

A

Funeral Sermon

Occasson'd by the

DEATH

Of the Reverend

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Late Minister of the Gospel at

Hempstead in Hartfordshire.

Preach'd *Decemb. the 24th*, 1708.

ECCLES. IX. 5.

For the Living know that they shall die.

IT has not only been the Observation of those who liv'd before us, that all things in this World vary and are subject to change, but every one experiences the Truth of it. And tho we have not had either the Capacity or the Opportunity, with which the wisest of Men was favour'd, to search into the Nature of all those Creatures, which compose the vast System of the World; yet there are scarce any of us so little acquainted with our selves, or the World we live in, but have reason to pronounce with *Solomon*, that all we meet with here is *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

We cannot find enough in our selves to render us happy, and 'tis impossible that the Creatures which are subject to *Vanity* should make us so. Uncertainty is inscrib'd upon all things in this World; and as for Life it self, one of the most valuable Blessings, we are not sure of enjoying it for a moment to come: For, as *St. James* observes, *What is your Life? 'tis even a Vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away.*¹

Does it not then equally deserve our Compassion and Wonder, that the generality of People should stupidly neglect their Preparation for Death? tho they know as certainly that they shall die as that they now live, and that 'tis not in the Power of any Mortal to protract a short Life, or prevent a sudden Death. *The Living know that they shall die*; this is a Truth that Men need not have prov'd to 'em by a long train of Reasoning: The Records of the Grave are a standing Evidence of Man's Mortality; and every day convinces us, *That Man in his best Estate is altogether Vanity*; and that Men indefinitely, one as well as another, *go to their long Home, and the Mourners go about the Streets*. Yet many live at such a rate, as if this Life wou'd never have an end, and as if the other wou'd never begin; tho there is not a Man living but knows he shall die. This is a Truth that the World has been acquainted with above five thousand years: and lest any should be so vain as to imagine that they are exempted from the Common Law of Mortality, God does frequently admonish 'em, by Diseases and Decays in their Bodies, that this earthly House of their Tabernacle must shortly be dissolv'd and crumble into Dust. *The Living know that they shall die.*

The necessity of Dying is equally invincible to all; *What Man is he that liveth, and shall not see Death? Shall he deliver his Soul from the Hand of the Grave? Selah.*² *Your Fathers, where are they? And the Prophets, do they live for ever?*³ *As all things come alike to all*, as the *Wise-Man* observes, and *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*,⁴ as to the good and evil things of this Life: so it is with respect to Death it self; for the Holy as well as the Profane are subject to the Great Law of Mortality: *They shall lie down alike in the Dust, and the Worms shall cover them.*⁵ *The Living* (however differenc'd and distinguish'd in their Characters while living) *know that they shall die.*

The Connexion of these Words with the Context, is not easily discern'd at the first View. But however, after the *Wise-Man* had asserted, that the Dispensations of Divine Providence are promiscuous and dark; and that we are not capable of discerning God's Favour or Displeasure by what happens to Men in this Life; he tells us, *That this it an Evil among all things that are done under the Sun, that there is one Event unto all.*⁶ The meaning of which Phrase I take to be this, That

1 Jam. 4. 14

2 Psal. 89. 48.

3 Zech. 1. 5.

4 Ver. 2. [Eccl. 9. 2. Ed.]

5 Job 21. 26.

6 Ver. 3.

'tis very troublesome and shocking to wise and good Men, that they shou'd be as much expos'd to Misery and Trouble in this Life as the Wicked themselves. Then he insinuates how apt bad Men are to abuse the Divine Patience: *Yea, also the Heart of the Sons of Men is full of Evil, and Madness is in their Heart while they live.* The Thoughts of the Divine Forbearance towards 'em, push them on violently in a course of Sin, as the Wise-Man else-where observes: *Because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil; and after that they go to the Dead.*⁷ They sink into the Grave like other Mortals: for Solomon lets us know, that Death puts an end to the Happiness, as well as to the Precipitancy and Madness of the Wicked: for he adds immediately, *For him that is join'd to all the Living, there is Hope.*⁸ *Melancthon** translates the Words thus, *What therefore is to be chosen? in one that is alive there is Hope:* And in answer, says he, to those who, being disturb'd at the Confusion of things, ask'd, Must we then chuse to labour, when we meet with no Rewards? *Solomon* replies, by all means, follow your Callings, and leave Events to God. *In one that is alive, there is Hope;* which may be extended to the Mind as well as to our outward Concerns: there is Hope, Men may live to see their Follies, correct their Mistakes, amend their Lives, and recover the Favour of God, which is irrecoverably lost when gone from hence.

But he adds, *A living Dog is better than a dead Lion;* whereby he wou'd signify the just Preference which ought to be given to Life, above any thing that is inanimate. The meanest Creature living is better than the noblest dead. But some may be ready to ask, Is not this inconsistent with what the Wise-Man has elsewhere advanc'd, in *praising the Dead which are already dead, more than the Living which are yet alive?*⁹ To this I return, that in one Passage he has regard to the Troubles of Life, and in the other to the Advantages of it; so that taking him in these different Views, the seeming Contradiction is perfectly reconcil'd: and then follows the Text, *But the Living know that they shall die.*

The Royal Preacher wou'd not have Life undervalu'd, nor wou'd he have Rational Beings ignorant of the Offices of Life; and therefore having asserted the Dignity of it, he adds, *For the Living know that they shall die:* q.d. Life is to be improv'd as a Preparation for Death, and Time as it may dispose us for a Blessed Eternity. So that he seems here to insinuate, that to die well is the great End of living; and that Life it self is principally to be valu'd on this account, as it gives us an Opportunity to prepare for our great Change, that we may make a comfortable and happy Exit out of this World; *For the Living know, &c.*

In discoursing of these Words I shall,

- I. Speak of the Knowledg that the Living have concerning their Death.
- II. Show you, that tho the Living are under a necessity of dying, 'tis no Reflection either on the Justice or Goodness of God.
- III. Inquire whence it is that the generality of the Living neglect their Preparation for Death, tho they certainly know they shall die.

- I. We are to speak of the Knowledg that the Living have concerning their Death.

The Living know that they shall die, that the Union betwixt Soul and Body shall be dissolved, that they shall leave this World and enter on another State; and Reason dictates that they shall then be

7 Ecc. 8. 11.

8 Ver. 4.

* Vid. *Dr. Patrick's Paraphrase.*

9 Eccl. 4. 2.

conversant with a World of Spirits; and agreeably to their good or bad Behaviour here, be happy or miserable hereafter.

The Frame and Constitution of Human Nature is such, that every one who makes just Reflections on his own Being and Faculties, must readily acknowledg, that Man is compos'd of two very different Principles, viz. Matter and Spirit. Now all material compounded Beings are subject to Dissolution. Indeed the Soul is Immaterial, and consequently Immortal: I don't say 'tis absolutely immortal, for in that sense God only hath Immortality. Yet our Souls are incapable of dying, because there are no internal Causes of Dissolution in a Spiritual Substance. I acknowledg that God may, if he pleases, annihilate Human Souls; but I know no reason which should induce us to believe that he will: tho we have the greatest reason in the World to conclude, that we shall put off these Bodies, and that they shall be reduc'd to Dust, from whence they were at first taken.

Again, the Experience of every Age has shown that Men are mortal, and the Living of the present Age know that they are compos'd of the same frail Materials as those were, who liv'd and died in Ages past; and as they fill up the rooms of others who are gone, they know they must shortly lie down in the Dust, that others may succeed in their room. *One Generation passeth away, and another Generation cometh.*¹⁰ Now these two ways the Heathens were capable of knowing the Truth in our Text, without the Assistance of a Divine Revelation: But we who enjoy the Word of God, have a very clear and distinct discovery, which way Death was first introduc'd into this lower World, as well as the Method that infinite Wisdom has established for our compleat Victory over it at last, viz. by our Blessed Saviour's Death and Resurrection. By the former we took away the *Sting of Death*, and *destroy'd him that had the Power of Death*; and by the latter he gave us the assuring Pledg, and the most perfect Pattern of our own Resurrection.

