

THE ELDERS BEFORE THE THRONE

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A SERMON
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 BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON
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*“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats:
 and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,
 clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold....
 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne,
 and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne,
 saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power:
 for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”*
Revelation 4:4, 10-11

THE universe of God is one, heaven and earth are not so separate as unbelief has dreamed. As the Lord has but one family, written in one register, redeemed with one blood, quickened by one Spirit, so this whole household abides in one habitation evermore. We who are in the body abide in the lower room which is sometimes dark and cold, but bears sufficient marks that it is a room in God's house, for it is to the eye of our faith often lit up with heavenly luster, and we, even we, while we are yet here, are by blessed earnestness made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

It is the same house, I say, but ours is the lower room, while our glorified brethren are up there, in the upper story, where the sunlight streams in everlastingly, where no chilling winds or poisonous breath can ever reach. It was well said that God's great house seems to have two wings, the one was a hospital and the other a palace.

We are as yet in the wing on the left hand side, which is the hospital. We came into it sick even unto death, leprous to our very core, polluted from head to foot, having no soundness in us anywhere. And in this hospital, we are undergoing the process of cure—a cure which is already certain, which is soon to be perfected.

And then we shall pass from the hospital, the lazar-house, into the palace, where “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” we shall be recognized as the aristocracy of God, princes of the blood-royal of the universe, “sons of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus.” Still it is but one building, one roof covers the whole, both lazar-house and palace, one family, we dwell in it—one church, above, beneath, though now divided by the narrow partition of death.

Now, to a great extent there is a likeness between the lower room and the upper room. As on earth we prepare for heaven, so the state of the saints on earth is heaven foreshadowed. In many respects the condition of the child of God on earth is a type of his condition in heaven, and I may say without fear of question that what the character of the saints is above, that should be the character of the saints below. We may very safely take for our example those glorified spirits. We need not be afraid that we shall be led astray by imitating them, by learning their occupations, or by attempting to share their joys.

Surely the things in heaven are patterns of the things on earth, and as *they* are before the throne so ought we to be, and so shall we be in proportion as we live up to our privileges, and receive the likeness and image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, beloved, it is upon this subject that I want to speak this morning. God is making heaven very near to us. We are now so large a church that according to the laws of mortality, we lose five or six every month by death, and frequently two or three are removed in a week. We can hardly hope to meet together upon a single Sabbath without hearing that another of the stars is set.

Some little time ago we went to the grave with an excellent elder of our church, who had long known the Master, and had served Him well, and now, during the coming week, it will be our lot to perform the same mournful office for another brother who has been in Christ, I suppose, these forty or fifty years, and who has served this church for some little time with industry and zeal, but this week has been removed from our midst to join “the general assembly and church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven.”

The veil grows thinner and thinner, and our faith in the unseen grows stronger. As the advanced guard of the army wades through the stream, and we hear their triumphant shouts upon the other shore, this world fades away, and that better land stands out in stronger and more glorious reality than it did before. Come, let us talk to one another by the way this morning of that better land, and let us encourage each other’s hearts to make ourselves through God such as *they* are who sit upon their thrones, and to make *this* land, through the Spirit, such as that land is where God sheds His light forever.

With regard to the spirits before the throne, we shall have three things to say this morning. First, a little *concerning their state and enjoyments*, then further, *concerning their occupations and spirit*, and a few words with regard to *their testimony and precepts to us, as, speaking from the upper spheres, they urge us to follow their example*.

I. First then brethren, with regard to THE STATE AND ENJOYMENTS OF THE SPIRITS BEFORE THE THRONE.

In John’s vision you perceive that the church of Christ is represented by the four-and-twenty elders who sat round the throne. We are to look upon them as being the representatives of the great body of the faithful gathered to their eternal rest.

1. Mark then, in the first place, that the saints in heaven are represented as “*elders*,” which we take to refer not merely to the office of the eldership, as it is exercised among us, although it seems most fitting that the officers should be the representatives of the whole body, but the reference is rather to the fullness of growth of believers before the throne.

Here we have elders, and those who are elders in office should be chosen, because they have had spiritual experience, are well taught in the things of the kingdom of heaven, and are therefore elders by grace as well as elders by office, but in all our churches we have many who are babes in Christ, who as yet can only receive the elements of the Gospel.

