

SERMONS ON HEAVEN

by John C. Ryle

Ryle's exploration of the nature of heaven and holiness, arguing that without holiness no one can see the Lord and examining what heaven requires of believers in their present walk with God.

2 Chapters

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Heaven

J. C. Ryle Tracts

These rare, short "Helmingham Series" tracts were first published about the middle of the last century, while J. C. Ryle was a Rector at Helmingham, Suffolk.

HEAVEN

by

J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900)

There is a glorious dwelling place provided by Jesus Christ for all His believing people. The world that now is, is not their rest: they are pilgrims and strangers in it. Heaven is their home.

There will be a place in heaven for all sinners who have fled to Christ by faith, and trusted in Him : for the least as well as the greatest. Abraham took care to provide for all his children, and God takes care to provide for His. None will be disinherited; none will be cast out; none will be cut off. Each shall stand in his lot, and have a portion in the day when the Lord brings many sons to glory. In our Father's house are many mansions.

Reader, I want you to go to heaven, after this life is over. I want heaven to be very full, and I want you to be one of its inhabitants. Listen to me for a few moments, while I tell you something about the manner of the place.

I can tell you a little of the blessedness of heaven, but not all. What mortal man can explain the full nature of the inheritance of the saints in light? Who can describe the glory which is yet to be revealed and given to the children of God? Words fail, language falls short. Mind cannot conceive fully, and tongue cannot express perfectly, the things which are comprised in the glory yet to come upon the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Oh, it is indeed a true saying of the Apostle John : "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2).

The very Bible itself only lifts the veil a little, which hangs over this subject. How could it do more? We could not thoroughly understand more, if more had been told us. Our constitution is as yet too earthly, Our understanding is as yet too carnal to appreciate more if we had it. The Bible generally deals with the subject in negative terms, and not in positive assertions. It describes what there will not be in the glorious inheritance, that thus we may get some faint idea of what there will be. It paints the absence of certain things, in order that we may drink in a little the blessedness of the things present. It tells us that the inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away. It tells us that the devil is to be bound,-that there shall be no more night and no more curse,-that death shall he cast into the lake of fire,-that all tears shall be wiped away, and that the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." And these are glorious things indeed! No corruption!-No fading!-No withering!-No devil! No curse of sin!-No sorrow!-No tears!-No sickness!-No death! Surely the cup

of the children of God will indeed run over!

But reader, there are positive things told us about the glory yet to come upon the heirs of God, which ought not to be kept back. There are many sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comforts in their future inheritance, which all true Christians would do well to consider. There are cordials for fainting pilgrims in many words and expressions of Scripture, which you and I ought to lay up against time of need.

Is knowledge pleasant to us now? Is the little that we know of God, and Christ, and in the Bible, precious to our souls, and do we long for more? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What says the Scripture?-"Then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Blessed be God, there will be no more disagreements among believers! Episcopalians and Presbyterians, Calvinists and Arminians, Millenarians and Anti-Millenarians, friends of Establishments and friends of the Voluntary system, advocates of infant baptism and advocates of adult baptism,-all will at length be of one mind. The former ignorance will have passed away. We shall marvel to find how childish and blind we have been.

Is holiness pleasant to us now? Is sin the burden and bitterness of our lives? Do we long for entire conformity to the image of God? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What says the Scripture?-"Christ gave Himself for the Church, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27). Oh, the blessedness of an eternal good-bye to sin! Oh, how little the best of us do at present! Oh, what unutterable corruption sticks, like birdlime, to all our motives, all our thoughts, all our words, all our actions! Oh, how many of us, like Naphtali, are godly in our words, but, like Reuben, unstable in our works! Thank God, all this shall be changed!

Is rest pleasant to us now? Do we often feel faint though pursuing? Do we long for a world in which we need not be always watching and warring? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What saith the Scripture?-"There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. iv. 9). The daily, hourly conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, shall at length be at an end: the enemy shall be bound; the warfare shall be over; the wicked shall at last cease from troubling; the weary shall at length be at rest. There shall be a great calm.

