

Heavenly Meditation with Richard Baxter

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Preacher: Kyle MacKenney

[0 : 00] Well, thank you for having me with you this morning. It is good to be with you. I always really look forward to this event. And then for the final 48 hours, I dread it just a little bit. But it's good to be with you.

It's truly a grace amidst my solitary studies over at Regent to be able to share with the community. And I know that other scholars such as Dr. Packer, I see Bill Moore out here, also have felt the same way.

So thank you. Last time I was with you, it was this past September. We spoke on John Calvin and his life of prayer. Really enjoyed that together. And then before that, in April, we had studied Karl Barth and his life.

And we looked specifically, actually, at a couple sermons from Barth that he had given in his local Swiss prison. And I found that really a rewarding time as well. So thank you for having me back. This morning, as Dr. Packer has said, we're looking at heavenly meditation with Richard Baxter.

This was Baxter's favorite life theme, in Dr. Packer's words. It's the power of the hope of glory to energize and direct Christians in their course throughout this world.

[1 : 04] Let me just open us in prayer and we'll get started. Father, we thank you that we have the chance to gather this morning.

As a community that is seeking after you, Lord, we thank you that you have sought us first. And that all that we do is we meditate on you and your great truths and your great presence with us as a response to you.

I pray, Lord, that by your spirit you would join us here. That you would speak through each of us as we share later in this time. That you would be with my words. And that this would be for your glory, both in this world and the world to come.

In your son's name we pray. Amen. Let me ask first, and this is a question for all of us. What comes to mind when you think of Richard Baxter? Is there any former acquaintance, anything that comes to mind for people?

Yeah? Yeah, patrolling the village on Sunday to make sure that they're keeping their Sabbath activities or restrictions.

[2 : 11] In other words, they couldn't go out for a walk. They had to be singing songs or quoting the sermons. Okay. Discussing that. Okay. Interesting. And I don't know too much about that, so that's great to hear.

It's interesting. Other acquaintance with Baxter. He was in the 1600s, so his dates were 1615 to 1691.

Puts him in a very volatile time in England. Yes? I mean, all I know is he's a famous Puritan. Yeah, famous Puritan. Absolutely. Yeah. And that's really helpful because some have wanted to maybe not see him instantly as Puritan, but absolutely he was, and that's important.

That's helpful. Thank you. He was a nonconformist, so it puts him at odds with Church of England in some of its established forms. Longtime pastor at Kittermeister.

Help me with the pronunciation. Kittermeister? Kittermeister. Kittermeister, yeah. So he would have been a pastor for 15 years there, for a year from 1641 to 1642, and then from 1647 to 1661.

[3 : 20] Those were his dates. And through his time and his pastorate there, a large percentage of the town was converted. Really quite distinctive, in fact. From Dr. Packer again, he was the most voluminous English theologian of all time.

Ten million words. I just brought two of his books. There's another two that go with this, and this is just four million of his words. These are his practical works.

These are two of the four collected books. And then there's another six million words separately. So just amazingly prolific. The book that we'll be studying this morning is Saints Everlasting Rest.

And I have just the, I've read much of it, but this is the abridged version here. And we have a great copy over here at Regent's Bookstore. This is Saints Everlasting Rest, published in 1649.

Another book that you might be familiar with is The Reformed Pastor. Yeah, really, really important book on pastoral care, on pastoral practice. Still in use today.

[4 : 27] Again, it's in print. He, Baxter was quite the student, really interesting educational background. And again, in Dr. Packer's words, he was an omnivorous polymath.

He was always studying, reading quickly, and remembering well what he had read. Interestingly, and I don't know if this goes with his studious nature, he was sickly.

And we'll return to that a little bit as we talk about the book. The book was actually written as he was, he thought he was on his deathbed as he wrote it. He wrote it over the course of five months in the late 1640s.

And he thought he was dying in his early 30s. Again, he would live until 1691, so many more years of life. His biographer wrote that he wrote as ever in the views of eternity.

And I think that's going to be really important as we look today. He was married and lost his wife much earlier than he passed away. So this morning we will begin my talk with Richard Baxter and his practice of heavenly meditation.

[5 : 32] We will then turn, after a short break, to his understanding of heaven. And I think this is really interesting to look at his understanding of heaven in the beatific vision, specifically both centered in Jesus Christ and in community with all the saints.

And so I'm really looking forward to discussing that. The Puritans themselves, as you might know, were a heavenly-minded bunch. And I hope we hear their call to us this morning. At the end I want to have some extensive interaction, and I've left time for that.

I realize many in this room have more experience in the Christian life, including specifically in Richard Baxter. So I look forward to hearing from you and enjoying good dialogue together.

In 1649, Baxter published his Saints' Everlasting Rest, written over the course of five months on what he thought was his deathbed. Central to the book was his practice of heavenly meditation.

At the time, Baxter wrote that it, Describing his life theme, he called the duty of meditating on the hope of glory, quote, The most delightful task to the spirit, and the most tedious to the flesh, that ever men on earth were employed in.

[6 : 47] Furthermore, this was a duty by which all other spiritual duties were improved. It's a duty by which the soul digests truth, and draws forth their strength for its nourishment.

Now, lest some of us think ourselves uniquely languishing, as we don't necessarily practice heavenly meditation, Baxter also described the lack of heavenly meditation amongst the fellow Christians of his day.

