

ARE YOU PREPARED TO DIE?

NO. 635

**A SERMON
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*“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”
Jeremiah 12:5*

CANAAN may be considered as a type of two states or conditions in the Christian's life. It was the land of rest to the children of Israel after a weary pilgrimage in the wilderness. Now it is written that, “We who believe do enter into rest.” A true Christian, possessed of strong faith, will not have a wilderness state on earth so much as a land flowing with milk and honey, because his faith will give him the substance of things hoped for, and be the evidence of things not seen.

Many disciples live a life of depression, wretchedness, and discomfort which would be completely changed if they had faith in God, and lived a higher life of devotedness and love. Canaan may be fairly considered as a type of that better state of Christianity which some enjoy. It is not altogether free from ills—the Canaanite dwells in the land, and there are wars and fights still, but there is rest, and there is the spirit of service developing itself in the cultivation of the promised land.

But Canaan is generally used to shadow forth, “The rest which remaineth for the people of God” beyond the skies. Heaven is thus frequently described as corresponding to the earthly inheritance of the Jews. It is our hope, the end of our pilgrimage. It contains our Jerusalem, and the temple “not made with hands.”

When this is the view taken of the type, then Jordan is not unnaturally likened unto death. Its dark waters are made to picture forth to our minds the chill stream through which we wade in our dying hour. It is a beautiful emblem, and we have all doubtless often sung Dr. Watt's hymn with much feeling—

*“There is land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.*

*“There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heavenly land from ours.”*

Taking “the swelling of Jordan” to represent the precise time of death, the question really is, what shall we do when we come to die? “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

I. We notice, in the first place, that this is an EXCEEDINGLY PRACTICAL QUESTION.

“How wilt thou *do*?” is the inquiry. There are some subjects which are more or less matters of pure faith and personal feeling. And though all Christian doctrines bear more or less directly upon the Christian life, yet they are not what is commonly meant by practical subjects. Our text, however, brings us face to face with a matter which is essentially a matter of doing and of acting—it asks how we mean to conduct ourselves in the hour of death.

We sometimes hear the remark made by those who object to doctrinal preaching, that we are too speculative, and utter our own opinions, which feed men's fancies, but do not regulate their life. Now we believe that every promise leads to a precept, and every doctrine has its duty. So we will not admit

the justice of the insinuation, even if we did preach doctrine entirely to the exclusion of the commandments, which we emphatically deny.

But here we have at any rate a topic practical enough, I am only afraid it will be a little too much so for some. They will turn it into a sentiment and a feeling, and not act upon it so as to put it into practice, and exemplify its power in after days. Christians may differ from me on some points, but I am sure that here we are united in belief—we must die, and ought not to die unprepared.

There is a divergence of opinion as to what we ought to do at the commencement of our Christian life. I maintain that we ought to follow Christ and be immersed in water, “For thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” Others oppose that as being unnecessary, inexpedient, or what not. We differ at the beginning of life, but we agree in the end—we must die, and we all want to die the death of the righteous, and to have our last end like his.

II. We notice, in the second place, that it is UNDOUBTEDLY A PERSONAL QUESTION.

“How wilt *thou* do?” It individualizes us, and makes us each one to come face to face with a dying hour. Now we all *need* this, and it will be well for each one of us to look for a minute into the grave. We are too apt to regard all men as mortal but ourselves. Somehow we can see frailty of life, as well as all the other frailties which we possess in common, much more clearly in other people than we can in ourselves. We are blind to our own weakness far too much, and shall do well to ask ourselves, each of us, “My soul, how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

The ancient warrior who wept because, before a hundred years were passed, he knew his immense army would be gone, and not a man remain behind to tell the tale, would have been wiser, if he had wept also for himself, and left alone his bloody wars, and lived as a man who must one day die, and find after death a day of judgment.

Each one of you must die. If I were addressing an assembly of the sages of the world, I would say, “All your combined wisdom cannot lengthen the days of one of you even a single minute. You may reckon the distance of the stars, and weigh worlds, but you cannot tell me when one of you will die, nor how many grains of sand are left behind in the hourglass of time, which shows the exit of each spirit from the world.”

I say now to you, the wisest of you must die, and you know not but that you may die ere long. So with the mightiest and the richest of men. Samson was mastered by a stronger than man, and the wealthiest of men cannot bribe death to stay his dart for a single hour.

