



DEATH IS THE END OF SORROW,
BUT THE DAWN OF GLORY.



A
BELIEVER'S
LAST DAY,
HIS
BEST DAY

*You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.*

PSALM 73:24

THOMAS BROOKS



MONERGISM CLASSICS

A Believer's Last Day, His Best Day

by Thomas Brooks

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A sermon preached at the funeral of Mrs. Martha Randall, at Christ's Church, London, June 28, 1651, by Thomas Brooks, minister of the Gospel.

"You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory." Psalm 73:24

"Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart."
Psalm 97:11

The Epistle Dedicatory

To my worthy and beloved friends, Mr. And Mrs. John Russell, and to Mr. Thomas Randall; all happiness in this world, and in that which is to come. The ensuing sermon was preached upon your importunity, and printed also upon the same account. You know that nothing would satisfy your spirits but the printing of it, which at last made me unwillingly willing to answer your desires; not that I did delight to deny your desires, nor because I prized it—but because I thought it not good enough for you, nor worthy of that weight which you laid upon it—it being but the fruit of some short broken meditations. I have now published these notes, which in all love I present to you. They were once in your ear, they are now in your eye—may the Lord keep them ever in your hearts! If there is anything in this sermon worth the having, it is not mine but the Lord's, through grace.

Dear friends, you know we must all die in the wilderness of this world, be gathered to our fathers—leave this earth, and be seen no more. Abraham and Sarah must part, Jacob and Rachel must be separated, David and his child must be severed. Our days are numbered, our period of time is appointed, and our bounds we cannot pass. "All flesh is as grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of the field," Psalm 103:15; therefore do not mourn as people

"without hope," neither be like Rachel, who would "not be comforted." To that purpose take this counsel.

1. First, Dwell much upon the sweet behavior of others, under the loss of their near and dear relations. When God had passed the sentence of death upon David's child, "Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate." 2 Samuel 12:20. When his servants questioned this action, he answers, "Now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" verse 23.

Just so, when Aaron's sons were destroyed by fire for their offering up strange fire, Lev. 10:22-23, Aaron holds his peace; he bridled his passions, and submitted sweetly and quietly to divine justice. Just so, when it was told Anaxagoras that both his sons, which were all he had, were dead, being not terrified at the sad news, he answered, "I knew I begat mortal creatures!" The people in Thrace, bury their children with great joy—but at their birth lament grievously, in regard of the miseries which are like to befall them while they live.

2. Secondly, In time of crosses, losses, and miseries—it is the wisdom of believers to look more upon the crown—than upon the cross; to dwell more upon glory—than upon misery; to eye more the

brazen serpent which is lifted up—than the fiery serpent which bites and stings. [2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 10:34, 11:24-26, 35, and 12:1-3.] Basil speaks of some martyrs who were cast out all night naked in a frigid time, and were to be burned the next day, how they comforted themselves in this manner: "The winter is sharp—but paradise is sweet; here we shiver for cold—but the bosom of Abraham will make amends for all." Galen writes of a fish called Uranoscopos, which has but one eye—and yet looks continually up to heaven. A Christian under the cross should always have an eye looking up to heaven, so that his soul may not faint, and he may give glory to God in the day of visitation. It is recorded of Lazarus, that after his resurrection from the dead he was never seen to laugh; his thoughts and affections were so fixed in heaven, though his body was on earth, that he could not but slight temporal things, his heart being set upon eternal things. [Let heaven be a man's object—and the earth will be his abject.] "A man," says Chrysostom, "who would dwell in the contemplation of heaven, would be loath to come out of it." "Nay," says Augustine, "a man might age himself in the contemplation of heaven, and sooner grow old than weary."

3. Thirdly, Compare your mercies and your losses together, and you shall find that your mercies will wonderfully outweigh your losses. You have lost one mercy, you enjoy many mercies. What is the loss of a wife, a child, or any other temporal mercy, compared to a soul's enjoyment of the favor of God, pardon of sin, peace of

conscience, hopes of heaven, etc.? Besides, you enjoy many temporal mercies, which many of the precious sons of Zion lack, etc.

4. Fourthly, Consider seriously of the reasons of God's stripping his people of their nearest and their dearest mercies. They are these —

[1.] For a trial of the strength and power of their graces. It is not every cross nor every loss, which tries the strength of a Christian's graces. Job held bravely in the face of many afflictions for a time—but when he was thoroughly afflicted in his body, then he acts like a man void of grace, rather than like a man who did excel all others in grace. [God tried the strength of Abraham's faith, and the strength of Job's patience, and the strength of Moses' meekness, and the strength of David's zeal, and the strength of Paul's courage—to the utmost. God will not only try the truth—but he will also, sooner or later, try the strength of every grace which is in a believer. Exod. 12:27, 30-31.]

When God burns up the shed—but leaves the palace standing; when he takes away the servant—but leaves the child; when he gathers here a flower and there a flower out of men's gardens—but leaves the flowers which are the delight of their eyes and the joy of their hearts; they bear it patiently and sweetly. But when he burns up the palace, and takes away the child, and gathers the fairest flower in all our garden—then we usually show ourselves to be but men, yes, to

be weak men, passionately crying out, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! O that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Sam. 18:33.

[2.] God passes the sentence of death upon men's dearest mercies, that he himself may be more dreaded, and that his precious servants and their counsel may be the better minded and regarded. The Egyptians trembled not under several judgments, nor minded not what Moses and Aaron said, until God smote their firstborn—and then they tremble, and then the servants of the Lord and their counsel found better reception with them than formerly they had done. Ah, friends! has the Lord smitten your firstborn, as I may say? then look to it, as you prize the honor of God, the advancement of the gospel, the peace of your own consciences, the stopping of the mouths of the wicked, and the gladdening of those hearts that God would not have saddened, that God be more dreaded, and that his servants and his services be more owned, loved, and regarded.

