

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 180

DEATH IS COMING

FLEE FROM THE WRATH OF GOD

*It is appointed unto men
once to die, but after
this the judgment.*

Hebrews 9:27

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

Free Grace Broadcaster

DEATH IS COMING: FLEE FROM THE WRATH OF GOD

180

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AN APPOINTMENT YOU WILL KEEP

Joel Beeke

Dear Reader,

You and I may not know each other; possibly we shall never see one another. Yet, I desire to write a personal letter to you.

I write to you because you and I have more in common than you may realize. Though we may never meet each other in this world, we shall one day be in each other's presence because *we both possess a never-dying soul*. With this soul both of us must appear before God, your and my Creator, in the great judgment day. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27).

You may do all in your power to put the *thought* of death away from you. Yet you cannot escape the *fact* that you must die. You *know* that you *must* die and face God. Perhaps you are reluctant to think about death because you also know judgment follows death as surely as night follows day. In all seriousness, therefore, could I possibly press upon you a more significant question than this: *What is going to happen to you when you die?*

The Bible, conscience, and common sense, all declare to you that there is an eternity you must face. Therefore, don't avoid this question for your own sake: *Am I prepared to die and face God as judge?*

I am sorry to have to tell you that millions today think they are prepared to meet God who shall end in hell following the great Day of Judgment. This is what God tells us in His holy Word: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:22-23).

Did you ever consider what a terrible awakening it will be for those who are traveling on in this life thinking all is well with them to hear in that day as they stand before the most high God, "I never knew you"? Words cannot describe the anguish of soul as this sentence will be passed upon them: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Shall you and I also be among these disappointed "many" that Christ speaks of in Matthew 7?

Dear reader, please give me five minutes of your time to try to show you who will end in hell and who will end in heaven.

The Broad Road to Eternal Destruction

First, I must honestly tell you the Bible informs us in Matthew 7 that the vast majority of people will be going to hell. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth

unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat 7:13-14). Perhaps this sounds cruel to you, but this sad fact is true not because God is cruel. Rather, we are cruel to ourselves. We willfully defy our Creator and despise His love, while trampling upon His commandments given for our true well-being. Due to such rebellion and wickedness, *we have all earned death and hell*. These are the only two things we have deserved; “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

What kinds of people are included in this vast multitude which is hell bound? (1) All *ungodly people* shall end in hell. This includes those who openly live wicked lives, doing such things as:

- (i). Spending their time in taverns and their money on drink and drugs;
- (ii). Engaging in unlawful sexual relationships;
- (iii). Treating Sunday as but another day of the week;
- (iv). Daily watching the graphic display of sin on a TV screen;
- (v). Openly swearing against God by using His holy name in vain;
- (vi). Living a life of rebellion against parents and authority given by God.

Such ungodly people shall end in hell unless they are brought to true repentance and conversion by the almighty power of God’s grace. Are you one of this group? If so, I urge you to seek repenting, confessing, and turning grace before it is forever too late to seek the Lord!

(2) All *worldly people* shall end in hell. Those shall end in hell who abstain from gross sins, but whose lives are intertwined with the world, who live unburdened when they continually do such things as:

- (i). Place self above and before God;
- (ii). Esteem the possessions of worldly riches above the riches of God’s grace;
- (iii). Promote the desires of other people above God’s will as revealed in His Word;
- (iv). Value the needs of daily life above the need of a Savior for their immortal souls;
- (v). Consider the results of sin to be more tragic than offending and sinning against their holy Creator who showers them with blessings;
- (vi). Believe it is more important what their neighbors and friends think of them than what God thinks of them.

These shall end in hell unless they are brought to true repentance and conversion by the almighty power of God’s grace. Are you one of this group?

If so, I must say to you: Heaven itself would be no happiness to you if you arrived there, for the Lord of heaven is not your friend—what pleases Him does not please you; what He dislikes gives you no pain. His Word is not your counselor; His day is not your delight; His Law is not your guide. You care little for hearing of Him; you know even less of speaking with

Him. To be forever in His company would be a thing you could not endure; the society of saints and angels would weary you. As far as your practical life is concerned, the Bible means little, Christ means less, and salvation is a needless thing. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light...Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Eph 5:14; Mat 6:24).

(3) Many *religious people* shall end in hell. It is possible to be hell-bound though we are faithful church attenders, Sunday school teachers, and even ministers. Religion can be our favorite subject, our conversation can be about God and Christ, and our outward walk of life can be blameless—all without our soul being saved from destruction.

We can be as religious as the five false virgins in Matthew 25, possessing the same confession, the same expectation, the same lamps, and the same outward appearance as the five wise virgins—and still perish. We can be as religious as Ahab of whom Scripture says, “He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (1Ki 21:27)—and still be unconverted.

It is possible to experience common convictions of sin and impressions of God and His holy attributes—even to acknowledge sin and be somewhat humbled under it, to weep and pray over it, to be afraid to sin again—and still not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. Think of Cain, Saul, and Judas.

We need more than half-hearted religion and church attendance. We need the irresistible, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in order to be born again and converted. Only then will we love God with our entire being—the key ingredient missing in the foregoing examples—and pant after God as a thirsty man pants for cold water. Only then shall we be enabled by God’s grace to be prepared to meet the Lord. “Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness” (Luk 11:35).

How may I know if I am included among those who are heaven-bound?

The Narrow Road to Eternal Life

All those who shall arrive in heaven will confess their salvation to be a great miracle of God’s free grace. They shall all be souls that have been truly born again by the Holy Spirit (see Joh 3). They are people who have been converted by God. In their conversion they experience three things: (1) heartfelt *sorrow* over their own sinfulness, (2) heartfelt *joy* over salvation in Jesus Christ, and (3) heartfelt *gratitude* to God for His great salvation (see Rom 7:24-25; Psa 50:15).

(1) When the Holy Spirit begins to work salvation in a sinner, He does not begin with revealing Christ to him. There is no room in our hearts by nature for Christ. Rather, He brings such a sinner face to face with his tragic misery and dangerous state of sinnership before God. The sinner is brought to experience:

(i). Heartfelt sorrow over his innumerable actual sins in thoughts, words, and actions against an all-knowing God;

(ii). Heartfelt sorrow over being without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world;

(iii). Heartfelt sorrow over his dreadful original sin through his deep fall in Adam, being taught his entire heart is nothing but a fountain of pollution and corruption;

(iv). Heartfelt sorrow not only because the burden of sin becomes too heavy to bear, but also because he finds it impossible to free himself of this burden;

(v). Heartfelt sorrow when he is brought to the point where he realizes that he cannot save himself and yet that he must be saved so that he cries out, “Lord, Thou art righteous and just to cast me away forever, but is it possible that there is a way in Thee to escape Thy divine punishment and be restored into Thy favor?”

Have you also become such a concerned, miserable, unworthy, guilty, and lost sinner—a sinner who knows by experience that there is no hope of salvation from your side?

(2) When the sinner experiences he has no future but condemnation from his side, and the Holy Spirit enables him to cast himself upon God as the only place of refuge, that same blessed Spirit shall unveil the triune God’s unspeakably rich way of salvation and deliverance through the blood and satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner is brought to experience:

(i). A need for Christ;

(ii). A view of some aspect of Christ’s atoning work in its beauty, fullness, and suitability;

(iii). A revelation of Christ in his soul by means of Word and Spirit through which he learns how Christ has fully obeyed the Law and fully borne the punishment of sin on behalf of fallen, unworthy sinners;

(iv). An application of Christ by which he may embrace Christ with unspeakable joy as his Savior and his salvation.

Have you also experienced something of Christ as the great way of deliverance through the power of the Holy Spirit applying God’s Word to your soul? Has it caused you to desire to know Christ more and more as your All-in-all—to know Him *experientially* as the exclusive, willing Savior who saves to the uttermost?

(3) Finally, those who truly experience God’s way of salvation in Jesus Christ will also express a wholehearted gratitude for such a great deliverance: “What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me?” (Psa 116:12). They desire to surrender everything, soul and body, for time and eternity into the hands of the Lord, lie at His feet in true submission, and confess, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10). Despite many shortcomings on our part, we then desire to live to

the glory of God above all, and to lovingly serve our neighbor to his spiritual and temporal welfare.

Dear reader, examine yourself.

Which Road Are You Traveling?

Are you traveling the broad road to eternal destruction or the narrow road to eternal life? In this world there are many different roads; but in the spiritual world there are only two; and these two never intersect. They are as opposite from one another as darkness from light, Satan from God, nature from grace, and hell from heaven. Only God, in His free grace, can take us off the broad road to destruction and place us on the narrow road to everlasting life.

Sinner, we beseech you, turn from your sinful and evil ways. Cry for true conversion from Him Who not only said, "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7), but Who also testified of Himself, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luk 19:10). Your soul is lost and your condition miserable; therefore, beg the Lord to show you this, so that room may be made within you for the gospel message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Allow me to leave you with a final warning. In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, hell is mentioned 234 times. If life's road were twenty-seven miles long, and there were 234 billboards along this route which all read, "This road leads to hell," would you stay on that road? As long as you are an unrepentant, unbelieving, Christless, self-satisfied sinner, you are on this road to hell. Hell is the end of a worldly or religious life which remains Christless.

This short message is still another billboard sent by God to you on your pathway of life to warn you that all the ways of man end in death. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa 55:6).

How many more billboards will the Lord send your way before His patience comes to an end, and He fulfills His own Word: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27)?

Make haste, sinner, for your life's sake. The thread of your life is not yet cut, but it is growing increasingly thin and brittle. The Lord still calls to you: "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Eze 33:11).

The door of grace is still open. The throne of Christ is not yet shut. Will you hear His voice before it is too late? "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa 2:12).

All those who have lived without God on earth shall be without God in hell. How terrible it shall be to experience with the rich man in Luke 16,

“In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments...And he cried... I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:23-24).

Dear friend, I desire to warn you with love. You and I cannot escape death. It is an appointment we will keep—regardless.

Are you prepared to die?

Sincerely,

Joel R. Beeke

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Do not deceive yourselves; it is not an indifferent thing whether you will come to Christ upon His invitations or not; a thing which you may put off from one occasion into another. Your present refusal of it is as high an act of enmity against God as your nature is capable of.—*John Owen*

The uplifted arm of vengeance is yet stayed. The collected wrath yet waits a moment. A voice from the mercy-seat, a warning voice, is heard. The Saviour calls. Haste then, O sinner, haste to Christ, the only refuge from the storm. Then, safe from the fear of evil, at a distance you shall only hear the thunders roll; while pardon, and peace, and eternal life are yours.
—*Asahel Nettleton*

ESCAPE FOR YOUR LIFE

Joel Beeke

GOD speaks. Sometimes He whispers by the still small voice of the gospel to us in tender overtures of mercy through the preached Word. Sometimes He speaks through His Word with power, warning us to turn from our iniquity. And sometimes He thunders through His divine, providential judgments of famine, war, fire, or some other tragedy.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, God spoke to us in thunder. He did so because we as a nation have not been bowing under His Word, have not been repenting under His stream of mercies showered upon us for decades, and have not repented under the smaller judgments He has sent our way. God sent a just, dreadful wake-up call to America—yes, to every one of us. The staggering destruction of lives at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the subsequent tales of horror have left us stunned, speechless, and humbled.

