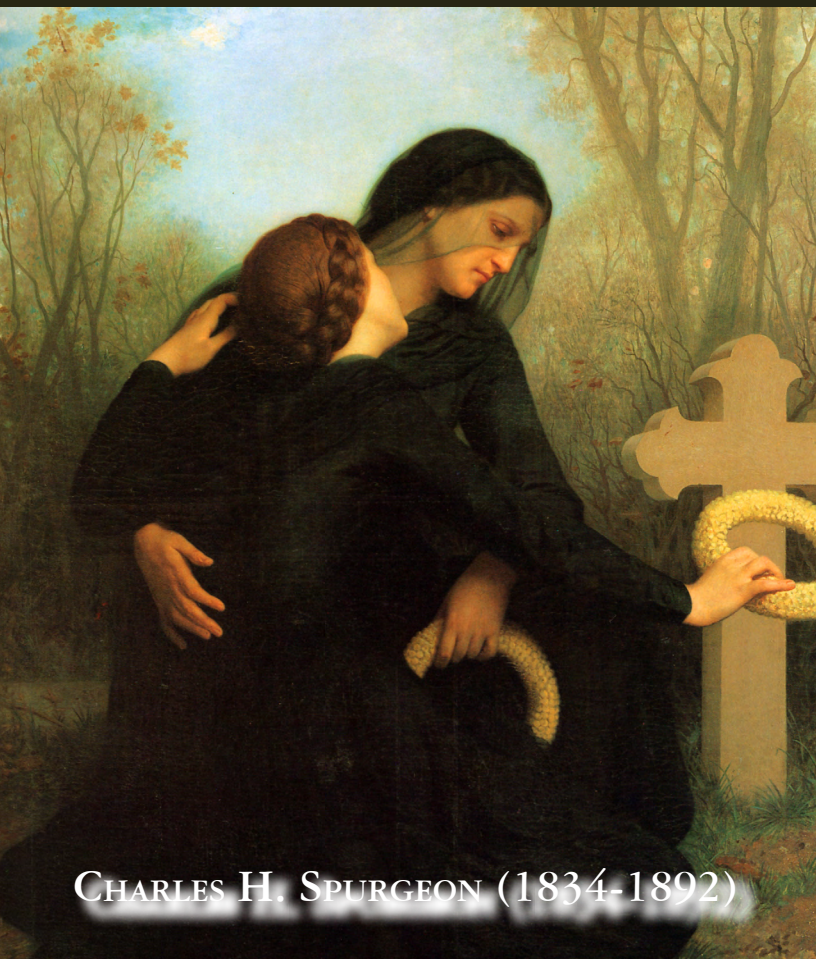


# Concerning Death



CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

# CONCERNING DEATH

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# CONCERNING DEATH

*“For I know that thou wilt bring me to death,  
and to the house appointed for all living.”*

—Job 30:23

## I. Introduction

Job suffered from a terrible sickness, which filled him with pain both day and night. It is supposed that, in addition to his grievous eruptions upon the skin, he endured great difficulty in breathing. He says, “By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat” (Job 30:18). His clothes were sodden and clung to him; his skin was blackened and seemed to be tightened. He was like a man whose tunic strangles him; the collar of his garment seemed to be fast bound about his throat. Those who have suffered from it know what distress is occasioned by this complaint, especially when they are also compelled to cry, “My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews<sup>1</sup> take no rest” (Job 30:17). At such a time Job thought of death; and surely if at any period in our lives we should consider our latter end, it is when the frail tent of our body begins to tremble because the cords are loosened and the curtain is rent.

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<sup>1</sup> **sinews** – tendons, or perhaps muscles.

It is the general custom with sick people to talk about “getting well”; and those who visit them, even when they are gracious people, will see the tokens of death upon them and yet will speak as if they were hopeful of their recovery. I remember a father asking me when I prayed with a consumptive<sup>2</sup> girl to be sure not to mention death. In such cases, it would be far more sensible for the sick man to turn his thoughts towards eternity, and stand prepared for the great change. When our God by our affliction calls upon us to number our days (Psa 90:12), let us not refuse to do so. I admire the wisdom of Job that he does not shirk the subject of death, but dwells upon it as an appropriate topic, saying, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23).

