

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

An Enrollment of Our Names in Heaven—the Noblest Source of Joy

by Samuel Davies, January 14, 1759

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!"

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven!" Luke 10:17-20

This is the answer Christ gave to his disciples, when returned from their mission, flushed with victory over the most mighty and most malignant enemies, the infernal powers. "The seventy-two returned with joy and said—Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!" This they probably mentioned with a tincture of vanity, and were secretly proud of their new power, which their Master had given them. Though they owned it was his gift, they gloried in it, as conferring some new honor and dignity upon themselves. And probably like the rest of their countrymen, their heads were filled with notions of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, and his conquests over the other nations of the earth in favor of the Jews; and inferred that they should have an irresistible power over their enemies on earth, from the power they had been enabled to exercise over evil spirits, so much more mighty, and seemingly unconquerable.

Their Lord and Master, among other things in his answer, checks this secret vanity, and points out to them a superior cause of joy. "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you." That is, do not rejoice as much as you do, do not rejoice principally in this—that the spirits, (that is, evil spirits,) are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven!

As if he should say, "Though you may safely rejoice in the victory you have obtained through my name over the powers of hell—yet you ought to take care that it be not a vain, selfish, carnal joy—a joy springing from the gratification of your own ambition. And take care also, that it does not run into excess; for I will show you a much greater cause of joy than even this; and that is, that your names are written in heaven! It is possible, that while you are casting the devil out of the bodies of others, your own souls may be under his power, and you may be his miserable slaves forever. But since your names are written in heaven, you are safe; and that is cause of joy indeed. Rejoice in this—above all other things."

How would we rejoice, and perhaps boast, if the mighty powers of hell were subject unto us, and we could make them fly at a word! But the lowest Christian is more happy than this, and has cause of greater joy.

For the further explanation of the text, it is only necessary to inquire, what is meant by their names being written in heaven?

Heaven is here compared to a city or corporation, in which a list or record is kept of all the citizens or freemen who are entitled to its privileges and immunities. And, therefore, to have our names written in heaven, signifies to be citizens, or freemen of the heavenly city; that is, to have a right to an inheritance there, and to all its privileges and enjoyments.

This naturally suggests a very important inquiry, the decision of which may hold us all in an anxious suspense: "How may I know (may each of us ask) whether MY unworthy name is written in heaven? Who can open and read the records of heaven, and show me whether my name is registered there?"

I answer, This is a secret that may be discovered; for all who have their names written in heaven—may be distinguished by their characters, their temper, and practice, while upon earth. And their characters are such as these:

1. All who have their names written in heaven—are deeply sensible of the vanity of all earthly things, and that heaven alone is a sufficient portion and happiness. All who are registered as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have a superlative esteem of that privilege, and count all things but loss—in comparison of it, Matthew 6:24-26, and 13:45, 46. And is this your character? Are your hearts in heaven? Or are your highest affections confined to the earth?

2. All who have their names written in heaven—have a heavenly nature; a nature very different from that of the men of this world, and like that of the citizens of heaven! And is this your temper? Or is it earthly and sensual?

3. All who have their names written in heaven—have a peculiar love for all their fellow-citizens, who are heirs of heaven. They love them as members of the same family with themselves. 1 John 3:14.

4. If your names are written in heaven, it is the chief business and concern of your life—to obtain a saving interest in heaven. This is not the object of languid, lazy wishes; or of lukewarm, spiritless prayers; but of your vigorous, anxious, persevering desires. And do you thus seek the kingdom of heaven? Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16.

These marks must suffice at present to assist you in self-examination; and I beg you would bring them to your hearts, and see if you will stand this test.

If your names are written in heaven, then my text authorizes me to tell you, this is the greatest cause of joy you can possibly have; a joy that may swallow up every other joy.

On the other hand—if your names are not written in heaven, there is nothing in the world that can happen to you, that can be a cause of rational, lasting joy to you.

I. If your names are written in heaven, this is the greatest cause of joy you can possibly have; a joy that may swallow up every other joy! This will appear by an induction of particulars.

Are you rich in this world? Has God blessed your industry and frugality—so that you are in easy, affluent circumstances? This is cause of joy and gratitude to God, as it furnishes you with the materials of earthly happiness, frees you from many anxieties and painful needs, and puts it in your power to enjoy the generous pleasure of doing good with your substance.

But what is this—when compared with the blessings of the sanctified use of riches, and the assurance that God has given you, that all things shall work together for your good? What is this—when compared to the unsearchable riches of Christ, and that fullness of grace and glory, in which you have a saving interest? Rejoice more in this—than in thousands of gold and silver.

