

Many Shall Come

by J.C. Ryle

Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that many shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven, and that they shall come from different places, including unlikely ones.

Scripture: Matthew 7:14, Matthew 8:11, Romans 8:33, Revelation 7:9

Topics: "Salvation", "Hope in Ministry"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the promise of Jesus that 'many shall come from the east and west' to sit in the kingdom of heaven, encouraging believers to remain steadfast in their faith and efforts to bring others to Christ. He reflects on the fulfillment of this promise, noting that while the number of true believers may seem small, they will ultimately be a multitude in heaven, including those from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Ryle urges Christians not to despair over the apparent lack of success in their ministry, reminding them that God's grace can reach even the most unlikely individuals. He reassures that the company in heaven will be filled with saints from all walks of life, united in faith and love for Christ. The sermon concludes with a call to action, encouraging believers to continue their work for the Lord with hope and patience, as the day of gathering approaches.

Transcript

"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."--Matthew 8:11

The words of Scripture which head this page were spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. You may take them either as a prophecy or as a promise. In either point of view they are deeply interesting, and contain much food for thought. Take the words as a prophecy, and remember that they are sure to be fulfilled. The Bible contains many predictions of things most unlikely and improbable, which have yet proved true. Was it not said of Ishmael, the father of the Arabian race, that he was to be "a wild man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him?" (Gen. xvi. 12). We see the fulfilment of those words at this very day, when we look at the tribes in the Sudan, or observe the ways of the Bedouins. Was it not said of Egypt that it was finally to become "the basest of kingdoms," and its inhabitants a people who could neither govern themselves nor be governed? (Ezek. xxix. 15). We see the fulfilment of those words at this very day along the whole valley of the Nile, and every statesman in Europe knows it to his sorrow. It will be just the same with the prophecy before our eyes. "Many shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

Take the words as a promise. It was spoken for the encouragement of the Apostles, and of all Christian ministers and teachers down to the present day. We are often tempted to think that preaching, and teaching, and visiting, and trying to bring souls to Christ does no good, and that our labour is all thrown away. But here is the promise of One who "cannot lie," and never failed to keep His word. He cheers us with a gracious sentence. He would have us not faint or give way to despair. Whatever we may think, and however little success we may see, there is a Scripture before us which cannot be broken, "Many shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

I. We have first in these words, the number of those who shall be saved. Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that they shall be "many."

How strange that word "many" sounds! Will any be saved who are not born again, washed in Christ's blood, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost? Will any be saved (except infants) who have not repented of sin, believed on the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, and been made holy in heart? None, none, certainly none. If men and women can be saved without repentance, faith and holiness, we may as well throw the Bible away, and give up Christianity altogether.

But are there many people of this kind to be seen in the world? Alas! there are very few. The believers whom we see and know are "a little flock." "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it" (Matt. vii. 14). Few are to be seen in towns, and few in country parishes! Few among the rich, and few among the poor! Few among the old, and few among the young! Few among the learned, and few among the unlearned! Few in palaces, and few in cottages! It is an abiding sorrow with all true Christians that they meet so few with whom they can pray, and praise, and read the Bible, and talk of spiritual things. They often feel to stand alone. Many are the people who never go to any place of worship from the first day of January to the last day of December, and seem to live without God in the world. Few are the communicants in any congregation--a mere handful compared to those who never go to the Lord's table at all. Few are the men and women who do anything for the cause of Christ upon earth, or appear to care whether those around them are lost or saved. Can any one deny these things? Impossible! Yet here is our Lord Jesus Christ saying, "Many shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

Now, why did our Lord say so? He never made a mistake, and all that He says is true. Let me try to throw some light on this question.

(a) There shall be "many" when all are gathered together who have died in the Lord, from Abel, the first saint, down to the last who is found alive when the trumpet sounds, and the resurrection takes place. They shall be a "multitude, which no man can number" (Rev. vii. 9).

(b) There shall be "many" when all the infants who died before they knew good from evil, or their right hand from their left, are called from their little graves, and assembled. Few, probably, are aware what an enormous proportion of children never live for a year! "They shall be a multitude which no man can number."

