

The Practice of Heavenly Meditation

Learning from Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1646, during a time of severe illness and suffering (and as he thought, imminent death) Richard Baxter decided he needed to meditate on heaven, in order “to sweeten both the rest of my life and my death.”¹

Not only did this heavenly meditation transform Baxter's outlook (to the extent that he could even look back with gratitude on the suffering that led him to this task), but the book that grew out of the notes he made during this time - *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* - went on to become a devotional classic, one of the most read books of its time.

The opening of Baxter's book is striking: he notes how we struggle to believe the *good* God has in store for us. It is not just ‘hard things’ that we struggle to believe, but also God's wonderful promises.

“As the poor man, that would not believe any one had such a sum as a hundred pounds, it was so far above what he himself possessed, so men will hardly now believe there is such a happiness...”²

Thus Baxter wants to convince us of the good that awaits us - and he is prepared to spend over 600 pages doing so! His reason for doing this is simple:

¹Baxter, *Rest*, viii.

²Baxter, *Rest*, 1.

not only are we so unwilling to believe this, but also knowing the good we have in store is, for Baxter, absolutely crucial for the Christian life. A true understanding of heaven and meditating on it is: “the ground of all the believer’s comfort, the end of all his duty and sufferings, the life and sum of all gospel promises and Christian privileges.”³

Thus Baxter is prepared to make the bold statement:

“If in the faithful following of this prescribed course (...) if thy soul enjoy not more fellowship with God, and thy life be not fuller of pleasure and solace, and thou have not comfort readier by thee at a dying hour, and when thou hast greatest need; then throw these directions back in my face and exclaim against me as a deceiver forever.”⁴

Surely these are things we all desire! In that case, Baxter would have us come with him, and join him in heavenly meditation.

³Baxter, *Rest*, 1.

⁴In fact Baxter does give one qualification - that God may in his providence be withholding mercies from us (for our good) for a season. Nevertheless, Baxter is clear that in the normal way God has arranged things, heavenly meditation will lead to all of these benefits. Baxter, *Rest*, 548.

II. DESCRIPTIONS OF HEAVEN

The majority of the first part of *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* is Baxter setting out descriptions of heaven.⁵ This is a necessary precursor to his description of how to meditate on heaven, for as he says: "We cannot make that our end, which we know not; nor that our chief end, which we know not, or judge not, to be the chief good."⁶

At this point we might raise an objection. Is it not wrong (even idolatrous) to focus on rest as our ultimate end, not God's glory? Is all of this focussing too much on what *we* get, rather than on God?

Whilst there may be a danger of such 'godless' seeking after only what we can get, Baxter would have us remember:

"What God hath joined, man must not separate. The glorifying himself, and the saving of his people, as I judge, are not two decrees but one decree (...) Therefore I know no warrant for putting such a question to ourselves, as some do, Whether we could content to be damned, so God were glorified? Christ hath put no such question to us, nor bid us put such to ourselves."⁷

⁵Like many people today, Baxter uses 'heaven' as a shorthand for the New Creation, the world to come. This is rather unfortunate, as, strictly speaking 'heaven' refers to the spiritual realm where God is now, but we look forward to the new heavens and new earth, when the dwelling place of God will be with men. We must banish any 'purely spiritual' ideas of 'heaven' - it is a restored and resurrected creation that we look forward to. Thus, whilst keeping Baxter's frequent use of 'heaven', we should remember what is usually being referred to by this.

⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 10.

⁷Baxter, *Rest*, 7-8.

God communicates his glory to us *by* doing us good - by giving us himself, and an eternity with him. Of course we should have no thoughts of heaven *without* focussing on God, but neither should we go the other way, and try to think of God *apart* from all he does for us. Thus a right focus on heaven will lead us to glorify and delight in God more and more.

Baxter's descriptions of heaven make the most of his able talents as a word-smith - the poetic vividness of his style points to the wonderful realities he is describing. Moreover, as we shall see, Baxter is concerned by more than just correct doctrine - he wants us to be changed by this. Thus what follows is a summary intended to be *memorable*, as we need to have these truths easily accessible for us to meditate on them.⁸ Running through the following acrostic could be useful in beginning our meditations on heaven – as so often if we try to think on heaven, we run out of ideas very quickly. One minute spend meditating on each of these truths would lead to a meditation of nearly ten minutes – something we might find very difficult without some direction or reminders.

⁸Longer extracts from Baxter describing the glories to come are found in the Appendix. They are so rich and evocative that they deserve reading in full, rather than simply being summarised here.

JERUSALEM acrostic

J Jesus will be there

We will see him face to face.

E End of sorrow and suffering

Both in our lives, and in the lives of fellow Christians.

R Renewed creation

We will live in the new heavens and new earth, in all its splendour.

U Undeserved

We will know that we deserve condemnation, and we are only there by Christ's blood.

S Sinless

We will no longer sin, offending God and hurting others.

A Adoring God perfectly

We will finally love God as we should, and we will spend eternity praising him.

L Love

We will finally understand and experience just how much he loves and has loved us.

E Everlasting

There will be no prospect of losing glory - we will be there in perfection forever.

M Multitude

There will be people from all nations, a new society, joyfully serving God together.

III. REPROVING OUR EXPECTATIONS OF REST ON EARTH

One feature of *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* that quickly becomes apparent is that Baxter seems to have a low view of this world, and the blessings to be expected in this life. He seems to take it as self evident that we will not find comfort in this world, and he cites numerous examples of the trials, sufferings and illnesses that we face.⁹

At this point we may feel that Baxter is being influenced too much by his own situation - that his view of what we should expect our Christian experience to be is based more on his exceptionally difficult circumstances than by the Bible.¹⁰

⁹Baxter, *Rest*, 458–59.

