

Ekklesia

The Church Triumphant
(Part V of V)

"The Church's One Foundation" (Stanza 2) with Scripture Proofs

And to one hope she presses,
With ev'ry grace endued.

The church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain and cherish
Is with her to the end;
...
She ever shall prevail.

Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious

"Called in one hope of our calling." (Eph 4:4)

"...grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Eph 4:7)

"Upon this Rock will I build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt 16:18)

"Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." (Matt 28:20)

...

"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! when I fall I shall arise." (Micah 7:8)

"Watch unto prayer." (1Pe 4:7)

"Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." (Ps 25:22)

"Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting..." (Rom 8:23)

"The redeemed of the Lord...shall come with singing unto Zion." (Isa 51:11)

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, and against powers," etc. (Eph 6:12)

"In all these things we are more than conquerors." (Rom 8:37)

"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." (Rom 16:20)

Shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
With the God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won:
With all her sons and daughters
Who, by the Master's Hand
Led through the deathly waters,
Repose in Eden-land.

O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee.
There, past the border mountains,
Where in sweet vales the Bride
With Thee by living fountains
For ever shall abide!

"We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1Jn 3:2)

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (Heb 4:9)

"Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son JESUS Christ." (1Jn 1:3)

"...the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you." (2Co 13:14)

"Ye are come unto the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn...and to the spirits of just men made perfect." (Heb 12:22-23)

"When thou passeth through the waters I will be with thee." (Isa 43:2)

"...with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

"Faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." (Jude 24)

"Humble yourselves...that He may exalt you in due time." (1Pe 5:6)

"He carried me...to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the Holy Jerusalem." (Rev 21:10)

"The Lamb...shall lead them unto the living fountains of waters." (Rev 7:17)

"The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them." (Rev 21:3)

The Eve of Battle

In the movie *The 13th Warrior*, the vision of the Nordic afterlife is told in an ancient prayer sung by the warriors on the eve of battle. “Lo there do I see my father. Lo there do I see my mother and my sisters and my brothers. Lo there do I see the line of my people, back to the beginning. Lo, they do call to me, they bid me take my place among them, in the Halls of Valhalla, where the brave may live forever.”¹ *Eaters of the Dead*, the novel by Michael Crichton from which this movie is adapted, retells in the first three chapters the true story of Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, a 10th century Muslim traveler sent out from Baghdad, and his journey north where he met an ancient Viking clan. From there it proceeds to retell the Beowulf story in a new and frightening way. At one point, the warrior Herger tells Ahmad, “It is always thus, now and in Valhalla,’ which is their idea of heaven. In this heaven, which is to them a great hall, warriors battle from dawn to

¹ “*The 13th Warrior*,” directed by John McTiernan and Michael Crichton, Buena Vista Pictures, Scripts.com (1999). https://www.scripts.com/script/the_13th_warrior_1554. This fascinating prayer written for the movie is actually based on the writings of the Muslim Ibn Fadlan (circa 921 AD) on his tour of the hinterlands in northern Russia and the Rus Vikings. “*On the final afternoon the slave girl was led to a structure resembling a door frame. Standing on the palms of the men, she was lifted three times to overlook the frame. Ibn Fadlan asked the interpreter what she had said when looking over the fame. The first time she said ‘Behold, I see my father and mother’; the second time ‘I see all my dead relatives seated’; the third time ‘I see my master seated in Paradise and Paradise is green; with him are men and boy servants. He calls me. Take me to him.’*” See Mike Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 2.

dusk; then those who are dead are revived, and all share a feast in the night, with endless food and drink.”²

In August 480 BC, the Persian Empire under Xerxes I was on the doorstep of Greece. **Brave king Leonidas**, said to have descended from Heracles/Hercules himself, took a miniscule force of 1,200 men, including just 300 Spartan hoplites, and staved off the inevitable march of the 2,000,000 Persians (Herodotus’ number) for three glorious days by forcing the battle to be waged in the narrow pass now called **The Persian Gates**. As retold by Herodotus, “**Although extraordinary valor was displayed by the entire corps of Spartans and Thespaians, yet bravest of all was declared the Spartan Dienekes. It is said that on the eve of battle, he was told by a native of Trachis that the Persian archers were so numerous that, when they fired their volleys, the mass of arrows blocked out the sun. Dienekes, however, quite undaunted by this prospect, remarked with a laugh, “Good. Then we’ll have our battle in the shade”** (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.226).

