

The Possession of the Saints' Rest Is Not on Earth

by Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter's sermon teaches that true rest for Christians is found only in heaven, not in earthly possessions or comforts.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Psalm 42:1, Psalm 119:67, Luke 12:19, Luke 14:26, Acts 14:22, Acts 20:28, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Eternal Rest", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Richard Baxter preaches about the folly of seeking rest in earthly enjoyments rather than in God, highlighting the tendency to prioritize material blessings over spiritual growth. He emphasizes the importance of enduring troubles as a means to stay on the path to eternal rest, and the danger of idolizing temporary comforts. Baxter urges believers to consider the unreasonableness of desiring continual prosperity and the necessity of facing present troubles with faith and perseverance, rather than seeking rest in worldly pleasures. He also addresses the reluctance to die and the need to shift our focus from earthly comforts to the eternal rest and joy found in God's presence.

Transcript

We have not yet come to our resting place. How foolish it is to expect it here. What Christian doesn't deserve this correction? All of us would like continual prosperity, because it is so pleasing to the flesh; but we don't consider how unreasonable such a desire is. When we enjoy lovely homes, money, property, and income, or even the necessary means which God has appointed for our spiritual welfare, we are inclined to seek rest in these enjoyments. Do we not desire earthly delights more than God himself? If we lose them, it troubles us more than our loss of God. Is it not enough that these things can be aids on our way to heaven, but must they become our heaven itself? Christian reader, I would rather make you aware of this sin than of any other sin in the world, if I could; for God has a complaint against us on this very point. In order to do this, I urge you to consider THE REASONABLENESS OF PRESENT TROUBLES, and THE UNREASONABLENESS OF RESTING IN PRESENT ENJOYMENTS, and also our unwillingness to die in order that we may possess eternal rest.

Consider that trouble and work are the common way to rest. The day for work is first and then follows the night for rest. Why should we desire the order of grace to be upset any more than the order of nature? It is a divine law, "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22); and that

"if we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). What are we, that God's rules should be reversed at our whim?

Troubles are useful to us, to keep us from mistaking our rest. The most dangerous error of our souls is to replace God with what God has created. A similar error is to mistake earth for heaven. What warm affections we have toward the world until troubles cool them. Troubles speak forcefully, and will be heard even when preachers are not.

Troubles are God's most effective means of keeping us from losing our way to our eternal rest. Without this hedge of thorns on the right hand and the left, we would hardly stay on the road to heaven. If there be but one gap in the hedge, how ready we are to find it and slip through it. When we grow wild, worldly, or proud, how quickly can sickness or other trouble bring us to our knees! Every Christian, as well as Martin Luther, may call trouble one of the best school teachers, and, with David, may say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray--but now have I kept your word" (Ps. 119:67). Not only the green pastures and still waters, but the rod and staff, "they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4). Though the Word and Spirit do the main work, yet suffering unlocks the door of the heart, so that the Word enters more easily.

Consider, further, that it is the flesh that is mainly troubled by afflictions. Didn't Paul and Silas sing when their feet were in the stocks? Their spirits were not imprisoned. Don't grumble about God's dealings with your body. He doesn't do it because He lacks love for you; for if that were the case, He would not have dealt that way with all His saints before you. Don't expect your body to understand the meaning of the rod. It will say God is destroying you, when He is saving you. The flesh is not fit to be judge; it is the accused! Could we stop our ears to our body and listen to God and His Word, we would have a better understanding of our troubles.

God seldom gives His people so sweet a foretaste of their future rest as in their deep troubles. When did Christ preach such comfort to His disciples as when their hearts were troubled? (John 14). When did He appear among them and say, "Peace be unto you" (John 20:21), but when they were hiding for fear of the Jews? (John 20:19). When did Stephen see heaven opened, but when he was giving up his life for the testimony of Jesus (Acts 7:55-56)? Is it not our best condition when we have most of God? Why else do we desire to come to heaven?

Don't say, "I could bear any other trouble but this." If God had troubled you where you could bear it, your idol would not have been discovered nor removed. And don't say, "If my trouble did not disable me from doing my duty, I could bear it." As for your duty to others, it is not your duty when God disables you.

