

THOMAS BROOKS (1608-1680)

A BELIEVER'S LAST DAY HIS BEST DAY

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

This text is taken from the 1657 edition as edited by Grace Gems (www.gracegems.org), which has been carefully compared to the original to preserve the author's words and meaning. In this edition, we have modernized punctuation and added headings and footnotes for biographies and archaic words.

The original title, A Believer's Last Day Is His Best Day, appeared in 1651-52. It passed through a great number of editions during the ten subsequent years and onward, though the various reprints are not designated in the title pages. It is often found as an appendix to Heaven on Earth. Perhaps nothing proves more completely the popularity of Brooks than the large circulation of such messages as this and "String of Pearls," both of which were funeral sermons.

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A BELIEVER'S LAST DAY HIS BEST DAY

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

Psalm 73:24

Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Psalm 97:11

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. 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, 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. "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (Psa 103:15). Therefore, do not mourn as people "without hope," neither be like Rachel, who would "not be comforted" (Mat 2:19). To that purpose take this counsel.

1. 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, he "arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat" (2Sa 12:20). When his servants questioned this action, he answers, "Now [that] he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" (12:23).

Just so, when Aaron's sons were destroyed by fire for their offering up strange fire, Aaron holds his peace; he bridled his passions, and submitted sweetly and quietly to divine justice (Lev 10:22-23). Just so, when it was told Anaxagoras that both his sons were dead (which were all he had), 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 that are likely to befall them while they live.

2. 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 that bites and stings (2Co 4:16-18; Heb 10:34; 11:24-26, 35; 12:1-3).

Basil³ speaks of some martyrs who were cast out naked all night 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."

Galen⁴ writes of a fish called *uranoscopos*, which has but one eye, 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.

"A man," says Chrysostom,⁵ "who would dwell in the contemplation of heaven, would be loath to come out of it." "Nay," says Augustine,⁶ "a man might age himself in the contemplation of heaven, and sooner grow old than weary."

3. Compare your mercies and your losses together, and you shall find that your mercies will wonderfully outweigh your losses. You have lost one mercy, yet you still 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 favour of God, pardon of sin, peace of conscience, hopes of heaven, etc.? Besides, you enjoy many temporal mercies that many of the precious sons of Zion lacked.

strange fire – fire for the altar of the Tabernacle brought at their own initiative, not according to the holy commandment of God.

² Anaxagoras (c. 510 - c. 428 BC) – pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who formulated theories about meteors and planets.

Basil the Great (AD c. 330-379) – one of three theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers; best remembered for his contribution to the development of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity; withstood the Arian party, which denied the deity of Christ.

⁴ Galen (AD 129 - c. 200/216) – accomplished Greek physician, surgeon, and philosopher in the Roman Empire.

⁵ John **Chrysostom** (c. 347-407) – Bishop of Constantinople, an important Early Church Father. He is known for his eloquence in preaching and his denunciation of abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders. (*Greek*: "golden mouthed")

⁶ Aurelius **Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology. Born in Tagaste, North Africa.

- 4. Consider seriously the reasons for God's stripping His people of their nearest and dearest mercies. They are these—
- a. For a trial of the strength and power of their graces. It is not every cross nor every loss that 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 wet to the skin, then he acted like a man void of grace rather than like a man who did excel all others in grace.⁷

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 that 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, 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!" (2Sa 18:33).

b. God passes the sentence of death upon men's dearest mercies so that He Himself may be more feared, and that His precious servants and their counsel may be the better minded and regarded. The Egyptians trembled not under several judgments, nor minded what Moses and Aaron said, until God smote their firstborn—and then they trembled, and then the servants of the Lord and their counsel found better reception with them than formerly. Ah, friends! Has the Lord smitten your firstborn (as I may say)? Then look to it: 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—so that God will be more feared, and that His servants and His services will be more owned, loved, and regarded.

The people of God and His ordinances are to Him 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 that is given to you by an outstretched hand from heaven—does not work this gain, then the next potion will be far more bitter (Joh 5:14)!

c. God passes the sentence of death upon men's nearest and dearest mercies so that He may win them to a more complete and full dependence upon Himself. Man is a creature apt to hang and rest upon creature props. "I looked on my right hand and beheld," says the psalmist, "but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psa 142:4). Well, what does he do, now that all props fail him? Why, now he

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⁷ God tried the strength of Abraham's faith, the strength of Job's patience, the strength of Moses' meekness, 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 that is in a believer (Exo 12:27, 30-31). [Author]

⁸ saints – other believers, as God's holy people (1Co 1:2).

sweetly leans upon God: "I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living" (:5).