We all come into the world one by one, and will go out of it also alone. Loved ones come to the brink of the dark stream, but there they shake hands and say, “Farewell,” and we go on alone. The prophet’s companion and successor followed his master till the fiery chariot came to take his leader away, but when the messengers of God came, they left the servant behind, vainly crying, “My father, my father; the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.”

We had better therefore take the question up as individuals, seeing that it is one in which we shall be dealt with singly, and be unable then to claim or use the help of an earthly friend. I put to the young, to the old, to the rich, to the poor, to each one of this vast assembly—I put it as if we were alone before our God—“How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?”

III. As a third thought, we call attention to the fact that it is one of the MOST SOLEMN questions.

Death and life are stern and awful realities. To say that anything “is a matter of life and death,” is to bring one of the most emphatic and solemn subjects under our notice. Now, the question we are considering this morning is of this character, and we must deal with it as it becomes us, when we investigate a subject involving the everlasting interest of souls.

The question is of infinite importance to all, but there are some whose case is manifestly such that they need to gird up the loins of their minds and address themselves to its consideration, with intensest thought and care. Let me call attention to one or two cases, for while I wish to stir up all, I am bidden to have special compassion on some, making a difference, so that I may pluck them as brands out of the fire.

I have been curious enough to think that I should like to ask that question of a Jew, of one who rejects Christ as the Messiah. “How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?” According to the law, and it is that under which every Jew is born, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.”

Now there never was, and never will be any man who did, or could “continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them,” and consequently every man becomes accursed. And it must be a dreadful thing for a man to think of dying under the curse and ban of his own religious faith, and yet every Jew is so, cursed by his own book of law—accursed forever. What comfort will that yield him when he comes to the swelling of Jordan.

I have thought too, that I should like to ask the atheist, the unbeliever, this question, “How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?” He tells me, perhaps, that he believes in annihilation—he will want comfort when he is lying upon that last weary bed—will he get it out of that well? The dreary blank of total destruction, of ceasing to be—is there anything to help a spirit when it lies where it most wants consolation, tossing to and fro in pain and weakness? I think not.

I should like also to put the question to a Roman Catholic—for how will *he* do “in the swelling of Jordan?” Some time ago, you will remember, a prince of the Catholic church departed—where did he go? I am not versed in such matters, and should not like to judge anybody’s soul, but on the coffin of the Cardinal, we find a request that we would pray for his soul, and there have been masses said for its repose. It is evident, therefore, that the Cardinal’s soul went somewhere, where it wants praying for, and to some place where it is not in repose.

Now, if this is to be the lot of a Cardinal Archbishop, there is but a poor outlook for an ordinary professor of the same faith. If a *prince* in the church dies, and goes not to heaven as we have been hoping, not to eternal rest, but to a place where he needs our intercession, and where he has no repose for his soul, why then it must be dreadful work to die with such a creed as that. I would sooner have beneath my head the most prickly thorn bush than have that for my dying pillow.

Oh, we want something better than this, a hope more rapturous, more divine, more full of immortality than the certainty of going to a place where there is no repose, and where our souls need the prayers of sinful men on earth. But I do not know that we have very much to do with any of these—they must “*Gang their ain gait*”—they must go their own way, and if they are found wrong at the last, we are sorry that it should be so, but *our own* business is certainly the first matter in hand. Therefore, forgetting them, let the question come to each of us, “How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?”

IV. Remember, in the fourth place, that this question was put by way of REBUKE to the prophet Jeremiah.

He seems to have been a little afraid of the people among whom he dwelt. They had evidently persecuted him very much, mocking at him, and laughed him to scorn. But God tells him to make his face like flint, and not to care for them, for, says He, “If you are afraid of them, ‘How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?’”

This ought to be a rebuke to every Christian who is subject to the fear of man. I do not believe that any preacher will be long in his pulpit without having the temptation to be afraid of some man or another—and if he does not stand very firmly upon his integrity, he will find some of the best of his friends getting the upper hand with him. And this will never do with God’s minister.

He must deal out God’s Word impartially to rich or poor, to good or bad, and he must determine to have no master except his Master who is in heaven—no bit nor bridle for his mouth, except that of prudence and discretion—which God Himself shall put there.