As to the entrance of Death into the World, St. Paul gives us the following account: *Wherefore by Man Sin enter'd into the World, and Death by Sin, or for Sin; and so Death pass'd upon all Men, for that all had sinned. For until the Law, Sin was in the World; but Sin is not imputed when there is no Law. Nevertheless, Death reign'd from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the Similitude of Adam's Transgression, who is the Figure of him that was to come.*¹¹ In these few words the Apostle substantially proves, That the true Cause of Man's being subjected to the common Law of Mortality, was the Sin of Adam; which elsewhere he expressly affirms, and often repeats in words very significant and emphatical: e.g. – *Thro the Offence of one, many are dead; – By one Man's Offence, Death reign'd by one; – By the Offence of one, Judgment came upon all Men to Condemnation; – By one Man's Disobedience, many were made Sinners.*¹² So the same Apostle says in another Epistle, *That in Adam all die.* All which Expressions are of like Import with that first cited, *In whom all have sinned*; from which the Apostle seems to argue after this manner: Tho all that descended from Adam in an ordinary way, had sin'd as well as he, who was the common Parent of Mankind; yet till the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, we find no Law promulg'd, that denounc'd Death against all kind of Sin, but that very Law that threatned Adam himself with Death. *But of the Tree of the Knowleg of Good and Evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the Day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.* Now 'tis evident, that none of the Posterity of Adam did actually violate this Law; and says the Apostle, *Sin is not imputed where there is no Law:* i.e. 'Tis not so charg'd upon Man, that he should die for it, before there is any Law that threatens Death against it. *Nevertheless, Death reign'd from Adam till Moses, even over them who had not sin'd after the Similitude of Adam's Transgression.* Now whether we understand this of Infants, or such as were adult, neither of 'em did eat the forbidden Fruit, nor sin against any Law that threaten'd Death to all Sinners. So that upon the whole the Apostle infers, that 'twas Adam's in which did render Men

¹⁰ Eccles. 1. 4.

¹¹ Rom. 5. 12, 13, 14.

¹² Rom. 5. 15, 17, 18, 19.

obnoxious to Death: He sin'd as the Head and common Parent of Mankind; so that all his Posterity may be said *to have sin'd in him, and fallen with him in his first Transgression.*

Now *Adam* having brought himself under the Sentence of Death by his Apostacy from God, 'twas impossible under such Circumstances, that he shou'd propagate an Immortal Race. So that the Living not only know that they are obnoxious to Death, but that they die for *Adam's* Sin, and in consequence of God's Decree and Appointment.¹³ But before I leave this Head, I would make one Remark, *viz.* That 'tis evident from Divine Revelation, that Men do as well deserve Death for Actual, as for Original Sin. And therefore tho the *Antediluvians*, and the *Men of Sodom*, were subjected to the Law of Mortality by the Sin of *Adam*; yet the one perish'd by Water, as the other did by Fire, because of their own personal Rebellions against the Sovereign of the World.

Again, *The Living know they shall die*; but then their Knowledg does not extend, either to the precise Time, the particular Manner, or distinct Place of their Death: When, how, and where we shall die, we cannot tell. Tho each of us may say with *Job*, *I know thou wilt bring me to Death, and to the House appointed for all Living.*¹⁴ And yet we may as truly say with good old *Isaac*, *I know not the Day of my Death.*¹⁵ God has in great Wisdom and Mercy conceal'd from us future Events, and particularly the Time of our own Death, and the Death of our Friends: In Mercy, I say, that we might not torment our selves with melancholy Reflections on the fatal Period, if near; nor indulge our Appetites, and so defer our Preparations, upon the distant View of our Change. If we perfectly knew the exact time of our Dissolution, as it might discourage us from the vigorous pursuit of Knowledg, and the beneficial Offices of human Life; so probably many, *thro fear of Death, would be all their Lift-time subject to Bondage.*¹⁶ If Men were fully assur'd they should attain to a very great Age, it would tempt them to be careless of their Health, and put 'em upon undue Methods in a time of Sickness. If Men are so vicious now, when they cannot tell but they shall die the next Moment; into what excess of Riot would they run, and into what Mischiefs would they plunge themselves, if they had fifty or sixty Years in view? If Men are so mad on their Lusts, that they break thro the Restraints of Reason and Religion, and all the Remonstrances of Conscience, when they know not but they may die in the midst of their Follies; what wou'd these Wretches be, what wou'd they do, yea, what wou'd they not do, to gratify and please their sensual Appetites, could they be ascertain'd of half an Age to come? Indeed, such is the amazing Degeneracy of Human Nature, that Men who are enslav'd to their Lusts, do not only take encouragement to sin from the vain Expectation of a long Life, but are sometimes excited with the utmost Violence to pursue their forbidden Pleasures, when they apprehend that their time here will be very short. Therefore when we tell the Men of Liberty and Pleasure, who have made great Advances in Sin, that they must shortly bid an Eternal Adieu to every thing that flatters and courts their Senses; they do like the obstinate *Jews*, who when God had told 'em by his Prophet, that they should shortly be cut off by his Judgments, said, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we shall die.* And I remember, the Book of *Wisdom* represents the Wicked as encouraging themselves to be dissolute and luxurious, from the Consideration of the Shortness and Vanity of Human Life, in such words as these: *Our Life shall pass away as the Trace of a Cloud, and shall be dispers'd as a Mist that is driven away with the Beams of the Sun, and overcome with the Heat thereof. For our time is a very Shadow that passeth away. – Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let us speedily use the Creatures, like as in Youth. Let us fill our selves with costly Wine, and Ointments; and let no Flower of the Spring pass by us. Let us crown our selves with Rose-buds before they be wither'd. Let none of us go without his part of our Jollity: Let us leave Tokens of our Joyfulness in every place; for this*

13 Heb. 9. 27.

14 Job 30. 23.

15 Gen. 27. 2.

16 Heb. 2. 25. [Should be Hebrews 2:15, Ed.]

is our Portion, and our Lot is this.¹⁷ Can any thing be more absurd than such Inferences as these, from the Consideration of the Shortness of Life, and the Certainty of Death? Yet these are the celebrated Maxims of those who place Happiness in the Gratifications of the Animal Nature, and know no Pleasures beyond those of the Body. 'Tis a remarkable Passage which is recited by *Herodotus** concerning *Mycerinus*, one of the Kings of *Egypt*, That when Notice was given him by an Oracle, that he had no more than six Years to live; finding that neither the Apologies he made for himself, nor the Complaints he return'd to the Oracle, could alter the Decrees of Fate, he resolv'd to indulge himself in Ease and Luxury, to live fast; and by turning the Nights into so many Days, he contriv'd to live twelve Years in six.

Again, Did we certainly know that upon such a Day the best and dearest Friend we had upon Earth would take his final leave of us, how should we anticipate the sorrows of parting, and live under continual Fear and Dread? Finally, *The Living know that they shall die*; but the particular Time, and the various Circumstances thereof, are in much Goodness and Wisdom conceal'd from us, that so we may be always ready.

Indeed the Holy Scripture informs us, that *Enoch* and *Elijah* had the Privilege to be exempted from the great Law of dying. Of the former 'tis said, *That he walk'd with God and was not, for God took him*:¹⁸ and of the latter, *That he went up by a Whirlwind into Heaven*.¹⁹ So that their Time run into Eternity, with very little interruption; some there seems to have been, for without doubt they past under a very considerable Change, before they were admitted to the Pleasures of the Heavenly State: For *Flesh and Blood*, as 'tis now fram'd, fashion'd, and corrupted, *cannot inherit the Kingdom of God*.

Moreover, the same Apostle says, That tho *we shall not all sleep*,²⁰ i.e. die, yet *we shall be chang'd*. He speaks of those that shall be alive when our Saviour shall come to judg the World: These Men shall not die like others, but shall pass under a Change that shall be equivalent to Death, as the Scriptures in the Margin shew. The Apostle, after he had spoken of our Saviour's descending *from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Archangel, and the Trump of God*, he adds, *That the Dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord*.²¹ But this shall not be till these Persons have pass'd under a Change, as appears from the above cited Text. So that the Living know that all shall die, except those that shall be alive when Christ comes to judg the Quick and the Dead.

I proceed now to the second general Head of Discourse:

II. And that is to shew you, That Man's being under a necessity of Dying, is no Reflection either on the Wisdom or the Goodness of God. And this will appear from the following Considerations.

1. Man being compos'd of Soul and Body, was originally liable to Dissolution, or capable of dying, as I hinted before. Indeed if Man had never sin'd, he would certainly never have died. But being fix'd in such Circumstances, that 'twas possible for him to sin, 'twas also possible for him to die. So that with this Explication and Restriction we may affirm, That Man was not immortal by Nature, but was originally capable of dying. Tho I assert, that if Man had continu'd innocent, he should never have tasted Death; and I am inclin'd to think, that human Life even then would have been

17 Wisd. 2. 4. 9.

* Vid. *Herodot. lib. 2. Hist.*

18 Gen. 5. 24.

19 2 Kings 2. 11.