Some heroically tried to save those in the buildings and in the process lost their own lives. Countless stories have been told of heroic deeds. One, little noticed, contains much spiritual instruction. A policeman, situated just outside the entrance of the buildings, shouted to the people as they streamed out, *“Don’t look up; don’t look back; run for your life!”*

Those words remind us of Genesis 19:17b: “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”

Let’s examine heaven’s message to us in this time of divine judgment by considering the theme, “Escape for Your Life,” in three thoughts:

1. Realize your danger—“lest thou be consumed.”
2. Forsake all—“look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain.”
3. Run for your life—“escape for thy life.”

1. Realize Your Danger

When the cry of “Fire! Fire!” ran up and down the floors of the World Trade Center and filled the streets of New York City, people knew in a moment that danger was imminent. Flames are cruel tyrants and devour remorselessly. The very word fire can send chills down our spines.

But that word uttered by thousands of New Yorkers on September 11th is only a shadow of what Jesus called “hell fire” in Matthew 5:22. The eternal cry of “hell fire” that shall ascend from millions of lips in the eternal abyss on the Day of Judgment comprehends weighty matters that only eternity can reveal. As dreadful as those events were, they are all but child’s play compared with the wrath of God that will one day be poured out without mixture

upon all those who do not repent and believe in God's Son. God's wrath against unbelievers has eternity and infinity and deity in it—and where these three oppose a person, woe be to that person! Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire of God's wrath and with everlasting burning (Isa 33:14)?

We deserve far worse than we have received, for North America has been unfruitful spiritually. We have slighted God's gospel, despised God's Law, and served the Lord lukewarmly at best. We have neglected personal conversion and reformation. We have grown idolatrous, covetous, worldly, sensual, proud, and self-indulgent, addicting ourselves to a host of evils. We have become a nation of liars, backbiters, and murmurers. The blood of unborn millions is on our hands. Every three days we murder more babies in their mothers' wombs in America than were killed in the New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania tragedies combined. We have called evil good, and good evil (see Isa 5:20).

And yet, God is speaking to us from the ashes of the World Trade Center, "Escape for your life, lest you be consumed."

Our danger cannot be overcome by any human help. Fire-engines went to the scene in New York, only to be burned up in the flames. Cranes are now picking up burned out fire-engines and casting them aside like toothpicks. The very means used to extinguish the fire were consumed by the fire. That is your danger, so long as you are unsaved. No means of your devising can enable you to escape the fire of God's wrath. There is a fire of sin within you that you cannot quench; there is a fire of hell outside of you that you will never be able to extinguish. You are in danger beyond your coping ability, so long as you don't escape for your life to Jesus Christ. Your most strenuous efforts, naturally and spiritually, cannot deliver you from the wrath of a holy God who cannot dwell with sin and sinners. If you neglect the only way of salvation, how can you escape?

*O sinner, seek His face,
Whose wrath you cannot bear;
Fly to the dying Savior's wounds,
And find salvation there.*

Escape for your life. Realize your danger. Don't trifle with your own soul, with hell and heaven, with God and His bleeding, inviting Son.

Your danger requires immediate attention. Those people who successfully escaped the World Trade Center, didn't stop to fill their briefcases. They escaped for their lives! They ran for the stairs. There was not a moment to waste. So it is with you. You have not a moment to lose. "Escape, Lot," the angels say, "for your life—it is now or never. A few more minutes, a few more hours, and it will be too late."

"Escape for thy life, lest thou be consumed" is a present-tense cry. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2). Now, now, now! Tomorrow's faith is simply today's unbelief. Good intentions will bring you to hell, not to heaven. Procrastination doesn't

only steal time; it destroys souls. “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2Ki 20:1).

There is but a step between us and death. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, trembling and needy sinner, and you shall be saved. Don’t repent and don’t believe, and you will be lost. John 3:36 says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

2. *Forsake All*

Lot had to forsake his former friends, who were not believers—including some family members. He had to forsake his former comforts. He had gone to Sodom to live a comfortable life. No doubt he had a well-furnished home. But now he had to leave everything behind.

Lot had everything at stake. If he had stayed in Sodom, he would have lost all. He would not just have lost his home, his furniture, and his family, but he would have lost himself.

Lot had to forsake all from his heart. His wife escaped, but not with her heart. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. “Remember Lot’s wife,” Jesus warned (Luk 17:32).

If you don’t forsake all to follow Christ—if you try to cling to this world or allow your self-indulgence or possessions to stand between you and Christ—one day, soon, you will lose everything, including yourself. What will it profit you if you gain the entire world but lose your own soul? If you don’t forsake all for Christ, Christ will forsake you on the great day; and if your soul goes lost in that day, it would have been far better for you to have never been born. Far, far better to enter heaven like Lazarus than to be the rich man cast into hell (Luk 16:19-31).

Escape for your life. Don’t look behind you. Don’t stay in the plains of this world. Forsake evil friends, materialistic bondage, worldly toys—yes, forsake all to follow Christ. Take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Christ.

Escape for your life—your immortal life, your eternal life. Will you be content to lose your life, content to perish in your sin? If your house was set on fire tonight, and the cry arose, “Fire!” would you not immediately leave everything behind and run out of your house to save your life? Today God calls to you that the fires of hell are stoked, and that you must escape for your life.

Dear child of God, you have known what this is. You have forsaken all in the past. Are you still forsaking all in the present? Or, are you like Lot, lingering too much in this world, becoming too cozy with worldly people? Are you in danger again of perishing with the world?

Don’t forget: if Lot had not escaped, he would have perished with the Sodomites. God, of course, graciously preserved him. But that doesn’t mean that Lot didn’t have to forsake all and escape for his life.

3. *Run for Your Life*

“Escape for your life, Lot,” the angels said. Lot must not stop to argue. Nor must you. You don’t need more evidence of your need. Your conscience tells you that you must be born again, that you must repent and believe.

As Lot must run from the doomed city of Sodom—as the people had to run from the doomed Trade Center—so you must run from this present, evil world, this City of Destruction. Run for your life.

But where must I run? Run to the mountain. Symbolically, that means don’t return to sin and Satan, for that is looking back to Sodom. Don’t rest in yourself or the world, for that is staying in the plain. But run to Christ and heaven, for that is escaping to the mountain. Entrust your soul, your all, to Him for this life and a better.

If you won’t entrust your soul to Christ, whom can you trust? Will you trust yourself?

Why do you linger? Is not Christ the physician and His blood the balm that you need? Why are you not recovered (Jer 8:22)? Your conscience tells you that God is more willing to save you than you are to be saved. You know the good news that Christ came to save sinners. You know that the chief of sinners is welcome with Him. Even the dying thief on the cross—whose record may well have been able to compete with the terrorists behind all of this recent destruction—found mercy.

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” Jesus said (Joh 6:37). Oh, may God help you to come now, for Christ’s sake.

Yes, but how do I come? You come, by the Spirit’s grace, just as you are, with all your sin, repenting, believing, surrendering all into the arms of God, pleading on God’s promises to save the lost. You come trusting wholly in the blood of Jesus Christ to save your soul, forsaking the ways of sin. You come in gracious response to the free offers and promises of the gospel as a poor, needy sinner, trusting in the full righteousness of Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. You come trusting Christ’s perfect, active obedience to the Law and His perfect, passive obedience in paying for sin to be your satisfaction of God’s holy justice; to be your only ground of reconciliation with God, as Paul tells us. You come, saying with a poet,

*A wounded, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ’s kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and confidence,
My Jesus and my all.*

Oh, I beseech you, run for your life; run straight to Christ. Don’t run to ceremonies, feelings, ministers, works, orthodoxies—but run straight to Christ. Fall into His arms—the arms of the evangel, the arms of the Savior who Himself is the gospel. Don’t look behind you. Run for your life. “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20).

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DEATH AND LIFE: THE WAGE AND THE GIFT

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Romans 6:23

IN the fifth chapter of this Epistle, Paul had shown at considerable length our justification from sin through the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior. Our apostle goes on to speak of our sanctification in Christ; that as by the righteousness of Christ we have been delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin, so by the power and life of Christ in us we are delivered from the dominion of sin, so as not to live any longer therein. His object is to show that true servants of God cannot live in sin; that by reason of our newness of life in Christ, it is not possible that we should continue to yield our members instruments unto iniquity. We have passed out of the realm of death, we have come into the domain of life; and, therefore, we must act according to that life. And that life being in its essence pure, holy and heavenly, we must proceed from righteousness unto holiness.

Whilst he is driving at this argument, our apostle incidentally lets fall the text which may be regarded as a Christian proverb, a golden sentence, a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky. As Jesus said of the woman who anointed Him to His burial, “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (Mat 26:13), so I may say, “Whosoever the gospel is preached, there shall this golden sentence, which the apostle has let fall, be repeated as a proof of his clearness in the faith.” Here you have both the essence of the gospel and a statement of that misery from which the gospel delivers all who believe. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

First, it will be my painful duty to dwell for a while upon *death as the wages of sin*; and then, more joyfully, we shall close our morning’s meditation by considering *eternal life as the gift of God*.

I. First, DEATH IS THE WAGES OF SIN. The apostle has in his mind’s eye the figure of a soldier receiving his pay. Sin, the captain, pays his hired soldiers a dreadful wage. The original word signifies “rations,” or some translate it “stipend.” It means the payment which soldiers receive, put in the plural as wages, because pay can be given in different forms. Soldiers might be paid in meat, or in meal, or in money, or in part by their clothing, or by lands promised when the time of service came to an end. Now that which sin, the grim captain, pays to those who are under him, is comprehended in

this terrible term “death.” It is a word as full as it is short. A legion of terrors are found around this “king of terrors.” Death is the rations which sin pays to those who enlist beneath its banner.

Now “sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the Law of God.”¹ Sin is that evil power which is in the world in rebellion against the good and gracious power of righteousness which sits upon the throne of God. This evil power of unholiness, untruth, sin, and contrariety to the mind of God holds the great mass of our fellow-men beneath its sway at this hour. The rations with which it rewards the most desperate valour of its champions is death.

To set forth this terrible fact, I shall make a few observations. First, *death is the natural result of all sin*. When man acts according to God’s order he lives; but when he breaks his Maker’s laws he wrecks himself, and does that which causes death. The Lord warned Adam thus: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Dying does not mean ceasing to exist, for Adam did not cease to exist, nor do those who die. The term “death” conveys to me no such idea as that of ceasing to exist, or how could I understand that word in 1 John 3:14: “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”? How could a man abide in annihilation? A grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies; but it does not cease to be; nay, rather, it bringeth forth much fruit (see Joh 12:24). That Adam did die in the day when he ate of that fruit is certain, or else the Lord spake not the truth. His nature was wrecked and ruined by separation from God and by a fall from that condition which constitutes the true life of man. When any man commits sin, he dies to holiness and purity. No transgression is venial, but every sin is mortal and gendereth death.