Yet Job made a mistake in the hasty conclusion that he drew from his grievous affliction. Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die; he feared that God would not relax the blows of His hand until his body became a ruin, and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. A life of usefulness, happiness, and honor lay before him, and yet he had set up his own tombstone and reckoned himself a dead man.

It is a pity for us to pretend to predict the future, for we certainly cannot see an inch before us. As it is idle with daydreams to fascinate the heart into a groundless expectation, so is it equally foolish to in-

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<sup>2</sup> **consumptive** – debilitated by a disease such as tuberculosis, common in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

crease the evil of the day by forebodings of tomorrow. Who knoweth what is to be? Wherefore should I wish to uplift the corner of the curtain and peer into what God has hidden? Some of those who have been most sure that they would die soon have lived longer than others. A prophet once prayed to die, and yet he never saw death. From the lip of Elias, who was to be caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, it was a strange prayer: "Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1Ki 19:4).

It is the part of a brave man, and especially of a believing man, neither to dread death nor to sigh for it, neither to fear it nor to court it. In patience possessing his soul, he should not despair of life when hardly<sup>3</sup> pressed; and he should be always more eager to run his race well than to reach its end. It is no work of men of faith to predict their own deaths. These things are with God. How long we shall live on earth we know not, and need not wish to know. We have not the choosing of short or long life; and if we had such choice, it would be wise to refer it back to our God. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luk 23:46) is an admirable prayer for living as well as for dying saints. To wish to pry between the folded leaves of the book of destiny is to desire a questionable privilege: doubtless we live the better because we cannot foresee the moment when this life shall reach its *finis*.<sup>4</sup>

Job made a mistake as to the date of his death, but he made no mistake as to the fact itself. He spake

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<sup>3</sup> **hardly** – in a hard, abrupt, difficult manner.

<sup>4</sup> *finis* – French: end.

truly when he said: “For I know that thou wilt bring me to death.” Some day or other the Lord will call us from our home above ground to “the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23). I invite you this morning to consider this unquestioned truth. Do you start<sup>5</sup> back? Why do you do so? Is it not greatly wise to talk with our last hours? [Some may say,] “We want a cheerful theme.” Do you? Is not this a cheerful theme to you? It is solemn, but it ought also to be welcome to you. You say that you cannot abide the thought of death; then you greatly need it. Your shrinking from it proves that you are not in a right state of mind, or else you would take it into due consideration without reluctance. That is a poor happiness which overlooks the most important of facts. I would not endure a peace that could only be maintained by thoughtlessness. You have something yet to learn if you are a Christian and yet are not prepared to die. You need to reach a higher state of grace, and attain to a firmer and more forceful faith. That you are as yet a babe in grace is clear from your admission, that to depart and be with Christ does not seem to be a better thing for you than to abide in the flesh.

Should it not be the business of this life to prepare for the next life, and, in that respect, to prepare to die? But how can a man be prepared for that which he never thinks of? Do you mean to take a leap in the dark? If so you are in an unhappy condition, and I beseech you as you love your own soul to escape from such peril by the help of God’s Holy Spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> **start** – jump abruptly, as in fright.

“Oh,” saith one, “but I do not feel called upon to think of it.” Why, the very season of the year calls you to it. Each fading leaf admonishes you. You will most surely have to die; why not think upon the inevitable? It is said that the ostrich buries its head in the sand, and fancies itself secure when it can no longer see the hunter. I can hardly fancy that even a bird can be quite so foolish, and I beseech you: do not enact such madness. If I do not think of death, yet death will think of me. If I will not go to death by meditation and consideration, death will come to me. Let me, then, meet it like a man, and to that end let me look it in the face.

Death comes into our houses and steals away our beloved ones. Seldom do I enter this pulpit without missing some accustomed face from its place. Never a week passes over this church without some of our happy fellowship being caught away to the still happier fellowship above. This week a youthful member has melted away, and her mourning parents are in our midst. We as a congregation are continually being summoned to remember our mortality; and so, whether we will hear him or not, death is preaching to us each time we assemble in this house. Does he come so often with God’s message, and shall we refuse to hear? Nay, let us lend a willing ear and heart, and hear what God the Lord would say to us at this time.

