
LIFE, AND THE PATH TO IT
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A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON
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"You will show me the path of life: in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11.

I THINK YOU must have noticed, while I was reading the Psalm from which my text is taken, that I expounded it partly concerning David and partly concerning David's Lord, Jesus, the Messiah. It often happens, in the Psalms, that you can scarcely tell whether it is David, or Jesus, or both of them to whom the writer is referring. Oftentimes you lose sight of David, altogether, and are quite certain that he is not there, while, at other times, the words seem equally suitable either to David, the type, or to Jesus the antitype. I think that this fact is very instructive to us. It looks as if the Holy Spirit intended, even in those ancient times, to let God's saints know that there is a mysterious union between Christ and His people, so that almost all things which may be said concerning Him may be said, also, concerning those who are in Him. They are so completely one, they are so intimately united in bonds of mystic, vital, eternal union, that it would not be possible to always keep the sayings concerning them apart. As two bank-divided streams flow side by side for a while, and at last melt into one river—and you can scarcely say which river it is when they are joined in one—so Christ and His Church are united in one mighty stream, and, therefore, what is said of the one may, at least in some sense, be said of the other. O Christian, treasure up this precious thought! You are one with Jesus, and, consequently, much that is said concerning Him may also be said concerning you!

In this 16th Psalm we are sure that there is a clear reference to the Saviour because to no one but to Him could these words be absolutely applied, “You will not leave my soul in the abode of the dead; neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption.” All other bodies see corruption, but His holy body did not. His birth was not according to carnal generation. His human nature was perfect, untainted by evil. Such a body belongs to no one else, so these words are, in the fullest sense, only applicable to our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we feel no hesitation, as believers, in taking them to ourselves, at least to a very large extent, remembering that our Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “Because I live, you shall live also.” And that He prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom you have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.” This proves that we, also, shall tread the path of life which He has trod—that the presence of His Father, in which He is glorified, is that same presence which will make our heaven! That the right hand of God, at which He sits, is the place to which He will also exalt us, and that the pleasures forevermore, in which He Himself rejoices, are the very pleasures with which He will indulge our souls, for it is His purpose that His joy shall abide in us that our joy may be full.

This brings us to our text, in which there are two things of which I am going to speak to you. First, an assurance as to the untrodden path. And, secondly, an assurance as to the life to which that path leads.

I. First, then, we have here AN ASSURANCE AS TO THE UNTRODDEN PATH—“You will show me the path of life.”

If you take these words as referring to Christ, they must apply to Him as man. As a man, He was to die. His soul was to be, for a little while, separated from His body, yet, even as a man, He spoke with perfect confidence to His Father. You remember that His dying words were,

“Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” “And having said this, He gave up the ghost.” He spoke with the full assurance that His Father would show Him “the path of life.” Where did the spirit of Christ go when it left His body? In what mysterious way it entered at once into paradise, it is not for us even to guess. There have been a great many questions raised in the Christian Church, in all ages, concerning this matter. Some, taking the words literally, have said that Christ descended into hell, and they have even ventured to affirm that He preached to the dead, and delivered the spirits that were in that awful prison. All that kind of talk seems to me very like that which come from dreamland! We know, from our Saviour’s own declaration, that He was in paradise the very day that He died, for He said to the penitent thief, “Today shall you be with Me in paradise.” But whatever pathway the human soul of Jesus took, it was not unguided—His Father showed to Him, “the path of life.”

His sacred body had to lie three days in the tomb, but it was not corrupted in the least degree. Dr. Watts very sweetly sings— *“There the dear flesh of Jesus lay, And left a long perfume.”* That body, lying in Joseph’s sepulchre, wrapped in linen, and sweet spices through the love and kindness of Christ’s disciples, must rise again—and once more the Father showed to His Son, “the path of life.” How it came to pass that the Spirit of God worked upon that precious body, and raised Jesus from the dead, we cannot tell, for the work of the Spirit is secret and mysterious. But those blessed eyes of Jesus opened again, and the pulses of His human heart began to beat once more—and He stood upon those dear feet that had been pierced by the nails, and He unwound the napkin from His head with those very hands that had been fastened to the cross, but which would never again suffer pain, for He had risen from the dead no more to die! As the first-born from the dead, His Father had showed to Him, “the path of life.”

