

## THE END OF THE RIGHTEOUS DESIRED

### NO. 746

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 21, 1867,  
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AT THE AGRICULTURAL HALL, ISLINGTON.**

*“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”  
Numbers 23:10.*

CARLYLE, in his “History of the French Revolution,” tells us of a Duke of Orleans who did not believe in death. And when his secretary stumbled on the words, “The *late* King of Spain,” he angrily demanded what he meant by it. The flattering attendant replied, “My Lord, it is a title which some of the kings of Spain have taken.”

In all this assembly I have not such a lunatic! For you unanimously believe that the entire race of men await alike the inevitable hour. We know that all our paths, wind as they may, will lead to the grave. A certain king of France believed in death, but forbade that it should ever be mentioned in his presence. “And if,” said he, “I at any time look pale, no courtier must dare, on pain of my displeasure, to mention it in my presence.” Thus imitating the foolish ostrich, which, when pursued by the hunter, and utterly unable to escape, is said to hide its head in the sand fancying that it is secure from the enemy which it cannot see.

I trust I do not address today any men so idiotic as to desire to forget the certainty of death, or to thrust the fact from their remembrance. I trust that, being sane men, you desire to look in the face the whole of your future history, both in the present world and in worlds beyond the region of sight. And, foreseeing that soul and body must part in the article of death, you are desirous to consider that event that you may be prepared for it. You desire to take death into your reckoning that it may not surprise you. He who should go upon a long journey and provide for every difficulty on the road but one, would probably find the journey a failure. If, with a rolling chariot for the solid ways, he had forgotten to find the means of crossing the last *river* which would divide him from the country which he sought, he would be disappointed after all his pains.

If you have provided for *life*, but have not also prepared for *death*, what better will you be, my Hearer, than such a foolish traveler? We have heard of one, who, going into a tavern, ordered according to his wildest wishes and feasted sumptuously on the best the house afforded, hour after hour. But when the host came with the bill, he told him that he had no money, and had quite forgotten the reckoning, thinking it quite enough to attend to the eating and drinking while these were the order of the day, without perplexing himself about the unknown future. Alas, my Hearer, are you living in this inn of life, forgetting the reckoning? Do you go from cup to cup, from merriment to merriment, feasting as though there were no day of account appointed for you?

If so, are you fool or knave, or both? For a man who would enjoy life, and yet shirk the account of his responsibilities with which the scene must close, is either foolish, or knavish, or both. Surely, since we must die. Since “there is no discharge in this war.” Since every man must be a conscript to the army of Death. Since whether it is tomorrow or the next day, or in a few years time, every one of us must pass through the iron gate—it behooves us, knowing the fact, to take it into our account—to be diligent in forestalling its demands and providing for its emergencies.

And yet I should not wonder if many here almost shudder at the subject which I am now introducing, so unaccustomed are they to it! Or, if they listen to it, they consider it to be especially applicable to those by whom they are surrounded, but they fail to see its application to themselves. Young’s verse is true—“All men think all men mortal but themselves.” They regard others as having death written upon their brow, but they imagine that they, at least, shall last for years to come! They will not dare admit that they are immortal, yet alas, they act as if they thought they were so. And trifling away year after year, suffer life itself to disappear without improvement.

I beseech all honest and wise hearts at this hour to reflect upon their latter end. Prepare *now* that you may be ready when the final summons shall be sounded, and may God grant you Divine Grace that the words of this morning may be made helpful to your preparations. Balaam, though a base man, was no fool. *He* had thoughts of death. He did not shut

his eyes to what he did not like. He believed that he should die, and he had desires about it—and though those desires were never realized, but the reverse—yet he had wit enough to gaze upon the tents of God’s chosen Israel and to say from his heart, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

I shall regard this exclamation as having in it a double wish. First, a wish concerning death, and secondly, a wish concerning the after death. When these have been spoken upon as the Holy Spirit may help me, I shall try to make some practical use of the whole.

