; and the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created. (30)

But in the midst of all this celebration John sees an unopened scroll in the right hand of the One who sits on the throne. It is protected with seven unbroken seals. John hears an angel asking 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals? (31) It seems that a 'man' must open this scroll, and there is no-one who qualifies to do so. Heaven, earth and the regions beneath the earth are quickly scanned but the search is fruitless; no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon, (32) and John is heartbroken. It seems that 'history' is locked and God's purposes blocked too. (33)

One of the heavenly elders comforts John; there is a qualifier! Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. (34) The elder uses the word 'overcome' or 'prevail' that was used in the original promise of Christ to the church at Laodicea; I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. John will now see this truth in his vision. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. (35) It is not incidental that we have a re

ference here which identifies someone as being from the tribe of Judah and as a 'root of David; this is great David's greater son; this is the promised king.

The usual word for 'lamb' is 'arḥam' but this word is 'arnion'; the diminutive form. In many languages affection is expressed by using a diminutive form of the name. The same is true here; this is a 'dear Lamb'. But this dear Lamb has been 'butchered'; that is not said for dramatic effect but is the real meaning of the Greek word used here. But then again this 'butchered' Lamb is standing; it has passed through bloody brutal death into triumphant life, and look where it is standing... in the midst of the Throne. Calvary's despised victim has become king over all. The book of the Revelation is full of symbols, and this 'dear Lamb' has seven horns and seven eyes. What can this symbolise? In the Bible's symbolic language the horn is a symbol of strength, and the eyes are the symbol of knowledge. This 'dear Lamb' has seven of each. We are not intended to paint the portrait of this vision; such a Lamb would be grotesque. Seven is symbolic of completion and fullness. The symbols of John's 'heavenly Lamb' signify that this Lamb has all power and all knowledge. That is a powerful combination. If he had all power but was without all knowledge, He would be able to do all things, but some things always remain beyond his knowledge, and consequently would go untouched. If he had all knowledge, He would be able to know all things, but unable to affect all things. In order to rule in completeness the Lamb must have seven horns and seven eyes, or as the theologians might say He must have omnipotence and omniscience.

We must leave the consequences of this to the next chapter. The Throne of God has become the Throne of God and of the Lamb, and that has changed the basis for all of God's dealings in the entire cosmos. Towards the end of the Revelation we have a clear statement; And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (36) It is only 'the one who sits upon the Throne' that can say 'Behold, I make all things new'. The limitations of His earthly experience are ended. He has passed through the heavens to the Throne of God. From this place He can begin His new creation, and from this place, the Throne of God and of the Lamb, will pour 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal' (37).

Notes:

1. Phi 2:5-8 NASB
2. John Stott "The Cross of Christ"
3. Luk 24:19-21 NASB
4. Mat 1:1 KJV
5. Matt 1:22
6. Joh 1:45 KJV
7. John 1:49
8. Rev 12:5 KJV
9. Act 2:22-24 NASB
10. 1 Cor 15:4-8
11. Act 10:40-42
12. John 20:22
13. Numbers 11
14. Luk 24:45-48 KJV
15. the phrase 'the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms' is a way of referring to the whole of the Old Testament by referring to its three main 'sections'.
16. Acts 1:3
17. Luke 24:49
18. Joh 16:7 NASB
19. Act 1:1-2 NASB
20. Acts 1:12
21. Ephesians 4:8
22. Acts 1:11
23. Luk 24:52-53 KJV
24. Acts 2:1
25. Rev 12:5 KJV
26. Psa 93:2 KJV
27. Rev 1:4 KJV
28. Rev 3:20-21 KJV

- 29. Rev 4:2
- 30. Rev 4:8-11 ASV
- 31. Rev 5:3
- 32. Rev 5:4
- 33. cf Luke 12:50
- 34. Rev 5:5
- 35. Rev 5:6 ASV
- 36. Rev 21:5-6 KJV
- 37. Rev 22:1

Re: Next Door To Heaven by Ron Bailey - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2011/11/22 10:46

QUOTE:

"The Throne is the central reference point of the book of the Revelation. The list of prepositions used in connection with the Throne is almost endless; things are 'in' or 'around' or 'above' or 'before' or 'on' or 'out of' the Throne. For John, in his vision, it was the ultimate fact of life. It is not hard to see the significance for the man who recorded the vision. His world was in ruins. The religious system in which he had grown up had been swept away by the Roman legions and the symbols of that religion were all gone; the city, the temple, the priesthood... all gone. He had witnessed the new beginnings of the Church but by the time of his writing of the Revelation he is an old man, and the churches are under various attacks from within and without. It seemed as though they were in danger of being swept away too. Now, to make matters worse, he had been exiled to a penal colony on Patmos. Everything was running out of control... or was it? In the midst of John's personal experience of traumatic change and decay he is given a vision of the Throne. The overriding message of the book of the Revelation is that history is not in the hands of the conquerors, but in the hands of God. His vision begins with the Throne; his message proper begins John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before his throne; (27)"

YES! I love it!

Revelation is so comforting! You read secular news reports and know things are spinning out of control. We also know that this is essential to help people to realize the futility of trusting in the experts....remember how they said the economy will go belly-up last year! It is as though the world would stop its spin and all would come to a stand-still. Things were always bad and will continue to be and get worse but God has it all in his power and control...

How I love the description of the throne as detailed in chapter 4...I love to think and give full reign to my imagination when I read this..I always end up being totally in awe and a sense of holy WOW fills me!

The scroll the Lamb was given: what is written therein? I have looked and looked and find no place where it hints of its contents - it always talks about the seals that are being removed before the scroll can be unrolled and read. Anyone know?

ginnyrose