Cynaegeirus, an Athenian captain, used great valor in the Persian war. He pursued his enemies who were laden with the rich spoil of his country. They were ready to set sail and be gone, but 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, that they will hold upon one prop, and if God cuts off that, then they will catch hold on another, etc., until God cuts off all their props—and then they will come, rest, and center in God, and say, "All my springs are in thee" (Psa 87:7)!

d. God strips His people of their dearest mercies so that He may work their hearts to a more diligent examination of their own hearts and ways, so that they may say with the church, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD" (Lam 3:40). The Hebrew word rendered "search" signifies to search as you would to find a person in disguise. 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!"

Seneca¹¹ reports that Sextus 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 have you bettered this day?

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

e. God strips His people of their dearest outward mercies so that they may be more compassionate toward those who are, or shall be, in the same condition as themselves. The Jews at this day, in their 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 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 that are tuned one to another: no sooner is one struck but the other trembles.

f. God strips His people of their nearest and dearest outward mercies, so that they may better prize and taste their spiritual and heavenly mercies. Diogenes¹² noted the folly of the

⁹ Persian War (Greco-Persian War) – series of conflicts between the Achaemenid Empire and Greek city-states that started in 499 BC and lasted until 449 BC, a collision between the fractious political world of the Greeks and the enormous empire of the Persians.

¹⁰ springs – cool fresh water streams bubbling up from the earth; sources of strength.

¹¹ **Seneca** (c. 4 BC - AD 65) – Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman.

¹² **Diogenes** (c. 412-404 - 323 BC) – Greek philosopher and one of the founders of Cynic philosophy; born in Sinope, an Ionian colony on the Black Sea.

men of his time: they undervalued the best things but overvalued the worst things. Ah, that this were not the sin and shame of professors ¹³ in these days!

God takes away uncertain riches so that His people may the more prize *certain* riches. God takes away natural strength so that His people may the more prize spiritual strength. God takes away the creature ¹⁴ so that His people may more prize their Savior. Only spiritual things will abide with you in all changes. Spiritual and heavenly things can alone satisfy the soul. The language of a gracious spirit is this: Ah, Lord! As what I have offered to You does not please You without myself; so the good things that I have from You, though they may refresh me, yet they cannot satisfy me without Yourself! (Joh 14:8). "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa 73:25).

5. The 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. God took away the bodily presence of Christ from His disciples, but gave them more abundantly of His spiritual presence, which was far the more choice and sweeter mercy. "I tell you the truth; It is expedient [i.e., beneficial] for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (Joh 16:7). God will always make that word good, "I will not leave you comfortless" (Joh 14:18), or as the Greek has it, "I will not leave you as orphans or fatherless children." No! I will come and comfort you on every side, and I will meet all your needs, and be better to you than all your mercies. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver," etc. (Isa 60:17).

To draw to a close, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death" (Pro 14:32). We should lament over that dead man or woman whom hell harbors, whom the devil devours, whom divine justice torments! But let those departed believers—whom angels accompany and Christ embosoms, and whom all the court of heaven comes forth to welcome—account immortality a mercy, and be grieved that they were so long detained from the sweet company of Christ. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like" theirs (Num 23:10). "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psa 116:15)...

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

¹³ **professors** – those who profess to believe in the Christian faith, but who may not have new hearts.

¹⁴ **creature** – a created thing or person.

A BELIEVER'S LAST DAY HIS BEST DAY

"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." Ecclesiastes 7:1

"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 precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's 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 nativity¹⁵ is the begetting¹⁶ of his misery. "Man that is born of a woman is...full of trouble" and sorrow (Job 14:1). The Hebrew word 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 into the world crying. Before ever the child speaks, he prophesies by his tears of his ensuing sorrows.

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: *A believer's last day is his best day*. His dying-day is better than his birth-day! This will be a very sweet and useful point to all believers.

Doctrine of Hope in Death

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

1. Change of Place

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 might go to his own place" (Act 1:25). A soul out of Christ is not in his place: beneath¹⁷ 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.