The further a man goes in lust and iniquity, the more dead he becomes to purity and holiness. He loses the power to appreciate the beauties of virtue or to be disgusted with the abominations of vice. Our nature at the very outset has lost that delicacy of perception which comes of healthy life; and as men proceed in unchastity, or injustice, or unbelief, or sin of any kind, they enter deeper and deeper into that awful moral death which is the sure wage of sin. You can sin yourself into an utter deadness of conscience, and that is the first wage of your service of sin.

All desire after God and all delight in Him die out where sin reigns. Death is the separation of the soul from God. Alas, this death hath “passed upon all men” (Rom 5:12). “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Man may continue to believe in the existence of God, but for all practical purposes God to him is really non-existent. The fool hath said in his heart, “No God”—he does not desire God; indeed, he wishes there were no God (Psa 14:1). As for seeking after God, and delighting himself in the Almighty, the sinner knows nothing thereof. His sin has killed him towards

¹ *Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 14; available from Chapel Library.

all desire for God, or love to Him, or delight in Him. He is to God dead while he liveth. “To be carnally minded is death” (Rom 8:6).

As there is through sin a death to God, so is there *a death to all spiritual things*. “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” (1Co 2:14). The man doth not perceive and discern spiritual things, for he is dead to them. Talk to him of the sorrows of the spiritual life. He has never felt them, and he despises them as mean cant.² Speak to him of the joys of the spiritual life, and you will soon discover that you are casting your pearls before swine. He has never sought such joys, he does not believe in them, and he thinks you a fanatic for talking such nonsense. He is as dead to spiritual realities as a mole is blind to astronomy or a stone is dead to music. To him it is as though there were neither angel, nor spirit, nor God, nor mercy-seat, nor Christ, nor holiness, nor heaven, nor hell. Giving himself up to the dominion of sin, the sinner receives more and more the result of his sin, even as the apostle says, “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam 1:15). “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal 6:8).

Inasmuch as in holy and spiritual things dwells the highest happiness of our manhood, this man becomes an unhappy being: at first by deprivation of the joy which spiritual life brings with it, and afterwards by suffering the inevitable misery of spiritual death. God has justly appointed that if a man will not be conformed to God he shall not taste of happiness; and if a man will follow after that which is evil, that evil shall of necessity bring with it sorrow and unrest (Rom 2:9). Since sin as naturally brings spiritual death upon men as fire brings burning, death is spoken of as the wages of sin.

I would observe next, that *the killing power of some sins is manifest to all observers*; for it operates upon the body and the mind as well as upon the spirit. This spiritual death of which I speak may not strike some of you with fear. You may think it a small matter, though to me I do confess that hell, however painted, is never so terrible a thing as the death which fills it. Some sins are murderous to a degree which is clear to all. For instance, if a man takes to drunkenness, or if he indulges in lasciviousness, it is manifest even to the unspiritual that the wages of sin is death. See how by many diseases and deliriums the drunkard destroys himself: he has only to drink hard enough, and his grave will be digged. The horrors which attend upon the filthy lusts of the flesh I will not dare to mention; but many a body rotting above ground shall be my silent witness. All know, or ought to know, the mischief which is occasioned to men and women by the violation of that law which commands us to be pure. I spoke the other day to an aged brother who feels the result of natural decay, but is in all other respects sound and healthy, and I congratulated him upon retaining so much vigor at such

² **mean cant** – contemptible, insincere talk about religion and morals.

an age. "Yes," he replied, "I owe it to the grace of God that I never abused myself in my younger days, and hence I have a store of strength in my old age." How many, on the contrary, feel the sins of their youth in their bone and in their flesh. We have all known that sins of the flesh kill the flesh; and therefore we may infer that sins of the mind kill the mind. Death in any part of our manhood breeds death to the whole. Death drags man down from the power, beauty, and joy of life to the wretched existence, the feebleness, the abominableness of death. The man is no more a man, but the wreck of a man; and his body is not the house of his soul, but a ruin, in which his poor spirit seeks in vain for comfort. A withered heart, a blinded mind, a blasted being—such is the death which comes of sin. The wage of sin is openly death when it assumes certain forms, and it is always really so, take what form it may.

Now *this tendency is in every case the same*. "The wages of sin is death," everywhere to everyone. It is so not only where you can see it operating upon the body, but where you cannot see it. I may perhaps startle you when I say that the wages of sin is death even in the man who has eternal life. Sin has the same deadly character to one as to the other, only an antidote is found. You, my Christian brother, cannot fall into sin without its being poison to you, as well as to anybody else. In fact, to you it is more evidently poison than to those hardened to it. If you sin, it destroys your joy, your power in prayer, your confidence towards God. If you have spent evenings in frivolity with worldlings, you have felt the deadening influence of their society. What about your prayers at night? You cannot draw nigh unto God. The operation of sin upon your spirit is most injurious to your communion with God. You are like a man who has taken a noxious drug, whose fumes are stupefying the brain, and sending the heart into slumber.

If you, being a child of God, fall into any of the sins which so easily beset you, I am sure you will never find that those sins quicken your grace or increase your faith; but on the contrary, they will work you evil, only evil, and that continually. Sin is deadly to any man and every man, whoever he may be; and were it not for the mighty curative operation which the indwelling Spirit of God is always carrying on upon the believer's nature, not one of us would survive the deadly effects of even those sins of infirmity and ignorance into which we fall. I wonder not that Paul cried aloud, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24).

If a man takes poison, if it does not absolutely kill him, it injures him, and thus proves its killing tendency. In certain places the air is pestilential, and though a very healthy man may pass through them and seem none the worse, yet this does not disprove the general deadly tendency of the malarious district, nor does it even prove that the healthy person is not secretly but really injured by having been there. Evils caused by sin may be too deep to be at once visible, just as the most serious of diseases have their periods

of incubation, during which the person affected has no idea of the ill which is hatching within him.

Sin is in itself an unmitigated evil, a root which beareth wormwood. *Sin is death*. Wonder not therefore that the apostle saith, “The wages of sin is death.” As the sparks fly upward, and as the rain falleth to the ground, so sin leads to death. As the river takes its leap in the thundering cataract, so must the stream of sin create the fall of death.

Moreover, when we read of anything being a wage, what does it mean? It means that it is a reward for labor. *Death is sin’s due reward, and it must be paid*. A master employs a man, and it is due to that man that he should receive his wages. If his master did not pay him his wages, it would be an act of gross injustice. Now, if sin did not bring upon man death and misery, it would be an injustice. It is necessary for the very standing of the universe that sin should be punished. It must be so. They that sow must reap. *The sin which hires you must pay you*. Wrong cannot produce right. Iniquity, transgression, and sin must, in the nature of things, become darkness, sorrow, misery, [and] death. Every transgression and disobedience must receive its just recompense of reward (see Heb 2:2). There is no use in attempting to alter it so long as God and justice reign. Those who do sin’s work must receive sin’s wage, and “the wages of sin is death.”

Now, observe, that this death, this wage of sin, is in part *received by men now as soldiers receive their rations, day by day*. It is a terrible thing that they do so receive it. The Scripture saith, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (Rom 8:13)—such a life is a continued dying. Again, it is written, “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1Ti 5:6). The wrath of God abideth on him that believeth not on the Son of God (Joh 3:36); it is there already. I would that men here who are not converted would recollect where they now are—they are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). O men, you are not merely sick, but you are “dead in your sins” (Col 2:13)! You are already dead to the highest spiritual enjoyments, and can never know them except by passing from death unto life. You cannot rejoice in God, you cannot know spiritual truth, you cannot taste of spiritual bliss; for your sin deadens you to these things every day that you live in it. To all that which is worthy of a man, to all that which is the true life of manhood, you are dead through sin.

But then a Roman soldier did not enlist merely for his rations. His chief pay often lay in the share of the booty which he received at the end of the war. He expected to share in his captain’s triumph, and to be a partaker in the spoil. *Death is the ultimate wage of sin*. The death which is here intended is the eternal loss and wreckage of the soul, the destruction of all about it that is worth having, the drifting of the guilty being for ever upon the full tide of those evil tendencies which caused his sin, and were further increased by sin. When all comes to all, this is where sin will drive you; it will perpetuate itself, and so for ever kill the soul to God, and goodness, and joy,

and hope. You will enter upon a world in which the highest enjoyments which even God himself can provide for men will be revealed; but they will be hidden from your eyes because you will be utterly incapable of knowing, appreciating, and enjoying them. Being under the ever-growing power of sin, it will become more and more a hopeless thing that you should escape from the death which thus settles down upon you.

All the agencies which could have recovered you from the clutch of death have failed to bless you in the life which has come to an end; and now in eternity neither the death of Christ, nor the Holy Ghost, nor the ministry of the Word, will ever again operate upon you. Till your last moments you chose sin, and through eternity you will still choose it; for this death is the reward of your sin. Our Lord Himself said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Mat 25:46). Then you shall come to know to the full what that awful word "death" really means as God intends it. Meanwhile, if you would escape this dreadful doom, read your Bible and see how the result of sin is expounded. As our Savior taught, that future death includes within itself the fire which never shall be quenched, the worm that never dieth, the outer darkness, the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and the departure into everlasting fire which begins with a curse from the lip of love (Mar 9:45-46; Mat 25:30, 41). Alienation from God is death, and can never be otherwise. The Holy Ghost, speaking of the ungodly, saith, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2Th 1:8-9). This will be the ultimatum of sin. As surely as rivers run into the sea, so surely must sin run into death. There is no help for it. This hard and impenitent heart heaps up for itself "wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom 2:5). Sin inevitably pays to all who are its servants the death by which bondage to its power is sealed for ever. O my God, grant us grace to see what a wretched service this is which pays such terrible rations now, and gives such a terrible dividing of the spoil in the end.

I shall not longer dwell upon it—the subject is so distressing to me—save that I must add a few solemn words. *The misery of the misery of sin is that it is earned.* Every pang that shall fall upon the ungodly either in this life or in the life to come will have this for its sting—that it was duly earned. The sinner may well say, "I worked for this; I laid myself out to earn this; I now feel the misery of what I willfully did." Death is the result of being out of gear with God. But the sinner puts himself into that condition. If men in the world to come could say, "This misery of ours has come upon us by an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God, quite apart from its just results," then they would derive from that fact some kind of comfort to their conscience, some easement of their biting remorse. But when they will be obliged to own that all their woe was their own choice in choosing sin, and

is still their own choice in abiding in sin, this will scourge them indeed. Their sin is their hell. The worm which gnaws at the heart of the lost soul is its own willful hate of God and love of evil.