¹⁰Packer's summary of what Baxter faced in his life is sobering:

“Of all the great Puritan sufferers - and the Puritans as a body were great sufferers - none had a heavier load of pain and provocation to endure than did he. He suffered throughout his adult life from a multitude of bodily ailments (a tubercular cough; frequent nosebleeds and bleeding from his finger ends; migraine headaches; inflamed eyes; all kinds of digestive disorders; kidney stones and gallstones; and more), so that from the age of 21 he was, as he says “seldom an hour free from pain”, and expected death constantly through the next 55 years of partial disablement before his release finally came. Then after 1662, he suffered a great deal of hatred and harrassment because he was a prominent nonconformist leader: this led to several arrests for preaching, some spells in prison, the confiscation of his goods to pay fines, including one one occasion, the very bed on which he was lying sick, and finally a trial, if it can be called that, before the appalling Judge Jeffreys.” J. I. Packer, *A Man for All Ministries: Richard Baxter* (St Antholin's Lecture; 1991), 9.

However, what Baxter is saying is that whilst we may find enjoyment and value in the things of this world, we must not find our *rest* in them.¹¹ Baxter would rebuke our common obsession with this world, and have us focus on the world to come.

Baxter uses one striking Biblical image to help us get this perspective we need. He pictures Moses going up the mountain from where he could see both the wilderness behind (where the people had been wandering for 40 years) and the wonderful promised land ahead. This perspective would show how much better the promised land was - and so it would be if we could see both earth and heaven:

“To stand on that mount, whence we can see the wilderness and Canaan both at once; to stand in heaven, and look back on earth, and weigh them together in the balance of a comparing sense and judgment; how must needs it transport the soul and make it cry out (...) Why now I see the gospel is indeed good tidings (...) O vile nature that resisted so much and so long such a blessing. Unworthy soul, is this the place thou camest so unwillingly towards? Was duty wearisome? Was the world too good to lose?”¹²

¹¹Baxter, *Rest*, 454 Seeking rest in the things of this world would be idolatry - and Baxter reminds us that God is jealous, and will not let us persist in our worship of idols. He will cause us to seek comfort above, not here. “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 wherewith he sees you are about to destroy yourselves.” Baxter, *Rest*, 456.

¹²Baxter, *Rest*, 26.

Baxter says we shall have this perspective one day, but he also encourages us to have it now. He would have us now, by faith, to 'go up this mountain', to look at heaven, and then at earth, and to compare them, and thus see where our heart should be.¹³

IV. LEARNING ABOUT HEAVEN FROM THIS WORLD

As we have seen, Baxter would have us focus on, and delight in heaven rather than this world. However, he does see this world as playing an important part in this. He thinks that we should let every circumstance of life point us towards heaven.¹⁴

Speaking of heaven using language of the senses

For Baxter, heaven is not an ephemeral, purely spiritual place, but a real, concrete reality. Thus he would have us think of heaven in concrete ways. Baxter knows that our senses are powerful, that what is seen, touched etc. has more power on us than what is perceived by faith only. Thus he would have us engage the senses to help us meditate on heaven.

Underpinning Baxter's argument here is the way he sees God as communicating with us. He speaks of God 'condescending' - i.e. speaking in our language,

¹³See Appendix 6.

¹⁴Baxter, *Rest*, 541.

using concepts we can understand.¹⁵ As an example he speaks of the new Jerusalem being built of gold with gates of pearl. He admits that these descriptions are “improper and figurative, yet doubtless if such expressions had not been best, and to us necessary, the Holy Ghost would not so frequently have used them.”¹⁶

Since God has chosen to communicate analogically, in concepts we understand, and which are available to our senses, we should let our senses help us in delighting in heaven. In other words we should not just assent to the fact that the New Jerusalem is made of pure gold, clear as glass (or, worse, think “but of course its not *really* like that”), but we should imagine ourselves seeing it, touching it, and let these senses fire our emotions.

Very often when we think about heaven, we are tempted to think in cold, abstract terms. But Baxter would encourage us to mine the Bible for the rich evocative descriptions it contains, and to feast on these, to let our senses be full of them, and communicate to our affections.¹⁷

Letting the things of this world teach us about heaven

More than simply thinking of heaven in terms taken from this world, Baxter would have us learn of heaven from the things of this world themselves.

¹⁵Baxter, *Rest*, 598.

¹⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 598.

¹⁷See Appendix 16.

Every good thing we have in this world, should make us think of the greater we will have in heaven:

“What delight hath the taste in some pleasant fruits (...) Oh what delight, then, must my soul needs have in feeding upon Christ, the living bread, and in eating with him at his table in his kingdom.”¹⁸

As well as the physical creation, Baxter would have us learn of heaven from God’s providence - from his acts both in history¹⁹ and in our own lives.²⁰

Enjoying the things of this world as ‘foretastes’ of heaven

Not only are we to use the things of this world to help us meditate on heaven, but this should actually lead us to delight in the things of this world *more*. Baxter says that “God’s sweetest dealings with us at the present would not be half so sweet as they are if they did not intimate some further sweetness.”²¹ He gives the example of receiving sixpence. We will be *more* glad to receive this, if the sixpence is in earnest of a thousand pounds. We might give the example of someone who has bought a stake in a vineyard. As they receive the first bottles from the vineyard, they will enjoy them all the *more* if they remember they are the sign of more and better wine to come!

¹⁸Baxter, *Rest*, 601. See Appendices 6 and 7 for further examples.

¹⁹See Appendix 9.

²⁰Baxter, *Rest*, 604–5. See also Appendix 12.

²¹Baxter, *Rest*, 542.