¹⁵ **nativity** – birth.

¹⁶ begetting – conception.

¹⁷ beneath – hell.

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2Co 5:8). A believer is not in his place at present. 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 to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phi 1:23)—that is, I would gladly weigh anchor, hoist sail, and come home. And upon this account, those precious souls groaned for deliverance, "In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2Co 5:2). What is the reason? Why, it is this: "whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" (5:6). 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. Change of Company

The second thing that demonstrates the truth asserted is this: death is a change of company. The best that breathes in this world must live with the wicked, and converse with the wicked. And this is a part of their misery; it is their hell on this side of heaven. This stuck upon the spirit of David: "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar" (Psa 120:5). And so Jeremiah 9:2, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men." This was that which did vex and tear Lot's righteous soul: he "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2Pe 2:7-8).

Oh, death is a change of company. A man changes *from* the company of profane persons, of vile persons, *for* the company of angels; and the company of weak Christians for the company of just men made perfect. This is a remarkable scripture,

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 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 be granted that a believer's dying-day is better than his birth-day.

3. Change of Employment

Death is a change of employment. A believing soul, when he dies, changes his work and employment. The work of a believer in this world lies in praying, groaning, sighing, mourning, wrestling, and fighting. 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. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the

¹⁸ I have read of a good gentlewoman who, being near death, cried out, "Lord, let me not go to hell where the wicked are, for thou knowest that I never loved their company while in the time of life!" [Author]

darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph 6:12). ¹⁹ The truth is, the very life of a believer is a continual warfare, and his business is to be in the field [of battle] always. Believers have to deal with subtle enemies, malicious enemies, vigilant enemies, and untiring enemies. They have to deal with subtle, malicious, wakeful, and watchful enemies—with such enemies that 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 most patient man in the world; and Joshua, the most courageous man in the world; and Paul, the best apostle in the world. A Christian's life is a warfare. Job says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (Job 14:14). Job says in effect, "I am still a-fighting with lusts and corruptions within, and with devils and men abroad!" And in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." And in 2 Timothy 2:4, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

Death is a change of employment. It changes this hard service—this work that lies in mourning, wrestling, and fighting—for rejoicing and singing hallelujahs to the Almighty! Now no longer prayers, but praises! Now 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 is the shroud that wipes away all tears from the believer's eyes (Rev 7:17)!

4. Change of Enjoyments

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

a. Obscure to sweet

Death is a change of our more dark and obscure enjoyment of God, for a more clear and sweet enjoyment of God. The best believer who breathes in this world—who sees and enjoys most of God and the visions of His glory—yet he does not enjoy God so clearly, because he is still 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 glass: "For 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" (1Co 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 [therefore] 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 so that we cannot see Him.

Plutarch²⁰ tells of Eudoxus,²¹ that he would be willing to be burnt up presently by the sun, if so he might be admitted to come so near it as to learn the nature of it. This is upon

¹⁹ A valiant Roman emperor's motto was, "No fight—no pay!" Just so, I say, "No fight—no crown! No fight—no heaven!" [Author]

²⁰ Plutarch (c. AD 46-120) – Greek historian, biographer, essayist, and follower of Plato.

the heart of believers: Lord, let us be burnt up, so we may see Thee more in all Thy glorious manifestations; let us be poor, let us be anything, so that we may be taken up into a more clear enjoyment of Thyself. Chrysostom professed 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 face to face Whom our souls do dearly love!" Oh, but in heaven saints shall have a clear vision of God: there are no clouds or mists in heaven!

b. Imperfect to perfect

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. "How little a portion is heard" of God, and of that which is heard, how little a portion is understood (Job 26:14)!

It is an excellent expression of Augustine, "The glorious things of heaven are so many that they exceed number; so precious that they exceed estimation; so great that they exceed measure!" Bernard²² 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 Corinthians 13:12, "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 we might be filled with the fullness of God! There are no complaints in heaven, because there are no needs.

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 upon grace, but in heaven they shall receive glory upon 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; but 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 such splendor and glory, that no eye can behold it but a glorified eye.