He laments that even though all confess it to be a duty, most constantly neglect it. As a result, it is, he explains, why so much preaching is lost amongst us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls.

I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation. If they did hear one hour and meditate seven, they would find another kind of benefit by sermons than the ordinary sort of Christians do.

So what is this meditation? Now, lest we think the meditation easy, we might pay heed to Baxter's foreword, which he wrote to two well-off individuals, the Sir Thomas Roos and his wife, Lady Jane Roos.

[8 : 08] He had actually begun his book under their roof. And he writes to them, quote, So have you far stronger temptations to divert you, I think alluding to their wealth and their security at that time.

It being extremely difficult for those that have fullness of all things here to place their happiness really in another life and to set their hearts there as the place of their rest, which yet must be done by all that will be saved.

How little comfort do all things in this world afford to a departing soul? How is it that we release our minds from this world? We recognize, instead, the greater good of heaven.

As Dr. Packer has written in an article, this means regaining the, quote, two-worldly perspective of the scriptures. It means sitting loose to everything here in order to lay hold of glory hereafter.

It means recognizing the eternal significance of all present action. As Leland Ryken comments, the Puritans were the true sacramentalists of their day, seeing this too-worldly perspective.

[9 : 16] It's only in heaven that we, and our souls and bodies, will be perfected. Baxter notes in Saints Everlasting Rest that it's in heaven that our senses, our memory, our intellect, which was quite important to him, as we've heard, our will and our affections will be perfected.

But as Baxter writes, Christ first brings the heart to heaven, and that can happen to some degree in this life. It is only then that Christ brings the person to heaven. One way that Christ brings our hearts to heaven is through this heavenly meditation.

There are three stages in this heavenly meditation. We'll largely focus this morning on the first. This first stage is the bringing to mind of key truths of the gospel. We allow these truths to then warm our affections, and it's only after we've used these truths to warm our affections that we then preach to ourselves.

And then pray to God. First, let us discuss these truths. For Baxter, this may mean dwelling on even one sentence. He says, You may look over any promise of eternal life in the gospel, any description of the glory of the saints, or the very articles in the creed of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Some one sentence concerning those eternal joys may afford you matter for many years' meditation. This made me think, in just his admonition to think of one sentence, made me think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life together.

[10 : 53] I know many of us have read this. It's a marvelous little book. And Bonhoeffer similarly picks up the theme of meditation and contrasts how we meditate on our own versus the communal worship of the church, where we read large chunks of scripture together.

In contrast, personally, in our personal meditation on scripture, we might stick to a brief selected text that will possibly remain unchanged for an entire week.

If in our communal reading of the scriptures, as in this morning's service, we are led more into the whole length and breadth of the holy scriptures, here we are guided into the unfathomable depths of a particular sentence and word.

Both the communal and this private study of the smaller scriptures are equally necessary. And he quotes here Ephesians 3.18, saying that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

It's in this private study that again we not only hear God's word for the community of faith, but God's word for me personally, for us personally.

[12 : 01] And Bonhoeffer and Life Together suggests dwelling on such words as Father, Love, Mercy, Cross, Sanctification, and Resurrection.

And I think Baxter would agree with Bonhoeffer. Baxter would add, to study also the gracious disposition of Christ and his readiness to entertain and welcome all that will come.

I wonder here if the comfortable words in our liturgy each Sunday, from Jesus, from St. Paul, and from St. John, might be helpful for our meditation. As we bring these truths to mind, we can also include thanksgiving for our experiences of God's love.

Baxter writes, we should, get therefore a truer conceit of the loving nature of God, and lay up all the experiences and discoveries of his love to thee, and then see if it will not further thy heavenly mindedness.

Leland Ryken called the Puritans the worldly saints. And I'm inclined to agree, because absolutely everything for Baxter can be a cause for heavenly meditation.

[13 : 07] Absolutely everything. The mercies we have received here from God, with our renewed nature, think how much greater receiving God's love in heaven, when we are perfectly holy and without blemish, fully to, able to fully receive God's love.

Or the grace of the holy sacraments. Consider how much greater the feast will be with God in heaven. Or, especially for us in Vancouver, the glorious works of creation that we now see.

This is just the footstool. Consider the glory of heaven where God the creator himself dwells. We allow, as we call these truths to mind, we allow these to then kindle our affections.

Dwelling on these truths, we find an increased love for God. This love leads us to desire for God and to place our desires that, in this world, are headed every which way, but in God they're called back to our true desire in God.

This love leading to desire then leads us to hope. To finding our hope to be in God. And this hope fosters courage. And this courage then leads to joy.

[14 : 23] It's after these truths of meditation have kindled our affections that we then speak to ourselves. And we preach to ourselves what Baxter calls soliloquy.

And it's this preaching to ourselves that would go before prayer or speaking to God. He says that want of this makes prayer with most to have little more than the name of prayer and men to speak as lightly to God as if it were to one of their companions.

Speaking to the God of heaven in prayer is a weightier duty than most are aware of. And Bonhoeffer and life together, as I've already referenced, echoes this same progression, placing prayer in intercession after his meditation.

Near the end of his life, Baxter would say, quote, I live in almost continual thoughts of heaven. It's a great quote. He was a truly heavenly-minded Puritan.