The people of God, and the ordinances of God—are to God as his firstborn; and those who make light of God's firstborn, God will make as light of their firstborn. These Egyptians had slain Israel, God's firstborn, and therefore God smites their firstborn. My desire and prayer shall be that God's removing and taking away your firstborn, as I may say, may be the making of more room in your bosoms for God, Christ, saints, and ordinances, so that your great loss may be turned into the greatest gain. And certainly, if this

remedy, this potion which is given to you by an outstretched hand from heaven does not work this—the next potion will be far more bitter! John 5:14.

[3.] God passes the sentence of death upon men's nearest and dearest mercies, that he may win them to a more complete and full dependence upon his blessed self. Man is a creature apt to hang and rest upon creature props. "Look to my right and see;" says the psalmist, "no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life." Psalm 142:4. Well, what does he do, now that all props fail him? Why, now he sweetly leans upon God: verse 5, "I cry to you, O Lord; I say—You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Cynaegirus, an Athenian captain, used great valor in the Persian war, pursuing his enemies who were laden with the rich spoil of his country, and were ready to set sail and be gone; he held the ship with his right hand, and when that was cut off, he held it with the left, that also being cut off, he held it with the stumps, until his arms were cut off, and then he held it with his teeth until his head was cut off. It is the very temper of most men and women in the world—they will hold upon one prop, and if God cuts off that, then they will catch hold on another, etc., until God cut off all their props, and then they will come and rest and center in God, and say, "All my fountains are in you!" Psalm 87:7.

[4.] God strips his people of their dearest mercies, that he may work their hearts to a more strict and diligent search and examination of their own hearts and ways, that they may say with the church, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord our God," Lam. 3:39-40, 48. When God's hand, when God's rod is upon our backs—our hands must be upon our hearts, and we must cry out, "What evil have we done! what evil have we done!"

Seneca reports of Sextus, who would every night ask himself three questions—

(1.) What evil have you healed today?

(2.) What vice have you stood against this day?

(3.) In what part are you bettered this day?

When the storm beats strong upon you, you had need to see what Jonah is asleep at the bottom of your souls, so that, he being discovered and cast overboard, your souls may be safe, for in the drowning of your sins, lies the security of your soul.

[5.] God strips his people of their dearest outward mercies, that they may be more compassionate toward those who are, or shall be, in the same condition with themselves. The Jews at this day, in their very nuptial feasts and mirth, break a glass with wine in remembrance of Jerusalem, saying, when they throw it down, "Thus was Jerusalem broken!" What they spill in wine, they fill with tears.

Is it not a shame to have the same name, the same faith, the same Christ, the same profession, etc.—and to desire always to tread on roses? Is it not a shame to to be embarked in this great ship of Christianity with so many brave spirits—and to hide under hatches? Saints should be like two lute strings which are tuned one to another; no sooner one is struck but the other trembles.

[6.] God strips his people of their nearest and dearest outward mercies, that they may the more prize and the better taste spiritual and heavenly mercies. Diogenes noted the folly of the men of his time — that they undervalued the best things — but overvalued the worst things. Ah, that this were not the sin and shame of professors in these days! God sometimes strips His people of their nearest and dearest outward mercies — that they may the more prize and the better taste, of spiritual and heavenly mercies. God takes away uncertain riches — that His people may the more prize certain riches! God takes away natural strength — that His people may the more prize spiritual strength! God takes away the creature — that His people may more prize their Savior. Spiritual and heavenly things can alone satisfy the soul. The language of a godly man is this, "Ah, Lord! the good things which I have from You, though they may refresh me — yet they cannot satisfy me without Yourself!" "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" Psalm 73:25-26

5. The fifth and last word of counsel that I shall give you is this, Consider seriously and frequently, that God's taking away or removing of one mercy is but his making of way for another, and usually for a better mercy. God took from David a Michal—and gave him a wise Abigail. God took from David an Absalom—and gave him a wise Solomon. "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." John 16:7. God took away the bodily presence of Christ from his disciples—but gave them more abundantly of his spiritual presence, which was far the choicer and the sweeter mercy. God will always make that word good, "I will not leave you comfortless," or as the Greek has it, John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans, or fatherless children." No! I will come and comfort you on every side, and I will make up all your needs, and be better to you than all your mercies: "For your brass I will give you silver, and for your iron you shall have gold," etc., Isaiah 60:17.

To draw to a close—"When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge!" Proverbs 14:32. We should lament over that dead man or dead woman whom hell harbors, whom the devil devours, whom divine justice torments! But let rejoice over those departed believers whom Christ embosoms—and whom all the court of heaven comes forth to welcome!"Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be

like theirs!" Numbers 23:10. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints!" Psalm 116:15.

I desire you, and all others who shall read what is here written, to overlook the mistakes of the printer, if you meet with any, I having no time to wait upon the press to correct what may be found amiss. The perusal and acceptance of what I here present in love, I shall leave to your judgments.

In the love and service of our dearest Lord,
Thomas Brooks

A Believer's Last Day, His Best Day

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!"- Philippians
1:21

Beloved, I am here at this time to speak a word to the living, my business being not to speak anything of the dead. Be pleased, therefore, to cast your eye upon Ecclesiastes 7:1: "A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth." I shall discourse upon the latter part of this verse at this time: "The day of death is better than the day of birth."

The Greeks say, "that the beginning of a man's nativity—is the begetting of his misery."

Job 14:1, "Man who is born of a woman is born to trouble" and sorrow. The word which is there rendered "born," signifies also generated or conceived; to note to us that man is miserable as soon as he is warm in the womb; he comes crying into the world. Before ever the child speaks, he prophesies by his tears—of his ensuing sorrows.

