

SERMONS  
ON  
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,  
BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS  
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Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.  
IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE FIFTH EDITION.

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TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,  
THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,  
NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;  
MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;  
AND  
TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,

By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

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## SERMON XXXV.

[A Sermon preached at Hanover, in Virginia, Jan. 14, 1759.]

AN ENROLMENT OF OUR NAMES IN HEAVEN THE NOBLEST SOURCE OF JOY.

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LUKE X. 20.—*Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

THIS is the answer Christ gave to his disciples, when returned from their mission, flashed with victory over the most mighty and most malignant enemies, the infernal powers. *Lord, say they, even the devils are subject to us, through thy name.* This they probably mentioned with a tincture of vanity, and were secretly proud of their new power, which their Master had given them. Though they owned it was his gift, they gloried in it, as conferring some new honour and dignity upon themselves. And probably like the rest of their countrymen, their heads were filled with notions of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, and his conquests over the other nations of the earth in favour of the Jews; and inferred that they should have an irresistible power over their enemies on earth, from the power they had been enabled to exercise over evil spirits, so much more mighty, and seemingly unconquerable.

Their Lord and Master, among other things in his answer, checks this secret vanity, and points out to them a superior cause of joy. *Rejoice not in this;* that is, rejoice not so much as you do, rejoice not principally in this, *that the spirits,* (that is, evil spirits,) *are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven;* as if he should say, “Though you may safely rejoice in the victory you have obtained through my name over the powers of hell, yet you ought to take care that it be not a vain, selfish, carnal joy, a joy springing from the gratification of your own ambition. And take care also, that it does not run into excess; for I will show you a much greater cause of joy than even this; and that is, that your names are written in heaven. It is possible, that while you are casting the devil out of the bodies of others, your own souls may be under his power, and you may be his miserable slaves for ever. But since your names are written in heaven, you are safe; and that is cause of joy indeed. Rejoice in this above all other things.”

How should we rejoice, and perhaps boast, if the mighty powers of hell were subject unto us, and we could make them fly at a word? But the meanest Christian is more happy than this, and has cause of greater joy.

For the further explication of the text, it is only necessary to inquire, what is meant by their names being written in heaven?

Heaven is here compared to a city or corporation, in which a list or record is kept of all the citizens or freemen who are entitled to its privileges and immunities. And therefore, to have our names written in heaven, signifies to be citizens, or freemen of the heavenly city; that is, to have a right to an inheritance there, and to all its privileges and enjoyments.

This naturally suggests a very important inquiry, the decision of which may hold us all in an anxious suspense: “How may I know (may each of us ask,) whether my unworthy name be written in heaven? who can open and read the records of heaven, and show me whether my name is registered there?”

I answer, This is a secret that may be discovered; for all that have their names written in heaven, may be distinguished by their characters, their temper, and practice, while upon earth. And their characters are such as these:

1. They are deeply sensible of the vanity of all earthly things, and that heaven alone is a sufficient portion and happiness. All that are registered as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have a superlative esteem of that privilege, and count all things but loss in comparison of it, Matt. vii. 24–23. and xiii. 45, 46. And is this your character? Are your hearts in heaven? or are your highest affections confined to the earth?

2. All that have their names written in heaven have a heavenly nature; a nature very different from that of the men of this world, and like that of the citizens of heaven? And is this your temper? or is it earthly and sensual?

3. All that have their names written in heaven have a peculiar love for all their fellow-citizens, who are heirs of heaven. They love them as members of the same corporation with themselves. 1 John iii. 14.

4. If your names are written in heaven it is the chief business and concern of your life to obtain an interest in heaven. This is not the object of languid, lazy wishes, or of lukewarm, spiritless prayers; but

of your vigorous, anxious, persevering desires. And do you thus seek the kingdom of heaven? Matt. x. 12. Luke xvi. 16.

These marks must suffice at present to assist you in self-examination; and I beg you would bring them to your hearts, and see if they will stand this test.

If your names are written in heaven, then my text authorizes me to tell you, this is the greatest cause of joy you can possibly have; a joy that may swallow up every other joy. But on the other hand,

If your names are not written in heaven, there is nothing in the world that can happen to you, that can be a cause of rational lasting joy to you.

I. If your names are written in heaven, this is the greatest cause of joy you can possibly have; a joy that may swallow up every other joy. This will appear by an induction of particulars.

