

Our God Ascends His Lofty Throne

Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)

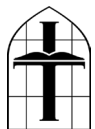
Our God ascends his lofty throne,
Array'd in majesty unknown;
His lustre all the temple fills,
And spreads o'er all th' ethereal hills.

The holy, holy, holy Lord,
By all the Seraphim ador'd,
And, while they stand beneath his seat,
They veil their faces, and their feet.

Lord, how can sinful lips proclaim
The honors of so great a name?
O for thine altar's glowing coal,
To touch his lips to fire his soul!

Then if a messenger thou ask,
A laborer for the hardest task,
Thro' all his weakness and his fear,
Love shall reply, "Thy servant's here."

Nor let his willing soul complain,
Tho' every effort seem in vain;
It ample recompense shall be,
But to have wrought, O God, for thee.



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In the Nick of Time

For the Coming Year

Kevin T. Bauder

Five years ago this month, Bible Baptist Church in East Bethel, Minnesota, asked me to become their interim pastor. I accepted. That is when I began to discover the shortage of qualified pastoral candidates who are willing to minister in smaller churches. Eventually, I became the pastor of the church while continuing to teach as a full-time professor for Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Once I accepted the pastorate, I bought a home in Cambridge, Minnesota, to be near Bible Baptist. Since then, I have commuted on weekends. I spend the week at my home in Crystal, where I have lived since 1998. On Friday night or Saturday, Mrs. Bauder and I will drive to Cambridge, then return to Crystal after the services on Sunday.

This situation has not worked as well as I had hoped. My plan was to use the Cambridge home as a base for ministry north of the Twin Cities. But the extra home maintenance consumes more time than I had anticipated. Also, Cambridge is north of East Bethel, while the main population centers are south and west. Still, the Cambridge home has provided a place to host church members and to hold committee meetings. And my wife and I enjoy both the home and the small town of Cambridge.

Meanwhile, our neighborhood in Crystal is changing. For over twenty years we enjoyed relative peace and quiet. We still do to a large extent. But many of the original homeowners have died. In some instances, their homes have been purchased by rental companies. With the rentals has come a spate of new tenants who take no care of their property and have slender regard for their neighbors. We are blessed to have next-door neighbors on both sides who are considerate and even helpful, but the neighborhood is neither as neat nor as crime-free as it once was.

Crystal is an inner suburb of Minneapolis. We have no vote in Minneapolis elections, but whatever happens in Minneapolis affects us directly. That effect was rarely felt before the Tim Walz governorship. Since he became governor, we have twice been threatened by nearby riots, and we are now fearing them again.

To be sure, our little neighborhood is geographically protected. We have an airport that shelters us with high fences on two sides. We have a major highway backed by a line of clinics and fenced businesses on the third side. The fourth side is a main street, but there is a railroad track half a mile down. Trouble rarely makes its way across.

The airport is one of the best parts of living here. It is a smaller field that is almost entirely devoted to general aviation. We get to see a wide variety of aircraft, including a fair number of “warbirds” during airshow season. One of the area hospitals hangars a helicopter here. We’ve also seen a fair number of blimps tethered across the street. The noise is never a problem. Over the past twenty-eight years, I’ve only seen or heard jets use the field three times.

But the highway that runs past our neighborhood goes straight into North Minneapolis, where much of the trouble starts. We are part of Ilhan Omar’s district. And when trouble begins in Minneapolis, it spreads up Broadway, which becomes our highway. The rioting has never reached as far as our neighborhood yet, but it has got close enough that nearby businesses have boarded up their windows and barricaded their doors.

For a variety of reasons, moving everything to our Cambridge home is becoming more appealing. But two factors complicate that decision. One is distance. From Crystal I have a twenty-minute drive to work. From Cambridge it will be an hour, and probably more during the traffic rush. That adds up to a lot of time and miles.

The second complication is that I don’t see myself keeping the pastorate in East Bethel indefinitely. I’ve enjoyed the ministry, and I love the people of the congregation. But the truth is that I am not providing the pastoring that this church needs. My primary responsibilities are to Central Seminary, and I try to work hard to fulfill those. I recently began my eightieth decade, and I simply do not have as much stamina as I once did.

Given a choice, I believe that it is far more important to devote my last few years of active ministry to teaching and writing. Doing that from Cambridge will be more complicated than doing it from Crystal. But Central Seminary has shifted toward synchronous Zoom classrooms. We may even introduce some asynchronous elements into our approach. Those are things that I can do as well from Cambridge as I can from my study on campus. Perhaps the administration will allow some flexibility in dealing with the distance and time.

I’ve talked with the people at Bible Baptist about this. They know that I have a limited shelf life. But I’m not planning on resigning immediately. I want to help them through a process of transitioning toward the future (though without trying to name my successor). Perhaps I’ll tell you more about that sometime.

Everything I’ve said here is subject to the Lord’s guidance. During more than half-a-century of preaching, I’ve discovered that God often surprises me with the direction He leads. But He rarely leads while I’m sitting still. So, I take a guess as to what the best direction might be, and I start moving that way. Then God brings circumstances, counselors, and changes of desire into my life. He seems to know how to get me to go where He wants me to go. That’s just as important near the end of ministry as it was at the beginning.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
