

How to Seek the Saints' Rest While on Earth

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard Baxter:

Be convinced of the value of heaven, for if you do not believe it to be the greatest treasure, you will never set your heart upon it. This conviction must sink into your heart, for if it is only an intellectual opinion it will have little motivational power.

Endeavor to remember how near your rest is. We are more aware of that which we think is near at hand than that which we behold at a distance. People give little regard to heaven, because they think of it at too great a distance; they look on it as twenty, thirty, or forty years off. If you really believed you would die tomorrow, how seriously you would think of heaven tonight!

Let your eternal rest be the subject of your conversation, especially with those that can speak from their hearts about the same subject. It is a pity that Christians should ever meet together without some talk of their meeting in heaven, or of the way to it, before they part. It is a pity so much time is spent in petty conversation and useless disputes. O, that we were skillful and determined to turn the stream of conversation to these more sublime and precious matters. When people begin to talk of trifles, we could put in a word for heaven. We would say, as the psalmist, "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:6).

Let your spiritual experiences increase your interest in heaven. When you kneel down in prayer, do it with the hope of getting your heart nearer to God before you rise up. When you open the Bible, or other book, hope to meet with some passage of divine truth that with the Spirit's blessing will give you a fuller taste of heaven. When you are going to church, say, "I hope to hear something from God that will lift my vision. I hope Christ will appear to me, and shine about me with light from heaven (Acts 26:13-19). Let me hear His refreshing voice, and cause the scales to fall from my eyes (Acts 9:18), that I may see more of that glory than I have yet seen. I hope, that before I return home from church, my Lord will bring my heart within view of that everlasting rest, that I may return as 'the shepherds' from the heavenly vision, 'glorifying and praising God for all the things' I have 'heard and seen'" (Luke 2:20). Remember, therefore, always to pray for your minister, that God would put some divine message into his mouth which may leave a heavenly relish upon your spirit.

Make every object and every event remind your soul of its approaching rest. If we would do this we might have a fuller taste of Christ and heaven in every common meal than most men have in the Holy Communion. If you prosper in the world, let it make you more aware of your eternal prosperity. If you are tired from work, let it make the thought of your eternal rest more desirable. If things go wrong, let your eagerness be increased to have your sorrows and sufferings forever cease. Is your body refreshed with food or sleep? Then remember the coming refreshment with Christ. Do you hear any good news? Then remember what good news it will be to hear the trumpet of God at the Second Coming. Are you delighted with the fellowship of the saints? Then remember what the perfect fellowship in heaven will be. Do you hear of war? Then remember the day when you shall be in perfect peace, under the reign of the Prince of Peace forever. Thus you see how every condition can afford us an opportunity for heavenly contemplation, if we put our mind to it.

Be much in the angelic work of praise. Praising God is the activity of angels and saints in heaven. It will be our own everlasting work; and if we were now doing it more, we would be more like what we shall be then. Here is the most vivid symbol of heaven that I know upon earth. It is when the people of God with a deep sense of His majesty and mercy, join together, both in heart and voice, to sing His praises from hearts abounding with love and joy.

Reader, I urge you to let praises have a larger part of your activities. Whoever offers praise, glorifies God. "Praise the Lord—for the Lord is good—sing praises unto his name—for it is pleasant" (Ps. 135:3). O, the sinful foolishness of many of the saints, who drench their spirits in continual depression. Instead of joining with the people of God in His praises, they are wallowing in their unworthiness and concentrating on their miseries. So they rob God of His glory and themselves of their joy.

Keep your soul filled with believing thoughts of the infinite love of God. When our ignorance and unbelief have drawn the most deformed picture of God in our imaginations, then we complain that we cannot love Him, nor delight in Him. This is the case of many thousands of Christians. Scripture assures us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8); that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11). O, that we could always think of God as we do of a friend; as of one who loves us, even more than we do ourselves; whose very heart is set upon us to do us good, and has therefore provided for us an everlasting dwelling with Himself. It would not be so hard then to have our hearts ever with Him.

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Cherish the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God must be to you what the chariot was to Elijah—the very living principle by which you must move and ascend. Don't grieve your Guide, and don't knock off your chariot wheel! What supernatural help the soul will find in its approaches to the Almighty, if constantly obeying the Spirit. Christian reader, do you not feel sometimes a strong urge to retire from the world and draw near to God? Do not disobey that prompting, but accept the offer. Hoist up the sails while this blessed Wind is blowing. The more you obey, the faster you will go.

I advise you, as a further help to this heavenly life, that you do not neglect the due care of your physical health. Your body is a useful servant if you give it its due, and no more than its due. But it is a most devouring tyrant, if you allow it to have everything it wants. On the other hand, it is like a blunt tool, if you unfairly deny what is necessary for its support. As he who wrecks the house wrongs its inhabitants, so they who hurt their bodies, wrong their souls also. When our body is sickly, and our spirits sluggish; how lifelessly do we drag ourselves along the pathway to heavenly meditation.