20 1 Cor. 15. 51.

21 1 Thess. 4. 17.

continu'd after an extraordinary manner. Agreeable to this, is the Opinion of a late modern Divine*, who speaking of Man whilst innocent, says, He was immortal, not from everlasting Principles of Nature, but by Divine Preservation; of which the Tree of Life was the Ordain'd Means and Sacramental Pledge. And if so, 'twas purely in the Pleasure of Almighty God, who is the Author of our Beings, and the Supreme Arbiter of Life and Death, to continue the one, or discontinue the other, according to his Sovereign Pleasure. If God Almighty was under no Obligation to give us Being, he can be under none to continue the Beings that he voluntarily made out of nothing, any longer than he pleases. All human Creatures are as much indebted to Heaven for their Conservation, as they are for their Existence. Now if the matter be as I have Stated it; if our Bodies were not originally immortal, but capable in their own Nature of Dissolution; to be sure it cannot be inconsistent with the Justice or Goodness of God, either to suspend, or to bestow an Immortality, which is a supernatural Privilege, upon what Terms he pleases. 'Tis allow'd by all, beside the Obligations which *Adam* was under to keep the Moral Law, from his natural Relation to God as a Creator, that God restrain'd him by a positive Law from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; and at the same time gave him the highest Assurance in the World, that his Abstinence should be rewarded with Immortality. Now for the Accomplishment of this, and that the Decays of Nature might be prevented, or at least repair'd, that a Man made of Dust might not be reduc'd to Dust again; 'tis the Opinion of many Divines, that the Tree of Life, planted in the midst of Paradise, had a Virtue in it that would render human Bodies (naturally capable of Death) durable and immortal. But *Adam* having actually violated the Divine Law, by eating of the forbidden Fruit, God cuts him off from the Privilege which he might have enjoy'd by the Tree of Life; and left him not only to the ordinary Course of Nature, but pronounc'd upon him the Sentence of Death. And I presume all Men will allow, that upon *Adam's* Disobedience and Apostacy, 'twas no Impeachment of the Divine Justice to chase him out of Paradise, and to deprive him wholly of the use of the Tree of Life. Now if *Adam* as not immortal by Nature, and if he forfeited his supernatural Privilege of Immortality by his Sin, I think 'tis evident, even to Demonstration, that God has done us no Injustice, by appointing Man once to die.

2. If we reflect upon the Moral and Penal Evils that attend the best of Men in this World, we shall see much more reason to admire both the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in laying us under a necessity of Dying, than to reflect on either of these Attributes, because God has appointed Man once to die. Here good Men are not only tempted to sin, but frequently overcome by the Tempter: *They find a Law in their Members warring against the Law of their Minds, and frequently carrying them into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in their Members.*²² Now we shall never be perfectly freed from indwelling Sin, till the moment of our Dissolution. Moreover, as long as Sin is in the World, it will be follow'd with a Train of Miseries: Indeed some People are not expos'd to so many and so great Troubles as others; yet Men indefinitely are *born to Trouble, as the Sparks fly upward. Man that is born of a Woman, is of few Days, and full of Trouble.*²³ Now since Man in no State of Life here can be entirely freed from Sin, and perfectly exempt from Troubles, even of various kinds; 'tis so far from being any just Reflection upon the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that Man is made subject to Death, that 'tis an unspeakable Mercy to all good Men, that they are oblig'd to drop these Bodies, with which they put off the Body of Sin, and have an Opportunity to *rest in their Beds;*²⁴ I mean, to lie down in the Grave, *where the Wicked cease from Troubling, and where the Weary are at Rest.*²⁵

* *Dr. Bates Works*, P. 419.

22 Rom. 7. 23.

23 Job 14. 1.

24 Isa. 57. 2.

25 Job 3. 17.

3. The Ends of the Divine Government upon Earth are admirably serv'd, by this Decree and Dispensation concerning the Mortality of Man. God's Design in governing the World, is the real Benefit of Rational Beings, as well as the Advancement of the Glory of his own Attributes and Perfections. If Men run riot in Sin now, and are prodigiously wicked, tho they know they shall die, and they cannot reasonably expect to live beyond the common Standard of Human Life; what a Hell would this Earth be, if inhabited with innumerable Myriads of immortal Sinners! 'Tis more than probable, that the extraordinary Wickedness of the Old World, which provok'd God to destroy all but eight Persons, was very much promoted by the long Lives of wicked Men, who had so many and so great Opportunities of corrupting those they convers'd with: And therefore it has been frequently observ'd, that when God promis'd *Noah*, that there should never be such another Deluge as to destroy all Flesh, he saw it necessary, after the Flood, to contract Human Life; that Men might not have so many Opportunities of tempting one another to Sin, and of advancing the Interests of Satan's Kingdom, as the *Antediluvians* had.

4. Good Men cannot receive a consummate Reward in this Life, nor bad Men be expos'd to the utmost Miseries their Sins have deferv'd: for if wicked Men were to be punish'd here according to their Deserts, who could bear the thoughts of continuing in this World, which would so much resemble that Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where the Worm never dies, nor is the Fire ever quench'd? Indeed God does sometimes, in the Course of his Providence, put a visible difference betwixt the Righteous and the Wicked, even in this Life: But the compleat Happiness of the one, and the perfect Misery of the other, cannot be administred here, but is reserv'd for the other State into which Men enter at Death. What God can do, if he'd act out of his ordinary way, by a Series of Miracles, thro the Ages of Eternity, is not for us to determine; but according to his establish'd Methods of Government, and the Nature and Order of Things, the Glory of God, and the Happiness of Mankind, is best secur'd by his appointing Man once to die.

5. If God had not determin'd that Men should die, the World would have been overstock'd with People many Ages ago: And what would have follow'd upon this, but while Men could have subsisted, the first Possessors would have been Princes, and the generality of their Descendants Beggars? For 'tis not to be imagin'd that they who had been in possession of an Estate three or four thousand Years, would consent to quit their Right, while living, to younger Branches of the Family. And if the Poor are so numerous and full of Complaints now, both would have increas'd in proportion, or else all People must have been upon a level, and all Civil Distinctions lost; and instead of well-govern'd Communities, the whole World would have been one confus'd Mob. Moreover, 'tis easy to make it appear, even to Demonstration, that if there had not been a Succession of Funerals, as well as Births, the whole Globe of the Earth would not have contain'd the infinite Numbers that would have been produc'd from *Adam* to this day. Nor could the Earth have furnish'd a Supply; so that the Inhabitants must either have died with Famine, or have been sustian'd by Miracles. No one therefore has the least shadow of Reason to reflect either on the Goodness or the Wisdom of God, for decreeing that Man should die; especially if we consider,

In the sixth and last place, The infallible Assurance that God has given all good Men, of a joyful Resurrection to Eternal Life. And this was done very early; for so amazing was the Divine Goodness, that the Promise was exhibited before the Sentence of Death was denounc'd on our first Parents. For tho they had forfeited their Immortality by their Sin, and highly displeas'd and provok'd the great Sovereign of the World: yet before God said to them, *Dust thou art, and to Dust thou shalt return;*²⁶ he promises the Messiah, and says to Satan, *I will put an Enmity between thee and the Women, and between thy Seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy Head, and thou shalt bruise his Heel.* In which words we have the Gospel, as it were, in Miniature: for both Jewish and

26 Gen. 3. 19.

Christian Interpreters have acknowledged, that this Promise did refer to the Messiah; and in it there is a very plain intimation, not only that the Son of God should assume Human Nature, and suffer in it, but that his Success should be glorious, that he should destroy the Power of Satan, and be the Author of eternal Redemption to his People. Indeed 'tis objected, That [*Seed*] signifies a Nation, or Number of Persons; as when God promises the Messiah, that he *shall see his Seed*.²⁷ In return to which, I say, That tho *Seed* be a Noun of Multitude, yet we find it apply'd in Scripture to a single Person; as when *Seth* is call'd *another Seed*.²⁸ And agreeably to this, is the way of arguing the Apostle uses in his Epistle to the *Galatians*: *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the Promises made. He saith not, And to Seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ*.²⁹ St. Paul argues from the Words being in the Singular Number, because 'tis *Seed**, and not *Seeds*; therefore it signifies one Person, and not more; and that Person is Christ. Now since Mankind had this early Assurance of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and that in the Human Nature he should overcome Satan, or as the Author to the *Hebrews* expresses it, *Destroy him who had the Power of Death, that is the Devil, and deliver them, who thro fear of Death, were all their Life-time subject to Bondage*: I say, this is such an Instance of amazing Goodness, as may justly raise the Admiration of Men and Angels, that an offended Deity should promise the great Blessing of a perfect Saviour to Rebels, before he denounces against 'em a Threatning for their Disobedience.