And this made Solomon to prefer his coffin before his crown, the day of his dissolution before the day of his coronation. But not to hold you longer from what is mainly intended, the observation that I shall speak to at this time is this—That a believer's last day is his best day! His dying-day is better than his birthday! This will be a very sweet and useful point to all believers.

1. I shall first demonstrate the truth, that a believer's last day is his best day!

1. Death is a change of PLACE. When a believer dies, he does but change his place. He changes earth for heaven, a wilderness for a Canaan, an Egypt for a land of Goshen, a dunghill for a palace: as it is said of Judas, that "he went to his place," Acts 1:25. An unbeliever is not yet in his place—hell is his place. Just so, when a believer dies he goes to his place. Heaven, the bosom of Christ, is his place. And that speaks out the truth asserted, that a believer's dying day is his best day.

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:8. A believer is not at present, in his place. His soul is still working and warring, and he cannot rest until he comes to center in the bosom of Christ. This Paul well understood when he said, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far!" Phil. 1:23. I would gladly weigh anchor, hoist sail, and cruise home. And upon this account those precious souls groaned for deliverance, "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling!" 2 Corinthians 5:2 Why is this? "While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord," ver. 6. We are not in our place, and therefore we groan to be at home—that is, to be in heaven, to be in the bosom of Christ, which is our proper place, our most desirable home.

2. Death is a change of COMPANY. In this world, the godliest man must live with the wicked, and converse with the wicked, etc.; and this is a part of their misery; it is their hell on this side heaven. This stuck upon the spirit of David: Psalm 120:5, "Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!" [I have read of a godly woman, who, being near death, cried out, "O Lord, let me not go to hell where the wicked are, for you know that I never loved their company while in this life!"] And so Jer. 9:2, "Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people!" And this was that that did vex and tear Lot's

righteous soul: 2 Peter 2:7-8, "Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard." Oh—but death is a change of company. A godly man does but change the company of profane people, of vile people, etc., for the company of angels; and the company of weak Christians for the company of just men made perfect. That is a remarkable place, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, " Hebrews 12:22-24. Here is a change indeed. Death is a change of company as well as a change of place. And if this be but well weighed, it must needs be granted that a believer's dying day is better than his birthday.

3. Death is a change of EMPLOYMENT. A believing soul when he dies, changes his work and employment. I open it thus: The work of a believer in this world, lies in praying, groaning, sighing, mourning, wrestling, and fighting, etc. And we see throughout the Scripture that the choicest saints, who have had the highest visions of God, have driven this trade; they have spent their time in praying, groaning, mourning, wrestling, and fighting: Eph. 6:12, "For we wrestle not

against flesh and blood—but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." [Probus a valiant Roman emperor's motto was, "No fight—no pay!" Just so, I say, "No fight—no crown! No fight—no heaven!"] The truth is, the very life of a believer is a continual warfare. Believers have to deal with subtle enemies, malicious enemies, vigilant enemies, and untiring enemies. They have to deal with such enemies as threw down Adam in paradise, the most innocent man in the world, and that threw down Moses, the meekest man in the world, and Job, the patientest man in the world, and Joshua, the most courageous man in the world, and Paul, the best apostle in the world, etc. A Christian's life is a warfare. Job says, "All the time of my warfare will I wait, until my change come," Job 14:14. "I am still a-fighting," says Job, "with lusts and corruptions within, and with devils and men abroad!" "All the time of my warfare will I wait until my change come." Just so, in 2 Tim. 4:8, "I have fought the good fight of faith," etc.

Death is a change of employment. It changes our hard service, our work that lies in mourning, wrestling, and fighting—for rejoicing and singing hallelujahs to the Almighty! No longer prayers—but praises! No longer fighting and wrestling—but dancing and triumphing! Can a believing soul look upon this glorious change, and not say, Surely "better is the day of a believer's death than the day of

his birth"? Death's shroud wipes away all tears from the believer's eyes! Rev. 7:9.

4. Death is a change of ENJOYMENTS, as well as a change of employments. I shall express this in three considerable things—

(1.) Death is a change of our more dark and obscure enjoyment of God—for a more clear and sweet enjoyment of God. I say, the best believer who breathes in this world, who does see and enjoy most of God, and the visions of his glory—yet he does not enjoy God so clearly—but that he is much in the dark.

The apostle Paul was a man who was high in his enjoyments of God—yet while he was here in the flesh, he did but see as through a dark glass. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." 1 Corinthians 13:12

God told Moses that he could not see his face and live. The truth is, we are able to bear but little of the discoveries of God, there being such a mighty majesty and glory in all the spiritual discoveries of God. We are weak, and able to take in little of God. We have but dark apprehensions of God. Witness our tears, sighs, groans, and complaints, because we go forward and backward. We look on the right hand and on the left, as Job speaks, Job 23:8-9, and God hides himself that we cannot see him. Plutarch tells of Eudoxus, that he would be willing to be burnt up presently by the sun, so he might be

admitted to come so near it as to learn the nature of it. This is upon the heart of believers, "Lord, let us be burnt up—so we may see you more in all your glorious manifestations; let us be poor, let us be anything—just so that we may be taken up into a more clear enjoyment of yourself." [Chrysostom professes that the lack of the enjoyment of God would be a far greater hell to him, than the feeling of any punishment.] Ask those who live highest in the enjoyment of God, "What is your greatest burden?" They will tell you, "This is our greatest burden, that our apprehensions of God are no more clear, that we cannot see him whom our souls do dearly love, face to face!" Oh—but now in heaven saints shall have a clear vision of God! There are no clouds or mists in heaven!