Recommending this practice to all of us who would hear him, he says, quote, thou shalt find it will make thee another man or woman and elevate thy soul and clear thine understanding and polish thy conversation and leave a pleasant savor upon thine heart so that thine own experience will make thee confess that one hour thus spent in meditation will more effectually revive thee than many in bare external duties.

[15 : 47] And the day in these contemplations will afford thee truer content than all the glory and riches of the earth. Be acquainted with this work and thou wilt be in some remote sort acquainted with God.

Thy joys will be spiritual and prevalent and lasting according to the nature of their blessed object. Thou wilt have comfort in life and comfort in death. End quote.

Being the good practical Puritan that he was, he gave us some practical suggestions on how to implement this heavenly meditation. He advocated a set and constant time for this duty.

It was to be at least once a day, preferably for an hour, potentially for a half hour. And for each person, it was up to them to carefully observe the temper of their body as for the best time for them to meditate.

So they would carefully observe the temper of their body and their mind and mark when they would find their spirits most active and fit for contemplation. For some of us, that's mornings. I'm a morning person, so I think for me it is the morning.

[16 : 53] For Baxter, it was the evening. He said even the, especially the night, especially a warm and clear night. I think he would actually do his meditation while walking, which was quite interesting. He says, whether within doors or without, whether sitting still or walking, as Christ had his accustomed place, so must we.

Further commenting on the time, he said, the Lord's day is a time exceedingly seasonable for this exercise. When should we more seasonably contemplate on rest than on that day of rest, which it doth typify it to us?

The Lord's day is a day appropriated to worship and spiritual duties. Methinks we should never exclude this duty, which is so eminently spiritual. What fitter time to converse with our Lord.

It's fitting as we study here on the Sabbath, on the Lord's day. Baxter said, As you go from stair to stair till you come to the top, so use your Sabbaths as steps to glory till you have passed them all and are there arrived in heaven.

As I was preparing this talk, I was thinking about the Lenten season. Some of us give up things during the Lenten season. Others take on certain practices, almsgiving and prayer and fasting.

[18 : 09] And I wonder as we give something up, I wonder if we might even take on this practice of heavenly meditation in a different way. Or deepen our practice if we already are practicing heavenly meditation.

It's something worth considering. Let's take a two minute break and after the break we will look specifically at Baxter's understanding of heaven.

We'll take two minutes now. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. So we turn from heavenly meditation in Baxter to looking specifically at Baxter's understanding of heaven.

[20 : 29] And within that, his understanding of the beatific vision. Last February, Billy Gaines presented here on the beatific vision in John Owen. I wish I could have attended.

The beatific vision has been increasingly recognized by scholars and Puritan thinkers, and it's a fascinating subject. However, Richard Baxter, for some reason, has remained largely overlooked.

In conversation with Dr. Packer after the 730 service this fall, I asked him a little bit about Baxter's beatific vision and ended up writing on it for a paper over at Regent.

I want to turn to Baxter's work on heaven and the beatific vision and examine two specific themes. Number one, heaven, for Baxter, is centered in Jesus Christ.

And number two, heaven is communal. We've already mentioned *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, published in 1649. It was his first book mentioning the beatific vision.

[21 : 32] As we've mentioned, he wrote it during a time of grave illness. His biographer A.R. Liddell comments, quote, In his introduction, Baxter said that, The book met with wide popularity despite its 844 pages.

It's much longer than this abridged version. And around 3,000 copies were published each year for its first 10 years. I'm indebted to Dr. Packer for these statistics. 3,000 copies each year for 10 years.

Popular book. For Baxter, the beatific vision, defined as the sight of God, or how do we see God face to face, is largely reserved for heaven, although it may begin to some degree in this life.

Here on earth, our wills remained compromised, we remain sinners, our desires remain unfulfilled, and our knowledge remains incomplete. Additionally, continued sin and imperfection here on earth hold us back from the beatific vision.

As sinners, we cannot see God. Given these reasons, it is only in heaven that we will, quote, perfectly please God, and be perfectly pleased in God forever.

[23 : 14] Baxter describes this end at length, saying that God only is our happiness and chief good. I need not prove to any that indeed believeth him to be God. That salvation consists in the fruition of this happiness is past doubt.

And as sure is it that God is not fully enjoyed in this world, much less in the creature when it is loved for itself, and not esteemed as a means to him. All that believe a life after this do sure believe that there is our felicity.

Again, it's the two worlds. To be saved is to have the blessed vision of God and to love him and delight in him perfectly to everlasting. While Baxter's discipline of heavenly meditation may bring elements of the beatific vision to earth, he locates this vision firmly in heaven.

As Tom Schwanda, a Wheaton professor, writes, quote, the Puritans followed the teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, who taught that while we can anticipate and perhaps even catch a foretaste of the beatific vision, we cannot experience its fullness until heaven.

Regarding the beatific vision, Baxter expresses both confidence and some agnosticism. We shall be admitted, he says, into the holiest and brought as near God as our natures are capable of and as near as we are fit for.

[24 : 33] We shall behold the face of the blessed God and see his wisdom and power and glory, and we should know God as we are known. While we will somehow see the face of God, Baxter admits he does not fully know what this vision will entail.

He describes this saying, and we know in general that we have a heavenly city and an inheritance. We shall see God and we shall be with Christ in everlasting happiness, loving and praising God with joy in the perfected, glorious church of Christ.