Are you rich in this world? Has God blessed your industry and frugality, so that you are in easy, affluent circumstances? This is cause of joy and gratitude to God, as it furnishes you with the materials of earthly happiness, frees you from many anxieties, and painful wants, and puts it in your power to enjoy the generous pleasure of doing good with your substance. But what is this, when compared with the blessings of the sanctified use of riches, and the assurance that God has given you, that all things shall work together for your good? what is this to the unsearchable riches of Christ, and that fulness of grace and glory, in which you have an interest? Rejoice more in this than in thousands of gold and silver.

Or if you are not in affluent circumstances, are you above extreme want, and able by your labour and industry to provide yourselves and your dependents with the necessities of life? This is the happiness of most, even of the poor in our country; and this is cause of joy. But what is this to the happiness of having provision made for your subsistence through everlasting ages? Is it not superior cause of joy, that when you are stript of all the enjoyments of the present life, you shall also be delivered from all its wants and labours, and shall not only have a bare sufficiency, but a rich overflowing abundance of happiness, equal to the capacities of your souls in their highest enlargements? In this you may warrantably rejoice, and you cannot run into excess.

Do you enjoy health of body? In this rejoice: but how trifling a cause of joy is this to that of your souls being in health and prospering, and bearing the symptoms of immortal life and vigour?

Are your bodies free from diabolical possession? Rejoice not so much in this, but rather rejoice that the devil is cast out of your souls, and that you are not under his spiritual tyranny.

Are you happy in your friends and relations, and every domestic blessing? Rejoice not so much in this as that you have the most honourable relations and friends in heaven. God is your father; Christ is your Saviour, your elder brother, your friend; the Holy Ghost is your sanctifier; the angels and all the saints are your fellow-servants, your brethren of the same household of God.

Do you rejoice in the salvation of your country, and that you are delivered from the hands of your savage and perfidious enemies on earth? Rather rejoice that you are delivered from the tyranny of sin and Satan, and from the condemnation of the divine law.

Do you rejoice that our forces have been victorious over our enemies'? Rather rejoice in the victory which the Captain of your salvation has gained for you over your spiritual enemies. Rather rejoice in the victory you are enabled to gain over sin, Satan, and the world, through the blood of the Lamb. Rather rejoice to see your lusts slain, or at least mortally wounded, and dying in your hearts.

Do you rejoice that you have the prospect of living in safety and peace in your country? Rather rejoice that you have peace of conscience, and peace with God, through Jesus Christ; and that you shall enter into everlasting peace whenever you leave this restless world.

Do you rejoice that your earthly possessions, your property and liberty are safe? Rather rejoice that your heavenly inheritance is safe; and that whatever becomes of the kingdoms of the earth, you have a kingdom that cannot be shaken, eternal in the heavens.

Do you rejoice that you live under the government of a good king? and that you enjoy the blessings of our happy constitution? This is a peculiar happiness indeed; but rejoice not so much in this, as that you are the subjects of the King of kings, and under a dispensation of grace, and the government of a Mediator. *The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice.* Psalm xcvi. 1. Rejoice, above all, in this, that you and all your affairs are under the direction of a divine hand, that will

manage all for your good. Rejoice that ere long you shall be admitted to the court of the heavenly King, and see him in all his glory.

Do you rejoice that your life is prolonged, while so many are dropping into the grave around you? Rather rejoice that you are not to live always in this most wretched world. Rejoice that death itself, your last enemy, will not be able to do you any lasting injury, but only convey you home to your Father's house, and the full possession of your heavenly inheritance.

Do you rejoice that you enjoy the gospel and the means of salvation and that these invaluable blessings are not likely to be torn from you by the hands of Indian savages and Popish idolaters? This indeed is cause of rejoicing; but how much more ought you to rejoice that the gospel and the means of salvation are made effectual by divine grace for your conversion and sanctification! Many enjoy them as well as you, to whom they are of no service, but an occasion of more aggravated guilt and ruin.

Let me therefore persuade you to rejoice, not only as a privilege, but as a duty. God enjoins it upon you by the same authority by which he requires you to pray, or to love himself or your neighbour. *Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart.* Psalm xxxii. 11. *Rejoice evermore: rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice.* 1 Thess. v. 16. It is decent and congruous that you should now rejoice in that in which you shall rejoice for ever. And, on the other hand, it is highly unbecoming that you should walk towards heaven melancholy and dejected, as if you were going to the place of execution. Let sinners be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, who stand every moment on the slippery brink of eternal misery. Sorrow and lamentation become their circumstances. But will you always mourn and droop, who stand every moment on the threshold of heaven, and know not but you may be there before another sun shall rise? How indecent is this! Therefore rejoice with all your hearts, that your worthless names are written in heaven. This is greater cause of joy than if they were registered in the annals of fame, or among princes of the blood royal.