Of course, we will lack many things in this world, and Baxter would have us learn from this. Whatever good we lack now, we will have in heaven. Whatever trouble we are facing, it will be removed in heaven:

“If thou prosper in the world, and thy labour succeed, let it make thee more sensible of thy perpetual prosperity: if thou be weary of thy labours, let it make thy thoughts of rest more sweet: if things go cross and hard with thee in the world, let it make thee the more earnestly desire that day when all thy sorrows and sufferings shall cease. (...) Thus you may see, what advantages to a heavenly life every condition and creature doth afford us, if we had but hearts to apprehend and improve them.”²²

V. STEPS FOR MEDITATION

Firstly, we must *know* the truths of heaven

“For the present purpose, you may look over any promise of eternal life in the gospel, any description of the glory of the saints, or the very articles of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. (...) And if any should be barren of matter through weakness of memory, they may have notes or books of this subject for their furtherance.”²³

To this end Baxter’s descriptions of heaven (summarised above with JERUSALEM acrostic, and given in extended form in the Appendix) may prove

²²Baxter, *Rest*, 542. See Appendix 10 for further learning from providence.

²³Baxter, *Rest*, 576.

very useful, as well of course as the relevant Scripture passages. We should note at this point how far from some contemporary views of meditation this is. Far from emptying the mind, Biblical meditation involves filling it - with Biblical truth - in order to mull it over, reflect and ponder.

Secondly, we must *believe* these truths

“Produce the strong arguments for the truth of Scripture; plead them against thy unbelieving nature; answer and silence all the cavils of infidelity; read over the promises; study all confirming providences; call forth thine own recorded experiences; remember the Scriptures already fulfilled both to the church and saints in the former ages, and eminently to both in this present age, and those that have been fulfilled particularly to thee.”²⁴

Thirdly, we must know and believe these truths to be good

This is in order to convey these truths from our mind to our heart.²⁵ We might ask ourselves:

“Is there happiness in all this or not? Is not here enough to make me blessed? Can he want anything who fully possesseth God?”²⁶

If you still don't feel love, Baxter says, show your soul Christ.²⁷ Consider also “Christ's personal excellences.”²⁸ When we have viewed the goodness of the

²⁴Baxter, *Rest*, 577.

²⁵Baxter, *Rest*, 579.

²⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 576 See Appendix 2 for more on the goodness of heaven.

Lord, we should mourn that we are here and desire to be there²⁹ and we should be looking forward to heaven with *joy*.³⁰

In the above sequence, we should note the importance of what Baxter (and the Puritans in general) call the *affections* - or what we might call the emotions. Baxter wants to get the truth from our head to our hearts, because our living is shaped so much by what we feel and desire, rather than just what we know.³¹ Baxter wants our hearts to be warmed by the thought of heaven. Only when this is the case (and not merely when our 'doctrine' is correct) do we "think on heaven as heaven should be thought on."³²

VI. 'DUTIES' - HOW OUR WORK AND GOD'S WORK RELATE

Having expounded what heaven is like, and having described the process of heavenly meditation, Baxter will finish his book with a serious challenge to his readers:

"I wish thee to remember, that it is the practice of a duty that I am directing thee in, and therefore, if thou wilt not practise it, do not read it."³³

²⁷ Baxter, *Rest*, 580 See Appendix 3 for exposition of this.

²⁸ Baxter, *Rest*, 582 See appendix 4 for more.

²⁹ Baxter, *Rest*, 583 See Appendix 5.

³⁰ Baxter, *Rest*, 589.

³¹ Baxter, *Rest*, 551.

³² Baxter, *Rest*, 552.

³³ Baxter, *Rest*, 620.

Baxter here is picking up a common Puritan theme of 'duties'. These are spiritual endeavours, such as Bible reading, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, the Lord's Supper, and of course (centrally for Baxter) heavenly meditation.

Again, at this point in his thinking, Baxter shows himself to be of a different age to us. We might wonder whether this emphasis on duties seems legalistic, old fashioned, or even to be denying the gospel of grace. However, Baxter is incredibly helpful in showing us what duties are, and how they fit with God's grace.

Like most other Puritans, Baxter was convinced of God's sovereignty - that God can do what he chooses, and that any work of grace in the life of a Christian, any spiritual growth, must be down to the work of God. But Baxter does not make the (perhaps rather contemporary) mistake of thus thinking we have no part in this. Like other Puritans, he asks *how* God chooses to sovereignly work in the lives of his people. And he concludes that whilst God can of course do what he chooses, his ordinary (i.e. usual) means of building the faith of his people is through *means*, through what Baxter would call *duties*.

It is precisely through meditation, Bible reading, prayer etc. that God does his work.³⁴ It is in this context that we should understand Baxter's frequent calls

³⁴"God feedeth not the saints as birds do their young, bringing it to them, and putting it into their mouths, while they lie still in the nest, and only gape to receive it. But as he giveth to the man the fruits of the earth, the increase of their land in corn and wine, while we plough, and so, and weed, and water, and dung, and dress, and then

for hard work. He is adamant that we should not work in our own strength, but he also says that Christ being the source of all blessings doesn't mean we don't need to work hard to receive them.³⁵

This leads on to an important point about these duties. Baxter is clear that it is false reasoning to argue that we should only do such duties if we feel like them. This argument has a noble kind of appeal to it: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason." (T.S. Eliot) Baxter agrees that our duties should be done out of love. But then he asks where this love for God and this delight in Christ will come from. It is *through* reading the Bible, praying, meditating on Christ and heaven that God will help us to love him:

"There are means appointed by God to procure this love; and shall I not use those means till I can use them from love?"³⁶

Thus we should not refrain from these things if we do not feel a love for God, rather we should continue doing them, praying that God might use them to re-kindle our love for him.

with patience expect the blessing; so doth he give the joys of the soul." Baxter, *Rest*, 490.

³⁵We must remember that the blessings spoken of here are not the blessings of salvation - our forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, adoption as sons - all of these are entirely through what Christ has done, to be received by faith. Yet our experience of the Christian life, our sense of closeness with God - God has ordained that normally these come through our doing our Christian duties (and even this through God's grace.)

³⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 618.

