

What Will We Be Doing for All Eternity?



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Our Eternal Activity

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WHAT WILL WE BE DOING FOR ALL ETERNITY?

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

I remember vividly my naïve anticipation of heaven as a child. Somehow I believed that I would be standing before God's throne, waving for all eternity palm branches and saying, "Glory, hallelujah!" Though I desired to be with Christ, such routine activity seemed to me rather boring.

The scriptural statements are sparse concerning the believer's occupation in the eternal state. Nevertheless, several activities are stated or implied, activities which should enhance our anticipation of eternity.

1. Serving the Savior

a. The privilege of service:

John reveals that in our eternal home, the heavenly Jerusalem, "his servants shall serve him," literally, "His slaves will keep on serving Him" (Rev. 22:3). The church age believers, who have been made kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6) will serve Christ in a priestly and royal function.

b. The pattern for service:

As in the present dispensation angels are God's servants to the saints (Heb. 1:14), so for all eternity it will be the saints' privilege to serve the Savior. Whatever that service might imply, one can be certain that it will be interesting and worthwhile activity.

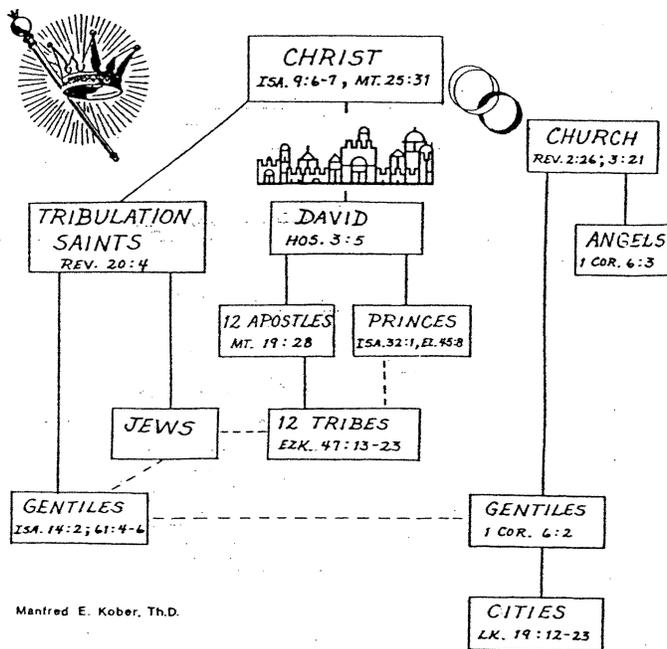
2. Ruling the World

a. Appointments to every believer:

John further suggests that the climaxing privilege of God's slaves is to share in the eternal reign of Christ, "for they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). Already in the millennial kingdom we will rule with Christ (Rev. 20:4, 6--and that includes carnal believers such as the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 6:2). This is the eventual fulfillment of God's command to rule over all creatures and creation (Gen. 1:26).

The diagram shows tentatively the chain of authority for the Millennium.

The Monarch And His Millennial Managers



b. Areas of responsibility:

Greater faithfulness will be rewarded with greater responsibility. In the parable of the pounds, the Savior indicated that some servants would rule over ten cities, some over five (Luke 19:17-19). As mentioned above, this rule includes royal and priestly activity, for the saints in heaven praise God, saying, [thou] "hast made us unto our God kings and priests: we shall reign over the earth" (Rev. 5:10). This authority might be expanded in the eternal state as we rule with Christ over the nations (Rev. 21:26, 22:2) and possibly the vast galaxies of the new universe.

3. Judging Angels

a. Supervision of angels in the millennium and eternal state:

According to the Apostle Paul, every believer will share in Christ's rule and in the judgment of angels: "Do ye not know that saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1. Cor. 6:2-3). This somewhat ambiguous reference may relate to the administration of angels in their service both to the Savior and His Bride in future eons.

b. Sentencing of evil angels at the Great White Throne Judgment: Some see the reference to judgment as the believer's involvement in judging Satan and the demons at the climactic judgment immediately after the millennium (Rev. 20:12-15). After the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, the Bride apparently will accompany the Bridegroom wherever He is and will assist Him in His activities.



