

Pastoral Letter August 2014

No more sea

Heaven is a wonderfully positive place! We shall 'be away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:8). We shall 'be with Christ, for that is far better' (Philippians 1:23). Our 'eyes will behold the king in his beauty' and 'they will see a land that stretches afar [a land of far distances]' (Isaiah 33:17). We shall have entered 'into the joy of (our) master' (Matthew 25:21). We shall be where 'the wicked cease from troubling, and .. the weary are at rest' (Job 3:17). A wonderfully positive place indeed!

How interesting it is, therefore, that much of the language Scripture uses to describe heaven is cast in the negative. I refer to what we often speak of as the 'no mores' of heaven. Why is this? Our dear friend Octavius Winslow has the answer. 'Who can fail to recognise in this arrangement of the picture the hand of a Divine Artist? Throwing in the background of the canvas some of the darker shadows of the present life, the great and attractive objects of the future are thus made to stand out in more distinct form and in richer glow. By portraying to us what heaven is NOT, we form a more correct and bright conception of what heaven really is'.

There are several of these 'no mores', and they all bear witness to Winslow's remarks. To know that there will be in heaven no more tears, mourning or crying tells us very vividly what a happy and blissful place it is – that there is no more pain speaks of being finished with affliction, weakness and persecution – no more hungering and thirsting speaks of absolute satisfaction and contentment, with every need supplied – no more death gives us a sweet assurance of the life, vigour and victory of heavenly experience – while no more night provides the rich comfort of complete safety, security and peace, with nothing to threaten or cause alarm anymore.

There is another 'no more', however, which can be easily missed – yet it is one of the most precious of all: no more sea (Revelation 21:1). To many here on earth, the sea has great appeal – sailing, swimming, cruising, travelling, adventuring, and so on. Waves, surf, billows, reefs, or just the sight of calm and still waters, each hold their own attraction, and speak powerfully of the glory of the One who created them. But the sea can also be a very dangerous place, with many terrors – somewhere where many people have come to grief or lost their lives. There is more than one character to the sea.

So why this particular mention, concerning heaven, of no more sea?

- 1) Here is assurance of our sins having been dealt with completely. Already God has 'cast all our sins into the depths of the sea' (Micah 7:19) – and *there*, there will be no more sea at all!
- 2) Sea is often an image of turmoil, restlessness, and agitation – it rages, it tosses, it rises and falls – and *there*, all will be absolute serenity and calm, with nothing to disturb in any way!
- 3) For all that some love the sea, others are terrified by it – while *there*, no terrors will remain, either for body or soul! There will be no place for sin, fear, anxiety, distress – or the devil.
- 4) Nations on earth are often divided by seas and oceans – *there*, however, will dwell that 'great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'' (Revelation 7:9f).

Ah! 'Could we but climb where Moses stood – And view the landscape o'er – Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood – Should fright us from the shore'!