The best of Christians are able to take in but little of God. Their hearts are like a glass vial that cannot be filled quickly, though it lies in the midst of the sea, where all fullness is. Their hearts are like the widow's vessel, which could receive but a little oil (2Ki 4:2ff). Sin,

²¹ **Eudoxus** of Cnidus (c. 390 - c. 337 BC) – ancient Greek astronomer, mathematician, scholar, and student of Archytas and Plato (424-348 BC).

²² **Bernard** of Clairvaux (1090-1153) – French monk known for his devotion; best known theologian of his day.

the world, and creatures do take up so much room in the best hearts, that God gives out Himself only little by little, as parents give sweets to their children. But in heaven God will communicate Himself fully and all at once to the soul! Grace shall then be swallowed up of glory (2Co 5:4)!

c. Transient to permanent

Death is a change from an inconstant and transient enjoyment of God to 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" (Psa 10:1); 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 (Mal 4:2) hides His face, all creature-comforts cannot make up for the lack of His countenance.²³

David sometimes could say that God was his portion, his salvation, his strong tower (Psa 73:26; 18:2; 61:3), and what not; and yet shortly he cries out, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" (Psa 42:5). In one place he says, "I shall never be moved [shaken]"; and yet presently it follows, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled" (Psa 30:6-7). 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—all tears shall then be wiped away. That is a sweet word, "And so shall we be ever with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1Th 4:17-18). 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 Him.

Oh, what a glorious change is this! These things should make us long for our dying-day, and account this present life but a lingering death.

5. Change of Transience

Death is a change that puts an end to all change. 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. The comforts of a man now are smiling, the next hour they are dying. Everything temporal is as transitory as a rapid torrent, a ship, a bird, an arrow, a runner who passes by. Man himself, the king of these out-

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²³ 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 that place cannot limit, music that time cannot vanish away, fragrances that are never dissipated, a feast that is never consumed, a blessing that eternity bestows. Eternity shall never see an end."—Augustine

ward comforts, what is he but a mere nothing?—the dream of a dream, a shadow, a bubble, a flash, a blast. Death puts an end to all external changes. There shall be no more sickness, no more complaints, no more needs, etc.²⁴

Death also puts an end to all *internal* changes. The Lord smiles upon the soul and, at another time, He frowns upon the soul. God gives assistance to conquer sin and then, 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. Job was heroic in the midst of storms and spoke 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—then a man would have thought him an incarnate devil by his cursing. But death puts an end to internal as well as external changes. Then the soul shall be tempted no more, be foiled no more, sin no more. So, 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 that it had long groaned under (Lev 25:9-10). The heathens held death to be man's *summum bonum*, his chief good. When one of them had built the temple at Delphos, ²⁵ he asked of Apollo²⁶ to reward him with 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. Change of Rest

Death is a change that brings the soul to an eternal rest. Death is the bringing of the soul to bed. 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. While we are here in this present world, the soul is in a continual agitation. The godliest man in the world—who is highest and clearest in his enjoyments of God—is too often like Noah's dove, which found no rest (Gen 8:9). Either he lacks some temporal mercy or some spiritual mercy, and he will do so until his soul is swallowed up in the everlasting enjoyments of God! Death brings a man to an unchangeable rest!

The Lord says to write it down as a thing of worth and weight, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." Why? "That they may rest from their labours" (Rev 14:13). Death brings the soul to unchangeable rest. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds" (Isa 57:1-2).

²⁴ "There is nothing excellent that is not perpetual," said Gregory Nazianzen (c. 330-389) [4th century Archbishop of Constantinople, Cappadocian father influential in the development of the orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity]. Philosophers could say that he was never a happy man who might afterwards become miserable. Eternity is an existence that is perpetual. [Author]

Delphos (or Delos) – island in the Aegean Sea; important mythological and historical site in Greece.
Olympian Greek mythology made it the birthplace of the god Apollo. The temple of Apollo dates from the 6th century BC.

²⁶ **Apollo** – ancient Greek and Roman pagan deity; the god of light, healing, music, and manly beauty.

Oh, death is a change that brings a soul to unchangeable rest; it brings a soul to bed. This was that which made Paul "desire to depart, and to be with Christ" (Phi 1:23), and the Corinthians to groan for deliverance (2Co 5:2).²⁷

It was a notable saying of Cooper, "Many a day have I sought death with tears. Not out of impatience or distrust, 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 death²⁸ that 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. Death to a believer is an entrance into Abraham's bosom, into paradise, into the New Jerusalem, into the joy of his Lord (Luk 16:23; 23:43; Rev 3:12; 21:2; Mat 25:21).

