

The Suddenly of God

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There is a suddenly with God. In a moment An eye will twinkle.

The end will arrive. We will be raised. And transformed.

Perishable body clothed with the imperishable. Mortal body clothed with immortality. Death swallowed in victory. That future, in Christ, is certain.

And sudden. There is a slowly with God. Between now And then.

The question is how do we live before that future bodily resurrection? A life where God seldom moves suddenly and often moves slowly. Of course, we desire flashes of insight which carry us forward quickly. But we must apply those insights and that can take years. That is the slowness of God. The Apostle Paul tells us how to live during those years, before Christ appears:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-3 NIV).

Focus Your Heart and Mind

Notice Paul ends with the sudden unveiling of our true identity when Christ returns in glory. In the meantime, he first tells us to set our *hearts, our emotional center*, on Christ in heaven, because we have been raised and seated with him there.

Paul next commands us to focus our *mind, our thoughts*, on Christ in heaven, not on this world, because we died with Christ and are hidden with him in God. Like a page in a book, we are hidden in Christ. We who were once alive to the world and dead to Christ, must see ourselves as dead to the world and alive to Christ.

But what, exactly, does it mean to focus our “minds” on Christ in heaven? In part, it means to focus our thoughts on Jesus, his teaching and life. It means believing what he says about us, rather than the lies that demean us.

Does it also mean to imagine yourself with him in heaven? I have such a picture in my mind. When I think of Jesus in heaven, I recall Stephen’s vision. Before the Jews stoned him to death, the first Christian martyr saw a vision. In Acts 7:55-56 we read, “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’”

That's the only biblical snapshot we have of Jesus at God's right hand in heaven. But other biblical passages give us insight into what Stephen saw. As people can't look directly at the sun, neither can they look into the face of God (Exodus 33:20). It would seem, though, that the glory of God appears like a dazzling light (Ezekiel 10:4).

In Stephen's vision, to the right of God's glory, stood the resurrected Jesus. Did the Lord appear as he did on the Mount of Transfiguration? If so, Luke's description helps, "And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing *became* white *and* gleaming" (Luke 9:29).

When I think of Christ in heaven, I visually imagine the scene described by Stephen. And I imagine myself with Jesus, at God's side. We can only see this with eyes of faith. Of course, we can imagine it. But to imagine such an image and believe it represents reality, requires faith. The author of Hebrews defines faith in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see" (NET).

Somehow, you are currently here—with the issues of life—and there—in Christ Jesus, sharing his resurrection life. Your mental and emotional focus must be there, not here. Such focus creates clear eyes and a pure heart. How? As you think resurrection, you'll see resurrection in every loss. I believe that's what Jesus meant when he said:

"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds" John 12:24