

“Where Art Thou?”

by JC Ryle

Dear congregation,

In Genesis 3:9 it says “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, “Where art thou?”

This question is the first which God asked of man after the fall.

It is the question He asked Adam in the day that he ate the forbidden fruit, and became a sinner.

In vain did Adam and his wife hide themselves among the trees of the garden of Eden.

In vain did they try to escape the eye of the all-seeing God.

They heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the cool of the day: “Where art thou?”

Think for a moment how awful those words must have sounded!

Think what the feelings of Adam and Eve must have been!

About 6,000 years have passed away since this question was first asked.

Millions of Adam's children have lived and died, and gone to their own place.

Millions are still upon earth, and every one of them has a soul to be lost or saved.

But no question has ever been, or ever can be, more solemn than the one which is before you:

Where are you?

Where are you in the sight of God?

Come now, and give me your attention, while I tell you a few things which may shed light on this question.

I know not who you are – whether you are learned or unlearned; - whether you are rich or poor; - whether you are young or old: about all this I know nothing.

But I do know that you have got an undying soul, and I want that soul to be saved.

I do know that you have to stand before the judgement seat of God, and I want you to be prepared for it.

I do know that you will be forever in heaven or in hell, and I want you to escape hell, and reach heaven.

I do know that the Bible contains very solemn things about the inhabitants of the earth, and I want every man, woman, and child in the world to hear them.

I believe every word in the Bible; and because I believe it, I ask every one, “Where are you in the sight of God?”

1. In the first place, there are many people about whom the Bible shows me I ought to be exceedingly afraid. Are you one of them?

These are those who have not yet been converted and born again.

They are not justified.

They are not sanctified.

They have not the Spirit.

They have no faith.

They have no grace.

Their sins are not forgiven.

Their hearts are not changed.

They are not ready to die.

They are not fit for heaven.

They are neither godly, nor righteous, nor saints.

Some of these people, to all appearance, think no more about their souls than animals do.

Their treasure is obviously on earth.

Their good things are clearly all on this side of the grave.

Their attention is swallowed up by the perishable things of time.

Food, drink, and clothing – money, houses, and land – business, pleasure or politics – marrying, reading, or companionship – these are the things which fill their hearts.

They live as if there were no such book as the Bible.

They go on as if resurrection and eternal judgement were not true, but a lie.

As for grace, and conversion, and justification, and holiness – they are things which they do not care for – they are words they are either ignorant of, or despise.

They are all going to die.

They are all going to be judged.

And yet they seem to be even more hardened than the devil, for they do not appear to believe or tremble.

What a sad state this is for an undying soul to be in!

Some of the people I speak of have some form of religion, but after all it is nothing but a form.

They call themselves Christians.

They go to a place of worship on Sunday.

But when you have said that, you have said all.

Where is the religion of the New Testament to be seen in their lives?

Nowhere at all!

Sin is plainly not considered their worst enemy,

nor the Lord Jesus their best friend,

nor the will of God their rule of life,

nor salvation the great purpose of their existence.

The spirit of sleep keeps hold of their hearts, and they are at ease, self-satisfied, and content.

They are in a luke-warm frame of mind, and think they have enough religion.

God speaks to them continually -

by mercies,

by afflictions,

by sermons;

but they do not want to hear.

Jesus knocks at the door of their hearts, but they do not want to open.

They are told of death and eternity, but continue unconverted.

They are warned against the love of the world, but plunge into it week after week without shame.

They hear of Christ coming to earth to die for sinners, and go away unaffected.

There seems a place in their hearts for everything except God:

room for business

room for pleasures

room for sin

room for the devil

room for the world:

but like the inn at Bethlehem, no room for Him who made them -

no admission for Jesus, the Spirit, or the Word.

What a sad condition of things is this!

But how common!

I put it solemnly to your conscience, as in the sight of God, are you one of these people whom I have just described?

There are thousands of such people in our land, among rich and poor.

Are you one of them?

If you are, I fear for you - I tremble for you - I am alarmed for you - I am exceedingly afraid.

What is it that I fear for you?

I fear everything.

I fear that you will continue rejecting Christ until you have sinned away your own soul.

