

## A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

NO. 481

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 23, 1862

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“But this I say, brethren, the time is short:  
it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;  
and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not;  
and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it:  
for the fashion of this world passeth away.”*

*1 Corinthians 7:29-31*

HOLY Scripture seldom gives a special rule for each particular case, but it rather instructs us by general principles applicable to all cases. To meet every distinct moral emergency which could possibly arise, and solve every separate problem of action, would require rather a library than a volume.

To men who are taught of the Spirit of God, general principles are far more valuable than special precepts, and I am half persuaded that it is so with all persons, for it is less difficult to apply a general principle to a peculiar case than it is to find out exactly what the particular case may be, and what special rule is applicable to it.

In writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle had to answer several questions with regard to marriage, whether, for instance, it was not better in those persecuting times, when men often had to flee suddenly from their houses, that they should remain unmarried. Whether, again, supposing a person became a Christian after marriage, it was lawful for him to separate from the person with whom he was unequally yoked, and several other questions as to fitting action in certain extraordinary positions.

To these the apostle answers with an, “I suppose,” or again, “Howbeit, for this speak I, not the Lord,” as if he felt himself quite out of his element in attempting to meet every case. But soon he lands on sure ground in the verses before us, and seems to say, “Whatever may be the answers which I ought to give to these special questions, of this one thing I am quite sure, I say positively and without any doubt that the time is short, and therefore it remaineth, whether you are married or not, whether you weep or whether you rejoice, whether you buy or whether you sell, that you should act in all these things as knowing their temporary and unsubstantial character.”

Dear brethren, the important lesson which we endeavor to teach this morning is just this—that because time is so short, and the things of this world so frail and fleeting, it becomes us always to look at the things which are seen in their true character, and never to build substantial hopes on unsubstantial comforts, nor seek for solid joy from unreal things.

In order that I may make this matter very plain, and may be the more likely to enlist your attention, and to secure the friendship of your memories in future years, I intend this morning to *take you to a play*. Strange thing for me to do, who has never crossed the threshold of a theater on any occasion, good or bad!

Yet this morning I shall seat you in front of the stage, and I shall *put the worldling side by side with you while the five acts are performed*. I shall next invite you to attend *in the character of a Christian, to look through the whole and discern its emptiness*. Then, in the third place, I shall *point you to the curtain which is quite sure to drop upon the scene*, and then we will walk out of this theater of unreal show, this fashion of this world which passes away, and *see what there is to do in this world which is real, practical, and lasting*.

Do not suppose that the idea of taking you to a theater this morning is original on my part, it is in my text. “The fashion of this world passeth away”—the word translated “fashion” is borrowed from the changing scenes of the drama, where the splendid pageantry vanishes as the scene changes. Nor will you think Holy Scripture too severe in its comparison, when I remind you that one of the world’s own poets has said—

*“All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.”*

Nor will the most precise among you complain of the levity of a metaphor which is sanctioned by apostolic use, but I trust you will all cheerfully listen, while in simple words I tell the story which the bard of the sanctuary has sung in flowing verse.

*“This life’s a dream, an empty show;  
But the bright world to which I go,  
Hath joys substantial and sincere:  
When shall I wake and find me there?”*

**I. WE WILL WITNESS “THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD” AS IT PASSES BEFORE US, LISTENING TO THE WORLDLING’S COMMENT.**

The *first act* introduces *those who have wives*. It opens with a *wedding*. The bride and bridegroom advance to the altar in bridal attire. The bells are ringing, crowds are cheering at the door, while overflowing mirth is supreme within. In another scene we observe domestic happiness and prosperity, a loving husband and a happy wife.

Yet, further on in the performance, rosy children are climbing the father’s knee, the little prattlers are lisping their mother’s name. “Now,” says our companion as he gazes with rapture, “This is real and enduring, I know it is. This will satisfy me, I crave for nothing more than this. *Home* is a word as sweet as heaven, and a healthy happy race of children is as fine a possession as even angels can desire. On this rock will I build all my hope, secure me this portion, and I cheerfully renounce the dreamy joys of religion.”

We whisper in his ear that all this is but a changing scene, and will by and by pass away, for time is short, and wife and children are dying creatures. The man laughs at us and says, “Fanatics and enthusiasts may seek eternal joys, but these are enough for me.” He believes that if there be anything permanent in the universe it is marrying and being given in marriage, educating and bringing up a family, and seeing them all comfortably settled.