(2.) Death is a change of our imperfect and incomplete enjoyments of God, for a more complete and perfect enjoyment of him. As no believer has a clear sight of God here, so no believer has a full and perfect sight of God here. In Job 26:14, how little a portion is heard of him—speaking of God—and of that is heard, ah how little a portion is understood! It is an excellent expression that Augustine has: "The glorious things of heaven are so many—that they exceed number; so precious—that they exceed estimation; so great—that they exceed measure!" Bernard says, "For Christ to be with Paul was the greatest security—but for Paul to be with Christ was the chief happiness!" Chrysostom says, "If it were possible that all the sufferings of the saints should be laid upon one man, it could not

equal one hour's being in heaven!" Such is the greatness and fullness of that glory above. The saints' motto is, "Let us go hence! Let us go hence!"

So in 1 Cor. 13:12, "Now we see through a glass darkly—but then face to face. Now I know in part—but then shall I know even as also I am known." The soul, while it is in this present world, says, "I enjoy something of God — and that I would not lack for a thousand worlds —yet my enjoyment is not full." If you should say, "Souls, why do you wait upon God in this ordinance and that ordinance?" they will answer, "That we may enjoy God more fully. Oh, that I might be filled with the fullness of God!"

There are no complaints in heaven, because there are no needs. Oh, when death shall give the fatal stroke, there shall be an exchange of earth—for heaven; of imperfect enjoyments—for perfect enjoyments of God; then the soul shall be swallowed up with a full enjoyment of God; no corner of the soul shall be left empty—but all shall be filled up with the fullness of God. Here in this present world, they receive grace—but in heaven they shall receive glory. God keeps the best wine until last; the best of God, Christ, and heaven—is beyond this present world. Here we have but some sips, some tastes of God; fullness is reserved for the glorious state. He who sees most of God here on earth, sees but his back parts; his face is a jewel of that splendor and glory, which no eye can behold but a glorified eye.

The best of Christians are able to take in but little of God; their hearts are like the widow's vessel, which could receive but a little oil. Sin, the world, and creatures do take up so much room in the best hearts, that God gives out himself little by little, as parents give sweets to their children. But in heaven God will communicate himself fully at once to the soul! Grace shall then be swallowed up of glory!

(3.) Death is a change of a more inconstant and transient enjoyment of God—for a more constant and permanent enjoyment of God. Here on earth, the saints' enjoyment of God is inconstant. One day they enjoy God, and another day the soul sits and complains in anguish of spirit. He who should "comfort my soul stands afar off;" my glass is out, my sun is set, and what can make up the lack of this sun? As all candle-light, star-light, and torch-light, cannot make up the lack of the light of the sun; so when the Sun of righteousness hides his face, it is not all creature-comforts that can make up the lack of his countenance.

[By death, saints come to a fixed and invariable eternity. What will that life be—or rather, what will not that life be—since all good is in such a life—light which place cannot limit, music which time cannot vanish away, fragrances which are never dissipated, a feast which is never consumed, a blessing which eternity bestows—but eternity shall never see at an end.]

David sometimes could say that "God was his portion, and his salvation, and his strong tower," and what not; and yet shortly cries out, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" In one place he says, "I will never be shaken," Psalm 30:6; and yet presently it follows, "You hide your face from me, and I was troubled," ver. 7. And this is the state of a believer in this world. But in heaven there shall no clouds arise between the Lord and a believing heart. God will not one day smile, and another day frown; one day take a soul in his arms, and another day lay that soul at his feet. This is his dealing with his people here. But in heaven there are nothing but kisses and embraces, nothing but a perpetual enjoyment of God. When once God takes the soul unto himself, it shall never be night with it any more—never dark with that soul any more, etc.; all tears shall then be wiped away. That is a sweet word in the 1 Thes. 4:17-18, "And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." There are angels and archangels in heaven. Yes—but they do not make heaven; Christ is the most sparkling diamond in the ring of glory! It is heaven and happiness enough to see Christ, and to be forever with Christ. Now, oh what a glorious change is this! Methinks these things should make us long for our dying-day, and account this present life but a lingering death.

5. Death is a change, which puts an end to all CHANGES. What is the whole life of a man—but a life of changes? Death is a change that

puts an end to all external changes. Here on earth, you often change your joy for sorrow, your health for sickness, your strength for weakness, your honor for dishonor, your plenty for poverty, your beauty for deformity, your friends for foes, your silver for brass, and your gold for copper. Now the comforts of a man are smiling, the next hour they are dying, etc. All temporals are as transitory as a rapid torrent, a ship, a bird, an arrow, a runner who passes by. Man himself—the king of these outward comforts—what is he—but a mere nothing?—the dream of a dream, a shadow, a bubble, a flash, a blast. Now death puts an end to all external changes: there shall be no more sickness, no more complaints, no more needs, etc.

And then death also puts an end to all internal changes. Now the Lord smiles upon the soul, and at another time he frowns upon the soul. Now God gives assistance to conquer sin, before long the man is carried captive by his sin; now he is strengthened against the temptation, in a short while he falls before the temptation, etc. Job was heroic in the midst of storms, and speaks like an angel—but when his body was afflicted, and the arrows of the Almighty stuck in him, and his day was turned into night, and his rejoicing into mourning, etc., then a man would have thought him an incarnate devil, by his cursing. But death puts an end to internal changes, as well as external changes. Now the soul shall be tempted no more, sin no more, be foiled no more. Now you may judge by this, that a Christian's dying-day is his best day.

Death is another Moses: it delivers believers out of bondage, and from making bricks in Egypt. It is a day or year of jubilee to a gracious spirit—the year wherein he goes out free from all those cruel taskmasters which it had long groaned under. The heathen gods held death to be man's summum bonum, his chief good; therefore, when one of them had built and dedicated the temple at Delphos, he asked of Apollo for his recompense the thing that was best for man: the oracle told him that he should go home, and within three days he should have it—within which time he died. Thus the very heathens themselves have consented to this truth, that a man's dying-day is his best day.