At dawn of the third day, when the Greeks had learned that they would be trapped in the pass, Leonidas is said to

² **Michael Crichton**, *Eaters of the Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan, Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 135.

have told his brave remaining soldiers, “Let us dine, fellow-soldiers, for we shall sup in the nether (or rather the upper) world.”³ In his brilliant retelling of the Battle of Thermopylae, Stephen Pressfield puts the quote this way, “Now eat a good breakfast, men. For we’ll all be sharing dinner in hell.”⁴ Those are actually quite different and together with the previous story help lead us into today’s final subject on the church. Before explaining how they are different a little later, first notice that in both of these stories, you have a war leading to a victory. But it is a victory that is only going to be celebrated in the afterlife.

Last week we discussed the Church Militant. This week we talk about its pair: The Church Triumphant. What does this mean, the Church Triumphant? Based on the misconception of the Church Militant, many people have the mistaken idea that it means some kind of political victory won with armies, navies, and air-forces. This kind of thinking goes a long, long way back.

³ Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius À Lapide: S. Luke’s Gospel*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman, Fourth Edition, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1908), 354.

⁴ Stephen Pressfield, *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1998), 356. Diodorus Siculus, “Leonidas hereupon commending the Courage of his Soldiers, commanded them that they would with all speed go to their Dinners with that cheerfulness as those that must be with the ¹¹¹⁹ Gods at Supper.” ^{Note 1119} < in non-Latin alphabet > , “Sup with them below, or with the Infernal Spirits.” (Diodorus, *Historical Library* Book 10) (EBBO, 220).

In Israel during the days of Jesus, there were **four main sects of Jews**. The Pharisees, the best known, were basically the conservatives of the day. The Sadducees were the liberals. The Essenes were those who sought to escape the world and lived out in the desert. And then there were the **Zealots**, one of whom Jesus actually chose (Simon the Zealot) to be one of his Twelve!

Zealots were **a political movement** in the 1st century that seem to have been founded by one Judas of Galilee (or Judas of Gamala) in 6 AD after Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, a Roman Aristocrat and governor of Syria, mandated a census be taken in the newly formed Roman province of Judaea. Judas and his Zealots didn't like any form of Roman rule and Josephus tells us that they “**agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord**” (**Josephus**, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.23). Like Judas Maccabees before him, this Judas led a **revolt** and some scholars speculate that some thought he must be the long awaited Messiah. Josephus even seems to put the blame for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD at Judas' feet, as it was his followers all those decades later who instigated the war with Rome

which led to the obliteration of their temple and their entire way of life which has, to this day, never been the same.

Judas represents a form of zealotry, *triumphalism* as some have called it, which seeks to bring the eschatological victory into some form of present political triumph.⁵ But is triumphalism, *is political freedom, the kingdom that Jesus came to bring?* Is this what we mean when we talk about the Church Triumphant?

Clearly, even the disciples were all—at least in some sense—expecting and hoping that *Jesus would be their political hero*. Just before he ascended to heaven, they asked him, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (*Acts 1:6*), or at The Message Bible puts it, “*Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?*” This question presupposes that it wasn’t just Simon the Zealot who was hoping for this. They all were. When they didn’t get it and their Master died like a criminal on a cross, their expectations were dashed. But now that he was risen from the dead, their hopes were renewed, probably infinitely more so.

⁵ *Thomas C. Oden, Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology, Vol. III* (San Francisco, CA: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1992), 306.

Jesus had just told them about something **coming in the future**. The two verses before this have Jesus ordering them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father (**Acts 1:4**). “**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now**” (5). This was the very last thing said prior to them asking if this was when he was finally going to restore the kingdom to Israel. They thought that’s what those words meant. Of course, we look back on this with hindsight, knowing how Acts continues. We say, “**How silly they were,**” because we know Jesus was talking about Pentecost, not some kind of military victory over Rome. Triumphalism!

This makes the way all Christians speak about one another regarding our own eschatological views at least slightly ironic. **Eschatology** is the doctrine of the “**last things**.” We might say that this was precisely what the Apostles were thinking Jesus was talking about. And, of course, he was. For Hebrews says, “**In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son**” (**Heb 1:2**). And on that very day of Pentecost, Peter himself preaches, “**In the last days it shall be ...**” (**Acts 2:17**). But when the Apostles asked that question and answered it, they hardly had in mind what Jesus was about to do. It makes me wonder about our own views of

eschatology, for we are similar in so many ways that we don't want to admit.

