

THOUGHTS ON THE LAST BATTLE

NO. 23

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING,
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***“The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Corinthians 15:56, 57***

WHILE the Bible is one of the most poetical of books and though its language is unutterably sublime, yet we must remark how constantly it is true to nature. There is no straining of a fact, no glossing over a truth. However dark may be the subject, while it lights it up with brilliance, yet it does not deny the gloom connected with it. If you will read this chapter of Paul’s Epistle, so justly celebrated as a masterpiece of language you will find him speaking of that which is to come after death with such exaltation and glory that you feel, “If this is to die, then it were well to depart at once.”

Who has not rejoiced and whose heart has not been lifted up, or filled with a holy fire, while he has read such sentences as these—“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?”

Yet with all that majestic language, with all that bold flight of eloquence, he does not deny that death is a gloomy thing. Even his very figures imply it. He does not laugh at it, He does not say, “Oh, it is nothing to die.” He describes death as a monster, he speaks of it as having a sting. He tells us wherein the strength of that sting lies and even in the exclamation of triumph he imputes that victory not to unaided flesh, but he says, “Thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When I select such a text as this, I feel that I cannot preach from it. The thought overpowers me, my words stagger—there are no utterances that are great enough to convey the mighty meaning of this wondrous text. If I had the eloquence of all men united in one, if I could speak as never man spoke, (with the exception of that one godlike man of Nazareth), I could not compass so vast a subject as this. I will not, therefore, pretend to do so, but offer you such thoughts as my mind is capable of producing.

Tonight we shall speak of three things—first, *the sting of death*. Secondly, *the strength of sin*. And thirdly, *the victory of faith*.

I. First, THE STING OF DEATH. The Apostle pictures death as a terrible dragon or monster, which, coming upon all men, must be fought with by each one for himself. He gives us no hope whatever that any of us can avoid it. He tells us of no bridge across the river Death. He does not give us the faintest hope that it is possible to emerge from this state of existence into another without dying. He describes the monster as being exactly in our path and with it we must fight—each man personally, separately and alone—each man must die.

We all must cross the black stream. Each one of us must go through the iron gate. There is no passage from this world into another without death. Having told us, then, that there is no hope of our escape, he braces up our nerves for the combat. But he gives us no hope that we shall be able to slay the monster. He does not tell us that we can strike our sword into his heart and so overturn and overwhelm death. But pointing to the dragon, he seemed to say, “You can not slay it, Man, there is no hope that you should ever put your foot upon its neck and crush its head. But one thing can be done—it has a sting which you may extract.

“You can not crush death under foot, but you may pull out the sting which is deadly. And then you need not fear the monster, for monster it shall be no longer—but rather it shall be a swift-winged angel to waft you aloft to Heaven.” Where, then, is the sting of this dragon? Where must I strike? What is the sting? The Apostle tells us that, “The sting of death is sin.” Once let me cut off *that*, though death may be dreary and solemn, I shall not dread it. But holding up the monster’s sting, I shall exclaim, “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?” Let us now dwell upon the fact that “the sting of death is sin.”

I. First, sin puts a sting into death from the fact that *sin brought death into the world*. Men could be more content to die if they did not know it was a *punishment*. I suppose if we had never sinned there would have been some means for us to go from this world to another. It cannot be supposed that so huge a population would have existed that all the myriads who have lived from Adam down till now could ever have inhabited so small a globe as this. There would not have been space enough for them. But there might have been provided some means for taking us off when the proper time should come and bearing us safely to Heaven.

God might have furnished horses and chariots of fire for each of His Elijahs. Or as it was said of Enoch, so it might have been declared of each of us, “He is *not*, for God has taken him.” Thus to die, if we may call it death. To depart from this body and to be with God, would have been no disgrace. In fact it would have been the highest honor—fitting the loftiest aspiration of the soul—to live quickly its little time in this world, then to mount and be with its God. And in the prayers of the most pious and devout man—one of his most sublime petitions would be, “O God, hasten the time of my departure, when I shall be with You.” When such sinless beings thought of their departure they would not tremble, for the gate would be of ivory and pearl—not as now, of iron—the stream would be as nectar, far different from the present “bitterness of death.”