6. Death is a change, which brings the soul to an eternal REST. Death is the bringing of the soul to bed—to a state of eternal rest. [Death is a rest from the trouble of our labors, a rest from afflictions, a rest from persecutions, a rest from temptation, a rest from desertion, a rest from sin, and a rest from sorrow, Gen. 8:8.] That is the last demonstration of the point, that a believer's dying-day is his best day. Now while we are here in this present world, the soul is in a perpetual agitation. The godliest man in the world—who is highest and clearest in his enjoyments of God—is too often like to Noah's dove, which found no rest: either he lacks some temporal mercy or spiritual mercy—and will do so until his soul is swallowed up in the everlasting enjoyments of God! Death brings a man to an unchangeable rest!

Rev. 14:13, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." Why? "They will rest from their labor." Oh, says he, write it down as a thing of worth and weight, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. They will rest from their labor." Death brings the soul to unchangeable rest.

"The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death." Isaiah 57:1-2

Oh, death is a change which brings a soul to unchangeable rest; it brings a soul to bed. This was that that made Paul long "to be dissolved, and to be with Christ;" and the Corinthians to groan for deliverance. [Laurence Saunders kissing the stake, said, Welcome the cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life. Faninus, the Italian martyr, kissed him who brought him word of his execution. It was a notable saying of blessed Cooper, "Many a day have I sought death with tears; not out of impatience or distrust," says he, "but because I am weary of sin, and fearful to fall into it." You know how the martyrs hugged the stake, and welcomed every messenger of death which came to them, and clapped their hands in the midst of the flames.

Death is a believer's coronation-day, it is his marriage-day. It is a rest from sin, a rest from sorrow, a rest from afflictions and temptations, etc. Death to a believer is an entrance into Abraham's

bosom, into paradise, into the "New Jerusalem," into the joy of his Lord.

And thus much for the doctrinal part. You see that it is clear, by these six things, that a believer's dying-day is his best day, and the day of his death better than the day of his birth.

Practical Application

I might by many other arguments demonstrate this truth to you—but let these suffice; because I would not willingly keep you longer from the Practical Application of the point—application being the life of all teaching.

1. Never mourn immoderately at the death of any believer, let them be the most excellent and useful who ever lived. Death is not the death of the man—but the death of his sin. Death is to them the greatest gain; and it speaks out much selfishness in us to be more absorbed with the gain and benefit which redounds to us by their lives, than with the happiness and glory that redounds to them by their deaths. In the primitive times, when God had passed the sentence of death upon their dearest comforts, Christians behaved at a more high, sweet, and noble rate than now-a-days they do.

Remember this—death does that in a moment, which no graces, no duties, nor any ordinances could do for a man all his lifetime!

Death frees a man from those diseases, corruptions, temptations, etc., that no duties, nor graces, nor ordinances could do. When Abraham came to mourn for his deceased Sarah, he mourned moderately for her, because her dying-day was her best day. When Luther, that famous instrument of God, buried his daughter, he was not seen to shed a tear. Just so, Mr. Whately, who was famous in his time, where as he had preached his own child's funeral sermon upon this subject, "The will of the Lord be done," he and his wife laid their own child in the grave. [The people in Thrace mourn and greatly lament at the birth of their children, because of the sorrows and troubles they are born to; and they greatly joy and rejoice at the death of their children, because death is the funeral of all their sorrows. Death is not such as some would paint it. It was the saying of a heathen man, That the whole life of a man should be nothing else but a meditation on death. See Deut. 32:29. Alexander the Great did ask the Indian philosopher how long a man should live; says he, Until he think it better to die than to live.] That is the first use, let us not mourn immoderately for any believer's death.

2. Do not fear death. Compose your spirits; say not of death as that wicked prince said to the prophet, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" 1 Kings 21:20—but rather long for it, not to be rid of troubles—but that the soul may be taken up to a more clear and full enjoyment of God. Your dying-day is your best day. Good Jacob dies with a sweet composed spirit; he calls for his children, and blesses

and kisses them, and gathers up his feet into his bed, and dies. Moses, that morning that the messenger came to him, and told him he must die, he goes up the hill, sees the land of Canaan at a distance, and dies. Joseph built his sepulcher in his own garden. And some philosophers had their graves always open before their gates, that going out and coming in they might always think of death, for in life they found comforts to be rare, crosses frequent, pleasures momentary, and pains permanent. Believers, your dying-day is your best day. Oh, then, be not afraid of death, and that you may not, remember that it is not such a slight matter as some make it, to be unwilling to die. There is much reproach cast upon God, by believers being unwilling to die. You talk much of God, heaven, and glory, etc.—and yet when you should come to go and share in this glory, you shrug and say, "Spare me a little while!" Is not this a reproach to the God of glory? But that this counsel may stick upon you, remember these five things—

[1.] Christ's death is a meritorious death. Can a believer think upon the death of Christ as meriting peace with God, pardon of sin, justification, glorification—and yet be afraid to die? What! is the death of Christ thus meritorious, and shall we still be unwilling to depart?

[2.] Is not death a sword in your Father's hand? It is true, a sword in a madman's hand, or in an enemy's hand, might make one tremble—but when the sword is in the father's hands, the child does not fear.

Grant that death is a sword—yet why should the child fear and be afraid, when it is in the father's hand—who will be sure to handle it so as he shall not be hurt or harmed by it.

[3.] Remember that Christ's death is a death-conquering death. [The fear of death is worse than the pains of death, because fear of death kills us often, whereas death itself can do it but once. "Let him fear death that is loath to go to Christ," said Cyprian. "I fear not to die—but I fear to be damned," says one. Luther, speaking of the blood of Christ, says, "That one little drop is of more worth than heaven and earth." If the souls under the altar cry, How long, Lord?—if they solicit for the day of judgment, why not I for the day of death, since death's day is but the eve of God's day? Zeno said, I have no fear but of old age.] Christ has taken away the sting of death—so that it cannot hurt you. His death is a death-sanctifying and a death-sweetening death. He has by his death sanctified and sweetened death to us.

