

DO YOU REALISE YOU ARE IN GLORIOUS COMPANY?

Today's Text: Heb. 12: 18-29

Extracts:

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest... But *you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel* [Heb. 12: 18-24]

Named after Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, Oxfam is a major international non-governmental organisation(NGO) founded in 1942.¹With a total staff strength of 10,000 in 90 countries, Oxfam makes a major impact/contribution in the areas of disaster relief and poverty eradication (among others), using a confederation of 19 independent charitable organisations around the world. Recently, Oxfam became embroiled in a major scandal. It was accused of concealing the findings of an inquiry into claims that staff used sex workers while delivering aid to Haiti in 2011. Donors, big and small, governments and other interested parties became worried. Oxfam has apologised. In fact, 22 other aid agencies have also apologised for the sector's failings. That is an eye opener for that donor-driven sector not to take its stakeholders for granted from now on.

Believers can find themselves in a similar situation. As we grow in our spiritual walk, we can get complacent. We take the fear of God for granted, believing that He is faithful to forgive us each time we fail Him. However, like Oxfam, we can be caught unprepared! That is why it is important that we know the company to which we now belong after accepting Christ. In today's Bible verses, we are made aware that we belong to a glorious company in heaven. Did you know that? Let us find out!

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Oxfam," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxfam>; Jamie Gierson and agencies, "Oxfam International boss vows to root out wrongdoing at charity," *The Guardian*, Friday, 16 Feb. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/16/oxfam-international-boss-vows-to-root-out-wrongdoing-at-charity>; "Oxfam Haiti Scandal: Thousands cancel donations to charity," *BBC*, 20 Feb. 2018; <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43121833> and "Aid organisations 'truly sorry' for sector's failings," *BBC*, 24 Feb. 2018; <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43167746>

1. Background: Identifying your glorious company

Isaac and Rebekah were married for twenty years before they had twins-boys, Esau and Jacob [**Gen. 25: 20, 26**]. During her pregnancy, Rebekah went to inquire of the LORD why the twins were struggling together within her. God told her that there were two nations in her womb, two peoples. One would be stronger than the other and “the older shall serve the younger.” Esau came out before Jacob, indicating that Jacob had God’s favour to be stronger than Esau. However, Jacob began to behave like a typical ambitious human being! He tricked Esau to sell his birthright to him [**vv. 20-34**] and, with his mother’s connivance, he received the firstborn blessings from their old father, Isaac [**Gen. 27: 1-29**].

As he fled from his elder brother’s wrath, Jacob found himself at Bethel. He fell asleep and had a dream. He saw a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached up to heaven. He saw angels of God ascending and descending on it. The LORD stood above the ladder and said to Jacob, “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants... and in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed” [**Gen. 28: 10-14**]. When Jacob woke up, he said, “*Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.*” He became afraid and said, “*This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*” [**vv. 16-17**]. That was the turning point in Jacob’s spiritual life.

We all easily fall into the trap of complacency and begin to take God for granted. When our children are grown and doing well, we see them as the fruits of our labour more than the grace of God. When we are strong and hardly sick or sickly, we attribute it to our rigorous exercise routines. Before we know it, the matter gets into our heads. That big position we now occupy or the enormous wealth we have stumbled into, we have gained by our “power and the might” of our hands, not from God who has given us the power to get it [**Deut. 8: 17-18**]. When challenges then set in, we blame the devil or our enemies! *We forget that success is unsafe at any speed. The road to it is always under construction because success is measured at the end of our sojourn on earth.* Perhaps the time has come for all believers to realise what accepting Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith implies- that they are now in glorious company. What does that mean?

The author of the book of Hebrews, in the 12th chapter, has drawn our attention to the spiritual features of the glorious company that *true believers* keep. Let us pay attention to the following:

a) *Your true home- the city of the living God*

The author writes, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, to an innumerable company of angels” [**Heb. 12: 22**]. Therefore, the believer’s true home is in heaven, the city of the living God. By implication, believers are mere “strangers

and pilgrims on the earth” [Heb. 11: 13] and “ambassadors for Christ” [2 Cor. 5: 20].