To be the soul's rest is God's own privilege. To make anything less than God the basis of our rest is gross idolatry. Of course, it is obvious idolatry to place our rest in riches or popularity, but it is a more subtle and refined idolatry to take up our rest in spiritual exercises. How it must offend our dear Lord when we give Him cause to charge, "My people can find rest in anything rather than in me. They can delight in one another, but not in Me. They would rather be anywhere than be with Me. Are these their gods? Have these redeemed them? Will these be better to them than I have been?"

God gave you enjoyments to refresh you on your journey to heaven. All God's mercies here are not that rest--as John the Baptist professed he was not the Christ--but he was a "voice crying in the wilderness," to bid us prepare, because the kingdom of God, our true rest, "is at hand" (John 1:8; Matthew 3:1-3).

Any time we love God's gifts better than God himself, we put God in a position of denying the blessings we request, or of taking them away from us. If you had an employee in your home whom your wife loved better than she loved you, would you not be unhappy with your wife and rid your home of such an employee? So also, if the Lord sees that you begin to settle in the world, and say, "Here I will rest," no wonder if He soon unsettles you. If He loves you, no wonder He will take that from you with which He sees you are destroying yourself. It has long been my observation of many, that when they have attempted great projects, and have just finished them; or have aimed at great things in the world, and have just obtained them; and begin to look on their condition with contentment and retire to rest in it; they are then usually near to death or ruin. When a man starts saying, "Soul, take your ease" (Luke 12:19), the next news usually is, "You fool, this night," or this month, or this year, "your soul shall be required of you--then whose shall those things be, which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20). Where is there a home where this fool doesn't live? Let us consider whether it be our own case!

Whether you be a friend to God or an enemy, you can never expect that God will allow you to enjoy your idols undisturbed.

Our rest is our heaven. Where we take our rest, there we make our heaven. If God would let you take up your rest here, it would be a curse to you. It would be better if weariness would make you seek after true rest. Whenever you talk of a rest on earth, it is like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration wanting to stay there. "Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here," said Peter excitedly; but the Scripture adds, "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). If nothing else will convince us, surely the remains of sin should. "The sin which does so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1) should quickly convince the believer that his rest is not here.

The soul's rest must be sufficient to afford it perpetual satisfaction. If God should rain down angel's food, we would soon hate the manna. Our delights on earth grow dull. The more the world is known, the less it satisfies. Can you remember the state that fully satisfied you? If you do you think can, do you think it would continue to satisfy you forever? I believe we may all say of our earthly rest, as Paul of our hope, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

It is also a sad mistake when we are content with religious exercises without God, and had rather be at public worship than in heaven, or a member of the church here than of the perfect church above. Let your soul delight in spiritual exercises only so far as God accompanies them. Remember, this is not heaven, but only the down payment. "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6), and while we are absent from Him, we are absent from our rest. See that you watch and pray against settling anywhere short of heaven, or resting your soul on anything less than God.

Let us also consider OUR UNREASONABLE RELUCTANCE TO DIE. We linger, like Lot in Sodom, until "the Lord being merciful unto" us, he plucks us away against our will (Genesis 19:16). I admit that death, of itself, is not desirable; but the soul's rest with God is desirable, and death is the common route to it. We are inclined to minimize this sin, so let me be the more emphatic about it and show the remedy for it.

Consider how it shows lack of faith. If we really believed that there is such blessedness prepared for believers in heaven, we would be as impatient of living as we are now fearful of dying. Every day would seem like a year until our last day would come. Is it possible that we can truly believe that death will transfer us from misery to glory, and yet be so reluctant to die? Though there is much faith and Christianity in our mouths, yet there is also much faithlessness and atheism in our hearts. That is the main reason we

are so unwilling to die.

It is also due to our lack of love. If we love a friend, we love his company. His presence is delightful; his absence is painful. Whatever we pretend, if we love either father, mother, husband, wife, child, friend, wealth, or life itself, more than Christ; we are not yet a true disciple (Luke 14:26). When it comes to this test, the question is not who preaches most or talks most, but who loves most. Do we love Him and yet care not how long we are absent from Him? If this holy flame of love were thoroughly kindled in our hearts, we would cry out with David, "As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God--when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1-2).