I. First, dear Friends, Balaam’s WISH CONCERNING DEATH. He anxiously desired that he might die such a death as the righteous die. Truly we commend his choice, for, in the first place, it must, at the least, be as well with the righteous man when he comes to die, as with any other man. By the righteous man we mean the man who has believed in Jesus Christ and so has been covered with Christ’s righteousness, and washed in His most precious blood, and moreover, has by the power of the Holy Spirit received a new heart, a *righteous* heart, so that his actions are righteous both towards God and man.

Such a man, being righteous by faith in Jesus Christ unto perfect justification, and righteous also in act and spirit through sanctification of the Holy Spirit, is alone the truly righteous man! Such a man must be right at last, and this you will see clearly by the following story. A certain carping infidel, after having argued with a poor countryman who knew the faith, but who knew little else, said to him, “Well, Hodge, you really are so stupid that there is no use arguing with you, I cannot get you out of this absurd religion of yours.” “Ah, well,” said Hodge, “I dare say I am stupid, Master, but do you know we poor people like to have two strings to our bow?”

“Well,” said the critic, “what do you mean by that?” “Master, I’ll show you. Suppose it should all turn out as *you* say. Suppose there is no God, and there is no hereafter, don’t you see I am as well off as you are? Certainly, it will not be any worse for me than it will be for you if we, both of us, get annihilated. But don’t you see if it should happen to be true as *I* believe, what will become of you?”

Clearly in either case it must be right with the righteous, for if he should have ignorantly received a cunningly devised fable, yet, seeing according to his own experience it makes him a better and a happier man. So far so good—he is no loser here—and he will be certainly at the last in no worse a position than the man who rejected the holy and comfortable influences of what he styled a deception.

While, if the religion of Jesus should be true—ah, ghastly, if for you who doubt it!—if it should all be true, ah, then your weeping and your wailing at the discovery will be a terrible contrast to the joy and the glory which God has reserved for them that love Him! Upon the very lowest possible ground it will be well with the righteous, as well at any rate as with the best of other men. There is this to be said for the righteous man—he goes to the death chamber with a quiet conscience. It has been clearly ascertained that in the event of death the mind is frequently quickened to a high degree of activity, so that it thinks more, perhaps, in the course of five minutes than it could have done in the course of years at other times.

Persons who have been rescued from drowning have said that they imagined themselves to have been weeks in the water, for the thoughts, the many views and visions, the long and detailed retrospect seemed to them to have required weeks—and yet the whole transpired in a few seconds! Frequently towards the last, the soul travels at express speed, traversing its past life as though it rode upon lightning. Ah, then how blessed is that man who, looking back upon the past, can see many things of which conscience can approve! And how accursed must that man’s deathbed be who has to look back upon a youth spent in folly, a middle life of sin, and an old age of iniquity!

What will it be, my Hearer, if, when you lie dying there should rise up before your memory those whom you led into sin, seduced to vice, or taught in profligacy! A grim assemblage must gather around some men’s beds when guilt, like a grim chamberlain, shall usher them in, one by one, and call out their names with horrible distinctness, and tell out their doings and dealings with the wretch who shivers on the brink of death accused by so many, and unable to answer one of a thousand. I picture such a man traveling over the wastes of remorse, hounded by the wolves of his past sins—rushing with desperation into a destruction still worse than his present woe—all unable to endure the horrible baying of his old sins, much less to endure their sharper fangs when they shall tear him in pieces and there shall be none to deliver!

But the righteous man knows that though his sins were as scarlet, they have been made white as wool through the precious blood of Christ! And moreover, by the power of the Holy Spirit, his life has been kept from the vices of the

world and he has been enabled to serve his Lord. This surely must help to make soft his dying pillow. He remembers those holy days of sacred worship, those gatherings around the family altar, that child taught to pray, that young man won from folly and led in the paths of righteousness. Above all he remembers the love visits which the Lord Jesus has paid to his favored soul! And so, perfectly at peace, forgiving all men their offenses as he desires to be forgiven, and conscious that his Father has forgiven him, he can sleep upon his dying bed as softly as on the stillest night of his life. “Let me,” in this sense, “die the death of the righteous.”

