

## Sermon XXI

### "The Portion of the Men of the World and the Hope of the Godly"

by

Joseph Milner

*"Men of the world, who have their portion in this life and whose belly You fill with Your hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold Your presence in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Your likeness" (Psalm 17:14, 15).*

Though the evidences of a future state are by no means so clear in the Old Testament as in the New, yet it may seem wonderful [astounding] that any learned men should have asserted that in the former there is to be found no revelation whatever of a future life or of immortality. The truth is, these positions are there repeatedly revealed. The single passage before us contradicts the opposite opinion, and at the same time serves to admonish ingenious and learned persons that in religious inquiries, when they lean (as the Scripture says) to their own understandings, they are ever in danger of falling into the most gross and palpable absurdities.

I have chosen to introduce no more words in the text than what directly relate to the subject in view. What was particular in David's circumstances, and gave occasion to these words, shall now be briefly mentioned.

David had many enemies; and in his Psalms he frequently prays to be delivered from them. No man's life was ever more variously exercised than his, and therefore we read very much both of his inward and his outward trials. We have indeed an opportunity, in his case, of seeing godliness tried in all possible ways. The Psalms are therefore the Christian's book of experience. Everyone who fears God may, from time to time, be met with meditations and prayers exactly suited to his own case and affording him language the most proper to express his various feelings.

In the Psalm before us, David prays against the designs of his enemies and beseeches the Lord to deliver his soul from the wicked, "which is Your sword, from men who are Your hand, O Lord." Wicked men are, as it were, the Lord's sword, hand, or instrument for executing his counsels. They can do no more than what He ordains or permits. David remarks [notes] of them that they are *men of the world*--men who live for this world, and as if there were no other; who have no taste for anything but what is of this world; *"who have their portion in this life"*--they desire no other, their affections are here only; and *"whose belly You fill with Your hid treasure."* This is often the case; and by this very dispensation [distribution] it sufficiently appears of how little value in the eyes of the Lord are worldly riches and worldly grandeur. These things after which the unconverted pant so greedily are often committed to the management of men who have no love for God. Nay, such men often possess them in abundance, *"they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes."*

To conclude life in this way is the highest felicity [bliss] of a worldly man. He is so selfish that his benevolence extends very little beyond his own family. If then he has many children, possesses riches during his own life, and has the prospect of leaving much wealth among his children that they may possess it after him, he enjoys all that his heart wishes, or for which he has any taste.

But all this will not satisfy a child of God. Every real saint, in the world, will turn from these things to that which supremely engages his affections: *"As for me, I will behold Your presence in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Your likeness."* In this world he is far from being satisfied; but he has a foretaste, a relish, a prospect which cheers his heart while he thinks of the future. The time will come when he shall behold his God as He is; when in the morning of the glorious resurrection he shall awake from the dust and find himself in body and soul made perfectly like the Saviour for whose coming he now looks and wishes: "Who will transform his lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" [Phil. 3:21]. He will then be perfectly conformed to his Saviour in righteousness. He will then behold, admire, and live upon His excellencies and His loving-kindness. This is David's heaven; for this he waits. And in this taste and disposition a real saint stands directly opposite to the character of a man of the world.

The text then gives us in a few words a striking description of the difference between a worldly and a heavenly-minded man. I will endeavor to improve the instructive passage by stating this difference a little more particularly and distinctly. To this end I would first speak of "the man of the world," and secondly of the Christian--not attempting to detail everything at large of their characters, but rather to show how they stand opposed to one another in their views of what each would call a happy termination of human life. My object is to furnish matter for self-examination to us that we may know what our state is; and see for what we have to hope or to fear, for what we have cause to rejoice or to grieve; and may learn, in the first case, to be thankful and persevere, [and] in the second, to repent and believe the Gospel.

1. The unconverted man is a "man of the world." This word has generally a bad sense in Scripture. Thus: "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" ([James 4:4]; "They are of the world . . . and the world hears them" [1 John 4:5]; "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" [1 John 3:13]).