Is service pleasant to us now? Do we find it sweet to work for Christ, and yet groan, being burdened by a feeble body? Is our spirit often willing, but hampered and clogged by the poor weak flesh? Have our hearts burned within us when we have been allowed to give a cup of cold water for Christ's sake; and have we sighed to think what unprofitable servants we are? Let us take comfort. We shall be able to serve perfectly in glory, and without weariness. What saith the Scripture?-"They serve Him day and night in His temple" (Revelation 7:15).

Is satisfaction pleasant to us now? Do we find the world empty? Do we long for the filling up of every void place and gap in our hearts? We shall have it perfectly in glory. We shall no longer have to mourn over cracks in all our earthen vessels, and thorns in all our roses, and bitter dregs in all our sweet cups. We shall no longer lament, with Jonah, over withered gourds. We shall no longer say, with Solomon, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." We shall no longer cry, with aged David, "I have seen an end of all perfection." What saith the Scripture?-"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Psalms 17:15).

Is communion with the saints pleasant to us now? Do we feel that we are never so happy as when we are with the excellent of the earth? Are we never so much at home as in their company? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What saith the Scripture?-"The Son of man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which work iniquity." "He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds" (Matthew 13:41; Matthew 24:31). Praised be God, we shall see all the saints of whom we have read in the Bible, and in whose steps we have tried to walk.

We shall see apostles, prophets, patriarchs martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and ministers, of whom the world was not worthy. We shall see the faces of those we have known and loved in Christ on earth, and over whose departure we shed bitter tears.

We shall see them more bright and glorious than they ever were before. And, best of all, we shall see them without hurry and anxiety, and without feeling that we only meet to part again. In glory there is no death, no parting, no farewell!

Is communion with Christ pleasant to us now? Do we find His name precious to us? Do we feel our hearts burn within us at the thought of His dying love? We shall have perfect communion with Him in glory. "We shall ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). We shall be with Him in paradise: we shall see His face in the kingdom. These eyes of ours will behold those hands and feet which were pierced with nails, and that head which was crowned with thorns. Where He is, there will the sons of God be. When He comes, they will come with Him: when He sits down in His glory, they shall sit down by His side. Blessed prospects indeed! I am a dying man in a dying world; all before me is unseen: the world to come is a harbour unknown! But Christ is there, and that is enough. Surely if there is rest and peace in following Him by faith on earth, there will be far more rest and peace when you see Him face to face. If we have found it good to follow the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, we shall find it a thousand times better to sit down in our eternal inheritance with our Joshua, in the promised land.

Ah, reader, if you are not yet among the heirs of glory, I do pity you with all my heart. How much you are missing! How little true comfort you are enjoying! There you are, struggling on, and toiling in the fire, and wearying yourself for mere earthly ends,-seeking rest and finding none,- chasing shadows and never catching them-wondering why you are not happy, and yet refusing to see the cause,-hungry, and thirsty, and empty, and yet blind to the plenty within your reach,-your expectations all perishing, and none to look forward to beyond the grave. Oh, that you were wise! Oh, that you would hear the voice of Jesus, and learn of Him.

Reader, if you are one of those who are heirs of glory, you may well rejoice and be happy. You may well wait, like the boy Patience in Pilgrim's Progress : your best things are as yet to come.-You may well bear crosses without murmuring: your light affliction is but for a moment; the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which is to be revealed. When Christ our life appears, then you also shall appear with Him in glory.-You may well not envy the transgressor and his prosperity: you are the truly rich.

Well said a dying believer, in my own parish, "I am more rich than I ever was in my life." You may say, as Mephibosheth said to David, "Let the world take all: my King is coming again in peace." You may say, as Alexander said when he gave all his riches away, and was asked what he kept

for himself: "I have hope." You may well not be cast down by sickness: the eternal part of you is safe, and provided for, whatever happens to your body. You may well look calmly on death: it opens a door between you and your inheritance. You may well not sorrow excessively over the things of the world,-over partings and bereavements,-over losses and crosses: the day of gathering is before you; your treasure is beyond reach of harm. Heaven is becoming every year more full of those you love, and earth more empty. Glory in your inheritance. It is all yours by faith, if you are a son of God : it shall soon be yours in possession.