But alas, how different! Death is now the punishment of sin. “In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die.” “*In Adam all die.*” By his sin every one of us become subject to the penalty of death and thus, being a punishment, death has its sting. To the best man, the holiest Christian, the most sanctified intellect, the soul that has the nearest and dearest communion with God, death must appear to have a sting, because sin was its mother.

O fatal offspring of sin, I only dread you because of your parentage! If you did come to me as an honor, I could wade through Jordan even now and when its chilling billows were around me I would smile amidst its surges. And in the swellings of Jordan my song should swell, too—and the liquid music of my voice should join with the liquid swellings of the floods, “Hallelujah! It is blessed to cross to the land of the glorified.” This is one reason why the sting of death is sin.

2. But I must take it in another sense. “The sting of death is sin”—that is to say, *that which shall make death most terrible to man will be sin, if it is not forgiven*. If that is not the exact meaning of the Apostle, still it is a great Truth and I may find it here. If sin lay heavy on me and were not forgiven—if my transgressions were unpardoned—if such were the fact (though I rejoice to know it is not so) it would be the very sting of death to me. Let us consider a man dying and looking back on his past life—he will find in death a sting and that sting will be his past sin.

Imagine a conqueror’s deathbed. He has been a man of blood from his youth up. Bred in the camp, his lips were early set to the bugle and his hand, even in infancy, struck the drum. He had a martial spirit. He delighted in the fame and applause of men. He loved the dust of battle and the garment rolled in blood. He has lived a life of what men call glory. He has stormed cities, conquered countries, ravaged continents, overrun the world. See his burners hanging in the hall and the marks of glory on his escutcheon. He is one of earth’s proudest warriors.

But now he comes to die. And when he lies down to expire what shall invest his death with horror? It shall be his sin. Methinks I see the monarch dying. He lies in state. Around him are his nobles and his counsellors. But there is someone else there. Hard by his side there stands a spirit from Hades. It is the soul of a departed woman. She looks on him and says, “Monster! My husband was slain in battle through your ambition—I was made a widow and my helpless orphan and myself were starved.” And she passes by. Her husband comes and opening wide his bloody wounds, he cries, “Once I called you monarch. But by your vile covetousness, you did provoke an unjust war. See here these wounds—I gained them in the siege.

“For your sake I mounted first the sealing ladder. This foot stood upon the top of the wall and I waved my sword in triumph. But in Hell I lifted up my eyes in torment. Base Wretch! Your ambition hurried me there!” Turning his horrid

eyes upon him, he passes by. Then up comes another and another and another yet—waking from their tombs they stalk around his bed and haunt him. The dreary procession still marches on, looking at the dying tyrant. He shuts his eyes, but he feels the cold and bony hand upon his forehead. He quivers for the sting of death is in his heart.

“O Death!” says he, “to leave this large estate, this mighty realm, this pomp and power—this were somewhat—but to meet those men, those women and those orphan children, face to face, to hear them saying, ‘Are you become like one of us?’ While kings whom I have dethroned and monarchs whom I have cast down shall rattle their chains in my ears and say, ‘you were our destroyer, but how are you fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you brought down as in a moment from your glory and your pride!’ ”

There you see the sting of death would be the man’s sin. It would not sting him that he had to die but that he had sinned—that he had been a bloody man, that his hands were red with wholesale murder—this would plague him indeed, for “the sting of death is sin.”

Or suppose another character—a minister. He has stood before the world proclaiming something which he called the Gospel. He has been a noted preacher—the multitude have been hanging on his lips, they have listened to his words. Before his eloquence a nation stood amazed and thousands trembled at his voice. But his preaching is over. The time when he can mount the pulpit is gone. Another standing-place awaits him, another congregation. And he must hear another and a better preacher than himself. There he lies. He has been unfaithful to his charge. He preached philosophy to charm his people, instead of preaching Truth and aiming at their hearts.

