

HEAVEN

by J. C. Ryle

"Nothing unclean, or anyone who does anything detestable, and no one who tells lies will ever enter it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter it." Revelation 21:27

Brethren, there can be no question about the place described in our text. It is heaven itself, that holy city, the new Jerusalem, which is yet to be revealed.

I would gladly begin this, my last Sunday among you, by speaking of heaven. Before I depart and leave you in the wilderness of this world, I would dwell a little on that Canaan God has promised to those who love Him. *There* it is, that the last and best wish of my heart, you may all go. *There* it is, which is my consolation to think, where I shall meet some of you again.

Brethren, you all hope to go to heaven yourselves. There is not one of you but wishes to be in eternal happiness after death. But on what are your hopes founded? Heaven is a prepared place. Those who shall dwell there are all of one character. The entrance into it is only by one door. Brethren, remember that. And then, too, I read of two sorts of hope: a good hope and a bad hope; a true hope and a false hope; a living hope and a dead hope; the hope of the righteous and the hope of the wicked; the hope of the believer and of the hypocrite. I read of some who have hope through grace, a hope that does not make ashamed; and of others who have no true hope, and are without God in the world. Brethren, remember that. Surely it were wise and prudent and safe to find out what the Bible tells you on the subject, to discover whether your confidence is indeed well founded; and to this end I call your attention to the doctrine of my text. There you will find three things:

I. The place of heaven.

II. The character of those who will certainly not be in heaven.

III. The character of those who will certainly be in heaven.

May the Lord grant you to well consider your own fitness for heaven. There must be a certain fitness for that blessed place in our minds and characters. It is senseless, vain, and absurd to suppose that all shall go there--whatever their lives have been. May God the Holy Spirit incline you to examine yourselves faithfully while you have time, before

that great day comes when the unconverted shall be past all hope, and the saints past all fear!

I. The place of heaven. There is such a place as heaven. No truth is more certain in the whole of Scripture than this--there remains a rest for the people of God. This earth is not our rest--it cannot be--there breathes not a man or woman who ever found it so. Go, build your happiness on earth, if you are so disposed; choose everything you can imagine would make life enjoyable--take money, house, and lands; take learning, health, and beauty; take honor, rank, respect, troops of friends; take everything your mind can picture to itself or your eye desire. Take it all, and yet I dare to tell you, that even then you would not find rest. I know well that a few short years, and your heart's confession would be--"It is all hollow, empty, and unsatisfying! It is all weariness and disappointment! It is all vanity and vexation of spirit!" I well know that you would feel within a hungering and famine, a leanness and barrenness of soul; and ready indeed would you be to bear your testimony to the mighty truth, "This earth is not our rest!"

O brethren, how faithful is that saying, "If in this life only we have hope, we are indeed most miserable." This life, so full of trouble and sorrow and care, of anxiety and labor and toil; this life of losses and bereavements, of partings and separations, of mourning and woe, of sickness and pain; this life of which even Elijah got so tired that he requested he might die; truly I would be crushed to the very earth with misery, if I felt that this life were all that is. If I thought there was nothing for me beyond the dark, cold, silent, lonely grave--I would indeed say--Better never have been born!

Thanks be to God--this life is not all. I know and am persuaded there is a glorious rest beyond the tomb! This earth is only the training-school for eternity; these graves are but the stepping-stone and half-way house to heaven. I feel assured this my poor body shall rise again; this corruptible shall yet put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality, and be with Christ forever. Yes, heaven is true--and not a fable I do not doubt it. I am not more certain of my own existence than I am of this--there does remain a rest for the people of God.

And, brethren, **what sort of a place shall heaven be?** Before we pass on and consider its inhabitants, let us just pause an instant and think on this. What sort of a place shall heaven be?

Heaven shall be **a place of perfect rest and peace.** Those who dwell there have no more conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Their warfare is finished, and their

fight is fought--at length they lay aside the armor of God, at last they may say to their spiritual weapons--Rest and be still. They watch no longer, for they have no spiritual enemies to fear. They fast and mortify the flesh no longer, for they have no vile earthy body to keep under subjection. They pray no more, for they have no evil to pray against. *There* the wicked must cease from troubling! *There* sin and temptation are forever shut out! The gates are better barred than those of Eden--and the devil shall enter in no more.