Oh! You that are *youngest*, you that are fullest of health and strength, I lovingly invite you not to put away this subject from you. Remember, the youngest may be taken away. Early in the life of my boys I took them to the old churchyard of Wimbledon and bade



them measure some of the little graves within that enclosure, and they found several green hillocks that were shorter than themselves. I tried thus to impress upon their young minds the uncertainty of life. I would have every child remember that he is not too young to die.

Let others know that they are not too *strong* to die. The stoutest trees of the forest are often the first to fall beneath the destroyer's axe. Paracelsus, the renowned physician of old time,<sup>6</sup> prepared a medicine of which he said that if a man took it regularly he could never die, except it were of extreme old age—yet Paracelsus himself died a young man. Those who think they have found the secret of immortality will yet learn that they are under a strong delusion. None of us can discover a spot where we are out of bow-shot of the last enemy, and therefore it would be idiotic to refuse to think of it.

A certain vainglorious French duke forbade his attendants ever to mention death in his hearing; and when his secretary read to him the words, "The late King of Spain," he turned upon him with contemptuous indignation, and asked him what he meant by it. The poor secretary could only stammer out, "It is a title which they take." Yes, indeed, it is a title we shall all take, and it will be well to note how it will befit us. The King of terrors comes to kings, nor does he disdain to strip the pauper of his scanty flesh. To you, to

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<sup>6</sup> **Paracelsus** (born Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) – Swiss German Renaissance physician, botanist, alchemist, and astrologer.

me, to all he comes; let us all make ready for his sure approach.

## II. Personal Knowledge

First, then, very solemnly under the teaching of God's Spirit, I call your attention to a piece of personal knowledge. "*I know* that thou wilt bring *me* to death, and to the house appointed for all living." A general truth here receives a personal application.

Job knew that he should be brought to the grave, because he perceived *the universality of that fact in reference to others*. He lived on the verge of an age when life was longer than now; and yet the patriarch had never known a person who had not after a certain age quitted this earthly stage. Cast your eye over every land, glance from the pole to the equator and along to the other pole, and see if this be not the universal law: that man must be dissolved in death. "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb 9:27).

Two men alone entered the next world without seeing death,<sup>7</sup> but those two exceptions prove the rule. Another great exception is yet to come, which I would never overlook. Peradventure the Lord Jesus Christ may personally come before we see death; and when He cometh, we that are alive and remain shall not fall asleep; but even then "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for...the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1Co 15:51-52). This is the great exception to the rule, and we cheerfully allow it

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<sup>7</sup> Elijah (2Ki 2:11) and Enoch (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5).

to dwell upon our minds; but if the Master tarries, we ourselves shall not be exempt from the common rule. Die all we must. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, must be the last word for us among the sons of men.

I hope nobody here is so foolish as to suppose that he shall live on, and never be gathered with the great assembly in the house appointed for all living. Last week one poor fanatic who taught that she herself would never see corruption, was taken from the midst of her dupes to be laid in the sepulcher.<sup>8</sup> A clergyman whom I well knew, lectured upon his having found the means of living here forever; but he too has gone over to the great majority. That we can avoid the grave is a dream—an idle dream not worthy of a moment's controversy. All flesh shall see corruption in due time, if it be not changed at the Lord's coming. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" (Psa 89:48). In their myriads the races of the past have subsided into the earth. In one endless harvest, death has reaped down all of woman born. Job knew that he himself should be brought to death, because all others had been brought there.

He knew it also because *he had considered the origin of mankind*. In our text, the Hebrew expression would run somewhat thus: "I know that thou wilt bring me to death" (Job 30:23). He had never died before; yet the expression is constantly used, as in the following passage: "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men"

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<sup>8</sup> **sepulcher** – tomb.

(Psa 90:3). We were never in the grave before; how then can we return? Was it not said to Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19)? We were taken out of the earth, and it is only by a prolonged miracle that this dust of ours is kept from going back to its kindred. The day will come when our earth shall embrace its mother, and so the body shall return to its original.

If we had come from heaven, we might dream that we should not die. If we had been cast in some celestial mould, as angels are, we might fancy that the grave would never encase us; but being of the earth, earthy, we must go back to earth. Job says, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister" (Job 17:14). Thus we have affinities that call us back to the dust. Job knew this, and therefore, seeing whence men came, he inferred, and inferred correctly, that he himself would return to the earth.