For, if we are afraid of a man who shall die, and the son of man who is crushed before the moth, how fearful shall we be when we have to talk with the grim king of terrors! If we are afraid of puny man, how shall we be able to face it out before the dread ordeal of the day of judgment?

Yet I know some Christians who are very much abashed by the world’s opinion, by the opinion of their family circle, or of the workshop. Now what does it matter after all? There is an old proverb, that,

“He is a great fool who is laughed out of his coat,” and there was an improvement on it, that, “He was a greater fool who was laughed out of his skin.” And there is another, that, “He is the greatest fool of all who is laughed out of his soul.”

He, who will be content to be damned in order to be fashionable, pays dearly indeed for what he gets. Oh, to dare to be singular, if to be singular is to be right—but if you are afraid of man, what will you do in the swelling of Jordan?

The same rebuke might be applied to us when we get fretful under the little troubles of life. You have losses in business, vexations in the family—you all have crosses to carry—but my text comes to you, and it says, “If you cannot bear this, how will you do in the swelling of Jordan? If your religion is not equal to the ordinary emergencies of common days, what will you do when you get to that extraordinary day, which will be to you the most important day of your being?”

Come friends, be not bowed down with these things, bear them cheerfully, since there is much sterner work to do than any that you have met with in the battle of life. And the same reproof might come to us when we get petulant under pains of body, for there are some of us, who as soon as ever we get a little sick, become so fretful, that those who those like us best who are farthest from us.

We can scarcely have a little depression of spirit, but straightway we are ready to give up all for lost, and like Jonah say, “We do well to be angry even unto death.” Now this ought not to be. We should quit ourselves like men, and not be perturbed with these little rivulets—for if these sweep us away, what shall we do when Jordan is swollen to the brim and we have to pass through that?

When one of the martyrs, whose name is the somewhat singular one of Pommily, was confined previous to his burning, his wife was also taken up upon the charge of heresy. She, good woman, had resolved to die with her husband, and she appeared, as far as most people could judge, to be very firm in her faith. But the jailer’s wife, though she had no religion, took a merciful view of the case as far as she could do so, and thought, “I am afraid this woman will never stand the test, she will never burn with her husband, she has neither faith nor strength enough to endure the trial.”

And therefore, one day calling her out from her cell, she said to her, “Lass, run to the garden and fetch me the key that lies there.” The poor woman ran willingly enough, she took the key up and it burned her fingers, for the jailer’s wife had made it red hot. She came running back crying with pain. “Ay, wench,” said she, “if you cannot bear a little burn in your hand, how will you bear to be burned in your whole body?”

And this, I am sorry to add, was the means of bringing her to recant the faith which she professed, but which never had been in her heart. I apply the story thus—If we cannot bear the little trifling pangs which come upon us in our ordinary circumstances, which are as it were the burning of your hands, what shall we do when every pulse beats pain, and every throb is an agony, and the whole tenement begins to crumble about the spirit that is so soon to be disturbed?

Come, let us pluck up courage! We have to fight the giant yet! Let us not be afraid of these dwarfs! Let the ordinary trials of every day be laughed to scorn! In the strength of divine grace, let us sing with our poet—

*“Weak as I am, yet through Thy strength,
I all things can perform.”*

For if we cannot bear these, how will we do in the swelling of Jordan? This is what the text was originally meant to teach. We will now use it for a further purpose.

V. The question may be put as A MATTER OF CAUTION.

In this assembly, there are some who have no hope, no faith in Christ. Now, I think, if they will look within, at their own experience, they will find that they are by no means completely at ease. The pleasures of this world are very sweet, but how soon they cloy, if they do not sicken the appetite. After a

night of merriment, there is often the morning of regret. “Who has woe? Who has redness of eyes? They who tarry long at the wine; they who go to seek mixed wine.”

It is an almost universal confession that the joys of earth promise more than they perform, and that in looking back upon them, the wisest must confess with Solomon, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Now if these things seem to be vanity while you are in good bodily health, how will they look when you are in sickness?

If vanity while you can enjoy them, what will they appear when you must say farewell to them all? If it was vanity to the rich man while he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, what greater vanity it must have been when it was said, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” How wilt thou do in Jordan when these joys shall vanish, and there shall be a dreary blank before you?

Moreover, you feel already that conscience pricks you. You cannot live without God and be perfectly at ease, unless you are one of those few who are given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart. You could not take an hour quietly to think about yourself and your state, and yet go to your bed easily.