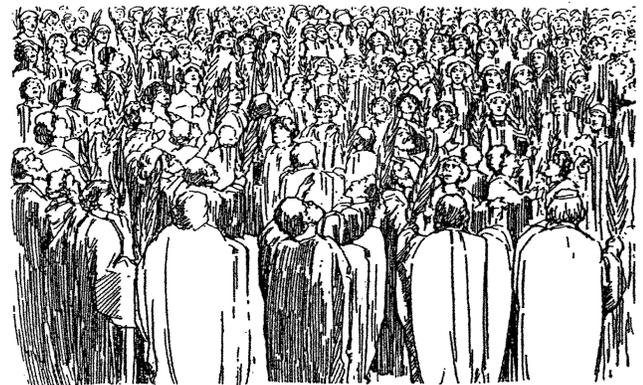
4. Enjoying Fellowship

a. Companionship of saints, angels and the triune God:

Paul intimated the unbroken and intimate fellowship the believer will enjoy with his Savior from the moment of his death (1 Thess. 4:14) and the rapture (4:17, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord"). Furthermore, that blessed fellowship includes fellowship with the triune God (Rev. 20:3-4), the holy angels and the saints of all the ages (Heb. 12:22-23). Being totally sanctified in his body, soul and spirit (1. Thess. 5:23), the believer's individual idiosyncrasies will longer affect harmonious fellowship but each one of us will be a paragon of perfection. As someone has wryly remarked, *"To dwell with saints we love above, that will be glory! To dwell below with those we know. . .well, that's another story!"*

The Lord might well grant us the opportunity to ask Him and the biblical writers about matters that always have intrigued us. The question is, will we care then who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, who were the sons of God in Genesis 6 or how Noah celebrated his 900th birthday?

It is impossible to imagine the delight of fellowship with our beloved relatives and friends who have gone before and lengthy conversations with individuals like Noah, Job and Abraham, as well as Deborah, Esther and Mary.



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b. Consumption of paradisiacal food:

In this life fellowship frequently involves food. Will that which enhances fellowship in this life be absent from the believer's experience in the future state? Even here the prophetic word affords a very satisfactory answer. God's provision for a variety of food on the tree of life and the pure water in the river of life (Rev. 22:1-5) will serve more than esthetic purposes. Undoubtedly, these viands are designated to be refreshment for the redeemed. The Holy Spirit made the promise that he "that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7). That includes every believer, because John defines an overcomer as one who "believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1. John 5:5). Indeed, this future fellowship is one of the benefits of our salvation.



5. Offering Worship

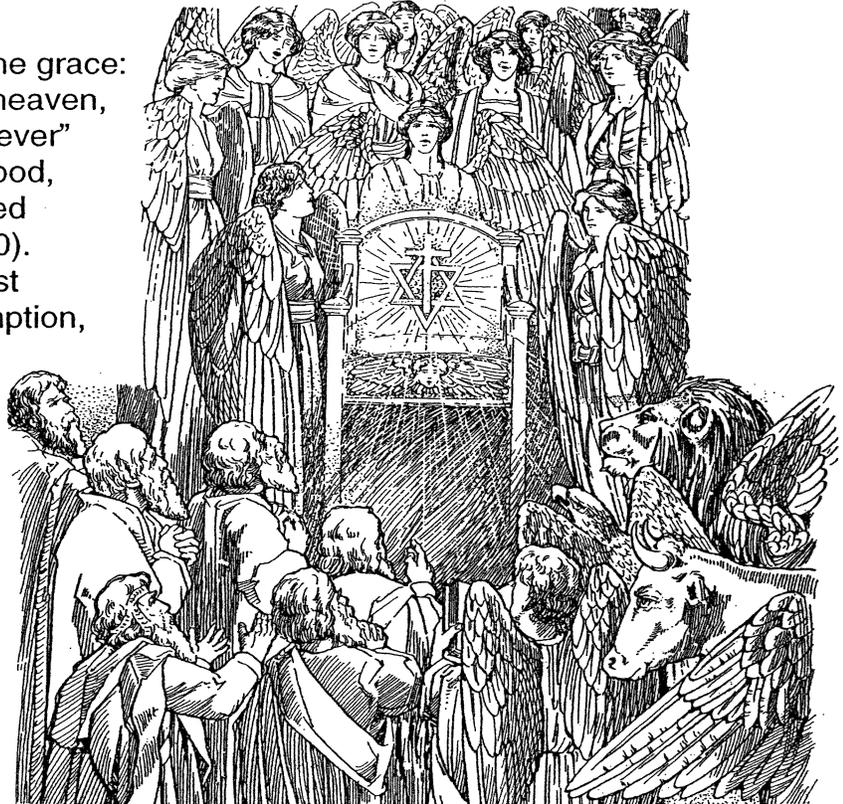
a. The adoration of the Lamb:

In eternity to come, the saints will join the twenty-four elders who bow before the throne and the throng pictured in heaven who say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

b. The acknowledgement of divine grace:
The theme of the worshipping saints in heaven, which will rise to "the Lamb forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13), focuses on Christ's shed blood, His gracious redemption and underserved honor bestowed on His own (Rev. 5:9-10). As the saints fully understand what Christ has done for their and the world's redemption, they will be filled with wonder and adore Him in worship.

6. Singing Praise

a. The effects of Spirit-control:
If the filling of the Spirit today is evidenced by "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19), the believer in the eternal state, fully glorified (Rom 8:30) and completely



controlled by the Spirit, will join the heavenly chorus of angels and redeemed. The singing of the redeemed of the tribulation (Rev. 5:9) will undoubtedly continue in future ages.



b. The expression of adoration in song:
As the angels sang at creation (Job 38:6-7) and at the incarnation (Luke 2:13-14), they undoubtedly will sing at the consummation. The saints will join them and sing ever new songs (Isa. 42:10). The songs of heaven will be an expression of worship. Since true worship is in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), all future songs will be spiritual in nature rather than carnal in their appeal, as certain songs are today. Furthermore, all songs will be theologically sound in content (according to doctrinal truth), something one could only wish were true this side of glory.

7. Entering Rest

a. The distinctions of rest:
The biblical concept of rest is involves inactivity but cessation of a certain type of activity. A final rest is promised to believers. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of **the Creator's rest** (4:4), **Canaan's rest** (3:18, 4:5), **Christ's rest** (4:3), and also of a future **Creation's or Heaven's rest**, because "there remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God" (4:9).

THE REST IN HEBREWS 3 - 4				
	CREATOR'S	CANAAN'S	CHRIST'S	CREATION'S (HEAVEN'S)
REFERENCE	4:4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.	3:18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believe not?	4:3a For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest:	4:9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.
TIME	PERPETUAL	PAST	PRESENT	PROSPECTIVE
SOURCE	WORK OF GOD	TYPE OF CHRIST	DEATH OF CHRIST	PRESENCE OF CHRIST
RELATIONSHIP	PREFIGURES ALL OTHER RESTS	PATTERNED AFTER CREATOR'S REST	POSSESSED BY FAITH	PERFECTED IN THE FUTURE
RELEVANCY	GOD	O.T. SAINTS	N.T. SAINTS	O.T. AND N.T. SAINTS
				



b. The delights of the eternal rest:

What glorious anticipation that after the conflicts, controversies and confusion of this life and after the satanic strategy against the Savior and the saints at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:7-10), the believer will enjoy his unending, undisturbed rest from sin and Satan. The rest of heaven is not a passive one but an existence filled with unending delight. J. Edmonson writes about heaven as a happy place. *"Two things are found in heaven which cannot fail to make its inhabitants happy: the first is, the absence of all evil; and the second is, the presence of all good. The one prevents sorrow; and the other brings fullness of joy"* (*The Home Beyond or Views of Heaven* [1885], 366).

Indeed our gracious God has prepared a glorious future for believers. If you know Jesus Christ as personal Savior, these blessed prospects are part of your salvation experience, involving indescribable future felicity.

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THE HEAVENLY REST.

THERE is an hour of peaceful rest,
To mourning wanderers given;
There is a joy for souls distressed,
A balm for every wounded breast,
'T is found above, in heaven.