(c) There shall be "many" when all the believers of every name, and nation, and people, and tongue--the Old Testament saints, like Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and the Prophets--the saints of the New Testament, like the Apostles--the saints among the primitive Christians, and the Reformers--when all these are brought together, they will be "a multitude which no man can number."

(d) There will be "many" when the true Christians are gathered together, who are now scattered over the face of the globe, and not known either by the Church or the world. There are not a few who belong to no congregation, and are not numbered in any list of communicants, though their names are in the Lamb's book of life. Some of them live and die in great neglected parishes unknown and unvisited. Some of them get hold of the truth by hearing the Gospel preached by missionaries at home or abroad; but the preacher has never known them, and they have never been formally enrolled in the list of converts. Some of them are soldiers and sailors, who stand alone in regiments and on board ship, and are not understood by their companions. There are myriads of such persons, I believe, who live the life of faith, and love Christ, and are known to the Lord, though not known by men. These also will make a large addition to the "multitude which no man can number."

The plain truth is, that the family of God will be found at last much larger than most of us suppose it is. We look at the things we see with our own eyes, and we forget how much there is going on in the world, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, which our eyes never see at all. The inner life of the vast majority of all around us is a hidden thing, of which we know nothing. We do not think of the ages that are past, and the countless millions who are now "dust and ashes," though each in his turn fell asleep in Christ and was carried to heaven. No doubt it is perfectly true that "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matt. vii. 13). It is fearful to think what an immense majority of all around us appear dead in sin, and utterly unprepared to meet God. But, for all that, we must not underrate the number of God's children. Even supposing they are in a minority, when judged by human estimate, they will still prove at last to be very many in the kingdom of glory, an enormous company, "a multitude which no man can number."

Is any reader of these pages disposed to laugh at religion, because those who profess it decidedly are few in number? Are you secretly inclined to despise those who read their Bibles, and make a conscience of keeping their Sundays holy, and trying to walk closely with God? Are you afraid of making a profession yourself, because you think there will be so few with you and so many against you, and you do not like to be singular, and stand alone? Alas! there have always been many like you! When Noah built the ark, there were few with him, and many mocked at him: but he was found to be in the right at last. When the Jews were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem after the return from Babylon, Sanballat and Tobiah scoffed at them, and said, "What do these feeble Jews?" When the Lord Jesus Christ left the world, only a hundred and twenty disciples met together in the upper chamber in Jerusalem, while the friends of the unbelieving Pharisees, and scribes, and priests were numbered by tens of thousands. But the disciples were right, and their enemies were wrong. When bloody Mary sat on the throne, and Latimer and Ridley were burnt at the stake, the friends of the Gospel seemed very few, and their enemies were a great majority. Yet the Reformers were right, and their enemies were wrong. Take care of what you are doing! Beware of judging vital Christianity by the small number of those who seem to profess it. You may have the crowd with you now, and the laugh may be on your side, but a day is coming when you will open your eyes with amazement, and find out, perhaps too late, that the very people whom you despised were not few, but many, a vast company, "a multitude which no man can number."

Is any reader of this paper disposed to be cast down and discouraged, because he loves Christ, and tries to serve Him, but finds himself almost entirely alone? Does your heart sometimes fail you, and your hands hang down, and your knees wax faint, because you so seldom meet anyone whom you can pray with, and praise with, and read with, and talk with about Christ, and open your heart to without fear? Do you ever mourn in secret for want of company? Well, you are only drinking the cup which many have drunk before

you. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and the Prophets, and Paul, and John, and the Apostles were all people who stood very much alone. Do you expect to fare better than them? Take comfort, and have faith. There is more grace in the world than you can see, and more Christians travelling towards heaven than you are aware of. Elijah thought he stood alone, when there were "seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal." Take comfort, and look forward. Your good time is coming. You will have plenty of company by-and-by. You will find many and not few in the kingdom of heaven--many to welcome you--many to rejoice and praise with--many with whom you will spend a blessed eternity. How pleasant it is to meet a single saint now for a few short hours! How it cheers and refreshes us, like snow in summer or sunshine after clouds! What, then, will it be when we shall see an enormous company of saints, without a single unconverted sinner to spoil the harmony; all men and women of faith, and none unbelievers; all wheat and no chaff; "a multitude which no man can number!" Surely the "many" we shall see in heaven will make ample amends for the "few" that we now see upon earth.