You know right well that the only way some of you can keep your peace of mind at all is by going from one gay assembly to another, and from one party of frolic to another, or else from business to business, and from care to care. Your poor soul, like the infant which is to be cast into Moloch’s arms, cries, and you do not hear its cries because you drown it with the noisy drums of this world’s pleasures and cares.

But still, you are not at rest—there is a worm in your fair fruit, there are dregs at the bottom of your sweetest cups, and you know it. Now, if even now you are not perfectly at peace—if in this land of peace wherein you have trusted, you are getting weary of these things—then, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

Moreover, you sometimes have, if I mistake not, very strange apprehensions. I have known some of the most reckless sinners who have had fearful times, when nobody could cheer them, when a certain fearful looking for of judgment has haunted them. The most superstitious people in the world are those who are the most profane. It is a strange thing that there is always that weak point about those who seem to be most hardened.

But you who are not thus hardened—you know that you dare not look forward to death with any pleasure—you cannot. To go to the grave is never very joyous work with you. Ay, and if you were certain that there could be no more death, it would be the best news that you had ever heard. Whereas to some of us it would be the worst that could ever come.

Ah, well! If the very thought of death is bitter, what will the reality be? And if to gaze at it from a distance is too hard a thing for your mind, what will it be to pass under its yoke—to go through its dark valley, to feel its dart, to know that the poison is rankling in your veins? What wilt thou do? “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

Well, I shall not describe what you will do, though I have seen it, and you must have seen it too. Sometimes a man dies at ease, like a sheep, because he has been dosed with the laudanum of self-confidence. At other times, the man is awakened, and sees the dreadful doom to which death is driving him, and starts back and shrinks from the wrath to come, and cries and shrieks—and perhaps swears that he will not die.

And yet die he must—dragged down to that place where he must lift up his eyes to see nothing that can give him hope—nothing that can take away the sharpness of his anguish. I leave that point. God make it a caution to many present. Some of you men and women here may be nearer death than you dream of. I wish you would answer the question, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

VI. But now I intend to use the question as EXCITING MEDITATION in the breasts of those who have given their hearts to Christ, and who consequently are prepared to die whenever the summons may come. Well, what do we mean to do—how shall we behave ourselves when we come to die?

I sat down to try and think this matter over, but I cannot, in the short time allotted to me, even give you a brief view of the thoughts that passed through my mind. I began thus, “How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?” Well, as a believer in Christ, perhaps I may never come there at all, for there are some who will be alive and remain at the coming of the Son of Man, and these will never die. For so says the apostle—“Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”

This thought we wish to keep ever before us. My real hope is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would far rather see the Master return than see the messenger Death. I regulate my life as one who is looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Son of Man. I will not pay more attention to the servant than to the Lord of all. “Come, Lord Jesus! yea, come quickly,” is the prayer of our hearts continually, and as the bride of Christ, we ought to have our hearts filled with rapture at the thought of His return to claim us as His own.

If He sends for us, “It is well,” but best of all if He come Himself again the second time without sin unto salvation. A sweet truth, which we place first in our meditation. I may not sleep, but I must and shall be changed!

Then, I thought again, “How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?” I may go through it in the twinkling of an eye. Remember that good man, who some time ago was getting ready to preach as usual, but the sermon was never delivered on earth. I mean the President of the Wesleyan Conference—how speedily was he taken to his rest. And how happy it is just to close one’s eyes on earth and open them in heaven.

Such also was the death of one of God’s aged servants, Mr. Alleine, who had battled well for the truth. He was suddenly taken ill and was advised to retire to bed. “No,” said he, “but I will die in my chair and I am not afraid to die.” He sat down and only had time to say, “My life is hid with Christ in God,” and he closed his eyes with his own hands and fell on sleep.

When Ananias, a martyr, knelt to lay his white head upon the block, it was said to him as he closed his eyes to receive the stroke, “Shut your eyes a little, old man, and immediately you shall see the light of God.” I could envy such a calm departing. Sudden death, sudden glory; taken away in Elijah’s chariot of fire, with the horses driven at the speed of lightning, so that the spirit scarcely knows that it has left the clay, before it sees the brightness of the beatific vision. Well, that may take away some of the alarm of death—the thought that we may not be even a moment in the swelling of Jordan.