And as he pants upon his bed, that worst and most accursed of men—for sure none can be worse than he—there comes up one, a soul from the pit and looking him in the face, says, “I came to you once trembling on account of sin. I asked you the road to Heaven and you did say, ‘Do such-and-such good works,’ and I did them and am damned! You did tell me an untruth. You did not declare plainly the word of God.” He vanishes only to be followed by another. He has been an irreligious character and as he sees the minister upon his deathbed, he says, “Ah, and are you here? Once I strolled into your house of prayer but you had such a sermon that I could not understand. I listened. I wanted to hear something from your lips, some Truth that might burn my soul and make me repent. But I knew not what you said and here I am.”

The ghost stamps his foot and the man quivers like an aspen leaf, because he knows it is all true. Then the whole congregation arise before him and as he lies upon his bed he looks upon the motley group. He beholds the snowy heads of the old and the glittering eyes of the young. And lying there upon his pillow, he pictures all the sins of his past life and he hears it said, “Go! Unfaithful to your charge—you did not divest yourself of your love of pomp and dignity. You did not speak—

***As though you never might speak again,
A dying man to dying men.”***

Oh, it may be something for that minister to leave his charge, somewhat for him to die. But worst of all, the sting of death will be his sin—to hear his parish come howling after him to Hell—to see his congregation following behind him in one mingled herd. He led them astray. He was a false prophet instead of a true one, speaking peace, peace, where there was no peace, deluding them with lies, charming them with music, when he ought rather to have told them in rough and rugged accents the Word of God. Verily it is true, it is true, the sting of death to such a man shall be his great, his enormous, his heinous sin of having deluded others.

Thus, then, having painted two full-length pictures, I might give each one of you miniatures of yourselves. I might picture, O drunkard, when your cups are drained and when your liquor shall no longer be sweet to your taste. When worse than gall shall be the dainties that you drink, when within an hour the worms shall make a carnival upon your flesh. I might picture you as you look back upon your misspent life. And you, O swearer, methinks I see you there with your oaths echoed back by memory to your own dismay.

And you man of lust and wickedness—you who have debauched and seduced others. I see you there and the sting of death to you, how horrible, how dreadful! It shall not be that you are groaning with pain, it shall not be that you are racked with agony, it shall not be that your heart and flesh fails. But the sting, the sting shall be your sin. How many in this place can spell that word “remorse?” I pray you may never know its awful meaning. Remorse, remorse! You know its

derivation—it signifies to bite. Ah, now we dance with our sins—it is a merry life with us—we take their hands and sporting in the noontide sun, we dance, we dance and live in joy.

But then those sins shall bite us. The young lions we have stroked and played with shall bite. The young adder, the serpent whose azure hues have well delighted us, shall bite, shall sting when remorse shall occupy our souls. I might, but I will not tell you, a few stories of the awful power of remorse—it is the first pang of Hell, it is the ante-chamber of the pit. To have remorse is to feel the sparks that blaze upwards from the fire of the bottomless Gehenna. To feel remorse is to have eternal torment commenced within the soul. The sting of death shall be unforgiven, unrepented sin.

3. But if sin in the retrospect is the sting of death, what must *sin in the prospect be*? My Friends, we do not often enough look at what sin is to be. We see what it is—first the seed, then the blade, then the ear and then the full corn in the ear. It is the wish, the imagination, the desire, the sight, the taste, the deed. But what is sin in its next development? We have observed sin as it grows. We have seen it at first a very little thing but expanding itself until it has swelled into a mountain. We have seen it like, “a little cloud, the size of a man’s hand,” but we have beheld it gather until it covered the skies with blackness and sent down drops of bitter rain.

But what is sin to be in the *next* state? We have gone so far, but sin is a thing that cannot stop. We have seen where it *has* grown, but where *will* it grow? For it is not ripe when we die. It has to go on still. It is set going, but it has to unfold itself forever. The moment we die the voice of justice cries, “Seal up the fountain of blood, stop the stream of forgiveness. He that is holy let him be holy still. He that is filthy let him be filthy still.” And after that the man goes on growing filthier and filthier still. His lust develops itself. His vice increases. All those evil passions blaze with ten-fold more fury and, amidst the companionship of others like himself, without the restraints of grace, without the preached Word, the man becomes worse and worse.