O Christian brethren, rouse you and take comfort; surely this shall be indeed a blessed rest. *There* shall be no need of means of grace, for we shall have the end to which they are meant to lead. *There* shall be no need of ordinances, we shall have the substance they are appointed to keep in mind. *There* **faith** shall be swallowed up in sight, and **hope** in certainty, and **prayer** in praise, and **sorrow** in joy! Now in this present world--is the school-time, the season of the 'lesson and the rod'--then will be the eternal holiday. Now we must endure hardness and press on faint yet pursuing--then we shall sit down at ease, for the Canaanite shall be expelled forever from the land.

Now we are tossed upon a stormy sea--then we shall be safe in harbor! Now we have to plough and sow--there we shall reap the harvest! Now we have the labor--but then the wages! Now we have the battle--but then the victory and reward! Now we must bear the cross--but then we shall receive the crown! Now we are journeying through the wilderness--but then we shall be at home! O Christian brethren, well may the Bible tell you, "**Blessed** are those who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labor." Surely you must feel that witness is true.

But again. Heaven shall be **a place of perfect and unbroken happiness**. Mark what your Bible tells you in the very chapter which contains my text, "God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of His people; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain--for the former things are passed away." Hear what the prophet Isaiah says in the twenty-fifth chapter: "The Lord God has swallowed up death forever! The Lord will wipe away tears from off all faces. It shall be said in that day--Behold, this is our God! We have waited for him, and he will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for him. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

Brethren, think of an eternal habitation in which there is no sorrow. Who is there here below that is not acquainted with sorrow? It came in with thorns and thistles at Adam's fall, it is the bitter cup that all must drink, it is before us and behind us, it is on the right hand and the left, it is

mingled with the very air we breathe. Our bodies are racked with pain, and we have sorrow. Our worldly goods are taken from us, and we have sorrow. We are encompassed with difficulties and troubles, and we have sorrow. Our friends forsake us and look coldly on us, and we have sorrow. We are separated from those we love, and we have sorrow. Those on whom our hearts' affections are set go down to the grave and leave us alone, and we have sorrow. And then, too, we find our own hearts frail and full of corruption, and that brings sorrow. We are persecuted and opposed for the Gospel's sake, and that brings sorrow. We see those who are near and dear to us refusing to walk with God, and that brings sorrow. Oh, what a sorrowing, grieving world we live in!

Blessed be God! there shall be no sorrow in heaven. There shall not be one single tear shed within the courts above. There shall be no more disease and weakness and decay. The coffin, and the funeral, and the grave shall be things unknown. Our faces shall no more be pale and sad. No more shall we go out from the company of those we love and be parted asunder--that word, 'farewell', shall never be heard again. There shall be no anxious thought about tomorrow to mar and spoil our enjoyment. There shall be no sharp and cutting words to wound our souls. Our needs will have come to a perpetual end, and all around us shall be harmony and love.

O Christian brethren, what is our light affliction when compared to such an eternity as this? Shame on us if we murmur and complain and turn back--with such a heaven before our eyes! What can this vain and passing world give us better than this? this is the city of our God Himself, when He will dwell among us Himself. The glory of God shall enlighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. Truly we may say, as Mephibosheth did to David, "Let the world take all, forasmuch as our Lord will come in peace." Such is the Bible heaven, there is none other; these sayings are faithful and true, not any of them shall fail. Surely, brethren it is worth a little pain, a little laboring, a little toil, if only we may have the lowest place in the kingdom of God.

II. The character of those who will certainly not be in heaven. Let us now pass on and see that great thing which is revealed in the second part of our text.

You have heard of heaven—but all shall not enter it. Who are the people who shall not enter in? Brethren, this is a sad and painful inquiry, and yet it is one that must be made. I can do no more than declare to you Scripture truth: it is not my fault if it is cutting and gives offence. I must deliver my Master's message and diminish nothing; the line

I have to draw is not mine—but God's: the blame, if you will lay it, falls on the Bible not on me. "There shall never enter into heaven anything that defiles, neither whatever works abomination—or tells lies." Verily these are solemn words; they ought to make you think.

"Nothing that defiles." This touches the case of all who are defiled with sins of heart, and yet feel it not, and refuse to be made clean. These may be decent people outwardly—but they are vile and polluted within. These are the worldly-minded. They live to this world only, and they have no thought of anything beyond it. The care of this world, the money, the politics of this world, the business of this world, the pleasures of this world, these things swallow up their whole attention. As for James' advice to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, they know not what it means.