We have many others who are young men, strong, but not matured. They have the vigor of manhood, but they have not yet the ripeness of advanced age. The elders in the church are those who by reason of years have had their senses exercised, they are not the saplings of the forest, but the well-rooted trees, they are not the blades of corn up-springing, but the full corn in the ear awaiting the reaper’s sickle. Such are the saints before the throne. They have made wondrous strides in knowledge, they understand now the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of the love of Christ, which still surpasses even *their* knowledge.

The meanest, if there be such differences, the meanest of the glorified understands more of the things of God than the greatest divine on earth. The rending of the veil of death is the removal of much of our ignorance. It may be that the saints in heaven progress in knowledge—that is possible, but it is certain that, at the time of their departure they made a wondrous spring, they are babes no longer, they are children and infant beginners no more, God teaches them in one five minutes, by a sight of the face of Jesus, more than they could have learned in threescore years and ten while present in the body and absent from the Lord.

Their heresies are all cleared away with their sins, their mistakes are all removed, the same hand which wipes away all tears from their eyes wipes away all motes from their eyes too. Then they become sound in doctrine, skillful in teaching, they become masters in Israel by the sudden infusion of the wisdom of God by the Holy Ghost. They are “elders” before the throne. They are not unripe corn gathered green and damp, but they are all fully ripe, and they come to the garner as shocks of corn come in their season.

Perhaps they are represented as elders to show the dignity and gravity which shall surround saints of God in heaven. We sometimes hear complaints made about the younger members of churches, that they are somewhat light in their conversation. Well, this has always been the fault of young people, and as I said the other day, when one complained, *I could not make lambs into sheep*, and while they were lambs I suppose they would show some playfulness.

It seems to be the natural failing of young people to be overflowing with mirth, and sometimes overtaken with levity. But there is a gravity which is very becoming in Christians, and there is a solidity which is extremely comely in the young believer, and I think when we make a profession of our faith in Christ, though we are not to cast away our cheerful faces, but to be more happy than we ever were before, yet we must put away all unseemly levity, and walk as those who are looking for the coming of the Son of Man, hearing this voice in our ears, “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!”

Now, that fault can never be brought against the church of God before the throne, there they are elders, glorious, blissful, happy, but yet serene and majestic in their joy. Theirs is not the prattling joy of the child, but the deep silent bliss of the full-grown man. As the senators in the Roman senate sat down in solemn grandeur, so that even the invading barbarians were overawed by their majestic bearing, so let our holy tranquility and joyful serenity cast an influence over the foes of our religion.

Look upwards, Christians. There are the elders before the throne, representatives of what you and I, and all of us who trust in Christ, shall soon be, let us be laying aside childish things, let us be getting ready for the elders’ dignity, let us leave the toy, the trifle, the plaything, to those who know not the immortal manhood of believers, and let us go on unto perfection, growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In passing, I may observe, that the number of *four-and-twenty* is somewhat puzzling. There have been different attempts made to account for it. They say that this was the number of the Sanhedrin, but that is not clear. Others think that as the number twelve was the symbol of the Jewish church, in the twelve tribes, so twelve more may have been added to represent the accession of the Gentile church, or it may show the multiplication of the church, that though small, so that it is numbered by twelve, its number, while still definite and complete, is now larger than it was before.

But still better, I think, as there were twenty-four courses of Levites, who were porters at the gate of the temple, and twenty-four courses of priests who offered sacrifice, so the number twenty-four is made use of to show that the service of God in His temple is complete, that there are as many as will be wanted, that every part of the divine service will be taken up, and around that altar which smokes before God eternally there shall be a full complement of those who shall bow before Him, and do Him homage.

2. But secondly, you will notice that these elders are said to be *around the throne*. We suppose, as near as we can catch the thought of John, sitting in a semi-circle, as the Jewish Sanhedrin did around the Prince of Israel. It is a somewhat singular thing that in the passage in Canticles, where Solomon sings of the king sitting at his table, the Hebrew has it “a round table.” From this, some expositors, I think without straining the text, have said, “There is an equality among the saints.”

In heaven, they are not some sitting at the head and some sitting lower down, but there is an equality in the position and condition of glorified spirits. Certainly that idea is conveyed by the position of the four-and-twenty elders. We do not find one of them nearer than the other, but they all sat round about the throne. We believe then, that the condition of glorified spirits in heaven is that of nearness to Christ, clear vision of His glory, constant access to His court, and familiar fellowship with His person.

