

Names Written in Heaven

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"Whose names are in the Book of Life. "—Phil. 4:3

My subject is a deep one, but we find depths—unfathomable depths—in nature, and it should be no matter for surprise, therefore, if we meet with depths in revelation. By the "Book of Life" I do not understand any material book, but the book of God's eternal purposes and decrees; or, in other words, his divine predestination to eternal life.

I will, first of all, endeavour to prove to you from God's word that God has had an eternal purpose, which he is carrying out and will accomplish. The apostle James declared at the council at Jerusalem, ***"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,"(Acts 15:18)***. Here, you observe, not merely is foreknowledge on the part of God asserted, but a foreknowledge added to a design; and hence we find the apostles Peter and John and others declaring in their prayer recorded in Acts 4, that the enemies of the Lord Jesus were gathered together ***"for to do whatsoever thy (God's) hand and thy (God's) counsel determined before to be done," (vs. 28)***. Likewise Peter, in his first sermon at Jerusalem, said of Jesus, ***"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," (2:23)***. Thus we see that the greatest

crime ever committed by men—the murder of the Lord of glory—was foreordained of God, man’s responsibility and wickedness being at the same time in no wise lessened.

But not only did God foreordain all things connected with the Lord Jesus Christ, but he has had an eternal purpose *in Christ*, as you may learn from Eph. 3:11, **“According to the ETERNAL PURPOSE which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** This eternal purpose is revealed and unfolded to us in Rom. 8:28-30, **“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”** There is God’s purpose, extending from eternity to eternity.

Do not be frightened, dear friends, at this term, “predestination.” It is involved in a very simple proposition, viz., that God is the great Architect of the universe, and that, like a wise architect, he formed his plans before exercising his creative power. **“I am God,”** he declares, **“and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,”**(Isa. 46:9-10). It is related that King William III once remarked in conversation with Bishop Burnet, “If I did not believe in predestination, I could not believe in Providence, for it is absurd to suppose that God can act without a *plan*, for which predestination is only another name.”

We have a beautiful summary of God’s plan in the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, from the third verse: **“Blessed be the God**

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself; according to the good pleasure of his will,
(and what follows through verse 11).

Now, from what is thus revealed to us, we conclude that the idea of a "Book of Life," in which the names of God's people are written, is a figurative one, and respects his eternal foreknowledge of his people, and eternal choice of them in Christ Jesus to everlasting salvation.

**"He knoweth all His people,
From everlasting knew;
The greatest and the smallest,
The many and the few."**

Let me here remark how plainly we are thus assured of God's special personal knowledge of and love for his people. The Lord Jesus declared it when he prayed, ***"that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me,"***(***John 17:23***).

In the book of Revelation we read of ***"the Lamb's Book of Life,"*** (***21:27***) indicating that this knowledge of his people is likewise possessed by the eternal and coequal Son of God, who said, ***"I know my sheep, and am known of mine,"*** (***John 10:14***). He has loved them with an everlasting love, and, as their Surety, redeemed them by his vicarious life, sufferings, and death; for ***"he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,"*** (***Rom. 5:21***). Our justification before God is ***"through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"*** (***see Rom. 3:19-28***). In a sense, Christ himself might be called "The

Book of Life," for all the redeemed were chosen "IN HIM". They are evidently "***bound in the bundle of life***" with him, for he said, "***I give unto them eternal life;***" "***I am the resurrection and the life;***" and "***Because I live, ye shall live also,***" (1 Sam. 25:29; John 10:28; 11:25; 14:19).

I propose the consideration of five questions on the subject of my text:—

I. WHEN were the names of God's saints written in the Book of Life?

II. WHY were they written there?

III. WHOSE names are written there?

IV. How may one know that HIS name is written in the Book of Life?

V. Are OUR names written there?

I. WHEN were the names of God's saints written in the Book of Life? Since we have seen that the "Book of Life" signifies God's eternal purpose, it is evident that the names of his saints were written there from all eternity. Christ in prophecy declared, "***My substance ('body,' margin) was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them,***" (Psa. 139:15-16).

II. WHY were they written there? What was the moving cause which led God to rescue any from their ruined condition?—His sovereign grace and love. There was nothing—no good thing in any one—to call forth his love and mercy, but just the opposite. We were "***by nature***

children of wrath, even as others," (Eph. 2:3). What is there in rebels to call forth the love of their Lord? Yet, WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. The child of God, knowing something of the vileness of his nature, and confessing with the apostle, ***"In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing,"*** is constrained to say, "Why ***me,*** Lord?" and the answer must be because ***"He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy."***

"Grace first inscribed my name

In God's eternal book;

'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,

Who all my sorrows took."

Such love we should suppose would melt the affections of saints, and break the stony hearts of rebellious sinners, but we know that it does neither, except ***"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," (Rom. 5:5).***

III. WHOSE names are written there? "Secret things belong unto the LORD," but "the secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant," (Deut. 29:29; Psa. 25:14). We have never seen the Book of Life, but yet we may believe that the names of certain persons are written there. Paul says of Clement and others, "whose names are in the book of life." How did he know? We cannot suppose that he had seen the Book of Life, or that his knowledge was limited to these persons; but they professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and their godly lives testified to the genuineness of their profession. They laboured with Paul in the gospel, thus showing their love to the Lord Jesus, and so he esteemed them as true saints. In this way established Christians may believe, or at least charitably hope, that such and such names are written in the Book of Life.