Then again, I thought if I must pass through the swelling of Jordan, yet the real act of death takes no time. We hear of suffering on a dying bed—the suffering is all connected with life, it is not death. The actual thing called death, as far as we know of, does not cost a pang—it is the life that is in us that makes us suffer, but death gives one kind pin’s prick, and it is all over.

Moreover, if I pass through the swelling of Jordan, I may do so without suffering any pain. A dying bed is sometimes very painful with certain diseases, and especially with strong men, it is often hard for the body and soul to part asunder. But it has been my happy lot to see some deaths so extremely pleasing, that I could not help remarking that it were worth while living only for the sake of dying as some have died.

We have seen consumption for instance—how gently it takes down the frame very often. How quietly the soul departs. And in old age, and debility, how easily the spirit seems to get away from the cage that was broken, which only needed one blow, and the imprisoned bird flies straight away to its eternal resting place.

Well, then, as I cannot tell in what physical state I may be when I come to die, I just tried to think again, how shall I do in the swelling of Jordan? I hope I shall do as others have done before me, who have built on the same rock, and had the same promises to be their succor. They cried, “Victory!” So shall I, and after that die quietly and in peace. If the same transporting scene may not be mine, I will at least lay my head upon my Savior’s bosom and breathe my life out gently there.

You have a right, Christian, to expect that as other Christians die, so shall you. How will you die? Why, you will die as your sainted mother did. You will die as your father did. When the time came for the “silver cord to be loosed and the golden bowl to be broken, for the pitcher to be broken at the fountain and the wheel broken at the cistern,” the pitcher was broken and the cord loosed, and their spirits went to God who gave them.

How will you die? Why, as I mused on this I took down my little book of “Promises,” for I thought I shall certainly do as God says I shall. Well, how is that? “When thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee.” And again, “Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” And again, “He shall swallow up death in victory.”

And again, “He shall make all thy bed in thy sickness.” And yet again, “Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God; I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” You know what a many dying pillows God has made for His dear people in the hour of their departure. “How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?” Why, do manfully, do patiently, if God shall keep His promise as we know He will.

Now, let me speak to you all again—I mean you that are in Christ. “How will you do in the swelling of Jordan?” Why, you will do as a man does who has had a long day’s walk, and he can see his home. You will clap your hands. You will sit down upon the next milestone with tears in your eyes, and wipe the sweat from your face and say, “It is well, it is over. Oh how happy it is to see my own roof-tree and the place where my best friends, my kindred dwell. I shall soon be at home—at home forever with the Lord.”

How will you do? Why you will do as a soldier does when the battle is fought. He takes off his armor, stretches himself out at length to rest. The battle is all over. He forgets his wound, and reckons up the glory of the victory and the reward which follows. So will we do. We will begin to forget the wounds, and the garments rolled in blood, and we will think of the “crown of life that fadeth not away.”

“How will we do in the swelling of Jordan?” We will do as men do when they launch for a foreign country. They look back upon those they leave behind, and wave their handkerchiefs as long as they can get sight of them—but they are soon gone. And we will bid adieu to dear ones. They shall have the tears, but we shall have the joy, for we go to the islands of the blest, the land of the hereafter, the home of the sanctified, to dwell with God for ages.

Who will weep when he starts on such a voyage and launches on such a blessed sea! What will we do when we come into the swelling of Jordan? Why methinks, dear friends, we shall then begin to see through the veil, and to enjoy the paradise of the blessed which is ours forever. We will make that dying bed a throne, and we will sit and reign there with Christ Jesus.

We will think of that river Jordan as being one tributary of the river of life which flows at the foot of the jasper throne of the Most High. We will live in the land of Beulah on the edge of Jordan, with our feet in the cold stream, singing of the better land. We will hear the songs of angels as celestial breezes bring them across the narrow stream.

And sometimes, we will have in our bosom, some of the spices from the Mountains of Myrrh, which Christ shall give us across the river. And when we come to die, what will we do in the swelling of Jordan? Why we will try and bear our dying testimony.

***“My joyful soul on Jordan’s shore,
Shall raise one Ebenezer more.”***

Oh, that was a grand thing when Joshua said to the twelve men, “Take up twelve stones, and set them down in the midst of Jordan where the priests’ feet stood still, and take up twelve other stones, and set them up on the other side of Jordan, where the children of Israel first trod the promised shore.” You and I will do this—we will leave twelve stones in the midst of Jordan. They shall tell our friends and kindred here of the good words we said, the adieu we gave them, and the joyful hopes which cheered us—the song we sang when death began to stay our throat.