We know that an embassy is an extension of the country to which it belongs. The staff of an embassy are an integral part of the home country. They enjoy diplomatic immunity in the countries where they are located, implying that local authorities cannot arrest or touch them without the authority of their home state. By implication, the believer’s true home is in heaven, “the city of the living God.” In that city, citizens do not hunger or thirst. The sun will not strike them, nor do they suffer any heat. Jesus, the Lamb of God who is in the midst of the throne of God “will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters (and) God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” [Rev. 7: 16-17].

Therefore, as you pass through the rough avenues of this physical world, you can afford to focus on your heavenly home. You may be hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed [2 Cor. 4: 8-9]. Jesus has prepared a mansion for you in His Father’s house [Jn 14: 2-3]. Sooner than later, you will be given the keys to your mansion up there!

b) *Your place of worship- the Church of the firstborn registered in heaven*

The author writes that people of true faith have come “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” [Heb. 12: 23]. By implication, *your place of worship is not just that fine building on earth but the church in heaven*. Apostle John was given a glimpse of that congregation when he was a prisoner in the island of Patmos [Rev. 4: 1-11].

John was in Spirit on the Lord’s Day and he saw a throne set in heaven on which One sat. Around the throne were 24 elders “sitting clothed in white robes.” Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne “which are the seven Spirits of God.” In the midst of the throne stood a Lamb “as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Of course, that Lamb is the “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” [Rev. 5: 6]. Of this “Rod from the stem of Jesse (David’s father), Isaiah had prophesied that the seven Spirits shall rest on Him [Is. 11: 1-2]. The seven Spirits are:

1. *The Spirit of the LORD*
2. *The Spirit of wisdom*
3. *The Spirit of understanding*
4. *The Spirit of counsel*
5. *The Spirit of might*
6. *The Spirit of knowledge*
7. *The fear of the LORD*

The four living creatures (cherubim) around the throne are said to be full of eyes in front and in back; they neither rest day or night [**Rev. 4: 7-8**]. The first creature looked like a lion, the king. The Gospel of Matthew presented Jesus as the King of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah [**Matt. 27: 37**]. The second creature looked like a calf, representing service and sacrifice. Mark concentrated on Jesus as the Servant [**Mk 10:45**]. The third creature looked like a man. Luke concentrated on the humanity of Jesus as the Son of Man. The fourth creature looked like a flying eagle, high and heavenly. John looked at Jesus as the Son of God. Remarkably, therefore, the four living creatures represent the four Gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke and John] that we read during worship in our churches on earth!

Clearly, the churches on earth are mere glimpses of the church in heaven. The next time you are in your place of worship, you can now appreciate that you belong to a much much bigger congregation. When next you hear the call for prayers, focus on a similar call in the church in heaven. All the worshippers fall down before the throne, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory honour and power; for Thou hath created all things for Thy pleasure; they are and were created” [**vv. 11-12-KJV**].

c) *Your Advocate-Jesus Christ the Mediator of the new covenant*

The author writes that we have come “to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel” [**Heb. 12:24**]. A mediator is a person who intercedes on our behalf, just as a lawyer pleads on behalf of an accused in the law court. Jesus has been called our Advocate with the Father [**1 Jn 2: 1**]. An advocate knows the truth about his/her client but s(he) will only use the part of it that helps the client’s case! In like manner, Jesus has covered our tracks by offering His own blood to pay for our sins. That is why He has been called the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” [**Rev. 13: 8**].

As you kneel to pray or confess your sins, you cannot hide anything from your Advocate because He knows and sees everything that you do! Tell it like it is to Him so that He can also represent you most effectively before His Father. That way, you are in glorious company.

