

Blessed Conviction

I can't think of a single Christian who doesn't want to know what heaven will be like. Scripture gives us plenty of insights, using language like "reclining at the feast table" and "green pastures" and "streets paved with gold" and "pearly gates" and such. ***Still... what will it be like?*** It's no wonder that books/stories about people suffering a tragic accident and dying and getting to spend a few minutes in "heaven," only to be brought back to life in the ER and recount their time "on the other side," ***fly off the shelves and fill hours and hours of YouTube and social media.*** People LOVE these stories! Inquiring minds want to know. What will heaven be like? What are our dearly-departed loved ones experiencing right now?

This is what makes the words of Jesus so very strange to our ears. "*But now I am going to the Father/Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are you going?'*" Nobody asked Jesus what heaven was going to be like, even though He just got done telling them that He's going back home to heaven?! That's crazy! We buy books and binge-watch YouTube clips with questionable/poor theology in an attempt to get some sort of answer. These guys had Jesus sitting right there... and not a word! ***Talk about wasted golden opportunity!*** The old adage says that the only stupid question is the one that isn't asked. And it seems like Jesus really ***wanted*** to answer those types of questions, but these fools were too busy feeling sorry for themselves to ask.

Now, I know this all makes sense to our ears, but that doesn't make it true. Yes, they were too busy feeling sorry for themselves to ask Jesus about His going home to heaven and His heavenly Father, but that's not why Jesus admonishes them. Jesus chides these guys because nobody asked ***WHY*** He must return to the One who sent Him from heaven.

Remember: Jesus has been telling them—repeatedly—of the **necessity** of His suffering, death, and resurrection. Here at the Last Supper, Jesus has spoken extensively about how that time has now arrived, and nobody bothered to ask "*what does this mean?*" Nobody bothered to ask ***WHY*** it's a necessity that He must leave them and go home to heaven. All they heard is that He's going to be parted from them, ***and they didn't like what they heard.*** They tuned out and shut down. They were all grief-stricken and full of sorrow at the news that Jesus was leaving them. "*Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.*"

Now, at this point we do need to make clear that being sorrowful over the suffering and death of Jesus isn't necessarily a bad thing. After all, if you understand how bad sin really is, ***repentant sorrow and grief is the absolute right***

response. Your sin put Jesus on that cross. That should grieve you and fill you with sorrow! Your sin is so great—even the little ones that you think aren't a big deal and everyone else is doing it too—that the holy and innocent God had to die for it! And there's a reason for that. As sinful children of Adam, we simply don't have the currency to make payment for the wage of even one single sin, let alone an eternity's worth of them. Only the blood of the Lamb of God can make this atonement. Only God's holy and innocent blood can redeem/buy back sinners from death to life.

But this is precisely why Jesus is so **particular** in His wording. He never says that He's simply going home to heaven. He says that He's **returning** to His Father, "*to Him who sent Me.*" "*God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son....*" This [*the crucifix*] was the Father's plan for our redemption/salvation, first announced in the Garden of Eden when our first parents fell headlong into sin, death, and damnation. Jesus was sent to bring that cruciform Gospel plan to completion. "*It is finished!*" Jesus returning to "*Him who sent Me*" is Jesus returning to report "**mission complete.**" This is GOOD NEWS of the highest order! His death means our forgiveness; our redemption; our salvation.

This is what NOBODY was asking about. They were too busy wallowing in their own **selfish sorrow** because Jesus was going to leave them. And if we're honest, the same can often be said of us, can't it? We grieve when our loved ones die. We know they're in heaven, but if we're honest, we'd rather they still be here with us in this vale of tears. ***Do you realize how foolish/selfish that is?! Still... we all do it.***

If you pay attention to the conversation our Lord has with His disciples, all that talk about the Holy Spirit and His work of convicting in sin, righteousness, and judgment ***is meant as Gospel to their pitiful ears.*** It's a response to their self-centered sorrow. "*Nevertheless; that is, in spite of your sorrow, I tell you the Truth.*" I know that sounds strange. After all, we don't use the word "convict" in a very flattering way. It's a word with **criminal connotations.** Convicts get convicted. But that's not what Jesus is saying here! The word that Jesus uses here (in the original Greek) is *elegko*, which we translate as "convict," although a better translation would be "convince" or "give you firm conviction in your believing." Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will *elegko* (convince/give firm and faithful conviction) in the Truth of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Folks: Look at this cross! Here is God in the flesh! Here is the wage of sin, lifted up and on full display for all the world to see! This is why the Holy Spirit is sent: ***to convince us and give us firm and faithful conviction in the reality of just how deadly and damning our sins really are in the sight of God.*** If they weren't such a big deal, then Jesus wouldn't have to die for them!