But it is little that we know distinctly of the conscience and operations of spirits and separated souls. There's a great deal about the place and state that is just dark to us, but none of it is dark to Christ.

Here, therefore, an implicit trust should not only bound and stop our selfish and overboldened inquiries, but also quiet and comfort our souls, as if we ourselves knew all.

So Baxter does avoid speculating on some of the details of the hereafter and the heavenly realms. His positive emphasis, as we will now turn to, instead is a focus on Jesus Christ and on the saints.

[25 : 41] He describes both of these, with Jesus Christ and the saints, as a union, union with Christ and union with the church. And toward the end of his life, he writes, it is very probable that there will be a nearer union of holy souls with God and Christ and with one another than we can here conceive of.

But this is so far from being to be feared, it is the highest of our hopes. First, as perfected souls, in heaven we will fully receive and know God's love.

This love is centered in and through Jesus Christ. Baxter describes this beautifully. The Lord Jesus Christ will not only be the object of our delightful love, but will also love us with an effectual, operative love forever.

His love will be as the vital heat and motion of the heart to all the members, the root of our life and our joy. The love of our Redeemer will flow out into all of us as the vital spirits, and his face of glory will be the sun of the heavenly Jerusalem and will shine upon us and will show us God.

And in his light we shall have light. We shall not only believe, but feel that he loves us. Christ's love will give us life and joy, then prompting our praise.

[27 : 00] Baxter again elsewhere picks up the theme of God's love connected with Christ. Oh, think what it is for a perfected holy soul to see the glorified Redeemer, and all the holy company of saints and angels, yea, to see the glory of God himself, to feel his love poured out onto us, and to be wrapped up in loving and praising him forever in the most transcendent joy and pleasure of the soul.

In heaven, having been freed from our sin, we will then be able to be fully loved by God and to love him in return. This is expressed significantly through Christ, who will show us God.

And in heaven, we will see physically, including the physical sight, we will see Christ. Baxter's words again soar, How glad would I have been to have seen Christ but with the wise men in the manger, or to have seen him do his miracles, or heard him preach.

Much more to have seen him as the three disciples in his transfiguration. But how far is all this below the sight that we shall have of him when he comes in glory? The face of love shall then be unveiled, and his face will ravish us into the highest love and joy that our natures are capable of.

How perfectly will our doubt, fear, and grief be cured when we see the glorious face of Christ and behold the new Jerusalem in its glory and when we are numbered with the saints that judge the world.

[28 : 30] Seeing the glorious face of Christ is a substantial part of the heavenly beatific vision. We will see Jesus Christ in his physical body as well as in his divinity.

His physical body will be glorified. Baxter exclaims, And oh, how much better will Christ's own glorious presence be than his presence in humbled flesh was to his followers on earth? There, even his body is more glorious than the sun.

And the heaven or holy city needs no sun because God and the Lamb is the light thereof. Lest we think heaven a disembodied spirituality, as some have suggested, Baxter would not suggest this at all.

He explains our continuing use of our senses, saying that God himself delights in all his works, and so shall we. We must not, on pretense of taking the heavenly Jerusalem to be merely spiritual, deprive ourselves of all the sensible ideas of it which God's description offers to us.

Light is sensible. Christ glorified there is sensible. Moses and Elijah were sensible to Peter, James, and John in the transfiguration. Stephen, martyred.

[29 : 43] He saw heaven open and Christ sitting at the right hand of God. And all eyes shall see him at his glorious return. Heavenly glory is not enjoyed only by mere thinking and knowing, nor as in a dream, but by the most eminent intellectual sensation, exalted and invigorated.

This is the center of the heavenly Jerusalem and of the beatific vision in heaven as well. Now as we've heard Moses and Elijah mentioned and the holy company of saints and angels before that, Baxter consistently references when talking about heaven the glorified saints.

Dr. Packer also notes this in an article writing that Baxter, quote, often refers to the communion of saints as a principal ingredient in heaven's joy. We will pause here to discuss two aspects.

One, they are a second cause of communicating God's glory to us. And second, the saints remain differentiated and individuals. First, Baxter recognizes the saints as a second cause of communicating God's glory.

He explains this in terms of union. But though all my receivings will be from God, they will not be from him alone. We must live in perfect union also with one another and with all the heavenly society.

[31 : 03] And therefore, as we must love them all, so shall we be beloved by them all. And this will be a subordinate part of our blessedness. God there will make use of second causes even in communicating his love and glory.

I find this personally fascinating. That the promise of heaven, that we will see in some way God face to face through Jesus Christ, we will see God.

But that just as importantly, Baxter also emphasizes that the saints seeing each other will also be a way that we know God's glory. It's worth pausing on. Baxter again elsewhere describes our future union and communion saying, the whole society of angels and saints will be perfect and glorious.

And our joy and glory will be as much in participation by union and communion with their glory as the life and health of the eye or the hand is in and by union and communion with the body.

We must not dream of any glory to ourselves, but in a state of that union and communion with the glorious body of Christ. And Christ himself is the glorified head.

[32 : 16] He is the chief part of this society whose glory we shall behold. In all this, the glory of God will shine forth and he will be admired in his saints.

Again, Baxter says, in us it shall appear how abundant he is in power and wisdom and goodness in holiness, faithfulness, and righteousness. All this we see in each other and through the saints in heaven.