Nor do we think that there is any difference before the throne between one saint and another. We believe that all the people of God, apostles, martyrs, ministers, or private and obscure Christians, shall all have the same place *near the throne*, where they shall forever gaze upon their exalted Lord and forever be satisfied in His love.

There shall not be some at a distance, far away in the remote streets of the celestial city, and others in the broad thoroughfares, there shall not be some near the center, and others far away on the verge of

the wide circumference, but they shall all be near to Christ, all ravished with His love, all eating and drinking at the same table with Him, as equally His favorites and His friends.

Now brothers and sisters, as we bade you imitate the saints in their eldership and perfection, so would we exhort you to imitate them in their nearness to Christ. Oh, let us be on earth as the elders are in heaven, sitting round about the throne. May Christ be the center of this church! May He be the center of your thoughts, the center of your life.

If an angel should fly across this assembly this morning, when he came back to heaven, could he say, “I saw them in the house of God, sitting around the throne. Their eyes were gazing on the slaughtered Lamb, their hearts were loving and praising *Him*, they were desiring to do *Him* homage and to pay *Him* reverence”?

And what think you of tomorrow, and the other days of the week? Will it be true of you that you are sitting before the throne? Brothers and sisters, we are out of our proper place when we are looking after anything but Christ. “We are not our own; we are bought with a price.” Why live as if we were our own? He is our husband, our soul is espoused to Him.

Oh! how can we live at such a distance from Him? He is our life, He makes us live, He makes us blest, how can we be so much forgetful of Him? How can our hearts be such strangers to their beloved? Jesu! draw us nearer to Yourself! Oh to be nearer to Your throne, Lord, even while we are here! O take thou us up to Thee, or else come down to us. Say unto us, “Abide in me, and I in you,” and permit our souls to say, “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.”

*“Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live;
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without Thee I dare not die.”*

3. A third point of likeness strikes us at once. It seems that the elders sitting around the throne were represented to the illuminated eye of John as “*clothed in white raiment.*” Not in raiment of party colors, whereon there were some spots, and yet some signs of whiteness. They are without fault before the throne of God, they have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” and the Spirit of God also has so thoroughly renewed them that they are “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” they have been presented holy and unblameable before the throne of God.

Brothers and sisters, in this too, they are an example to us. Oh that the Spirit of God might keep the members of this church, that our garments might be always white. Perfection we must not hope to see here, but oh, we must aim after it. If one should never unite with a Christian church till he found one which is perfect and free from all fault, then such a man must be a schismatic forever, for with no Christian people could he ever join.

Yet, this is what we aspire unto—to be faultless before God. We desire to so walk, and to so act among men, that our conduct may never bring a slur upon our profession—that our language, our actions, our motives, everything that is about us, may witness to the fact that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of Him.

O brothers and sisters, it is impossible for one pastor, assisted even by the most earnest of elders, to oversee so large a flock as this. Let me ask, have you kept your garments white this last week? Oh, if you have stained them, I beseech you, repent, bitterly repent before God, and if any of you have backslidden, I pray you, do not be hypocrites, let your guilt be fully confessed before God. If you cannot honor this church, do not dishonor it, if you cannot glorify Christ by your walk and conversation, at least do not trample under foot His blood, and put His cross to an open shame. There is nothing which can so injure a church, and cut the sinews of its strength, as the unholiness of its members.

When we are “fair as the moon, and clear as the sun,” then we shall be “terrible as an army with banners,” but not till then. Those blots upon the escutcheon, those spots upon the garment, are soon

perceived by a lynx-eyed world, and then they turn round and say, "Ah! these are your Christians, this is your religion!" The sons of Belial make excuses for their own conscience, and go on in their sin, hardened by our mistakes. Oh, let this be your prayer, I exhort you, you who are mighty in prayer, never forget this day and night, "Lord, keep Thy people, hold Thou them up."

I can say it has been at all times the bitterest draught I have ever had to drink, when any who have professed the name of Christ have turned back unto vanity. To bury you is but a blessed duty in comparison with noting and correcting backsliding and apostasy. I know my prayer for myself has been a hundred times, "A speedy death, a soon and sudden sleeping beneath the green turf, or even a painful, agonizing, languishing decay, upon a bed of pain, rather than you should live to see your pastor stain his profession, and fall from his integrity."