And who can tell where his sin may grow? I have sometimes likened the hour of our death to that celebrated picture which I think you have seen in the National Gallery—of Perseus holding up the head of Medusa. That head turned all persons into stone who looked upon it. There is a warrior there with a dart in his hand—he stands stiffened, turned into stone, with the javelin even in his fist. There is another with a knife beneath his robe about to stab. He is now the statue of an assassin, motionless and cold. Another is creeping along stealthily, like a man in ambush and there he stands a consolidated rock, he has looked only upon that head and he is frozen into stone.

Well, such is death. What I am when death is held before me, that I must be forever. When my spirit goes, if God finds me hymning His praise, I shall hymn it in Heaven. If He finds me breathing out oaths, I shall follow up those oaths in Hell. Where death leaves me, judgment finds me. As I die, so shall I live eternally—

***“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we haste.”***

It is forever forever, forever! Ah, there are a set of heretics in these days who talk of short punishment and preach about God’s transporting souls for a term of years and then letting them die. Where did such men learn their doctrine, I wonder?

I read in God’s Word that the angel shall plant one foot upon the earth and the other upon the sea and shall swear by Him that lives and was dead, that *time* shall be no longer. But if a soul could die in a thousand years it would die in *time*. If a million of years could elapse and then the soul could be extinguished, there would be such a thing as *time*. Talk to me of *years* and there is *time*. But, Sirs, when that angel has spoken the word, “*Time* shall be no longer,” things will then be eternal. The spirit shall proceed in its ceaseless revolution of weal or woe, never to be stayed, for there is no time to stop it. The fact of its stopping would imply time—but everything shall be eternal—for time shall cease to be.

It well becomes you, then, to consider where you are and what you are. Oh, stand and tremble on the narrow neck of land between the two unbounded seas, for God in Heaven alone can tell how soon you may be launched upon the eternal future. May God grant that when that last hour may come, we may be prepared for it! Like the thief, unheard, unseen, it steals through night’s dark shade. Perhaps, as here I stand and rudely speak of these dark hidden things, soon may the hand be stretched and dumb the mouth that lisps the faltering strain. Oh, You that dwells in Heaven. You Power supreme! You everlasting King—let not that hour intrude upon me in an ill-spent season, but may it find me wrapt in meditation high, hymning my great Creator.

So in the last moment of my life I will hasten beyond the azure, to bathe the wings of this my spirit in their native element and then to dwell with You forever—

***“Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in.”***

II. “THE STRENGTH OF SIN is the Law.” I have attempted to show how to fight this monster—it is by extracting and destroying its sting. I prepare myself for the battle. It is true I have sinned and therefore I have put a sting into death, but I will endeavor to take it away. I attempt it, but the monster laughs me in the face and cries, “The strength of sin is the Law. Before you can destroy sin you must in some way satisfy the Law. Sin cannot be removed by your tears or by your deeds, for the Law is its strength and until you have satisfied the vengeance of the Law, until you have paid the uttermost farthing of its demands, my sting cannot be taken away for the very strength of sin is the Law.”

Now, I must try and explain this doctrine, that the strength of sin is the Law. Most men think that sin has no strength at all. “Oh,” many say, “we may have sinned very much, but we will repent and we will be better for the rest of our lives. No doubt God is merciful and He will forgive us.” And we hear many divines often speak of sin as if it were a very venial thing. Inquire of them what is a man to do—there is no deep repentance required, no real inward workings of Divine grace, no casting himself upon the blood of Christ. They never tell us about a complete atonement having been made.

They have, indeed, some shadowy idea of atonement—that Christ died just as a matter of form to satisfy justice—but as to any liberal taking away of our sins and suffering the actual penalty for us, they do not consider that God’s Law requires any such thing. I suppose they do not, for I never hear them assert the positive satisfaction and substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ. But, without that, how can we take away the strength of sin?

1. The strength of sin is in the Law, first, in this respect, *that the Law being spiritual it is quite impossible for us to live without sin.* If the Law were merely carnal and referred to the flesh, if it simply related to open and overt actions, I question even then, whether we could live without sin. But when I turn over the Ten Commandments and read, “you shall not covet,” I know it refers even to the wish of my heart. It is said, “you shall not commit adultery.” But it is said, also, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed that sin. So that it is not merely the *act*, it is the *thought*. It is not the *deed* simply, it is the very *imagination*, that is a sin.