Again, the righteous man, when he dies, does not lose his all. With every other man the sound of “earth to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes,” is the end of present seeming wealth and the beginning of eternal and real need. But the Christian is not made a bankrupt by the grave—death to him is *gain*. “Go,” said the dying Saracen hero, Saladin, “take this winding sheet and as soon as I expire, bear it on a lance through all the streets, and let the herald cry as he holds aloft the ensign of death, ‘This is all that is left of Saladin, the conqueror of the East.’ ” He need not have so said if he had been a Christian, for the Believer’s heritage is not torn from him, but *opened up* to him by the rough hand of Death! The world to come and all its infinite riches and blessedness are ours in the moment of departure.

It is written upon the tomb of Cyrus, “Stranger, here lies Cyrus, who gave the empire to the Persians. Grudge him not the little earth that covers him.” But the Christian lies not there under the tombstone—he is not here, for he is risen! He has left his poor worn garments here to be washed, and cleansed, and purified—and by-and-by, when they are whiter than any fuller can make them—he will come to take his garments again. But meanwhile the Christian is not buried here, nor is the tomb his sole possession—his treasure is in Heaven, and he is gone where his wealth is stored. Who would not wish to die a death which would be a gain to him? Are you not conscious, some of you, that death would be a horrible loss to you? It would shut up forever all the outlets of your present mirth and all the sources of your present joy. Alas for you! For the day of the Lord to you will be darkness and not light!

“Let me die the death of the righteous” may well be our wish because he dies with a good hope. Peering into eternity, with eyes marvelously strengthened, the Believer frequently beholds even while he is yet below, something of the glory which is to be revealed in him. Have you ever heard the songs of dying women, and seen their glowing countenances as they thought they could hear the angels and all but see the invisible glory? Have you ever seen their beaming eyes and heard their memorable words, so rich, so original, so quaint, so wet with the dew of Heaven that they could not have borrowed them? Ignorant, unlettered persons have I heard say in their dying moments words which were worthy of the most refined poetry.

Have you ever seen the gray-headed man who, in his weakness, had come to talk as a child, suddenly clothed with patriarchal dignity, as, stretching out his bony hand he has exclaimed, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me”? It is sweet to die with Canaan’s happy land in view—to melt into eternal bliss as the twilight of the morning melts into opening day! It must be a dreary thing to die believing in annihilation, or expecting a doom still worse! My Hearer, will this be your death? Will you hear the warning cry of the angel: “One woe is past, and, behold, there come two woes more”?

Death is past, but the Judgment and the pit are yet to come. God forbid that such horrors should freeze the genial current of my soul, but may bliss eternal be my prospect from the top of my expiring Pisgah. Let me die as the Christian whose eye is resplendent with visions of light, and whose heart is fired with the confidence of seeing his Redeemer and being made like He is, to dwell with Him world without end!

Moreover, Beloved, the Believer dies in the arms of a Friend. I do not say in the arms of a *mortal* friend, for it has fallen to the lot of some Christians to be burnt at the stake. And some of them have rotted to death in dungeons. But yet I will repeat it, every Believer dies in the arms of a Friend—the best of friends, the Friend that sticks closer than a brother. Precious is communion with the Son of God, and never more so than when it is enjoyed upon the verge of Heaven—

*“Jesus can make a dying bed  
Feel soft as downy pillows are,  
While on His breast I lean my head,  
And breathe my life out sweetly there.”*

Jesus is a Friend who is most practically friendly, for the righteous man, in the most calm and business-like manner, leaves his wife and his children in the hands of God and quotes the promise, “Leave your fatherless children, and let your widows trust in Me.”

He would gladly live, perhaps, to comfort the partner of his bosom a little longer, and to see the children of their mutual love brought up to riper manhood. But since he must go, how often does God enable him to forget all care, to cast it so completely into the hands of Christ, that he sings, “All is well!” I have sometimes heard from dying saints sentences like these, “My business is all settled, I never want to hear again of the stock, of the farm, or of the shop, or of the family, I have put it all away. God will provide for those I have left behind and I have nothing now to do but just to hear the summons, ‘Come up higher,’ and then to enter into my Father’s house.”