II. We have, secondly, in our Lord Jesus Christ's words, the dwellings and position of those who shall be finally saved. It is written "that they shall come from the east and the west."

There can be little doubt that this expression is a proverbial one. It must not be taken literally, as if the saved were not to come from the north and south, but only from the rising and setting of the sun. We find the same expression in the 103rd Psalm, where it is said, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." The meaning is simply this: The saved shall come from different places--from distant places--and from places where you would have thought it most unlikely they would be found.

(a) They will not all have belonged to one church. There will be Episcopalians, and Presbyterians, and Independents, and Baptists, and Methodists, and Plymouth Brethren, and many other kinds of Christians whom I have neither space nor time to name. However much they may disagree and dispute now, they will have to agree at last. They will find to their amazement that the points upon which they were of one mind were a vast quantity, and the points on which they differed were very few. They will all be able to say with one heart, "Hallelujah! praise to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood!" And they will all be able to reply with one voice, "Amen, amen!" The anthem in heaven, said good George Whitefield, will be to all eternity, "What hath God wrought!" The points of earthly disagreement will have dropped off, and melted like snow in spring. The common teaching of the Holy Ghost will stand out clear and plain before every eye in heaven. At length there will be one real "Holy Catholic Church," without spot or blemish or any such thing, without quarrelling, controversy, or dissension, all wheat and no tares, all sound members and none unsound.

(b) They will come from various countries in every part of the globe, from Greenland's icy mountains, and the scorching regions of the tropics, from India and Australia, from America and from China, from New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, from Africa and from Mexico. Some will have laid their bones in solitary graves like Henry Martyn in Persia, with none to do them honour in their death. Some will have been buried at sea with a sailor's funeral. Some will have died the death of martyrs, and been burnt to ashes like our own Reformers. Some will have fallen victims to malignant climates, or heathen violence at missionary stations. And some will have died like Moses, in places where no human eye saw them. But they shall all come together, and meet again in the kingdom of heaven. It matters little where we are buried, and how we are buried, and in what kind of a grave. China is just as near to heaven as England is, and the sea shall give up her dead at the same moment as the land. Our coffin, and our funeral, and the

burial service, and the long procession of mourners, are all matters of very secondary importance. The one point we should aim to make sure, from whatever place we may come, is to be amongst those who "shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

(c) They shall come from utterly different ranks, classes, and professions. Heaven will be a place for servants as well as masters, for maids as well as mistresses, for poor as well as rich, for the unlearned as well as the learned, for tenants as well as landlords, for subjects as well as rulers, for the pauper as well as the queen. There is no royal road to heaven, and there will be no class distinctions when we get there. At length there will be perfect equality, perfect fraternity, and perfect freedom. It will matter nothing whether we had much money on earth, or none at all. The only question will be whether we have really repented of our sins, really believed on the Lord Jesus, and were really converted and sanctified people. There will be no preference given to those who have come from monasteries, nunneries, or hermits' caves.

It is very likely that those who have done their duty in that state of life to which God called them, and have carried Christ's cross in the Army or the Navy, in Parliament or at the Bar, in the bank or the merchant's office, behind the counter or at the bottom of a coal-pit, will be found in the first rank in the kingdom of heaven. It is not necessary to wear a peculiar dress, or to put on an austere countenance, and to retire from the world, in order to sit down in the kingdom of heaven.

