

SHALL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER?

AND OTHER PAPERS.

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I PITY that man who never thinks about heaven. I use that word in the broadest and most popular sense. I mean by “heaven” the future dwelling-place of all true Christians, when the dead are raised, and the world has passed away. Cold and unfeeling must that heart be which never gives a thought to that dwelling-place! Dull and earthly must that mind be which never considers “heaven!”

We may die any day. “In the midst of life we are in death.” We must all die sooner or later. The youngest, the fairest, the strongest, the cleverest, all must go down one day before the scythe of the King of Terrors. This world shall not go on for ever as it does now. Its affairs shall at last be wound up. The King of kings will come, and take his great power, and reign. The judgment shall be set, the books opened, the dead raised, the living changed. And where do we all hope to go then? Why, if we know anything of true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we hope to go to “heaven.” Surely there is nothing unreasonable in asking men to consider the subject of heaven.

Now, what will heaven be like? The question, no doubt, is a deep one, but there is nothing presumptuous in looking at it. The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler, is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity, you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell for ever in that “better country, even a heavenly one,” we ought to seek all the knowledge we can get about it. Before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it.

There are many things about heaven revealed in Scripture which I purposely pass over. That it is a prepared place for a prepared people; that all who are found there will be of one mind and of one experience, chosen by the same Father, washed in the same blood of atonement, renewed by the same Spirit; that universal and perfect holiness, love, and knowledge will be the eternal law of the kingdom—all these are ancient things, and I do not mean to dwell on them. Suffice it to say that heaven is the eternal presence of everything that can make a saint happy, and the eternal absence of everything that can cause sorrow. Sickness, and pain, and disease, and death, and poverty, and labour, and money, and care, and ignorance, and misunderstanding, and slander, and lying, and strife, and contention, and quarrels, and envies, and jealousies, and bad tempers, and infidelity, and scepticism, and irreligion, and superstition, and heresy, and schism, and wars, and fightings, and bloodshed, and murders, and law-suits—all, all these things shall have no place in heaven. On earth, in this present time, they may live and flourish. In heaven even their footprints shall not be known.

Hear what the inspired apostle St. John says: “There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or

maketh a lie but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"(Rev. xxi. 27). "There shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever"(Rev. xxii. 5). "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. vii. 16, 17). "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. xxi. 4).

Hear what that glorious dreamer, John Bunyan, says, though writing with an uninspired pen: "I saw in my dream that these two men, Christian and Hopeful, went in at the gate. And lo! as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them; the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, 'Enter ye into the joy of our Lord.' I also heard the men themselves sing with a loud voice, saying, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'

"Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold the city shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.

"There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.' And after that they shut up the gates; which when I had seen, I wished myself among them."

But I will not dwell on these things. I purposely pass by them all. I wish to confine myself in this paper to one single point of deep and momentous interest. That point is the mutual recognition of saints in the next world. I want to examine the question, "Shall we know one another in heaven?"

Now, what saith the Scripture on this subject? This is the only thing I care to know. I grant freely that there are not many texts in the Bible which touch the subject at all. I admit fully that pious and learned divines are not of one mind with me about the matter in hand. I have listened to many ingenious reasonings and arguments against the view that I maintain. But in theology I dare not call any man master and father. My only aim and desire is to find out what the Bible says, and to take my stand upon its teaching.

Let us hear what David said when his child was dead. "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. xii. 23). What can these words mean, but that David hoped to see his child, and meet him again in another world? This was evidently the hope that cheered him, and made him dry his tears. The separation would not be for ever.

Let us hear what St. Paul said to the Thessalonians. “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thess. ii. 19). These words must surely mean that the apostle expected to recognise his beloved Thessalonian converts in the day of Christ’s second advent. He rejoiced in the thought that he would see them face to face at the last day; would stand side by side with them before the throne, and would be able to say, “Here am I, and the seals which thou didst give to my ministry.”

Let us hear what the same apostle says, in the same epistle, for the comfort of mourners. “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thess. iv. 13, 14). There would be no point in these words of consolation if they did not imply the mutual recognition of saints. The hope with which he cheers wearied Christians is the hope of meeting their beloved friends again. He does not merely say, “Sorrow not, for they are at rest—they are happy—they are free from pain and trouble—they are better off than they would be here below.” No! he goes a step further. He says, “God shall bring them with Christ, when he brings them back to the world. You are not parted for ever. You will meet again.”

I commend these three passages to the reader’s attentive consideration. To my eye, they all seem to point to only one conclusion. They all imply the same great truth, that saints in heaven shall know one another. They shall have the same body and the same character that they had on earth—a body perfected and transformed like Christ’s in his transfiguration, but still the same body—a character perfected and purified from all sin, but still the same character. But in the moment that we who are saved shall meet our several friends in heaven, we shall at once know them, and they will at once know us.

