

Heaven

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Some time ago, on my way to a meeting, a friend asked what was to be my subject. I told him I thought I would preach about Heaven. He seemed much disappointed and replied that he was in hopes I should talk about something practical, and that there would be time enough to talk about heaven when we got there.

Now, I think if God did not want us to know anything about heaven, He would not have written so much about it. And if heaven is to be our future home, we should try to learn all we can about it, so that we may be living more for it. If we were about to emigrate to a distant land, we should never tire hearing about it. We should wish to know all about its people, its climate and resources, its schools and institutions, its advantages for children, and its prospects for business. There would be nothing relating to the country that would not interest us. And when we are going to spend eternity in another world, can we know or hear too much about it?

Christians are often asked why they address their prayers *upwards*, as if God's dwelling-place were any more above than around them. But I think it is right to locate heaven and to locate it *above*. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Deuteronomy we read, "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel." *Look down* from heaven. Then in Genesis we are told that God "went up" from talking with Abraham — *went up*. And Christ himself, the only One who can really tell us about heaven, for He has been there, what does He say? In the third chapter of John you find the words, "No man hath ascended *up* to heaven but He that came *down* from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven. "In the seventh chapter of Mark, again we are told that, "looking *up* to heaven, He sighed." And when His work was over here, and He was just returning to the many mansions of His Father's house, standing in the midst of the loved ones for whom He was going to prepare a place, "Behold, He was taken *up*, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Heaven is the dwelling place of God. This, after all, is the great point. It matters little how far away it is. God is there, and that is enough. And we may be sure that it is not so far away but that He can hear the humblest sigh of prayer or watch the gathering tears of penitence trembling on the sinner's cheek. And man, too, can look from earth to heaven. When God opens his eyes, and draws aside the veil, like Stephen, He can see right into it. "He being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Stephen found out the secret of the attractiveness of heaven. He saw Christ at the right hand of God. The King in his beauty was there and that makes heaven. Someone being asked what he expected to do when he got to heaven replied that he would take one good look at Christ for about five hundred years, and then he might look round and see the apostles, and saints, and martyrs. And it seems to me that one glimpse of Him who loved us and washed us in His blood will repay us for all we can suffer here in this dark world.

A little child, whose mother was dying, was taken away to live with some friends because it was thought she did not understand what death is. All the while the child wanted to go home and see her mother. At last, when the funeral was over and she was taken home, she ran all over the house, searching the sitting-room, the parlor, the library, and the bedrooms. She went from one end of the house to the other and when she could not find her mother, she wished to be taken back to where they brought her from. Home had lost its attractions for the child when her mother was not there. My friends, the great attraction in heaven will not be its pearly gates, its golden streets, nor its choir of angels, but it will be Christ. Heaven would be no heaven if Christ were not there. But we know that He is at the right hand of the Father, and those eyes shall gaze on Him by-and-by; and we shall be satisfied when we awake with his likeness.

But the company of heaven is more varied still — our friends are there. God the Father is there, Christ the Son is there, angels are there, and in Revelation 7 we read of "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues." We read of the redeemed who stand "before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." Yes, we have friends in heaven.

A bereaved father asked me the other day if I thought the little one he had lost had gone to be with Jesus. I could only tell him what David said when he lost his sons. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." It is a very sweet thought to me and it must be to you also who have lost little ones, that the King can take better care of them than we can. If we could look into the eternal city we should see the Shepherd leading them by the green pastures and the still waters. He will care for each little lost lamb Himself far better than its own fond mother; and is it not sweeter for them to be forever with the Lord than down in this sad land of suffering and sin? Our friends are not lost, just gone before. They have had "the desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" and He has gratified it. Although to live was to live for Christ, yet to be with Him, was, even with Paul "far better."

But there is more in heaven still. Once the disciples had been out preaching and met with wonderful success. They had great power, had cast out devils, and worked many miracles. They came back greatly elated. Like workers in a great revival, they say to one another, "Is not this glorious?" But Christ says, "Do not rejoice at that. I will tell you what to rejoice about. In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you but rather rejoice that *your names are written in heaven.*" What a glorious thought is this? Our names are written in heaven. We may be sure of it. If the children of God are not to *know* that their names are written in

heaven how are they to rejoice? If there had been any *doubt* about it, how could the disciples have rejoiced when Christ told them to rejoice? It is our privilege, if we are Christians, not only to know it, to be quite sure of it, but to rejoice in it.