If it be so with the minister, it must be so with each of you. Better for you that you depart at once than that you should live bearing the name of Christ, to make that name a reproach and a by-word among the heathen. Lord, help Thou us, that we, like Thy saints above, may be clothed in white garments.

4. Further, to carry on the parallel. You perceive that these elders *exercised a priesthood*. Indeed, their being clothed in white garments, while it is an emblem of their purity, also represents them as being priests unto God. They themselves expressly sing in the tenth verse of the fifth chapter, "Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests." They exercise the office of the priesthood, as you perceive, by the double offering of prayer and praise. They hold in their hands the censers full of sweet incense and the harps which give forth melodious sounds.

Brethren, in the wilderness of old they were not all priests. One special tribe, and one family out of that tribe, alone could exercise that office, the rest of the people stood in the outer court. As for the most holy place, into that only came the high priest, and he only once a year, so much exclusion was there in that age of shadows.

But now all believers are priests, we have all a right to stand in the priest's place, to offer sacrifice and incense. Nay, more, through Christ we enter into that which is within the veil, and stand in the most holy place, and look at the bright light from the Shekinah, fearing not that we shall die, but having boldness and confidence through the new and living way, the rent body of Christ. The saints before the throne are represented as all of them in the holy place, round the throne, all officiating, every one of them presenting sacrifice.

Brethren, what are *we* doing? Let us look up to them as the priests of God, and then ask ourselves, are *we* celebrating His worship too? Brother, did you this morning, before you came up to this house, lift up your hand with the bowl of incense in it, in your earnest prayer for a blessing upon His people? Have you this day, in our sacred song, been laying your fingers mystically among the strings of your golden harp? What did you do last week, my brethren? What *were* you? Can you say that you were a priest? Or must you not blush that you were rather a buyer and a seller, or a thinker and a writer, than a priest unto our God? And yet this is our high calling, this is our blessed vocation.

Our earthly calling is but little honor to us, nor should it engross our richest thoughts, our heavenly calling is of the most importance, it is that which is to last forever, it is that which should have the cream of our soul's attention. We are priests. Oh! brethren, if we have failed in the past, may God give us grace for the future! and during the coming days of the next work-day week, may He help us, that our buyings and our sellings, our travelings and our tarryings at home, may all be the exercise of priesthood!

You know, you can make "the bells upon the horses" holiness to the Lord, and the very pots of your house can be as the bowls upon the altar, you need not go out of your everyday callings to be priests, but be priests in your callings. Sanctify the Lord God in your workshops, in your fields, in your marketplaces, in your exchanges, and whatsoever you do, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, who has made you priests and kings unto Him.

I know there is a sad tendency among us all to leave the priesthood to some peculiar clan. Mark you, members of this church, I will be no priest for you. It is as much as I can do to exercise the priesthood to

which God calls me on my own account, to offer my own thanks and my own petitions. I will have none of your responsibilities, you must be priests for yourselves. You cannot shift this burden off, nor would you wish, I am sure, if you be true-hearted.

You say you are poor, you are unknown, you have no talent. You need it not, these cannot make you priests. How came the sons of Aaron to the priesthood? By birth. So with you. You have been “born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, nor of blood, but of God,” and the priesthood is the inalienable inheritance of the new birth. Exercise your office then, be you who you may, O you beloved of the Lord. In the name of Him who has “begotten you again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” live as men sanctified for divine service, who cannot and must not be servants of men and slaves of sin.

5. Once more and I think I shall have said enough upon this first point. There is yet another likeness between the saints in heaven and those on earth. You perceive that these *had on their heads crowns of gold*. They reigned with Christ. He was a king, and He made them kings with Him. As in the old Persian court the princes of the blood wore crowns, so in the court of heaven the princes of the blood, the brethren of the Lord, are crowned too. They are royal senators, they sit upon thrones, even as He has overcome, and sits down with His Father on His throne.