Death is a fall that came by a fall. To die is to be no more unhappy, if we consider death aright. "Oh," says one, "that I could see death, not as it was—but as you, Lord, have now made it!" Death is the greatest monarch and the most ancient king of the world. "Death reigned from Adam to Moses," says Paul. Oh! but the Lord Jesus has, as it were, disarmed death, and triumphed over death. He has taken away its sting, so that it cannot sting us, and we may play with it, and put it into our bosoms, as we may a snake whose sting is

pulled out. The apostle, upon this consideration, challenges death, and out-braves death, and bids death do his worst, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

[4.] Did not Christ willingly leave his Father's bosom for your sake? Did he not willingly die for you? Did Christ plead thus, These robes are too good for me to leave off, this crown too glorious for me to lay aside, I am too great to suffer for such a people? No! He readily leaves his Father's bosom, he lays down his crown, and puts off his robes, and suffers a cursed, cruel, and ignominious death. Ah, souls, you should reason thus, "Did Christ die for me that I might live with him? I will not therefore desire to live long away from him." All men go willingly to see him whom they love; and shall I be unwilling to die, that I may see him whom my soul loves? Shall Christ lay aside all his glory and pomp, and marry a poor soul that had neither portion nor loveliness; and shall this soul be unwilling to go home to such a husband? Oh think of it, you souls who are unwilling to die!

Present life is not life—but the way to life; for when we cease to be men, we begin to be as angels. They are only creatures of inferior nature who are pleased with the present. Man is a future creature. The eye of his soul looks ahead. The laborer hastens from his work to his bed, the mariner rows hard to gain the port, the traveler is glad

when he is near his inn; so should saints when they are near death, because then they are near heaven, they are near their eternal home!

[5.] Are you not complete in Christ? ["One Christ will be to you instead of all things else, because in him are all good things to be found." Augustine.] Why should a believer be afraid to die, who stands complete before God in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus? If we should appear in our own righteousness, in our own duties, it would be dreadful to think of dying—but a believer is complete in him, etc. "You are complete in him," Col. 2:10. In Rev. 14:4-5, they are said to be "without fault before the throne of God;" and in Cant. 4:7, "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you." A believer, when he dies, he appears before God in the righteousness of Christ. All the spots and blemishes of his soul are covered with the righteousness of Christ, which is a matchless, spotless, peerless righteousness. Christ's spouse has perfection of beauty; she is all "glorious within" and without, she is spotless and blameless, she is the fairest among women, that she may be a fit mate for him who is fairer than all the children of men, Psalm 45:2. The saints are as that tree of paradise, Gen. 3—fair to his eye, and pleasant to his palate. The saints are as Absalom, in whom there was no blemish from head to foot. Think of these things to sweeten your last changes, and to make you long to be in the bosom of Christ.

[6.] Sixthly, Consider that the saints' dying-day is to them the Lord's pay-day. Every prayer shall then have its answer; all

hungerings and thirstings shall be filled and satisfied; every sigh, groan, and tear that has fallen from the saints' eyes shall then be recompensed. [That is not death but life, which joins the dying man to Christ! That is not life but death, which separates the living man from Christ.] Then they shall be paid and recompensed for all public service, and all family service, and all closet service. Then a crown shall be set upon their heads, and glorious robes put upon their backs, and golden scepters put into their hands; their dying-day being the Lord's payday, they shall hear the Lord saying to them, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into your Master's joy," Mat. 15:21. In that day they shall find that God is not like Antiochus, who promised often—but seldom gave. No! Then God will make good all those golden and glorious promises that he has made to them, especially these which are here cited. [Rev. 2:10, 3:4, 12, 22, and 7:16-17.] Now God will give them gold for brass, and silver for iron, felicity for misery, plenty for poverty, honor for dishonor, freedom for bondage, heaven for earth, an immortal crown for a mortal crown!

[7.] Seventhly, Consider this—the way to glory is by misery; the way to life is by death. In this world we are all Benonis—the sons of sorrow. The way to heaven is by Weeping-cross. Christ's passion-week was before his ascension-day; none passes to paradise but by burning seraphim; we cannot go out of Egypt but through the Red Sea; the children of Israel came to Jerusalem through the valley of

tears, and crossed the swift river of Jordan before they came to the sweet waters of Siloam. [A man will easily swallow a bitter pill—to get health. The physician helps us with painful remedies—and yet we reward him for it.] There is no passing into paradise but under the flaming sword of this angel—death! There is no coming to that glorious city above, but through this difficult, dark, dirty lane of death. No wiping all tears from your eyes—but with your winding-sheet, which should make you entertain death, not as a foe—but as a friend; not as a stranger—but as a guest that you had long looked for, and welcome death as more blessed than your birth. [Death to a believer is the gate of heaven; it is the door of life. It conveys us out of the wilderness into Canaan, out of a troublesome sea into a quiet haven, John 14:1-3.] Every man is willing to go to his home, though the way which leads to it be ever so dark, dirty, or dangerous; and shall believers be unwilling to go to their homes, because they are to go through a dark entry to those glorious, lightsome, and eternal mansions that Christ has prepared for them? Surely not!

[8.] Eighthly, Consider that while we are in this world, our weak and imperfect and diseased bodies cast chains, and fetters, restraints, hindrances, and impediments upon the soul, that the soul is hindered from many high and noble actings. In heaven, the soul works clearer, and understands better, and discourses wiser, and rejoices louder, and loves nobler, and desires purer, and hopes stronger than it can do here. [When Plato saw one over-indulgent to

his body by high feeding it, he asked him what he meant, to make his prison so strong.]