There is something to my mind unspeakably glorious in this prospect: few things so strike me in looking forward to the good things yet to come. Heaven will be no strange place to us when we get there. We shall not be oppressed by the cold, shy, chilly feeling that we know nothing of our companions. We shall feel at home. We shall see all of whom we have read in Scripture, and know them all, and mark the peculiar graces of each one. We shall look upon Noah, and remember his witness for God in ungodly times. We shall look on Abraham, and remember his faith; on Isaac, and remember his meekness; on Moses, and remember his patience; on David, and remember all his troubles. We shall sit down with Peter, and James, and John, and Paul, and remember all their toil when they laid the foundations of the Church. Blessed and glorious will that knowledge and communion be! If it is pleasant to know one or two saints, and meet them occasionally now, what will it be to know them all, and to dwell with them for ever!

There is something unspeakably comforting, moreover, as well as glorious in this prospect. It lights up the valley of the shadow of death. It strips the sick-

bed and the grave of half their terrors. Our beloved friends who have fallen asleep in Christ are not lost, but only gone before. The children of the same God and partakers of the same grace can never be separated very long. They are sure to come together again when this world has passed away. Our pleasant communion with our kind Christian friends is only broken off for a small moment, and is soon to be eternally resumed. These eyes of ours shall once more look upon their faces, and these ears of ours shall once more hear them speak. Blessed and happy indeed will that meeting be!—better a thousand times than the parting! We parted in sorrow, and we shall meet in joy; we parted in stormy weather, and we shall meet in a calm harbour; we parted amidst pains and aches, and groans, and infirmities: we shall meet with glorious bodies, able to serve our Lord for ever without distraction. And, best of all, we shall meet never to be parted, never to shed one more tear, never to put on mourning, never to say good-bye and farewell again. Oh! it is a blessed thought, that saints will know one another in heaven!

How much there will be to talk about! What wondrous wisdom will appear in everything that we had to go through in the days of our flesh! We shall remember all the way by which we were led, and say, “Wisdom and mercy followed me all the days of my life. In my sicknesses and pains, in my losses and crosses, in my poverty and tribulations, in my bereavements and separation, in every bitter cup I had to drink, in every burden I had to carry, in all these was perfect wisdom.” We shall see it at last, if we never saw it before, and we shall all see it together, and all unite in praising Him that “led us by the right way to a city of habitation.” Surely, next to the thought of seeing Christ in heaven, there is no more blessed and happy thought than that of seeing one another.

Shall we get to heaven at all? This, after all, is the grand question which the subject should force on our attention, and which we should resolve, like men, to look in the face. What shall it profit you and me to study theories about a future state, if we know not on which side we shall be found at the last day? Let us arouse our sleepy minds to a consideration of this momentous question. Heaven, we must always remember, is not a place where all sorts and kinds of persons will go as a matter of course. The inhabitants of heaven are not such a discordant, heterogeneous rabble as some men seem to suppose. Heaven, it cannot be too often remembered, is a prepared place for a prepared people. The dwellers in heaven will be all of one heart and one mind, one faith and one character. They will be ready for mutual recognition. But, are we ready for it? are we in tune? Shall we ourselves get to heaven?

Why should we not get to heaven? Let us set that question also before us, and fairly look it in the face. There sits at the right hand of God One who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, and One who is as willing to save as he is able. The Lord Jesus Christ has died for us on the cross, and paid our mighty debt with his own blood. He is sitting at God’s right hand, to be the Advocate and Friend of all who desire to be saved. He is waiting at this moment to be gracious. Surely if we do not get to heaven the fault will be

all our own. Let us arise and lay hold on the hand that is held out to us from heaven. Let us never forget that promise, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John i. 9). The prison-doors are set wide open; let us go forth and be free. The lifeboat is alongside; let us embark in it and be safe. The bread of life is before us; let us eat and live. The Physician stands before us; let us hear his voice, believe, and make sure our interest in heaven.

Have we a good hope of going to heaven, a hope that is Scriptural, reasonable, and will bear investigation? Then let us not be afraid to meditate often on the subject of “heaven,” and to rejoice in the prospect of good things to come. I know that even a believer’s heart will sometimes fail when he thinks of the last enemy and the unseen world. Jordan is a cold river to cross at the very best, and not a few tremble when they think of their own crossing. But let us take comfort in the remembrance of the other side. Think, Christian reader, of seeing your Saviour, and beholding your King in his beauty. Faith will be at last swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. Think of the many loved ones gone before you, and of the happy meeting between you and them. You are not going to a foreign country; you are going home. You are not going to dwell amongst strangers, but amongst friends. You will find them all safe, all well, all ready to greet you, all prepared to join in one unbroken song of praise. Then let us take comfort and persevere. With such prospects before us, we may well cry, “It is worth while to be a Christian”

I conclude all with a passage from “Pilgrim’s Progress,” which well deserves reading. Said Pliable to Christian, “What company shall we have in heaven?”

Christian replied, “There we shall be with seraphim and cherubim, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look upon. There, also, you shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place; none of them hurtful, but loving and holy; every one walking in the sight of God, and standing in his presence with acceptance for ever. In a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns; there we shall see holy virgins with their golden harps, there we shall see men that by the world were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love they bore to the Lord of the place; all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment.”

Then said Pliable, “The hearing of this is enough to ravish one’s heart. But are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers hereof?”

Then said Christian, “The Lord, the Governor of the country, hath recorded that in this book; the substance of which is, if we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely.”

Then said Pliable, “Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things. Come on, let us mend our pace.”