VII. CONCLUSION

Baxter helps us to gain a right perspective: relativising our attachment to this world, in the light of the world to come. His rich descriptions of the new creation can feed our soul, and his steps for meditation can help us to start this practice that proved so beneficial to him in his own life, enabling him to remain joyful even in the midst of severe afflictions. Baxter challenges us (in an age where often we only do something if we *feel* like doing it) to practise our ‘duties’ regardless of how we feel, expectant that God will use these means to help us love and treasure him, and therefore turn these duties into delight.

In our increasingly secular society we would do well to hear this call from Baxter to focus on the world to come. For Baxter the journey is over – he now gazes into the face of his Lord, beginning that eternity of delight, the thought of which kept him going through suffering, sickness and toil. For us here on earth our journey continues – and it would surely be Baxter’s prayer that 400 years after his death, his work would still encourage us to “set our hearts on things above”³⁷ and to look forward to “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”³⁸

³⁷ Colossians 3:1.

³⁸ Hebrews 11:10.

VIII. APPENDIX - QUOTATIONS FROM BAXTER TO HELP US MEDITATE ON HEAVEN

1. We should consider all we will leave behind as we enter glory

“Farewell, sin and suffering, for ever; farewell, my hard and rocky heart; farewell, my proud and unbelieving heart; farewell, atheistical, idolatrous, worldly heart; farewell, my sensual, carnal heart: and now welcome, most holy, heavenly nature, which, as it must be employed in beholding the face of God, so is it full of God alone, and delighteth in nothing else but him. Oh, who can question the love which he doth so sweetly taste, or doubt of that which with such joy he feeleth! Farewell, repentance, confession, and supplication; farewell, the most of hope and faith; and welcome, love, and joy, and praise. I shall now have my harvest without ploughing or sowing, my wine without the labour of the vintage, my joy without a preacher or a promise, even all from the face of God himself. That is the sight that is worth the seeing; that is the book that is worth the reading. Whatever mixture is in the streams, there is nothing but pure joy in the fountain. Here shall I be encircled with eternity, and come forth no more; here shall I live, and ever live, and praise my Lord, and ever, ever, ever praise him. My face will not wrinkle, nor my hair be grey ; but this mortal shall have put on immortality, and this corruptible, incorruption, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.”³⁹

2. Consider God and who he is

“Let thy faith, as it were, take thy heart by the hand, and show it the sumptuous buildings of thy eternal habitation, and the glorious ornaments of thy Father's house; show it those mansions which Christ is preparing, and display before it the honours of the kingdom. Let faith lead thy heart into the presence of God, and draw as near as possibly thou canst, and say to it, Behold the Ancient of days; the Lord Jehovah, whose name is, I AM. This is he who made the worlds with his word; this is the Cause of all causes, the Spring of action, the Fountain of life, the First Principle of the creature's motions, who upholds the earth, who ruleth the nations, who disposeth of events, and subdueth his foes; who governeth the depths of the great waters, and boundeth the rage of her swelling waves; who ruleth the winds, and moveth the

³⁹Baxter, *Rest*, 624.

orbs, and causeth the sun to run its race, and the several planets to know their courses. This is he that loved thee from everlasting, that formed thee in the womb, and gave thee this soul; who brought thee forth, and showed thee the light, and ranked thee with the chiefest of his earthly creatures; who endued thee with thy understanding, and beautified thee with his gifts; who maintaineth thee with life, and health, and comforts; who gave thee thy preferments, and dignified thee with thy honours, and differenced thee from the most miserable and vilest of men. Here, O here, is an object, now, worthy thy love; here shouldst thou even put out thy soul in love; here thou mayst be sure thou canst not love too much; This is the Lord that hath blessed thee with his benefits; that hath spread thy table in the sight of thine enemies, and caused thy cup to overflow (Psa 23:4-5). This is he that angels and saints do praise, and the host of heaven must magnify forever.”⁴⁰

3. If you don't feel love, show your soul Christ!

“But if yet thou feelest not thy love to work, lead thy heart further, and show it yet more: show it the Son of the living God, whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6): show it the King of saints on the throne of his glory, who is the First and the Last, who is, and was, and is to come; who liveth and was dead, and behold, he lives for evermore; who hath made thy peace by the blood of his cross, and hath prepared thee, with himself, a habitation of peace: his office is to be the great peacemaker; his kingdom is a kingdom of peace; his gospel is the tidings of peace; his voice to thee now is the voice of peace. Draw near and behold him: dost thou not hear his voice! (Luk 24:36-39). He that called Thomas to come near, and to see the print of the nails, and to put his finger into his wounds, He it is that calls to thee, Come near and view the Lord thy Saviour, and be not faithless, but believing (John 20:27). Peace be unto thee, fear not, it is I (John 20:19-21). He that calleth, Behold me, behold me, to a rebellious people that calleth not on his name (Isa 59:1), doth call out to thee a believer to behold him: he that calls to them who pass by, to behold his sorrow in the day of his humiliation (Lam 1:12), doth call now to thee to behold his glory in the day of his exaltation: look well upon him; dost thou not know him? Why, it is He that brought thee up from the pit of hell: it is He that reversed the sentence of thy damnation; that bore the curse which thou shouldst have borne, and restored thee to the blessing that thou hast forfeited and lost, and purchased the advancement which thou must inherit for ever: and yet dost thou not know him? Why, his hands were pierced, his head was pierced,

⁴⁰Baxter, *Rest*, 579.