Oh, now, Sinner, how can you get rid of sin? Your very thoughts, the inward workings of your mind—these are crimes—this is guilt and desperate wickedness. Is there not, now, strength in sin? Has not the Law put a potency in it? Has it not nerved sin with such a power that all your strength cannot hope to wipe away the black enormity of your transgression?

2. Then, again, the Law puts strength into sin in this respect—that *it will not abate one tittle of its stern demands.* It says to every man who breaks it, “I will not forgive you.” You hear persons talk about God’s mercy. Now, if they do not believe in the Gospel they must be under the Law, but where in the Law do we read of *mercy*? If you will read the commandments through, there is a curse after them, but there is no provision made for pardon. The Law itself speaks not of that. It thunders out, without the slightest Mitigation, “the soul that sins it shall die.” If any of you desire to be saved by works, remember, one sin will spoil your righteousness. One speck of this earth’s dross will spoil the beauty of that perfect righteousness which God requires at your hands.

If you would be saved by works, Brothers and Sisters, you must be as holy as the angels, you must be as pure and as immaculate as Jesus. For the Law requires perfection and nothing short of it. And God with unflinching vengeance will smite every man low who cannot bring Him a perfect obedience. If I cannot, when I come before His Throne, plead a perfect righteousness as being mine, God will say, “you have not fulfilled the demands of My Law. Depart, accursed one! You have sinned and you must die.”

“Ah,” says one, “can we ever have a perfect righteousness, then?” Yes, I will tell you of that in the third point. Thanks be unto Christ, who gives us the victory through His blood and through His righteousness, who adorns us as a bride in her jewels, as a husband arrays His with ornaments.

3. Yet again, the Law gives strength to sin from the fact that *for every transgression it will exact a punishment.* The Law never remits a farthing of debt—it says, “Sin—punishment.” They are linked together with adamant chains.

They are tied and cannot be severed. The Law speaks not of sin and *mercy*. Mercy comes in the Gospel. The Law says, “Sin—die. Transgress—be chastised. Sin—Hell.” Thus are they linked together. Once let me sin and I may go to the foot of stern justice and, as with blind eyes, she holds the scales. I may say, “Oh, Justice, remember, I was holy *once*, remember that on such-and-such an occasion I did keep the Law.”

“Yes,” says Justice, “all I owe you you shall have. I will not punish you for what you have not done. But remember you *this* crime, O Sinner?” And she puts in the heavy weight. The sinner trembles and he cries, “But can you not forget that? Will you not cast it away?” “No,” says Justice and she puts in another weight. “Sinner, do you recollect *this* crime?” “Oh,” says the sinner, “will you not for mercy’s sake forget that one?” “I will not have mercy,” says Justice. “Mercy has its own palace, but I have nothing to do with forgiveness here. Mercy belongs to Christ.

“If you will be saved by justice you shall have your full of it. If you come to me for salvation, I will not have mercy brought in to help me, she is not my vicegerent, I stand here alone without her.” And again, as she holds the scales, she puts in another iniquity, another crime, another enormous transgression. And each time the man begs and prays that he may have that passed by—Justice says, “No, I must exact the penalty. I have sworn I will and I will. Can you find a Substitute for yourself? If you can, there is the only room I have for mercy. I will exact it of that Substitute, but even at His hands I will have the utmost jot and little. I will abate nothing, I am God’s justice stern and unflinching, I will not alter, I will not mitigate the penalty.” She still holds the scales. The plea is in vain. “Never will I change!” She cries, “bring me the blood, bring me the price to its utmost. Count it down, or else, Sinner, you shall die.”

Now, my Friends, I ask you, if you consider the spirituality of the Law, the perfection it requires and its unflinching severity, are you prepared to take away the sting of death in your own persons? Can you hope to overcome sin yourselves? Can you trust that by some righteous works you may yet cancel your guilt? If you think so, go, foolish one, go! O madman, go! Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, without the God that works in you. Go, twist your rope of sand, go, build a pyramid of air. Go, prepare a house with bubbles and think it is to last forever. But know it will be a dream with an awful awakening, for as a dream, when one awakes will he despise alike your image and your righteousness. “The strength of sin is the Law.”

