

Heaven, The Believer's Great Hope

"I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace."

2 Kings 22:20

The Old Testament is full of vivid imagery that substitutes for abstract terms. For example it says, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them" instead of using the abstract term earthquake. Or, as in our text it uses the softer and more physical term "gather to your fathers" instead of using the term "death".

The Old Testament is not full of information on those who have been gathered to their fathers. To people then it was not as clearly defined as in the New Testament. Yet there was a hope that gradually formed in the minds of God's people over the centuries until the full revelation came in the New Testament.

Sadly today among the people of God, heaven is not talked about much. The New Testament gives us wonderful ideas about the future of those who love Jesus but we do not treasure those thoughts or meditate on them much except at the funeral of someone who has died in the faith.

Why do we ignore our future hope? What causes us to neglect this glorious prospect? Perhaps it is because we treasure so much what we western Christians have in this life. Or is it because we have so many ways of sensing this world via taste, sight, and so on and so little

ability to connect with heaven? Is it our fear of the act of dying?

Possibly it is because while heaven whispers its joys to us, earth shouts its virtues and it is so much easier to pay attention to the one who speaks the loudest. Somehow only those desperately ill or weary of life's sorrows can hear the whisper of heaven above the shout of this life.

Well, we are missing out on the best thing to think about and it is our loss. I deal with people who are soon to depart this life. This has been my work and I have a lot of wonderful things to say to these people about where the Christian is going when they leave us.

We live in what is called by some the "Shadowland" and the real world is the one to come. I often ask the question, "Why should an heir of heaven be afraid of claiming their inheritance?" As a cancer patient I have said before, "I have stared death in the face and it blinked first." Christians should never fear death, rather they should embrace the idea of being in God's eternal presence and enjoying all He has planned for His people.

A very readable Puritan writer, Richard Baxter, writing on heaven said, "If we but believed the promises of God we should

be as impatient of living as we are fearful of dying." He also said, "Let him not wish to die who does not wish to see Christ."

These are challenging thoughts. Can you speak the words of Baxter with confidence? We do not have to be seriously ill to have thoughts about heaven and our destination with Christ. We will be better able to live in this world the more we think of the next.

The Bible calls on us to set our hearts and minds on things above and not on the things of earth. This is the secret of living the good life here and now. Then when this world robs us of health, wealth, friends, loved ones, whatever, we will still have our compass intact and be able to chart our course well.

If this world comes first in our lives we shall surely lose all and be eternally miserable. Only by trusting in Jesus, the only Saviour, can we cope and live confidently. Then we shall know the promise in the verse for today. God Himself shall place loving arms around us at the end and gather us home to where we truly belong.

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