Thus 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. 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.

Practical Application

1. Mourn Moderately

The first use of this doctrine shall be, Never mourn immoderately at the death of any believer, even if he is the most excellent and useful who ever lived. Death is to them the greatest gain.²⁹ It speaks out much selfishness in us to be more absorbed with the gain and benefit that 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 level than they do now.

Remember this: death does in a moment for a man that which no graces, duties, nor any ordinances could do for him in all his lifetime! Death frees a man from those diseases, corruptions, and temptations, that no duties, graces, or ordinances could do. When Abraham came to mourn and "weep" for his deceased Sarah, he mourned moderately for her (Gen 23:2),30 not because she was old and worn, but because her dying-day was her best day. When Luther, 31 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, preached his child's fu-

²⁷ Laurence Saunders (1519-1555), kissing the stake, said, "Welcome the cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life." [English Protestant martyr; educated at Eton and Cambridge. He warned his congregations against the popish religion of Queen Mary, was arrested, convicted of heresy, and burned at the stake on February 8, 1555.] Faninus, the Italian martyr, kissed him who brought him word of his execution. [Author]

²⁸ messenger of death – flame of fire as they were being burned at the stake for their faith in Christ. (Many Protestants were put to death in England during the 1500s.)

²⁹ Death is not the death of the man, but the death of his sin. [Author]

³⁰ The Hebrew word-form for "weep" signifies to weep but a little.

³¹ Martin Luther (1483-1546) – German monk, theologian, and university professor whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation, changing the course of western civilization.

neral sermon upon this subject, "The will of the Lord be done." He and his wife then laid their own child in the grave. 32

That is the first use: let us not mourn immoderately for any believer's death.

2. Do Not Fear Death

The next use is, Do not fear death. Compose your spirits. Say not of death as that wicked prince Ahab said to the prophet, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1Ki 21:20). 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, blesses and kisses them, gathers up his feet into his bed, and dies (Gen 49:33). Moses, that morning when the messenger came to him and told him he must die, goes up the hill, sees the land of Canaan at a distance, and dies (Deu 34:1-5). Joseph built his sepulcher in his own garden. Some philosophers had their graves always open before their gates, so 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 to help you in this, remember that to be unwilling to die is not such a slight matter as some make it. There is much reproach cast upon God by believers being unwilling to die. You talk much of God, heaven, and glory—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?

a. Five aids to not fearing

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 a father's hands, the child does not fear. Granted that death is a sword; yet why should the child be afraid when it is in the Father's hand, Who will be sure to handle it so as He shall not hurt or harm by it.
- 3) Remember that Christ's death is a death-conquering death.³³ 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.

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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 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, "The whole life of a man should be nothing else but a meditation on death" (see Deu 32:29). Alexander the Great asked an Indian philosopher how long a man should live; he answered, "Until he thinks it better to die than to live." [Author]

Death is a fall that came by a Fall.³⁴ 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 (Rom 5:14). Oh! But the Lord Jesus has, as it were, disarmed death and triumphed over it. He has taken away its sting, so that it cannot harm us. We may play with it and put it into our bosoms, as we may a snake whose sting is pulled out. Upon this consideration, the apostle challenges death, out-braves death, and bids death do his worst: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 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 [before His incarnation], "These heavenly robes are too good for Me to take 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, 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 and thus 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? (Jer 31:32). 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 creatures of inferior nature who only 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 be when they are near death, because then they are near heaven, near their eternal home!

5) Are you not complete in Christ?³⁵ 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" (Col 2:10). In Revelation 14:4-5, they are said to be "without fault be-

³³ 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 (c. AD 200 - 258) [Bishop of Carthage and a notable early Christian writer].

[&]quot;I fear not to die, but I fear to be damned," said one.

Luther, speaking of the blood of Christ, said, "One little drop is of more worth than heaven and earth. If the souls under the altar cry, 'How long, O Lord?' (Rev 6:9-10), 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?"

[&]quot;I have no fear but of old age," said Zeno (c. 334 - c. 262 BC) [Hellenistic philosopher from Citium, Cyprus]. [Author]

³⁴ a Fall – when Adam rebelled against God and plunged the world into sin, death, and condemnation (Gen 2:17; 3:6-19).