My Hearers, I am not giving you an exaggerated picture! I am not telling you some wondrous stories of remarkable departures! I am telling you what is the *common* way of the dying of the righteous, which I trust commends itself to your conscience as being naturally that which righteous men might expect to feel when returning to their God. The Christian dies in peace, and often in triumph. According to the state of his body, or the disease by which he may be taken off, his feelings will vary between peace and triumph. Sometimes the death scene is still as a summer’s evening, and the Christian crosses the Jordan almost dry shod. Or if there is a storm, and Jordan overflows its banks, the Believer, resting upon the everlasting arms, feels the bottom of the river and finds it good.

At times, however, God has been pleased to give to His people Divine Grace to mount to Heaven in a chariot of fiery joy, so that their dying bed has been a throne, and their chamber a palace of glory. These instances are not uncommon, they are probably the rule—but in all cases there is a strong, deep current of pure and precious peace which glides along the valley of death and makes glad the follower of the Lamb—“Let me die the death of the righteous,” for such dying is the dawn of bliss, the beginning of immortal glory!

Lastly, when the good man dies, he dies with honor. Who cares for the death of the wicked? A few mourning friends lament for a little time, but they almost feel it a relief within a day or two that such a one is gone. As for the righteous, when he dies there is weeping and mourning for him! Like Stephen, devout men carry him to the sepulcher and make great lamentation over him. See the funeral of the tares? They are hurried up in heaps, they are thrown over the garden wall, they are burned, and no one regrets them. They were no blessing in living—they are no lamentation in dying.

Did you ever see the funeral of the wheat, if such I may call it? Here come the golden sheaves! The wagon is heavy with the precious freight: on the top stands one who gives a cheery note, and all around the harvest men and village maidens dance or shout for joy as they bring home the shocks of golden corn to the garner! Let me be gathered home with the triumphant funeral of the wheat which man values—garnered by angels, housed with songs of saintly spirits—and not cast away as a reprobate and worthless thing, like the weeds of which men are thankful to be rid.

May it be yours and mine, when we depart, to be remembered by those whom we have succored in their need, whom we instructed in their ignorance, whom we comforted in their distress! May we not depart from this world shaken off from it, as Paul shook the viper from his hand, but may our ashes be gathered up as sacred dust, precious in the sight of the Lord! Let me, in that sense and every other, “die the death of the righteous.” I need not tarry long on this point. Any one of these suggestions might suffice to incite, even in such a man as Balaam, a desire to “die the death of the righteous.” Surely it will kindle in you the same longings.

**II.** Balaam spoke concerning the godly man, of HIS LAST END. I do not know that this wicked prophet, whose eyes were once opened, knew anything about this latter end as I shall interpret it, but you and I know, and so let us use his words, if not his thoughts. We do *not* believe that death is the last end of men. Those who *do* believe it are welcome to their belief. We certainly shall not wish to deprive them of it. When a dog has his bone, let him keep it—we envy not his enjoyment. If ungodly men delight in the thought of dying like brutes, perhaps they know their own value best and know what would be best for society if it should happen to them. So they, having made their choice, shall keep it if they will.

As for us, we believe ourselves to be immortal—that God has endowed us with a *spiritual* nature which shall outlive the sun, outlast the stars, and run on existing with eternity. Like the years of God’s right hand, like the days of the Most High, God has ordained the life of souls to be. Now, I can well believe that the most of us wish that our position after death may be like that of the righteous. The first consideration in death is that the spirit is disembodied. What a spirit is

like without a body you and I cannot guess. It is, of course, not a thing to be seen, or heard, or touched, or handled. It is quite out of the realm of materialism and quite beyond the reach of the senses.

Yet you and I are conscious that there is an immaterial something within us infinitely more precious than these poor clay hands, and feet, and eyes of ours. This immaterial something will leave the body, and it will be naked—not a thing to be desired, for even Paul says, “Not that we would be unclothed.” He did not desire the disembodied state for its own sake, nor should we. Those disembodied saints who are now in Heaven are happy, perfectly happy as to their *souls*, but they, as to their manhood, are not yet made perfect. They, without us, the Apostle says, cannot be made perfect. Until we all are gathered in and the Resurrection Day comes, they are without bodies, and are, as it were, but half men.