Or if you are not in affluent circumstances—then perhaps are you above extreme poverty, and able by your labor and industry to provide yourselves and your dependents with the necessaries of life. This is the happiness of most, even of the poor in our country; and this is cause of joy. But what is this, compared to the happiness of having provision made for your blissful existence through everlasting ages! Is it not superior cause of joy, that when you are stripped of all the enjoyments of the present life—that you shall also be delivered from all its needs and labors, and shall not only have a bare sufficiency—but a rich overflowing abundance of happiness equal to the capacities of your souls in their highest enlargements? In this you may warrantably rejoice, and you cannot run into excess!

Do you enjoy health of body? In this rejoice: but how trifling a cause of joy is this to that of your souls being in health and prospering, and bearing the symptoms of immortal life and vigor.

Are your bodies free from demon possession? Rejoice not so much in this—but rather rejoice that the devil is cast out of your souls, and that you are not under his spiritual tyranny.

Are you happy in your friends and relations, and every domestic blessing? Rejoice not so much in this as that you have the most honorable relations and friends in heaven. God is your father; Christ is your Savior, your elder brother, your friend; the Holy Spirit is your sanctifier; the angels and all the saints are your fellow-servants, your brethren of the same household of God.

Do you rejoice in the freedom of your country, and that you are delivered from the hands of your savage and treacherous enemies on earth? Rather rejoice that you are delivered from the tyranny of sin and Satan, and from the condemnation of the divine law.

Do you rejoice that our forces have been victorious over our enemies? Rather rejoice in the victory which the Captain of your salvation has gained for you over your spiritual enemies. Rather rejoice in the victory you are

enabled to gain over sin, Satan, and the world—through the blood of the Lamb. Rather rejoice to see your lusts slain, or at least mortally wounded, and dying in your hearts.

Do you rejoice that you have the prospect of living in safety and peace in your country? Rather rejoice that you have peace of conscience, and peace with God, through Jesus Christ: and that you shall enter into everlasting peace whenever you leave this restless world.

Do you rejoice that your earthly possessions, your property and liberty are safe? Rather rejoice that your heavenly inheritance is safe; and that whatever becomes of the kingdoms of the earth—you have a kingdom that cannot be shaken, eternal in the heavens.

Do you rejoice that you live under the government of a good king? and that you enjoy the blessings of our happy constitution? This is a peculiar happiness indeed; but rejoice not so much in this, as that you are the subjects of the King of kings, and under a dispensation of grace, and the government of a Mediator. The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Psalm 97:1. Rejoice, above all, in this, that you and all your affairs are under the direction of a divine hand, that will manage all for your good. Rejoice that before long you shall be admitted to the court of the heavenly King—and see him in all his glory!

Do you rejoice that your life is prolonged, while so many are dropping into the grave around you? Rather rejoice that you are not to live always in this most wretched world. Rejoice that death itself, your last enemy, will not be able to do you any lasting injury—but only convey you home to your Father's house, and the full possession of your heavenly inheritance!

Do you rejoice that you enjoy the gospel and the means of salvation, and that these invaluable blessings are not likely to be torn from you by the hands of Indian savages and Popish idolaters? This indeed is cause of rejoicing; but how much more ought you to rejoice that the gospel and the means of salvation are made effectual by divine grace for your conversion and sanctification! Many enjoy them as well as you, to whom they are of no service—but an occasion of more aggravated guilt and ruin.

Let me, therefore, persuade you to rejoice, not only as a privilege—but as a duty. God enjoins it upon you by the same authority by which he requires you to pray, or to love himself or your neighbor. "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy all you who are upright in heart." Psalm 32:11. "Rejoice evermore," 1 Thess. 5:16, "Rejoice in the Lord always! And again, I say, rejoice!" Philippians 4:4. It is only fitting that you should now rejoice in that in which you shall rejoice forever. And, on the other hand, it is highly unfitting that you should walk towards heaven melancholy and dejected, as if you were going to the place of execution. Let sinners be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, who stand every moment on the slippery brink of eternal misery! Sorrow and lamentation befit their circumstances. But will you always mourn and droop, who stand every moment on the threshold of heaven, and know not but you may be there before another sun shall rise? How inappropriate is this! Therefore rejoice with all your hearts, that your worthless names are written in heaven! This is greater cause of joy—than if they were registered in the annals of fame, or among princes of the blood royal.