The Doctrine of the Resurrection is plainly reveal'd in the Old Testament, tho various Circumstances concerning that Event are set in a clearer Light by the New. *Job* is express with reference to this great Article of Faith: *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter Day upon the Earth; and tho after my Skin, Worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for my self, and my Eyes shall behold, and not another, tho my Reins be consum'd within me*.³⁰ Which Words cannot be interpreted in a figurative and improper Sense, without some Force and Violence. And 'tis certain they were understood in a literal Sense in the Apostolical Age; for I find 'em cited by **Clemens Romanus*, to prove the Resurrection of Human Bodies. Again, the Prophet *Daniel* affirms, *That many of them who sleep in the Dust of the Earth shall awake, some to Everlasting Life, and some to Shame and Everlasting Contempt*.³¹ This Text indeed is understood metaphorically by a very learned †Interpreter, tho in this he opposes the most learned of the †*Jews*.

But, I say, the New Testament sets this matter in a clear Light, and gives us an account of various very considerable Circumstances in reference to this Event, which had been conceal'd from the World in Ages past: 'Tis this part of Divine Revelation assures us, *That Christ hath abolish'd Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light thro the Gospel*; the meaning of which words seems to be this, that Christ has virtually, and in effect, abolish'd Death. For tho we are yet subject to the common Law of Morality, and must take the Grave in our way to Heaven, yet at length Death shall be swallow'd up in Victory: *For this end Christ both died, and rose, and reviv'd, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and the Living*;³² so as to raise them up at the last Day, he having an unalienable Right and Propriety in 'em. He *hath abolish'd Death*: The *original Word signifies not always the taking away the thing it precisely refers to, but a destroying the Power of that thing, and so making it in effect as tho it were not at all; as the Scriptures at the bottom fully shew. Moreover,

27 Isa. 53. 10.

28 Gen. 24. 25. [Should be Genesis 4:25, Ed.]

29 Gal. 3.16.

* *Indeed R. Isaac makes some spiteful Remarks on the Apostle upon this Occasion, which are fully confuted by Bishop Kidder, in his 2d Part of his Demonstration of the Messiah, p. 256.*

30 Job 19. 25, 26. [Job 19:25-27, Ed.]

* Ad Corinth. Epist. p. 85.

31 Dan. 12. 2.

† Grotius.

‡ Vid. Manasseh Ben Israel, De Resurrectione.

32 Rom. 14. 9.

* Καταργήσαντος, Rom. 4. 14. Rom. 7.2. Gal. 5.4.

by this Phrase of *Christ's having abolish'd Death*, we are to understand not only the Victory he obtain'd over it in his own Person, who, after he was dead and bury'd, rais'd himself from the Dead, the Bonds of Death not being able to hold him: but farther, we are to consider, that Christ both died and rose from the Dead, as a publick Head and Representative; and by his Resurrection has given us Assurance, that we also shall be rais'd from the Dead at the last Day. Christ has taken the whole Disposal of Death into his own hands: *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the Keys of Hell and of Death.*³³ Our Blessed Saviour has the most indisputable Right and uncontrollable Power to dispose of all Persons, with respect to their future State: And that is not all, but Death is alter'd in its nature to a good Man; and the Apostle represents Believers not only as reconcil'd to Death, but as triumphing over it, in these words: *O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory? – Thanks be to God which giveth us the Victory thro our Lord Jesus Christ.*³⁴ Death has lost its Power, so that it cannot finally destroy: For our Saviour having been made the *First-Fruits of them that slept*, his Resurrection, which is past, is a certain Pattern, and an assuring Pledg of ours which is to come. The Victory obtain'd by the Head, gives sure and certain Hopes that the Members shall not always remain under the Power of Death. When the Prophet *Hosea* personates our Blessed Saviour, and would represent the Greatness of his Conquest, and the Glory of his Triumphs over the last Enemy, he introduces him as uttering these words: *I will ransom them from the Grave, I will redeem them from Death: O Death, I'll be thy Plagues; O Grave, I'll be thy Destruction; Repentance shall be hid from mine Eyes.*³⁵ All good Men will find this Promise partly accomplish'd at Death, tho its absolute Completion will be reserv'd to the first Resurrection; for then *this Corruptible shall have put on Incorruption, and this Mortal shall have put on Immortality: and then*, says the Apostle, *shall be brought to pass that Saying which was written, Death is swallow'd up in Victory.* And a noble Victory shall the whole Body of the Elect obtain, when they are perfectly rescu'd from the Captivity of the Grave, and have entirely shook off the Dishonours of Mortality and Corruption: For *Christ shall change their vile Bodies, that they may be fashion'd like unto his glorious Body, according to the working where-by he is able even to subdue all things unto him-self.* Now is it reasonable that any should complain they are subjected to the common Law of Mortality for the first *Adam's* Sin; since the second *Adam* has given the most infallible Assurance that he will raise 'em from the Dead, and bestow upon 'em a better Immortality than Man would have enjoy'd if he had continu'd innocent? Therefore let none censure the Goodness or the Wisdom of the Divine Government, and complain of Man's being under a Necessity of Dying; *For since by Man came Death, by Man came also the Resurrection of the Dead.*³⁶

I proceed now to the Third general Head of Discourse.

III. Whence is it that the Generality of Peoepel neglect their Preparation for Death, tho they certainly know they shall die?

Now the Causes of this fatal Mismanagemeat are very various, according to Mens different Inclinations, and the different Principles by which they govern themselves. I shall not therefore pretend to enumerate every particular Cause which has an influence into this ill Conduct; but shall mention several things which are very comprehensive, to which other Matters may be easily reduc'd. And,

1. Gross Ignorance is one Cause why People neglect to prepare for their great Change. They know indeed 'tis approaching, and that 'twill certainly overtake 'em; yet so gross is the Ignorance and

33 Rev. 1. 18.

34 1 Cor. 15. 55, 57.

35 Hos. 13. 14.

36 1 Cor. 15. 21.

Stupidity of the greatest part of Mankind, that they put the evil Day far from them, and wretchedly neglect the grand Affair of Life, I mean, to prepare for Death. Indeed, in Scripture, Ignorance is taken notice of as the common Source of all Sin. God resolves the Wickedness of the *Jewish Nation* under the Old Testament, into their Ignorance; *For they are a Nation void of Counsel, neither is there any Understanding in them.*³⁷ And under the New Testament, the Crucifixion of our Blessed Saviour is charg'd upon the Ignorance of the same People; *For had they known it, says the Apostle, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.*³⁸ And I observe, that the Error of a numerous Sect among the *Jews*, who disbeliev'd the Resurrection of the Dead, is said to have the like Source: *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power or God.*³⁹ And when St. Paul would describe the true Cause of the great Degeneracy of the Gentile World, in that they committed Lasciviousness with Greediness, he says, 'twas because of the *Blindness of their Hearts.*⁴⁰ And St. John tells us, *That he that doth Evil, hath not seen God;*⁴¹ i.e. He is ignorant, and has no true Knowledge of God and his Perfections. Now as Sin in general springs from a Defect in the Understanding, so this complicated Evil of neglecting to prepare for Death, is owing to the same Cause.

How ignorant are abundance of People both concerning God and themselves! 'Tis almost incredible, that rational Creatures should live without reflecting on their own Beings or Circumstances, or without considering the Perfections of that God who first caus'd them to exist. Yet a very little Observation upon the Conduct of Human Life, will furnish us with too many proofs of this. Is any thing more common than for those, who are in a State of Nature, under the Curse of a broken Covenant of Works, and who in the Language of our Saviour are *condemn'd already*, to pass away their Time in Mirth and Jollity, as if they were in as happy Circumstances as any People in the World? And whence does this arise, but from Ignorance? People are insensible how they are corrupted and deprav'd by the Fall, and how much worse their Circumstances are made by their actual Transgressions of the Divine Law. Now, I say, tho the Living know they shall die, yet being ignorant of the infinite Danger to which they are expos'd by their Sins, they rather treasure up Wrath against the Day of Wrath, than labour to be found of Christ in Peace, without Spot and Blame, in the Day of God. For while Men are stupidly ignorant of God and themselves, and are intire Strangers to the Method of Salvation, which is establish'd in the Gospel, thro the meritorious Suffering of the Son of God; no wonder if they defer their Preparation for Death and Judgment. No one would be solicitous about a Saviour, till he is sensible that he is a lost Sinner, and has his Mind deeply impress'd with a Sense of the exceeding Sinfulness of his Sins, as they are opposite to the pure Nature and the perfect Word of God.