I fear that you will be given over to a wicked mind, and that you will come to such deadness and hardness of heart, that nothing but the voice of the archangel and the trump of God will wake you up.

I fear that you will cling to this vain world so tightly, that nothing but death will part it and you.

I fear that you will continue to live without Christ,

die without forgiveness,

rise again without hope,

receive judgement without mercy,

and sink into hell without remedy.

I do solemnly warn you to flee from the wrath to come.

I plead with you to remember that the Bible is all true, and will be fulfilled -

that the end of your present ways is misery and sorrow,

that without holiness no man shall see the Lord,

that the wicked and all that forget God will be cast into hell,

that God shall one day take account of all your doings,

and that Christ-less sinners like yourself can never stand in His sight, for He is holy, and a consuming fire.

Oh, that you would consider these things!

Where is the person who can hold his finger for one minute in the flame of a candle?

Who will be able to live with everlasting burnings?

I know well the thoughts that Satan will put into your heart, as you listen to these words.

I know well the excuses that you are going to make.

You will tell me "Religion is all very well, but a person must live."

I answer, "It is quite true that a person must *live*, but it is no less true that he must also *die*."

You may tell me, "A person who has to work for his food, has no time for anything else: he cannot starve."

I answer, that "I do not want anyone to starve, but neither do I want any one to burn in hell."

You may tell me, "A person must take care of his business first in this world."

I answer, "Yes! And the first business a person should take care of is his eternal business – the

business of his soul!”

I plead with you to break off your sins – to repent and be converted.

I plead with you to change your path – to turn from your present carelessness about your soul.

I offer to you through Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of all past sins –  
free and complete forgiveness, everlasting forgiveness.

I tell you, in my Master's name, that if you will turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, this forgiveness will  
be yours at once.

Oh, do not refuse such a gracious invitation!

Do not hear about Christ dying for you – Christ shedding His own blood for you – Christ stretching  
out His hands to you, and still remain unmoved.

Do not love this dying world better than eternal life.

Dare to be bold and decided.

Resolve to come out from the broad way which leads to destruction.

Arise and escape for your life, while it is called today.

Repent, believe, pray, and be saved.

I fear for you in your present state.

My heart's desire and prayer is that God may teach you to fear for yourself.

2. In the second place, there are many people about whom the Bible shows me I ought to stand in  
doubt. Are you one of these?

There are many whom I must call “almost Christians”, because I know no other expression in the  
Bible which describes them so exactly.

They have many things about them which are right, and good, and praiseworthy, in the sight of  
God.

They are moral in their lives.

They are free from glaring outward sins.

They keep up many decent and proper habits.

They are usually diligent in their attendance on the means of grace.

They appear to love the preaching of the Gospel.

They are not offended at the truth as it is in Jesus, no matter how plainly it is spoken.

They have no objection to religious companions, religious books, and religious talk.

They agree to everything you say when you speak to them about their souls.

And this is all good.

But still there is no movement in the hearts of these people that even a microscope could see.

Week after week, year after year roll on, and they are just where they were.

They listen to the preaching, but, like Pharaoh's lean cows, are nothing the better for all they hear.

There is always the same attendance on the means of grace -

the same wishing and hoping -

the same way of talking about religion -

but there is nothing more.

There is no going forward in their Christianity.

There is no life, and heart, and reality in it.

Their souls seem to be at a stand still.

And all this is sadly wrong.

Are you one of these people?

I ask you to give an honest answer to the question -

Is this the state of your soul in the sight of God?

If it is, I can only say your condition is very unsatisfactory.

As the apostle said to the Galatians, so I say to you: "I stand in doubt of you."

How can I feel otherwise?

There are only two sides – the side of Christ and the side of the devil; but you make it doubtful on which side you are.

I dare not say you are completely careless about religion, but I cannot call you decided.

I shrink from counting you with the ungodly, but I may not place you among the Lord's children.

You have some light; but is it saving knowledge?

You have some feeling; but is it grace?

You are not non-religious; but are you a child of God?

You may possibly be one of the Lord's people; but you live so close to the border, I cannot tell what side you belong to.

You may not perhaps be spiritually dead; but like a sickly tree in winter, I hardly know if you are alive.

And so you live on – I cannot help doubting about you.