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Suppose An Unholy Man Went To Heaven

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J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900)

Suppose for a moment that you were allowed to enter heaven without holiness. What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself and by whose side would you sit? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes are not your tastes, their character not your character. How could you possibly be happy, if you had not been holy on earth?

Now perhaps you love the company of the light and careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous, the reveler and the pleasure-seeker, the ungodly and the profane. There will be none such in heaven.

Now perhaps you think the saints of God too strict and particular and serious. You rather avoid them. You have no delight in their society. There will be no other company in heaven.

Now perhaps you think praying and Scripture reading, and hymn singing, dull and melancholy and stupid work, a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not enjoyed. You reckon the Sabbath a burden and a weariness; you could not possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshipping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof rest not day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in occupation such as this?

Think you that such an one would delight to meet David and Paul and John, after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he take sweet counsel with them and find that he and they had much in common? Think you, above all, that he would rejoice to meet Jesus, the crucified One, face to face, after cleaving to the sins for which He died, after loving His enemies and despising His friends? Would he stand before Him with confidence and join in the cry, "This is our God... we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9)? Think you not rather that the tongue of an unholy man would cleave to the roof of his mouth with shame, and his only desire would be to be cast out? He would feel a stranger in a land he knew not, a black sheep amid Christ's holy flock. The voice of cherubim and seraphim, the song of angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, would be a language he could not understand. The very air would seem an air he could not breathe.

I know not what others may think, but to me it does seem clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy man. It cannot be otherwise. People may say, in a vague way, they "hope to go to heaven", but they do not consider what they say... We must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes, in the life that now is, or else we shall never find ourselves in heaven, in the life to come.

And now, before I go any further, let me say a few words, by way of application. For one thing, let me ask everyone who may read these pages, are you holy? Listen, I pray you, to the question I put to you this day. Do you know anything of the holiness of which I have been speaking?

I do not ask whether you attend your church regularly, whether you have been baptized, and received the Lord's Supper, whether you have the name of Christian. I ask something more than all this: are you holy, or are you not?

I do not ask whether you approve of holiness in others, whether you like to read the lives of holy people and to talk of holy things, and to have on your table holy books, whether you mean to be holy, and hope you will be holy some day. I ask something further: are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not?

And why do I ask so straightly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the Scripture says, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is written, it is not my fancy; it is the Bible, not my private opinion; it is the word of God, not of man: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Alas, what searching, sifting words are these! What thoughts come across my mind, as I write them down! I look at the world and see the greater part of it lying in wickedness. I look at professing Christians and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible and I hear the Spirit saying, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Surely it is a text that ought to make us consider our ways and search our heart. Surely it should raise within us solemn thoughts and send us to prayer. You may try to put me off by saying you feel much, and think much about these things, far more than many suppose: I answer, "This is not the point. The poor lost souls in hell do as much as this. The great question is not what you think, and what you feel, but what you do."

You may say, it was never meant that all Christians should be holy and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people of uncommon gifts. I answer, "I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that every man who hath this hope in Christ purifies himself' (1 John 3:3). "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

You may say, it is impossible to be so holy and to do our duty in this life at the same time: the thing cannot be done. I answer, "You are mistaken." It can be done. With Christ on your side nothing is impossible. It has been done by many. David and Obadiah and Daniel and the servants of Nero's household are all examples that go to prove it.

You may say, if you were so holy you would be unlike other people. I answer, "I know it well. It is just what you ought to be. Christ's true servants were always unlike the world around them—a separate nation, a peculiar people, and you must be so too, if you would be saved!"

You may say, at this rate very few will be saved. I answer, "I know it. It is precisely what we are told in the sermon on the mount." The Lord Jesus said so eighteen hundred years ago. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). Few will be saved because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season...

You may say, these are hard sayings; the way is very narrow. I answer, "I know it. So says the sermon on the mount." The Lord Jesus said so eighteen hundred years ago. He always said that men must take up the cross daily, and that they must be ready to cut off hand or foot, if they would be His disciples. It is in religion as it is in other things, there are no gains without pains. That which costs nothing is worth nothing.

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