How so? **Premillennialists** have been called **triumphalist** because they have a political rule of Jesus prior to the eternal state. Let's bring the eternal state to bear now. **Postmillennialists** have been called triumphalist because they see the nations' king bowing down to Jesus prior the eternal state. **Amillennialists** have been called triumphalist because they see the millennium now and the millennium is supposed by those who make the claim to be a golden age, and age of political triumph. Of course, advocates for each position will often argue that theirs is not triumphalist, because that term has taken on a fairly negative meaning in our day. And no one wants to be called that.

Triumphalism is a kind of **golden age mentality** brought to bear on earth now, prior to the eternal state. Even apart from millennial eschatology, like the Jews of old, **Christians** often have thought patterns that run the same way, even outside of the church. One is the idea that such and such a political figure is going to save the planet and bring God's righteous rule to the earth. In recent years we've seen that from the left with some supporters of Obama and on the right with some supporters of Trump, although to be fair,

their visions for what God's righteous rule might be are almost diametrically opposed. But of course, it isn't just Christians. **Non-Christians** also have them. You have new-agers and the World Economic Forum calling for a return to the Golden Age of the past, but with a merging of technology and humanity and politics that will usher in Gaia's Utopia. **Socialism** is a form of triumphalism and **Communism** usually heads up that class. But this helps you see the point about triumphalism vs. the Church Triumphant. What exactly do we mean by the Church Triumphant?

Let's return now to our two opening examples. We saw in both the idea of a **battle** that would be so fierce that no one would make it out alive. Yet, the belief was that they would celebrate a kind of victory in the **afterlife**, even if they lost the war on earth. This is precisely what we mean by the Church Triumphant. For as long as there has been a NT Church, the view of the Church Triumphant is that **it refers to the saints already gone before us in heaven**. We see this, again, in **Hebrews 12:23**, "... to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven."

We previously talked about them as part of **the church invisible**, but now we are thinking about them as **victorious**. On earth, they were the Church Militant, God's saints at

war in the spiritual battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. But though some may have seen some victories, **none saw the final victory** played out before their eyes on earth. In fact, many died as martyrs, suffering greatly for their faith in Christ. Yet, today, alive but in the presence of God, they celebrate victory together in heaven. In a nutshell, that's the Church Triumphant. But there's lots more I want to discuss about this.

To One Hope

Let's **return to our song**: "The Church's One Foundation." Of all the doctrines this song teaches, it might be surprising to learn that the majority of it speaks not about the war, not even our doctrine, but about **our hope**. And since it's about the church, this hope is **the Church Triumphant**. The doctrine is our foundation. The war is our present reality. But it is our hope that it sets before us.

The first moment we see this is when we sing, "**And to one hope she presses, with ev'ry grace endued.**" It uses Ephesians 4 here for both lines. In the same passage where we get things like "**one Lord, one faith ... one holy name,**" the Apostle says, "**Called in one hope of our calling**" (**Eph**

4:4). Notice here, again, the plural. It is “*our* calling,” not just “my” calling. This is *the whole churches’* hope.

We could use other passages as well. **Romans 4:18** talks about **Abraham** in regard to hope. “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” There was a promise that was given by God to him and he believed even though it seemed impossible. He believed for the future. Yet, Hebrews, in its great chapter on faith, talks about **the Patriarchs (more than one)** and similarly says, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth ... But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (**Heb 11:13, 16**).

Very importantly, hope is something **we possess now**, though its object is for something that we do not yet possess, at least in fulness. That’s what we will talk more about here as we go along. We might be able to taste it or see it from a distance, but the reality is still just a bit out of reach. Webster defined hope as, “**A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. Hope differs from wish and desire in this, that**

it implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired, or the possibility of possessing it” (Webster, 1828). To use a popular current slang term as a foil, hope is the opposite of *hopium*—the combination of hope and opium which mocks true hope because it rests on blind faith and wishful thinking. Like a drug, hopium promises something it can’t deliver. Hope can, because it rests on the promises of God.