I cannot read the secrets of your heart.

Perhaps there is some pet bosom sin, which you are holding tightly, and will not give up.

This is a disease which stunts the growth of many professing Christians.

Perhaps you are kept back by the fear of man.

Perhaps you are careless about private prayer and communion with God. This is one reason why many are weak and sickly in spirit.

But whatever your reason may be, I warn you with love to be careful.

You are not safe.

Awake to a sense of your danger!

Strive to enter in.

You must give up this halting between two opinions, if you ever want to enjoy good evidences of your salvation.

There must be a change in you.

There is no real standing still in true Christianity.

If God's work is not making progress in a person's heart, the devil's is;

and if a person is always at the same point in religion, the probability is that he has got no religion at all.

It is not enough to cease to evil;

we must also learn to do well.

It will not be enough to do no harm;

we must also labour to do good.

Oh, tremble, lest you should be an unprofitable receiver of God's talents.

Remember, he that is not with Christ, is against Him.

I call on you strongly to never rest until you have found out whether you have grace in your heart or not.

Wishes and desires and good feelings and convictions are all excellent things, but they alone will never save you.

The way-side hearers in the parable listened, but the Word took no root in them – they were not saved.

The stony ground hearers listened with joy, but the Word had no depth in them – they were not saved.

The thorny ground hearers brought forth something like fruit, but the Word was choked by the world- they were not saved.

Do you tremble at the Word?

So did Felix, but he was not saved.

Do you like to hear good sermons, and do many things which are right?

So did Herod, but he was not saved.

Do you wish to die the death of the righteous?

So did Balaam, but he was not saved.

Do you have knowledge?

So did Judas Iscariot, but he was not saved.

Once more I call on you to take care what you are doing.

But there are others about whom I stand in doubt.

These are those who once thought to be true believers, but they have turned back again to the world.

They walk no more in the ways they once seemed to choose.

They are backsliders.

Is this the state of your soul?

If it is, know for certain, that your condition is unsatisfactory.

It matters little what you past experience was.

It proves little that you once were counted among true Christians.

It may have been all a mistake and a delusion.

It is your present condition of soul that I look at.

I believe there was a time when all the saints of God who saw you rejoiced at the sight.

You seemed to love the Lord Jesus sincerely, and to be willing to give up the broad way forever, and forsake all for the Gospel's sake.

The Word of God seemed sweet and precious to you;

the voice of Christ's ministers a pleasant sound;

the gathering of the Lord's people the place you loved best;

the company of true believers your great delight.

Your place was never empty at Church.

Your Bible was never long out of your hands.

There were no days in your life without prayer.

Your zeal was strong.

But where are you now?

Have you left your first love?

Are your serious impressions fast dying off; are they getting weaker and fainter every day?

Are your convictions withering up?

Does the preaching, to which you once listened intently, now bore you?



The books you delighted in, do they still give pleasure?  
Is the progress of Christ's Gospel no longer interesting?  
Is the company of God's children no more looked for?  
Are you becoming impatient of rebuke and advice, careless about little sins?  
If so, you are grieving the Spirit, and tempting the devil.  
I cannot let you go without trying to do you good.  
Even with all your backsliding, there is hope even for you.  
There is no disease of soul that the glorious Gospel cannot cure.  
That cure is the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus.  
Go to Him without delay, and Jesus Christ will make you whole.

Take your neglected Bible and see how David fell and lay in sin for a whole year, and yet when he repented and turned to God, there was mercy for him.

See how Peter denied his Master three times with an oath, and yet when he wept and humbled himself, there was mercy for him.

Hear the words of our Lord and Saviour in Matthew 11:28: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And in Jeremiah 3:1 "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet, return again to Me."

And in Isaiah 1:18 "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Or in Jeremiah 3:22 "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."

Oh that you would answer like Israel, "Behold I come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord my God."

3. In the third place, there are some people about whom the Bible tells me I ought to feel a good hope. Are you one of these?

These people have found out they are guilty sinners, and have fled to Christ for salvation.

They have found out that sin is a miserable and unhappy thing, and they hate it, and long to be free from it completely.