O lover of sin, you are under the power of this death—this worse than death! You are dead to God, and dead to holiness, and dead to love, and dead to true happiness; and you have brought this death upon yourself, every part and particle of it. You have chosen that which has made you a wreck and ruin, and that in the teeth of many warnings and admonitions. It must be so, that “the wages of sin is death”; and the terror of that death is that it comes as a wage. Why will you die? Why will you earn death? Why will you choose your own delusions? Have you wickedly determined to prove what outer darkness means? Have you turned your back on God just to see how a man must fare who wars with his Maker? Have not enough dashed themselves to pieces on the rock of sin? Why will you do the same? If you will do so, this shall be the misery of your misery: that you brought it on yourselves, and that you rejected the one remedy provided of the Lord in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

Note, next—and I speak with the truest compassion—*that it will be the folly of follies to go on working for such wages*. Hitherto they that have worked for sin have found no profit in it. What fruit have you had, any of you, in the things whereof you have cause to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)? Has sin ever brought you any real benefit? Come, now, and let us reason together—up till now has doing wrong ever worked for your health or your happiness? Are you the better for hate, or greed, or lust, or drink? Has sin ever developed your inner self into anything worth calling life? You know it has not. It has rather destroyed you than improved you, and you know it. Why, then, will you go further in sin? Have you not learned enough already of the deadly nature of evil? Why will you press further into this barren region, which will become more and more a howling wilderness to you as you advance into it? Why will you go where it will be more and more difficult to return? Oh, may God’s infinite mercy prevent our being such madmen as to labor in the very fire to earn nothing else but death! God forbid that we should plunge from sin to sin by an inventiveness of rebellion, only to discover more and more what it is to be dead forever to God, and heaven, and hope, and everything that is to be desired.

Let me add, *it ought to be the grief of griefs to each of us that we have sinned*. Oh, misery, to have wrought so long in a service which brings such terrible wages! Though I have known the Lord now these six-and-thirty years, I still regret most deeply every sin that I have ever committed against the perfect Law of the Lord. I take it that repentance is not the temporary act of a certain period of time, but it is the spirit of the whole life after conversion. When we know we are forgiven, we repent all the more that ever we loved that sin which is so abominable unto God, and so evil in every way. Evil seems most evil when we have the clearest sense of divine goodness. Its con-

stant wage is death, and only death; and our lamentation is that we harboured this assassin, yea, even became its slave. Let us humble ourselves before God because we have played the fool exceedingly by sinning against Him. We have wounded, injured, and destroyed ourselves, and all for nothing—our only wage being a still deeper destruction.

Oh you that have never repented, but are still abiding in this spiritual death, how I long that the voice of Jesus may echo in that sepulcher of sin in which you now lie asleep. May it arouse you, and make you dread the death that never dies! Oh that you may turn over, as it were, in your grave, and begin to moan, “O God, deliver me!” If there be such a thought as that in your soul, I shall hope that the Spirit of God has begun to bring life into your spirit. But what an awful thing it is to have spent all these days—and some of you are getting grey—in only doing that which is your undoing, in giving life to that which is your death! The sole wage that some of you have yet earned is death. Is not this a poor reward for all the risk, labor, and perseverance with which you have served sin? God help you to see your folly and repent of it.

One thought more ere I leave this point, and that is, *it must certainly be a miracle of miracles if any sinner here does not remain for ever beneath the power of sin*. Sin has this mischief about it, that it strikes a man with spiritual paralysis; and how can such a palsied one ward off a further blow? It makes the man dead; and to what purpose do we appeal to him that is dead? I have tried to describe what a dreadful thing it is to be dead to God, and purity, and happiness; but the dead man does not know or care for these things. Our preaching may well be called foolishness, since it is addressed to ears that cannot, or, rather, will not hear. What a miracle of miracles it is when the divine life comes streaming down into the heart that sin has chilled into death! What a blessedness it is when God interposes and finds a way by which the wage most justly due shall not be paid! It is a necessity, that every transgression should have its recompense; but in the person of the Lord Jesus such an expiation³ is made, that sin pays its wage of death to Him who did not earn it, while those who did earn it go free.

O sinner, none can save you but the God who made you! You, as dead in sin, are in such a state that you will rot into corruption, and go on for ever rotting into a yet fouler and filthier corruption throughout the ages; and none can prevent it but Almighty God Himself. Only one power is capable of affording you the help you need; and that power worketh through the Lord Jesus, Who is at this moment mighty to save. Oh, that the miracle of miracles might be wrought upon you! For if not, there it stands, “The wages of sin is death.” Alas! I fear that sin will pervert even the ministry of the Word, and make it a savor of death unto death. This is the first teaching of the text, and I pray the Holy Ghost to impress it on every conscience!

³ **expiation** – the act of making atonement.

II. And now I am glad to pass into liberty and joy while I speak on the second subject: **ETERNAL LIFE IS THE GIFT OF GOD.**

Note well the change: death is a *wage*, but life is a *gift*. Sin brings its natural consequences with it; but eternal life is not the purchase of human merit, but the free gift of the love of God. The abounding goodness of the Most High alone grants life to those who are dead by sin. It is with clear intent to teach us the doctrine of the grace of God that the apostle altered the word here from wages to gift. Naturally he would have said, "The wages of sin is death, but the wages of righteousness is eternal life." But he wished to show us that life comes upon quite a different principle from that upon which death comes. In salvation all is of free gift. In damnation everything is of justice and desert. *When a man is lost, he has earned it; when a man is saved, it is given him.*

Let us notice, first, that *eternal life is imparted by grace through faith*. When it first enters the soul it comes as God's free gift. The dead cannot earn life; the very supposition is absurd. Eternal life enjoyed on earth comes to us as a gift. "What!" saith one, "do you mean to say that eternal life comes into the soul here?" I say, yes, here, or else never. Eternal life must be our possession now; for if we die without it, it will never be our possession in the world to come, which is not the state of probation, but of fixed and settled reward. When the flame of eternal life first drops into a man's heart, it is not as the result of any good works of his which preceded it, for there were none; nor as the result of any feelings of his, for good feelings were not there till the life came. Both good works and good feelings are the fruit of the heavenly life which enters the heart, and makes us conscious of its entrance by working in us repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Eternal life is the gift of God in Jesus Christ." By faith we come consciously into Christ. We trust Him, we rest upon Him, we become one with Him, and thus eternal life manifests itself. Has He not said, "I give unto them eternal life" (Joh 10:28); and again, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (Joh 6:47)?

O beloved, you that have been quickened by the Spirit of God, I am sure you trace that first quickening to the grace of God. Whatever your doctrinal views may be, you are all agreed in the experimental acknowledgment that by the grace of God you are what you are. How could you, being dead, give yourself life? How could you, being the slave of sin, set yourself free? But the Lord in mercy visited you as surely as the Lord Jesus Christ visited the tomb of Lazarus; and He spoke with His almighty voice, and bade you come to life; and you arose and came to life at His bidding. You remember well the change that came upon you. If any man here could have been literally dead, and then could have been made to live, what a wonderful experience his would have been! We should go a long way to hear the story of a man who had been dead, and then was made alive again. But I tell you, his experience, if he could tell it, would not be any more wonderful than our experience as quickened from death in sin; for we have suffered the pains

that come through the entrance of life into the soul, and we know the joys which afterwards come of it. We have seen the light that life brings to the spiritual eye. We have felt the emotions that life brings to the quickened heart. We have known the joys which life, and only life, can bring to the entire man. We can tell you something about these things; but if you want to know them to the full, you must feel them for yourselves. "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). We bear our witness that eternal life within our spirit is not of our earning, but the gift of God.

Beloved, since we received eternal life, we have gone on to grow, and we have made great advances in the divine life. Our little trembling faith has now grown to be full assurance. That zeal of ours which burned so low that we hardly dared to attempt anything for Jesus has now flamed up into full consecration, so that we live to His praise. Whence has this growth come? Is it not still a free gift? Have you received an increase of life by the Law, or has it come to you as the free gift of God? I know what you will say.

And if any of you have so grown in grace that you have become ripe Christians; if any of you have been taught of God so that you can teach others; if any of you have been led by the Holy Spirit so that your sanctification is known unto all men, and you have become saintly men and women; I am sure that your holiness and maturity are still gifts received, and not wages earned. I will put the question to you again. Did this abundant life come to you by the works of the Law, or by grace through faith which is in Christ Jesus? Your instantaneous answer is, "It is all of grace, in the latter as well as in the earlier stages." Yes, in every degree the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Yes; and when we get to heaven, and the eternal life shall there be developed as a bud opens into a full-blown rose; when our life shall embrace God's life, and God's life shall encompass ours; when we shall be abundantly alive to everything that is holy, divine, heavenly, blessed, and eternally glorious; oh, then we shall confess that our life was all of the grace of God, the free gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord! I am sure that our heavenly education will only make us know more and more fully that while death is the well-earned wages of sin, eternal life is from beginning to end the gift of infinite grace.

Beloved, observe gratefully what a wonderful gift this is—"the gift of God"—the gift which Jesus bestows upon every believer. For to "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Joh 1:12-13). How express is our Lord's statement: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (Joh 3:36)! What a life this is! It must be of a wonderful sort, because it is called "life" *par excellence*, emphatically "life," true life, real life, essential life. This does not mean mere existence, as some

vainly talk. There never was a greater blunder than to confound life with existence, or death with non-existence. These are two totally different and distinct ideas. The life of man means the existence of man as he ought to exist—in union with God, and consequently in holiness, purity, health, and happiness. Man, as God intended him to be, is man enjoying life. Man, as sin makes men, is man abiding in death. All that man can receive of joy and honor the Lord gives to man to constitute life eternal in the world to come. What a life is this! The life that is imparted to us in regeneration is God's own life, brought into us by the living and "incorruptible seed...which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pe 1:23). We are akin to God by the new birth, and by loving union with His Son Jesus Christ. What must life mean in God's sense of it?

Moreover, we have life *eternal*, too, never ending. Whatever else may end, this never can. It can neither be killed by temptation, nor destroyed by trial, nor quenched by death, nor worn out by the ages. The gift of the eternal God is eternal life. Those who talk about a man having everlasting life, and losing it, do not know the force of language. If a man has eternal life, it is eternal, and cannot therefore end or be lost. If it be everlasting, it is *everlasting*; to lose it would prove that it was not everlasting. No, if you have eternal life, you can never perish. If God has bestowed it upon you, it will not be recalled, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29). This eternal life is evidently a free gift; for how could any man obtain it in any other way? It is too precious to be bought, too divine to be made by man. If it had to be earned, how could you have earned it? You, I mean, who have already earned death. The wage due to you already was death, and by that wage you were effectually shut out from all possibility of ever earning life. Indeed, the earning of life seems to me to be from the beginning out of the question. It has come to us as a free gift. It could not come in any other way.