(d) They shall come from most unlikely places, and from positions in which you would have thought the seed of eternal life could never have grown up in a soul. Saul, the young Pharisee, came from the feet of Gamaliel, and from persecuting Christians, and rose to be the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who turned the world upside down. Daniel lived in Babylon, and served God faithfully in the midst of idolatry and heathenism. Peter was once a fisherman on the sea of Galilee. Matthew was a public tax-gatherer, who spent his days in receiving custom. Luther and Latimer began life as devoted Papists, and ended life as devoted Protestants. John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress," was once a careless, thoughtless, swearing, bell-ringing young man in a country village. George Whitefield served in a public house at Gloucester, and spent his early days in cleaning pots and carrying out beer. John Newton, the author of well-known hymns and letters, was once the captain of a slave-ship on the coasts of Africa, and saw no harm in buying and selling human flesh and blood. All these truly "came from east and west," and seemed at one time in their lives the most unlikely people in the world to come to Christ, and "sit down in the kingdom of heaven." But they did come unmistakably, and they are an everlasting proof that our Lord Jesus Christ's words are strictly true. Men and women may "come from the east and west," and yet be found at last in the kingdom of eternal happiness and glory.

Let us learn never to despair of the salvation of any one as long as he lives. Fathers ought never to despair of prodigal sons. Mothers ought never to despair of self-willed, headstrong daughters. Husbands should never despair of wives, nor wives of husbands. There is nothing impossible with God. The arm of grace is very long, and can reach those who seem very far off. The Holy Ghost can change any heart. The blood of Christ can cleanse away any sin. Let us pray on, and hope on, for others, however unlikely their salvation may appear to be at present. We shall see many in heaven whom we never expected to see there. The last may yet prove first, and the first last. The famous Grimshaw, the Apostle of Yorkshire, when he died, left his only son unconverted, careless, thoughtless, and indifferent to religion. The day came when the young man's heart was changed, and he walked in the steps of his father. And when he lay upon his deathbed, one of his last words was, "What will my old father say when he sees me in heaven?"

Let us learn not to sorrow "as those who have no hope," when we part from friends who are true Christians, and part, perhaps, forever. The separations and goodbyes of this world are probably some of its most painful things. When the family circle is broken up, when the old nest begins to lose its inmates, when the young man sets sail for Australia, New Zealand, or the Fiji Islands, with no hope of returning for ten or twelve years--when these things take place, it is a sore trial to flesh and blood. I have witnessed scenes on the landing-stage at Liverpool, when the great steamships are about to start for America, which might bring tears to the eyes of the most cold-hearted stranger. The partings of this world are terrible things; but true faith in Christ and the resurrection to eternal life through Him, takes the sting out of the worst of partings. It enables a believer to look beyond the things seen to the things unseen, to the coming of the Saviour, and our gathering together unto Him. Yes, it is a pleasant thing to remember, as the great ship moves away, and we wave our last adieux, "it is but a little time, and we shall see them all again to part no more." God's people shall come together from east and west, and we shall all meet at last "in the kingdom of heaven," and go out no more.

III. We have, thirdly, in our Lord Jesus Christ's words, the future portion and reward of those who shall be finally saved. It is written, "they shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

That expression, "sit down," is a very pleasant and comfortable one to my mind. Let us sift it, and examine it, and see what it contains. In the judgement day believers shall STAND with boldness at the right hand of Christ, and say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). But when the judgement is passed and over, and the eternal kingdom begins, they shall "SIT DOWN."

(a) Sitting down implies a sense of confidence and being at home. If we were in the presence of a stern judge, or of a king clothed in awful majesty, we should not dare to sit down. But there will be nothing to make believers afraid in the kingdom of heaven. The sins of their past lives will not make them tremble and feel alarmed. However many, however great, and however black, they will all have been washed away in Christ's precious blood, and not one spot will remain. Completely justified, completely absolved, completely forgiven, completely "accepted in the Beloved," they will be counted righteous before God for the sake of Him who was made sin for us, though He knew no sin (2 Cor. v. 21). Though the sins of their lives "were as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; and though red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Their sins will be "remembered no more," "sought for, and not found, blotted out as a thick cloud," "cast behind God's back," "plunged in the depths of the sea." Believers will need no purgatory after they die. It is ignorance and unbelief to think so. Once joined to Christ by faith, they are complete in the sight of God the Father, and even the perfect angels shall see no spot in them. Surely they may well sit down; and feel at home! They may remember all the sins of their past lives, and be humbled at the recollection of them. But those sins will not make them afraid.