By our unwillingness to die, it appears we are not really very weary of sin. If we felt sin to be the greatest evil, we would not be willing to have its company so long. Ah, foolish soul, does every prisoner groan for freedom, and every sick man long for health, and every hungry man for food; and do you alone hate deliverance? Does the farmer desire the harvest, and the worker his pay? Does the traveler long to get home, and the runner to win the race; and are you reluctant to see your labors finished, and to receive the reward of your faith? O unworthy soul, who would rather dwell in this land of darkness, and wander in this wilderness, than be at rest with Jesus Christ! Has the world lately become more kind? We may at our peril reconcile ourselves to the world, but it will never reconcile itself to us.

This unwillingness to die impeaches us of high treason against the Lord. It is choosing earth before Him, and making present things our very god. Do you expect anyone to believe you when you call the Lord your only hope, and yet would endure the hardest life, rather than die and enter into His presence? What self-contradiction this is. What hypocrisy, to profess to strive for heaven, and be so reluctant to come to it. In this way we disgrace the Lord and His promises in the eyes of the world. When unbelievers see those so unwilling to leave their hold of present things, who have professed to live by faith, and have boasted of their hopes in another world; doesn't this confirm their skepticism? "Surely," they say, "if these Christians expected so much glory, they would not be so reluctant to leave earth for heaven." How can we ever repair the wrong which we do to God and people's souls by this scandal?

What an honor it would be to God, and what a strengthening it would be to believers, and what a conviction to unbelievers it would be, if Christians could cheerfully welcome the news of rest.

Our inability to do so shows that we have wasted our lives. Have we not had all our lifetime to prepare to die; so many years to make ready for one hour; and are we so unready and unwilling yet? What have we been doing? Why have we lived? Did we have any more important matters to mind? Did we need any more frequent warnings? How often death entered the homes of our neighbors. How often it knocked on our own door. How many diseases attacked our own bodies. And are we still unready and unwilling after all this?

One man on his death bed, when he was asked whether he was willing to die or not, replied, "Let him be loathe to die, who is loathe to be with Christ." May that be our conviction also.

The Lord Jesus Christ was willing to come from heaven to earth for us, and shall we be unwilling to remove from earth to heaven for ourselves and Him? Christ came down to raise us up. Has He bought our rest at so costly a price? Is our inheritance "purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28)? And are we, after all this, reluctant to enter? O, listen, it was Christ, and not us, that had cause to be reluctant! May the Lord forgive and heal this foolish ingratitude.

The devil's daily business is to keep our souls from God. What sport this must be to Satan, that, when he sees he cannot get you to hell, he can so long keep you out of heaven, and that his desires, and yours concur on this.

Do not our daily fears of death make our lives a continual worry? Our lives could instead be full of joy in the daily contemplation of the life to come. When we might lie down, and rise up, and walk about with our hearts full of the joys of God, we continually fill them with fears; for he that fears dying must be always fearing, since he always has reason to expect it. How can that man's life be comfortable who lives in continual fear of losing his comforts? These fears of death are self-created sufferings.

Most of us have had sufficient time for life. Why shouldn't a man, that would die at all, be as willing at thirty or forty, if God sees fit, as at seventy or eighty? As you do not covet unlimited wealth or fame, do not desire it in time either. Be content with your share of time. Has your life been so sweet that you are reluctant to leave it? Is this your thanks to Him who is thus drawing you to His own sweetness? O foolish soul, I wish you were as eager for eternity as for a perishing life, and for the presence of God in glory as for continuance on earth.

What a number of your own dear friends are now gone. Why should you be so unwilling to follow? Hasn't Jesus Christ Himself gone this way? Has He not sanctified the grave to us? Are you even reluctant to follow HIM?

The reason I have said so much on this subject is that I find it so needful to myself and others. I find so few Christians that can willingly die. I find Christians who will work hard and suffer much for Christ and who conquer other weaknesses, but so few that have conquered this unwillingness to depart and be with Christ.

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