Furthermore, remember that it is life *in Jesus*; the "through" of our version is "in" in the original. We are in everlasting union with the blessed person of the Son of God, and therefore we live. To be in Christ is a mystery of bliss. The apostle felt that this was an occasion for again rehearsing our blessed Master's names and titles of honor—"in Jesus Christ our Lord." I noted to you on a former occasion how, at certain seasons, the various honors and titles of great men are proclaimed by heralds with becoming state; and so here, to the praise of the Lord Jesus, Paul writes His full degree—"Eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." He writes at large the august name before which every knee shall bow, and he links our life therewith. Here we read the cheering and precious name of Jesus. By that name He is nearest to man. When He was born into our nature He was named Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat 1:21). The life which comes in connection with Him is salvation from sin. In this Savior is life. The next name is "Christ," or anointed, by which name He is nearest to God, being sent forth

and anointed of God to treat with us on God's behalf. He is the Lord's Christ and our Jesus. Next He is called "our Lord." Herein lieth the glory of our anointed Savior—we through grace becoming servants participate in the life and glory of our Lord. He reigneth as our Lord, and by His reigning power He shows Himself to be the Lord and giver of life. "All live unto him" (Luk 20:38). Our Lord hath life in Himself, and breathes it into us (Joh 5:26). What a life this is—a life saved from sin, a life anointed of the Holy Ghost, a life in union with Him Who is Lord of all. This is the life which is peculiarly the gift of God.

Thus I have set forth this doctrine, and I desire to apply it by adding a little more of practical importance. First, *let us come at this time, one and all, and receive this divine life as a gift in Christ Jesus*. If any of you have been working for it by going about to establish your own righteousness, I beseech you to end the foolish labor by submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God. If you have been trying to feel so much, or to pray so much, or to mourn so much, forbear from thus offering a price, and come and receive life as a free gift from your God. Pull down the idol of your pride, and humbly sue for pardoning grace on the plea of mercy. *Believe and live*. You are not called upon to earn life, but to receive it. Receive it as freely as your lungs take in the air you breathe. If you are dead in sin at this moment, yet the gospel of life has come nigh unto you. With that gospel there comes the life-giving wind of the eternal Spirit. He can call you out of your ruin, and wreckage, and death, and make you live. This is His word, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph 5:14). Will you have it as a gift? If there be any true life in you, your answer will be quick and hearty. You will be lost if you do not receive this gift. Your earnings will be paid into your bosom, and dread will be the death which will settle down upon you. The acceptance of a free gift would not be difficult if we were not proud. Accept it—God help you to accept it at once! Even that acceptance will be God's gift; for the will to live is life; and all true life, from beginning to end, is entirely of the Lord.

Beloved, have we accepted that free gift of eternal life? *Let us abide in it*. Let us never be tempted to try the law of merit; let us never attempt to live by our earnings. No doubt eternal life is a reward in one sense, but it is always a reward of grace, not a reward of debt. The Lord shall give us a crown of life at last as a reward; but even then we shall confess that He first gave us the work by which the crown was won. The Lord first gives us good works, and then rewards us for them. The labor of love is in itself a gift of love. Grace reigns all along; not only in removing sin, but in working virtue.

Finally, are we now abiding in eternal life, trusting in the Son of God, and clinging to His skirts? Then *let us live to His glory*. Do we know that because He lives, we shall live also? If so, let us show by our gratitude how greatly we prize this gift. We dwell in a world where death is everywhere manifesting itself in various forms of corruption—therefore let us see from

what the Lord has delivered us. Let no man boast in his heart that he is not subject to the vile influences which hold the world in its corruption. Let no pride because of our new life ever cross our spirit. Chase every such thought as that away with detestation. If our life be of grace, there is no room for boasting, but much space for soul-humbling. When you walk the streets, and hear the groans of the dead in the form of oaths and blasphemies, thank the Lord that you have been taught a more living language. Think of drunkenness and lust as the worms that are bred of the putridity of the death which comes of sin. You are disgusted and horrified, my brethren; but these things would have been in you also but for the grace of God. We are like living men shut up in a charnel-house.⁴ Wherever we turn we see the dreary works of death; but all this should make us grateful to the sacred power which has brought us out of death into spiritual life.

As for others, let us anxiously ask the question—“Can these bones live?” (Eze 37:3). Then let us be obedient to the heavenly vision when the divine Word saith to us, “Son of man...prophesy upon these bones” (Eze 37:3-4). We must cherish the faith which will enable us to do this. Moreover, a sight of the universal death of unrenewed nature should drive us to prayer, so that we cry, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Eze 37:9). This prayer being offered, we should live in hopeful expectancy that the Lord will open the graves of His people, and cause them to come forth and live by His Spirit. Oh for grace to prophesy believingly upon these bones, and say, “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live” (Eze 37:4-5). Beloved, we shall yet see them stand up an exceeding great army, quickened of the Lord our God. He delights to burst the bonds of death. Resurrection is one of His chief glories. He heralds resurrection work with trumpets, and angels, and a glorious high throne, because He delighteth in it. The living Jehovah rejoices to give life, and especially to give it to the dead. Corruption flies before Him, grave clothes are cut, and sepulchres are broken open. “I am the resurrection, and the life,” saith Jesus (Joh 11:25); and so He is even at this hour. O God, save this congregation to the praise of the glory of Thy grace, wherein Thou hast made us to live and to be accepted in Thy well-beloved Son. Amen and Amen.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential Baptist minister in England. History’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. Born at Kelvedon, Essex.



⁴ **charnel house** – a vault or building where corpses or bones are deposited.

THE ETERNAL DESTINY OF THE UNSAVED

I.C. Herendeen

THIS message is about one of the most important and solemn subjects contained in the Word of God, and should therefore be dealt with in great boldness and plainness. But important as it is, sad to say the great majority of preachers rarely mention it and then but lightly. This is all the more reason why we should carefully consider it, and set forth what we find the Holy Scriptures have to say about it. They are very clear as to the destiny of the unsaved. Christ Himself spoke more often and to a greater extent on this solemn subject than He did on heaven and its glories. Today we hear far more about heaven and its glories than about hell and its miseries. No one objects hearing too often about “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven” (Col 1:5), no matter how often mentioned or emphasized. But when it comes to presenting that which is not so pleasing, then we are apt to be told, “Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa 30:10).

Need to Think about Eternity

Everything about us is passing away and coming to an end, and our life’s race is apt to end any moment of any day. We have no lease on life. It is a journey from the cradle to the grave, from time to eternity; and ere we are aware we shall have arrived at our final destination—heaven for the righteous and hell for the unsaved sinner. This is the clear teaching of the Bible, our only infallible source of information. We cannot, we dare not, fail to give this solemn subject our earnest and concentrated attention, for none of us is more than a heart beat away from eternal weal or woe. If we had a clearer vision of the awe-inspiring matter, it would banish much of our levity and irreverence and cause us to realize our deep need of fleeing “from the wrath to come” (Mat 3:7).

Reason for This Message

I am in hearty agreement with Arthur W. Pink when he wrote: “It is the deepening conviction of the writer that what is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths which are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is—

1. A scriptural setting forth of the character of God: His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable holiness, His inflexible justice, and His unchanging veracity.
2. A scriptural setting forth of the condition of the natural man: his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, and his inveterate hostility to

God, and the fact that he is condemned already and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding on him (Joh 3:36).

3. A scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are, the indescribably awful doom which awaits them.

4. A scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost, the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, and the endlessness of it. It is because of these convictions that by pen as well as by voice we are seeking to raise the alarm.”

To quote Bishop J.C. Ryle: “The eternity of future punishment has been held by almost all the greatest theologians from the time of the Reformation down to the present day.” Further on he continues, “But after every allowance, admission and deduction there remains, in my humble judgment, a mass of Scripture evidence in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment which can never be explained away, and which no revision or new translation of the English Bible will ever overthrow. That there are degrees of misery as well as degrees of glory in the future state is undeniable. But that the punishment of the wicked will ever have an end... I maintain is utterly impossible to prove by texts of Scripture.”

What Is Hell Like?

In Revelation 21:8 we read, “The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” Here we learn that the vilest of the vile will all be associated together. Those of high moral standards, who pride themselves on their truthfulness and honesty, their religiousness, their morality, if they die in their sins, will for ever and ever be shut up in the prison-house of the universe, with all the vile Sodomites, with every murderer, every whoremonger, with every blasphemer that ever lived—with Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas! Devils and wicked men all under the same condemnation will be their eternal companions. And this companionship, instead of affording relief, will only aggravate their woe. The whole throng, hateful and hating one another, will be tormentors of one another. The passions that burn in the hearts of wicked men on earth and destroy all eternal peace and sometimes drive them to suicide will then be unrestrained and do their full work of torture; and relief by suicide will be forever impossible—endure such torments they must. There will be no relief from their sufferings. Their torments will be interminable with no hope of deliverance, no means of escape, no resting-place in hell, no change or variation of their lot. With no prospects of any improvement they will sink down to black despair and to “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luk 13:28).

It is high time these facts were thundered forth far and wide and often to warn guilty sinners that “the wrath of God abideth on” them (Joh 3:36), and that execution of His wrath awaits them the moment they pass out of

this life. God is a holy God (Jos 24:19) and “will not at all acquit the wicked” (Nah 1:3).

The Sinner’s Folly and Madness

What has been before us above serves to expose the folly and madness of probably the greatest part of mankind, who for “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25), for a little wealth, or for a little earthly fame and glory, go on in utter heedlessness and carelessness to their eternal doom, as the ox goeth to the slaughter. How mad are those who know they must die in a few short years at the very most, but show no concern as to what is to become of them in the next world! And of those who have been faithfully warned, many are not in the least disturbed, but hear with as much indifference as though they were not at all concerned in the matter, as though the warning did not apply to them! And yet, for all they know to the contrary they may be in the fiery torments before another day or even an hour passes. O the blinding power of sin! O the perversity of human nature! O the utter insensibility and indifference of men and women who are now sporting on the brink of eternal hell, suspended only by the frail thread of mortality which may be snapped at any moment!

These serious thoughts ought to make every unsaved sinner quake and tremble. Reader, it is useless to flatter yourself with the vain hope that this will not be true of you, if you do not make sure and certain that you have been “born again” (Joh 3:3; 1Pe 1:23), washed in the precious blood of the Lamb of God and made an heir of glory. Every professing Christian ought to obey the Scripture command to “examine” himself (2Co 13:5), to make sure that he has passed from death unto life, not prejudiced in his own favor, remembering that he has a heart that “is deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9). He should be careful not to give himself the benefit of any doubt or take anything for granted. Each of us should weigh the tremendously solemn issues which turn on whether or not we have really passed from death unto life. We simply cannot afford to be uncertain or mistaken, for far too much is at stake.

What folly on the part of those who deny the reality of hell! Strong and impressive proof of this momentous truth is furnished by divine revelation. In it “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). From God’s infallible Word we learn that wicked men treasure up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5). We are told that “the rich man...died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments” (Luk 16:22-23). Men will be called from their graves to the judgment (Heb 9:27), and from the judgment the wicked will be sentenced to everlasting punishment. God is to be feared (Ecc 5:7); for He can and will “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat 10:28).

