

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard Baxter:

If there is such a wonderful rest remaining for us, why don't we think about it more? Has the eternal God provided us such a hope, and promised to take us up to dwell with Himself; and is it not worth thinking about? Do we believe this, and yet forget it and neglect it? Why does God condemn earthly-mindedness and command, "Set your affection on things above"? (Col. 3:2). If God says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15), why then do we make earth our principal concern? Where is the Christian whose concentration is really on his rest? What is the matter—**are we so full of joy that we need no more?**

I urge you, reader, to bend your soul to study eternity. Busy it about the life to come. Make such meditation your habit. Bathe your soul in heaven's delights; and if your backward soul begins to drag its feet and your thoughts wander, call them back. Hold them to their work. Don't put up with their laziness. When you have, in obedience to God, tried this work, and kept a guard on your thoughts until they are accustomed to obey; then you will find yourself in the suburbs of heaven. Then the life of Christianity will be a life of joy.

The Value of a Heart Set Upon Heaven.

This is the way to live abundantly. It will be the best preventive against temptations. It will be your best comfort in troubles. It will make you most helpful to others. It will honor God.

A heart set upon heaven is an evidence of your sincerity. If you ask, "How can I know that I am truly sanctified?" this will provide a sure sign from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself—"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). God is the saints' treasure and happiness; heaven is the place where they must fully enjoy Him. A heart therefore set upon heaven, is a heart set upon God. That is good evidence of saving grace. Such a Christian considers it a day of imprisonment in a windowless dungeon when he has not had one refreshing view of eternity. Christians, if you would like a proof of your title to glory, keep your thoughts on heaven. If sin and Satan cannot keep your affections out of heaven, neither will they be able to keep you yourself out.

The noblest of Christians are they whose faces are set most directly for heaven. The heavenly mind is the best way to a life of comfort. The countries far north are cold and frozen because they are distant from the sun. What makes such frozen, uncomfortable Christians, but their living so far from heaven? And what makes others so warm, but their living higher, and having nearer access to God? When the sun in the spring draws nearer to our part of the earth, how do all things congratulate its approach? The earth looks green, the trees shoot forth, the plants revive, the birds sing, and all things smile upon us. If we would but try this life with God, and keep these hearts above, what a spring of joy would be within us; how we would forget our winter sorrows; and how we would praise our great Creator. O Christian, get above. Those who have been there have found it warmer!

Whom should we blame if we lack such joy, but our own negligent hearts? God has provided us with a crown of glory, and promised to set it soon upon our heads, but we will not so much as think about it. He invites us to behold and rejoice, but we will not so much as look at it. And yet we complain for lack of joy. It is by believing that we are "filled with joy and peace," and no longer than we continue believing.

As you would delight a covetous man by showing him gold, so God delights His people by leading them into heaven, and showing them Himself and their rest with Him. I urge you, reader, in the name of the Lord, and as you value the life of steady joy, to enter upon this work seriously, and learn the art of heavenly-mindedness.

A heart in heaven will be an excellent defense against temptations to sin. A heart in heaven can reply to the tempter, as Nehemiah did, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down" (Neh. 6:3). A Christian, when he is taking a survey of his eternal rest, will not listen to the alluring charms of Satan. One with a heavenly mind is the freest from sin, because he has a clearer interest in spiritual things and deeper insight into the evil of sin. Therefore temptations have little power over him. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird," says Proverbs 1:17, and usually in vain does Satan lay his traps to catch the soul that plainly sees them. Earth is the place for his tempting bait, but how will these trap the Christian who has left the earth and walks with God? If conversation with wise men is the way to make one wise, how much more is conversation with God. If travelers return home with wisdom and experience, how much more he who travels to heaven!

A heavenly mind is also fortified against temptations, because love is increased. He who **LOVES** most, and not he who only **KNOWS** most, will most easily resist the allurements of sin. When you have had a fresh, delightful taste of heaven, you will not easily be led away from it. You cannot persuade a child to part with his candy while

the taste is in his mouth. O that you would be frequently tasting the delights of heaven. How this would strengthen your faith and make you despise the foolishness of the world. If the devil had tried to trap Peter in the mount of transfiguration, when he saw Moses and Elijah talking with Christ, would Peter have so easily been tempted to deny his Lord? With all that glory in his eye? Never! So if Satan should attempt to snare a believing soul when he is on the mountaintop with Christ, such a soul would say, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). If we could keep the taste of our souls continually delighted with the sweetness above, with what disdain would we spit out the baits of sin.

The heavenly Christian is the lively Christian. It is our strangeness to heaven that makes us so dull. When we frequently think of our everlasting treasure we are powerfully motivated in our Christian service. On the other hand, we run so slowly, and work so lazily, because we so lightly consider the prize. Observe the man who is much in heaven, and you will see that he is not like other Christians. Something of what he has seen above appears in all he does. If a preacher, how heavenly are his sermons. If a layman, how heavenly his prayers and behavior. Give yourself to this work and others will notice that you have been "with God on the mount" (Exodus 34:29). But if you complain of deadness and dullness—that you cannot love Christ as much as you should, nor rejoice in His love as you wish you could—then know that you are the cause of your own complaints. If you would have light and heat, why don't you spend more time in the sunshine? Where must you go but to heaven where Christ is?