All the powers they have are full of happiness, but they are waiting for the adoption, to wit, the *redemption* of the body which will be at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But what is there desirable in the state of the Christian when his spirit is disembodied? I should desire to be like a Christian in the disembodied state, because he will not be altogether in a new and strange world. Some of you have never exercised your spirits at all about the spirit-world. You have talked with thousands of people in bodies, but you have never spoken with spiritual beings. To you the realm of spirit is all unknown, but let me tell you, Christians are in the daily habit of communing with the spirit-world, by which I mean that their souls converse with God! Their spirits are affected by the Holy Spirit. They have fellowship with angels who are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that are the heirs of salvation.

Now, when some of you enter into the spirit-world, you will say, “I never was here before. This is a foreign land to me.” I can conceive that you will call for some companion. “Is there anyone here with whom I have had dealings?” And there will be a voice heard, “Yes, I have often spoken to you, and you to me.” “Who is that?” It is Satan or some evil spirit with whom, alone out of all spirits you have ever had communion. He will be the only friend to meet you—and what a friend! Your grim companion, your fellow sinner, and your fellow prisoner forever!

But a Christian in the disembodied state, if I may so imagine it, might cry, “Where are my friends? I have been here before! Where are those with whom aforesaid I had fellowship?” And a response will come from the ministering angels, and there, above all, will be the blessed Spirit of God! There will be God Himself, and the Spirit of the ever-living Christ. All these will make up sweet company for the Believer. After the soul has left the body, we believe that it at once appears before God, and receives by anticipation what will be its final sentence. To the righteous soul there is no sleeping in the grave, no delay in “purgatory” before he enters into Heaven. “*Today* shall you be with Me in Paradise,” is the portion of all who trust in Jesus.

Now, think, dear Hearer, your disembodied spirit will have to appear before the fiery eyes of God! What, then, is your relation to God this morning? Why, some of you never think of Him! Some of you, I almost blush to say it, have cursed Him to His face, and have even asked Him to damn you! Ah, He will do it, except you *repent*! But how delightful must it be for a man to say, “I am going up to God. He is my Father. It is no more terror to me than for a child to go home from school. I am going to my God with whom I am reconciled by the precious blood of Jesus. I have known my God, He is no stranger to me. I saw Him in Christ, and I trusted Him. And all my life long I learned to see Him in the works of nature. I could say of the mountains and the valleys, ‘My Father made them all.’ I was never so happy as when thoughts of God came flowing into my spirit. My spirit has dwelt with God when in the body. It is not afraid to fly up to God now that it has left the body behind it.”

Surely, in the prospect of such a judgment, each man may say, “Let my last end be like his!” After the judgment is pronounced, the disembodied spirit dwells in Heaven. Some of you could not be happy if you were allowed to enter that Heaven. If you could be admitted between those pearly gates which forever exclude pollution, sin, and shame, you could not be happy there. Shall I tell you why? It is a land of *spirit*, and you have neglected your spirit! Some of you even deny that you *have* a spirit, and I do not wonder that you say so because I do not suppose that you have ever exercised it. But let a man who has delighted to commune with the Holy Spirit enter into the spirit-world, and he will be in his element!

Besides, the world to come is a holy world. The engagements of disembodied spirits are all pure and lovely. What will that man do who loved drunkenness, who indulged in unclean habits? He will be out of his element. If he could be in Heaven, as Whitfield used to say, he would ask God to let him out, and would run into Hell for shelter, for Heaven would be a dreadful place to an ungodly man! There is a dream which is told (I tell it not for the dream, but for the moral

of it) of a young woman who imagined that she was in Heaven unconverted and thought she saw upon the pavement of transparent gold, multitudes of spirits dancing to the sweetest music.

She stood still, unhappy, motionless, silent, and when the King said to her, "Why do you not partake in the joy?" she answered, "I cannot join in the dance, for I do not know the measure. I cannot join in the song, for I do not know the tune." Then said He in a voice of thunder, "What are you doing here?" And she thought herself cast out forever. Ah, dear Hearer! Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. If you do not learn Heaven's language on earth you cannot learn it in the world to come! If you are not holy you cannot be with holy saints. What a misery would it be for you to be always with those who are praising and serving God if you know nothing of His love. If you have never praised Him on earth, you will not readily take to it there. You would be strangers in a strange land!

