



Reasons why Christians must not Seek their Rest on Earth¹

I shall now proceed to show you, why it is said this rest remains, and is not to be enjoyed till we come to another world.

The chief reason is, it is not the will of God that we should have our rest on earth. Who should dispose of the creatures, but he that made them; and order the times and changes respecting them, but their absolute Lord, who alone has wisdom to order them for the best, and power to see his will accomplished? You may, therefore, as well ask, Why have we not the spring and harvest without winter? Or why is not all the world a sun, that it may be more glorious? and ask, Why have we not rest on earth?

It is not the natural order of things that we should have our rest on earth. All things must come to perfection by degrees. Nothing is perfect in its beginning, where the fall brought an imperfection. The strongest man must be first a child; the greatest scholar must be first a school-boy; the most skilful artificer was first an ignorant learner; the tallest oak was once an acorn. This is the constant course of nature in the production of sublunary things. Now, this life is our infancy; and would we have God overturn the course of nature for us?

It would deprive God of much honour if we had our rest on earth. If our rest were here, most of God's providences would be useless, and his great designs would be frustrated. Should God lose the glory of all the deliverances of his church, of the fall of his enemies, of the wonders wrought to this end, merely that men may have their happiness on earth? If man had kept his first rest in paradise, God would not have had an opportunity to manifest his far greater love to the world in the gift of his Son. If man had not fallen into the depth of misery, Christ would not have come down from the height of glory, nor died, nor risen, nor been believed on in the world.

And as God would not have had opportunity for the exercise of all his grace, so he would not have had corresponding returns from us. We would never so fear offending him, nor depend on him so closely, nor call on him so earnestly, if we wanted nothing. Do we not even now feel how ready our prayers are to become lifeless, if we be but in health, and prosperous, though we are still far from contentment and rest? How little then would he hear from us, if we had what we would have? God delights in the soul that is humble and contrite, and trembles at his word; but there would be little of this in us, if we had here our full desires. Have not thy own highest joys and praises to God, O Christian, been occasioned by thy dangers, or sorrows, or miseries? We think we could praise God best if we lacked nothing; but experience tells us the contrary.

It would be no small injury to ourselves, if we had our rest on earth. Oh the sweet comforts which the saints have had in returns to their prayers, when they have been long in sorrow, and God has lifted them up, and spoken peace to their souls, and granted their desires, and said, as Christ to the paralytic, *'Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; arise from thy bed of sickness, and walk, and live!'* How should we know what a tender hearted Father we have, and how gladly he would come forth to meet us, and take us in his arms, if we had not, as the prodigal, been denied the husks of earthly pleasure and profit, upon which the wordling feeds! We should never have felt Christ's tender hand, binding up our wounds, and wiping the tears from our eyes, if we had not been involved in sorrows.

And it would be our loss for the future, as well as for the present. It is a delight to a soldier or a traveller to look back upon his adventures and escapes when they are over; and for a saint in heaven to look back upon the state in which he was on earth, and to remember his sins, his sorrows, his fears, his tears, his enemies and dangers, his wants and calamities, must needs make his joys more joyful. When he reaches his journey's end, he will look back upon the way. When the fight is done, and the danger over, his rejoicing in the remembrance of them is not done, nor the praises of his Redeemer yet over. But if we had nothing but rest on earth, what room would there be for these rejoicings and praises in heaven?

We labour under a natural incapacity for rest on earth.

We ourselves are at present incapable subjects of rest; and that in respect both of soul and body. Can a soul that is so weak in grace, so prone to sin, so hampered with contradictory principles and desires, have perfect rest on earth? What is rest, but the perfection of our graces in habit and act, to know God perfectly, and love him, and rejoice in him? How then can the soul be at rest, which possesses so little of this knowledge, and love, and joy?

And our bodies are incapable as well as our souls. They are not now those purified bodies which they shall be, when this corruptible hath put on incorruption, and this mortal hath put on immortality. They are our prisons and our burdens, so full of defects and infirmities, that we are fain to spend the most of our time in repairing them, and supplying their continual wants, and mollifying their grievances. Is it possible that an immortal soul should have rest, in such a mean and distempered habitation, especially when it every day expects to be turned out, and to leave its beloved companion to the worms? Surely these sickly and weary bodies must be refined to a perfection suitable thereto before they can be capable of perfect rest.

We want those objects on earth which can alone afford us rest. Those we do enjoy, are insufficient; and that which is sufficient is absent from us.

What we possess here is insufficient to be our rest. We enjoy the world, and its labours, and fruits; but alas! what is there in the world to give us happiness? They that have the most of it, have the greatest burden, and the least rest of any others. They that set most by it, and rejoice most in it, do cry out at last that all is 'vanity and vexation of spirit'.

And so what we enjoy on earth is insufficient to be our rest, so God who is sufficient, is here little enjoyed. It is not on earth that he has prepared the presence chamber of his glory. He has drawn the curtain between us and him. We are far from him as creatures, and farther as frail mortals, and farthest of all as sinners. We hear now and then a word of comfort from him, and receive his love tokens, to keep up our hearts and hopes: but, alas! this is not our full enjoyment. 'While we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord'; even absent while he is present; for though he be not far from us, seeing 'we live, and move, and have our being from him', who is all in all, yet have we not eyes now capable of seeing him, for mortals cannot see God and live. And can any soul that has made God his portion, and chosen him for his only happiness, find rest in so vast a distance from him, and so seldom and small enjoyment of him?

Finally there is a moral impropriety in our having rest on earth. There is a worthiness which must go before our rest. It has the nature of a reward; not, indeed, a reward of debt, but a reward of grace.

'To him that overcometh,' says Christ, 'will I grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.' 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' 'I have fought a good fight,' says Paul, 'I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give unto me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.'

And are we fit for the crown, before we have overcome; or the prize, before we have run the race; or to be ruler of ten cities, before we have improved our ten talents; or to enter into the joy of our

Lord, before we have well done as good and faithful servants; or to inherit the kingdom, before we have manifested our love to Christ, by our love to his people? Let men cry down works as they please, yet these you will find are the conditions of the crown. God will not alter the course of justice to give you rest, before you have laboured; nor the crown of glory, till you have overcome. Thus we see reasons enough, why our rest should remain till the life to come

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¹ Taken from *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*.