There is a soft, a downy bed,
'T is fair as breath of even;
A couch for weary mortals spread,
Where they may rest the aching head,
And find repose — in heaven.

There is a home for weary souls
By sin and sorrow driven;
When tossed on life's tempestuous shoals,
Where storms arise, and ocean rolls,
And all is drear but heaven.

There, faith lifts up her cheerful eye,
To brighter prospects given;
And views the tempest passing by,
The evening shadows quickly fly,
And all serene in heaven.

There, fragrant flowers, immortal bloom,
And joys supreme are given;
There, rays divine disperse the gloom:
Beyond the confines of the tomb
Appears the dawn of heaven.

WILLIAM BINGHAM TAPPAN.

1822, 1846.
—◆—

A Library of Religious Poetry,
Philip Schaff and Arthur Gilman, eds.
(1881), 945.

THE SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST

by Richard Baxter, 1652

(A paraphrase and abridgment by Robert E. Baxter)

"There remains therefore a **rest** to the people of God."
Hebrews 4:9



CHAP. X.

The Saint's Rest is not to be expected on Earth.

§ 1. In order to shew the sin and folly of expecting rest here, § 2. (I.) the reasonableness of present afflictions is considered; § 3. (1.) that they are the way to rest, § 4. (2.) keep us from mistaking our rest, § 5. (3.) from losing our way to it, § 6. (4.) quicken our pace towards it, § 7. (5.) chiefly incommode our flesh, § 8, 9. and (6.) under them the sweetest foretastes of rest are often enjoyed; § 10. (II.) How unreasonable to rest in present enjoyments; § 11. (1.) that 'tis idolatry; § 12. (2.) that it contradicts God's end in giving them; § 13. (3.) is the way to have them refused, withdrawn, or embittered; § 14. (4.) that to be suffered to take up our rest here is the greatest curse; § 15. (5.) that it is seeking rest where it is not. § 16 (6.) that the creatures without God, would aggravate our misery. § 17. (7.) and all this is confirmed by experience. § 18. The Author laments that this is nevertheless a most common sin. § 19-23 (III.) How unreasonable our unwillingness to die, and possess the saint's rest, is largely considered. § 24. The Author apologizes for saying so much on this last head.

§ 1. **W**E are not yet come to our resting place. Doth it remain? How great then is our sin and folly to seek and expect it here? Where shall we find the Christian that deserves not this reproof? We would all have continual prosperity, because it is easy and pleasing to the flesh; but we consider not the unreasonableness of such desires. And when we enjoy convenient houses, goods, lands, and revenues? or the necessary means God hath appointed for our spiritual good; we seek rest in these enjoyments. Whether we are in an afflicted, or prosperous state, it is apparent, we exceedingly make the creature our rest. Do we not desire creature enjoyments more violently, when we want them, than we desire God himself? Do we not delight more in the possession of them, than in the enjoyment of God? And if we lose them, doth it not trouble us more than our loss of God? Is it not enough, that they are refreshing helps in our way to heaven, but they must also be made our heaven itself? Christian reader, I would as willingly make thee sensible of this sin, as of any sin in the world, if I could tell how to do it; for the Lord's greatest quarrel with us is in this point. In order to this, I most earnestly beseech thee to consider,—the reasonableness of present afflictions,—and the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments;—as also of our unwillingness to die, that we may possess eternal rest. {181}

§ 2. (I.) To shew the reasonableness of present afflictions, consider,—they are the way to rest;—they keep us from mistaking our rest,—and from losing our way to it;—they quicken our pace towards it;—they chiefly incommode our flesh;—and under them God's people have often the sweetest foretastes of their rest.

§ 3. (1.) Consider, that labor and trouble are the common way to rest, both in the course of nature and grace. Can there possibly be rest without weariness? Do you not travel and toil first, and rest after? The day for labor is first, and then follows the night for rest. Why should we desire the course of grace to be perverted, any more than the course of nature? It is an established decree, *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*^[298] And that *if we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ.*^[299] And what are we that God's statutes should be reversed for our pleasure?