In themselves they see only weakness and corruption, but in the Lord Jesus they see the very things they need:

pardon, peace, light, comfort and strength.

Christ's blood, Christ's cross, Christ's righteousness, Christ's intercession,  
these are the things their minds love to think on.

They want to please God, and to live for the Lord.

After death, their hope is that they will be with the Lord.

Is this the state of your soul?

Do you know anything of the faith and hope and love which I just described?

If you do, I thank God for it.

I know well that you live in a world full of trials.

I know well that pride, and unbelief, and laziness are constantly struggling for the mastery within you.

You have fightings without and fears within.

I doubt not that your heart is deceitful and you are often sick of yourself.

But none the less, I must have hope for your soul.

I hope, because I believe that God has begun a work in you which He will never allow to be overthrown.

Who taught you to hate sin and love Christ?

Who made you delight in God's service?

These things do not come from your own heart.

These things are the work of God, and where He begins, He always finishes.

I hope because you have a Saviour whose blood can cleanse from all sin -

a Saviour who invites all, and casts out none that come to Him -

a Saviour that will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax -

a Saviour that can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities, and is not ashamed to call you brethren -

a Saviour who never changes – the same yesterday, today, and forever, always able to save to the uttermost.

I hope because God has given to you the exceeding great and precious promises -

promises of being kept unto the end -

promises of grace for every time of need and strength according to your day -

promises that were never yet broken.

Surely here is ground for hope.

If you are a believer, these things are a strong foundation.

If God be for you, who can be against you?

There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

Nothing shall ever separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let me tell you what I want you and every true Christian to aim at.

I want you to seek the full assurance of hope – that lively hope which makes a person never ashamed.

Our souls are every ready to cleave to the dust.

There is room for improvement in us every day.

Listen then, while I tell you a few things which we must never forget, if we want to grow in grace, and have more hope.

\*If we want to grow in grace, and have more hope, we must seek more knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How little do we know of Him!

Our cold affections toward Him are a witness against ourselves.

If our eyes were more open to what He is and does for us, we should love Him more.

Nothing is so sanctifying as knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and communion with Him.

“Abide in Me,” He says Himself, “and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in Me.”

Christ must be the spring of our holiness, as well as the rock of our faith.

Christ must be all in all.

I do not doubt that He is precious to you that believe.

But oh, Christ ought to be far more precious to us than He has ever been yet!

All our darkness arises from not keeping close to Him.

Christ crucified for sinners –

Christ seen with the eye of faith -

Christ present in the heart -

Christ as the bread of life -

this must be the doctrine we cling to.

Nothing else will save, satisfy or sanctify a sinful soul.

\*If we want to grow in grace and have more hope, we must seek more knowledge of our own hearts.

The half of the sin that is in us has been hidden from our eyes.

If we would be happy Christians, let us stop putting confidence in our hearts.

Let us learn to expect nothing from them but weakness.

Let us stop looking to our feelings for our comfort.

Hope built on anything within us must always be wavering and unstable.

\*If we want to grow in grace, and have more hope, we must seek more holiness in our life and walk.

There is an inseparable connection between a close walk with God and comfort in our religion.

Let this never be forgotten.

Are there are things missing in us? -

-the meekness and gentleness of our Master: many times we are harsh, rough-tempered and critical.

-real boldness in confessing Christ before others: we often think much more of the time to be silent than the time to speak.

-real humility: not many of us like to take the lowest place, and esteem every one better than ourselves, and our own strength perfect weakness.

-real charity: few of us have that unselfish spirit which seeks not its own. There are few of us who are not more taken up with our own feelings and our own happiness than that of others.

-real thankfulness of spirit: we complain, and murmur, and fret and brood over the things we do not have, and forget the things we have.

-decided separation from the world: Many of us, like a chameleon, are always taking the colour of our company; we become so like the ungodly that it is hard to tell the difference.

These things ought not to be. If we want more hope, let us be more zealous of good works.

\*If we want to grow in grace, and have a more lively hope, we must seek more watchfulness in times of prosperity.

I know of no time in a believer's life when his soul is in such real danger as when all things go well.

I know no time when a believer is so likely to contract spiritual diseases and lay the foundation of many days of darkness and doubt.

You and I naturally like our lives to run smoothly.

