

The World Passeth Away

By Horatius Bonar

THE things that are seen are temporal. Ours is a dying world, and here we have no continuing city. But a few years,—it may be less,—and all things here are changed. But a few years,—it may be less,—and the Lord shall have come, and the last trumpet shall have sounded, and the great sentence shall have been pronounced upon each of the sons of men.

There is a world that passeth not away. It is fair and glorious. It is called “the inheritance in light.” It is bright with the love of God, and with the joy of heaven. “The Lamb is the light thereof.” Its gates are of pearl; they are always open. And as we tell men of this wondrous city, we tell them to enter in.

The Book of Revelation tells us the story of earth's vanity: “A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers and musicians, and of pipers and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee. And no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee” (18:21-22).

Such is the day that is coming on the world, and such is the doom overhanging earth,—a doom dimly foreshadowed by the sad commercial disasters that have often sent sorrow into so many hearts, and desolation into so many homes.

An old minister—now two hundred years since—lay dying. His fourscore years were well-nigh completed. He had been tossed on many a wave, from England to America, from America to England, again from England to America. At Boston he lay dying, full of faith and love. The evening before his death, as he lay all but speechless, his daughter asked him how it was with him. He lifted up his dying hands, and with his dying lips simply said, “Vanishing things, vanishing things!” We repeat his solemn words, and, pointing to the world, with all the vanities on which vain man sets his heart, say, “Vanishing things!”

“The world passeth away.” This is our message.

Like a dream of the night. We lie down to rest; we fall asleep; we dream; we awake at morn; and lo, all is fled that in our dream seemed so stable and so pleasant! So hastes the world away. O child of mortality, have you no brighter world beyond?

Like the mist of the morning. The night brings down the mists upon the hills,—the vapor covers the valleys; the sun rises, all has passed off,—hill and vale are clear. So the world passeth off, and is seen no more. O man, will you embrace a world like this? Will you lie down upon a mist, and say, This is my home?

Like a shadow. There is nothing more unreal than a shadow. It has no substance, no being. It is dark, it is a figure, it has motion, that is all! Such is the world. O man will you chase a shadow? What will a shadow do for you?

Like a wave of the sea. It rises, falls, and is seen no more. Such is the history of a wave. Such is the story of the world. O man will you make a wave your portion? Have you no better pillow on which to lay your wearied head than this? A poor world this for human heart to love, for an immortal soul to be filled with!

Like a rainbow. The sun throws its colors on a cloud, and for a few minutes all is brilliant. But the cloud shifts, and the brilliance is all gone. Such is the world. With all its beauty and brightness; with all its honors and pleasures; with all its mirth and madness; with all its pomp and luxury; with all its revelry and riot; with all its hopes and flatteries; with all its love and laughter; with all its songs and splendor; with all its gems and gold,—it vanishes. And the cloud that knew the rainbow knows it no more. O man, is a passing world like this all that you have for an inheritance?

Like a flower. Beautiful, very beautiful; fragrant, very fragrant, are the summer flowers. But they wither away. So fades the world from before our eyes. While we are looking at it, and admiring it, behold, it is gone! No trace is left of all its loveliness but a little dust! O man, can you feed on flowers? Can you dote on that which is but for an hour? You were made for eternity; and only that which is eternal can be your portion or your resting place. The things that perish with the using only mock your longings. They cannot fill you;

and even if they filled, they cannot abide. Mortality is written on all things here; immortality belongs only to the world to come,—to that new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Like a ship at sea. With all its sails set, and a fresh breeze blowing, the vessel comes into sight, passes before our eye in the distance, and then disappears. So comes, so goes, so vanishes away this present world, with all that it contains. A few hours within sight, then gone! The wide sea o'er which it sailed as calm or as stormy as before; no trace anywhere of all the life or motion or beauty which was passing over it! O man, is that vanishing world thy only dwelling-place? Are all thy treasures, thy hopes, thy joys laid up there? Where will all these be when thou goest down to the tomb? Or where wilt thou be when these things leave thee, and thou art stripped of all the inheritance which thou art ever to have for eternity? It is a poor heritage at the best, and its short duration makes it poorer still. Oh, choose the better part, which shall not be taken from thee!