The sense of daily failure, weakness, imperfection, and inward conflict, will no longer mar their peace. At last their sanctification will be completed. The war within shall come to a perfect end. Their old besetting sins and infirmities will have dropped off, and melted away. At length they shall be able to serve God without weariness, and attend on Him without distraction, and not be obliged to cry continually, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24). Who can tell the blessedness of all this while we are yet in the body? Here in this world we do not realise the completeness of our justification, and "groan, being burdened" by reason of our imperfect sanctification. Our best endeavours after holiness are accompanied by a sorrowful consciousness of daily failure. But when "the

old man" is at last entirely dead, and the flesh no longer lusts against the spirit,--when there is an end of indwelling sin, and the world and the devil can no longer tempt us, then at last we shall understand what God has prepared for them that love Him. We shall "sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

(b) But this is not all. Sitting down implies rest, and a complete cessation of work, and toil, and conflict. There is a rest that remaineth for the people of God. Here in this life we are never still. The Word of God tells us that the Christian must "walk," and "run," and "work," and "labour," and "fight," and "groan," and "carry the cross," and wear the "armour," and stand like a sentinel on guard in an enemy's land. It is not till we enter the kingdom of heaven that we must expect to "sit down." Work for Christ, no doubt, is pleasant, and even in this life brings a rich reward--the reward of a happy conscience, a reward which the mere politician, or merchant, or man of pleasure, can never reap, because they only seek a corruptible crown. "They that drink of these waters shall thirst again." But even the Christian's work is exhausting to flesh and blood; and so long as we dwell in a mortal body, work and weariness will go together. The very sight of sin in others, which we cannot check, is a daily trial to our souls. No doubt the fight of faith is a "good fight," but there never can be fighting without wounds, and pain, and fatigue. The very armour the Christian is bid to put on is heavy. The helmet and the breastplate, the shield and the sword, without which we cannot overcome the devil, can never be worn without constant exertion. Surely it will be a blessed time when our enemies will all be slain, and we can lay aside our armour in safety, and "sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

In the meantime let us never forget that the time is short. Even the devil knows that, and has great wrath because he has but a short time (Rev. xii. 12). Let us work on, and fight on, in full assurance of hope, with the blessed recollection that it shall not be for ever. When the great battle of Waterloo was raging, and the event of the day seemed to tremble in the balance, it is said that the Duke of Wellington kept calmly turning his eyes to the left, in the confident expectation that in a little time his Prussian allies would appear, and his victory would be sure. Let this kind of hope animate our souls when we are bearing the labour and heat of the day. Our King is soon coming, and when he comes we shall "sit down," and toil and fight no more.

IV. The fourth and last thing which the words of our Lord Jesus Christ contain is, the company which those who are finally saved shall enjoy for ever.

Now, company is one great secret of happiness. Man is by nature a social being. It is a rare exception indeed to find any one who likes to be always alone. A palace filled with untold wealth and luxuries, would at last be little better than a prison if we lived in it entirely alone. A cottage with congenial companions is a happier dwelling-place than a royal castle with no one to speak to, no one to listen to, no one to exchange mind with, nothing to converse with, but one's own poor heart. We all want some one to live with and love, and the dweller in a solitary island, like Robinson Crusoe, is never satisfied, if he is a real man.

Our blessed Lord, who formed man out of the dust of the earth, and made him what he is, knows that perfectly well. When, therefore, it describes the future portion of His believing people, He takes care to tell us what kind of company they shall have in the kingdom of heaven. He says that the saved shall "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" in the world to come.

Now, what does that expression mean? Let us look at it, analyse it, and see what it contains.

The companions of the saved in the eternal world shall be all the believers who have ever lived on earth from the beginning to the end. The old soldiers, the old pilgrims, the old servants of Christ, the old

members of Christ's family--all, in a word, who have lived by faith and served Christ, and walked with God, these shall form the company in which the saved shall spend an endless existence.