And do not excuse yourselves from this agreeable duty, by saying, "I would rejoice—if I were sure that my name is written in heaven; but, alas! I am not." For is not this uncertainty your own fault? the effect of your own negligence? Besides, have you not some cheerful hopes and probabilities, and even some transient assurance? and is not this cause of joy to creatures that deserve to be left under the pangs of everlasting despair?

Let me advance a step farther, and tell you, that you should rejoice that your names are written in heaven, not only more than in all other causes of joy—but also in opposition to all causes of sorrow.

What though you are poor in this world—when the heavenly inheritance is yours? That you are despised among men—when you have the honor of being the sons of God? That you are weak, or sick and pained in body—when your souls are recovering from the deadly disease of sin? That you are the slaves of men—when you are sharers in the liberty of the sons of God? That your enemies should prove victorious over you upon earth, when you shall certainly overcome at last? That your mortal relations and friends die, when your heavenly Father and all your spiritual kindred live, and you cannot be bereaved of them?

In short, what though you endure all the afflictions that can crowd upon one man in the present life—when they are all short and transitory, and work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and when you will soon arrive in the land of rest, beyond the reach of every misery? In spite of all these calamities,

"Rejoice and be exceeding glad, since your names are written in heaven!"

But I must proceed to address another class of hearers; and to them I must say,

II. If your names are NOT written in heaven, you can have no cause of solid, rational, and lasting joy in anything. This also I shall illustrate by an induction of particulars.

Rejoice not that you are rich, or enjoy the least comforts of life—while you are destitute of spiritual and everlasting riches.

Will it be any pleasure to you, to pass from a splendid well-furnished house—into the regions of horror and darkness?

Will it be any pleasure to you, to pass from faring sumptuously every day—to suffer the extremities of eternal misery?

Will it be any pleasure to you, to pass from mirthful and merry company—to the society of lost fiends in hell?

Will it be any pleasure to you, to pass from all the luxuries of life—to weep and wail, and gnash your teeth forever?

Will it be any pleasure to you, to pass from wearing fine silks and laces—to be enrapt in sheets of infernal flame?

Alas! what joy can you take in all the advantages that riches can give you—while you must be stripped of them all so soon, and feel a terrible reverse?

Many who are styled religious and honorable among men—are but vile, despicable creatures in the sight of God, and must before long sink into shame and everlasting contempt. Many a body adorned with whatever riches can procure—is animated by a poor, worthless soul, full of sin, and void of the beauties of holiness. And can you rejoice in such trifles as these? A man who has a gangrened foot may as well rejoice—that it is covered with a silken plaster; or a criminal may as well rejoice—that he is carried to the gallows in a fine coach!

Besides, remember how hard it is for rich men enter into the kingdom of God! "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" Matthew 19:23. It is a human impossibility; but it is not impossible to Omnipotence. As riches increase, temptations increase; temptations to love the world more, and to think less of heaven; temptations from pride, flattery, amusements, vain company, etc. And can you rejoice that your salvation is made more difficult? And can you rejoice that you, who are apt to stumble at straws—have mountains thrown up in your way? Alas! if this were rightly considered, would the wealthy and affluent be so resolute and eager in the pursuit of riches?

What though you are in good business, and prospering in the world—while you are not doing the work of your salvation, nor carrying on a trade for heaven, and your hurry of business is a great occasion of this pernicious neglect?

What though you enjoy health of body—while your souls are dead in trespasses and sins, and your health is no security against death or hell?

What though you enjoy friends and relatives—while the great God is your enemy?

What though you enjoy mirth and pleasure—when they will end in eternal howlings, and you will be upbraided with them forever, like Dives, "Son, remember that you in your life-time enjoyed your good things?"

What though your enemies are routed? Alas! the devil and your sins are still rulers over you! What though your country is safe—when you shall stay in it but a very little time, and you have no place prepared for you in heaven? What though you are the free-born descendants of Britons, and never were in bondage to any man? Alas! you are the slaves of sin! What though you live under the government of the best of kings, while you are the captives of the prince of darkness, and the King of heaven is your enemy? What though your bodies are not exposed to the sword of your fellow-mortals, when you are liable every moment to the sword of divine justice?

What though you are safe, as to your outward estate—when your immortal souls are in danger? What is a man profited, if he gains the whole world—and loses his own soul? What does it profit you to enjoy the gospel, while you receive no advantage from it—but abuse it to your more aggravated ruin? What does it avail that God is merciful, when you have no share in his mercy, and never will, if you continue in your vain, carnal joy? What does it avail that Christ died for sinners, while you willfully exclude yourselves from the blessed effects of his death?