These thrones they have to show their dominion, their rights and jurisdiction. Know you not that we shall judge angels, and that when Christ shall come He will bring His people with Him, and they will sit upon His throne as co-assessors with Him? Then the wicked, the persecutors, the revilers of God’s people, shall be brought to judgment, and the saints whom they despised shall be their judges. So that when Christ shall say, “Depart, ye cursed,” there shall be heard the thundering assent of the ten thousands of His saints, as they say “Amen,” and confirm from their hearts the sentence of the all-righteous Judge. Therefore do these elders sit upon their thrones.

Now, beloved, let us imitate them in this. “Oh!” say you, “but I cannot wear a crown as they do.” Nevertheless, you are a king, for they who are Christ’s are kings. Take care brother, that you wear your crown, by reigning over your lusts. Reign over your sins. Reign over your passions. Be as a king in the midst of all that would lead you astray. Christ Jesus has broken the neck of your sin, put your foot upon it, keep it under, subdue it. Be king in the dominions of your own being. In the world at large act a king’s part.

If any would tempt you to betray Christ for gain, say, “How can I? I am a king. How shall I betray Christ?” Let the nobility of your nature come out in your actions. Forgive in a royal manner, as a king can forgive. Be ready to give to others as God has helped you, as a king gives. Let your liberality of spirit be right royal. Let your actions never be mean, sneaking, cowardly, dastardly. Do the right thing, and defy the worst. Dare all your foes in the pursuit of that which is right, and let men see while they look upon you that there is a something under your homely appearance which they cannot understand.

Men make a deal of fuss about the blood of the aristocracy, I dare say it is not very different from the blood of crossing-sweepers. But there is a great deal of difference between the life-blood of the saints and the life-blood of the proudest prince, for they who love Christ have fed upon His flesh, and have drunk of His blood, and have been made partakers of the divine nature. These are the royal ones, these are the aristocrats, these are the nobility, and all are mean beside.

Christians, perhaps some of you have not reigned as kings during the last week. Perhaps you have been either murmuring, like poor whining beggars, or you have been scraping, like dunghill rakers with your covetousness, or you have been sinning, like idle boys in the street, who roll in the mire. You have not lived up to your kingship.

Now I pray you, ask God’s grace that during the week to come you may say of sin, “I cannot touch it, I am a king, I cannot demean myself with it,” that you may say of this earth’s dross, “I cannot go down and scrape that, my heritage is above,” that you may be able to say of everything that is low and mean, “Shall such a man as I do this? How can I come down from the elevated position to which God has called me, to act as others act, from their motives and with their ends?” Let then, the state of the

saints above, while it is the theme of our delightful thought, while we anticipate the time when we shall fully partake of it, be also an example to us while in these lands below.

II. Briefly upon our second point—THE OCCUPATION AND SPIRIT OF THOSE GLORIFIED ONES, AS THEY SHOULD BE IMITATED BY US BELOW.

1. Notice their occupation. First of all it is one of *humility*. At the tenth verse in our fourth chapter, we perceive it is written, “They fall down before him.” They are kings, but yet they fall down—they wear royal crowns, but yet they prostrate themselves. They are second to none in God’s universe, they stand as first in the peerage of creation, yet before the King they have no honor and no esteem, but as if they were slaves and menials, they cast themselves upon their faces before His throne, having nothing of their own whereof to glory, but boasting alone in Him.

The more holy, the more humble. Where holiness is in perfection, there humility is in perfection too. The cherubim veil their faces with their wings, while they cry, “Holy, holy, holy, LORD God of Sabbaoth.” So do these elders, taking the same posture of humility, they bow before the throne.

Brothers and sisters, are we as humble as we should be? If we think we are, we at once betray our pride. But let us understand how unseemly anything but humility must be to us. We are yet on earth, if they in heaven boast not, how dare we? We are yet sinful and erring, if the spotless ones bow what shall we do? If we threw dust and ashes on our head, and acknowledged ourselves to be the vilest of the vile, yet were the words not too coarse for us, nor the action too humiliating. Far hence from us be the pride which would let us exalt ourselves.

Pride is natural to us all brethren, we cannot get rid of it, even though we strive against it. What shall we say of those who nurture it—whose very carriage and walk betray the pride of their hearts? What shall we say of the pride which finds root in the purse, or that which shows itself in outward array and garments? What shall we say of the pride of station and of rank, which will not permit the professedly Christian to speak with his poorer brother?