III. But now, in the last place, we have before us THE VICTORY OF FAITH. The Christian is the only champion who can smite the dragon of death and even he cannot do it himself. But when he has done it, he shall cry, “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” One moment and I will show you how the Christian can look upon death with complacency through the merits of Jesus Christ.

First, Christ has taken away the strength of sin in this respect, *that He has removed the Law*. We are not under bondage, but under grace. Law is not our directing principle, grace is. Do not misunderstand me. The principle that I must do a thing—that is to say, the principle of Law—“do, or be punished., Do and be rewarded,” is not the motive of the Christian’s life. His principle is grace. “God has done so much for me, what ought I to do for Him?” We are not under the Law in that sense but under grace.

Then Christ has removed the Law in this sense, *that He has completely satisfied it*. The Law demands a perfect righteousness. Christ says, “Law, you have it. Find fault with Me. I am the sinner’s Substitute, have I not kept Your commandments? Wherein have I violated your statutes?” “Come here, My Beloved,” He says and then He cries to Justice, “Find a fault in this man! I have put My robe upon him. I have washed him in My blood. I have cleansed him from his sin. All the past is gone. As for the future, I have secured it by sanctification. As for the penalty, I have borne it Myself. At one tremendous draught of love, I have drunk that man’s destruction dry. I have borne what he should have suffered.

“I have endured the agonies he ought to have endured. Justice, have I not satisfied you? Did I not say upon the tree and did you not coincide with it, ‘It is finished! It is finished!’? Have I not made so complete an atonement that there is now no need for that man to die and expiate his guilt? Did I not complete the perfect righteousness of this poor, once-condemned but now, justified spirit?” “Yes,” says Justice, “I am well satisfied and even more content, if possible, than if the sinner had brought a spotless righteousness of his own.”

And now what says the Christian after this? Boldly he comes to the realms of death and entering the gates there, he cries, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect!” And when he has said it, the dragon drops his sting. He descends into the grave. He passes by the place where Fiends lie down in fetters of iron. He sees their chains and looks into

the dungeon where they dwell. And as he passes by the prison door, he shouts, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” They growl and bite their iron bonds and hiss in secret, but they cannot lay anything to his charge. Now see him mount aloft. He approaches God’s Heaven, he comes against the gates and faith still triumphantly shouts, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”

And a voice comes from within—“Not Christ, for He has died. Not God, for He has justified.” Received by Jesus, faith enters Heaven and again she cries, “Who,” even here among the spotless and ransomed, “shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” Now the Law is satisfied. Sin is gone. And now surely we need not fear the sting of the dragon but we may say as Paul did, when he rose into the majesty of poetry—such beautiful poetry, that Pope himself borrowed his words, only transposing the sentences—“O grave, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

If it were necessary tonight, I might speak to you concerning the *resurrection* and I might tell you how much that takes away the sting of death. But I will confine myself to the simple fact that “the sting of death is sin,” that “the strength of sin is the Law,” and that Christ gives us the victory, by taking the sting away and removing the strength of sin by His perfect obedience.

And now, Sirs, how many are there here who have any hope that for them Christ Jesus died? Am I coming too close home, when most solemnly I put the question to each one of you, as I stand in God’s presence this night, to free my head of your blood? As I stand and appeal with all the earnestness this heart is capable of? Are you prepared to die? Is sin pardoned? Is the Law satisfied? Can you view the flowing—

***“Of Christ’s soul-redeeming blood
With Divine assurance knowing
That He made your peace with God?”***

Oh, can you now put one hand upon your heart and the other upon the Bible and say, “God’s Word and I agree. The witness of the Spirit here and the witness there are one. I have renounced my sins, I have given up my evil practices. I have abhorred my own righteousness. I trust in nothing but Jesus’ doings. Simply do I depend on Him—

***Nothing in my hands I bring
Simply to Your Cross I cling.”***

If so, should you die where you are—sudden death were sudden glory. But, my Hearers, shall I be faithful with you? Or shall I belie my soul? Which shall it be? Are there not many here who, each time the bell tolls the departure of a soul, might well ask the question, “Am I prepared?” And they must say, “No”?