Dining vs. Supping

There are several metaphors we can use that will help us grasp hold of this hope of the Church Triumphant. The first I’ll use is the idea of *supper*. Let’s return to that quote from Leonidas of which I gave two forms. First, “Let us dine, fellow-soldiers, for we shall sup in the nether (or rather the upper) world,” vs. “Now eat a good breakfast, men. For we’ll all be sharing dinner in hell.” We’ll pick up the hell part of this later. Here, I’m interested in *dine/dinner* vs. *breakfast* and *sup/supper* vs. *dinner*. As I said earlier, these are not the same, and as Diodorus Siculus (see n. 3) demonstrates, it is “dinner” and “supper” that are original.

How are they different? This can actually be rather funny, as people call different meals of the day different

things, and then we argue about which is right? In some houses, dinner is lunch and supper is what you have at night. In my house, I remember always thinking that dinner is just what you have on Sundays, supper is what you have every night. Then there's Pippen. You remember? "What about breakfast?" "You already had it," Strider responds. "We've had one, yes .. but what about Second Breakfast?" "I don't think he knows about second breakfast, Pip," Merry whispers. "What about Elvenses, Luncheon, Afternoon Tea, Dinner ... he knows about them, doesn't he?"

The [etymology](#) of dinner and supper are interesting to consider. According to [Online Etymology Dictionary](#), "dinner" was the "first big meal of the day" (eaten between 9 A.m. and noon) back in 1300 AD. It comes from the Old French *disner* ("breakfast") and the Gallo-Roman *desiunare* "to break one's fast." So technically, breakfast is dinner, which I'm pretty sure none of us say. Supper on the other hand comes from *soper*, "evening repast, the last meal of the day." Sadly, this makes me wrong about thinking dinner was supper.

Why does any of this matter? In his great commentary on the Church Fathers, Cornelius à Lapide considers [Matt 22:2](#), "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king

who gave a wedding feast for his son.” His comment runs thusly,

But you will ask, **What was this supper?** 1. Some understand by it, the incarnation of the Word of God, the preaching of His Gospel, and the redemption wrought by Him. For this is the great supper to which Christ, when He became incarnate, invited us. S. Matthew calls it a dinner. It is a **dinner** as regards the **Church Militant**; a **supper** with respect to the **Church Triumphant**. In this sense Leonidas addressed his comrades before the battle: “*Let us dine, fellow-soldiers, for we shall sup in the nether (or rather the upper) world.*” For the Church Militant here on earth is striving eagerly to attain the Church Triumphant in Heaven.⁶

In other words, the **one meal** is considered by the Fathers in **two senses**, because there is one church at two periods of time. They based this on the idea that the early meal might lead to death because it was the last meal before the battle while the final meal was the first in the life to come. How interesting.

One is for us still living in **the Church Militant**. It is our first meal, the meal of war, our dinner. This corresponds to

⁶ à Lapide, *The Great Commentary*, 354.

Communion,⁷ which we take, like Melchizedek and Abraham in the context of war. Jesus, that very night, was **heading into the fray of battle**. Our song sings about this. “**Partakes one holy food, to one hope she presses with every grace endued.**” This meal is in the context of the Church Militant. Again, “**Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war, She waits the consummation Of peace for evermore ... Yet she on earth hath union With God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion With those whose rest is won.**” Yes, the Church Triumphant is here, but it is in the context of the Church Militant having communion with God and the church in heaven.

The other is **the Church Triumphant**. This is our last meal, the meal of victory, our supper. This is Abraham and Melchizedek eating the meal *after* the victory has been won (notice, same meal viewed from two perspectives). It is the focus of **the Wedding Supper of the Lamb** in Revelation 19. The multitude in heaven are crying, “**Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality**” (**Rev 19:1-2**).

⁷ Curiously, we call it the “Last Supper” or “Lord’s Supper,” even though those phrases are not in the Bible. In this sense, it is a foretaste of heaven to come. If we called it the “Lord’s Dinner,” it would refer in the way we are talking about it as the last meal before Jesus died in battle.

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready” (6-7). “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war ... Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called ... ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God’ (11, 17). This is the supper we await in the consummation, which even today the saints in heaven partake in as the Church Triumphant.

Tabernacles vs. Mountains

A second metaphor is brought out in our song. “With all her sons and daughters Who, by the Mater’s Hand Let through the deathly waters, Repose in Eden-land ... There, past the border mountains, Wherein sweet vales the Bride With Thee by living fountains For ever shall abide.”