The soul is now encaged in a body, and while it is in this body of clay, it cannot act like herself. It is like a caged bird, whose nature is to soar aloft towards the place whence she came. When the soul is upon the wings for heaven, the body like a lump of lead pulls it down to the earth, etc.

Now the soul cannot look out at the eyes but it will be infected, nor hear by the ears but it will be distracted, nor smell at the nostrils and not be tainted, taste by the tongue and not be allured, and touch by the hand and not be defiled. Every sense and member is too ready upon every occasion and temptation, to betray the soul; which should make us willing to die and to long for that day wherein our bodies shall be glorified. [The Greeks call the body the soul's chain, the soul's sepulcher.]

Ah, believers! it will be but shortly, before those bodies of yours, which are now like a picture out of frame, or a house out of repair, which are now deformed and diseased, etc., shall be agile and nimble, swift and facile in their motion. For clarity and brightness they shall be like Christ's body when it was transfigured, Mat. 17:2; they shall be very amiable and beautiful, they shall be unchangeable and immortal. Here our bodies are still dying. It is more proper to ask when we shall make an end of dying, than to ask when we shall

die. Death is a worm which is always feeding at the root of our lives, which should make death more desirable than life.

[9.] Ninthly, Dwell much upon the readiness and willingness of other saints to die. Good old Simeon having first laid Christ in his heart, and then taking him up in his arms, he sings, "Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation!" Luke 2:28-30. I have lived enough—I now have my life; I have longed enough—I now have my love; I have seen enough—I now have my sight; I have served enough—I now have my reward; I have sorrowed enough—I now have my joy.

Just so, the believing Corinthians, 2 Cor. 5:4, 8, they groaned earnestly to be clothed with their house which is from heaven; they groaned that mortality might be swallowed up of life, and "that they might be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Just so, Paul desires earnestly "to depart, and to be with Christ, which is best of all," Phil. 1:23. Just so, those in Peter, "they look for and hasten the coming of the day of God," 2 Pet. 3:12. They are said to hasten the day of God, in respect of their earnest desires after it, and in respect of their preparations for it. Just so, the souls under the altar cry, "How long, Lord, how long?" etc., Rev. 6:9-10.

So Paula, that noble lady, when one did read to her Cant. 2:11, "The winter is past, and the singing of birds has come;" "Yes," she replied, "the singing of birds has come," and so she went singing into

heaven. Just so, Mr. Jewel said, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace; break off all delays; Lord, receive my spirit." Further he said, "I have not so lived that I am ashamed to live longer; neither do I fear to die—because we have a merciful Lord. A crown of righteousness is laid up for me; Christ is my righteousness."

So another, being in a swoon, as her friends thought, a little before her end they cried, Give her a cordial—but she put it back, saying, "I have cordials you know nothing of." So Mr. Pearing, a little before his death, said, "I find and feel so much inward joy and comfort in my soul, that if I were put to my choice whether to die or live, I would a thousand times rather choose death than life—if it might stand with the holy will of God." ["Let all the devils in hell," says Augustine, "beset me round, let fasting macerate my body, let sorrows oppress my mind, let pains consume my flesh, let watching weary me, or heat scorch me, or cold freeze me, let all these—and whatever more can come—happen unto me—just so that I may enjoy my Savior."] So Mr. Bolton, lying on his death-bed, said, "I am by the wonderful mercies of God, as full of comfort as my heart can hold, and feel nothing in my soul but Christ, with whom I heartily desire to be."

Ah, Christians! if the exceeding willingness of the saints to die will not make you willing to die, what will?

[10.] Tenthly and lastly, Consider this—that the Lord will not leave you—but be with you in that dying hour. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me," says the psalmist, Psalm 23:4. Just so, the apostle, Heb. 13:5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said—Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." There are five negatives in the Greek, to assure God's people that he will never forsake them; five times in Scripture is this precious promise renewed, that we may press it until we have pressed the sweetness out of it. Though God may seem to leave you, you may be confident he will never forsake you. Why should that man be afraid of death, who may be always confident of the presence of the Lord of life? [Maximilian the emperor was so delighted with that sentence, "If God is with us—who shall be against us?" that he caused it to be written upon the walls in most of the rooms of his palace.]

3. The next use shall be to stir you all up to prepare and fit you for your dying-day. Ah, Christians! what is your whole life—but a day to fit for the hour of death? What is your great business in this world—but to prepare and fit for the eternal world? It was a sad speech of Caesar Borgia, who being on his deathbed said, "When I lived, I provided for everything but death! Now I must die, and am unprovided to die." Ah, Christians! you have need every day to pray

with Moses, "Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom," Psalm 90:12; and to follow the counsel of the prophet Jeremiah, "Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom," Jer. 13:16.

Old age is the dark mountain which makes a broad way narrow, and a plain way cragged. It is a high point of heavenly wisdom to consider our latter end: "Oh, that they were wise, that that understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" Deut. 23:19. Jerusalem paid dearly for forgetting her latter end. Jerusalem's filthiness was in her skirts, because she remembered not her latter end, therefore she was dreadfully brought down.

To provoke you to prepare and fit for a dying-day, consider seriously these following things—

(1.) He who prepares not for his dying-day, runs the hazard of losing his immortal soul. Though true repentance is never too late—yet late repentance is seldom true. "He who is not ready to repent today, will be less ready tomorrow; his understanding will be more dark, his heart more hard, his will more crooked, his affections more distempered, his conscience more benumbed," etc. Bede tells a story of a certain great man who was admonished in his sickness to repent, who answered, "That he would not repent now, for if he should

recover, his companions would laugh at him;" but, growing sicker and sicker, he then told them it was too late to repent— "For now," said he, "I am judged and condemned." It is the greatest wisdom in the world to do that every day, which a man would do on a dying-day, and to be afraid to live in such a state, as a man would be afraid to die in. Ah, souls! you are afraid to die in such and such sins; and will you not be afraid to live in those sins?