The Greatness of Wrath and Damnation

The greatness of the evil included in damnation may be inferred from the importance which the Scriptures attach to salvation. If wrath and damnation are trivial matters then the sending of God's only and well-beloved Son into the world to suffer for us as He did would be unworthy of infinite wisdom; it would not be worthy to be called "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3) if it did not deliver from "so great a death" (2Co 1:10). Paul declared that God in the person of His Son Jesus Christ "came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15). Hence He must have believed the salvation of sinners to be a work of vast magnitude and importance. The psalmist asks, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath" (Psa 90:11). The finite mind cannot conceive what it will be. Because of "the terror of the Lord" (2Co 5:11), every son of Adam ought to give himself no rest until he has made his "calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10).

Since eternal woe is something future, unseen, and unfelt, the human heart is prone to neglect or slight God's warnings and threatenings of "judgment to come" (Act 24:25). Its apprehension disquiets men and disturbs their enjoyments, and so they are strongly inclined to put it from them and go merrily on their way while all the time they are drawing nearer and nearer to the pit of woe. The threat of "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (Rom 2:8-9) is fearful; and they cannot think of these things and remain at ease, and so try to persuade themselves that these threatenings will never be executed upon them.

Of what elements future misery will consist we do not know, but we do know that it will include poignant remorse, a sense of divine wrath, with absence of all enjoyment and of all hope. The subjects of it will weep and wail and gnash their teeth as at last they realize that they are forever and ever shut out of heaven and in outer darkness. They will "remember" the good things they once enjoyed but will never enjoy again—the opportunities of mercy, once neglected, never to return (see Luk 16:25)! They will be "tormented in this flame" without a drop of water to cool their tongue (Luke 16:24). And their hatred of God will be such as to cause them to gnash their teeth in rage against Him and blaspheme His name as they realize they are the subjects of the Almighty's wrath and cannot extricate themselves!

Hell Is Eternal

The duration of their misery will be eternal—never ending. God's Holy Word expressly declares, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mat 25:46). The punishment of the one and the happiness of the other will be of eternal duration—both will be "everlasting." In Revelation 14:11 we read, "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." They will suffer "the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

The righteous will perpetually rejoice in the glory of heaven while the wicked will perpetually sink under the load of their woe. The terribleness and awfulness of hell is proven by the fact that the everlasting fire into which the wicked will depart is “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41). Being “prepared for the devil and his angels,” how intolerable it will be! How dreadful must that place be! That this “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” produces the most awful sufferings is clear from Revelation 20:10 where we are told that Satan “shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” Whether this fire is figurative or literal who can say positively? But I believe that when God says “fire,” He means fire. Was the “flood” figurative? Was the “fire and brimstone” which descended from heaven and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah figurative? Will it be figurative “fire” which shall yet burn this earth and cause the elements to “melt with fervent heat” (2Pe 3:10)? No: in each of these cases we are obliged to take the words of Scripture literally. Let those who dare to affirm otherwise answer to God. In the light of this we ask in the words of Ezekiel 22:14, “Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it.”

From the above, we learn how God’s character and throne will be vindicated. God will yet punish every rebel against Himself in the display of His sovereignty and government. When Pharaoh dared pit himself against Jehovah, God manifested His authority and destroyed him at the Red Sea. He turned Nebuchadnezzar into a beast, to make him “know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men” (Dan 4:32). God now endures the vessels of wrath with much longsuffering, but in a coming day He will shew His wrath and make His power known (Rom 9:22).

Who Goes to Hell and Why

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). From this scripture we learn that every last one of us is born into this world a sinner (Rom 3:23), on the road to hell because he is a descendant of his forefather Adam, who deliberately and willfully disobeyed God’s command in the Garden of Eden not to eat of the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17), thus incurring the penalty of death. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4).

In all likelihood some of the readers of this message will be among those yet unsaved, and travelling as fast as time can carry them to this very hell. If, then, you have any concern for the eternal welfare of your soul, you will give yourselves no rest until you have found out all you can as to what the Word of God teaches about this dreadful place, who will be its inhabitants, what their state therein will be, and what is the only way of escape. Pray do not take it for granted that all will be well with your soul because you are religious, for one can be very religious and yet lost. It is not enough to at-

tend church, be baptized, take communion, refrain from the grosser evils the world condemns, be moral, honest, upright, etc. These things are good in themselves; but they do not save, as the Bible plainly teaches. One may do all these things and yet go to hell notwithstanding, for Christ alone is the Saviour. In God's sight "there is none righteous, no, not one...they are all gone out of the way" (Rom 3:10, 12). If you are to miss hell at last you must "Repent...and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15). You must savingly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world for the express purpose of saving sinners and to give them right and title to "mansions in the skies." My earnest prayer is that after you have read this serious message you will give yourselves no rest until you have made sure of your eternal salvation through the mighty sacrifice of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). You dare not give yourselves the benefit of any doubt, for too much is at stake.

The Word reveals heaven as a "place" of eternal joy, bliss, glory, and happiness for all the redeemed of the Lord, "prepared" by the Lord Himself for all those that love Him in sincerity (Eph 6:24); whereas hell is for all those who refuse to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ and will not come to Him that they "might have life" (Joh 5:40). Since this matter is of vital importance you will play the fool if immediate steps are not taken to "flee from the wrath to come" (Mat 3:7), and apply to Christ for "the gift of God [which] is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23). We beg you not to put off this all-important matter another moment, for you are only a heart-beat away from your eternal destiny.

Hell is a most solemn and awful subject. O think of your case in time! Can you remain unmoved at that threat in John 8:24, "Ye shall die in your sins"? Your sins will follow you to judgment and there be your accusers, there be your tormentors! And bear this in mind. You do not know when you lie down but that you may be in hell before morning! Divine wrath is a fierce, devouring, everlasting, unquenchable fire. Take heed that it be not your portion. Mark 16:16 plainly warns you, "He that believeth not shall be damned." This is the Word of Him that cannot lie.

Great numbers spend their days without any thought as to their future and what it holds for them. They live as though they were to live for ever, give account to no one, and are sure they will go to heaven when they die regardless of how they have lived. Others do not hesitate to act insanely and do those things which are almost certain to result in their death, and yet this does not deter them in the least. They are perfectly willing, it seems, to risk their lives for the sake of possible fleeting fortune, earthly glory, or for the sake of a brief season of physical satisfaction. O what an awful price such will pay—an eternity suffering "the devouring fire" and the "everlasting burnings" (Isa 33:14) from which there will be no alleviation and no escape!

Considering these awful, inescapable, and eternal consequences, we can but wonder at the widespread indifference on the part of multitudes. Are men and women so anxious to lose their precious lives that they are willing and ready to take such awful risks? It would certainly seem so, since they appear never to stop to think what is involved should death overtake them. Death today is so common that men and women think nothing of it; they are not greatly affected by it. Great numbers are not aware that they are wicked sinners in the sight of God, that “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psa 7:11) and hates “all workers of iniquity” (Psa 5:5) as well as all works of iniquity, and “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7).

God is ineffably holy, inflexibly just, and absolutely sure to do as He has said, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell” (Psa 9:17), that “all the wicked will he destroy” (Psa 145:20), and this because the sinner’s heart is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), and because he hates God “without a cause” (Joh 15:25). From these scriptures we see that the sinner richly deserves the doom which awaits him. He is unaware or indifferent to the fact that he is in the hands of infinite Justice who will pour out to the uttermost His wrath upon the ungodly the moment their spirits leave their bodies (Luk 16:19-26). Death seals their doom for all eternity. Their souls go to be tormented in the “flames”—an “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41); and this is irrevocable and final whatever men may think or say to the contrary.

None of us have any reason to be ignorant of these truths, for the Word of God is everywhere available. But since the great majority do not read the Bible, and since great numbers of professed preachers of the Word are silent on the matter of an everlasting hell, well aware that this subject is not at all a pleasing one, sinners are not being warned of their fearful peril, as they should be, and bidden to “flee from the wrath to come” (Luk 3:7). It is also true that the occupants of many pulpits, commanded to preach “all the counsel of God” (Act 20:27), even go so far as to deny the eternal punishment of all who die in their sins. Their denials, however, do not change the facts of God’s holy Word. God has told us the wicked shall suffer “the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jud 7), and so it shall come to pass in due time.

How to Escape Hell

Countless thousands of all ages are now suffering the doom of the damned; and untold numbers of others, including hordes of unregenerate religionists are on their way to the same doom. This may not seem real now; but if you die unsaved, it will be your portion too. O my friend, do not dismiss this subject from your thoughts, or your folly will only accentuate your misery in that day. Far better to be made wretched and miserable now for a time than that you should weep and howl for ever! Oh, harden not your heart against Him, against infinite mercy, against the

Son of God's love! Ezekiel 33:11 tells us that God hath "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." "Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin" (Eze 18:30). If you do not repent, Christ Himself asks, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Mat 23:33). O sinner, why will ye die in your sins? Why will ye not come unto Him for life everlasting?

*Come to the Saviour, make no delay—
Here in His Word, He's shown us the way;
Here in our midst, He is standing today,
Tenderly saying, "Come!"*

He has graciously promised, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). God, in order to provide your salvation, "spared not his own Son" (Rom 8:32). God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9). God has graciously provided a way of escape—so flee now this very minute, while time and opportunity are yours. Flee to the blessed Saviour of even the "chief" of sinners (1Ti 1:15). Then you will not "fall into the hands of the living God" which is "a fearful thing" (Heb 10:31). Cast yourself into the arms of Christ who shed His life's blood for sinners that they might be saved "from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10). "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psa 2:12).

A clear understanding of the doom of the damned will cause the redeemed of the Lord to appreciate far better their "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3), and be the occasion of the profoundest praise to God, just as of old the overthrow of God's enemies at the Red Sea caused His people to rejoice in their deliverance. In the coming Day we shall be moved to rejoice when we witness the final display of God's holiness and justice in the overthrow and punishment of all who have wickedly defied Him.

How Does It Stand with You?

In closing we ask, what are your prospects in the future world? Have you seriously considered where you will spend eternity? If not, why not? Death is ever at hand and the Judge is at the door. Every act is a step to perdition, and you do not know but that ere night you may make your bed in hell. Oh, do not make light of this all-important matter. The very devils do not—they "believe, and tremble" (Jam 2:19); and you are not more hardened than they. It is not wisdom to sport with the second death. Do not contend with God. Repent and be converted and none of this will come upon you. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:6-7). "Why will ye die?...For I have no pleasure in the death of him that

dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye” (Eze 18:31-32). “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2Co 6:2). Tomorrow may be one day too late.