Further, Job had *a recollection of man's sin*, and knew that all men are under condemnation on account of it. Does he not say that the grave is a "house appointed for all living?" It is appointed simply because of the penal sentence passed upon our first parent, and in him upon the whole race. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Psa 90:3) was not for Adam only, but for all the innumerable sons that come of his loins. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). "In Adam all die" (1Co 15:22). Our babes, who have not personally sinned, yet feel the blight of Adam's sin, and wither in the bud. Our dear children who are nearing manhood and womanhood are cut down and gathered in their

beauty; we also, in the prime and flower of life, bow our heads before the killing wind of death. As for our sires, bending each man upon his staff, their posture salutes the tomb towards which they bend. A common fall, and a common sin, have brought on us universal death. Look on our vast cemeteries and say, "Who slew all these?" The only answer is, "Death came by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12).

Once more, Job arrived at this personal knowledge through *his own bodily feebleness*. Perhaps he had not always said, "I know that thou wilt bring *me* to death"; but now—as he sits upon the dunghill, scrapes himself with the potsherd, writhes in anguish, and is depressed in spirit—he realizes his own mortality. When the tent-pole quivers in the storm, and the covering thereof flaps to and fro in the wind, and the whole structure threatens to dissolve in the tempest, then the tenant of the habitation, chilled to his marrow, needs not to be instructed that his tabernacle is frail. He knows it well enough. We need many touches of the rod of affliction before we really learn the undeniable truth of our mortality.

Every man, woman, and child in this place would unite with me in saying, "I know that thou wilt bring *me* to death"; and yet, it is highly probable that a large number of us do not know this to be so. "It is a commonplace matter of fact that we all admit," cries one. I know it is so; and yet in the very commonness of the truth there lies a temptation to overlook its personal application. We know this as though we knew it not. To many it is not taken into the reckoning, and it is not a factor in their being. They do not

number their days so as to apply their hearts unto wisdom (Psa 90:12). That poet was half inspired who said, “all men count all men mortal but themselves.” Is it not so with us? We do not really expect to die. We reckon that we shall live a very considerable time yet. Even those who are very aged still think that as a few others have lived to an extreme old age, so may they. I am afraid there are few who could say with a gracious soldier, “I thank God I fear not death. These thirty years together I never rose from my bed in the morning and reckoned upon living till night.”

Those who die daily will die easily. Those who make themselves familiar with the tomb, will find it transfigured into a bed; the charnel<sup>9</sup> will become a couch. The man who rejoices in the covenant of grace is cheered by the fact that even death itself is comprehended among the things which belong to the believer. I would to God we had learned this lesson. We should not then put death aside amongst the lumber, nor set it upon the shelf among the things that we never intend to use. Let us live as dying men among dying men, and then we shall truly live.

This will not make us unhappy, for surely no heir of heaven will fret because he is not doomed to live here forever. It were a sad sentence if we were bound over to dwell in this poor world forever. Who among us would wish to realize in his own person the fabled life of the Wandering Jew,<sup>10</sup> or even of Prester John?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> **charnel** – building or chamber in which bodies or bones are deposited.

<sup>10</sup> **Wandering Jew** – a figure from medieval Christian folklore whose legend spread in Europe in the thirteenth century. The original

Who desires to go up and down among the sons of men for twice a thousand years? If the Supreme should say, “Live here forever,” it were a malediction<sup>12</sup> rather than a benediction.

To grow ripe and to be carried home like shocks of corn in their season, is not this a fit and fair thing? To labor through a blessed day, and then at nightfall to go home and to receive the wages of grace—is there anything dark and dismal about that? God forgive you that you ever thought so! If you are the Lord’s own child, I invite you to look this home-going in the face until you change your thought and see no more in it of gloom and dread, but a very heaven of hope and glory. Suffer not my text to be a dirge,<sup>13</sup> but turn it into a golden psalm, as you say, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.”

### III. Holy Intelligence

Having thus discoursed upon a piece of personal knowledge, I now beg you to see in my text the shining of holy intelligence. Peradventure, when I read

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legend concerns a Jew who taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was then cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming.