And do not excuse yourselves from this agreeable duty, by saying, "I would rejoice, if I were sure my name is written in heaven; but, alas! I am not." For is not this uncertainty your own fault? the effect of your own negligence? Besides, have you not some cheerful hopes and probabilities, and even some transient assurance? and is not this

cause of joy to creatures that deserve to be left under the pangs of everlasting despair?

Let me advance a step farther, and tell you, that you should rejoice that your names are written in heaven, not only more than in all other causes of joy, but also in opposition to all causes of sorrow.

What though you are poor in this world, when the heavenly inheritance is yours? That you are despised among men, when you have the honour of being the sons of God? That you are weak, or sick and pained in body, when your souls are recovering from the deadly disease of sin? That you are the slaves of men, when you are free of the heavenly city, members of the same corporation with the armies of heaven, and sharers in the liberty of the sons of God? That your enemies should prove victorious over you upon earth, when you shall certainly overcome at last? That your mortal relations and friends die, when your heavenly Father and all your spiritual kindred live, and you cannot be bereaved of them? In short, what though you endure all the afflictions that can crowd upon one man in the present life, when they are all short and transitory, and work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and when you will soon arrive in the land of rest, beyond the reach of every misery? In spite of all these calamities, rejoice; *rejoice and be exceeding glad, since your names are written in heaven.*

But I must proceed to address another class of hearers; and to them I must say,

II. If your names are not written in heaven, you can have no cause of solid, rational, and lasting joy in any thing. This also I shall illustrate by an induction of particulars.

Rejoice not that you are rich, or at least enjoy the comforts of life, while you are destitute of spiritual and everlasting riches. Will it be any pleasure to you to pass from a splendid well-furnished house into the regions of horror and darkness? From faring sumptuously every day, to suffer the extremities of eternal want? From gay and merry company, to the society of the lost spirits in hell? From all the luxuries of life, to weep and wail, and gnash the teeth for ever? From wearing silks and laces, and every form of finery, to be wrapt in sheets of infernal flame? Alas! what joy can you take in all the advantages that riches can give you, while you must be stript of them all so soon, and feel a terrible reverse? Many who are styled worshipful, honourable, and hear nothing but titles of dignity among

men, are vile, despicable creatures in the sight of God, and must ere long sink into shame and everlasting contempt. Many a body adorned with whatever riches can procure, is animated by a poor, worthless soul, full of sin, and void of the beauties of holiness. And can you rejoice in such trifles as these? A man that has a gangrened foot may as well rejoice that it is covered with a silken plaster; or a criminal, that he is carried to the gallows in a coach of state.

Besides, remember how hardly shall rich men enter into the kingdom of God! It is a human impossibility; but it is not impossible to Omnipotence. As riches increase, temptations increase; temptations to love the world more, and to think less of heaven; temptations from pride, flattery, hurry, company, &c. And can you rejoice that your salvation is made more difficult? that you, who are apt to stumble at straws, have mountains thrown up in your way? Alas! if this were rightly considered, would the wealthy and affluent be so resolute and eager in the pursuit of riches?

What though you are in good business, and prospering in the world, while you are not doing the work of your salvation, nor carrying on a trade for heaven, and your hurry of business is a great occasion of this pernicious neglect?

What though you enjoy health of body, while your souls are dead in trespasses and sins, and your health is no security against death or hell? What though you enjoy friends and relatives, while the great God is your enemy? Or mirth and pleasure, when they will end in eternal howlings, and you will be upbraided with them another day, like Dives, *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time didst enjoy thy good things?*

What though the French and Indians are routed? alas! the devil and your sins are still lords over you? What though your country is safe, when you shall stay in it but a very little time, and you have no place prepared for you in heaven? What though you are the freeborn descendants of Britons, and never were in bondage to any man? alas! you are the slaves of sin. What though you live under the government of the best of kings, while you are the captives of the prince of darkness, and the King of heaven is your enemy? What though your bodies are not exposed to the sword of your fellow-mortals, when you are liable every moment to the sword of divine justice? What though you are safe, as to your outward estate, when your immortal souls are in danger? *What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and*



*lose his own soul?* or to enjoy the gospel, while you receive no advantage from it, but abuse it to your more aggravated ruin? What avails it that God is merciful, when you have no share in his mercy, and never will, if you continue in your vain, carnal joy? That Christ died for sinners, while you wilfully exclude yourselves from the blessed effects of his death?