Too many take up with this general Notion: We are indeed Sinners, but then Christ dy'd for Sinners, and God is merciful to Sinners; and we doubt not but he will be so to us. These Men are ready, with the *Jews* of old, to *bless themselves in their Heart, saying, We shall have Peace, tho we walk in the Imaginations of our Heart, to add Drunkenness to Thirst.*⁴² Never considering that the Promises of Pardon and Eternal Life are made only to believing Penitents: As that Scripture imports in the Prophet, *Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*⁴³

Before I pass this Head, I cannot but remark, That even amongst Men of an extraordinary Genius and a vast Compass of Knowledge, their Mismanagement with respect to another Life is owing to their Ignorance: and tho this looks like venturing on a Paradox, yet 'tis too evident to be deny'd.

37 Deut. 32. 28.

38 1 Cor. 2. 8.

39 Mat. 22. 29.

40 Eph. 4. 18, 19.

41 John 3. 11. [Should be 3 John 11. Ed.]

42 Deut. 29. 19.

43 Isa. 55. 7.

The Discourse of a Learned Ruler among the *Jews* concerning the new Birth, recorded in the Gospel of St. *John*, does not discover a little Ignorance. And if our modern Libertines, who dare lampoon the Office of the Holy Spirit, and represent his renewing and sanctifying Work, as Vision and the Spleen; I say, if such Men cannot bear to be thought so ignorant as *Nicodemus*, I am sure they are more profane: concerning whom I shall only say at present, *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they wou'd consider their latter End!*⁴⁴ Let Men boast ever so much of their Wit, they are utter Strangers to true Wisdom, who lay aside all Thoughts of a future State, and neglect to prepare for the Invisible World. The Wisdom of a Man does not only appear in the Choice of a right End, but in the vigorous Use of those Means, which are most proper for the attaining of his End. So that whatsoever Excuses Men may frame for deferring their Preparation for Death; 'tis very evident, that one true Cause of it is a stupid Ignorance of God and themselves, and of that Eternal State into which they are hastning.

2. Another Cause of Peoples ill Conduct in this most important Affair, is Scepticism and Unbelief, with respect to a future State of Rewards and Punishments. One would think that Men should not want to be confirm'd in the Doctrine of a future State, or that any shou'd have Doubts concerning the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments after this Life, who have the Gospel in their hands, which has brought Life and Immortality to Light.

Indeed those Philosophers among the Antients, who were vicious, have done their utmost to persuade themselves and others that the Matter was doubtful; tho after all the Disguises they could invent, and the Colour of Reason they gave to their Discourses, they could not but own, that the Doctrine of future Rewards for good Men, was more probable than the contrary. For indeed if we abstract from the Consideration of that Discovery which is made of a future State by the Holy Scriptures, we have from Principles of Reason a much better Assurance that good Men shall be rewarded in a Life to come, than we have of many other things in this World, which yet have an extraordinary Influence both on our Minds and Manners. For this might be accounted for, from the Justice and Wisdom of God's governing Providence, from the Nature of our Souls as Rational and Immortal Beings, together with the Desires which seem to be interwoven with the very Frame and Constitution of our Minds; to which might be added, the Capacity God has given us to contemplate and admire him, to love and adore him. But that which is the most certain Proof of this matter, is the Revelation God has made by his Son, who came from Heaven with this kind Design; and after his Resurrection from the Dead, did visibly ascend thither again, to give Assurance to all whom his Father had given him, that where he was, there they should be also, to behold his Glory. Yet we have too much reason to fear, that many who enjoy the Gospel-Revelation, are Scepticks in this fundamental Article of the Christian Faith. And of many of those who profess to believe the Doctrine of a future State, it may rather be said, that they do not disbelieve it: for what they call Faith, is but a wavering Opinion, not a cordial Assent, or a well-grounded Persuasion. Now 'tis not likely that an unsettled Opinion about these important Matters should influence Men to prepare for that State and Life, which they do not steddily believe will ever come. Whereas if Men were fully persuaded, *That such who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, should obtain Eternal Life;* and, that they who are harden'd thro the Deceitfulness of Sin, who are fearful and unbelieving, and to every good work Reprobate, should have their Portion in that Lake which burns with Fire and Brimstone: I say, did Men steddily believe these things, 'tis hardly to be conceiv'd, that any under the influence of such a Faith, could neglect and defer their Preparation for Death.

Faith, in the ordinary Affairs of this Life, is a great Principle of Action, and will push Men on to enterprize things very difficult and hazardous. But how much stronger Influence then should the

44 Deut. 32. 29.

Faith of the Gospel have upon our Conduct, since the Objects which the Christian Revelation proposes, either to raise our Hope, or excite our Fear, are in their different Natures infinitely transcending any thing which the God of this World can present, either to please or terrify us?

Could we by Faith look on those things which are not seen, and make them present to our Minds, tho distant and future; were we firmly persuaded that a State of inconceivable Happiness awaits all good Men, and that all who are finally disobedient and impenitent, shall not only be excluded God's Eternal Rest, but doom'd to suffer the Vengeance of Everlasting Fire: I say, did we as verily believe these things, as if Heaven were open to our View, and the Covering taken off from Destruction, as if we heard the Hallelujahs of the Sav'd, and the Groans of the Damn'd; how easily should we repel all the fiery Darts of the Devil? With what contempt should we look down upon the vanishing Glories of this World? and with how great Abhorrence reject all those Temptations which were design'd to draw us into Sin, and hinder our Preparation for the invisible State? But,

3. Another Cause why Men procrastinate their Repentance, and delay their Preparation for Death, is the want of serious Consideration. For tho a Man may have a competent Knowledg of God and of himself, and be very sensible of the great Evil of Sin, and that his Guilt can only be expiated by the Sacrifice of the Son of God; and that there is a future State of Rewards and Punishments: Yet if this Person does not seriously consider these things, so as to have his Mind deeply impress'd with an awful Sense of them, he'll persevere in his Negligence, and make no Provision for the Eternal World. Inconsiderate People often cheat themselves with the Appearances of Happiness; for they look no farther than the Surface of things, and like the ignorant Pilot, if the Face of the Waters be smooth, have no apprehension of Dangers which are out of sight. 'Tis want of Consideration which makes Men confident and careless. For tho People believe that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them who diligently seek him; that Man is a frail dying Creature, that he has his Foundation in the Dust, and is crush'd before the Moth; that the Wicked at death shall go away into Everlasting Punishment, but the Righteous into Life Eternal: Yet if Men do not heartily advert to this Knowledg and Faith, and consider these things with all the Seriousness and deep Concern which Matters of such infinite Importance require; they will still continue negligent and remiss in their Preparation for Death and Judgment. For the strongest and most powerful Arguments in the World signify nothing to Men who will not consider. 'Tis impossible that an Argument should gain our Assent, till it is duly attended to, and weigh'd. All Arguments are propos'd to us, as we are rational Beings; and as such it becomes us to consider the Mediums that are offer'd, without which we shall always mistake in our Conduct.

Indeed the generality of the World are so immers'd in Sensuality, that they are not mov'd with any thing but what courts their Senses; and that which is not gross enough to regale them, they think, is too abstracted to be consider'd. And no wonder, while People thus suffer themselves to be govern'd by their Appetites, and to be excessively transported with present Enjoyments, if they neglect preparing for a future State.

4. Another Cause of Mens delaying in the great and necessary Work of Life, is their prevailing Love to this present World, and those Enjoyments which strike hard on their Senses. This World is a very great Snare to the generality of People, who love it so passionately that it engrosses the whole of their Thoughts and Time. Some pass away the greatest part of their Lives in Diversion and Pleasure, while others are wholly taken up with Business. The former consider which way they may spend an Estate, so as to gratify their sensual Appetites; and the latter how they may raise an Estate, to sooth a covetous Humour: and both of them, tho differently influenc'd, yet neglect the *One thing needful*, and defer their Preparation for Death and Judgment.