<sup>11</sup> **Prester John** – The legends of Prester John (also Presbyter Johannes), popular in Europe from the 12th through the 17th centuries, told of a Christian patriarch and king said to rule over a Christian nation lost amidst the Muslims and pagans in the Orient. Written accounts of this kingdom are variegated collections of medieval popular fantasy.

<sup>12</sup> **malediction** – curse.

<sup>13</sup> **dirge** – song of grief or lamentation.

the words in your hearing, you did not notice all they contain. Let me then point out to you certain hidden jewels. Job, even in his anguish, does not for a moment forget his God. He speaks of Him here: "I know that *thou* wilt bring me to death." *He perceives that he will not die apart from God.* He does not say his sore boils or his strangulation will bring him to death; but "*thou* wilt bring me to death." He does not trace his approaching death to chance, or to fate, or to second causes; no, he sees only the hand of the Lord. To Him belong both life and death. Say not that the wasting consumption took away your darling; complain not that a fierce fever slew your father—but feel that the Lord Himself hath done it. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good" (1Sa 3:18). Blame not the accident, neither complain of the pestilence; for Jehovah Himself gathereth home His own. He only will remove you and me. "I know that *thou* wilt bring *me* to death." There is to my heart much delicious comfort in the language before us. I love that old-fashioned verse—

*"Plagues and deaths around me fly  
Till He bids I cannot die;  
Not a single shaft can hit  
Till the God of Love thinks fit."*

In the midst of malaria and pest we are safe with God. "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Psa 91:9-10). Beneath the shadow of Jehovah's wing we need not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness.



We are immortal till our work is done. Be ye therefore quiet in the day of evil. Rest you peaceful in the day of destruction: all things are ordered by wisdom, and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psa 116:15). No forces in the world are outside of His control. God suffers no foes to trespass on the domain of providence. All things are ordained of God, and specially are our deaths under the peculiar oversight of our exalted Lord and Savior. He liveth and was dead, and beareth the keys of death at His girdle. He Himself shall guide us through death's iron gate. Surely what the Lord wills and what He Himself works cannot be otherwise than acceptable to His chosen! Let us rejoice that in life and death we are in the Lord's hands.

The text seems to me to cover another sweet and comforting thought, namely, that *God will be with us in death*. "I know that *thou wilt bring* me to death." He will bring us on our journey till He brings us to the journey's end: Himself our convoy and our leader. We shall have the Lord's company even to our dying hour: "Thou wilt bring me to death." He leadeth me even to those still waters that men so much fear. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psa 23:4). Beloved, we live with God, do we not? Shall we not die with Him? Our life is one long holiday when the Lord Jesus keeps us company: will He leave us at the end? Because God is with us, we go forth with joy, and are led forth with peace, the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field do clap their hands (Isa 55:12).

Will they not be equally glad when we rise to our eternal reward? It is not living that is happiness, but living with God; it is not dying that will be wretchedness, but dying without God. The child has to go to bed, but it does not cry if mother is going upstairs with it. It is quite dark, but what of that? The mother's eyes are lamps to the child. It is very lonely and still—not so; the mother's arms are the child's company, and her voice is its music. O Lord, when the hour comes for me to go to bed, I know that Thou wilt take me there, and speak lovingly into my ear; therefore I cannot fear, but will even look forward to that hour of Thy manifested love. You had not thought of that, had you? You have been afraid of death: but you cannot be so any longer if your Lord will bring you there in His arms of love. Dismiss all fear, and calmly proceed on your way, though the shades thicken around you—for the Lord is thy light and thy salvation (Psa 27:1).

It may not be in the text, but it naturally follows from it, that *if God brings us to death, He will bring us up again*. Job, in another passage, declared that he was sure that God would vindicate his cause—"I know," saith he, "that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26). Certain wise men who would expunge the very idea of a resurrection out of the Old Testament, have tried to make out that Job expected to be restored and vindicated in this life; but he evidently did not expect any such thing, for, according to the text, it is clear that he feared he should die at once. We gather from this verse, by a negative process of reasoning, that the living Re-

deemer, and the vindication that was to be brought to him by that living Redeemer, were matters of hope in another life after death.