Men of the world, who persecuted David, set their heart on this world. Its pomps and vanities, its pleasures and delights, its riches and honors, its wisdom and show of virtue without substance, are their treasure. They have no value for the things of another life. Though the idea of a God is not easily taken away from the minds of men, they think of him as little as possible. They would wish him to contrive the government of the world so that they should have health, agreeable friends and connections, pleasures in abundance, success in their schemes, and gratification of their lusts and passions. If he would but permit them to live here as long as possible--forever, if that could be--they would allow him to be a good and gracious Governor. But then they would wish to have no intercourse with him. They have no idea of any pleasure resulting from society with him. They have no desire to behold his face or ever to have more to do with him than they have at present. And yet many of them may have no objection to go through a decent form of religion, now and then, particularly on the Lord's day. But it is evident

their notions of happiness suggest no duties or employments of this kind. They have their delight wholly in the world.

This is the way of all men by nature, since the fall of our first Parents. Unconverted sinners have no other taste. They "have their portion in this life." And yet they very often find the course of things not to suit their wishes. By sickness or the danger of death, they are frightened at times into something of more earnest religion. But nature is nature still; and as they are not born again, they easily, when the interruption is removed, return to their old course.

Now it is not needful to suppose that the "man of the world" should be addicted to every vice. There may be some amiable qualities which adorn his character. He may, for instance, be humane and generous; and it is not at all necessary that he should be a drunkard or a miser (in the offensive and disgraceful sense of those words). This circumstance often deceives men of the world. For possessing some good social qualities and being free from some vices to which they see others addicted, they are ready enough to conclude themselves good men. This is one of the most common and fatal errors of persons of this class, because [in spite of the foregoing], still they are [truly] "men of the world" while [as long as] they "have their portion in this life" and have no love of God in them.

You with whom this is the case, consider what is the real frame [state] and condition of your heart. It does not love God. You show no love to him in any one instance. Religious exercises are to you very unpleasant and irksome; you are glad when they are over. With you, shortness is the best recommendation they can have. And you do not love to converse freely with any person in a serious way concerning the care of the soul, concerning the worth of eternity, concerning the preciousness of the Redeemer, or on any subject that might lead your minds to God. Such subjects throw a damp on your spirits. And when alone, you do not choose to meditate on things of this nature. Yet you have wishes and desires. There is something that is uppermost in your mind. And what is that something? It is either God or the world, heavenly or earthly things; and by this very something your character must be determined--either that you are a godly man or a man of the world.

Does not conscience tell you that worldly things are your great object [goal]? At times you say you think of death and judgment. The hardened thief or murderer also thinks of the Judge and of the place of execution, but he wishes he could not. He tries to dissipate such thoughts; they are very disagreeable to him. [Yet] you have no delight in thinking of death and judgment; and what sort of pleasure heaven would afford--if it were possible for you to arrive there--you may conceive [merely] by your present feelings; [and those feelings tell you that] it would be a great punishment to you to be confined for a month to the company and acquaintance of truly pious persons. Their religious exercises and modes of conversation would be very irksome to you. How disagreeable then would heaven itself be to you, where the service of God is the chief employment of the blessed forever! Learn hence, that at present you are not fit for heaven, and that you need an entire change of heart without which you never can arrive there.

But you know what you wish for, O men of the world. The Psalmist has expressed it: "*whose belly You fill with Your hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.*" You wish to be thus prosperous, as the men of the world formerly were whose portion was in this life, who persecuted David and treated him with much hatred and enmity.

For this is the common way of such persons, from the dislike they have of godliness. There at least [in the ways of the world] your wishes are not feeble or lazy. You can feel these subjects and think of them with spirit, and both talk and act concerning them with life and earnestness.

The men of the world mentioned in the text were favored, it seems, (favored shall I say, or accursed?) with the gratification of their wishes. They were full of money, and enriched with large possessions, and saw a numerous race of children, and had large fortunes to bestow on them all. You think this is life indeed, this is enjoyment, this is to live to some purpose! And if you have success in your schemes and find things to be with you, as the Psalmist describes them to have been with the men of the world in his time, you seem to have done well. You will feel pleased with your own merit and perhaps inwardly say, "my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth." I am not now to speak of the empty, vain, and miserable state to which, after all, the greatest prosperity of this kind reduces you. My business is to show you from your own feelings, views, and practices that you are "men of the world," and as such unfit for the kingdom of heaven.