They shall see all the old worthies of whom they read in the Old Testament, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the holy kings, who looked forward to the coming of Christ, but died without seeing Him. They shall see the New Testament saints, the Apostles, and the holy men and women who saw Christ face to face. They shall see the early fathers who died for the truth, and were thrown to the lions, or beheaded under the persecution of the Roman emperors. They shall see the gallant Reformers who revived the Gospel out of the dust on the Continent, and unstopped the wells of living water which Rome had filled up with rubbish.

They shall see the blessed martyrs of our own land, who brought about the glorious Protestant Reformation, and gave the Bible to our countrymen in the English tongue, and cheerfully died at the stake for the cause of the Gospel. They shall see the holy men of the eighteenth century, Whitefield, and Wesley, Romaine, and their companions, who, in the face of bitter opposition, revived religion in the Church of England. Above all, they shall see their own friends who fell asleep in Christ, and whom they once followed to their graves with many tears, and see them with the comfortable thought that they shall part no more. Surely the thought of such companionship as this should cheer us as we travel on the narrow way! It is a good thing yet to come.

There is little happiness in company unless there is entire sympathy and congeniality of taste. It is one of the heaviest trials of a true Christian upon earth that he meets so few people who are entirely of one mind with him about religion. How often in society he finds himself obliged to hold his tongue and say nothing, and to hear and see many things which make his heart ache, and send him back to his own home heavy and depressed! It is a rare privilege to meet two or three occasionally to whom he can open his heart, and with whom he can speak freely, without fear of giving offence or being misunderstood. But there will be an end of this state of things in the kingdom of heaven. Those who are saved will find none there who have not been led by the same Spirit, and gone through the same experience as themselves. There will not be a man or woman there who has not felt deeply the burden of sin, mourned over it, confessed it, fought with it, and tried to crucify it. There will not be a man or woman there who has not fled to Christ by faith, cast the whole weight of his soul upon Him, and rejoiced in Him as his Redeemer. There will not be a man or woman there who has not delighted in the Word of God, poured out his soul in prayer at the throne of grace, and striven to live a holy life. In a word, there will be none there who have not known something of repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of life and conversation. It is pleasant to meet a few people of this kind on earth as we travel along the narrow way that leads to heaven. It refreshes us like a brook by the way, and is like a little peep within the veil. But what will it be when we see "a multitude, which no man can number," of saints completely delivered from all sin, and not one single unconverted person among them to mar the harmony!

What shall it be when we shall meet our own believing friends once more, at last made perfect, and find that their besetting sins, and our own besetting sins, have all passed away, and there is nothing left in us but grace without corruption! Yet all this is to come when we pass within the veil. The inhabitants are not to be a mixed multitude unable to understand one another. They are all to be of one heart and of one mind. We are not to sit down amidst ignorant, godless, and unconverted people, but "with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Heaven itself would be no heaven if all sorts of characters got there, as some people falsely teach. There could be no order and no happiness in such a heaven. There must be meetness for "the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12).

(1) And now, reader, before you lay down this paper, ask yourself whether you shall be found among the many who shall "sit down in the kingdom of heaven." The question demands an answer. I charge you to give your soul no rest until you can answer it in a satisfactory way. Time is passing quickly away, and the world is growing old. The signs of the times ought to set us all thinking. "The distress of nations with perplexity" seems to increase every year. The wisdom of statesmen seems utterly unable to prevent wars and confusion in every direction. The progress of art, and science, and civilisation appear entirely powerless to prevent the existence of enormous moral evils. Nothing will ever cure the diseases of human nature but the return of the Great Physician, the Prince of Peace, the second coming of Jesus Christ Himself. And when He comes, shall you be found among the "many" who shall "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven?"

Why should you not be found among the many? I know no reason except your own want of will, or your own indolence and laziness, or your own determined love of sin and the world. An open door is before you: why not enter into it? The Lord Jesus Christ is able and ready to save you: why not commit your soul to Him, and lay hold on the hand which He holds out from heaven? I repeat that I know no reason why you should not be found amongst the "many" at the last day.

You fancy there is time enough, and no need of hurry or immediate decision. You had better take care what you are saying. It is not given to all men and women to live to threescore years and ten, and then die quietly in their beds. The notice to quit this mortal body sometimes comes very suddenly, and men and women are summoned to go forth in a moment into the unseen world. You had better use time while you have it, and not make shipwreck on that miserable rock, "a convenient season."