O beloved, you and I know this truth from many declarations of our Lord in His divine book. Though we die in one sense, yet in another we shall not die, but live. Though our bodies shall for a little while sleep in their lowly resting-places, our souls shall be forever with the Lord. We shall spend an interval as unclothed spirits in the company of Him to Whom we are united by vital bonds, and then the trump of the archangel shall summon our bodies from their sleeping places to be reunited with our souls. These bodies, the comrades of our warfare, shall be companions of our victory. "This mortal must put on immortality" (1Co 15:53). He who raised up Jesus shall also raise us up. We shall come forth from the land of the enemy in fullness of joy. Wherefore we ought to take great comfort from the words of our text, and be of good courage. We shall die: there is no discharge in this war. We shall die: let us not sit down like cowards, and weep tears bitter with despair. We sorrow not as those that are without hope. Let us view our departure in the soft and mellow light that is shed upon it by the words, "Thou shalt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

#### **IV. Quiet Expectation**

I pass on to notice the quiet expectation that breathes in this text. It is my prayer that we may enjoy the same restfulness. My dear brothers and sisters, the text is full of a calm stillness of hope. Job speaks of his death as a certainty, but speaks of it

without regret; nay, more, if you read the connection, it is with a smile of desire, with a flush of expectancy: "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Many men are unable to regard death with composure; they are disturbed and alarmed by the very hint of it. I want to reason with those disciples of our Lord Jesus who are in bondage from fear of death. What are the times when men are able to speak of death quietly and happily?

Sometimes they do so *in periods of great bodily suffering*. I have on several occasions felt everything like fear of dying taken from me simply by the process of weariness, for I could not wish to live any longer in such pain as I then endured; and I have no doubt that such an experience is common among sufferers from acute disorders. The sons and daughters of affliction are not only trained to wait the Lord's will, but they are even driven to desire to depart; they would sooner rest from so stern a struggle than continue the fierce conflict. It is well that pain and anguish should cut the ropes which moor us to these earthly shores, that we may spread our sails for a voyage to the Better Land.

Oh, what a place heaven must be to those whose bones have worn through their skin through long lying upon the bed of anguish! What a change from the workhouse or the infirmary to the New Jerusalem! I have stood at the bedside of suffering saints where I could not but weep at the sight of their pains—what a transition from such agony to bliss! Track the glorious flight of the chosen one from yon weary couch to the crown, the harp, the palm-branch, and the King in His beauty. The bitter suffering of the

body helps the believer to look upon his translation as a thing to be desired.

*The growing infirmities of age* work in the same way. Yonder venerable sister has at length become quite deaf. Her great delight was to attend the house of God, and she comes now; but the service is dumb show to her. She cannot hear her pastor's voice, which was once so sweet in her ear. Her eyes, after being helped with more powerful glasses, are at length unable to read that dear old Bible, which remained her sole solace when she could not hear. Her existence now is but half life. She cannot walk far; even in crossing the room her limbs tremble. She is already half gone. Do you not think that she will now feel happy to quit life, even as a ripe apple easily leaves the tree? At any rate, there will be little strength with which to resist the plucking of death's hand. It will be well when the spirit breaks away from the dilapidated hovel of the time-worn body, and rises to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Many of God's aged servants who have been spared to advanced years, have come to look out for the setting of earth's sun without a fear of darkness. While they have seemed to have one foot in the grave, they have really had one foot in heaven.

Beloved, without either falling into sickness, or aging into infirmity, we can reach this state of mind in another way: *by being filled with an entire submission to the will of God*. When the decree of God is our delight, we feel no abhorrence to anything that He appoints either in life or in death. If we are living as Christians ought to live, we have denied our self-will,

and we have accepted the Lord to be the arbiter of all events, the absolute ruler of our being. If your soul is truly married to Christ, you find your supreme bliss in the Bridegroom's will. Your cry is, "Thy will be done" (Luk 11:2). This should be our ordinary condition in daily life, and it is an admirable preparation for thinking of death with composure. Let me live, if God will be with me in life. Let me die, if He will be with me in death. So long as we are forever with the Lord, what matters where else we are (1Th 4:17)? We will not further ask when or where: our *when* is "forever," our *where* is "with the Lord." Delight in God is the cure for dread of death.