[298] Acts xiv, 22.

[299] 2 Timothy ii, 12.

§ 4. (2.) Afflictions are exceeding useful to us, to keep us from mistaking our rest. A Christian's motion towards heaven is voluntary, and not constrained. Those means therefore are most profitable, which help his understanding and will. The most dangerous mistake of our souls is, to take the creature for God, and earth for heaven. What warm, affectionate, eager thoughts have we of the world, till afflictions cool and moderate them? Afflictions speak convincingly, and will be heard when preachers cannot. Many a poor Christian is sometimes bending his thoughts to wealth, or flesh pleasing, or applause; and so loses his relish of Christ, and the joy above; till God break in upon his riches, or children, or conscience, or health, and break down his mountain which he thought so strong: And then, when he lieth in Manasseh's fetters; or is fastened to his bed with pining sickness, the world is nothing, and heaven is something. If our dear Lord did not put these thorns under our head, we should sleep out our lives, and lose our glory. {182}

§ 5. (3.) Afflictions, are also God's most effectual means to keep us from losing our way to our rest. Without this hedge of thorns, on the right hand, and left, we should hardly keep the way to heaven. If there be but one gap open, how ready are we to find it, and turn out at it? When we grow wanton, or worldly, or proud, how doth sickness, or other affliction, reduce us? Every Christian, as well as Luther, may call affliction one of his best schoolmasters; and with David may say, *Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*^[300] Many thousand recovered sinners may cry, "O healthful sickness! O comfortable sorrows! O gainful losses! O enriching poverty! O blessed day that ever I was afflicted!" Not only the *green pastures*, and *still waters*, but *the rod and staff, they comfort us*. Though the word and Spirit do the main work, yet suffering so unbolts the door of the heart, that the word hath easier entrance.

[300] Psalm cxix, 67.

§ 6. (4.) Afflictions likewise serve to quicken our pace in the way to our rest. It were well if mere love would prevail with us, and that we were rather drawn to heaven, than driven. But seeing our hearts are so bad, that mercy will not do it; it is better be put on with the sharpest scourge, than loiter, like the *foolish virgins*, till *the door is shut*. O what difference is there, betwixt our prayers in health, and in sickness; betwixt our repentings in prosperity and adversity! Alas! if we did not sometime feel the spur, what a slow pace would most of us hold towards heaven? Since our vile natures require it, why should we be unwilling that God should do us good by sharp means? Judge, Christian, whether thou dost not go more watchfully and speedily in the way to heaven, in thy sufferings, than in thy more pleasing and prosperous state. {183}

§ 7. (5.) Consider further, it is but the flesh that is chiefly troubled and grieved by affliction. In most of our sufferings the soul is free, unless we ourselves wilfully afflict it. "Why then, O my soul, dost thou side with this flesh, and complain, as it complaineth? It should be thy work to *keep it under, and bring it into subjection*, and if God do it for thee, shouldst thou be discontented? Hath not the pleasing of it been the cause of almost all thy spiritual sorrows? Why then may not the displeasing of it further thy joys? Must not *Paul and Silas sing*, because *their feet are in the stocks*? Their spirits were not imprisoned. Ah, unworthy soul! is this thy thanks to God for preferring thee so far before thy body? When it is rotting in the grave, thou shalt be a companion of the perfected spirits of the just. In the mean time, hast thou not consolation which the flesh knows not of? Murmur not then at God's dealings with thy body; if it were not for want of love to thee, he would not have dealt so by all his saints. Never expect thy flesh should truly expound the meaning of the rod. It will call love, hatred; and say, God is destroying, when he is saving. It is the suffering party, and therefore not fit to be the judge." Could we once believe God, and judge of his dealings by his word, and by their usefulness to our souls, and reference to our rest, and could we stop our ears against all the clamors of the flesh, then we should have a truer judgment of our afflictions.