Then, after tarrying here a little longer—that His re-united soul and body might dwell, for 40 days or so, in the midst of His disciples, that they

might be quite sure that it was His own body that had risen from the dead, and His own soul that communed with them—He led them out to Olivet, and once again His Father showed Him “the path of life.”—“*Then He arose ascending high, And showed our feet the way.*” His disciples beheld Him ascend while He was blessing them. And they gazed upon Him as He ascended, until a cloud hid Him from their astonished gaze. And we are expressly told that at the appointed time He shall come again in like manner as they saw Him go up into heaven. Truly, in Him was fulfilled the psalmist’s confident declaration, “You will show me the path of life.” We can easily imagine that as He passed through that cloud, the angels came to meet Him—squadrons of bright beings from the courts of heaven hurried down to do Him homage, and to escort Him back to the glory which He had with the Father before He came to sojourn here below! It seems to me to be not merely poetry, but a matter of fact that they did then sing, “Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be you lift up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.” And He did enter the gates, and went straight to the throne of God which His Father had appointed as the grand reward of His victory—and there He sits—and will continue to sit until His foes are made His footstool!

Thus you see that our text is true concerning our Lord Jesus Christ—and it is also true concerning all who are in Christ—and each of us who is trusting in Him may, with the hand of faith, grasp this divine assurance, “You will show me the path of life.” I feel quite enamoured of this portion of my text, and would be perfectly content if I had only to preach from it. You, O my God, You who know everything, You will show me the path of life! There is no other guide like You, my God. I trust no priest, no man like myself, nor even an angel. You, who did lead Your people through the wilderness by the cloudy, fiery pillar, You will show me the path of life!

And You will show it to me—unworthy as I am—just as if I were the only traveler upon life’s rough way. You will devote Your wisdom, and Your

strength to me, taking me by the hand, and leading me, as a father leads his child. You will be gentle and patient with me, and when I am so blind that I cannot see my way, You will go before me, and say to me, "This is the way; walk you in it."

And, my Lord, as there is only one "path of life," you will show me the path. It is but a narrow track, and it runs clean contrary to the broad way that leads to destruction. You will show me the path, O Lord, and guide my feet into it! When I know not which way to turn, to the right or to the left, You will show me the path—I know that You will!

And it will be the path of life that You will show me. I shall not live in a kind of living death, as others do, but I shall be really quickened by Your Holy Spirit. In that path, I shall find life, and by that path, I shall receive yet more of life, and, at last, I shall attain to the perfection of life and see You in the glory- life above, far more fully than I can ever see You in the grace- life below.

Thus you see that every word is precious and full of meaning, but just for a moment think of the complete sentence, "You will show me the path of life." That is true, my brothers and sisters, about the whole of your life while you are here. You will not be misled if you trust in God! Your own supposed wisdom will surely lead you astray if you follow its guidance, but trust in the Lord, and you shall be rightly guided in all times of trouble and difficulty. And when you come to die. When you are, indeed, entering upon a new and untrodden path, the Lord will still show you the path of life. He will teach you the way to be confident even when the dewdrops of death lie cold and clammy upon your brow. He will show you the way to meet your last great adversary without a fear, and without even a tremor—and He will teach you how to find life in death, and how to triumph in the last dread conflict! Think of what will happen when the parting moment comes, and the spirit is launched upon a sea it never traversed before! It leaves the