Alas, could we proportion our Esteem to the Worth of things, we should not be so mistaken in our Choice, nor be so exceedingly fond of the vanishing Glories of the present Life. But few Men keep so strict a guard upon their Passions as they ought: and therefore those things which are sensible and present, too commonly steal away their Hearts, and make them forget themselves, and the greatest Concern they have in this World; I mean, to prepare for the other. The Amusements of Sense dissipate our Minds, and prevent us from making those serious Reflections on our Frailty which become us; so that the greatest part of our Lives ordinarily runs out, either before we are capable of just Reflections, or else in the pursuit of those things which are foreign to our highest Interest. Indeed, *The Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life*,⁴⁵ make Impressions very different on Mens Minds, according to their Constitutions and Inclinations, and the various Circumstances of their Lives. However, the generality of People are vigorous in their different Pursuits; they have so passionate a regard to things Temporal, that they wholly neglect those of a Spiritual and Eternal Nature: They labour Night and Day for the *Meat which perishes*, but use no Industry for that which *endures to Eternal Life*.

Thus it was with the rich Epicure in the Gospel, his Thoughts were wholly taken up with the Affairs of this World; and he concluded, he had so made his Fortunes, that he might promise himself many merry and pleasant Years to come: *Soul*, says he, *thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Ease; eat, drink, and be merry*.⁴⁶ The Man seems to speak with a very pleasing Air; not that we are to imagine, the Wealth he had amass'd together had given him intire Satisfaction: for a Man may as well be fed and nourish'd by a Dream, as render'd completely happy by the Enjoyments of this Life. And 'tis remarkable in the Instance before us, that this rich Man had very anxious Thoughts about keeping what he had gotten. *He thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my Fruits? And he said, This I will do; I will pull down my Barns, and will build greater, and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods*.⁴⁷ Here's deep concern in contriving what shall be done; and the Resolution he takes up hereupon, could not be executed without great Care and Fatigue, together with a vast Expence of Time and Mony: besides, a thousand things might defeat the Design, destroy the Goods, and remove the Owner. And indeed the Parable mentions the last of these, as putting a sudden Period to the sensual Triumphs of this vain Man: *For God said to him, Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul shall be requir'd of thee; then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?*⁴⁸ And our Saviour adds, *So is he that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God*.⁴⁹ Yet how many such imprudent Persons are there in the World, the whole of whose Time is divided betwixt Pleasure and Business, till Death opens a new Scene, and their unprepar'd Souls are summon'd before the awful Tribunal of the Son of God? 'Twas a melancholy Consideration to him who was not awaken'd to a Sense of his Folly, till he lay on his Death-bed, who then express'd himself after this manner: "I have taken care to leave my Family in good Circumstances, my Children will have plentiful Fortunes; but I have made no Provision for my own Soul: I have laid up no Treasure in Heaven. Miserable Creature that I am! I must now take leave of all my Possessions, and lose my Soul for ever."

Indeed 'tis necessary that People take care of their Families, and *lay up for their Children*:⁵⁰ but if these things take up the whole of their Time, they'll repent it when 'tis too late, and find the Truth of that which the Wise-Man has long since observ'd; *Riches profit not in the Day of Wrath, but Righteousness delivereth from Death*.⁵¹

45 1 John 2. 16.

46 Luke 12. 19.

47 Luke 12. 17, 18.

48 Ver. 20.

49 Ver. 21.

50 2 Cor. 12. 14.

51 Pro. 11. 4.

This World, which we so much admire, is doom'd to be dissolv'd, and the Fashion of it is continually passing away: The Scenes are often shifting, and the Persons who appear to day vigorous and strong, to morrow become weak like other Mortals, and are brought down to the sides of the Pit. What an infinite Folly then is it to be excessively fond of this World, which cannot continue long, and which we must shortly leave; and intirely neglect our Preparation for the other World, into which we must suddenly pass, and where we must for ever dwell? If we could be prevail'd upon to judg according to the nature of things, and to think of this World and all those Enjoyments which are bounded by Time, as we shall do when we are on the Confines of Eternity; we should not neglect to prepare for our great Change, which will certainly come, and for ought we know may be very near. 'Tis said of a very learned *Man, that when he lay on his Death-bed, and some about him were admiring the Monuments of his Learning, and the vast Pains he had been at, he reply'd, *Ah! I have lost my time of Life in a busy Idleness.* And †another who was admirable for his Literature as well as Piety, in the Close of his Days, said, *I repent of all my Life, but that part of it I spent in Communion with God and doing Good.* To close this Head: Whenever you are in danger of being deluded by the faint Images of Happiness, I mean the transient Glorys of the present Life, considerately revolve in your Thoughts those Words of our Saviour: *What is a Man profited, if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul? Or what shall a Man give in exchange for his Soul?*⁵²

5. Another Cause why Men delay their Preparation for Death, tho they certainly know they shall die, is an Apprehension they have that 'tis a melancholy and troublesom Work. This World is generally thought to be a very pleasant and agreeable Place, especially by those who prosper in it, and have all that Heart can wish. Now Men who are passionately fond of this Life, cannot bear to hear of Death, especially if they ever dare reflect upon their Guilt, and the Expectations which are immediatly rais'd hereupon. 'Tis an Expression of the Son of Syrach: *O Death, how bitter is the Remembrance of thee to a Man that liveth at Rest in his Possessions, unto the Man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath Prosperity in all things!* The Thoughts of Death are very troublesom to prosperous Sinners; which makes them put the evil Day far from them, and delay their Repentance and Reformation. They imagine that if they should set about this Work, it would damp all the Joys of Life, that it would infuse a Bitterness into their pleasant Cups, that it would interrupt them in the pursuit of the World, and deprive them of those Diversions which are dearer to them than Life it self.

The Generality of People suppose, that Meditations on Death are only proper for the Sick and Aged, and very unsutable for those who are in health, especially for such as are in the flourishing Bloom of Youth; forgetting the Brevity and Uncertainty of Human Life. Nor can any thing be more absurd and unreasonable than for People to delay their Preparation for Death, when Life is so uncertain, upon a Pretence that 'tis a melancholy and difficult Work. Methinks all rational Men should rather put this Question to their Souls: Is the Work I am press'd to undertake absolutely necessary? And if it appears to be so, that single Consideration should supersede all other Pleas, and overballance any Excuses which Men may frame to delay it. For what is absolutely necessary, ought to be enter'd upon immediatly, lest we never have an Opportunity to effect it. "Well, but says a young and prosperous Sinner, if I immediatly enter on preparing for another Life, I must bid adieu to all the Comforts of this, I must be doom'd to an absurd and perpetual Melancholy. What! must I, who am an Heir to a great Estate, and have but just began to taste the Pleasures of Life; must I have my Expectations disappointed, and my Desires of Fame and Gallantry defeated? Must I be stop'd in my Pursuits, check'd in my Race of Glory, and forbidden those Pleasures which I value above all things besides?" Mistaken unhappy Man! Religion does not abridg thee of any Pleasure, truly rational and

* Grotius. Ah! vitam perdidit operose nihi agendo.

† Dr. Donne.

52 Mat. 16. 26.

manly: The Scriptures only interdict those Gratifications which are sordid and base; the wisest of Men assures us *That the Ways of Religion are Ways of Pleasantness, and that all her Paths are Peace; but that the Way of Transgressor is hard.* Now we have all the reason in the World to believe *Solomon*, as well on the account of his Experience as his Inspiration; for *he gave his heart to know Madness and Folly.* He ventur'd on the forbidden Delights of Sin, as well as tasted the real and refin'd Pleasures of Religion. So that upon the whole, we may conclude, that wicked Men take more pains to gratify their Lusts, and to serve the Devil, than good Men do to prepare themselves for Death and Judgment. But,

6. Another Cause why People delay their Preparation for Death, is from a vain Opinion that they have time enough before them, and consequently flatter themselves with the expectation of a long Life. If Persons are young, they are ready to conclude of course, that they must live to be old; tho they see Thousands younger than they fall at their right and their left hand. They who are old think, Surely since we have held out thus long, there will be an addition of some more Years to our Lives. And thus both agree to delay preparing for Death; tho the Scripture is express, *That Man that is born of a Woman is of few Days, and full of Trouble; and that Man in his best Estate is altogether Vanity.* How many of our own Relations and Acquaintance have gone down to the Grave, with their *Breasts full of Milk, and their Bones moisten'd with Marrow?* Yet obstinate Sinners, notwithstanding the notice God gives them in his Word, and the repeated Warnings he affords them in the Course of his Providence, and the Observation they are forc'd to make themselves concerning the Uncertainty of Human Life, will defer their Preparation for Death, and promise themselves many Years to come; as if their Times were not in God's hands, but in their own.