§ 8. (6.) Once more consider, God seldom gives his people so sweet a foretaste of their future rest, as in their deep afflictions. He keeps his most precious cordials for the time of our greatest faintings and dangers. He gives them, when he knows they are needed, and will be valued: and when he is sure to be thanked for them, and his people rejoiced by them. Especially when our

sufferings are more directly for his cause, then he seldom fails to sweeten the bitter cup. The martyrs have possessed the highest joys. When did Christ preach such comforts to his disciples, as when *their hearts were sorrowful* at his departure? When did he appear among them, and say, *Peace be unto you*, but when they were shut up for fear of the Jews? When did Stephen *see heaven opened*, but when he was giving up his life for the testimony of Jesus? Is not that our best state, wherein we have most of God? Why else do we desire to come to heaven? If we look for a heaven of fleshly delights, we shall find ourselves mistaken. Conclude then, that affliction is not so bad a state for a saint in his way to rest. Are we wiser than God? Doth he not know what is good for us as well as we? Or is he not as careful of our good, as we are of our own? Woe to us, if he were not much more so! and if he did not love us better, than we love either him, or ourselves! {184}

§9. Say not, "I could bear any other affliction but this." If God had afflicted thee where thou canst bear it, thy idol would neither have been discovered, nor removed. Neither say, "If God would deliver me out of it, I could be content to bear it." Is it nothing that he hath promised it *shall work for thy good*? Is it not enough that thou art sure to be delivered at death? Nor let it be said, "If my affliction did not disable me for duty, I could bear it." It doth not disable thee for that duty which tendeth for thy own personal benefit, but is the greatest quickening help thou canst expect. As for thy duty to others, it is not thy duty when God disables thee. Perhaps thou wilt say, "The godly are my afflictors: if it were ungodly men, I could easily bear it." Whoever is the instrument, the affliction is from God, and the deserving cause thyself; and is it not better to look more to God and thyself? Didst thou not know that the best men are still sinful in part? Do not plead, "If I had but that consolation, which you say God reserveth for suffering times, I should suffer more contentedly; but I do not perceive any such thing." The more you suffer for righteousness' sake, the more of this blessing you may expect; and the more you suffer for your own evil doing, the longer it will be before that sweetness comes. Are not the comforts you desire, neglected or resisted? Have your afflictions wrought kindly with you, and fitted you for comfort? It is not mere suffering that prepares you for comfort, but the success and fruit of sufferings upon your hearts. {185}

§ 10. (II.) To shew the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments, consider,—it is idolizing them;—it contradicts God's end in giving them;—it is the way to have them refused, withdrawn, or embittered;—to be suffered to take up our rest here, is the greatest curse;—it is seeking rest where it is not to be found;—the creatures, without God, would aggravate our misery;—and to confirm all this, we may consult our own and others' experience.

§ 11. (1.) It is gross idolatry to make any creature or means our rest. To be the rest of the soul, is God's own prerogative. As it is apparent idolatry to place our rest in riches or honors; so it is but a more refined idolatry to take up our rest in excellent means of grace. How ill must our dear Lord take it, when we give him cause to complain as he did of our fellow idolaters, *My people have been lost sheep, they have forgotten their resting place?*^[301] "My people can find rest in any thing, rather than in me. They can delight in one another, but not in me. They can rejoice in my creatures and ordinances, but not in me. Yea, in their very labors and duties they seek for rest, but not in me. They had rather be any where, than be with me. Are these their gods? Have these redeemed them? Will these be better to them, than I have been, or than I would be?" If yourselves have a wife, a husband, a son, that had rather be any where than in your company, and be never so merry as when furthest from you, would you not take it ill? So must our God needs do.

[301] Jeremiah I, 6.

§ 12. (2.) You contradict the end of God in giving these enjoyments. He gave them to help thee to him, and dost thou take up with them in his stead? He gave them to be refreshments in thy journey, and wouldst thou dwell in thy inn, and go no further? It may be said of all our comforts and ordinances, as it is said of the Israelites, *The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them, to search out a resting place for them.*^[302] So do all God's mercies here. They are not that rest; as John professed *he was not the Christ*; but they are *voices crying in this wilderness*, to bid us *prepare, for the kingdom of God*, our true rest *is at hand*. Therefore, to rest here, were to turn all mercies contrary to their own ends, and to our own advantages, and to destroy ourselves with that which should help us. {186}

[302] Numbers x, 33.