Ah, trouble not yourselves, that shall never be your portion. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," much less can he ever *enter* there. After awhile our bodies will be raised again. The soul will re-enter the body, for Christ has not only bought the souls of His people, but their bodies, too. Think of that tremendous day, when the trump shall be heard, shrill as a clarion, ringing through earth and Heaven, and Hell, "Awake, you dead! Awake, you dead! And come to judgment! Come to judgment, come away!" Then up will start the bodies of the wicked. I know not in what shapes of dread they will arise, nor how they will appear.

What forms of ghastliness they will put on or what horrors will wreath their brows, I cannot tell. But this I know, that when the *righteous* shall rise they will be glorious like the Lord Jesus! They shall have all the loveliness which Heaven itself can give them. Their body here is but a shriveled grain sown in the earth. Their next body will be as much more glorious than that as the sweetest flower of spring is fairer than the shriveled seed that was cast into the mold. It will be a glorious body, raised in honor, raised in power, raised no more to die! Oh, glorious hour! "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my *flesh* shall I see God, whom I shall see for *myself*, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."

Would you not wish to rise in the image of Christ as the righteous will? Remember you *must* rise from the grave very much what you are when put into it. I think I see a perfect model of a city before me, containing all that is to be built. Here I see a temple of alabaster, and there a dunghill. The architect is bid to produce on the largest scale, in the purest marble, that city as modeled before him. Rest assured that he will produce the temple as a temple, only far more splendid, and the dunghill as a dunghill, only 10,000 times more loathsome! Now, which are *you* in that model? For this life is a model of the life to come, and it is written, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

Ah, my Hearer, you may well wish to be holy here that you may be holy there! To be pure here, that you may be pure there! To be godlike on earth, that you may be godlike in Heaven. "Let my last end be like that of the righteous." Let me wave the palm of victory! Let me wear the crown of triumph! Let me be girt about with the fair white linen of immaculate perfection! Let me cast my crown before Jehovah's feet! Let me swell the everlasting song! Let my voice make one in that eternal chorus, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" Oh, how will I sing! How sweetly shall my voice be attuned to notes of gratitude! How will my heart dance with ecstasy before that throne! "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

**III.** As this is the last occasion of my preaching in this great hall I shall venture to trespass a little longer, and on the third head I shall most earnestly ask your solemn attention for a few minutes longer. We have to make A PRACTICAL USE OF THE WHOLE.

Behold the vanity of mere desires. Balaam *desired* to die the death of the righteous, and yet was slain in battle fighting *against* those righteous men whom he envied. There is an old proverb which says, "Wishers and woulders make bad housekeepers." And another which declares, "Wishing never filled a sack." I commend the truth of those proverbs to you now. Mere *desiring* to die the death of the righteous, though it may be natural, will be exceedingly unprofitable. I beseech you stop not there! Have you ever heard the old classic story of those ancient Gauls who, having once drunk the sweet wines of Italy, constantly, as they smacked their lips, said one to another, "Where is Italy?" And when their leaders pointed to the gigantic Alps crowned with snow, they said, "Cannot we cross them?" Every time they tasted the wine the questions were put, "Where is Italy? And cannot we reach it?" This was good plain sense. So they put on their war harness and marched to old Rome to fight for the wines of Italy.

So, my Brothers and Sisters, every time you hear of Heaven, I should like you, with Gothic ardor, to say, “Where is it? I gladly would go.” And happy should I be if men here would put on the harness of the Christian, and say, “Through floods and flames for such a conquest, to drink of such wines well refined, we would gladly go to the battle that we may win the victory.” Oh, the folly of those who, knowing and desiring this, yet spend their strength for nothing! The Roman Emperor fitted out a great expedition and sent it to conquer Britain. The valiant legionaries leaped ashore, and each man gathered a handful of shells, and went back to his ship again—that was all.

Some of you are equally foolish. You are fitted by God for great endeavors and lofty enterprises, and you are gathering shells! Your gold and your silver, your houses and your lands—they are mere empty shells—and Heaven and everlasting life you let go. Like Nero, you send to Alexandria for sand for your amusements and send not for wheat for your starving souls! O fools and slow of heart! When shall God, who gave you souls, give those souls wisdom that you may seek after the true treasure, the real pearl, the heavenly riches?