Additionally, the saints remain individuals. They remain differentiated. This is not some eternal absorption into one. There's none of that here in Baxter.

We remain individuals and he loves that. He references again the transfiguration as we've heard him mention. He notes that Christ, Moses, and Elijah in the transfiguration visibly appeared as three distinct individual persons.

It's quite important. Baxter says that this tells us that it is a false conceit that death would cease individuation and turn all souls into one. That's just not true. He continues, Moses is Moses still.

- [33 : 22] Elijah is Elijah still. And all our friends that are gone to Christ are still the same that they were. They may be called still by the same names. It's marvelous. Baxter actually writes lengthy and rhapsodic passages on this theme.

He mentions the joy of seeing Peter, Paul, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Calvin, Ames, Sibbes, among many others. That's just in one passage. He writes to the reader, you go to be perfectly incorporated into the heavenly society and to see the glorified faces of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, of Peter, and John, and Paul, and Timothy, and all the saints that ever you knew, or whose writings you have ever read, or whose names you have ever heard of, and millions more.

And all this is so near and sweet a union with the glorified ones who are the body and spouse of Christ that it shall be all as one praise, one love, one joy in all.

This, my friends, is what we await. We await praise in union with Christ, in union with his saints. As I mentioned, in recent years there has been a flourishing of scholarly interest in the Puritans and the beatific vision.

I'm encouraged by this. I think it's actually a fairly prominent theme in Puritan writings. While this is positive, and I'm thankful for each of these scholars that have done work, much of this work has been unfortunately somewhat limited in its scope.

- [34 : 53] Specific articles and specific excerpts have been given on individual Puritan thinkers, John Owen being one of them. But the connections between the individual Puritan thinkers, the connections have yet to be fully explored.

Suzanne MacDonald specifically has written influentially of John Owen. John Owen having lived right around the same time as Baxter, 1616 to 1683 for Owen. MacDonald has said that Owen reformed, quote unquote, the beatific vision.

She compares Owen's theology of the beatific vision to Thomas Aquinas and identifies it as, quote, a significantly reoriented doctrine of the beatific vision from what had been inherited from the Catholic tradition in Aquinas, with Christ at the center of our beholding of God in eternity as he is our beholding of God's glory now.

However, the works of Owen that Suzanne MacDonald identifies as containing this Christ-centered beatific vision actually do not predate those of Baxter. Again, Baxter's work came out in 1649.

It was reprinted quite frequently for those coming 10 years. And the beatific vision was a significant aspect in that work, although the work was largely focused on heavenly meditation.

- [36 : 12] But throughout Baxter's life, the beatific vision was a topic of significant reflection and encouragement for him. I believe that the Christocentric focus of the beatific vision being centered in Jesus Christ actually began earlier than Owen, as evidenced by findings from Baxter.

And I think this is important. Furthermore, there are additional Puritan thinkers who speak of the beatific vision and may do so in Christ-centered terms. Scholars, Puritan scholars, actually, Joel Beek and Mark Jones comment, quote, quote, when discussing the glories of heaven, the Puritans were thoroughly Christocentric.

Heaven's glory was never considered apart from Christ's presence. I find that really interesting. Moreover, Baxter may fill in a lack that MacDonald, Suzanne MacDonald again, identifies in Owen's understanding of the beatific vision, which was mentioned last February by Billy Gaines.

MacDonald concludes, quote, we would be well served by more reflection on the corporate and the ethical implications that stem from our beholding of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ now and in eternity.

It is not that Owen does not give us hints along these corporate lines. He does. On the whole, however, these are indeed hints rather than developed themes, and the emphasis for Owen generally lies elsewhere.

[37 : 33] Owen's focus, thus, is more inward and individual than scripturally and theologically it ought to be. End of MacDonald's quote. And as we've seen this morning, Baxter's emphasis strongly includes the communal aspects of the beatific vision with the saints.

Understanding the Puritans on the beatific vision requires taking this into account. This represents, actually, an earlier development of the distinctive beatific vision that the Puritans brought than has been acknowledged by scholars in recent years.

It's fitting to conclude this portion on Baxter's understanding of heaven with these representative words from his psalm of praise. And some of you might have sung this as a hymn before. Keep in mind here the two things we've specifically noted about heaven for Baxter, Jesus Christ, centered in Jesus Christ, and the saints from his psalm of praise.

You blessed saints at rest who see your Savior's face, whose glory, even the least, is far above our grace. God's praises sound as in his sight, with great delight you do abound.

With thy triumphant flock then I shall numbered be, built on the eternal rock, his glory we shall see. The sun is but a spark from the eternal light.

[38 : 56] Its brightest beams are dark to that most glorious sight. There the whole choir, with one accord, shall praise the Lord forevermore.

from his psalm of praise. I'd like us to just take a brief break, stand up and talk to your neighbor, celebrate the communion of saints, and we will conclude and open the floor for dialogue in maybe about three minutes.

Thank you. Well, we've covered a fair amount of terrain this morning. We've covered two things in depth, specifically how do we meditate on heaven in this life, this heavenly meditation, and then secondly we've covered Baxter's understanding of heaven.

So it leaves us a lot of room for dialogue. Also might leave some of the listeners room for confusion, so I'd be happy for questions to help clarify. I hope I haven't gone too quickly.