Before I pass this Head, I cannot but remark, That some Peoples Delays are too much owing to the barbarous Flattery of Friends and Physicians; who pretend, in complaisance, to tell People, that they are not in danger of Death, and that they discern no mortal Symptom upon them, and that they may recover, when they know 'tis utterly impossible they should without a Miracle. And so many please themselves with the hopes of living, till Death defeats their Expectations, and Divine Justice consigns 'em over to everlasting Burnings.

Lastly, Another Cause of Peoples delaying to prepare for Death, tho they know they shall die, is from a vain Opinion that this Work may be effectually done upon a Death-Bed. Now there are two Instances which Sinners commonly plead in excuse for the delay of their Repentance and Reformation: One is, that of the Labourers who enter'd not into the Vineyard till the eleventh Hour, and yet receiv'd as much as those who had born the Heat and Burden of the Day: And the other is, that of a Thief, who was converted on the Cross, while dying by the side of our Saviour. From whence obstinate Sinners argue after this manner: If God is the same kind and merciful Being, which he was in Ages past, then we have as much reason to believe he will receive us to his Favour, as he did others, who repented not till the Evening of their Lives; for *what has been, may be.* So that they conclude they may very safely put off providing for the other World, till they are just going out of this.

To which I return in general, That when we argue from Precedents, it ought to be consider'd, whether the Circumstances of each are parallel: for the Force of what is pleaded depends upon the likeness of the Case we argue for, to that Example we argue from. But if the Cases are not parallel, if they do not exactly resemble each other, 'tis very bad reasoning to infer the same things from one as the other. And this I apprehend to be in both the Cases before us.

As to the Labourers who enter'd at the eleventh Hour, we do not read that they were call'd before; and if so, it does not resemble the common Case of delaying Sinners, who have been deaf to the repeated Calls of God both in his Word and Providence.

As to the Case of the penitent Thief, there is something in every Circumstance of it peculiar and extraordinary; and therefore it cannot justly be argu'd from, to excuse the Procrastination of Sinners in common. What tho we read of a Man's being converted but a little before his Death; we have no promise to assure us, that if we delay preparing for the other World, it shall succeed with us as well as the last. Besides, this Thief had six Hours time to consider what he had been doing, whither he was going, and what was necessary to fit him for another World: but no delaying presumptuous Sinner can be sure of six Minutes to come. Again, The Conversion of this Thief seems to have been the first-Fruits of the Blood of the Cross, a Miracle of sovereign distinguishing Grace, whereby our Saviour would honour the Ignominy of his Death; to show, that while he was crucify'd in Weakness, there was an infinite Virtue in his Sufferings, tho he died in appearance as criminal. Moreover, some are of opinion, that this Thief never had the Offers of the Gospel before; and if so, I am sure he was so far from being a late Penitent, that he had the Honour of being an early Convert: for 'tis not reasonable to expect a Man should embrace Christianity, till Christ has been offer'd to him in the Gospel.

I have not now time to mention what Prejudices lay in the way of this Man's Conversion, and how he overcame them; what a distinguishing Lustre there was in his Faith, to own our Saviour while under a Cloud of Disgrace, and while suffering the shameful and accursed Death of the Cross: to own him, I say, at a time when one of his Disciples had betray'd him, another had deny'd him, and all of 'em had forsook him and fled; to own him while deserted by his Father, and insulted by Men and Devils. Yet none of these Discouragements hinder'd him from making an open, bold, solemn Confession of Jesus as Lord and Christ; so that with an extraordinary Humility, and a lively Faith, he addresses himself to his dying Saviour, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom.* Now who that considers this extraordinary Case of the penitent Thief, can see any ground, from this Instance, to delay preparing for Eternity?

Finally, If any will yet be so perverse as to venture on in a Course of Sin, and resolve to take shelter in this Instance, I would intreat 'em to remember, that there was another Thief died at the same, under the most deplorable Circumstances of Impenitency. So that there is much greater reason to think, if thou defer'st preparing for Eternity till thou art just finishing Time, that God will rather judiciously harden thee, than work a Miracle for thy Conversion. How melancholy a Consideration is it then, that any who call themselves Christians, and pretend to be the *Guides of Souls, should teach People, that to defer their Repentance is but a venial Sin; or as others of the same Communion, that 'tis no Sin at all: and so encourage Men to delay their Repentance till brought to a Death-Bed?

Thus have I pass'd thro the three general Heads I propos'd to insist upon. And I see I must wave those Inferences I design'd from the preceding Discourse, and can only mention one, *viz.* Since the Living know they shall die, then 'tis the most reasonable thing in the World, immediately, and without delay, to prepare for the invisible State.

Now that I may, if possible, prevail with poor Sinners to do so, I shall suggest a few things briefly to their most serious Thoughts.

* Escobar, Soto, Morinus, Lugo, &c.

Consider that nothing can be more unreasonable and absurd, than for Men to continue in Sin, and defer preparing for Death, in hopes they shall have time to repent hereafter: for what is the meaning of this, but that they'll continue in the practice of those things which hereafter they'll be ashamed of; and, if ever they heartily repent, will wish ten thousand times they had never done? Can any thing be more absurd than for a Man to continue in Sin, in hopes to repent upon a Death-Bed; *i.e.* in hopes to have Trouble, and Sorrow, and Anguish, beyond all Expression and Thought? Would any Man, who has the use of his Reason, continually eat of that Food, which he is certain beforehand will make him sick even to Death, and that he can never expect a moment's Ease till his Stomach is discharged of it? Yet such desperate Madness are all impenitent Sinners guilty of, who delay preparing for the other World, in hopes of doing it on a Death-bed. A Modern represents the Folly of it after this manner: "'Tis, says he, just as if a Man shou'd be content to be shipwreck'd, in hopes that he shall afterwards escape by a Plank, and get safe to Shore."

Again, Consider that a time of Sickness and Old Age is the most inconvenient which can be, to enter on any important Work: The Infirmities which commonly attend aged Persons, make 'em uneasy to themselves, and unserviceable to others. What can such do when the Strength of their Bodies is enfeebled, and the Faculties of their Minds impair'd, so that the Grasshopper is a Burden, and Desire shall fail? I say, what can such do, when their Apprehensions are slow, their Judgments weak, their Affections cold, and every thing in Body and Mind under the greatest Disorder?

Moreover, let it be consider'd, that the longer Men delay preparing for Death, and go on in Sin, the more difficult it will be for 'em to return to God. The Prophet compares the Change of a customary Sinner, to the washing of a Blackmoor white: *Can the Ethiopian charge his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? Then may ye also do Good, that are accustomed to do Evil.*

Again, If Men have any reason to repent of their Sins, they have reason to do it immediately. if thou art convinc'd of the Evil of Sin, and therefore would forsake it, 'tis much more reasonable thou shouldst do it now, than defer it to an uncertain Hereafter: for the greater Evil Sin is, the sooner we leave it, the better. Art thou convinc'd of the dangerous Consequences which will attend Sin, that it will expose thee to the Wrath of God, and to endless and inexpressible Miseries? Why, if there is such hazard in Sin, then to break off our Sins immediately, is the safest Course in the World: for the longer a Man goes on in Sin, the greater Danger he puts himself in, and the greater Punishment he exposes himself to. Hast thou not run far enough in Debt? Wouldst thou dare to increase the Sum of thy Guilt, and treasure up more Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and the fearful Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God? Dost thou promise to prepare for Death hereafter? Fool that thou art, thou art not sure of any time but the present. Moreover, should your Circumstances in your last Sickness be as favourable as you could desire; should you have some time allow'd you, and the use of your Reason too, you are not sure that you shall have a Heart to repent. Repentance and Faith are the Gift of God; and 'tis evident from Scripture and Experience, that poor Sinners can no more prepare themselves for the other World without God's special Grace, than they can subsist in this, without the common Concurrence of his mighty Power.

Again; Consider how ungrateful and disingenuous 'tis for Men to devote the first and best part of their time to the Service of Sin, and reserve only the Dregs of Life for the Service of God. Can you imagine that such an Offering will be pleasing to the Almighty, when there is no Prince on Earth but would abhor it?

Once more, consider with what Horrour you'll be seiz'd, if you should be summon'd to the Grave, and surpriz'd by Death with-out any Preparation at all: How will you bear the Terrors of a wounded Spirit, when you are not capable of supporting your selves under the Pains of a languishing Body?

What will you do? Whither will you fly? What can you say, when the Heavens are dark over your Heads, and Hell blazes under your Feet? Therefore as you know you shall certainly die, earnestly beg of God the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, that you may be *always Ready*: then Death in any Dress will be no Terror to you; but you will rather be *glad to find the Grave*, because Death will be for your infinite Advantage: as we have reason to believe it was to that excellent Minister of the Gospel, whose Decease has occasion'd this Discourse.