familiar precincts of the house of clay, and finds itself stripped and unclothed, and it cries, "Oh, where shall I go? In that unknown land without a track, where shall I go?" You need not ask that question, brother, sister, or, if you do, you can give the answer, "You will show me the path of life." Up to the realms where angels dwell, borne up on eagle wings, you shall ascend to heaven! God Himself will stoop from heaven to be your Guide, and He will take you to dwell, as a pure spirit, at His right hand. The ages will speed on, and, in due time, there will ring out the mighty blast of the resurrection trumpet! Where will my body be then? These limbs, all moldered back to dust. These eyes vanished from human kin. The whole mortal fabric dissolved, and returned to mother earth. Ah, my Lord! But I shall not have to raise myself from the grave, I could not work that miracle of resurrection—my bones have not to come together to their fellow bones by their own power. God will teach each atom to come to its fellow, and each individual life will be identified the same as before, yet wondrously changed! I know not how it will be, but God knows, and He will show us, "the path of life," the way to be conformed to the image of Christ, the way to attain to the perfection of life everlasting! This is the path that no eagle's eyes have ever seen, and no lion's cub has ever trod, yet, in blissful confidence I may die and rise again, for the Lord will show me, "the path of life."

Is not this a blessed truth of God? Then drink it in, and if you have any fears of death, let them all fly away as you meditate upon this comforting assurance which your Lord, Himself, has so graciously revealed to you!

II. Now, secondly, we have, in our text, AN ASSURANCE AS TO THE LIFE TO WHICH THAT UNTRODDEN PATH LEADS—"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore."

Concerning that life, we are told, first, the place where it is to be

spent. Many people ask, “Where is heaven?” Others inquire, “Is there such a place at all?” Assuredly, there is such a place, but where it is, I cannot tell. Some have imagined that, possibly, it is in the central star of our solar system, Alcyone in the constellation of the Pleiades. We may dismiss the conjecture as soon as we have heard it, and not be any the better for having heard it! What we do know, however, about heaven, is that it is in the presence of God. Do you know, beloved, what the “presence of God” means? Yes, in a feeble sense, you have realized it when, in His house, and especially at His table, He has unveiled His face. When the King has been with us— when we have consciously felt that we were in the royal presence, we have sung—“*No beams of cedar, or of fir, Can with His earthly courts compare.*” But what must it be to be in His presence when relieved from the burden of this flesh for a while, or when it is refined and purified—when the dimness that is now in our eyes shall all be gone, and the unclouded glory of God shall shine upon us? A poor prisoner who has seen a little gleam of light down in his dismal dungeon, knows something about the sun, but what a difference there must be between his knowledge of the great orb of day, and that which is possessed by the angel whom Milton represents as living in the sun! A contrast as great as this is going to happen to you, dear friends, in passing from this world—with now and then a glint of heaven’s sunlight—to dwelling with God forever in the glory that excels anything that we have ever imagined here! I cannot tell you what it will be—and neither will you know it until you get there, and learn what it is by actually dwelling in His presence!

We are also told that heaven is to be enjoyed at the right hand of God. The right hand, even on earth, is the place of favour, the place of honour, and the place of security. The right-hand place is always regarded as the post of dignity and nobility in all courts. God is not going to give His people any left-handed heaven—they are to dwell at His right hand forevermore! It is the place that Jesus Himself has, and that He has promised to His victorious followers—“To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with

My Father on His throne.” The very choicest place in heaven shall be yours, beloved! God will not put you away somewhere behind the doors of His royal palace, but He will guide you to the place of honour at His own right hand where “there are pleasures forevermore.”

Those last words that I quoted tell us something about the enjoyment of heaven—the kind of life which the glorified spend at the right hand of God above. The life of heaven is a life of joy, and the crowning joy is that the pleasures, there are “pleasures forevermore.” In this world a few drops of joy fall here and there, and there are, sometimes, showers of blessing. But up there it is joy, joy, joy forever—“pleasures forevermore.” Let these blessed joy bells ring in your ears, and in your heart just now—and if you know even a little of what they mean, you may anticipate that they will mean a thousand times as much on the other side of the Jordan of death—in the heavenly land of Canaan!