In short, what upon earth, or even in heaven, can afford you any pleasure or rational joy, while your names are not written in heaven, and you are not using earnest endeavours to be admitted citizens there? alas! your case calls for sighs, and tears, and sorrow, rather than joy. What have you to do with politics, news, and the fate of armies and kingdoms, while you know not whether you will be out of hell one day longer?

And as the joy of the righteous, in having their names written in heaven, may swallow every other joy, so your sorrow, on account of your names not being written there, may swallow up all other sorrows. Be sorrowful on this account, above all other things.

Have you lost your friends, your relatives, your estate? This is sad; but O! it is nothing to the loss of God, of heaven, and your souls. All will be lost ere long, if you continue in your present condition. Are you poor in this world? That is but a trifling affliction, compared with that everlasting poverty you must ere long suffer. Are you mean and despised by men? Alas! what is that to your being despised and abhorred by the God that made you? Are you the slaves of men? This would be trifling, and you need not care for it, were it not that you are the slaves to sin and Satan, and under the condemnation of the divine law. Are you disordered in body? That is nothing to the disorders of your souls. Are you afraid of natural death? alas! what is that to spiritual death, which has seized your souls, and the eternal death which is just before you? In short, nothing in all the world ought so to distress and grieve you as this, That your names are not written in heaven.

Therefore, instead of vain rejoicing, and mirth, and gaiety, I must read to you the denunciation of Jesus Christ against you; *But wo unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation. Wo unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger. Wo unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep.*” Luke vi. 24, 25; and call upon you as the apostle James does, *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.* James v. 9; and again, *Be afflicted,*

*and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. James iv. 9.*

I can honestly assure you, I am no enemy to the pleasures of mankind. But it is because I love you, that I wish you may return home sad and sorrowful from this place; for I well know, you are for ever undone, unless you turn to the Lord, and that you never will turn to him, without rending of your hearts, weeping, and mourning. Joel ii. 12.

If your joy and mirth were rational, I should say nothing against it; but is it not frenzy and madness to be merry in the chains of sin, under the wrath of God, and upon the brink of eternal ruin?

Is it not also dishonourable to God? It is as if you should tell him to his face, that you can be merry and happy without his favour, and that you care nothing for his displeasure.

I should not reprove your mirth, if it were harmless; but, alas! it will ruin you if you indulge it. For, let me tell you, such sinners as you cannot become converts, without alarming fears and deep sorrows. Without this you never will be in earnest in your religious endeavours.

You will tell me perhaps, “you see Christians cheerful, and sometimes merry; and why may not you be so?” I answer, (1.) There is a great difference in your case and theirs; they have a lively hope of everlasting happiness; but you can have no hope in your present condition. And may not they rejoice, while you have cause to mourn and weep? What would you think of a criminal under condemnation, if he allowed himself in that mirth and amusement, which may be lawful and becoming in others? (2.) The Christians you know now are cheerful with good reason; but did you know any of them under their first convictions; were they cheerful then? then, when they received a sight of their sin and danger, and were in an awful suspense what would be their everlasting doom! Were they merry and gay while they saw themselves without a Saviour, and under the displeasure of God? No; then all was sadness, fear, and sorrow. And this is what your case now requires. Can you expect the same cheerfulness in one under the power of a deadly disorder as in one recovering? or would it be becoming?

Finally, I should not endeavour to damp your joys and turn them into sorrow, if they would last. But oh! they will soon end, and nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth will succeed.

Look down into that hideous gulf, the prison of divine justice, where Dives and Judas, and thousands of sinners lie; and can you see no cheerful look, or hear one laugh among them? No, no: they have done with all joy; and must spend a miserable eternity in grief and tears. And will you not rather mourn in time, than mourn for ever? will you choose now to receive your consolation? or will you not rather delay it till you have reason to rejoice?

To conclude: Suffer a friend to your best interests to prevail upon you to return home this evening sadly pensive and sorrowful, and to resolve you will never indulge yourselves in one hour's mirth and gaiety, till you have some reason to believe that your names are written in heaven. This is what your own interest requires; and if you refuse, you will unavoidably be sorry for it for ever, when your sorrow can be of no service to you. Betake yourselves in serious sadness to the earnest use of all the means of salvation, and you have reason to hope God will have mercy upon you, and turn you to himself. Then you will have reason to rejoice, to rejoice in your temporal blessings, and especially because your names are written in heaven. And then God, and Christ, and angels will rejoice over you, and join in your joy.