

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard Baxter:

I have given you, dear reader, my best advice for maintaining a heavenly life. If you cannot meditate as systematically and completely as I have recommended, then do it as you can. Just be sure to do it seriously and frequently. Become friendly with this heavenly work, and you will, in some degree, become friendly with God. Your joys will be spiritual, stable, and lasting, like the object of their meditation. You will surely find comfort both in life and death. When you have neither wealth nor health nor the pleasures of this world, yet you will have comfort. Without depending upon the presence of any friend, minister, book, or any other help, you will still have vigorous, real comfort. When all means of help are denied you or taken from you, yet your spiritual life will be active and victorious. You will draw your daily joy from heaven.

You will be as one that stands on the peak of a mountain and looks down on the world below. The greatest rulers will seem but as grasshoppers. The busy, arguing, greedy world will seem like an ant hill. Men's threats will be no worry to you, nor the honors of this world any enticement. Temptations will be less dangerous, having lost their strength. Troubles will be less grievous, having lost their sting.

It is now up to you whether you will live this blessed life or not, and whether all this effort I have taken for you will do you any good or be wasted. If it be wasted through your neglect, you yourself will be the greatest loser. What do you have to consider that is better than God and heaven? Are you not almost out of this world already? One disease or another is liable to release your soul. The grave awaits you. What if your pulse must beat a few strokes more? What if you have a little longer to breathe, before you breathe your last; a few more nights to sleep, before you sleep in the grave? Very shortly you will hear your clock strike, and say to yourself, "My life is done; my time is gone; there is nothing now but heaven or hell before me." Where, then, should your heart now be, but in heaven? If you only knew what a dreadful thing it is to have doubts about heaven when you are dying, it would shake you. And what else can a person do, but have some trembling doubts, if he never seriously thought of heaven before?

Some say, "It is not worth so much time and trouble to think about the joys above. If we can be sure we are saved, we know heaven will be wonderful; so why spend any time in heavenly meditation?" These people do not obey God's command, which requires them to set their "affections on things above" (Col. 3:2). Our homeland or citizenship "is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ—who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21). Thus these people who ignore their homeland voluntarily make their own lives miserable, by refusing the delights which God has set before them. And if that were not all, it were a small matter—but see how many other problems follow the neglect of these heavenly delights. This neglect will dampen, if not destroy, their love of God. It will make even the thinking or speaking of God unpleasant. It weakens their desire to engage in His service. It tends to pervert their judgment concerning the ways of God. It leaves them in the power of every trouble and temptation. It will also make them afraid and unwilling to die; for who would want to go to a God or a place he has no delight in? Who would leave his pleasure here, if he did not know a better place to go?

Had I been proposing a course of sadness and fear, you might have objected. But I have been talking about heavenly delights. God is willing you should daily walk with Him and draw happiness from the everlasting fountain. If you are not willing; then suffer your loss, and when you are dying, try to find your comfort elsewhere. See if physical pleasures will remain with you then. Your conscience will remember, in spite of you, that you were once persuaded to a way for more excellent pleasures—pleasures that would have followed you through death and have lasted eternally.

As for you whose hearts God has weaned from all things here below, I hope you will value this heavenly life, and walk every day in the New Jerusalem. God is your love and your desire. I know it is your grief, that your heart is not even nearer to Him, and that you do not more completely love Him and delight in Him. Try this life of meditation on your heavenly rest, and the world will see by your heavenly life, that religion is something more than opinions and arguments or good deeds.

As Moses, before he died, went up into mount Nebo to take a survey of the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:1), so the Christian ascends the mount of meditation, and by faith surveys his rest. He hears as it were, the melody of the heavenly choir, and says, "Happy is that people that is in such a case—yes, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:15). When he looks upon the Lord himself, he is ready, with the rest of heaven's inhabitants to fall down and "worship him that lives forever and ever" (Rev. 4:10), and say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8). "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power—for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created" (Rev.

4:11). When he looks on the glorified Savior, he is ready to say "Amen" to that "new song" (Rev. 5:9) "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13). "For you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and have made us unto our God kings and priests" (Rev. 5:9-10). When the Christian looks back on the wilderness of this world, he blesses the believing, patient saints, and pities the ignorant, stubborn, miserable world; and for himself he says, as Peter, "It is good for us to be here" (Luke 9:33).

Daniel, in his captivity, daily opened his window toward Jerusalem, when he went to God in his devotions, even though Jerusalem was so distant and far out of sight (Dan. 6:10). So may the believing soul, in this captivity of the flesh, look towards "Jerusalem which is above" (Gal. 4:26).

O merciful Father, draw up these hearts unto yourself, and keep them there until they are purified; and persuade those who read these lines to practice this delightful, heavenly work. O let not the soul of your most unworthy servant be a stranger to those joys which he has described to others; but keep me, while I remain on earth, in daily breathings after You, and in a believing, loving walking with You. And when You come, let me be found so doing—waiting and longing for my Lord's return.

Let those who shall read these heavenly directions, not merely read the fruit of my studies, but the breathing of my active hope and love. Let these words not witness against me; but proceeding from the heart of the writer, through Your grace, let them be effective upon the heart of the reader, and so be a blessing to both. Amen!

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Luke 2:14).