You may look back with a sort of triumph of your own management and industry. You may describe with satisfaction your artifices and address, your usefulness to the community, and your knowledge in business. You may take notice with pleasure from what low beginnings in life you have been raised thus high. You may talk of your money, your estates, your connections, your rank and appearance in the world, the credit you are [held] in and the awe in which you hold mankind on account of your riches and consequence. But the soul cannot feed on such trash as this. Conscience itself is your accuser, and death is before you, and judgment draws nearer and nearer; and you have not the least relish, the least preparation for the state which is to come.

What is it to you that you will leave a great fortune behind you, and your children in the possession of it? What is it to you that numbers [of people] once your equals are now far your inferiors? Alas, what is all this to the happiness of the soul? "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" . . . But some of you are not so prosperous. On the contrary, many have to struggle with difficulties. In cases of this kind, as "men of the world" who have their portion in this life, you will look up with envy and admiration [approval] to those who have been more fortunate, [but as a consequence] you fret and murmur and live in great anxiety; so that in one case [that of the prosperous] you are lifted up with pride, and in the other [that of the poor] you are racked with discontent.

Thus it is [that] poor persons may show that they, as well as the rich, are men of the world. And till they obtain a taste and disposition entirely new, entirely opposite to what they now profess, or, in other words, till the great, the divine change of the new birth take place in them, they cannot be happy either in this life or in another. Such are the views and such the state of mind of those who have their portion in this life.

2. Let us for a few moments turn our eyes to those who have their portion in a better world. I am not going to represent either angels or saints in heaven. A real Christian, in this life, is far from being perfect. He may, in some qualities and in some views, be even inferior to a man of the world. Moreover, he has faults which may be seen and known. They are often not of an ambiguous nature, though it be still true that he is liable to frequent misrepresentation. Yet, after all, there is an essential difference of character between him and the man of the world.

Men should not carry their skepticism so far as to make all alike.

The difference between a Christian and a worldling is as real as that between the two different sorts of worlds to which they are hastening--as real as the difference between heaven and hell. It is not a just method of coming at the truth of their characters to rely on counting the virtues of the one and the vices of the other, and on setting off good things against bad ones. Nothing but confusion of character arises from this mode of trial. Look at the heart of each. Search the ruling passion, the governing principle. There you see what men are. The characters of men depend upon their habitual inclinations--in one word, upon their dispositions. What we habitually and constantly wish to be, that we are in the sight of God; and so shall we be accounted at the day of judgment.

A real Christian's heart cries, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" [Ps. 73:25]. He knows that his flesh and his heart will one day fail, but, nevertheless, God is the strength of his heart and his portion forever. While he continues in this world he is far from being what he wishes to be. He has the earnest of the Spirit indeed, but he has an ambition which this world can never gratify. He views its pleasures, honors, and riches with the eyes of a stranger. He sighs for that glorious redemption and liberty which he looks for above. Here he is burdened daily; and the most trying of all his burdens is his own corrupt nature. But he looks forward to a glorious day when he shall behold his Saviour in righteousness. He expects to see Jesus, who at present sustains him with aid unseen, comforts him with promises of future good, and undertakes to guide him--unworthy sinner as he is--to glory. And if a taste of his pardoning love and a glimpse of the light of his countenance be so pleasant now, what will it be to enjoy the fullness of these things hereafter!

This then is the rest of a truly Christian character. He is supported under present trials with the prospect of immortality through Jesus. He who constantly is so supported and is longing, waiting, looking for his glorious appearing, and is also by this prospect animated to endure, has in himself a certain witness of his interest in Christ and of a divine change of his affections. Let others look to what they please, he has "gladness of heart more than when their corn, and wine, and oil is increased." If in this life only he had hope, he would, perhaps, be of all men most miserable. But as his joy arises from the steady expectation of a happy immortality, it cannot be very materially affected by poverty or by worldly crosses.