From the forgoing, we can conclude that *knowing the glorious company we keep can steady our heads, no matter the circumstances we face. We do not need to play the hypocrite again because members of our home and church in heaven see us differently and our Advocate knows EVERYTHING about us*. So, from now on, how are you going to respond?

2. Your appropriate response

The only way to stay steady with our glorious company is to ***remain in Spirit all the time***. For example, while preaching to the household of Cornelius, the Roman military officer in Caesarea, Peter spoke of Jesus Christ as One who “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” [Acts 10: 38]. During His earthly ministry, Jesus once told His listeners, “[T]he Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees His Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” [Jn 5: 19]. Elsewhere, He told His disciples, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you” [Jn 15: 14-15]. ***Therefore, to stay in glorious company, you must be ready to be God-led in all your ways.***

The following issues should be of major interest to you:

a) *Don't refuse Him who speaks*

The author of the book of Hebrews states, “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” [Heb. 12: 25]. Elsewhere, Prophet Isaiah has warned that when we wander to the right or to the left, we shall hear a word behind us, saying, “This is the way, walk in it” [Is. 30: 21]. Therefore, we must be careful to know when God is speaking to us and listen!

People listen to what they want to hear. In the glorious company to which you now belong, you will know when God is speaking to you. All scripture has been given by inspiration of God and it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and for instruction in righteousness [2 Tim. 3: 16]. For example, even when about 400 prophets told Ahab king of Israel to go to war with Syria and that he would win, the visiting King Jehoshaphat of Judah asked, “Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of him?” Ahab mentioned Micaiah whom the king did not like because he only prophesied bad things for him! In the end, it was that young prophet's message that came to pass, being in line with God's punishment for Ahab for seizing the land of a poor man. Ahab was killed in that battle [1 Kgs 21: 19; 1 Kgs 22: 1-38].

Therefore, no matter how hard it may look, obedience is better than sacrifice [1 Sam. 15: 22]. Never refuse to hear God when He speaks to you.

b) *Use your grace for service not to sin*

The writer reminds believers who are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken that they should have grace by which they can serve God acceptably “with reverence and godly fear” [Heb. 12: 28]. In other words, there is nothing like grace for sin but for obedient service. Elsewhere, Paul asked, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” [Rom. 6: 1-2]. God told the church of the Laodiceans to be either hot or cold because if they were lukewarm, He would spew them out of His mouth [Rev. 3: 14-16].

You cannot serve two masters- God and mammon [Matt. 6: 24]. *If you are not ready to serve God in spirit and in truth, do not even try because He will not be impressed!*

c) *Never forget that God is a consuming fire!*

Bluntly, the writer of Hebrews concluded in that 12th chapter, “For our God is a consuming fire” [Heb. 12: 29]. A typical believer pays more attention to God’s forgiving heart than His judgment throne. That is understandable because God does not judge any one; He has “committed all judgment to His Son” [Jn 5: 22]. That does not make it easier!

Earlier, we had seen the role of Jesus as our Advocate before His Father. An advocate knows everything about an accused but only uses the favourable aspects of such information to defend the accused. Can you then imagine an advocate now appointed a judge over that same or related matter? The accused is done because Jesus will not recuse Himself from his/her case when He returns to judge the world! Evil people “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” [Matt. 25: 46].

Here is the heart of the matter. As a true believer, you are in glorious company. It is a heavenly company, implying that *you should always see your remaining days here on earth as an ambassadorial posting. Sooner than later, you will return home to familiar territory and family.* Can you afford to lose such a privilege through complacency or backsliding? God forbid!

3. Conclusion: May God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Part of the Lord’s Prayer which Jesus taught His disciples states, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” [Matt. 6: 10]. One way for us to do God’s will on earth is to remain in glorious company. The key is to never lose your focus on Jesus. Hold on to Him as your Advocate. In that role, He will take you through your tough earthly terrain and ultimately lead you to your mansion in His Father’s house in heaven.

Safe journey!