Some people are motivated by books, others from the mouth of an inspiring preacher, and some by the spurs of trouble. But he who knows the way to heaven, derives from such meditation a continual refreshing from the divine fountain. Don't ask, "How can mortals ascend to heaven?" Faith has wings, and meditation is its propulsion. Set your soul conscientiously to this work, wash frequently in this Jordan, and your leprous, dead soul, will revive (2 Kings 5). You will find out that God can give you a vigorous and joyful life.

Frequent views of glory provide comfort in affliction. If the way be ever so rough, can it be boring if it leads to heaven? Our tastes of heaven keep the suffering from the soul, so that it can only touch the flesh. Had it not been for that little—unfortunately, too little—taste which I had of heaven, my sufferings would have been too much for me. I may say, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13). Again, with the Psalmist, I could say, that unless this promised rest "had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction" (Ps. 119:92).

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion—in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall my head be lifted up above my enemies round about me—therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the Lord" (Ps. 27:4-6).

All sufferings are nothing to us, so far as we have these supporting joys. The reason we are impatient and complaining is that we gaze on some present evil but don't fix our thoughts on what is beyond it. Those who saw Christ on the cross, shook their heads and thought him defeated; but God saw him dying, buried, rising, glorified; and all this at one view. Faith will, in this, imitate God, so far as it has the telescope of a promise to help it. We see God burying us under the snow, but we fail to see the springtime when we shall revive. Could we only see heaven as the end of all God's dealings with us, surely none of His dealings could be grievous.

The Christian who concentrates on heaven is more useful to other people, and better company. When a man is in a strange country, how glad he is to meet someone from his own nation. How delightful it is to talk about their own country, their common acquaintances, and of interests back home. With what pleasure did Joseph talk with his brethren, and inquire about his father and his brother Benjamin. Is it not pleasurable also for a Christian to have fellowship with people who have likewise been meditating on their heavenly country, and to inquire about the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Such conversation is like perfume. All that are near may be made fragrant by it.

Happy the people who have a heavenly minister. Happy the children that have a heavenly father. Happy the man who has a heavenly wife. For my part, I would rather have the company of a heavenly-minded Christian, than that of the most learned or famous people.

When a Christian can live above, and rejoice in the things that are not seen, God is honored by such faith. The Lord will testify of him, "This man believes Me, and takes Me at my Word. He rejoices in My promise before he has the possession. He can be thankful for what his physical eyes never saw. His heart is with Me; he loves My presence, and he shall surely enjoy it in My kingdom forever!" "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet

have believed" (John 20:29).

The person who does not set his affection on things above, disobeys God and loses the most delightful discoveries of the Word of God. The same God who commanded you to believe, and to be a Christian, also commanded you to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1), and to "set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). The same God who has forbidden you to murder, steal, or commit adultery, has forbidden you to neglect this great duty; and do you dare disobey Him?

The descriptions of heaven, the discoveries of our future blessedness, and the precious promises of our rest, are the stars in Scripture's sky. They are the golden lines in the Book of God. Do you neglect and overlook so many of them? Why should God reveal so much and tell us beforehand of the joys we shall possess, except to give us present joy? It has pleased our Father to let us know the very intent of His heart, that our joy might be full (John 15:11), and that we might live as the heirs of such a kingdom.

It is only fair that our hearts should be on God, when the heart of God is so much on us. If the Lord of glory can stoop so low as to set His heart on sinful dust, I think we should easily be persuaded to set our hearts on Christ and heaven, and ascend to Him in our daily meditations. When God speaks of our forgetfulness toward Him, He says, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jer. 2:32). When you get up in the morning, you never go off forgetting to dress. Yet you can forget God and your eternal life, day after day. Is dressing more important? Let us get our souls up to God, and visit Him every morning, and let our thinking be directed toward Him every moment.

We call God "our Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Shall we be as children who are so absorbed in their play that they forget about their father? Friends and old acquaintances are in heaven. We delighted in their fellowship when they were on earth, and we grieved over their departure. If we could go to visit them on earth, we would do so. Why not rejoice now to think of meeting them in heaven? A believer should look to heaven, and contemplate the blessed state of the saints, and think with himself, "Though I am not yet so happy as to be with you, yet this is my daily comfort—**you are my fellow-members in Christ, and therefore your joys are my joys. I rejoice in spirit with you, and congratulate your happiness in my daily meditations.**"

If you were deported to a foreign land, how frequently would your thoughts be at home? Why is it not like that in respect to heaven? Is that not more truly our home, where we will take up our everlasting abode?

Nothing below heaven is worth setting our hearts upon. Have you found eternal happiness on earth? Where is it? What is it made of? If Satan should take you up to the mountain of temptation, and show you "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matt. 4:8), he could show you nothing that is better than your eternal rest. It is true that so far as duty and necessity require it, we must give some attention to earthly matters; but why limit ourselves to these confined quarters?

Now, reader, consider. Have I proved it to be your duty to keep your heart on things above, or have I not? If you acknowledge yourself convinced of the duty, then you condemn yourself if you willfully neglect such a confessed obligation; but if you be sincerely willing, the work is more than half done.

In the following chapters I have some plain directions to give you to help you in this great work; but there is no point in mentioning them unless you are willing to put them into practice. Nevertheless, I will propose them to you, and may the Lord persuade you to use them.