He was justly esteem'd by all Men of Probity and good Sense, who had the advantage of his Acquaintance: For if one consider the Reverend Mr. *EWER* in any Relation while living, he was very desirable.

He has distinguish'd himself for several Years as an exemplary Christian, whose Piety towards God, and Affability towards Men, have recommended him to the Esteem and Approbation of all; *Being an Example to the Believers in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity*. He was a *Nathanael*, an *Israelite* indeed, one who cou'd not stoop to the little Arts and Disguises by which some People make their way in the World.

He had a prudent and regular Zeal for the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls. He ever express'd a just Indignation against Sin, and press'd after the highest degrees of Holiness. He kept clear from the Extremes of Superstition and Enthusiasm, believing that substantial Religion did consist in a Conformity to the Moral Perfections of the Godhead. His Moderation was remarkable, and extensive: He follow'd the things which made for Peace, and diffus'd the grateful Odours of Charity wherever he came. He was patient and submissive under the various Trials and Afflictions, to which he was expos'd thro the Course of his Life.

And if we consider him in his publick Character, as a Divine, he was well qualify'd with useful Learning and Ministerial Gifts: *A Man Vigilant, Sober, and of Good Behaviour; given to Hospitality, apt to Teach; not given to Wine, no Striker, not greedy of filthy Lucre, but Patient; not a Brawler, not Covetous; One that rul'd well his own House, having his Children in subjection with all Gravity*. And as this Minister of Christ had a peculiar aptness to Teach, so he was unwearied in his Master's Work; having the Glory of God, and the Interest of Souls constantly at Heart. The Zeal of God's House had eaten him up; he was continually seeking of you, and not yours: *He coveted no Man's Gold or Silver*; he was the farthest in the World from a little mercenary Spirit: 'Twas not the Prospect of outward Gain, but the Love of Souls, that engag'd him in the Ministerial Work. He did forego that which he might have demanded, I mean a Maintenance for himself and Family: For no Man is oblig'd to go a Warfare upon his own Charge; and the Apostle says, *That Christ hath ordain'd that he that preaches the Gospel should live of it*. Yet you are Witnesses for your deceas'd Pastor, that he always generously gave you his Labours; and yet that did not cause him to take the less pains in the promoting of your Salvation. But he studied diligently to shew himself approv'd, a Workman who needed not to be asham'd, rightly dividing the Word of Truth; and constantly in the Course of his Ministry (as I am inform'd by those who attended it) he did insist upon the great and substantial Truths contain'd in the Christian Revelation.

If the Sermons of your deceas'd Pastor had not all the Embellishments of Language which some boast of, they had this peculiar Advantage, to be full of solid Divinity; which, I think, is a much better Character for a Pulpit-Discourse, than to say, that 'tis full of pompous Eloquence and Flights of Wit. The Praise of this useful Minister is in all the Churches, where the knowledg of him has reach'd. Here indeed he liv'd, here he constantly preach'd; and, I believe, you'll all own, that his Life was an excellent Sermon: for in that you might see the Practicableness and Usefulness of Relative Duties. In him you might behold the manly Tenderness of a loving Husband, the melting

Compassions of a kind Father, the generous Freedom of a true Friend, and the admirable Qualifications of a faithful Pastor. How did he exhort and reprove, and rebuke with all Long-Suffering and Doctrine; meekly instructing those who oppos'd themselves! Did he not warn every Man, Night and Day, beseeching them with Tears?

Thus did he fulfil his Ministry, having obtain'd Mercy of the Lord to be faithful; always desiring, that Christ might be magnify'd in his Body, whether in Life or Death. For he accounted not his Life dear to himself, so that he might finish his Course with Joy, and the Ministry which he had receiv'd of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.

As to his particular Behaviour during his last Sickness, I am told by those who were nigh him, that he did not pass the time of his Illness without some violent Assaults from Satan: but it pleas'd the Lord to afford him speedy Relief, and to make him more than a Conqueror, when he consider'd his Interest in the everlasting Covenant, which is order'd in all things, and sure. He had not only good Hope thro Grace: but before he left this World, he express'd his Satisfaction and Joy, *That all his Sins were pardon'd, and that that God whom he had serv'd in the Gospel, would never leave him nor forsake him.*

His Indisposition was but short; he was well and dead within the Compass of seven Days. He did not apprehend that he should die of his Illness, till about two days before his Death. His Pain was so great, that he car'd to discourse but little; and when he drew near his end, he was sometimes delirious. Yet when he had the least Interval, he express'd a very deep Concern for the Church under his Care, which he had fed and govern'd agreeably to the Divine Word. But he has done sowing in the Church Militant, and is gone to reap the Fruits of his Labours in the Church Triumphant. He is enter'd into that Rest which remains for the People of God: He is fallen asleep in Jesus, having fought the good Fight, and finish'd his Course, and kept the Faith. Death has clos'd his Eyes, and seal'd up his Lips till the first Resurrection.

You are to have no more Admonitions nor Exhortations from him. May you that once rejoic'd in his Light, and were comforted and edify'd under his Ministry, remember the wholesom Truths he taught, and the excellent Duties he recommended to your Practice; that he may not be a swift Witness against you in the Day of God.

I know I cannot speak this, without occasioning a great Emotion in your Mind; bu let not your Passions get the start of your Reason, and so hinder your receiving the Instructions which this Providence may furnish you withal.

To you who were his special Care and Charge, to whom his Memory will be ever precious; Continue in the Belief of those Doctrines, and in the Practice of those Duties you have been taught by him from the Word of God. Disappoint Satan or any Agents of his, who may have Designs to divide and scatter you. *Labour to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bonds of Peace: And put on as the Elect of God, Holy and Beloved, Bowels of Mercy, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.* And tho you have loft him who watch'd over you in the Lord, remember that the great Shepherd of the Sheep, and Bishop of your Souls, lives for ever; and if you are humble, and charitable, patient, and submissive, and wait on God, he will yet *satisfy his Poor with Bread*, and give you a Pastor after his own Heart, who shall feed you with Knowledg and Understanding.

To you his mournful Relict; Consider 'tis the Hand of that God, who is so wise, that he cannot do any thing against the real Interest of those who love him. Indeed he has suddenly remov'd from

you, him whom you hop'd to have enjoy'd many Years: But your God is the same to day, yesterday, and for ever; and has promis'd to be the Judg of the Widow, and that he will never leave nor forsake those who put their trust in him.

To you the tender Offspring of the Deceas'd; I charge you, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that you serve your Father's God: remember what seasonable Advice he gave you, and with what Importunity and Fervour he us'd to pray, that your Souls may be sav'd in the Great Day of our Lord. Let your Father's Vertues live in your Lives, and do you follow him as he follow'd Christ; then shall you meet him again with Comfort, at the Right-hand of the Redeemer, when he shall come the second time without Sin, to Salvation.

Once more, to all you who were the constant Auditors of that excellent Minister, whose Remains we are about to commit to the Dust: Let me intreat you to lay this Providence to Heart. The Wise-Man says, *'Tis better to go to the House of Mourning, than to go to the House of Feasting; for that is the end of all Men, and the Living will lay it to his Heart.* Probably here are many of you who have sat under the Reverend Mr. Ewer's Ministry for several Years, and yet continue in a State of Nature. God grant, that since you cannot date your Conversion from any of his Sermons, you may from this awful Providence; which publishes the Vanity of human Life, and calls aloud upon Sinners to make an early Preparation for the invisible World. Tho you have a great while resisted the Importunities of the Son of God, and would not be prevail'd upon by the Rhetorick of his Tears and Blood; I beseech you by the Mercies of God, and by the melting Compassions of the meek Jesus, that you immediately cast down the Weapons of your Rebellion, and submit to the Righteousness and Scepter of the Son of God. Then shall you have Hope in Death, and eternal Happiness after it; for an abundant Entrance shall be administer'd to all such, into the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *For blessed are the Dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their Labours; and their Works do follow them.*⁵³

This text was transcribed from image files generated from the Google Books version of John Piggott's book, *Eleven Sermons Preach'd Upon Special Occasions* (London: John Darby, 1714), 372-422 (<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=ARkHAAAAQAAJ>). The original is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

Note: In the original text, there were a number of marginal references (mainly Scripture references). These have been rendered as footnotes in this text. The position of these footnotes were assigned by the transcriber and any inaccuracy in their positioning is his alone.

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