Are you afraid that people will laugh at you, and mock you, if you begin to care for your soul, and to seek a place in the kingdom of heaven? Cast the cowardly feeling behind your back, and resolve never to be ashamed of religion. Alas! Where are too many who will find at last that they were laughed out of heaven, and laughed into hell. Fear not the reproach of man, who at most can only injure your body. Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Lay hold boldly on Christ, and He will give you the victory over all that you now fear. He that enabled the Apostle Peter, who once ran away and denied his Master, to stand firm as a rock before the Jewish council, and at length to die for the Gospel, the Lord I say is still living at the right hand of God, and is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him, and to make you more than conqueror.

Do you think that you will not be happy if you seek to have your soul saved, and to sit down in the kingdom of heaven? Cast aside the unworthy thought as a lying suggestion of the devil. There are no people so truly happy as true Christians. Whatever a sneering world may please to say, they have meat to eat which the world knows not, and inward comforts which the world cannot understand. There is no gloominess in true religion, and no religion in looking gloomy, sour, or austere. In spite of cross and conflict, the true Christian has an inward peace compared to which the world has nothing to give; for it is a peace which trouble, bereavement, sickness, and death itself cannot take away. The words of the Master are strictly true, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John xiv. 27). If men and women want to be truly happy, they should strive to be amongst those who "shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven."

(2) Last, but not least, let me wind up all by offering a word of exhortation and encouragement to those who have reason to hope that they are among the many who shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.

Would you have much joy and peace in believing? Try to do all the good you can in the world. There is always much to be done, and few to do it. There are always many living and dying in ignorance and sin, and no one goes near them, and tries to save their souls. We live in days when there is much talk about High Churchism, and Low Churchism, and Broad Churchism, and Ritualism, and Rationalism, and Scepticism, but little real Christian work done to mend the evils of the times! If all the communicants in all our churches laid themselves out to go among those who are without God in the world, with the Bible in their hands, and Christ-like loving sympathy in their hearts, they would soon be far happier than they are now, and the face of society would soon be changed. Idleness is one great cause of the low spirits of which so many complain. Too many, far too many Christians, seem quite content to go to heaven alone, and to care nothing about bringing others into the kingdom of God.

If you try to do good in the right way, you never need doubt that good will be done. Many a Sunday school teacher comes home on Sunday night with a heavy heart, and fancies that his or her labour is all in vain. Many a visitor returns from his rounds, and thinks he is producing no effect. Many a minister comes down from his pulpit desponding and cast down, imagining that his preaching is to no purpose. But all this is disgraceful unbelief. There is often far more going on in hearts and consciences than we see.

He that "goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed; he shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm cxxvi. 6, R.V.). There are more being converted and saved than we suppose. "Many shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven" whom we never expected to see there. Let us read on, and pray on, and visit on, and speak on, and tell of Christ to every one whom we can get at. If we are only "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," we shall find, to our amazement, that our labour was not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. xv. 58).

But if we try to do good, we must always cultivate patience. We cannot have two heavens, a heaven here and a heaven hereafter. The battle is not yet over. The harvest-time is not yet come. The devil is not yet bound. The time when our Lord's promise shall be fulfilled is not yet arrived. But it will arrive before long. When the late Queen Victoria at the end of the Crimean war came forward in front of the Horse Guards, and with her own royal hands gave the Victoria Cross to the gallant soldiers who had earned it, that public honour made rich amends for all that those soldiers had gone through. Balaclava, and Inkerman, and the hardships of the trenches were all forgotten for the time, and seemed comparatively small things. What, then, will be the joy when the Captain of our salvation shall gather His faithful soldiers round Him, and give to each one a crown of glory that fadeth not away! Surely we may well wait in patience for that day. It is coming, and will surely come at last. Remembering that day, let us cast behind us doubts and unbelief, and set our faces steadily towards Jerusalem. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." Not one word of the blessed promise before us shall fail "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/many-shall-come/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net