§ 13. (3.) It is the way to cause God, either to deny the mercies we ask, or take from us those we enjoy, or at least embitter them to us. God is no where so jealous as here. If you had a servant, whom your wife loved better than yourself, would you not take it ill of such a wife, and rid your house of such a servant? So, if the Lord see you begin to settle in the world, and say, "Here I will rest?" no wonder if he soon in his jealousy unsettle you. If he love you, no wonder if he take that from you with which he sees you are destroying yourselves. It hath long been my observation of many, that when they have attempted great works, and have just finished them; or have aimed at great things in the world, and have just obtained them; or have lived in much trouble, and have just overcome it; and begin to look on their condition with content, and rest in it; they are then usually near to death or ruin. When a man is once at this language, *Soul, take thy ease*; the next news usually is, *Thou fool, this night*, or this month, or this year, *thy soul shall he required, and then whose shall these things be*? What house is there where this fool dwelleth not? Let you and I consider, whether it be not our own case? Many a servant of God hath been destroyed from the earth, by being over-valued and over-loved. I am persuaded, our discontents and murmurings are not so provoking to God, nor so destructive to the sinner, as our too sweet enjoying, and resting in, a pleasing state. If God hath crossed you in wife, children, goods, friends, either by taking them away, or the comfort of them; try whether this be not the cause: For wheresoever your desires stop, and you say, "Now I am well;" that condition you make your God, and engage the jealousy of God against it. Whether you be friends to God or enemies, you can never expect that God should suffer you quietly to enjoy your idols.

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§ 14. (4.) Should God suffer you to take up your rest here, it is one of the greatest curses that could befall you. It were better never to have a day of ease in the world; for then weariness might make you seek after the true rest. But if you are suffered to sit down and rest here, a restless wretch you will be through all eternity. *To have their portion in this life*, is the lot of the most miserable, perishing sinners. Doth it become Christians then to expect so much here? Our rest is our heaven; and where we take our rest, there we make our heaven. And wouldst thou have but such a heaven as this?

§ 15. (5.) It is seeking rest where it is not to be found. Your labor will be lost, and, if you proceed, your soul's eternal rest too. Our rest is only in the full obtaining of our ultimate end. But that is not to be expected in this life; neither is rest therefore to be expected here. Is God to be enjoyed in the best church here, as he is in heaven? How little of God the saints enjoy under the best means, let their own complainings testify. Poor comforters are the best ordinances, without God. Should a traveller take up his rest in the way? No, because his home is his journey's end. When you have all that creatures and means can afford, have you that which you believed, prayed, suffered for? I think you dare not say so. We are like little children strayed from home, and God is now fetching us home, and we are ready to turn into any house, stay and play with every thing in our way, and sit down on every green bank, and much ado there is to get us home. We are also in the midst of our labors and dangers; and is there any resting here? What painful work doth lie upon our hands? Look to our brethren, to our souls, and to God; and what a deal of work, in respect to each of these, doth lie before us? And can we rest in the midst of all our labors? Indeed we may rest on earth, as *the ark* is said to have *rested in the midst of Jordan*; a short and small rest. Or as Abraham desired the *Angels to turn in, and rest themselves* in his tent, where they would have been loth to have taken up their dwelling. Should Israel have fixed their rest in the wilderness, among serpents, and enemies, and weariness, and famine? Should Noah have made the ark his home, and have been loth to come forth when *the waters were assuaged*? Should the mariner choose his dwelling on the sea, and settle his rest in the midst of rocks, and sands, and raging tempests? Should a soldier rest in the thickest of his enemies? And are not Christians such travellers, such mariners, such soldiers? Have you not fears within, and troubles without? Are we not in continual dangers? We cannot eat, drink, sleep, labor, pray, hear, converse, but in the midst of snares; and shall we sit down and rest here? O Christian, follow thy work, look to thy dangers, and hold on to the end, win the field, and come off the ground, before thou think of a settled rest. Whenever thou talkest of rest on earth, it is like *Peter on the mount*, thou knowest not what thou sayest. If, instead of telling the converted thief, *this day shalt thou be with me in*

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