*Say where is thy refuge, poor sinner,
And what is thy prospect today?
Why toil for the wealth that will perish,
And treasures that rust and decay?
Oh, think of thy soul that forever
Must live on eternity’s shore,
When thou in the dust art forgotten,
When pleasures can charm thee no more.
The Master is calling thee, sinner,
In tones of compassion and love,
To feel that sweet rapture of pardon,
And lay up thy treasures above.
To kneel at the cross where He suffered,
To ransom thy soul from the grave;
The arm of His mercy will hold thee,
The arm that is mighty to save.
The summer is waning, poor sinner,
Repent ere the season is past;
God’s goodness to thee is extended,
As long as the day-beam shall last.
Then slight not the warning repeated,
To all the bright moments that roll,
Nor say when the harvest is ended,
That no one hath cared for my soul.*

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb...and there shall be no night there...and the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:1, 5, 17). “Him that cometh to me I will no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37b). What an exceeding great and precious promise! Will you come while the door of mercy yet stands open?

Booklet available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



A PRAYER FROM HELL

Holmes Moore

“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”—Luke 16:24

OUR Saviour gives us the history of two men as no other person could. First He gives a brief account of their lives *on earth*. One man is rich and enjoys the luxuries of the world, while the other is very poor and must beg for a miserable sustenance. Then our Lord tells of these two men *at death*. The rich man is buried, no doubt very elaborately, with many mourners in attendance. The beggar also died and was afforded no better funeral than the potter’s field could provide. To this point, perhaps, any biographer could take us. However, the Saviour goes on to show us these two men *in eternity*! He was not compelled to stop where human writers must, because He could pull back that thin veil which separates this life from the next and unfold their eternal state.

While they lived, this is a story of *two satisfied men*. The beggar is satisfied with nothing but God. The rich man is satisfied with everything but God! Nonetheless, how soon after death had the rich man’s satisfaction completely disappeared! In agony he cries out in prayer from the eternal burning. The Bible records many prayers, but in this passage we have the only account of a prayer from hell!

The Circumstances of This Prayer Serve for Our Instruction.

Consider that the rich man *prayed when he saw the kingdom of God*. “He lift up his eyes...and seeth” (v. 23). Like so many others, he had never been aware of spiritual realities in this life. It was not that he denied them; he was merely oblivious of them! The reason for this was that he had never experienced the new birth. Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). In this world, a sure evidence of God’s quickening power within is the realization of spiritual verities that drives one to begin to cry out to God in prayer.

He prayed earnestly from a sense of need—“being in torments” (v. 23). During his lifetime he had often “said his prayers.” Being a religious man, he was not unfamiliar with a cold, formal type of praying, both public and private. How blasphemous a thing it is for us just to *say* prayers, whether they are written or spontaneous! But now the man is praying with all his might, without the aid of a prayer book. Had he prayed so earnestly while he lived on earth, he would not have come to that place of torment!

He prayed in great soul-agony—“and in hell...he cried” (vv. 23-24). Since he had never experienced such agony of soul on earth, therefore he had never so prayed. Some have known what it has been to be pressed to such painful prayer in this life. Some can say with the psalmist, “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow” (Psa 116:3). Would to God that all knew such trouble and sorrow of heart *here and now!* Most are far too satisfied and comfortable to pray so. Rees Howells well said, “These three aspects are never found in ordinary prayer: identification, agony, and authority.” The most pitiable sight on earth is an unsaved soul at peace!

Sadly, we note that *he prayed too late!* How we long to see people stirred by a realization of God’s kingdom beginning to pray, in earnestness and agony of soul. This must be done, however, while yet there is time. We must “seek...the LORD while he may be found” (Isa 55:6), while we yet have our life and being upon this earth, or else we pray too late.

The Petitions of This Prayer Are Intended for Our Correction.

This man prayed to the wrong person—“Father Abraham” (v. 24). Even “the Friend of God” and the father of all the faithful is no correct object of prayer (Jam 2:23). It is more than a little interesting that this is the only prayer in the Bible *addressed to a saint!* Remember—it came from hell! Only God can answer prayer and *He alone*, in the Trinity of His being, is to be addressed in prayer. Let those who make it a practice to pray to Mary, or any other saint, be corrected by this hellish petition!

He asked for the wrong deliverer—“and send Lazarus” (v. 24). Lazarus indeed was now among the blessed who had come to an end of all hunger, thirst, pain, and tears (Rev 7:15-17); but he was not able to relieve this rich man’s agony—nor are any of the saints above! He could not surmount nor cross that “*great gulf*” between him and the damned (v. 26). God sent, in the fullness of time, *the ONLY DELIVERER*, Jesus Christ, His own Son! He spanned the “great gulf” between God and man in His nature when He took upon Himself our flesh. He lived a perfect life and satisfied actively all that the Law of God demanded of our race. Going to Calvary, Jesus did bear our sins in His own body and bridged that infinite expanse between our sin and God’s righteousness. Having ignored and rejected Him, there was no other hope for this man or for any other! In vain does any sinner seek consolation from any other but Christ (Act 4:12)!

He sought the wrong water. “Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue” (v. 24). Even if Lazarus could have crossed over and done as this rich man requested, what good would such water have done him? How long would such a momentary cooling have benefited him in those flames? Oh, that he had asked for and received, while he yet lived on earth, the *living water*, which Jesus alone can give (Joh 7:37-39)! Then had his soul been eternally refreshed and satiated!

The Answer to This Prayer is for Our Solemn Warning.

We should tremble to see that *the answer given to this prayer from hell is only mockery!* This should not surprise us since mockery is exactly what God has promised to such a prayer as this. “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:24-26). Notice how each part of Abraham’s reply is only sheer mockery!

He called him “son” (v. 25). He was a son of the flesh but not of the Spirit. He was a son of Abraham by the first birth but not a son of God by regeneration. To bring up this natural relationship now that he was in the flames of hell was only mockery. Many who are baptized church members, but not saved, will likewise be mocked one day!

He asked him to “remember” (v. 25). What memories there will be in hell! This is one thing that this man did not wish to do, nor will any one who makes their bed in hell. He has that for which he had sold his soul called “thy good things.” Though once considered dear, all his purple clothing and sumptuous fare now only bitterly mock this man!

He is directed to consider what he has missed. “But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented” (v. 25). Never once on earth had he faintly thought of changing places with Lazarus, but now he would give ten thousand worlds of gold to do so!

He is told hell is forever. “There is a great gulf fixed” (v. 26). To go to hell is to be there forever. There will never be the hope of a brighter day or of relief from the torments of that pit. This dread fact will mock its inhabitants as long as God lives!

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The greater a man’s sins are, either in number or nature,
the more haste he should make to come to Christ.

—Edward Fisher

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“Their foot shall slide in due time.”—Deuteronomy 32:35

IN this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God’s visible people, and who lived under the means of grace, but who, notwithstanding all God’s wonderful works towards them, remained void of counsel, having no understanding in them (v. 28). Under all the cultivations of heaven, they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit, as in the two verses next preceding the text. The expression I have chosen for my text, “their foot shall slide in due time,” seems to imply the following things relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed:

1. **That they were *always exposed to destruction*, as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to fall.** This is implied in the manner of their destruction coming upon them, being represented by their foot sliding. The same is expressed in Psalm 73:18: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.”

2. **It implies that they were always exposed to *sudden, unexpected destruction*.** As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning. [This] is also expressed in Psalm 73:18-19: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!”

3. **Another thing implied is that they are liable to fall *of themselves*,** without being thrown down by the hand of another, as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.

4. **That the reason why they are not fallen already and do not fall now, is only that *God’s appointed time is not come*.** For it is said that when that due time or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide. Then they shall be left to fall, as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go; and then, at that very instant, they shall fall into destruction, as he that stands on such slippery declining ground, on the edge of a pit. He cannot stand alone. When he is let go he immediately falls and is lost.

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this: *there is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.* By the “mere pleasure of God,” I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God’s mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment. The truth of this observation may appear by the following considerations:

1. **There is no *want of power* in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment.** Men’s hands cannot be strong when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist Him, nor can any deliver out of His hands. He is not only able to cast wicked men into hell, but He can most easily do it. Sometimes an earthly prince meets with a great deal of difficulty to subdue a rebel, who has found means to fortify himself, and has made himself strong by the numbers of his followers. But it is not so with God. There is no fortress that is any defense from the power of God. Though hand join in hand, and vast multitudes of God’s enemies combine and associate themselves, they are easily broken in pieces. They are as great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth; so it is easy for us to cut or singe a slender thread that anything hangs by. Thus easy is it for God, when He pleases, to cast His enemies down to hell. What are we, that we should think to stand before Him, at Whose rebuke the earth trembles, and before Whom the rocks are thrown down?

2. **They *deserve* to be cast into hell;** so that divine justice never stands in the way. It makes no objection against God’s using His power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” (Luk 13:7). The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their heads; and it is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God’s mere will, that holds it back.

3. **They are already under a sentence of *condemnation* to hell.** They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the Law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between Him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. “He that believeth not is condemned already” (Joh 3:18). So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell. That is his place; from thence he is. “Ye are from beneath” (Joh 8:23). And thither he is bound. It is the place that justice, and God’s Word, and the sentence of His unchangeable Law assign to him.

4. **They are now the objects of that very same anger and *wrath of God* that is expressed in the torments of hell.** And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment is not because God, in Whose power they are, is not then very angry with them, as He is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth—yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation, who it may be are at ease—than He is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

So that it is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that He does not let loose His hand and cut them off. God is not altogether such an one as themselves, though they imagine Him to be so. The wrath of God burns against them; their damnation does not slumber. The pit is prepared; the fire is made ready; the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them. The flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.

5. **The *devil* stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own at what moment God shall permit him.** They belong to him; he has their souls in his possession and under his dominion. The Scripture represents them as his goods (Luk 11:21). The devils watch them. They are ever by them at their right hand. They stand waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back. If God should withdraw His hand, by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The old serpent is gaping for them. Hell opens its mouth wide to receive them; and if God should permit it, they would be hastily swallowed up and lost.

6. **There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish *principles* reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hell-fire if it were not for God's restraints.** There is laid in the very nature of carnal men a foundation for the torments of hell. There are those corrupt principles in reigning power in them, and in full possession of them, that are seeds of hell-fire. These principles are active and powerful, exceeding violent in their nature; and if it were not for the restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out. They would flame out after the same manner as the same corruptions, the same enmity does in the hearts of damned souls, and would beget the same torments as they do in them. The souls of the wicked are in Scripture compared to the troubled sea (Isa 57:20). For the present, God restrains their wickedness by His mighty power, as He does the raging waves of the troubled sea, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38:11); but if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon carry all before it. Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul. It is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly misera-

ble. The corruption of the heart of man is immoderate and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by God's restraints. Whereas if it were let loose, it would set on fire the course of nature; and as the heart is now a sink of sin, so if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into [a] fiery oven, or a furnace of fire and brimstone.

7. It is *no security* to wicked men for one moment that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages shows this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering; and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight; and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different, unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle or go out of the ordinary course of His providence to destroy any wicked man at any moment. All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world are so in God's hands, and so universally and absolutely subject to His power and determination, that it does not depend at all the less on the mere will of God whether sinners shall at any moment go to hell, than if means were never made use of, or at all concerned in the case.