The Anglican J. M. Neale (1818-1866), in his commentary of the Church and Medieval Fathers on the Psalms considers Psalm 15:1. “O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” He says, “We must understand the *tabernacle* of the Church militant; the *holy hill* of

the Church triumphant [Jansenius and Lorinus]. And in this sense it is well said, [Bruno of Aste] the *tabernacle* or tent, because tents are the habitation of them that are engaged in war, not of those who are at rest. By the mountains, as the Gloss beautifully says, eternal beatitude is represented, where is the vision of peace, and the perfection of love, where none contends in the vehemence of the conflict,—but every one rests in eternity of peace: the mountain in which it pleased the LORD to dwell, yea, the LORD will abide in it for ever. He asks not, [Gerhohus].”⁸

It is clearly an older way of looking at this verse that sees these two senses of the church, but the metaphors are correct. Clearly, **the tabernacle** which went everywhere with Israel in the wilderness, its God riding on the seat of the Ark of the Covenant, going before the people in war, is a symbol of the **church Militant**. Only when the wars had **all been fought** and the land had been taken did God allow a permanent place for his rest in **the Temple**.

⁸ J. M. Neale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Medieval Writers: Psalm 1 to Psalm 38*, Second Edition, vol. 1 (London; New York: Joseph Masters; Pott and Amery, 1869), 192–193. **Jansenius**: the Bishop of Ghent, whose *Harmony of the Gospels and Exposition of the Psalms* rank him high among the theologians of the sixteenth century; **Lorinus**: John Lorinus, who lived from 1569 to 1634, a Jesuit Priest, left a *Commentary on the Psalms* which has been more than once reprinted⁸ **Bruno of Aste**: Bruno of Aste (+ 1120) has left an exposition of considerable ability on the Psalms, given in the twentieth volume of the *Bibliotheca Maxima*. **Gerhohus**: Gerhohus the Great (1093–1169) and his “*Golden Commentary*.”

Eden, which the song does not get at specifically, was actually a mountain with a garden. We often think of it only as a garden, but the mountain is just as important, as it was the place of meeting in the divine council (Ezek 28:14), upon which Adam originally had a seat at the table. That the mountain is a place of rest: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place; ‘This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desire it’” (Ps 132:13-14). Zion, of course, is a mountain. And it is where God put his temple and rested in the confines of the Most Holy Place where the ark was permanently kept.

There is a reason why in Hebrews 12 we have come to “Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gather, and to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb 12:22-23). It is our great hope, somehow tasted even now in the Church Militant. In this way, we share communion with the Church Triumphant. As Bavinck says,

Although there is no room for the veneration of saints and intercession for the dead, there still is and remains a communion between the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven that cannot be broken. Believers on

earth, when they became Christians, came to the heavenly Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all; to the innumerable angels who serve and praise God there; to the assembly of the firstborn, that is, the devout of the Old Testament who are enrolled in heaven and have their citizenship there; to the spirits of the just, that is, the Christians who have already died and reached perfection, the consummation; to Christ the mediator of the New Testament and to God the judge of all (Heb. 12:22–24).

This communion does not imply that there has to be direct interaction between the members of the militant and triumphant segments of the church, for though this is lacking also between the different persons and peoples who lived at different times and places on earth, humankind is still an organism made up of one blood. The personal contacts that every believer has here on earth are limited to a few persons, but believers are nevertheless members of one, holy, catholic, Christian church. The unity that binds all believers together, the dead as well as the living, is anchored in Christ, and through him in fellowship with the same Father, in the possession of the same Spirit, and in joint participation in the same treasures of salvation.⁹

⁹ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 639–640.

OT vs. NT Hope

These comments lead me to consider that hope raised earlier. **What was the hope of the OT church?** It was slightly different than our own. It is stated by Job. “**After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God**” (**Job 19:26**). Now, that sounds an awful lot like the NT hope. The difference is that there was something in the intermediate state for the OT saint that is different from the NT. David spoke of his hope this way, that God “**will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption**” (**Ps 16:10**). The sons of Korah said the same thing, “**God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me**” (**Ps 49:15**).