Our text tells us of the quantity, as well as the quality of the joy of heaven. It is to be “fullness of joy.” That is what we never reach here, for when we are most joyous, there is always room for more joy, or there is something lacking to the completeness of our joy. But, in God’s presence, is “fullness of joy.” It may well be described as the fullness of joy because it is infinite. He who drinks from a cup can soon drain it dry, but he who lies down on the brink of a great river may drink as long as he likes, and he will never empty it, for he has come to its fullness. “Fullness of joy” means that you shall not only have as much joy as you can hold, but that it shall keep on running, and your capacity shall be enlarged, but you shall still be filled with joy—and so it shall continue forever! If you are the least among the saints in heaven, you shall have fullness of joy. And if you are the greatest, you shall still be full of joy. You shall be so full of joy that you could not be more happy! You shall have reached the very summit of eternal happiness! Yes, even there it shall not enter into your heart to conceive anything that shall be above the joy which God has revealed to them that love Him! What indescribable bliss must this fullness of joy be! You know that when

you are full of anything, you cannot put anything else in—so, where there is fullness of joy at God’s right hand, no sorrow will ever be able to enter. There are—“*No groans to mingle with the songs Which warble from immortal tongues.*” There will not be room for a single doubt there, or for a fear—no, not even for one sad memory! There will not be room for a wish—we shall be so full of joy that we shall have all that we could desire! Every faculty of our body glorified, and every power of our soul perfected, the life everlasting shall rush through us, and we shall be filled with it, sunk in it, as in an ocean of infinite satisfaction and eternal content! I find that words are but poor things to describe such a theme as this—I wish that I could more worthily speak of this “fullness of joy” in God’s presence.

Notice next, the variety of this joy, for I take it that while the term, “fullness of joy,” is given to show that it is one, yet the expression, “pleasures forevermore,” may teach us that the bliss is varied. I cannot give to you, beloved, a complete list of the joys of heaven, but I will briefly mention a few of them.

The glorified before the throne of God are forever singing about salvation, praising Him who washed them from their sins in His own blood. A sense of perfected salvation is a part of the bliss of heaven. They are washed whiter than snow, and they know it. They are delivered from all sin, and are “without fault before the throne of God”—and they know it! Now have they been brought right away from all danger of perishing, for they are “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

There will be a sense of security, too, for all who are at the right hand of God in glory. They are all perfectly safe there. “No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up there, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there.” “Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.” And they know that it shall be so, and, therefore, a sense of their security is one of the sweetnesses of the beatific state.

Coupled with that will be their assurance of victory. They will know that they have overcome all their enemies through the blood of the Lamb. Even the last enemy, death, himself, will then have been destroyed. When the resurrection shall be complete, what a vast sweep will the mind's eye of the glorified believer take! All human history will open up before him, and as he gazes upon it, he will see that God has triumphed, by His grace, in everything! And the adoring song of victory will go up forever and ever unto Him who has conquered sin, death, and hell, and led captivity captive. The palms will forever be waving, and the harps forever ringing out, "Glory, glory, glory to the mighty grace which has triumphed from the first day even until now!" Victory blending with security will indeed make glad the spirits of the saints at God's right hand!

There, too, their joy will consist in freedom from every form of evil. No temptation can ever enter there, no carking care, no spiritual weakness. They are eternally clear of all that made them sad in the days of their sinfulness and imperfection. One great part of the joy of the glorified will be the perfection of their characters, for he that is holy must be happy. Perfection of holiness must mean perfection of happiness—the two things must go together. Sin and sorrow cannot be divorced—and holiness and happiness cannot be separated. O brothers and sisters, what must it be to feel that you have no tendency to err, no understanding out of balance—that even memory does not bring to you a sinful reflection that would stain your purity—that, altogether, your whole mind is godlike, made holy through the operation of the blessed Spirit, and the cleansing blood of Jesus? Oh, to completely get rid of sin! One would not mind keeping a frail body with all its weakness and pains if he could once get rid of sin. One might be willing to be as poor as Lazarus if he could but get rid of sin. To shake off this viper into the fire—to be altogether clear of even the taint of sin would be heaven! And we shall have that bliss at God's right hand!