And then, we will raise another Ebenezer in heaven. There shall be twelve stones there that will tell the angels and the principalities of the love which cleft the Jordan, and brought us through it as on dry land. This is how we will do in the swelling of Jordan.

We are not looking forward to death with any fear, with any dread. When we get home tonight, we shall begin to take off our garments one by one. We shall not shed a tear. Nor shall we when we come to die.

*“Since Jesus is mine, I will not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a comfort and blessing,
Since Jesus to glory thro’ death led the way!”*

This is how we shall do in the swelling of Jordan. Take off our garments to put on the celestial robes. As the bridegroom longs for the marriage day, and as the bride waits until she is joined unto her husband in wedlock, even so our spirits wait for God. As the exile pants to be delivered, and the galley slave to be separated from his oar, so wait we to be set free for glory and immortality.

As she that mourns her absent lord pines for his return, as the child longs to reach his father’s house and to see his father’s face, so do we.

*“My heart is with Him on His throne,
And ill can brook delay,
Each moment listening for His voice,
‘Make haste and come away.’”*

I must finish, for time has gone. But I meant to have said a word or two by way of *warning*. I can only do so now briefly, abridging them and compressing the thoughts as tightly as I can. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” may well be used by way of warning.

I think, dear friends, you ought to ask yourselves one question. Some of you never think of dying, and yet you should. You say you may live long—you may and you may not. If there were a great number of loaves upon this table, and you were to eat one every day, and if you were told that one of those loaves had poison in it, I think you would begin every one with great caution—and knowing that one of them would be your death, you would take each up with silent dread.

Now you have so many days, and in one of these days there is the poison of death. I do not know which one. It may be tomorrow, it may not be until many a day has gone. But I think you ought to handle all your days with holy jealousy. Is not that a fair parable? If it be, then let me ask you to think upon the question, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” You grant that you will die, and you may die soon. Is it not foolish to be living in this world without a thought of what you will do at last?

A man goes into an inn, and as soon as he sits down, he begins to order his wine, his dinner, his bed. There is no delicacy in season which he forgets to bespeak, there is no luxury which he denies himself. He stays at the inn for some time. By and by, there comes the bill, and he says, “Oh, I never thought of that—I never thought of that!” “Why,” says the landlord, “here is a man who is either a born fool or else a knave! What! Never thought of the reckoning—never thought of settling-day!”

And yet this is how some of you live. You have this, and that, and the other thing in this world’s inn (for it is nothing but an inn), and you have soon to go your way, and yet you have never thought of settling-day!

“Well,” says one, “I was casting up my accounts this morning.” Yes, I remember a minister making this remark when he heard of one that cast up his accounts on Sunday. He said, “I hope that is not true, sir.” “Yes,” he said, “I do cast up my accounts on Sunday.” “Ah, well,” he said, “the day of judgment will be spent in a similar manner—in casting up accounts, and it will go ill with those people who found no other time in which to serve themselves except the time which was given them that they serve God.”

You have either been a dishonest man, or else you must be supremely foolish to be spending every day in this world's inn, and yet to be ignoring the thought of the great day of account. But remember, though you forget it, God forgets not. Every day is adding to the score. Photographed in heaven is every action that you perform. Your very thoughts are photographed upon the eternal mind, and in the day when the book shall be opened, it will go ill with you.

Perhaps you will say, as one did in the Book of Kings, "Well, I was busy here and there," "I was looking after my family and my property. I was looking after politics. I was seeing after such and such an investment, and my soul is gone." Yes, but that would not bring it back again. And what shall it profit you, though you gain the whole world and lose your own soul.

It is no business of mine what becomes of you, except this—I do desire so to talk with you at all times, that if you perish it may not be laid at my door. What would you say to that soldier who should be told by his commanding officer to fight with the foe on the field of battle, and the so-called soldier were to reply, "I don't know anything about battle or fighting. I never thought of the battlefield, I can do anything but fight!"