his sides were pierced, his heart was pierced, with the sting of thy sins, that by these marks thou mightest always know him. Dost thou not remember when he found thee lying in thy blood, and took pity on thee, and dressed thy wounds, and brought thee home, and said unto thee, " Live ?" (Eze 16:6-9; Luke 10:30 etc). Hast thou forgotten since he wounded himself to cure thy wounds, and let out his own blood to stop thy bleeding? Is not the passage to his heart yet standing open? If thou know him not by the face, the voice, the hands, if thou know him not by the tears and bloody sweat, yet look nearer, thou mayst know him by the heart; that broken-healed heart is his; that dead-revived heart is his; that soul-pitying, melting heart is his; doubtless, it can be none's but his. Love and compassion are its certain signatures; this is He, even this is He, who would rather die than thou shouldst die, who chose thy life before his own, who pleads his blood before his Father, and makes continual intercession for thee. If he had not suffered, oh what hadst thou suffered ! What hadst thou been, if he had not redeemed thee ! Whither hadst thou gone, if he had not recalled thee! There was but a step between thee and hell, when he stepped in, and bore the stroke; he slew the bear, and rescued the prey, he delivered thy soul from the roaring lion. And is not here yet fuel enough for love to feed on? Doth not this loadstone snatch thy heart unto it, and almost draw it forth of thy breast? Canst thou read the history of love any further at once? Doth not thy throbbing heart here stop to ease itself? And dost thou not, as Joseph, seek for a place to weep in? Or do not the tears of thy love bedew these lines? Go on then, for the field of love is large, it will yield thee fresh contents for ever, and be thine eternal work to behold and love: thou needest not then want work for thy present meditation. Hast thou forgotten the time when thou wast weeping, and he wiped the tears from thine eyes? when thou wast bleeding, and he wiped the blood from thy soul? when pricking cares and fears did grieve thee, and he did refresh thee, and draw out the thorns? Hast thou forgotten when thy folly did wound thy soul, and the venomous guilt did seize upon thy heart, when he sucked forth the mortal poison from thy soul, though therewith he drew it into his own?"⁴¹

4. Consider Christ's personal excellences

“And art thou not yet transported and ravished with love? Can thy heart be cool when thou thinkest of this? or can it hold when thou rememberest those boundless compassions? Rememberest thou not the time when he met thee in thy duties; when he smiled upon thee, and spake comfortably to thee? when thou didst sit down un-

⁴¹Baxter, *Rest*, 580–81.

der his shadow with great delight, and when his fruit was sweet to thy taste? when he brought thee to his banqueting-house, and his banner over thee was love? when his left hand was under thy head, and with his right hand he did embrace thee? And dost thou not yet cry out, " Stay me, comfort me, for I am sick of love ?" (Song 2:3-5). Thus, reader, I would have thee deal with thy heart; thus hold forth the goodness of Christ to thy affections. Plead thus the case with thy frozen soul, till thou say as David in another case, "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned," (Psa 39:3). If these forementioned arguments will not rouse up thy love, thou hast more, enough of this nature at hand. Thou hast all Christ's personal excellences to study; thou hast all his particular mercies to thyself, both special and common; thou hast all his sweet and near relations to thee, and thou hast the happiness of thy perpetual abode with him hereafter: all these do offer themselves to thy meditation, with all their several branches and adjuncts. Only follow them close to thy heart, ply the work, and let it not cool. Deal with thy heart as Christ did with Peter when he asked thrice over, " Lovest thou me?" till he was grieved, and answers, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," (John 21:15-17). So say to thy heart, Lovest thou thy Lord? and ask it the second time, and urge it the third time, Lovest thou thy Lord ? till thou grieve it, and shame it out of its stupidity, and it can truly say, Thou knowest that I love him."⁴²

5. We should earnestly desire to be in heaven

"When thou hast thus viewed the goodness of the Lord, and considered of the pleasures that are at his right hand, then proceed on with thy meditation thus : think with thyself, Where have I been; what have I seen? Oh the incomprehensible, astonishing glory! Oh the rare, transcendent beauty! O blessed souls that now enjoy it; that see a thousand times more clearly what I have seen but darkly at this distance, and scarce discerned through the interposing clouds! What a difference is there betwixt my state and theirs! I am sighing, and they are singing: I am sinning, and they are pleasing God: I have an ulcerated, cancerous soul, like the loathsome bodies of Job or Lazarus, a spectacle of pity to those that behold me; but they are perfect and without blemish: I am here entangled in the love of the world, when they are taken up with the love of God: I live indeed amongst the means of grace, and I possess the fellowship of my fellow believers; but I have none of their immediate views of God, nor any of that fellowship that they possess. They have none of my cares and fears; they weep not in secret; they languish not in sorrows; these tears are wiped away from

⁴²Baxter, *Rest*, 582.

their eyes. O happy, a thousand times happy souls! Alas that I must dwell in dirty flesh, when my brethren and companions do dwell with God! Alas that I am lapt in earth, and tied as a mountain down to this inferior world, when they are got above the sun, and have laid aside their lumpish bodies! Alas that I must lie, and pray and wait, and wait and pray, as if my heart were in my knees; when they do nothing but love and praise, and joy and enjoy, as if their hearts were got into the very breast of Christ, and were closely conjoined to his own heart! How far out of sight and reach and hearing of their high enjoyments do I here live, when they feel them, and feed and live upon them! What strange thoughts have I of God! what strange conceivings! what strange affections! I am fain to superscribe my best services, as the blind Athenians, to the unknown God, when they are as well acquainted with him as men that live continually in his house ; and as familiar in their holy praises, as if they were all one with him! What a little of that God, that Christ, that Spirit, that life, that love, that joy, have I! And how soon doth it depart and leave me in sadder darkness! Now and then a spark doth fall upon my heart, and while I gaze upon it, it straight goes out; or rather, my cold, resisting heart doth quench it: but they have their light in his light, and live continually at the spring of joys. Here are we vexing each other with quarrels, and troubling our peace with discontents, when they are one in heart and voice, and daily sound forth their hallelujahs to God with full delightful harmony and consent. Oh what a feast hath my faith beheld; and oh what a famine is yet in my spirit! I have seen a glimpse into the court of God, but, alas! I stand but as a beggar at the doors, when the souls of my companions are admitted in. O blessed souls! I may not, I dare not envy your happiness: I rather rejoice in my brethren's prosperity, and am glad to think of the day when I shall be admitted into your fellowship; but I cannot but look upon you as a child doth on his brother, who sits in the mother's lap while himself stands by, and wish that I were so happy as to be in your place; not to displace you, but to rest there with you. Why must I stay, and groan, and weep, and wait? My Lord is gone, he hath left this earth, and is entered into his glory. My brethren are gone; my friends are there; my house, my hope, my all is there! And must I stay behind to sojourn here ?"⁴³