Part of the joy of heaven will also lie in clear knowledge. Here, we only know in part, but there we shall know even as we are known. Here,

“we see through a glass, darkly; but there, face to face.” Some of you do not understand the doctrines of grace, here, but you will understand them there. You meet with a great many questions that are too difficult for you to answer, now, and you are often puzzled with problems which you cannot solve. You must believe, now, much that you cannot comprehend—but things will look very different in the clear light of heaven from what they do, now, in the dim twilight of earth! Wait a while, and do not worry. Tarry just a little season, and the eternal day shall break, and the shadows shall forever flee away, and you shall know all that you will desire to know when you are at God’s right hand in glory! But, perhaps, it is still sweeter to remember that heaven’s bliss will very much consist in fellowship, first, with the Father. How near we shall be to Him when we are in His presence! Here, we cannot see His face and live. But there we shall live by seeing His face! It will be the ecstasy of our glorified life to gaze upon Him who is invisible to mortal eyes! There, too, we shall see Jesus. Do not your sacred passions burn at the very thought of such bliss as this?—“*For there the Man that loved and died, Sits glorious at His Father’s side*” and these eyes shall behold Him, the God that died for me! Oh, that wondrous sight! Do we not feel as though, like John, we must fall at His feet as dead when we see Him as He is? O blessed Christ, we scarcely need any more of heaven than to be where You are! Then, too, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, will yet more gloriously manifest His divine power to us there—“*O blissful hour! O blest abode! I shall be near and like my God.*” We shall have such fellowship there with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as is not possible before, and then—this is coming down a long way from the sublime height of fellowship with God, yet it is a fact that is worth remembering—we shall have fellowship with the innumerable holy angels, and with all the glorified saints! All who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, even as we are, will be there as our happy companions forever and ever. Are you not anxious to see the apostles and prophets who have gone to heaven before you? Well, beloved, you shall see them—and the communion that you will have with them will be of the most intimate kind! And your beloved ones who have been called home before you, you shall

meet them, by-and-by, when the Master shall say to you, also, "Come up here." Oh, yes, there will be "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven . . . the spirits of just men made perfect," and it will be a part of the delights of heaven to have fellowship with them! I have heard some people say that they will have such sweet and satisfying fellowship with Christ that they will not want to have any with His people, but that is both absurd and impossible because you cannot have fellowship with the Head without having fellowship with the members at the same time! Christ will never wish you to look upon Him in heaven as divided from His people—they shall be so completely one with Him that in fellowship with His people, you shall in no degree be diminishing your fellowship with Christ, but rather be enjoying it in the form in which He, Himself, rejoices, for His delights will still be with the sons of men, and if, on earth, they were the excellent in whom was all your delight, He would have you take the same delight in them when you meet them before His throne in glory!

There is one more pleasure of heaven that I must mention, and that is rest—not that state of idleness of which some lazy people foolishly think—but that kind of rest which will be perfectly compatible with holy service. We are to serve God day and night in His temple—we shall always have something to do for our God throughout eternity, but that service will be rest to us. Just as, here on earth, we take Christ's yoke upon us, and learn of Him, and so find rest unto our souls—in heaven itself we shall continue in the service of our God, and we shall find therein the very sweetest rest. One part of that service will be everlasting praise. I am longing for the time when I shall have a heart that will never wander from my Lord— what hallelujahs will I sing to His holy name! And will not you, who love Him, do the same? Oh, what shouts we will make together when, as one complete family before the throne of God, we shall praise the almighty grace which has brought us safely home, and enabled us to join in the heavenly anthem, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and

ever”!