^{35 &}quot;One Christ will be to you instead of all things else, because in Him are all good things to be found."—

Augustine

fore the throne of God"; and in Song of Solomon 4:7, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." A believer, when he dies, 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 [the Church] 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" (Psa 45:2). The saints are as that tree of paradise (Gen 3:6): 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.

b. The Lord's payday

Consider that the saints' dying-day is to them the Lord's payday. 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.³⁶ Then they shall be paid and recompensed³⁷ for all public service, all family service, and all closet service.³⁸ Then a crown shall be set upon their heads, 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 servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat 25:23). 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 those of Revelation 2:10; 3:4, 12, 22; and 7:16-17. Now God will give them gold for brass, 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!

c. Misery leads to glory

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.³⁹ Christ's passion-week was before His ascension-day; none passes to paradise but by burning seraphim (Isa 6:2, 4); 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.⁴⁰ There is no passing into paradise but under the flaming sword of this angel of 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,⁴¹ 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

³⁶ 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. [Author]

³⁷ **recompensed** – compensated for a service, loss, or wrong.

³⁸ **closet service** – personal worship rendered to the Lord in privacy.

³⁹ Weeping-cross – estate in Staffordshire, England. The author uses this unique name to represent the suffering a believer must pass through in this world.

⁴⁰ 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. [Author]

⁴¹ winding-sheet – cloth in which the body of a dead person is wrapped for burial.

blessed than your birth. 42 Every man is willing to go to his home, though the way that 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!

d. Release

Consider that while we are in this world, our weak, imperfect, and diseased bodies cast chains, fetters, restraints, hindrances, and impediments upon the soul, such that the soul is hindered from many high and noble actings. In heaven, the soul works clearer, understands better, discourses wiser, rejoices louder, loves nobler, desires purer, and hopes stronger than it can do here. 43

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.⁴⁴

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. This should make us willing to die, and to long for that day wherein our bodies shall be glorified.

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—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 that is always feeding at the root of our lives. This should make death more desirable than life.

e. The saints' example

Dwell much upon the readiness and willingness of other saints to die. Good old Sime-on—having first laid Christ in his heart and then taking him up in his arms—he sings, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luk 2:28-30). [After death, one might say,] I have lived enough, I now have my [real] life; I have longed enough, I now have my [true] love; I have seen enough, I now have my [real] sight; I have served enough, I now have my reward; I have sorrowed enough, I now have my joy.

Just so, the believing Corinthians groaned earnestly to be clothed with their house that is from heaven; they groaned that mortality might be swallowed up of life, and that they

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⁴² Death to a believer is the gate of heaven, the door of life. It conveys us out of the wilderness into Canaan, out of a troublesome sea into a quiet haven (Joh 14:1-3). [Author]

⁴³ When Plato (424-348 BC) saw one over-indulgent to his body by high feeding it, he asked him what he meant by making his prison so strong. [Author]

⁴⁴ The Greeks call the body the soul's chain, the soul's sepulcher. [Author]

might "be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2Co 5:4, 8). Just so, Paul desires earnestly "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phi 1:23). Just so, the saints look for and hasten "the coming of the day of God" (2Pe 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, O Lord?" (Rev 6:9-10).

So Paula, that noble lady, when one did read to her Song of Solomon 2:11, "The winter is past...the singing of birds has come," she replied, "Yes, the singing of birds has come" and she went singing into heaven. Just so, Mr. Jewel 45 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 the friends of another, thinking her to be in a swoon a little before her end, 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." So Mr. Bolton (1572-1631), 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."46

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

f. The Lord's presence

Consider this: the Lord will not leave you, but be with you in that dying hour. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psa 23:4). Just so, the apostle, "Let your conversation⁴⁷ be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for [God] hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). There are five negatives in the Greek to assure God's people that He will never forsake them. And five times in Scripture is this precious promise renewed, so 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?⁴⁸

⁴⁵ John Jewel (1522-1571) – Bishop of Salisbury in the Church of England, one of the leaders of the Reform in that church. Born in Devonshire, educated at Oxford.

⁴⁶ "Let all the devils in hell 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."—Augustine

⁴⁷ **conversation** – conduct; behavior.