What’s so different about this? The LXX translation helps you understand it better. God will not abandon David’s soul “**to Hades [hell],**” “**God will ransom my soul from the power of Hades [hell].**” I said we would return to Leonidas’ comments on hell. But notice, it is **not unbelievers** saying this, but believers. Everyone in the OT age went to Hades/Sheol—believer or not. The hope of the OT (not Leonidas) was that somehow, God would not leave the believer

there, that somehow God would ransom them from its power.

Let's contrast this hope with the hope put forward in one of my favorite passages on hope: Romans 5. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and *we rejoice in hope* of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces *hope*, and *hope does not put us to shame*, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:1-5). There's nothing here or any-where else in the NT about a hope of being remembered in Sheol, because the NT believer does not go there, for through Christ, we have *obtained access* by faith into the grace which brings us straight to God when we die. Today, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2Cor 5:8). What a glorious thought for the Church Triumphant. Our hope is more firm and sure, not because they were not justified by faith in Christ (of course they were, see Rom 4 for example), but because we are justified by faith in Christ *who has come* in the flesh

and done something profound for us, something that changes where we go when we die.

We learn something related to this in our song. “**The church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend.**” This part is certainly about the Church Militant. It speaks, however, about *Jesus defending his church* so that she will never go fully away in this world. You see, the legal war has *already* been fought, the captives of old to the prison of Death have been set free. That victory has already been won and all our battles that we wage as the church today are fought in light of it.

Not only does he defend her, but he “**guides, sustains, and cherishes**” her and “**is with her to the end.**” In this, we have the promise of Christ, “**Lo, I am with you always even to the very end of the world**” (**Matt 28:20**). Who is he with? He is speaking to the disciples. So did he only mean them? If so, does this mean that when they died, the end of the world (or age, *aion*) came? Some have wanted to say that. But no. This is *a promise to the church*, not just to Christians (which is true), for as we have seen, the Apostles are the foundation of the church. The church’s mission did not end with the death of the disciples. It continues today. Until the very end of the age.

The song gives a **proof-text** for the church never perishing. It is **Matthew 16:18**, “Upon this Rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This promise rests upon something Christ did for his church that is rather mind-blowing, but not very well received by Christians today.

In the context, Jesus talks about “**the keys**.” The very next words say, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven**” (19). Keys of the kingdom of heaven is an image of the church being the door, with the keys of the door unlocking the entrance into the kingdom. That’s the context.

In **Revelation 1:18** Jesus says, “**I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.**” But we find Hades also in our Matthew 16 passage, that the gates of Hades shall not prevail, thus Jesus gives the keys. Thus, one scholar writes, “**The promise that the gates of Hades will not overcome the new people of God seems to parallel the implied promise that death and Hades will not overcome the church in Revelation 1:18.**”¹⁰ Both passages seem to have in mind **the Descent of Christ to the Underworld** as spoken about in the Apostle’s Creed. This is where

¹⁰ **Justin W. Bass**, *The Battle for the Keys: Revelation 1:18 and Christ’s Descent into the Underworld*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Great Britain: Paternoster, 2014), 37.

Jesus descended into the heart of the earth for three days, pillaged the gates of hell, and led his people out of captivity. NT saints no longer go there, otherwise, how can this promise to Peter make any sense?

Thus, **the Church Triumphant** rests upon the finished work of Christ—the Divine Warrior of our Faith, who has defeated sin, death, and the devil. He has taken the keys—objects known throughout the ancient world as being held by the underworld gods, and he now holds the power of life and death in his hands. He unlocked the gates of hell and released his captives, freeing them from their bonds of death. He unlocks the door to the kingdom of heaven, and through the church, people enter into its blissful glory, both now and in the age to come.

But **how now**? It is because of Christ's glorious **ascension**. And this may just be **the very best part** about our hope, because it is here that we see that future hope of the Church Triumphant is actually more than most dream, for this future reality is in some sense **here now**. But how?

You must keep in mind all of those analogies now about the church and Christ. We, together, are linked **organically** to Christ as branches to a vine, as a bride to a husband, as stones to a temple, and as a body to the head. But now here

is the question. **Where is our Head now?** He is not with us on earth. He is in heaven. But what is the Church Triumphant? It is the church *in heaven*. We often think of this only in terms of death. However, think about what this living organic relationship to Christ necessitates.