Like a tent in the desert. They who have travelled over the Arabian sands know what this means. At sunset a little speck of white seems to rise out of the barren waste. It is a traveller's tent. At sunrise it disappears. Both it and its inhabitant are gone. The wilderness is as lonely as before. Such is the world. To-day it shows itself; to-morrow it disappears. O man, born of a woman, is that thy stay and thy home? Wilt thou say of it, "This is my rest," an everlasting rest, remaining for the people of God?

THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY. This is the message from heaven. All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field.

THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY. But God ever liveth. He is from everlasting to everlasting; the King eternal and immortal.

THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY. But man is immortal. Eternity lies before each son of Adam as the duration of his lifetime. In light or in darkness for ever! In joy or in sorrow for ever!

THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY. What then? This is the question that so deeply concerns man. If the world is to vanish away, and man is to live for ever, of what importance is it to know where and what we are to be for ever! A celebrated physician, trying to cheer a desponding patient, said to him, "Treat life as a plaything." It was wretched counsel. For life is no plaything, and time is no child's toy, to be flung away. Life here is the beginning of the life which has no end; and time is but the gateway of eternity.

What then? Thou must, O man, make sure of a home in that world into which thou art so soon to pass. Thou must not pass out of this tent without making sure of the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. When thou hast done this thou canst lie down upon thy deathbed in peace. One who had lived a worldly life at last lay down to die; and when about to pass away he uttered these terrible words, "I am dying, and I don't know where I am going." Another in similar circumstances cried out, "I am within an hour of eternity and all is dark." O man of earth, it is time to awake!

"How can I make sure?" you ask. God has long since answered that question, and His answer is recorded for all ages: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! I have never done anything else," you say. If that be really true, then, as the Lord liveth, thou art a saved man. But is it really so? Has thy life been the life of a saved man? No, verily. It has been a life wholly given to vanity. Then as the Lord God of Israel liveth, and as thy soul liveth, thou hast not believed, and thou art not yet saved.

"Have I then no work to work in this great matter of my pardon?" None. What work canst thou work? What work of thine can buy forgiveness, or make thee fit for the Divine favor? What work has God bidden thee work in order to obtain salvation? None. His Word is very plain, and easy to be understood: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5)

There is but one work by which a man can be saved. That work is not thine, but the work of the Son of God. That work is finished,—neither to be taken from nor added to,—perfect through all ages,—and presented by Himself to you, that you may avail yourself of it and be saved.

"And is that work available for me just as I am?" It is. God has brought it to your door; and your only way of honouring it is by accepting it for yourself, and taking it as the one basis of your eternal hope. We honor the Father when we consent to be saved entirely by the finished work of His Son; and we honor the Son when we consent to take His one finished work in the room of all our works; and we honour the Holy

Spirit, whose office is to glorify Christ, when we hear what He saith to us concerning that work finished “once for all” upon the cross.

Forgiveness is through the man Christ Jesus, who is Son of God as well as Son of man! This is our message. Forgiveness through the one work of sin-bearing which He accomplished for sinners upon earth. Forgiveness to the worst and wickedest, to the farthest off from God whom this earth contains. Forgiveness of the largest, fullest, completest kind; without stint, or exception, or condition, or the possibility of revocation! Forgiveness free and undeserved,—free as the love of God, free as the gift of His beloved Son. Forgiveness ungrudged and unrestrained,—whole-hearted and joyful, as the forgiveness of the father falling on the neck of the prodigal! Forgiveness simply in believing; for, “by Him all that believe are justified from all things.”

Could salvation be made more free? Could forgiveness be brought nearer? Could God in any way more fully show His earnest desire that you should not be lost, but saved,—that you should not die, but live?

In the cross there is salvation—no-where else. No failure of this world's hopes can quench the hope which it reveals. It shines brightest in the evil day. In the day of darkening prospects, of thickening sorrows, of heavy burdens, of pressing cares,—when friends depart, when riches fly away, when disease oppresses us, when poverty knocks at our door,—then the cross shines out, and tells us of a light beyond this world's darkness, the Light of Him who is the light of the world.