6. We should take our heart to heaven and see the glories that await us

“Here, then, reader, take thy heart once again, as it were, by the hand ; bring it to the top of the highest mount; if it be possible, to some atlas above the clouds. Show it the kingdom of Christ, and the glory of it. Say to it, All this will thy Lord bestow upon

⁴³Baxter, *Rest*, 583–84.

thee, who hast believed in him, and been a worshipper of him. It is the Father's good pleasure to give thee this kingdom. Seest thou this astonishing glory above thee? Why, all this is thy own inheritance; this crown is thine; these pleasures are thine; this company, this beauteous place is thine; all things are thine, because thou art Christ's, and Christ is thine; when thou wast married to him, thou hadst all this with him.

Thus, take thy heart into the land of promise, show it the pleasant hills and fruitful valleys; show it the clusters of grapes which thou hast gathered; and by those convince it that it is a blessed land, flowing with better than milk and honey: enter the gates of the holy city, walk through the streets of the new Jerusalem, walk about Sion, go round about her, tell the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that thou mayst tell it to thy soul, (Psa 48:12-13). Hath it not the glory of God, and is not her light like to a stone most precious? See the twelve foundations of her walls, and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb therein. The building of the walls of it are of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as clear as glass. The foundation is garnished with precious stones, and the twelve gates are twelve pearls. Every several gate is of one pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, as it were transparent glass; there is no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it. It hath no need of sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof, and the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it. These sayings are faithful and true, and the Lord God of the holy prophets hath sent his angels and his own Son, to show unto his servants the things that must shortly be done, (Rev. 21:11-13 etc). What sayest thou now to all this? This is thy rest, O my soul, and this must be the place of thy everlasting habitation. "Let all the sons of Sion then rejoice, and the daughters of Jerusalem be glad: for great is the Lord, and greatly is he praised in the city of our God: beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Sion: God is known in her palaces for a refuge." (Psa 48:11, 1-3)"⁴⁴

7. Baxter gives more examples of learning from sense

"How pleasant, is drink in the extremity of thirst! The delight of it to a man in a fever, or other drought, can scarcely be expressed. It will make the strength of Samson revive. Oh, then, how delightful will it be to my soul to drink of that fountain of living water, which whoso drinks shall thirst no more! So pleasant is wine, and so refreshing to the spirits, that it is said to make glad the heart of man: how pleasant, then,

⁴⁴Baxter, *Rest*, 589–90.

will that wine of the great marriage be; even that wine which our water was turned into; that best wine, which will be kept till then! How delightful are pleasing odours to our smell! How delightful is perfect music to the ear! How delightful are beautiful sights to the eye; such as curious pictures; sumptuous, adorned, well-contrived buildings; handsome, necessary rooms, walks, prospects; gardens stored with variety of beautiful and odoriferous flowers; or pleasant meadows, which are natural gardens! O, then, think every time thou seest or rememberest these, what a fragrant smell hath the precious ointment which is poured on the head of our glorified Saviour, and which must be poured on the heads of all his saints, which will fill all the room of heaven with its odour and perfume! How delightful is the music of the heavenly host! How pleasing will be those real beauties above, and how glorious the building not made with hands, and the house that God himself doth dwell in, and the walks and prospects in the city of God, and the beauties and delights in the celestial paradise! Think seriously what these must needs be. The like may be said of the delight of the sense of feeling, which, the philosopher saith, is the greatest of all the rest.”⁴⁵

8. More examples of learning from creation

“Compare also the excellences of heaven with those glorious works of the creation which our eyes do now behold. What a deal of wisdom, and power, and goodness, appeareth in and through them to a wise observer! What a deal of the majesty of the great Creator doth shine in the face of this fabric of the world! Surely his works are great and admirable, sought out of them that have pleasure therein (Psa 92:4-5; 111:2; 145:6-12; 10:7,22; 136:4-6 etc; Job 36:24-26). This makes the study of natural philosophy so pleasant, because the works of God are so excellent. What rare workmanship is in the body of a man, yea, in the body of every beast, which makes the anatomical studies so delightful! What excellency in every plant we see, in the beauty of flowers; in the nature, diversity, and use of herbs; in fruits, in roots, in minerals, and what not! But especially if we look to the greater works; if we consider the whole body of this earth, and its creatures, and inhabitants; the ocean of waters, with its motions and dimensions; the variation of the seasons, and of the face of the earth; the intercourse of spring and fall, of summer and winter; what wonderful excellency do these contain! Why think, then, in thy meditations, if these things, which are but servants to sinful man, are yet so full of mysterious worth; what, then, is that place where God himself doth dwell, and is prepared for the just who are perfected

⁴⁵Baxter, *Rest*, 601–2.

with Christ! When thou walkest forth in the evening, look upon the stars how they glisten, and in what number they bespangle the firmament: if in the day-time, look up to the glorious sun. View the wide-expanded, encompassing heavens, and say to thyself, What glory is in the least of yonder stars! what a vast, what a bright, resplendent body hath yonder moon, and every planet! oh, what an unconceivable glory hath the sun! Why, all this is nothing to the glory of heaven! Yonder sun must there be laid aside as useless, for it would not be seen for the brightness of God. I shall live above all yonder glory; yonder is but darkness to the lustre of my Father's house. I shall be as glorious as that sun myself; yonder is but as the wall of the palace-yard; as the poet saith,

"If in heaven's outward courts such beauty be,
What is the glory which the saints do see !"