Next, I believe that *great holiness* sets us free from the love of this world and makes us ready to depart. By great holiness I mean great horror of sin, and great longing after perfect purity. When a man feels sin within him, he hates it and longs to be delivered from it. He loathes the sin that is around him, and cries, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" (Psa 120:5). Have you ever been cast in the midst of blasphemers? I am sure you have then sighed to be in heaven. If you have been sickened by the drunkenness and debauchery of this city, you have cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest" (Psa 55:6). Did you not wish as much last year when the lid was being lifted from the reeking caldron of London's unnatural lust? I am sure I did. I sighed for a lodge in some vast wilderness where rumor of such villainy might never reach me more. In the midst of human sin, if the trumpet were sounded "up and away," you would be glad to hear it, that you might

speed to the fair land where sin and sorrow will never assail you again.

Another thing that will make us look at death with complacency is *when we have a full assurance that we are in Christ*, and that, come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). Doubt your salvation and you may well be afraid to die. Let even a shadow of doubt fall athwart<sup>14</sup> the clear mirror in which you see your loving Lord, and you will be disquieted. If you can say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12), you cannot fear. What reason can you have for alarm? A Christian man should go to his bed at night without an anxious care as to whether he shall wake up in this world or in the next. He should so live that nothing would need to be altered if his last hour should strike.

Let us imitate Mr. Wesley’s<sup>15</sup> calm anticipation of his end. A lady once asked Mr. Wesley, “Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o’clock tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?” “How, madam?” he replied, “why just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this evening at Gloucester, and again at five tomorrow morning; after that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the

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<sup>14</sup> **athwart** – across.

<sup>15</sup> **John Wesley** (1703-1791) – Anglican minister and theologian, largely credited, with his brother Charles, for founding the English Methodist movement, which began when he took to open-air preaching in a similar manner to George Whitefield (1714-1770).

afternoon, and meet the society in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me; converse and pray with the family as usual; retire to my room at ten o'clock; commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

Live in such a way that any day would make a suitable topstone for life. Live so that you need not change your mode of living, even if your sudden departure were immediately predicted to you. When you so live, you will look upon death without fear. We usually fear because we have cause for fear; when all is right we shall bid farewell to terror.

Let me add that there are times *when our joys run high*. When the big waves come rolling in from the Pacific of eternal bliss, then we see the King in His beauty by the eye of faith. And though it be but a dim vision, we are so charmed with it that our love of Him makes us impatient to behold Him face to face. Have you not sometimes felt that you could sit in this congregation and sing yourself away to everlasting bliss? These high-days and holidays are not always with us. All the days of the week are not Sabbaths, and all our halting-places are not Elims.<sup>16</sup> Brethren, when we do play upon the high-sounding cymbals, then we are for joining the angelic chorus. When we feel heaven within us, and stand like the cherubim above the mercy seat with outstretched wings, then we do not dread the thought of speedy flight. "Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee" (Psa 39:7). Yea, we

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<sup>16</sup> **Elims** – place with pools of refreshing waters where the Israelites camped in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt.



even cry with Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word" (Luk 2:29). Brethren, we shall soon be on the wing. Then will we rise and sing, and sing as we rise. We will ascend yon azure sky, and within the jeweled portal we will spend eternity in praise.

I hope some of you are getting up a bit out of your notion that to think of death is gloomy work. I trust you will begin to view it with hope and confidence.

## V. Sacred Instruction

I conclude by saying that this subject affords us sacred instruction. "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Brethren and sisters, I shall not always have the privilege of coming here upon the Sabbath to speak with you. Perhaps, ere long, another voice will invite your attention, and I shall be silent in the grave. Neither will you mingle in this throng that so happily gathers here; not much longer will you sit among those who frequent these lower courts. What then?

*Let us prepare for death.* Let us cleave to the Lord Jesus, Who is our all. Make your calling and election sure. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe intensely. Repent of sin, and fly from it earnestly and with your whole heart.