(2.) Again, The certainty of death, should cause you to prepare for death. When we would affirm anything to be infallibly true, we say, "As sure as death." "It is appointed," says the apostle, "unto men once to die—but after this the judgment!" Heb. 9:27. [Psalm 89:48; Job 30:23; Eccles. 12:5.] "Once," implies two things—

[1.] A certainty — it shall be;

[2.] A singularity — it will be but once.

"What man lives—who shall not see death?" says the psalmist; that is, no man lives and shall not see death. In Job the grave is called "the house appointed for all the living." The learned call death, "our long home," where men must abide for a long time, even until the resurrection. To live without fear of death—is to die living! To labor not to die—is labor in vain. Death has for its motto, "I yield to none!" It is decreed that all must die. Every man's death-day is his doom's-day.

The Jews have a saying: "In the graveyard are to be seen skulls of all sizes;" that is, death comes on the young as well as the old; the lot is fallen upon all, and therefore all must die. All men are made of one mold and matter, "Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return," Gen. 3:19. "All have sinned, are fallen short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23; and therefore death must pass upon all.

(3.) The uncertainty of the time of your death, should cause you with open mouth to be in a constant readiness and preparedness for death. No man knows when he shall die, nor what kind of death he shall die—whether a natural or a violent death. Augustus died in a compliment, Tiberius died in a deception, Galba died with a sentence, Vespasian died with a jest! Zeuxes died laughing at the picture of an old woman, which he drew with his own hand! Sophocles was choked with the pit in a grape! Diodorus the logician died for shame that he could not answer a silly question propounded at the dinner table! Joannes Masius preaching upon the raising of the woman of Naomi's son from the dead, within three hours after, died himself! Felix, Earl of Wurtemburgh, sitting at supper with many of his friends, some at the table fell into discourse about Luther, and the people's general receiving of his doctrine, upon which the Earl swore a great oath, "that before he died he would ride up to the spurs in the blood of Lutherans;" but the very same night God stretched out his hand so against him, that he choked to death on his own blood! Bibulus, a Roman general, while riding in triumph

in all his glory—a tile fell from a house in the street, and beat out his brains!

(4.) Consider, in the last place—That it is a solemn thing to die. Death is a solemn parting of two near friends—soul and body. Remember, all other preparations are to no purpose, if a man is not prepared to die. What will it avail a man to prepare this and that for his children, kindred, or friends, etc., when he has made no preparations for his soul, for his eternal well-being? As death leaves you—so judgment shall find you! As the judgment finds you—so shall eternity keep you! If death takes you before you expect it, and are prepared for it, it will be the more terrible to you; it will cause your countenance to be changed, your thoughts to be troubled, your loins to be loosed, and your knees to be dashed one against another. [He who prepares for his body and friends—but neglects his soul, is like him who prepares for his slave—but neglects his wife.] Oh the hell of horrors and terrors which attend those souls who have their greatest work to do when they come to die! Therefore, as you love your souls—and as you would be happy in death—and everlastingly blessed after death—prepare for death! [When I was young, says Seneca the heathen, I then studied the art of living well; when old age came upon me, I then studied the art of dying well.]

See that you build upon nothing below Christ! See that you have a real interest in Christ; see that you die daily to sin, to the world, and to your own righteousness. See that conscience is always waking,

speaking, and tender. See that Christ be your Lord and Master. See that all reckonings stand right between the Lord and your souls. See that you are fruitful, faithful, and watchful—and then your dying-day shall be to you as the day of harvest to the farmer, as the day of deliverance to the prisoner, as the day of coronation to the king, and as the day of marriage to the bride. Your dying-day shall be a day of triumph and exaltation, a day of freedom and consolation, a day of rest and satisfaction! Then the Lord Jesus shall be as honey in the mouth, ointment in the nostrils, music in the ear, and a jubilee in the heart.

4. The last use then is this—If a believer's last day is his best day, then by the rule of contraries—a wicked man's last day must be his worst day, for he must there face judgment with all the sins of his life. [A great man wrote thus a little before his death: "Hope and fortune farewell."] Death shall put an end to all the benefits and comforts that now you enjoy. Now you must say, "Honors, friends, pleasures, riches, credit, etc., farewell forever! I shall never have one more happy moment! I shall never be merry again! My sun is set, my glass is out, my hopes fail, my heart fails; all offers of grace are past, the Spirit will never more strive with me, free grace will never more move me, the brazen serpent shall never more be held forth! Death will be an inlet to judgment, yes, to an eternity of misery! [Sigismund the emperor and Louis the Eleventh of France straitly charged all their servants that they should not dare to name that bitter word

'death' when they saw them sick, so dreadful were the very thoughts of death to them.]

What the voice of God was to Adam upon eating the forbidden fruit; what the coming of the flood was to the profane men of the old world; what the waters of the Red Sea were to Pharaoh and his army; what the fire from heaven was to the captains who came up against Elijah; what the burning furnace was to those who cast in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—the same will be the day of death to profane wicked souls.

Ah, sinners! my prayer for you shall be, that the Lord would awaken you, and set up a choice light in your souls, that you may see where you are, and what you are; that he would grant you to break off your sins by repentance, and give you a saving interest in himself; so that "for you to live may be Christ, and to die may be gain," Phil. 1:21; that in life and death Christ may be advantage to you; and that death may be the funeral of all your sins and sorrows, and an inlet to all that joy and pleasure, that blessedness and happiness—which is at God's right hand!

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