So think of the rest of the creatures. This whole earth is but my Father's footstool: this thunder is nothing to his dreadful voice: these winds are nothing to the breath of his mouth. So much wisdom and power as appeareth in all these; so much, and far much more greatness, and goodness, and loving delights, shall I enjoy in the actual fruition of God. Surely, if the rain which rains, and the sun which shines, on the just and unjust, be so wonderful; the Sun, then, which must shine on none but saints and angels, must needs be wonderful and ravishing in glory."⁴⁶

9. Examples of learning from providence (recorded in the Bible)

"Compare the things which thou shalt enjoy above, with the excellency of those admirable works of providence which God doth exercise in the church and in the world. What glorious things hath the Lord wrought! and yet we shall see more glorious than these. Would it not be an astonishing sight to see the sea stand as a wall on the right hand and on the left, and the dry land appear in the midst, and the people of Israel pass safely through, and Pharaoh and his people swallowed up ? What if we should see but such a sight now ? If we had seen the ten plagues of Egypt, or had seen the rock to gush forth streams, or had seen manna or quails rained down from heaven, or had seen the earth open and swallow up the wicked, or had seen their armies slain with hailstones, with an angel, or by one another; would not all these have been wondrous, glorious sights ? But we shall see far greater things than these: and as our sights shall be more wonderful, so also they shall be more sweet: there shall be no blood nor wrath intermingled. We shall not then cry out as David, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?" Would it not have been an astonishing sight to have seen

⁴⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 603–4.

the sun stand still in the firmament, or to have seen Ahaz's dial go ten degrees backward ? Why, we shall see when there shall be no sun to shine at all; we shall behold for ever a sun of more incomparable brightness."⁴⁷

10. Baxter teaches us to learn of heaven from all circumstances of life

“Certainly, by such a skilful, industrious improvement, we might have a fuller taste of Christ and heaven in every bit of bread that we eat, and in every draught of beer we drink, than most men have in the use of the sacrament. If thou prosper in the world, and thy labour succeed, let it make thee more sensible of thy perpetual prosperity: if thou be weary of thy labours, let it make thy thoughts of rest more sweet: if things go cross and hard with thee in the world, let it make thee the more earnestly desire that day when all thy sorrows and sufferings shall cease. Is thy body refreshed with food or sleep? remember the unconceivable refreshings with Christ. Dost thou hear any news that makes thee glad? remember what glad tidings it will be to hear the sound of the trump of God, and the absolving sentence of Christ, our Judge. Art thou delighting thyself in the society of the saints? remember the everlasting amiable fraternity thou shalt have with perfected saints in rest. Is God communicating himself to thy spirit? why, remember that time of thy highest advancement, when thy joy shall be full, as thy communion is full. Dost thou hear the raging noise of the wicked, and the disorders of the vulgar, and the confusions of the world, like the noise in a crowd, or the roaring of the waters? why think of the blessed agreement in heaven, and the melodious harmony in that choir of God. Dost thou hear or feel the tempest of wars, or see any cloud of blood arising? remember the day when thou shalt be housed with Christ, where there is nothing but calmness and amiable union, and where we shall solace ourselves in perfect peace, under the wings of the Prince of peace for ever. Thus you may see, what advantages to a heavenly life every condition and creature doth afford us, if we had but hearts to apprehend and improve them.”⁴⁸

11. Even the stars are as nothing compared to the glory to come

“Yonder is the Goshen, the region of light; this is a land of palpable darkness. Yonder twinkling stars, that shining moon, the radiant sun, are all but as the lanterns hanged out at thy Father's house, to light thee while thou walkest in the dark streets of the

⁴⁷Baxter, *Rest*, 604.

⁴⁸Baxter, *Rest*, 542.

earth : but little dost thou know (ah, little indeed!) the glory and blessed mirth that is within!"⁴⁹

12. Remember the Lord's kindnesses to us, as evidence of his goodness, and guarantee of glory

"Hast thou forgotten the time, nay, the many, very many times, when he found thee in secret all in tears; when he heard thy dolorous sighs and groans, and left all to come and comfort thee; when he came in upon thee, and took thee up, as it were in his arms, and asked thee, Poor soul, what aileth thee? Dost thou weep, when I have wept so much? Be of good cheer; thy wounds are saving, and not deadly. It is I that have made them, who mean thee no hurt: though I let out thy blood, I will not let out thy life.

O methinks I remember yet his voice, and feel those embracing arms that took me up: how gently did he handle me! how carefully did he dress my wounds, and bind them up ! Methinks I hear him still saying to me, Poor sinner, though thou hast dealt unkindly with me, and cast me off, yet will not I do so by thee; though thou hast set light by me and all my mercies, yet both I and all are thine: what wouldst thou have, that I can give thee; and what dost thou want that I cannot give thee? If any thing I have will pleasure thee, thou shalt have it: if any thing in heaven or earth will make thee happy, why it is all thine own. Wouldst thou have pardon? thou shalt have it; I freely forgive thee all the debt. Wouldst thou have grace and peace? thou shalt have them both. Wouldst thou have myself? why, behold, I am thine, thy Friend, thy Lord, thy Brother, thy Husband, and thy Head. Wouldst thou have the Father? why I will bring thee to him; and thou shalt have him in and by me. These were my Lord's reviving words: these were the melting, healing, raising, quickening passages of love. After all this, when I was doubtful of his love, methinks I yet remember his overcoming and convincing arguments. Why, sinner, have I done so much to testify my love, and yet dost thou doubt ? Have I made thy believing it the condition of enjoying it, and yet dost thou doubt ? Have I offered thee myself and love so long, and yet dost thou question my willingness to be thine? Why, what could I have done more than I have done; at what dearer rate should I tell thee that I love thee? Read yet the story of my bitter passion; wilt thou not believe that it proceeded from love? Did I ever give thee cause to be so jealous of me, or to think so hardly of me, as thou dost ? Have I made myself in the gospel a lion to thine enemies, and a lamb to thee; and dost thou so overlook my lamb-like nature? Have I set mine arms and heart there open to thee,