But let me just open the floor and I hope that people will share experiences both of meditation on heaven and how we meditate well and also thoughts on heaven or anything related to those.

[40 : 02] Or Richard Baxter because we do have an expert in the front row here. So please do feel free to ask any questions. I wanted to say that you shaped your message or talk and it seems to have been spiritually motivating and I think of John's statement, he who has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure.

and I think sometimes I've had that motivation myself and I mean I'm not all the talks are a rebuke to me because I don't think much of these things but I'm not the rest when I have.

And of course there's nothing like unfavorable circumstances to make you think that way. Absolutely. Absolutely. It dissipates when things get better. That's right. Absolutely. I think on that note I just want to read just an excerpt because these unfavorable circumstances obviously are many for Baxter and we haven't talked about that as much as we could have but as a nonconformist in 1600s in England he is absolutely marginalized in certain contexts and feels persecuted but he also dealt significantly with bodily issues and health issues.

I was smiling this past week as I read again from Dr. Packer just a list of some of these bodily ailments. Let me just read it. A tubercular cough frequent nosebleeds and bleeding from his finger ends.

Terrible. Migraine headaches inflamed eyes all kinds of digestive disorders kidney stones and gallstones and more so that from the age of 21 he was as he says seldom an hour free from pain and expected death constantly through the next 55 years of partial disablement before his release finally came.

[41 : 53] It's just absolutely this difficulty here in this world that he experienced and so for him the heavenly mindedness of the Puritan mindset but also his heavenly meditation was quite important.

It's exactly what you're saying and not least is Baxter's understanding that we are always in this world we are always sinners even as we are being purified and our sin there's a lot more in Saints Everlasting Rest that I could have spoken about about our sin and that's one of his reasons for heavenly meditation to just think about oh the grace of heaven where we will not have these wills that rebel against God anymore he speaks of the rebelling principle and that's his phrase and I love that phrase I find it all too true in myself and I assume others might as well and how in meditating on heaven we'll be free of that rebelling principle and what a marvelous mercy that is so absolutely thank you for that great comment yeah thank you for doing something about meditation because we don't hear very much about that not being Puritans I'm wondering if you have any suggestions about how the blessings of meditation could be encouraged by the Anglican form of worship wow that's a great question you know it's you're talking about things that we could do individually and meditation is always going to be individual even if you're doing it properly but we don't seem to make space for that nor do we have a lot of encouragement about that which is one reason that you've chosen this topic

I imagine thank you absolutely so how would you answer that well I think there are riches in Anglican worship for this I mentioned briefly just the liturgy with the comfortable words that are part of the Eucharistic liturgy that we hear after our confession of sin I believe I'm trying to think exactly where it is in the liturgy it's pre-Eucharist where we hear the comfortable words of Jesus we hear two verses there and then we hear the comfortable words from St. Paul and St. John but I think the biggest thing well there's a few things let me just mention a few things that come to mind I hear Baxter when he talks about hearing a sermon for an hour and then meditating seven that ratio being much more profitable and I'm convicted I spend much of my time reading these days I'm a student at Region I'm in my second full year there

I'm nearing the finish line but it is extensive reading and I don't leave myself necessarily enough time for margin enough just time walking in creation on the beach wherever your place is that you might meet with God in solitude and in silence and calling to mind these truths that we hear in the word but also that we experience in the sacrament and I think Baxter has a lot for us to dwell on in the communion that we experience as Christ meets us in the Eucharist and as we meet with each other in the Eucharist and to really take time then later both in the Sabbath and then also in the days preceding Sunday and also in the days following Sunday to really dwell on that I think that's an important aspect I'm very grateful in Anglican worship that we have this weekly or bi-weekly here at St. John's celebration of the Eucharist and I think for Baxter there's there's an invitation to dwell on on the sacrament and what we experience communally

I would also say that the public reading I've been doing morning prayer over at Regent with Nora Johnston and a couple other folks James Wagner and sometimes that that reading of scripture or even that we do together on Sundays can then give us maybe that phrase or that sentence that we might meditate on later and so I think that's one aspect maybe that I would suggest from from the Anglican tradition including morning prayer specifically that that we might have phrases from the morning prayer practice with the BCP and I think there's also an invitation to silence at points we have that in the liturgy we do have an invitation that silence may be kept or should be kept and silence I think is just really important when it comes to meditation both as we meditate when we're together communally but also meditation on our own there is a silence and so

[46 : 47] I just know that in this technological age there is more and more information flowing at us we have our phones on us all the time we might have the internet close by the computer computer in our pocket and so I think the invitation to silence is a great one and it's really necessary for meditation so those are things that come to mind with Anglican worship I would love to hear other people's comments feel free to share as they come up John with Mr.

Baxter you mentioned kidney stones and gold stones what would it cost the stones to build up in the system to have an overdose of calcium or imbalance what could it cost that I'm looking to George right behind you I don't know it just happens yeah Mr. Guest yes you mentioned Bernard yes did our good Puritan spend much time in or write about the song of songs oh I'm looking at Dr.