These are the men who set their affections on earthly things; they have each their idol in the chamber of their imagination, and they worship and serve it more than God. These are the proud and self-righteous, the self-honoring and the self-conceited; they love the praise of men, they like the good opinion of this world. As for the glorious Lord who made them--His honor, His glory, His house, His word, His service—these are all things which in their judgment must go down, and take the second place. These know not what sorrow for sin means. They are strangers to spiritual concern; they are self-satisfied and content with their condition. If you attempt to stir them up to zeal and repentance, it is more than probable that they will be offended.

Brethren, you know well there are such people; they are not uncommon; they may be honorable in the eyes of men, they may be wise and knowing in this generation, admirable men of business, they may be first and foremost in their respective callings—but still there is but one account of them; they bring no glory to their Maker, they are lovers of themselves more than of God, and therefore they are counted as defiled in His sight and nothing that is defiled shall enter heaven.

But again: **"Nothing that works abomination."** This touches the case of all who practice those sins which God has pronounced abominable, and take pleasure in them, and countenance those who practice them. These are the men who work the works of the flesh, each as his heart inclines him. These are the adulterers, fornicators, and unclean livers; these are the drunkards, revellers, and gluttons; these are the blasphemers, swearers, and liars. These are the men who count it no shame to live in hatred, variance, wrath, strife, envyings, quarrellings and the like. They throw the reins on the neck of their lusts--they follow

their passions wherever they may lead them. Their only object is to please themselves.

Brethren, you know well there are such people. The world may give smooth names to their conduct, the world may talk of them as light and mirthful, and loose and wild. But they are all abominable in the sight of God, and except they be converted and born again, they shall never enter heaven.

Once more: **"No one who tells lies."** This touches the case of hypocrites. These are the false professors; the lip-servants. They say that they know God—but in works they deny Him. They are like barren fig-trees, all leaves and no fruit. They are like tinkling cymbals, all sound—but hollow, empty and without substance. These have a name to live while they are dead, and a form of godliness without the power. They profess what they do not practice, they speak what they do not think, they say much and do little. Their words are most amazing, their actions are most poor. These men can talk most bravely of themselves; no better Christians than they are, if you will take them at their own evaluation. They can talk to you of grace, and yet they show none of it in their lives; they can talk to you of saving faith, and yet they possess not that charity which is faith's companion. They can declaim against forms most strongly, and yet their own Christianity is a form and no more; they can cry out loudly against Pharisees, and yet no greater Pharisees than they are themselves.

Oh, no; this religion is of a sort that is public, and not private; plenty abroad—but none at home; plenty outside—but none within; plenty in the tongue—but none in the heart. They are altogether unprofitable, good for nothing, they bear no fruit.

Brethren, you must know well there are such miserable people; alas! the world is full of them in these latter days. They may deceive ministers, they may deceive their neighbors, they may even deceive their friends and family, they may try hard to deceive themselves—but they are no better than liars in God's sight, and except they repent, they shall never enter heaven.

Brethren, consider well these things: "the sin-defiled, the abominable, the hypocrite, shall never enter into heaven." Look well to your own souls; judge yourselves that you be not judged of the Lord; I call heaven and earth to witness this day, those who will live these bad lives, whether they be Churchmen or dissenters, old or young, rich or poor, *they shall* in no wise enter heaven. Go, cleave to the ways of the world if you are so determined, stick to your sins if you must keep them—but I warn you solemnly this hour, that those who will have these things, shall never enter into heaven.

Go, blame me now for speaking sharply to you—think I am too particular if you like it—but, oh! remember if you ever stand outside the gates, crying in vain, "Lord, open to us!"—remember there was a time when I told you, the worldly-minded and the evil livers shall never enter in. Brethren, I have told you before, and I tell you now again for the last time, if you will cling to the things that God hates, you shall never enter into heaven.

III. The character of those who will certainly be in heaven. Brethren, we must pass on. The text has told you who shall not enter heaven. Oh! what a mighty crowd those words shut out! But it tells you something more: who are those who shall. Short is the account and simple: those only, who that are written in the Lamb's book of life. What is this book of life? There is a book, a little book, a book prepared from all eternity, which God the Father keeps sealed—the book of His election; of that book man knows nothing, excepting this blessed truth--that there is such a book. With that book man has little or nothing to do.