I shall not turn Prophet tonight but were it right for me to say so, I fear not one half of you are prepared to die. Is that true? Yes, let the speaker ask himself the question, “Am I prepared to meet my Maker face to face?” Oh, sit in your seats and catechize your souls with that solemn question. Let each one ask himself, “Am I prepared, should I be called to die?” Methinks I hear one say with confidence, “I know that my Redeemer lives.” “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” I hear another say with trembling accents—

***“A guilty, weak and helpless worm,
On Christ’s kind arms I fall.
He is my Strength and Righteousness,
My Jesus and my All”***

Yes, sweet words! I would rather have written that one verse than Milton’s “Paradise Lost.” It is such a matchless picture of the true condition of the believing soul. But I hear another say, “I shall not answer such a question as that. I am not going to be dull today. It may be gloomy weather outside today, but I do not want to be made melancholy.” Young man, young man, go your way. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. But for all this the Lord shall bring you to judgment. What will you do, careless spirit, when your friends have forsaken you, when you are alone with God? You do not like to be alone, young man, now, do you? A falling leaf will startle you. To be alone an hour will bring on an insufferable feeling of melancholy.

But you will be alone—and a dreary alone it will be—with God your enemy! How will you do in the swellings of Jordan? What will you do when He takes you by the hand at eventide and asks you for an account? When He says, “What did you do in the beginning of your days? How did you spend your life?” When He asks you, “Where are the years of

your manhood?” When He questions you about your wasted Sabbaths and inquires how your latter years were spent? What will you say then? Speechless, without an answer you will stand. Oh, I beseech you, as you love yourselves, take care! Even now begin to weigh the solemn matters of eternal life. Oh, say not, “Why so earnest? Why in such haste?”

Sirs, if I saw you lying in your bed and your house was on fire, the fire might be at the bottom of the house and you might slumber safely for the next five minutes. But with all my might I would pull you from your bed, or I would shout, “Awake! Awake! The flame is under you.” So with some of you who are sleeping over Hell’s mouth, slumbering over the pit of perdition, may I not awake you? May I not depart a little from clerical rules and speak to you as one speaks to his fellow whom he loves? Ah, if I loved you not I need not be here. It is because I wish to win your souls and if it be possible, to win for my Master some honor, that I would thus pour out my heart before you.

As the Lord lives, Sinner, you stand on a single plank over the mouth of Hell and that plank is rotten. You hang over the pit by a solitary rope and the strands of that rope are breaking. You are like that man of old, whom Dionysius placed at the head of the table—before him was a dainty feast, but the man ate not, for directly over his head was a sword suspended by a hair. So are you, Sinner. Let your cup be full, let your pleasures be high, let your soul be elevated—do you see the sword? The next time you sit in the theater, look up and see that sword. The next time you are in a tavern, look at that sword. When next in your business you scorn the rules of God’s Gospel, look at that sword.

Though you see it not, it is there. Even now you may hear God saying to Gabriel—“Gabriel, that man is sitting in his seat in the hall. He is hearing, but as though he heard not—unsheathe your blade. Let the glittering sword cut through that hair, let the weapon fall upon him and divide his soul and body.” *Stop! Gabriel, stop!* Save the man a little while. Give him yet an hour that he may repent. Oh, let him not die! True, he has been here these ten or a dozen nights and he has listened without a tear. But stop, perhaps he may repent yet.

Jesus backs up my entreaty and He cries, “Spare him yet another year, till I dig about him and feed him and though he now cumber the ground, he may yet bring forth fruit, that he may not be hewn down and cast into the fire.” I thank you, O God, you will not cut him down tonight. But tomorrow may be his last day. You may never see the sun rise, though you have seen it set. Take heed. Hear the Word of God’s Gospel and depart with God’s blessing.

“Whosoever believes on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.” “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” “He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto Him.” “Whosoever comes unto Him He will in no wise cast out.”

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