

20<sup>th</sup> May 2020

# Heaven

**"All this and heaven too."**

*Philip Henry, in 'Life of Mr Philip Henry' by Matthew Henry*

Working in a hospice, I had many conversations about heaven. For some people, it was an unshakeable belief in eternal life; for others, a fear that they would be "judged" harshly and denied heavenly rest; for many, a vague belief but profound hope. But for one lady, it was complete denial.

Winifred had been admitted to the same floor in the hospice where her only son had died two years before. I had met her back then, and had been invited to conduct her son's funeral. So I was anxious that she was now a patient, particularly because of the association of the hospice with her son's death. One day, I found her distressed. She told me that her eldest daughter had been comforting her with the assurance that, when she died, she would meet up with her son again in heaven. "Well?" I responded enquiringly, only to hear her reply: "I don't believe that!" And she elaborated on what was clearly an atheistic understanding of life in which heaven and a belief in eternity did not figure.

This was no time for a doctrinal debate, though she did ask me what I believed myself. But her belief system remained unaltered, and she was still distressed. Then I noticed a framed photograph of her son on her bedside table. Soon we were holding the picture together and she was talking warmly about the son she had lost. "Do you still love him?" I asked. "More than ever before," she replied, "and I tell him that every day." "Maybe that's what really matters," I responded. "If you carry the depth of your relationship with your son towards the conclusion of your life, that will be enough. And, if you do, maybe that's heaven for you here and now, and you can leave what happens after you die to take care of itself." Winifred smiled for the first time. And as she held the photo of her son to her chest, she whispered, "That'll do for me."

## **A prayer for today**

*"So do not fear all that is yet to be:*

*Heaven is close and God is good."*

John L Bell, from "Who is there to understand?"

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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