But can we tell whose names are **not** written there? Most assuredly not. While the names of all who will be saved are written therein, we cannot say who are not of this number. The most hardened sinner may, before he dies, be brought repentant to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. Nothing is impossible with God, and no soul has gone to such lengths in iniquity as to be beyond the reach of his almighty arm, or is so steeped in sin that the blood of Christ cannot cleanse him. On a dying bed, or even when a dying man is unable to convey what he experiences to others, so that they remain in ignorance of the great change he has had wrought in him, the Holy Spirit **may** convince him of sin, and show Christ as his Saviour, filling his soul with peace in the contemplation of the wonderful love, grace, and mercy of God to sinners. A ransomed soul **must** be saved. The responsible One has said, "**Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring,**" (John 10:16).

IV. How may one know, even how may one **hope**, that his name is written in the Book of Life? Many hope so in a general sort of way, and no one wishes to go to hell, but there must be a sure foundation for a "**good hope through grace.**" The hope of the hypocrite shall perish, (2 Thess. 2:16; Job 8:13).

But do you know—and not only know, but **feel**—that you are a sinner? Hart says—

"A sinner is a sacred thing;

The Holy Ghost has made him so."

A sinner who knows and mourns over his sinnership is the sinner indicated by the poet, and such a one is doubtless convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost.

But I not only ask, Do you feel that you are a sinner? but, also, have you experienced the suitability and preciousness of Christ as a

Saviour? Has the Gospel come to you with power? Jesus said, "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, HATH EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION, BUT IS PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE,**" (John 5:24). The good news of salvation is for all who want it. "**Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,**" (Isa. 55:1). I come down to the weakest in faith, who says, "I am undone without Christ, but I cannot say more than that," and I point out to you, dear soul, that you are one of the thirsty ones, and that you have come, and still are coming, to Christ; for you have no other plea than his infinite merits, his precious blood and righteousness, for your justification. The loving Saviour has said of you, "**Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,**" (John 6:37). You are, therefore, as safe as that one who can say from the heart, "**I know whom I have believed,**" and, doubtless, in God's own time, you will be able to say the same; but, if you never can, that cannot alter your standing in Christ, the Good Shepherd, who carries THE LAMBS in his bosom.

Dr. Hawker, in his "Morning and Evening Portions," in his commentary upon this text, asks, "Is not the Bible a copy of the Book of Life?" It may, indeed, be considered so; for it describes the characters of those whose names are written there—God's saints. They are the "poor," the "broken-hearted," the "captives," the "weary and heavy laden," the "lost." They are "**called with a holy calling,**" sanctified by the Spirit. They look to Christ Jesus as their Saviour, their All and in all. They walk in newness of life, manifesting the fruits of faith, the things which accompany salvation; for "**the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,**" (Tit. 2:11-12).

Thus does the Word of God describe those "**whose names are in the Book of Life.**" But,

V. Are OUR names there? If they are, then they will never be blotted out. When the children of Israel fell into idolatry, and made the golden calf, we find Moses pleading with God for the people, and saying, "**Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.**" But the Lord answered, "**Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book,**" (Ex. 32:32-33). We are here reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ standing up as the Surety of his people. He, the one Mediator between God and men, wrought out and brought in for his church an everlasting righteousness by living and dying as her substitute. Thus every member is "**complete in him,**" and

"Once in Him, in Him for ever;

Thus the eternal covenant stands."

He himself said of his sheep, "**I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand,**" (John 10:28).

But what if our names are not written there? We read that the apostle John in a vision "**saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the Book of Life...And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire,**" (Rev. 20:12, 15). It would be the height of folly and presumption in us to lay our hand upon any man, be he ever so great a sinner, and say, "the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not for you." It is for **sinners**, and sinners, **in hearing it**, are made willing to receive it as glad tidings indeed, according to the sovereignty of him who bloweth where he listeth. "**The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of**

God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," (1 Cor. 2:14).

**'Twas fixed in God's eternal mind
When his dear sons should mercy find;
From everlasting he decreed
When every good should be conveyed.**

**Determined was the manner how
Eternal favours he'd bestow;
Yea, he decreed the very place
Where he would show triumphant grace.**

**Also the means were fixed upon
Thru which his sovereign love should run.
So time and place, yea, means and mode,
Were all determined by our God.**

**Vast were the settlements of grace
On millions of the human race;
And every favour, richly given,
Flows from the high decree of heaven.**

**In every mercy, full and free,
A sovereign God I wish to see;
To see how grace, free grace has reigned,
In every blessing he ordained.**

**Yes, dearest Lord, 'tis my desire
Thy wise appointments to admire;
And trace the footsteps of my God,
Through every path in Zion's road.**

—R. BURNHAM