⁴⁹Baxter, *Rest*, 628.

and wilt thou not believe but they are shut? Why, if I had been willing to let thee perish, I could have done it at a cheaper rate."⁵⁰

13. We should delight in this world as an anticipation of the next

"What a beautiful fabric is this great house which here we dwell in! The floor so dressed with various herbs, and flowers, and trees, and watered with springs, and rivers, and seas! The roof so wide expanded, so admirably adorned, such astonishing workmanship in every part! The studies of a hundred ages more, if the world should last so long, would not discover the mysteries of divine skill, which are to be found in the narrow compass of our bodies. What anatomist is not amazed in his search and observations! What wonders, then, do sun, and moon, and stars, and orbs, and seas, and winds, and fire, and air, and earth, etc afford us! And hath God prepared such a house for our silly, sinful, corruptible flesh, and for a soul imprisoned? and doth he bestow so many millions of wonderful rarities, even upon his enemies? Oh, then, what a dwelling must that needs be, which he prepareth for pure, refined, spiritual, glorified ones ; and which he will bestow only upon his dearly beloved children, whom he hath chosen out, to make his mercy on them glorified and admired !"⁵¹

14. The chief good of heaven will be God himself

"As all good whatsoever is comprised in God, and all in the creature are but drops of this ocean; so all the glory of the blessed is comprised in their enjoyment of God: and if there be any mediate joys there, they are but drops from this. If men and angels should study to speak the blessedness of that estate in one word, what can they say beyond this, That it is the nearest enjoyment of God? Say, They have God; and you say, They have all that is worth the having. Oh the full joys offered to a believer in that one sentence of Christ's! I would not, for all the world, that one verse had been left out of the Bible: "Father, I will, that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me," (John 17:24). Every word is full of life and joy. If the queen of Sheba had cause to say of Solomon's glory, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, that stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom," (1 Kings 10:8); then, sure, they that stand continually before God, and see his glory, and the glory of the Lamb, are somewhat more than happy: to them will Christ "give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God;" and "to eat of the hidden manna," (Rev 2:7,17). Yea, "He will

⁵⁰Baxter, *Rest*, 628–29.

⁵¹Baxter, *Rest*, 637.

make them pillars in the temple of God, and they shall go no more out: and he will write upon them the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God, and his own new name," (Rev 3:12). Yea, more, if more may be, "He will grant them to sit with him in his throne," (Rev 3:21). "These are they who come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them: and the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," (Rev 7:14,15,17). And may we not now boast with the spouse, "This is my beloved, O daughters of Jerusalem!" And this is the glory of the saints! O blind, deceived world, can you show us such a glory? "This is the city of our God, where the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." "The glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof," (Rev 21:3, 23). "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. These sayings are faithful and true, and these are the things that must shortly be done," (Rev 22: 3,4,6). And now we say, as Mephibosheth, Let the world take all besides, if we may but see the face of our Lord in peace. If the Lord lift up the light of his countenance on us here, it puts more gladness in our hearts than the world's increase can do, (Psa 4:6-7). How much more, when in his light we shall have light without darkness; and he shall make us full of joy with his countenance!"⁵²

15. Meditate on what it means to be beloved of God

“Reader, stop here and think awhile what a state this is. Is it a small thing in thine eyes to be beloved of God; to be the son, the spouse, the love, the great delight of the king of glory? Christian, believe this, and think on it; thou shalt be eternally embraced in the arms of that love, which was from everlasting, and will extend to everlasting: of that love, which brought the Son of God’s love from heaven to earth, from the earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to glory: that love, which was weary, hungry, tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, crucified, pierced; which did fast, pray, teach, heal, weep, sweat, bleed, die: that love will eternally embrace them.”⁵³

⁵²Baxter, *Rest*, 18–19.

⁵³Baxter, *Rest*, 28–29.

“Oh what then will thy joys be (...) when the angels shall bring thee to Christ, and when Christ shall, as it were, take thee by the hand and lead thee into thy purchased possession, and bid thee welcome to his rest, and present thee unspotted before his Father, and give a place about his throne!”⁵⁴

Not only that, but God will take joy in us:

“Is there such joy in heaven at thy conversion, and will there be none at thy glorification?”⁵⁵

16. We should picture in our minds the things of heaven, that our affections might be stirred

“Get the liveliest picture of them in thy mind that possibly thou canst; meditate of them as if thou wert all the while beholding them, and is if thou wert ever hearing the Hallelujas, while thou art thinking of them; till thou canst say, Methinks I see a glimpse of the glory; methinks I hear the shouts of joy and praise; methinks I even stand by Abraham and David, Peter and Paul, and more of these triumphing souls; methinks I even see the Son of God appearing in the clouds, and the world standing at his bar to receive their doom; methinks I hear him say, " Come, ye blessed of my Father," and even see them go rejoicing into the joy of their Lord. My very dreams of these things have deeply affected me, and should not these just suppositions affect me much more? What, if I had seen, with Paul, those unutterable things, should I not have been exalted, and that, perhaps, above measure, as well as he? What, if I had stood in the room of Stephen, and seen heaven opened, and Christ sitting at the right hand of God? Surely that one sight was worth the suffering his storm of stones. Oh that I might but see what he did see, though I also suffered what he did suffer! What if I had seen such a sight as Micaiah saw; the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left? Why, these men of God did see such things; and I shall shortly see far more than ever they saw till they were loosed from this flesh, as I must be. And thus you see how the familiar conceiving of the state of blessedness, as the Spirit hath in a condescending language expressed it, and our strong raising of suppositions from our bodily senses, will further our affections in this heavenly work.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴Baxter, *Rest*, 31.

⁵⁵Baxter, *Rest*, 31.

⁵⁶Baxter, *Rest*, 600.

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