Packer I'm blanking well he didn't write directly on the song but there are echoes of the song again and again and again in the meditations which he wrote out and the book the reprinting that's right the reprinting it's a reprint mainly of part four of the saints everlasting rest isn't it and in part four he writes out meditations sample meditations do it like this and he certainly goes to town I'm going to say an echo of the song when he writes about love your meditation should move into spelling out of your love love of the lord who so loved you and done so much to redeem you and well that's the fact you will answer

I think to the question that I was going to say it's tremendous encouragement to us actually to try and develop the same art wisdom practice in our own life I say to oneself alright Song of Sullivan what is that well different scholars of course answer the question in different ways I say it's a torrid love song it really is between him and her and its purpose is as a pictorial parable let's say of the love of the lord for his people Israel and for each member of his people and with that as your clue you're meant we're all of us meant to pick up themes from the

Song of Solomon and work them into meditations on expressions of gratitude and love in response to the father and the son and the holy spirit focus central focus the son christ our savior and our lord and as I said baxter does this models this in what he writes about meditating your way through the reality of responsive love to christ which is part of part four of the saints everlasting rest one fact by the way that I love to throw into the discussion is you should know this baxter the man who had chronic indigestion found by experience that he could only digest his cooked evening meal if he preceded it by half an hour of brisk walking in and around

[52 : 03] Kedemistry and he developed the habit of using that half hour of walking time for meditating in the terms in which Carl's been talking and anyone can anyone can do that I tell you I have done a bit of it nothing like as much as would have been good for me I'm sure and I say anyone can and you simply start resolving that that's what you do and you verbalize all your thoughts to yourself and Baxter has a phrase I think it's in the Christian directory about this kind of meditation imitate the most powerful creature you ever heard in applying to yourself you see that principles the lessons the wisdom the the summons to express love which is the animating reality of your meditation imitate the most powerful preacher you ever heard do it well that was

Baxter's own practice and I would like you to know that maybe you want to comment on that well I do want to I think just saying that anybody any of us can do this and some of us have I myself would like to do much more of it and I think that's why I assigned myself the topic so but I think another possibility for some of us that might be more writerly oriented is to journal some of this with our preaching to ourselves and I think some probably in this room have found that quite helpful maybe don't journal while walking but keep those separate yeah yeah that's very helpful and thanks also for the song of songs answer I hope that answers Harvey's question yeah okay journaling which I've thought many times that's something I should do but I haven't can you recommend a book that would be a few primary on journaling

Christian journaling I'm going to open that to everyone else I know Lucy Shaw Lucy Shaw has a book on journaling that's over at Regent and I'm not sure if others have good ones I think that might be one to start with is Lucy Shaw's book it's I think it's a couple decades old but probably still quite relevant yeah yeah I I have a journal I'm not horribly disciplined I try and I have this exercise book and I address my thoughts to God that's what I do and I find it really helpful because I'm such a distract it started because I'm so distractable and so I can bring those wandering thoughts into that journal and then

I can get back absolutely yeah that's I mean that's a simple place to start it can be much more when you spend for me when I spend time doing it then I can get answers and I'll get dear daughter but I have to be at it for a while absolutely absolutely yeah that's really helpful thanks for sharing that I think and I think how Baxter and I mentioned Bonhoeffer his life together I think the movement for both of these men was always from the meditation and the dwelling on God's word dwelling on these phrases these sentences and really using these truths and even calling to mind our own experiences of God's love when have we really tangibly known God's love to each of us bring these experiences to mind and then from there we preach to ourselves and then from there we pray because then we remember who

God is we know more of his majesty know know more of his goodness and love towards us and I think I find in my rushed evening prayers or even my rushed morning morning prayers too quickly I I don't have the right conception at that point of who I would wish to be speaking with and so for me there's this good reset of knowing these truths dwelling on them I saw a couple questions yeah Tom writes understanding how is it similar to past years yeah do you want to explain Wright's understanding do you want me to I was told to ask this question I got sucked into a vortex the truth comes out can you encapsulate in the sentence or two anti-rights you know

[58 : 02] Mr. Wright as we all know is refocusing trying to refocus the Christian understanding that he wants to emphasize when we die we don't go to heavens we go to the new heavens and the new earth where he dwells righteousness and perhaps visions of restorative justice are part of the Christian vision for the future so he wants to rejigger it a bit but I don't think he's necessarily in contradiction to Mr.

Baxter but would you comment on that have you brought the juxtaposed there could be a whole talk on this lecture series on this I would just mention I think that Wright is working within a different framework being this contemporary mindset Baxter of course being nearly 400 years ago at this point is working in a much different mindset but I do think though that they may complement each other in some ways for Baxter the activity of heaven is praise in a very significant way it's praise there are just beautiful passages I don't know if I've been this blunt but this is worth reading at some point it's a marvelous little book instead of 844 pages this one is 184 pages that's quite doable but there are some marvelous passages on praise and so I think that

Wright also has that N.T. Wright does but I wouldn't want to lose that if we adopt N.T. Wright's understanding I would want to hear Baxter and understand that this that our future as as the saints and in union with Christ and in union with the triune God that we worship is one of praise and is there some good work to do that is in addition to praise quite possibly I'm not sure I just am out of my you know out of my expertise if I were to answer that but praise is absolutely what Baxter sees heaven and he knows that to be the case now and so when we praise together as a congregation as a communal people he's again going to say well think think about that heavenly praise to come use this praise that we experience as a gathered body of Christ here on earth to then extrapolate and say well how how much better will that be in the age to come

Bill I think we're all familiar with the phrase that someone or the false generalization that someone is too heavenly minded for the earthly good you commented something about the ethical dimensions or implications of Baxter's meditation particularly on guard to the saints could you comment on how that affected his life or how he went to people because I think it's really easy to relate to people based on their abilities or how much they can do or achieve and it seems like if you're meditating on people in regards to how they point you to the glory of God that really affects how you relate to people and see people so I love how you've seen how facts are that affected there that's a great question let me answer that by way of Riken Leland Riken was a long time professor of English he's still with us out at Wheaton College which is my alma mater he wrote this book on the

Puritans worldly saints that I referenced in my lecture and I think there's an aspect to this in Dr.