The conviction/convincing of righteousness? Again, look no further than this cross. Here is where “*It is finished!*” was spoken in victory. Here is where your all your sins were forgiven. Here is where the full wage of your sin was paid in full; paid in full with the lifeblood of Jesus. **How often, though, we don’t believe it... if we’re bold to confess.** There are times that we doubt. There are times that we’re not exactly convinced or convicted in this Truth. *There’s gotta be a catch, right?* Almighty God Himself declares from this cross “*it is finished,*” and yet there are times we think, “*yeah, but what do I need to do?*” And we **all** have our moments! Many a good Christian struggles in doubt simply because they allow their feelings to trump God’s justifying Word. “*I don’t feel saved/forgiven,*” as if our fleeting emotions are **more trustworthy** than the unchanging Word of our unchanging and almighty God.

And as for the convincing/convicting regarding God’s judgment? Again, look to this cross. God’s judgment against sin—all sin... YOUR sin—is staring you in the face! Now, this is Law, no doubt—the wage of sin is death, and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God—but at the same time this is beautiful Gospel. Jesus suffers His Father’s just and righteous judgment against sin—your sin—so that you don’t have to. He dies the death you justly deserve so that you would never perish. “*They that believe in Me will never die.*”

And while all this is most certainly true, it’s also important to remember that Jesus is speaking here primarily about God’s judgment **against the devil**. “*The ruler of this world is/has already been judged.*” That’s not what the devil wants us to believe though, is it? He wants us to think that he’s still got a fighting chance. In fact, the devil is working very hard to make it seem like **he’s actually winning the fight**. I’ll admit: I look around at the world today, and it’s hard to not believe him. And yet...the Holy Spirit convinces me, working in and through the words of Christ, that it **IS** finished. The victory has already been won. The devil is judged. He’s already lost. The serpent’s head has already been crushed by the pierced, yet victorious foot of the crucified Gospel promise in the flesh.

This is all very important when you consider the fact that Jesus was speaking these words to His apostles **mere hours** before He would be nailed to that cross. They would need convincing that Jesus wasn’t being defeated, **but instead overcoming and winning**. And—yes—that convincing wouldn’t take place in all its fullness until Pentecost. It wasn’t until the Holy Spirit came to them at Pentecost that the apostles would finally be able to understand the necessity of Christ’s crucifixion and rejoice. That’s when they were, through the working of the Holy Spirit, finally convinced, and that **blessed conviction and assurance** gave them a joy and a peace that surpasses all understanding. It was that faithful conviction that enabled them to **boldly** proclaim Christ crucified to the nations.

Dearly beloved: Nothing has changed from the night your Lord first spoke this promise. Your God and Lord continues to send the Holy Spirit for us, for our faith, for our conviction and peace. God the Father continues to send His Son to us in/through His Word and Sacrament for our blessed conviction of faith and assurance. Look to your baptism. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection? ***This is present-tense assuredness and peace;*** a peace that can only be known and understood in the conviction of Spirit-wrought faith. No matter what befalls you on this side of eternity; no matter what crosses you bear as you make your way through this shadowy valley we refer to as "life," ***you are completely covered over in Christ's perfect righteousness.*** Look to the altar. *"As often as you do this, remember what I have said...."* The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, still comes to us in, with, and under these blessed means of Word and Sacrament to work and nourish this blessed conviction of saving faith in us. He comes to us in order to take us back to Christ and His cross; to convince us of our sin and our absolute ***need*** of a Savior; to convince us of the fact that it is finished in Christ and because of Christ; to convince us of the fact that ***sin, death, and the devil have all already been judged, convicted and put to death in the blood of Jesus.*** Christ lives. The victory's won.

May Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—grant you this blessed assurance and conviction of saving faith; an unwavering faith that hears and holds fast to and stands firm in the Word and Promise of Christ, no matter the time or the circumstance. May this blessed Christ-centered three-fold conviction guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him and give you His peace, which surpasses all human understanding; the same peace that enables all convicted Christians to rejoice always, no matter the time or the circumstance. **AMEN**