Oh! these are damnable things. I hope we despise, and are rid of these, but there is a subtler pride—a pride which apes humility—a pride which comes in after prayer, or after preaching, or after anything that is done for Christ. Let us strive against it, and be it our constant and daily endeavor to fall before the throne, “While less than nothing we can boast, and vanity confess.”

2. But as they fall before the throne in humility, you will note that they express their *gratitude*. It is said they cast their crowns before the throne. They know where they got them from, and they know to whom to ascribe the praise. Their crowns are their own, and therefore, they wear them on their heads, their crowns were Jesu’s gift, and therefore, they cast them at His feet. They wear their crown, for He has made them kings, and they cannot refuse the dignity, but they cast the crown at His feet, for they are only kings by right received from Him, and acknowledge Him thus to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

It was a custom you know, in imperial Rome, for those kings who held dominion under the emperor, on certain occasions to take off their crowns and lay them down before the emperor, so that when he bade them put them on again, they had fully recognized that their rights of kingship flowed only through him. So do they who are before the throne. With what rapture, with what joy, with what delight, do they cast their crowns there! To think they have a crown, and a crown to cast before Him!

Brothers and sisters, I am afraid when you and I get any graces, or have been made useful in Christ’s cause, we are glad for the thing’s sake, but we are not right, if so, we should be glad because we have something to cast at *His* feet. Have you faith? I must thank *Him* for faith, I must lay it at His feet and say, “Jesu, use my faith for Your glory, for You are its author and finisher.” If you and I shall by divine grace persevere to the end, and shall arrive at heaven, it will be a joy to think that we are saved, but we will lay it all at the door of love divine.

Will you wear a crown, believer? Will you accept jot or tittle of the glory? O no, you will each of you disown anything like the Arminian’s proud boast of free self-will. It will be grace, grace, grace alone in heaven. There will be no division and no discord in that eternal hymn. We will cast our crowns

at once before Him, and we will say, “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the praise.” We imitate them then in this—in our gratitude mingled with humility.

3. Further, I well perceive that these elders spent their time in *joyous song*. How glorious was that strain—“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” These elders knew that the time was come when all earth and heaven should be more than usually glad.

They, with the four living creatures, whom we take to be the representatives of some special order of presence-angels, about whom we know but little, led the strain, and as the music rolled through the aisles of heaven, distant angels, who were in all parts of God’s dominion keeping watch and ward, stood still and listened till they had caught the strain, and then they joined with loudest notes, till from north and south, and east and west, from the highest star and from the uttermost depths, there came up the blessed refrain from ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing,” till, as these angelic ones sent up the song, the inferior creatures caught the divine infection, and in heaven and earth, the sea and the uttermost depths thereof, the voice was heard, and all creatures responded, while the universe echoed with the song, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

This is the occupation of saints before the throne, be it yours, brothers and sisters. Let us, as God’s redeemed, sing with all our hearts, and let us enlist others in the strain. Let us remember that we are to be leaders in the hymn of God’s works. We are to begin with, “Bless the LORD, O my soul,” but we are not to end there. We are to go on bidding all God’s works praise Him, till we come to a climax like that of David, “Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure; bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul.”

The world is the organ—we are the players. We are to put our fingers upon the notes, and wake the universe to thunders of acclaim. We are not to rest with our own feeble note, but we must wake even the dumb earth itself, till all the planets, listening to our earth, and joining her song, shall sing forth the music of the ages. God give you, brothers and sisters, to imitate the saints thus.

Some of you perhaps are good hands at groaning, perhaps some of you have come up here today mourning and murmuring, lay these things aside, take up your proper vocation, and now smite the strings of your harp, magnify the Lord, let the day of jubilee come to your spirits. Ye saints of God, rejoice, yea, in your God exceedingly rejoice.

4. Yet once again, these saints not only offered praise, but *prayer*. This was the meaning of the bowls, which are so foolishly translated vials. A vial is precisely the opposite of the vessel that was intended, the vial is long and narrow, whereas, this is broad and shallow. A bowl is meant, full of incense, covered over with a lid, and perforated with holes, through which the smoke of the incense rises. This does not mean that the four-and-twenty elders offer the prayers of the saints below, but their own prayers.

Some have thought, Is there any prayer in heaven? Certainly, there is room for prayer in heaven. If you want proof, we have it in the chapter which follows the one out of which we have been reading this morning—the ninth verse of the sixth chapter—“I saw under the altar the souls of them who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” There is prayer.