It must however be remembered that it is not any confused sort of prospect that forms the heaven after which the true Christian pants. Heaven without Christ would be hell to him. He means to "behold the presence of Christ in righteousness." For it is in Him that God becomes accessible, appears gracious, and is made visible to man. The body itself is in this life a great encumbrance to this holy man. But he shall awake by-and-by in the likeness of his Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

At present he is by faith united to Christ and is one Spirit with him, a member "of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" [Eph. 5:30]. In law and justice he is one with Him, redeemed from the curse by his surety who bore the curse for him, and in the Redeemer made the righteousness of God. His union with Him is compared constantly in Scripture to that of a wife with a

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<sup>1</sup> **KM Note:** Rev. Milner tends to portray the ultimate destiny of the redeemed as "heaven." However, theologians from all three eschatological positions (premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial) agree that the final destiny of the redeemed is the New Earth. See my article, "[The Christian Answer to Death and the Eternal Destiny of the Redeemed.](#)" During the "intermediate state" between death and resurrection, of course, the redeemed are in heaven (see Phil. 1:23).

husband. How glorious will his state then be when he shall "see face to face," when the veil shall be removed, when his likeness to his Saviour shall be complete, when an intimate communion with Him shall be carried on forever without cloud, without impediment. Certainly he will be satisfied. He will behold the glory, admire the perfections, be ravished with the grace, and enjoy the goodness of his Saviour forever. All will be love, and joy, and peace; and no more sorrow, darkness, temptation, or pain. If even now on earth, though not seeing his Saviour he loves him and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, what will that joy be in heaven?

Here then, I dare lay down one of the most certain proofs of a real [true] Christian. Though his frame [state] be not always as it should be--far from it!--yet the new nature works in him constantly in the manner which I have been describing. And the grievous affliction which he often feels on account of his sinful propensities proves that his relish for holiness and for heaven lives in him in the midst of his failings and infirmities.

A man may delude himself with foolish raptures and ungrounded fancies and presumptions at the same time that the general course of his practice proves him a worldly man after all, at the same time that his pride, and selfishness, and deceit thrive and domineer. But where a divine principle prevails indeed, there is this spiritual, this heavenly taste. And it is the source of the purest pleasures which in this world are to be known. Whoever has the least portion of it will despise and yet tenderly pity the condition of those who are looking for happiness from the things of this world.

This it is to pant after God as the deer pants after the water brooks--by an appetite natural indeed, but belonging to the *new*, not the *old* nature; an appetite not always equally keen but always in existence, and always productive of prayer and of a course of conduct quite opposite to anything worldly. The love of Jesus is the pleasant theme of the new man, who never fails to feel his spirit united to those who love that precious name, who never fails to pray that "grace may be with all them who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

Enough has now been said to point out the two characters. The marks by which men may know themselves are very plain. Christian, is it not thus with you? I allow, however, that if you are a real Christian, you yourself will be one of the last who can see the proofs of your own blessed state. But what means the restlessness of mind after Christ, the groaning in spirit, the earnest longings after heaven from time to time, the constant craving after spiritual pleasure and joy? Surely these affections are not from nature. They are of grace. Be assured that as you dread sin above all things, it shall never be your ruin. As you love God in Christ above all things, you shall, after having cheerfully taken up and patiently borne your cross, enjoy communion with him forevermore.

I exhort all persons who feel that they have no such desires and affections, but rather an aversion and disgust to them, not to deceive themselves with fancying their state to be good when conscience tells them the contrary, when conscience tells them that all their sensations of joy are of a worldly nature. But remember what divine grace can still do for you, and with a docile temper of mind observe what it has done for those whose dispositions are now spiritual. Their hearts were once like yours. Seek God for grace, in Christ, and yours may become as theirs. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save" [Isa. 59:1]. If you perish, you are your own destroyer. You perish through your own obduracy [stubbornness] and impenitence.

Let the great difference between both the character and the doom of these two sorts of persons engage the serious thoughts of all that are here present. We are each of us either in the one class or in the other. We are either vessels of honor under preparation for a happy eternity, or vessels of wrath fitting for destruction. If we be not found to be Christ's at his coming, we shall be found to belong to the world; and the description of the world is that it lies in wickedness. If we rise not [at the resurrection] to glory in our Saviour's likeness, we shall "rise to shame and everlasting contempt." May the Lord give us all grace to choose the good part while it is in our power, that we may not be confounded in the day of his appearing.

Sermon XXI from *Practical Sermons*, 3rd. ed., by Joseph Milner (London: J. & E. Hodson, 1804). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except for some very light editing for clarity. Also, punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized, long paragraphs have been divided, and the NKJV has been used for numerous quotations.