[62 : 00] Packer's words two worldly understanding of reality that enables us to engage this world more rightly right and so when we lose this telos and this participation of this world and in the world to come then we might look at people just functionally or we there's any number of ramifications and in Reichen's book he speaks of these worldly saints the Puritans and talks about their views on work and marriage and sex and church and worship and education and social action and in all those things they were leaders in their day including social action in part because they knew that they were preparing for the heavenly kingdom and it wasn't just it wasn't divorced it wasn't this world we're trying to better this world so that heaven will come or something like that or better this world just because this world needs bettering that we've seen in scripture or something like that but it's because this world is actually preparation for heaven and that we've been given our time by our creator and redeemer to also be in community with others

I'm trying to think on specifically Baxter's understanding of people I think if you read the reformed pastor for instance and I'm not sure if you read that over at Regent in the ministry program but he has a very humane understanding of people really does see them as individuals in some ways he reminds me a little bit of C.S.

Lewis in that regard C.S. Lewis ended up stealing the mere Christianity phrase to some degree from Baxter which is pretty interesting just some trivia on Baxter for you but just this really humane understanding of people and also I think it was very important to Baxter what people's eternal destinies were and so one of the things that was largely cut from this abridgment and Dr.

Packer writes the forward to this and notes it is that the eternal future for those that are damned and choose not to turn to their God is actually something that Baxter's really quite concerned about in St.

Everlasting Rest and does spend time on that and that's part of why he encourages heavenly meditation is actually because of evangelism it's really interesting and maybe I can just take your question and go this direction I'm sorry I'm not fully answering your question but the evangelism of as we spend time with our Lord yes both communally but also in meditation and in response to worship our faces do shine and are increasingly joyful and he speaks of Moses coming down from the mountain he speaks of the transfiguration and he talks about our shining joyful faces as we get to know God's love for us and return in our love for God and he talks about how that is attractive and that people ask questions and I'm not sure how literally to take that but in some instances I'm thinking about a couple saints that I know both here and in the city and I think yeah absolutely that's evangelistic so he has a very high view of people and specifically people redeemed in

[65 : 25] Jesus Christ maybe one more question okay genuinely I have to qualify this by saying I'm not a Catholic but I have this very Roman question yeah bastards see heavenly heaven as communal yes Moses as Moses Elijah as Elijah and we all partake in this heavenly community together so just as we would ask our brothers and sisters to communally pray for us for ourselves yeah and so by extension to heaven we it would also make logical sense that we could ask our saintly heavenly saintly brothers and sisters to pray for us too but this is a typically very Roman practice now how would

Axter respond great great question yeah it's a great question and there are some Protestants that would accept prayer by the saints or that we would pray and ask the saints to intercede for us Baxter from my understanding is not one of those because going back to Jesus Christ what is Jesus Christ's role for us well he is the priest he is he's prophet priest and king and as now he is the priest for us interceding in heaven as he super intends history and his body here on earth to join him in heaven so there's just no need for Baxter for the saints to intercede for us we wouldn't we wouldn't request that of the saints because we have direct access to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and that's as simple as my understanding is of

Baxter on it I'm not going to necessarily say that's the only answer I respect Protestants that wish to disagree with me on that or wish to disagree with Baxter on that but for him just the prophetic excuse me the priestly role of Jesus Christ who has risen and ascended is just so important and would you like to comment at all Dr.

Baxter well that's a good place to end yes I would offer you all a principle which I've been trying to enforce in circles where I've moved throughout my ministry we should we as believers should not be praying for the dead but we should be praising for the dead praise for the dead is the principle and well since this question gives me an opportunity to say that to you here in this learners exchange class I do so so and

I wish frankly that we heard the principle affirmed more often here in St. John's we tend when people leave this world to not exactly forget about them but we don't remember them we don't reflect on their modeling of godliness which maybe was a great blessing to us when they were here well praise for that and thanks to the God who moved them to exhibit the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in that way that is very appropriate I think and well all of us have been enriched spiritually by folk who are now in glory and to mention that before the

[70 : 01] Lord and give thanks for it from time to time is I believe very good for the soul and very much to the Lord's glory the spout of Packer is ended well I think that's a perfect place to end I want to take this opportunity to thank Kyle so much for both a very educating and challenging or a talk that presents a challenge to us all personally in our devotional life I think and also I specifically want to thank him for his ongoing commitment to Learners Exchange to come to us on a regular basis thank you so much thanks for having thank you thank you and if you reach down and you notice there's something hard underneath you just fold it up Thank you.

Thanks. Is that true?

Go ahead and show the last name for me. A-Y-2-2. Is it re-spelled French? Okay. Is he Italian? I don't know. It's a place to be a pastor. Did you get your question answered?

I did.