But we have little idea how dangerous this is to our religion.

David did not commit adultery while fleeing from Saul – it was when Saul was dead, and there was peace in Israel.

Oh, if we would have a lively hope, let us watch in the days of prosperity, and be sober.

\*If we want to grow in grace, and have a lively hope, we must seek more faith and contentment in times of trial.

Trial often makes us speak unwisely, and say and do things which come between our soul and

Christ.

Trial is a fire which often brings much dross to the surface of a believer's heart, and makes him say, "God has forgotten me, there is no hope for my soul; I am cast out of the Lord's sight; I am allowed to complain."

But trial is the hand of the Father chastening us for our profit, though we may be slow to believe it. They are often sent in answer to a prayer for sanctification – it is one of God's ways of carrying on that work of sanctification.

Blessed are they who patiently take the Lord's medicines – who bear the cross and say "It is well". Afflictions borne well are spiritual promotions.

Patience having a perfect work in the time of affliction will sooner or later yield a precious harvest of inward hope.

If we would grow in grace, and have a more lively hope, we must seek more preparedness for Christ's second coming.

I know no doctrine more sanctifying and enlivening than that of Christ's second coming.

It draws us from the world, and makes us focused, whole-hearted and joyful Christians.

But, do we love and long for our Lord's appearing?

Or are we not quite ready to receive Jesus?

Would He find the door shut, the fires almost out?

Oh, it ought not to be so!

We need more of a pilgrim's spirit: we ought to be always looking for and hurrying towards our home.

The day of the Lord's coming is the day of complete redemption, the day when the family of God shall at last be all gathered together.

It is the day when we will no longer walk by faith, but by sight – we shall see the King in His beauty.

Surely we ought to be saying daily, "Come Lord Jesus, let Thy Kingdom come."

Let us set Christ's coming continually in front of our eyes.

Let us say to ourselves every morning, "The Lord will soon return" and it will be good for our souls.

\*Lastly, if we want to grow in grace and have more hope, we must seek more diligence about the means of grace.

We must not think that our hope is *not* dependant in any way on the effort we take in the use of God's appointed means.

God has wisely ordered it so that lazy Christians hardly ever enjoy any assurance of their own salvation.

He tells us that we must labour, strive and work to make our calling and election sure.

Oh! that believers would remember this, and take it to heart.

I suspect that many of God's people are very lazy in their manner of using means.

They know little of David's spirit when he said, "My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the house of my God."

I wonder if there is much private prayer before and after sermons.

I wonder if the Bible is read as much as it should be.

I wonder if we are in private prayer as often we should be.

Are we satisfied to get up from our knees without having really seen or heard anything of God and Christ?

It is the diligent soul that enjoys lively hope.

Let us take to heart the things that I have mentioned.

Let us resolve, by God's help, to remember them continually, to pray for them, strive after them, and endeavour to attain them.

This is the way to be useful Christians.

The world knows little of Christ beyond what it sees of Him in His people.

What plainly, clearly-written epistles we ought to be!

A hopeful growing believer is a walking sermon, showing to all what grace can do.

Oh, the value and the power of a growing Christian!

The Lord make you and me such.

This is the way to be happy Christians.

Happiness is the gift of God, but that there is the closest connection between full following of God and full happiness, let no one doubt for an instant.

A hopeful, growing believer does not quench the Spirit by continual inconsistencies, and so the fire within him hardly ever burns low.

He has great peace because he really loves God's law, and all that see him are forced to admit that it is a privilege and not a bondage to be a Christian.

Oh the comfort of a tender conscience, a close walk with God, a heavenly frame of mind!

The Lord make us all of such a spirit.

And now, dear listeners, I heartily pray God to bless these words to your souls.

Oh that every listener would consider his own ways, and ask himself the question, "Where am I? What am I? Where am I going? What will be the end of my current manner? What is the hope of my soul?"

I ask you not to despise my question.

Think of it; consider it; pray over it.

Oh that it make take firm hold of your heart, and never leave you!

Time is fast ebbing away.

Life is a vast uncertainty.

Death is drawing nearer and nearer.

Judgement is sure to come.

Where are you?

Where are you in the sight of God?

Amen.