Because we are linked, and we could add even more living vitality to this like via the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to indwell us, this means that ***we are in heaven*** in as much as our head is there. This is a present reality, even though we are not yet dead. As Calvin put it, “**Faith ... perceives that the Lord, by his ascension to heaven, has opened up the access to the heavenly kingdom, which Adam had shut. For having entered it in our flesh, as it were in our name, it follows, as the Apostle says, that we are in a manner now seated in heavenly places, not entertaining a mere hope of heaven, but possessing it in our head**” (Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.16).¹¹

If this is true, then **what kind of power** must the church possess? The church originated in the heavenly plan. She is to be present in heaven forever in the future. But even now, the very power of heaven itself pulses through the church through our head, who is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. This is power unlike any other. Kings and princes,

¹¹ **John Calvin**, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

commanders and generals can only dream of such power. It is a spiritual power to loose bonds, to free captives, to bind the devil, and overcome sin, to command worship. This is why the church matters. This is why she is so vital in the world of men today.

This is the already/not yet mystery that is the Militant and Triumphant. We wage battle in spiritual realms, knowing that Christ has already won war. We await our final consummation knowing that Christ has already gone ahead of us into heaven. Thus we can sing, “**O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we, like them, the meek and lowly, On high may dwell with thee.**”

Conclusions: You and the Church

As we wrap up this short series on the church, consider the words of Charles Wesley in his song, “The Church Triumphant in Thy Love.”

*The Church triumphant in thy love,
their mighty joys we know;
they sing the Lamb in hymns above,
and we in hymns below.*¹²

¹² Charles Wesley, “The Church Triumphant In Thy Love,” a cento of “Happy the Souls to Jesus Joined,” (1745).

Again,

*Thee in Thy glorious realm they praise,
And bow before Thy throne;
We in the kingdom of Thy grace:
The kingdoms are but one.*

We've seen that **worship** which is sung about here is in fact our chief means of Christian warfare. Now we've added to it that the **Church Triumphant** and **Church Militant**—one church separated only by sphere of existence, are singing together the songs of the Lamb. With our **one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism** and our **means of grace**, the **church visible and invisible** cries out together how long before the awaited consummation? How long, Lord? Then suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, with the vision glorious, **Her longing eyes are blest, and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.**

The question before you now is simple. **Are you in this church?** You say, **"I'm sitting in church right now, pastor."** That's not what I asked. I didn't ask if you are sitting in church, but if you are in Christ's church. The first and only way this happens is when you **come to the Lord Jesus by**

faith, trusting in his glorious death and resurrection to atone for your sins, make you right with God, and give you eternal life. That's coming to the invisible church.

But our series has taught us that **the invisible church is in fact the visible church**. There is only one church. When you come to Christ, you come to his bride. Are become his bride along with millions of countless elect souls down through the ages and continuing until the last soul converts prior to Christ's Second Coming. The point here is not merely that you will long for salvation individually, personally, yourself. That, I pray, is something you long deeply for and that you seek with all your heart, for God puts that seeking into your heart and you will find him through Christ.

But the point more is that **you will learn to see your salvation in the context of a mass of people** that are all your brothers and sisters, parts of your own body, little branches with you on the vine, members of one household, stones built up together into a temple. And that you would learn to love this household, this visible church, this church around the world, the church universal, the place where the keys are to be found.

Too many despise the church, even some who call themselves Christians. Long ago, **Cyprian** said, “**One cannot have**

God as his Father without having the Church as his mother” (*On the Unity of the Church* 6). Why? It is because in church you are **nourished, fed, sanctified, washed, clothed, and sent out**. Jesus died for his church, specifically and specially. He saves each Christian into the church, and there is only one church, though with many local manifestations. To hate the church is to hate the bride of Christ. Yes, she has a myriad of problems, the tumult of her war, as the song tells us, a war that is fought as much against enemies within as bombardment without. But in the midst of the ugliness of the Church Militant, there is still Christ’s pure bride. This is what you are to long for as a Christian. For here you find rest from the battle waged today. And here we find the hope for our eternal rest in the age to come.

Turn to Christ and then to his Bride and love her as he does. Spend your life anxiously doing all you can to help her, to uphold her, to be part of her, to cherish her, to pray for her, to make her spotless, to do battle with her, to rescue her. For that’s what Christ has done and continues to do until that great day of consummation when he shall return for her and take her to his eternal home which he has been preparing for her since he left his disciples looking up in the sky wondering when he would return for them.

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