The general would be sorely amazed. He would want to know what the soldier lived for, if it were not to fight and defend his country in the hour of his country's need. What do we live for, if it is not to prepare for a hereafter life, and for the day for which all days were made? What, are we sent into this world, and told that we are to, "Prepare to meet our God," and we do everything else but the one thing—this will not be wise.

And when the Lord of the whole earth shall come out of His place to judge the sons of men, bitterly shall we rue our folly! Be wise now, remember this, and consider your latter end. What words shall I use to urge you to consider the subject and take my warning? Is heaven a place you would like to enter? Is hell a place you would like to avoid, or will you make your bed in it forever? Are you in love with eternal misery that you run to it so madly?

Oh, stop! Turn you! Turn you! why wilt thou die? I do pray you stop and consider. Consideration does no man harm. Second thoughts here are for the best. Think and think, and think again, and oh, may God lead you, through thinking, to feel your danger, and may you then accept that gracious remedy which is in Christ Jesus. For whosoever believes in Him is not condemned, whosoever trusts in Christ is saved. Sin is forgiven, the soul is accepted, the spirit is blessed the moment it trusts the Savior.

Before I close the subject, I must guide your thoughts to what is the true preparation for death. Three things present themselves to my mind as being our duty in connection with the dying hour. First, seek to be washed in the Red Sea of the dear Redeemer's blood, come in contact with the death of Christ, and by faith in it you will be prepared to meet your own.

Without giving an opinion upon the merit of that system of medicine which professes to cure diseases by producing an effect upon the system akin to the original malady, or as they put it, "like curing like," we recommend it in spiritual things. Come into union with Christ's death, and that will take away the evil and sting of your own.

Be buried with Him in baptism unto death, and have part with Him in the reality symbolized in that blest ordinance, and you will not dread Jordan's swellings, if the full tide of the Redeemer's blood has rolled over you, so that you are washed and clean.

If guilt be on your conscience, it will be as a millstone round your neck, and you will sink to endless woe. But if the love of Jesus is in your heart, it will buoy up your head and keep you safe, so that although heart and flesh fail you, you will have God to be the strength of your heart and your portion forever.

Again, learn of the apostle Paul to "die daily." Practice the duty of self-denial and mortifying of the flesh till it shall become a habit with you, and when you have to lay down the flesh and part with everything, you will be only continuing the course of life you have pursued all along. No wonder if dying should prove hard work if you are completely unused to it in thought and expectation.

If death comes to me as a stranger, I may be startled, but if I have prepared myself to receive him, he may come and knock at my door and I shall say, "I am ready to go with you, for I have been expecting you all my life."

How beautiful this expression of the apostle, "I am ready to be offered up and the time of my departure is at hand." He was waiting for death as for a friend, and when it came, I am sure he was well-pleased to go. He tells us he had "a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better." Even so may we learn to look at the time when we shall hear the summons, "Come up higher," as to a time to be longed for rather than dreaded.

Learn to submit your will to God's will daily. Learn to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross, so that when the last conflict comes it may find you able, by the grace of God, to bear the brunt of the final contest with unflinching courage.

And as the last preparation for the end of life, I should advise a continual course of active service and obedience to the commands of God. I have frequently thought that no happier place to die in could be found than one's post of duty. If I were a soldier, I think I would like to die as Wolfe died, with victory shouting in my ear, or as Nelson died in the midst of his greatest success.

Preparation for death does not mean going alone into the chamber and retiring from the world, but active service—"Doing the duty of the day in the day." The best preparation for sleep, the healthiest soporific, is hard work, and one of the best things to prepare us for sleeping in Jesus, is to live in Him an active life of going about doing good.

The attitude in which I wish death to find me is, with light trimmed, and loins girt—waiting and watching—at work, doing my allotted task, and multiplying my talent for the Master's glory. Idlers may not anticipate rest, but workers will not be unwilling to welcome the hour which shall hear the words, "It is finished."

Keep your eye upon the recompense of the reward. Lay up treasures in heaven, and thus you will be ready to cross the stream and enter the beloved land, whither heart and treasure have gone beforehand, to prepare the way.

Washed in the blood of Christ, accustomed to submit to whatever God wills, and to find our pleasure in doing His will on earth as we hope to do it in heaven, joined to a life of holy service, and I am persuaded that we shall be prepared with one of old to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," and with him, calmly and joyfully to anticipate the crown which fades not away.

God bring you to this point, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 CORINTHIANS 5

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.