⁴⁸ Maximilian, the emperor, was so delighted with that sentence, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31), that he caused it to be written upon the walls in most of the rooms of his palace. [Author]

3. Prepare for Death

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 for the eternal world? It was a sad speech of Cesare Borgia, who being on his death-bed 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, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psa 90:12).

Follow the counsel of the prophet Jeremiah, "Give glory to the LORD your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while ye look [hope] for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness" (Jer 13:16). Old age is the dark mountain that makes a broad way narrow and a plain way cragged. It is a high point of heavenly wisdom to consider our latter end: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end" (Deu 32:29). 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.

a. Unpreparedness risks great loss

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. Someone once said, "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." Bede⁵¹ tells a story of a certain great man who was admonished in his sickness to repent, who answered 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 every day what 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?

b. Certainty of death

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)! "It is appointed" signifies

⁴⁹ Cesare Borgia (1475-1507) – Italian nobleman, politician, and cardinal whose fight for power was a major inspiration for *The Prince* by Machiavelli. He was the son of Pope Alexander VI and the first person to resign a cardinalcy.

⁵⁰ **cragged** – marked by steep, rugged projections of rock.

⁵¹ **Bede** (672-735) – English Benedictine monk in what has become modern day England, author, teacher, and scholar. He wrote biblical commentaries, theological works, and the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Born near present day Sunderland.

that it lies in a man's lot. ⁵² "Once" implies two things: 1) a certainty – it shall be, 2) a singularity – it shall be but once.

"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" asks the psalmist (Psa 89:48); that is, no man lives and shall not see death. In Job, the grave is called "the house appointed for all living" (Job 30:23). The learned call death our "long home" (Ecc 12:5), 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." Death comes on the young as well as the old. The lot is fallen⁵³ upon all, and therefore all must die. All men are made of one mold and matter, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19). "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23); and therefore death must pass upon all.

c. Uncertainty of the time

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. Augustus⁵⁴ 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 that he had drawn with his own hand! Sophocles was choked with the pit of 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 widow of Nain's son from the dead (Luk 7:11-15), within three hours after died himself! Felix, Earl of Wurtemburgh, sitting at supper with many of his friends, fell into discourse with some at the table 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! ⁵⁵

⁵⁴ **Augustus Caesar** (63 BC - AD 14) – first emperor of the Roman Empire from 27 BC to his death in AD 14. Tiberius (42 BC - AD 37) – Roman emperor from AD 14 to 37.

Galba (3 BC - AD 69) – Roman emperor for seven months from AD 68 to 69, killed by Otho when Galba passed him over as his successor.

Vespasian (AD 9 - 79) – Roman emperor from AD 69-79, the fourth in the Year of the Four Emperors. He subjugated Judaea during the Jewish rebellion of 66.

Zeuxes – general and official in the service of the Seleucid king Antiochus III the Great at the end of the third century BC.

Sophocles (c. 497/6 - 406/5 BC) – ancient Greek tragedian of Athens, who wrote more than 120 plays. **Diodorus** Cronus (died c. 284 BC) – Greek philosopher and dialectician connected to the Megarian school, notable for logic innovations.

⁵² a man's lot – circumstances prescribed by God's sovereign rule over all things and people.

⁵³ **lot is fallen** – God's sovereign decree that will certainly come to pass.

⁵⁵ Marcus Calpurnius **Bibulus** (c. 102 - 48 BC) – politician of the Roman Republic who served in several magisterial positions alongside Julius Caesar and developed a life-long enmity towards him.

d. Solemnity

Consider 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 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 you are unprepared 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. Oh, the hell of horrors and terrors that attends 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!

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. Worst Day for the Wicked

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 lie down with ⁵⁸ 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: 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!" (Num 21:8-9). Death will be an inlet to judgment; yes, to an eternity of misery!⁵⁹

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

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⁵⁶ He who prepares for his body and friends, but neglects his soul, is like him who prepares for his slave, but neglects his wife. [Author]

⁵⁷ 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. [Author]

⁵⁸ lie down with – his sins will condemn him at the Judgment.

⁵⁹ Sigismund (1368-1437), Holy Roman Emperor, and Louis XI of France (1423-1483) 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. [Author]

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 (Gen 3:8; 7:23; Exo 14:23-28; 2Ki 1:9-10; Dan 3:19-22).

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 (Phi 1:21). [My prayer for you is] 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!