“Well,” cries one, “how is Heaven to be had?” It is to had only by a personal seeking after it. I have read of one who, when drowning, saw the rainbow in the heavens. Picture him as he sinks! He looks up, and there if he sees the many-colored bow, he may think to himself, “There is God’s covenant sign that the world shall never be drowned, and yet here I am drowning in this river.” So it is with you! There is the arch of God’s promise over you, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And yet, because you believe not in Him, you will be drowned in your sins.

“I would gladly enlist, then,” says one, “in the army of Christ, and fight for Heaven.” Come on, then, I am Christ’s enlisting officer today. “What am I to give?” says one. Give? Give nothing. “But I have many good works.” These are not to be brought as a price for Heaven. “I have my prayers and my tears of repentance.” These cannot avail meritoriously—if you want to be a Christian, you must come to Christ with empty hands! You know how the recruiting sergeant makes a soldier—not by asking the man to give him something, but by getting him to take the Queen’s shilling. Take Christ—that is God’s enlisting money—and you are enlisted! Do not bring anything, but take the water of life freely. If you will trust the Lord Jesus, and take Him to be your salvation, you are then enlisted as a soldier of Jesus. Oh, may you have Grace to do that!

But remember, all soldiers have to fight! One of the first things you will have to do, if you become a Christian, is to carry a Cross. Ah, you do not like it. “His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.” Take it upon you—and yet to carnal shoulders the Cross is very galling—and nothing but Divine Grace can make it light. You will have to give up your sins! You will have to give up your empty pleasures. You will have to, from now on, bear witness for Christ before a crooked and perverse generation. Do not expect to be Christ’s soldier and yet not wear His uniform. No, you must put on his regimentals. You must wear His crest—His crest is the Cross. You must take His shield, the shield of *faith*, and His sword, which is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And resting alone on Him, depending alone upon His merit, you shall certainly win the victory!

My Brethren, what a blessing it will be if you and I shall ever reach the land of triumph. You remember Bunyan’s picture. He says he saw a brave palace and as he looked up he could hear happy spirits singing on the top. They walked in white, clad in royal robes. And as he heard them singing, he longed to be with them. Going up to the door, he noticed that it was beset with armed men—a great host with pikes, and halberds, and swords—pushing back all who desired to come. Presently he saw a man of bold countenance, covered with armor, go up to a man who sat at a table with a writer’s ink-horn, and he heard him say, “Set down my name, Sir.” And as soon as the name was set down, the man drew his sword and began to hack and hew right and left, cutting himself a way right through the midst of his enemies.

After being covered with sweat and blood, and many wounds, he at length forced an entrance. And Bunyan says, “I did hear them sweetly sing at the top, ‘Come in! Come in! Eternal glory you shall win.’” I am this morning the man with the writer’s ink-horn. Is there anyone here who will say, “Set my name down, Sir”? I trust it will be so. I trust the Holy Spirit will win your hearts for Jesus! That you will rest in Him alone! But the moment your name is down, remember then the battle begins—then, with your sword drawn, you must begin to contend with your besetting sins! You must have done with your old ways, and must fight against them. You will have to cut as never soldier did, for you will have to wound yourself! It will be your own arms and eyes that will have to be given up! Your own sins that will have to be slain! But, oh, the victory will make amends for it all!

It was but the other day that on this floor men wrestled for the mastery—a dangerous sport in which few of us would like to take a share—but I do not doubt that to those who gained the victory, the victory seemed an ample compensation. Certainly to Rome’s old legionaries, when they rode through the streets, and all the people climbed to the very chimney tops to see them ride the streets of Rome, it was enough reward for all their hardships. But the triumphs of Heaven, the shouts of angels, the songs of the redeemed, the hallelujahs, the bliss forever, the glory without end! Oh, those will be an abundant recompense to the humble followers of the Lamb!

Be of good courage, my Brothers and Sisters! Follow the Captain of your salvation! Forward to the fight, to the victory, and to the crown! And may the Lord so bless you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307