The grand question of life is, *Is my name written in heaven?* Is my name in the Book of Life? Not, *Is it in the Church record?* That record may not be kept *in the same way* that the record in heaven is kept. And there may be names in the Church record which have never been written in heaven. But it is God's record we are talking about. God keeps a record, a book of the lost and a book of the saved, a book of the living and a book of the dead. Which book is your name in? Can you rejoice this moment that your name is written in the Book of Life? Weigh the question well. It is very important. For "Whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth it, neither whatsoever worketh an abomination or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Some friends, lately, in traveling, arrived at an English hotel, but found that it had been full for days. They were turning away to seek accommodation elsewhere when a lady of the party bade the others adieu and expressed her intention to remain. "How can that be," they asked, "when you hear the hotel is full?" "Oh," she replied, "I telegraphed on ahead a number of days ago and my room has been secured." My friend, send on your name ahead and the door of heaven can never be shut against you. Be sure it is a wise precaution. Then everything will be ready for you. And when the journey of life is over, you will mount up as with angel wings and inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. Many are spending their time and strength for a home down here with its shallow luxuries and fleeting joys. But what will all the mansions of earth do for you if you have secured no title to a mansion in the sky?

A soldier, wounded during our last war, lay dying in his cot. Suddenly the deathlike stillness of the room was broken by the cry, "Here! Here!" which burst from the lips of the dying man. Friends rushed to the spot and asked what he wanted. "Hark," he said, "they are calling the roll of heaven, and I am answering to my name." In a few moments once more, he whispered, "Here!" and passed into the presence of the King.

If we have made sure that our own names are written in heaven, the next most important thing is to be sure that our children's names are there. The promise is not unto you only but unto your children. Mother, is the name of that boy of yours written in the Lamb's Book of life? Is it not better that your children's names should be written there than that you should secure for them great possessions on this dark earth? Oh, I pity the son who has never had an interest beyond the grave; but more the mother who has never told him of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. May God make fathers and mothers more faithful and true to their solemn charge that their children may grow up to be a blessing to the world and that they meet at last, an unbroken circle, in heaven!

Whenever I think about this subject, two fathers come before me. One lived on the Mississippi river. He was a man of great wealth. Yet he would have freely given it all could he have brought back his eldest boy from his early grave. One day that boy had been borne home unconscious. They did everything that man could do to restore him, but in vain. "He must die," said the doctor. "But, doctor," said the agonized father, "can you do nothing to bring him to consciousness, even for a moment?" "That may be," said the doctor; "but he can never live." Time passed and after a terrible suspense the father's wish was gratified. "My son," he whispered, "the doctor tells me you are dying." "Well," said the boy, "you never prayed for me, father; won't you pray for my lost soul now?" The father wept. It was true he had never prayed. He was a stranger to God. And in a little while that soul, unprayed for, passed into its dark eternity. Oh, father! if *your* boy was dying and called on you to pray, could you lift your burdened heart to heaven? Have you learned this sweetest lesson of heaven or earth, to know and hold Communion with your God? And before this evil world has marked your dearest treasures for its prey, have you learned to lead your little ones to a children's Christ?

What a contrast is the other father! He, too, had a lovely boy and one day he came home to find him at the gates of death. "A great change has come over our boy," said the weeping mother; "he has only been a little ill before, but it seems now as if he were dying fast." The father went into the room and placed his hand on the forehead of the little boy. He could see the boy *was* dying. He could feel the cold damp of death. "My son, do you know you are dying?" "No; am I?" "Yes; you are dying." "And shall I die today?" "Yes, my boy, you cannot live till night." "Well, then, I shall be with Jesus tonight, won't I, father?" "Yes, my son, you will spend tonight with the Savior." As he turned away, the little fellow saw the tears trickling over his father's cheeks. "Don't weep for me, father," he said; "when I get to heaven I will go right to Jesus, and tell that ever since I can remember you have tried to lead me to Him." God has given me one little boy and if God should take him, I would rather have him carry such testimony as that to my Master, than have all the wealth of the world rolled at his feet.

Mothers and fathers, the little ones may begin early; be in earnest with them now. You know not how soon you may be taken from them, or they may be taken from you. Therefore let this impression be made upon their minds that you care for their souls a million times more than for their worldly prospects. And if you yourself have never thought how little it would profit you to gain the whole world and lose your own soul, I beseech you not to let another sun go down before you are able to say that *your* name has been in heaven.