Perhaps the prayers of the saints are the major portion of that perpetual litany which goes up to heaven. But leaving that for a moment, let us imitate them. If *they* pray, how much more reason have we? If they plead for the universal church, they who enjoy the rest of God, how should we pray who are still in this land of temptation and of sin, who see the perils of our brethren, know their weaknesses and their afflictions. Let us draw near unto God, let us never cease day and night to offer intercession for the whole company of the elect.

5. I must not forget, however, here, that these elders before the throne were ready not only for prayer and praise, but for *all kinds of service*. You remember there was one of them, when John wept, who said, “Weep not.” Depend upon it, that elder had been occupied in visiting the sick when he was on earth, and often when he had gone into their cottages and found them sorrowing, he had said unto them, “Weep not,” and the good man had not lost his character when he went to heaven, although it had been spiritualized and perfected, and seeing John weeping, he said to him, “Weep not.”

Ah! those saints before the throne, if there were mourners there, would comfort them I know, and if they could be sent down here to visit any of the sorrowing children of God, they would be too glad to do it.

Then there was, you remember, another of the elders, who said to John, for his instruction, “Who are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that came out of great tribulation.”

I venture to believe that this elder used to teach a catechumen class on earth, that he had been in the habit of teaching young people, and he put the question to John first, as he had been in the habit aforetime of putting it to young disciples on earth. The saved ones would be ready to teach us now, if they could, and they do today bear testimony for Christ, for to the ages to come God through His church makes known to principalities and powers the exceeding riches of His grace.

Now, those before the throne are willing to *comfort the weeper or to instruct the ignorant*. Let us do the same! and may it be ours to wipe the tear from many an eye, to chase the darkness of ignorance from many a young heart. Have you been doing that lately, brothers and sisters? If not, mend your ways, be more earnest in these two good works, visit the fatherless, the widow, the suffering, the mourning, and to teach the ignorant and those that are out of the way.

III. And now lastly, WHAT IS THEIR WORD AND LESSON TO US THIS MORNING?

Bending from their shining thrones, being dead they yet speak, and they say to us thus—

First, by way of encouragement, brethren, *follow on*. Be not dismayed. We fought the same battles that you fight, and passed through the like tribulations, yet we have not perished, but enjoy the eternal reward. Press on, heaven awaits you, vacant thrones are here for you—crowns which no other heads can wear—harps that no other hands must play. Follow courageously, faithfully, trusting in Him who has begun the good work in you, and who will carry it on.

Hear them again, as they say, mark the footsteps that we trod, for only in one way can you reach our rest. We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They say to all the world, If you would be clean wash there too. None but Jesus can save your souls. Trust in Him, repose in His atonement, confide in His finished work, flee to His sacrificial blood. You shall be saved by faith in Him, even as we have been.

***“I asked them whence their victory came; they with united breath
Ascribed their conquest to the Lamb, their triumph to His death.”***

Friends! are you trusting in Christ? My hearers, many of you are perfect strangers to me this morning, I ask you, are you putting your trust in Christ? Have you come under the shadow of His cross, to find a refuge from His vengeance? If not, no golden crown can be for you, no harp of gold, but whoever you may be, if you will believe in Christ Jesus, and put your soul into His hand, you shall be a partaker of the glories which He has laid up for them that love Him.

Lastly, they say to us, as they look down from the battlements of heaven, Are you getting ready to join our ranks, to take up our occupations, and to sing our song? Answer for yourself, my brother, as I must answer for myself. Are you living for your own pleasure? Then you must die, for “He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption.”

Are you living for Christ? Then shall you live, “because he lives you shall live also.” Are you a priest to God today? You shall bear the golden bowl in heaven. Are you instead thereof a servant of your

own body, your own lusts, your own gain, your own pleasure? Then the lowest depths must be your portion. Heaven is “a prepared place for a prepared people.” Are we prepared?

Brothers, sisters, can we say, “We hope in Christ, he is our only trust,” and do we endeavor to live to Him? and though with many failings and frailties, yet still can we say, “For me to live is Christ”? Oh! if it be so,

“Come, death, and some celestial band, to bear our souls away!”

But if it be not so, then our end must be destruction, because our God has been our belly.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.