8. Natural men's prudence and *care* to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to preserve them, do not secure them a moment. To this, divine providence and universal experience also bear testimony. There is this clear evidence that men's own wisdom is no security to them from death; that if it were otherwise we should see some difference between the wise and politic men of the world and others with regard to their liability to early and unexpected death—but how is it in fact? “How dieth the wise man? as the fool” (Ecc 2:16).

9. All wicked men's pains and *contrivance* which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ and so remain wicked men, do not secure them from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it. He depends upon himself for his own security. He flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Every one lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that

there are but few saved, and that the greater part of men that have died heretofore are gone to hell; but each one imagines that he lays out matters better for his own escape than others have done. He does not intend to come to that place of torment. He says within himself that he intends to take effectual care and to order matters so for himself as not to fail.

But the foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own schemes and in confidence in their own strength and wisdom. They trust to nothing but a shadow. The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace and are now dead are undoubtedly gone to hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive. It was not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape. If we could speak with them, and inquire of them one by one, whether they expected, when alive and when they used to hear about hell, ever to be the subjects of misery, we doubtless should hear one and another reply, "No, I never intended to come here; I had laid out matters otherwise in my mind. I thought I should contrive well for myself. I thought my scheme good. I intended to take effectual care; but it came upon me unexpected. I did not look for it at that time and in that manner; it came as a thief. Death outwitted me; God's wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would do hereafter; and when I was saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me."

10. God has laid Himself under no *obligation* by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell one moment. God certainly has made no promises either of eternal life, or of any deliverance or preservation from eternal death, but what are contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ, in Whom all the promises are yea and amen. But surely they have no interest in the promises of the covenant of grace who are not the children of the covenant, who do not believe in any of the promises, and have no interest in the Mediator of the covenant.

So that, whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural men's earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and manifest, that whatever pains a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no manner of obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

So that, thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell. They have deserved the fiery pit and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked. His anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of His wrath in hell; and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger; neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment. The devil is waiting for them; hell is gaping for them; the flames gather and flash about them and would fain lay hold on them and

swallow them up. The fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out; and they have no interest in any mediator. There are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of. All that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.

Application

The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation. This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God. There is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor any thing to take hold of. There is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

You probably are not sensible of this. You find you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing. If God should withdraw His hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf. And your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment, for you are a burden to it. The creation groans with you. The creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly. The sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan. The earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon. The air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. God's creatures are good and were made for men to serve God with, and do not willingly subserve any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of Him Who hath subjected it in hope. There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, stays His rough wind. Otherwise it

would come with fury; and your destruction would come like a whirlwind; and you would be like the chaff on the summer threshing floor.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present. They increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given. And the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course when once it is let loose. It is true that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto. The floods of God's vengeance have been withheld. But your guilt in the mean time is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath. The waters are constantly rising and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw His hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury and would come upon you with omnipotent power. And if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string; and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow. And it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls—all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced, light and life—are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets and in the house of God, it is nothing but His mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone from being in the like circumstances with you see that it was so with them; for destruction came suddenly upon most of them, when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, "Peace and safety." Now they see that those things on which they depended for peace and safety were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in His sight. You are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You

have offended Him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not go to hell...last night—that you were suffered to awake again in this world after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God’s hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God provoking His pure eyes by your sinful, wicked manner of attending His solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, Whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder. And you have no interest in any mediator and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. And consider here more particularly,

1. **Whose wrath it is: it is the wrath of the infinite God.** If it were only the wrath of man, though it were of the most potent prince, it would be comparatively little to be regarded. The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, who have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power, to be disposed of at their mere will. “The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul” (Pro 20:2). The subject that very much enrages an arbitrary prince is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that human art can invent, or human power can inflict. But the greatest earthly potentates in their greatest majesty and strength, and when clothed in their greatest terrors, are but feeble, despicable worms of the dust in comparison to the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth. It is but little that they can do when most enraged and when they have exerted the utmost of their fury. All the kings of the earth, before God, are as grasshoppers; they are nothing, and less than nothing. Both their love and their hatred are to be despised. The wrath of the great King of kings is as much more terrible than theirs as His majesty is greater. “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luk 12:4-5).

2. **It is the fierceness of his wrath that you are exposed to.** We often read of the fury of God, as in Isaiah 59:18: “According to their deeds, accord-

ingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries.” So, “For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isa 66:15), and in many other places. So, [in] Revelation 19:15, we read of “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, “the wrath of God,” the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful; but it is “the *fierceness* and wrath of...God”—the fury of God, the fierceness of Jehovah! Oh, how dreadful that must be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! But it is also “the fierceness and wrath of *Almighty* God,” as though there would be a very great manifestation of His almighty power in what the fierceness of His wrath should inflict, as though Omnipotence should be as it were enraged, and exerted, as men are wont to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. Oh, then what will be the consequence! What will become of the poor worms that shall suffer it! Whose hands can be strong? And whose heart can endure? To what a dreadful, inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery must the poor creature be sunk who shall be the subject of this!

Consider this, you that are here present, that yet remain in an unregenerate state. That God will execute the fierceness of His anger implies that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the ineffable extremity of your case and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportioned to your strength, and sees how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom, He will have no compassion upon you. He will not forbear the executions of His wrath or in the least lighten His hand. There shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay His rough wind. He will have no regard to your welfare nor be at all careful lest you should suffer too much in any other sense than only that you shall not suffer beyond what strict justice requires. Nothing shall be withheld, because it is so hard for you to bear. “Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Eze 8:18). Now God stands ready to pity you. This is a day of mercy. You may cry now with some encouragement of obtaining mercy. But when once the day of mercy is past, your most lamentable and dolorous cries and shrieks will be in vain. You will be wholly lost and thrown away of God, as to any regard to your welfare. God will have no other use to put you to, but to suffer misery. You shall be continued in being to no other end; for you will be a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction; and there will be no other use of this vessel, but to be filled full of wrath. God will be so far from pitying you when you cry to Him, that it is said He will only laugh and mock (Pro 1:25-26).

How awful are those words [of] Isaiah 63:3, which are the words of the great God: “I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury;

and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.” It is perhaps impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things, *viz.*¹ contempt, and hatred, and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, He will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case or showing you the least regard or favour, that instead of that, He will only tread you under foot. And though He will know that you cannot bear the weight of Omnipotence treading upon you, yet He will not regard that, but He will crush you under His feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood and make it fly; and it shall be sprinkled on His garments, so as to stain all His raiment. He will not only hate you, but He will have you in the utmost contempt. No place shall be thought fit for you, but under His feet to be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

3. The *misery* you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end that He might show what that wrath of Jehovah is. God hath had it on His heart to show to angels and men both how excellent His love is and also how terrible His wrath is. Sometimes earthly kings have a mind to show how terrible their wrath is by the extreme punishments they would execute on those that would provoke them. Nebuchadnezzar, that mighty and haughty monarch of the Chaldean empire, was willing to show his wrath when enraged with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and accordingly gave orders that the burning fiery furnace should be heated seven times hotter than it was before. Doubtless, it was raised to the utmost degree of fierceness that human art could raise it. But the great God is also willing to show His wrath, and magnify His awful majesty and mighty power in the extreme sufferings of His enemies. “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” (Rom 9:22). And seeing this is His design, and what He has determined, even to show how terrible the unrestrained wrath, the fury, and fierceness of Jehovah is, He will do it to effect. There will be something accomplished and brought to pass that will be dreadful with a witness. When the great and angry God hath risen up and executed His awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of His indignation, then will God call upon the whole universe to behold that awful majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it. “And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. Hear, ye that are far off, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites” (Isa 33:12-14).

Thus it will be with you that are in an unconverted state if you continue in it. The infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness of the omnipotent

¹ *viz.* – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

God shall be magnified upon you in the ineffable strength of your torments. You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh" (Isa 66:23-24).

4. It is *everlasting* wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty, merciless vengeance. And then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains, so that your punishment will indeed be infinite. Oh, who can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is! All that we can possibly say about it gives but a very feeble, faint representation of it; it is inexpressible and inconceivable. For who knows the power of God's anger?

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in the danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. Oh that you would consider it, whether you be young or old! There is reason to think that there are many in this congregation now hearing this discourse that will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity. We know not who they are, or in what seats they sit, or what thoughts they now have. It may be they are now at ease and hear all these things without much disturbance and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons, promising themselves that they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation, that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him! But, alas, instead of one, how many is it likely will remember this discourse in hell? And it would be a wonder if some that

are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, even before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons that now sit here, in some seats of this meeting-house, in health, quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning. Those of you that finally continue in a natural condition [and] that shall keep out of hell longest will be there in a little time! Your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell. It is doubtless the case of some whom you have seen and known, that never deserved hell more than you, and that heretofore appeared as likely to have been now alive as you. Their case is past all hope; they are crying in extreme misery and perfect despair. But here you are in the land of the living and in the house of God and have an opportunity to obtain salvation. What would not those poor, damned, hopeless souls give for one day's opportunity such as you now enjoy!

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands, in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners—a day wherein many are flocking to Him, and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north, and south. Many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to Him Who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day! To see so many others feasting, while you are pining and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a condition? Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people at Suf-field, where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?

Are there not many here who have lived long in the world and are not to this day born again, and so are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and have done nothing ever since they have lived, but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath? Oh, sirs, your case in an especial manner is extremely dangerous. Your guilt and hardness of heart is extremely great. Do you not see how the generality of persons of your years are passed over and left, in the present remarkable and wonderful dispensation of God's mercy? You...need to consider yourselves, and awake thoroughly out of sleep. You cannot bear the fierceness and wrath of the infinite God. And you, young men, and young women, will you neglect this precious season which you now enjoy, when so many others of your age are renouncing all youthful vanities and flocking to Christ? You especially have now an extraordinary opportunity; but if you neglect it, it will soon be with you as with those persons who spent all the precious days of youth in sin, and are now come to such a dreadful pass in blindness and hardness. And you,

children, who are unconverted, do not you know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God, who is now angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the devil, when so many other children in the land are converted, and are become the holy and happy children of the King of kings?

And let every one that is yet out of Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God's Word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favour to some, will doubtless be a day of as remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden; and their guilt increases apace at such a day as this if they neglect their souls; and never was there so great danger of such persons being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be hastily gathering in His elect in all parts of the land. And probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great out-pouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles' days—the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day that ever you were born, to see such a season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, and will wish that you had died and gone to hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly it is as it was in the days of John the Baptist. The axe is in an extraordinary manner laid at the root of the trees, that every tree which brings not forth good fruit may be hewn down and cast into the fire (Mat 3:10).

Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let every one fly out of Sodom. "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed" (see Gen 19:17).

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Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): Massachusetts Congregationalist preacher. Regarded as America's greatest evangelical theologian, well-known for his preaching in the Great Awakening along with George Whitefield. Author of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and numerous other titles. Born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony.