But there is another book, a little book, a book belonging specially to the Lord Jesus Christ, a book still unfinished, though year after year there are more names written in it; a book still open, still ready to receive the names of believing penitents: there are still some blank pages left for you; and this is the Lamb's book of life. And who are written in this precious book? I do not know their names—but I do know their characters, and what those characters are I will endeavor to tell you shortly, for the last time.

They are all **true penitents**. They have been convinced of their own unworthiness in God's sight; they have felt themselves to be sinners in deed and in truth; they have mourned over their sins, hated their sins, forsaken their sins; the remembrance of them is grievous, the burden of them intolerable; they have ceased to think well of their own condition and count themselves worthy to be saved; they have confessed with their whole heart: "Lord, we are really chief of sinners—Lord, we are indeed unclean."

Again: they are all **believers in Christ Jesus**. They have found out the excellency of the work He did to save them, and cast on Him the burden of their souls. They have taken Christ for their all in all: their wisdom, their righteousness, their justification, their forgiveness, their redemption. Other payment of their spiritual debts, they have none; other deliverances from the devil, they have not been able to find. But they have believed on Christ, and come to Christ for salvation; they are confident that what they cannot do, Christ can do for them; and having Jesus Christ to lean on, they feel perfect peace.

Once more: they are all **born of the Spirit and sanctified**. They have all put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man which is after God. They have all been renewed in the spirit of their minds; a new heart and a new nature has been given to them. They have brought forth those fruits which only are the proof of the Spirit being in them. They may have slipped and come short in many things; they may have mourned over their own deficiencies full often. But still, the general bent and bias of their lives has always been towards holiness—more holiness, more holiness, has always been their hearts' desire. They love God, and they must live to Him. Such is the character of those who are written in heaven. These, then, are the men whose names are to be found in the Lamb's book of life.

Once they may have been as bad as the very worst—defiled, abominable, liars--that does not matter. They have repented and believed, and now they are written in the book of life. They may have been despised and rejected of this world, poor and base and lowly in the judgment of their neighbors--that does not matter. They had repentance and faith and new hearts, and now they are written in the glorious book of life. They may have been of different ranks and nations; they may have lived at different ages, and never seen each other's faces--that does not matter. They have one thing at least in common, they have repented and believed, and been born again, and therefore they stand all together in the Lamb's book of life.

Yes, brethren, these are the men and women that enter heaven; nothing can keep them out. Tell me not of deathbed evidences, and visions and dreams of dying people; there is no evidence like that of Christ's followers. Repentance, faith, and holiness; this is a character against which the gates shall never be closed. Repent and believe in Christ and be converted, and then, whatever happens to others, you, at least, shall enter heaven; you shall never be cast out.

And now, men and brethren, in CONCLUSION, let me press upon you my old question. How is it with yourselves? What, no answer! Are you ready to depart? Again, no answer! Is your name written in the book of life? Once more, have you no answer?

Oh, think, think, unhappy man or woman, whoever you are, think what a miserable thing it is to be uncertain about eternity. And then consider, if you can not give your heart to God now, how is it possible you could enjoy God's heaven hereafter. Heaven is unceasing godliness; it is to be in the presence of God and His Christ for evermore. God is the light, the food, the air of heaven. It is an eternal sabbath. To serve God is heaven's employment; to talk with God is heaven's occupation.

O sinners, sinners, could you be happy there? to which of all the saints would you join yourselves, by whose side would you go and sit down, with whom of all the prophets and apostles would you love to converse? Surely it would be a wearisome thing to you; surely you would soon want to go forth and join your friends outside. Oh, turn, turn you while it is called today! God will not alter heaven merely to please you; better a thousand times to conform to His ways while you can. You must love the things of heaven before your death—or else you cannot enter heaven when you die.

Christian, look up and take comfort. Jesus has prepared a place for you, and those who follow Him shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hands. Look forward to that glorious abode He has provided; look forward in faith, for it is yours. O Christian brethren, think what a glorious meeting that shall be. There we shall see the saints of old, of whom we have so often read; there we shall see those holy ministers whose faith and patience we have admired; there we shall see one another round the throne of our common Savior, and be parted and separated no more. There we shall labor and toil no more, for the days of mourning shall be ended. Oh—but my heart will leap within me, if I see there faces I have known among you; if I hear the names of any of yourselves! The Lord grant it, the Lord bring it to pass. The Lord grant we may some of us, at least, come together in that day, when there shall be one fold and one Shepherd, and with one heart and voice join that glorious song, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain! Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto the Lamb forever and ever!"

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