In short, what upon earth, or even in heaven, can afford you any pleasure or rational joy—while your names are not written in heaven, and you are not using earnest endeavors to be admitted as citizens there? Alas! your case calls for sighs, and tears, and sorrow—rather than joy! What have you to do with politics, news, and the fate of armies and kingdoms, while you know not whether you will be out of hell one day longer?

And as the joy of the righteous, in having their names written in heaven, may swallow every other joy—so your sorrow, on account of your names not being written there, may swallow up all other sorrows. Be sorrowful on this account, above all other things.

Have you lost your friends, your relatives, your estate? This is sad; but oh! it is nothing to the loss of God, of heaven, and your souls! All will be lost before long, if you continue in your present condition. Are you poor in this world? That is but a trifling affliction, compared with that everlasting poverty you must before long suffer! Are you despised by men? Alas! what is that to your being despised and abhorred by the God who made you! Are you the slaves of men? This would be trifling, and you need not be concerned about it, were it not that you are the slaves to sin and Satan, and under the condemnation of the divine law. Are you disordered in body? That is nothing to the disorders of your souls. Are you afraid of natural death? Alas! what is that to spiritual death, which has seized your souls, and the eternal death which is just before you? In short, nothing in all the world ought so to distress and grieve you as this—that your names are not written in heaven!

Therefore, instead of vain rejoicing, and mirth, and gaiety, I must read to you the denunciation of Jesus Christ against you; "But woe to you who are rich—for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now—for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now—for you will mourn and weep!" Luke 6:24, 25; and call upon you as the apostle James does, "Go to now, you rich men, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you!" James 5:1; and again, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness!" James 4:9.

I can honestly assure you that I am no enemy to the pleasures of mankind. But it is because I love you, that I wish you may return home sad and sorrowful from this place; for I well know, you are forever undone, unless you turn to the Lord, and that you never will turn to him, without rending of your hearts, weeping, and mourning. Joel 2:12.

If your joy and mirth were rational—then I would say nothing against it; but is it not frenzy and madness to be merry in the chains of sin, under the wrath of God, and upon the brink of eternal ruin?

Is it not also dishonorable to God? It is as if you should tell him to his face, that you can be merry and happy without his favor, and that you care nothing for his displeasure.

I would not reprove your mirth—if it were harmless; but, alas! it will ruin you—if you indulge it. For, let me tell you, such sinners as you cannot become converts, without alarming fears and deep sorrows. Without this you never will be in earnest in your religious endeavors.

You will tell me perhaps, "you see Christians cheerful, and sometimes merry; and why may not you be so?" I answer,

(1.) There is a great difference in your case and theirs; they have a living hope of everlasting happiness; but you can have no hope in your present condition. And may not they rejoice, while you have cause to mourn and weep? What would you think of a criminal under condemnation, if he allowed himself in that mirth and amusement, which may be lawful and befitting in others?

(2.) The Christians you know now are cheerful with good reason; but did you know any of them under their first convictions; were they cheerful then? then, when they received a sight of their sin and danger, and were in an awful suspense what would be their everlasting doom? Were they merry and mirthful while they saw themselves without a Savior, and under the displeasure of God? No! then all was sadness, fear, and sorrow. And this is what your case now requires. Can you expect the same cheerfulness in one under the power of a

deadly disorder—**as in one recovering?**

Finally, I would not endeavor to dampen your joys and turn them into sorrow, if they would last. But oh! they will soon end, and nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth will follow. Look down into that hideous gulf, the prison of divine justice, where Dives and Judas, and thousands of sinners lie; can you see any cheerful look, or hear one laugh among them? No, no! They are done with all joy; and must spend a miserable eternity in grief and tears! "I am in agony in this fire!" Luke 16:24

And will you not rather mourn over sin in time—**than mourn forever? Will you choose now to receive your consolation? or will you not rather delay it until you have reason to rejoice?**

To conclude: Allow a friend to your best interest to prevail upon you to return home this evening sadly pensive and sorrowful, and to resolve you will never indulge yourselves in one hour's mirth and gaiety, until you have some reason to believe that your names are written in heaven. This is what your own interest requires; and if you refuse, you will unavoidably be sorry for it forever, when your sorrow can be of no service to you. Betake yourselves in serious sadness to the earnest use of all the means of salvation, and you have reason to hope God will have mercy upon you, and turn you to himself. Then you will have reason to rejoice, to rejoice in your temporal blessings, and especially because your names are written in heaven. And then God, and Christ, and angels will rejoice over you, and join in your joy!