

The Necessity of Seeking the Saints' Rest

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard Baxter:

Why don't people seek this wonderful rest more enthusiastically? You would think that if a person heard even once about such a tremendous possibility, and if he believed what he heard, that he would almost forget to eat and drink, and would care for nothing else but how to secure this treasure. And yet people who hear of it daily and profess to believe it as a fundamental article of their faith, act as if they had never heard of any such thing, or did not believe a word of it. They hardly talk about it, work for it, or think about it. And this is true not only of the worldly-minded, but even of devout Christians.

Of course, the **WORLDLY-MINDED** are absorbed with seeking the things below. They don't have time to seek this heavenly rest. They think of their contriving and striving to climb a step higher in the world than their brethren, while they neglect the eternal kingdom. They pursue pleasure with a passion, but regard the praising of God and the joy of the angels as boring. How careful they are to raise their children to succeed and to increase their possessions, but they don't stop to think whether they will be successful in the judgment. What early rising and working late, year after year, to make a living for themselves and their children, until they die; but what little thought they give to what shall follow.

What has this world done for its lovers and friends, that it is so eagerly followed, while Christ and heaven are neglected? The common entrance into this world is through anguish and travail. The passage through it is with continual worry and work. The exit is the sharpest of all. O deluded people, will laughter and pleasure stay with you forever? Will gold and earthly glory prove dependable friends in the time of your greatest need? Will they hear your cries in the day of tragedy? At the hour of your death, will they either answer or relieve you? Will they go along with you to the other world, and bribe the Judge, and get you off free? Will they purchase you a place among the redeemed? Oh, deceitful world, you flattered me in my prosperity, but now you abandon me in my time of need. If I had as faithfully served Christ as I have served you, He would not have left me helpless.

If every door were marked where families do not, morning and evening, sincerely seek the Lord in prayer, and if the Lord's wrath were poured out upon such prayerless families, our cities would be as places overcome by fatal epidemics. Try to persuade the average person to read good books, to sanctify the Lord's day in prayer, worship, and hearing God's Word. He would consider it a tedious life, as if he thought heaven were not worth that much.

Even the **PEOPLE WHO PROFESS TO BELIEVE** show a lack of heavenly mindedness. They may preach, or hear, or read, or talk of heaven, and pray with their families, and support good causes. They may desire to be associated with the godly. Still, they shun more spiritual duties, such as being fervent in private prayer and meditation, in conscientious self-examination, in loving and sincerely forgiving an enemy, in putting others before themselves, and in committing all they have, or do, to Christ. The Gospel influences only the surface of their souls. Such people are usually bold when it comes to opinions, though basically ignorant. They are usually conceited dealers in controversies, rather than humble embracers of known truth. Seldom talking with seriousness and humility of the great things of Christ, they show that their religion dwells in their brains, and not in their hearts. The wind of temptation carries them away as a feather, because their hearts are not stabilized with Christ and grace. They never, in private conversation, humbly admit their spiritual weaknesses or tenderly acknowledge their inattentiveness to Christ; but they pride themselves in being of a certain persuasion or party.

The **HYPOCRITE'S MIND** may tell him that God is the chief good, but his emotions have not affirmed it. The world has more of his love than God, and therefore it is his god. He will hold to the opinion which will best serve his worldly advantage. How weak he is in private prayer. How superficial in meditation, how empty in walking with God, rejoicing in Him, and desiring Him.

Even the godly are too **LAZY** when it comes to seeking their everlasting rest. We trifle away our time. What a frozen stupidity has benumbed us! We are dying, and we know it; yet we stir not. We do not make our eternal state the business of our lives. If I were not sick myself of the same disease, with what tears would I mix this ink in grieving over this universal deadness.

How few are the **PASTORS** who are serious in their work. Do we yearn to help the ignorant, careless, obstinate masses of people? When we look them in the face, do our hearts melt for them, lest we should never see their faces in rest? Doesn't sinful over-cautiousness diminish our fervor, and make our sermons dull on subjects that should be piercing? How mildly do we handle those sins which will so cruelly handle our people's souls? May the Lord pardon the great sin of the ministry in this timidity, and, in particular, my own.

How about the LAY PEOPLE? Are they more serious than the pastors? How can we expect them to be? Reader, ask yourself the question—have you set your eternal rest before your eyes as the great business you have to do in this world?

O blessed rest, how unworthily are you neglected! O glorious kingdom, how undervalued you are! We can never do too much with heaven in mind. No one can obey or serve God too much. We may easily do too much for the world, but we cannot for God.

The wisdom of God has ordered us to be diligent in seeking heaven. The best of CHRISTIANS, AT DEATH, lament their negligence. When people complain that we are too strict on this point, whom do they accuse, God or us? Who knows the way to heaven better than the God of heaven? "Strive to enter in at the straight gate" (Luke 13:24). "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccles. 9:10). "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

When Christians come to die, they wish, "O that I had been a thousand times more holy, more heavenly, more faithful in my labors for the Lord. The world accuses me for doing too much, but my own conscience accuses me for doing too little."

Rest must always follow labor. As actors upon a stage portraying a battle, differ from soldiers fighting for their lives, so hypocrites differ from serious Christians. Earnestness reveals our sincerity. Isn't it sensible to exert ourselves to the uttermost in obedience to God?

God is in earnest with you; why shouldn't you be so with Him? He was serious in His judgments. Was He not in earnest when He drowned the world, when He consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, and when He scattered the Jews? Is it time, then, to trifle with God? Jesus Christ was serious in purchasing our redemption. The Holy Spirit is serious in dealing with us. He is grieved when we resist Him. God is serious in hearing our prayers. He suffers with us. He regards every groan and sigh, and puts every tear into His bottle (Psalm 56:8). When you are in serious trouble, you pray earnestly! Shall we then be superficial in the work of God?

And now, reader, having provided these arguments, I charge you, in the name of God, to make your decision. Will you yield obedience or not? I am confident that your conscience is convinced of your duty. Do you now dare to go on in the careless, lazy way, living as loosely, sinning as boldly, and praying as seldom as before? If you had seen heaven opened, as Stephen did, and all the saints there triumphing in victory, what a life you would lead after such a vision! If you had possessed the glory of heaven but one year, what ambition you would have now. "What manner of people ought you to be—in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11). I charge you, Christian, in your Master's name, to let your life answer that question as well as your lips.