The last thing to be mentioned is the duration of all this bliss—“pleasures forevermore.” It would be robbing heaven of all that makes it to be heaven if you could deprive it of its everlasting duration. Our Lord will at the last say, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” Your life in heaven will be everlasting, and your joy will be everlasting, because you have an everlasting Christ, an everlasting God—and an everlasting covenant has been made with you, ordered in all things and sure! A million millions, what must that be? The human mind cannot grasp the meaning of such vast numbers, yet, when millions of millions of millions of millions of years have passed over the heads of Christ’s saints in glory, this text will not be exhausted! No, more—not one jot or tittle of it will be exhausted—and throughout eternity it will still be, “pleasures forevermore.” Ah, my brothers and sisters, this prize is worth winning! Eternal life is worth having! And it shall be the portion of everyone who truly trusts in our Lord Jesus Christ!

The last thing I am going to say is this. I greatly fear and tremble for some of you lest you should never enter upon this, “fullness of joy,” and these, “pleasures forevermore.” You know that dreadful word, “damned,” which Jesus used—“He that believes not shall be damned.” I will not try to explain to you what the sufferings of the lost must be, for they cannot be described. But a great part of the condemnation of the lost will consist in the fact that they will lose the “fullness of joy” in the presence of God, and the “pleasures forevermore” at His right hand. How dreadful this punishment of loss must be, in addition to all the suffering that must be forever endured in hell! There stand the pearly gates, but what if you should never enter them? Yonder are the streets of gold, but what if you should never stand upon that radiant pavement? There is the face of Jesus, but what if He should say to you, “I never knew you”? There is the throne of God, but what if it should burn like a devouring fire for you, so that you should be unable to come near it, and to say, “Father,” to Him who sits

on it? Shut out of heaven! Shut out forever! In the outer darkness forever! Away from the marriage feast forever! When once the Master of the house is risen, and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and He shall answer and say unto you, "I know you not who you are...depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity." Surely there is not a man, or woman, or child, who could look forward, without alarm, to the prospect of being shut out of heaven forever! And you will be, as surely as God lives, you will be unless you repent of sin, and trust His Son! I am no prophet of evil, neither do I like to harp upon this string, yet I must remind you that God has declared, concerning heaven, that "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles." You must, therefore, be washed in the blood of the Lamb if you are ever to be admitted within the pearly gates! Remember the apostolic message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," for it is as true now as when it was first uttered. May the Holy Spirit graciously compel you to believe in Jesus, now, and at once to yield up your whole being to His supreme sway! Ask Him to show you "the path of life," and to lead you in it, for then you shall enter into His presence, where there is "fullness of joy," and you shall stand at His right hand, where "there are pleasures forevermore!"

Somebody recommended all persons, before they go to sea, to wear a lifebelt. I do not believe that people in general are ever likely to follow that advice, but if somebody could invent a belt that made the wearer of it more ready for his work on land—that made him stronger, healthier, and more handsome— then everybody would be ready enough to have it! Well, now, salvation is a life belt for the hour of death; but it is also a strengthening belt, a help, a beauty, a joy and delight for this present life. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is as good to live with, as to die with, and nobody is fit to live who is not fit to die—and nobody is fit to die till he is fit to live! Fitness for work on earth is fitness for rest in heaven! Depend upon it, these two things go together. Do you all know the Lord? With that question

I will conclude.

Do you all know the Lord? If not, you do not know your best Friend. You do not know Him who is the Father of all believers. Do you know the Lord? If not, I pray you to seek His face this very hour, and I especially urge you to obey that word of His apostle which I quoted to you just now, but cannot quote too often, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." When you trust Christ, you shall see God in Christ, and shall come to the Father through the Son, and the Holy Spirit shall reveal Him unto you. The Lord grant that this may be the case, for Jesus' sake! Amen.