*Live diligently.* Live while you live. Let every moment be spent as you will wish to have spent it when you survey life from your last pillow. Let us live unto God in Christ by the Holy Ghost. May the Lord quicken our pace by the thought that it is but a little while! A short day will not allow of loitering. Do we

not live too much as if we played at living? A man will preach a poor sermon if he thinks, "I shall preach for another twenty years." We must preach as though we ne'er might preach again. You will teach that class very badly this afternoon if you have a notion that you can afford to be a little slovenly,<sup>17</sup> since you can make up in the future for the neglects of the present. Drop no stitches. Do all your work at your best. Do a day's work in a day, and have no balance of debt to carry over to tomorrow's account. Soon shall you and I stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the things done in the body. Therefore, let us live as in the light of that day of days, doing work which may bear that fierce light which beats about the great white throne (Rev 20:11).

Next to that, let us learn from the general assembly in the house appointed for all living to *walk very humbly*. A common caravansary<sup>18</sup> must accommodate us all in the end; wherefore let us despise all pride of birth, rank, or wealth. There are no distinctions in the last meetinghouse: the rich and the poor meet together, and the slave is free from his master. I hate that pride which makes persons carry themselves as if they were more than mortal. "I have said, ye are gods... but ye shall die like men" (Psa 82:6-7). A voice from the tombs proclaims a grim equality in death—

*"Princes, this clay must be your bed,  
In spite of all your towers;*

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<sup>17</sup> **slovenly** – untidy especially in personal experience.

<sup>18</sup> **caravansary** – hotel, inn.

*The tall, the wise, the reverend head  
Must lie as low as ours.”*

Therefore speak no more so exceeding proudly. It is madness for dying men to boast. When Saladin lay a-dying he bade them take his winding sheet<sup>19</sup> and carry it upon a lance through the camp, with the proclamation, “This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin, the conqueror of nations.” A lingerer in the graveyard will take up your skull one day and moralize upon it, little knowing how wise a man you were. None will then do you reverence. Therefore, be humble.

*Be prompt*, for life is brief. If your children are to be trained up in God’s fear, begin with them today; if you are to win souls, continue at the holy labor without pause. You will soon be gone from all opportunity of doing good; therefore, “whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Ecc 9:10). When the Eastern emperors were crowned at Constantinople, it is said to have been a custom for the royal mason to set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs, one of which he was to choose to be his tombstone. It was well for him to remember his funeral at his coronation. I bring before you now the unwritten marbles of life: which will you have, holiness or sin, Christ or self? When you have chosen, you will begin to write the inscription upon it, for your life’s works will be your memorial. God help us to be diligent in His business, for it is not long that we can be at it!

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<sup>19</sup> **winding sheet** – cloth in which the body of a dead person is wrapped for burial.

Men and women, *project yourselves into eternity.* Get away from time, for you must soon be driven away from it. You are birds with wings; sit not on these boughs forever blinking in the dark like owls; bestir yourselves, and mount like eagles. Rise to the heights above the present. Life is a short day at its longest, and when its sun goes down it leaves you in eternity. Eternal woe or eternal joy will fill your undying spirit. Your indestructible self must swim in endless bliss or sink in fathomless misery.

If you mean to be lost, count the cost, and know what you are doing. If you have set your mind on sin and its consequences, do the deed deliberately, and do not make sport of it. Oh, sirs, some of you will one of these days wake up as from an awful dream. Oh, that you could foresee the scene which awaits you! Those were strong words, but they were the words of Jesus: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments" (Luk 16:23). These words reveal none of the petty nonsense that some prattle about: "a larger hope." Yet Jesus spake them, and His hope was of the largest. He that loved you better than these philosophers love you, also said, "Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence" (Luk 16:26). Our Lord put it very strongly. If you mean to dare the infernal terrors, I can do no less that ask you to know what you are at. If you have chosen sin, you have chosen ruin. Begin to consider it, and see whether it is worthwhile.

But if you have chosen Christ, mercy, and eternal life, and if by faith these are yours, begin to enjoy

them now. Rehearse the music of the skies. Taste the delights of fellowship with God even here! Rejoice in the victory that now overcometh the world, even our faith. You will be in the glory land ere long, and some of you much sooner than you think.

So, as the sermon ends, under a sense of my own frailty, I bid you a sincere adieu. Until the day break and the shadows flee away—*fare you well.*