He is right in valuing the blessing, but wrong in making it his *all*. Will he see his error before the curtain falls? Or will he continue to found the hopes of an immortal spirit upon dying joys? See the green mounds in the cemetery, and the headstone, with “Here he lies.” Alas for you, poor deluded worldling, where is your soul now? Does it console you that the dust of your offspring shall mingle with your ashes? Where have you now a home? What family have you now to care for? The first act is over, take breath and say, “This also is vanity.”

The tenor of the drama changes, alas, how soon! Household joys are linked with household sorrows. *They that weep* are now before us in the *second act*. The cloudy and dark days have come. There are parents wringing their hands, a beloved child has died, and they are following its corpse to the tomb.

Anon, the merchant has suffered a tremendous loss, he puts his hand to his aching head and mourns, for he knows not what will be the end of his troubles. The wife is smitten by the hand of death, she lies on her bed, blanched with sickness and wan with pain. There is a weeping husband at her side, and then there is another funeral, and in the dim distance I see the black horses again and again.

The woes of men are frequent, and sorrow’s visits are not, like those of angels, few and far between. Our man of the world, who is much moved at this second act, foreseeing his own sorrows therein, weeps, until he fairly sobs out his feelings, clutches us with earnestness and cries, “Surely this is awfully

real, you cannot call this a fleeting sorrow or a light affliction. I will wring my hands forever, the delight of my eyes has been taken from me. I have lost all my joys now, my beloved in whom I trusted has withered like a leaf in autumn before my face. Now shall I despair, I shall never look up again!”

“I have lost my fortune,” says the afflicted merchant, “and distress overwhelms me, this world is indeed a wilderness to me, all its flowers are withered. I would not give a snap of my finger to live now, for everything worth living for is gone!”

Sympathizing deeply with our friend, we nevertheless venture to tell him that these trials to the Christian, because they are so short and produce such lasting good, are not killing sorrows. “Ah,” says he, “you men of faith may talk in that way, but I cannot. I tell you these are real things.”

Like an English sailor, who, seeing a play, sprung upon the stage to help a lady in distress, believing that the whole was real, so do such men weep and sigh, as if they were to mourn forever, because some earthly good has been removed. Oh that they knew that the depths of sorrow were never yet explored by a mortal mourner! Oh, that they would escape from those lower deeps where immortal spirits weep and wail amidst an emphasis of misery!

The sorrows of time are trifles indeed when compared with the pains of everlasting punishment, and on the other hand *we* reckon that they are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

They are but light afflictions, which are but for a moment, a mere pin’s prick to the man of faith. Happy is the man whose eyes are opened to see that heirs of heaven sorrow not as those who are without hope. A real joy of heavenly origin is ever with believers, and it is but the shadow of sorrow which falls upon them. There let the curtain drop—let us enter into an eternal state, and what and where are these temporary griefs?

But the *third act* comes on and presents us with a view of *those who rejoice*. It may be that the firstborn son has come of age, and there are great festivities. They are eating and drinking in the servants’ hall, and in the master’s banquet chamber. There are high notes of joy, and many compliments, and the smiling sire is as glad as man can be.

Or is it the daughter’s wedding, and kind friends implore a thousand blessings on her head, and the father smiles and shares the joy. Or is it a gain in business, a fortunate speculation, or the profits of industry have come flowing in, slowly perhaps, but still surely, and the man is full of rejoicing. He has a house, and home, and friends, and reputation, and honor, and he is, in the eyes of all who know him, happy. Those who do not know him think he has no cares, that he can have no sorrows, that his life must be one perpetual feast, and that surely there can be no spot in his sun, no winter in his year, no ebb to follow his floods.

Our friend by our side is smiling at this sunny picture. “There,” says he, “is not that real? Why, there must be something in that! What more do you want? Only let me get the same, and I will leave the joys of faith, and heaven, and immortality, to yourselves. These are the things for me, only let me laugh and make merry, and you may pray as you will. Fill high the bowl for me, put the roast and the viands on the table, and let me eat and drink, for tomorrow I die.”

If we gently hint to our friend that all this passes away like a vision of the night, and that we have learned to look on it as though it were not, he laughs us to scorn, and accounts us mad when he is most mad himself. As for ourselves, so far from resting upon the softest couch that earth can give us, we spurn its vain delights.

*“There’s nothing round this spacious earth  
That suits my large desire;  
To boundless joy and solid mirth  
My nobler thoughts aspire.*

*Where pleasure rolls its living flood,  
From sin and dross refined;*

*Still springing from the throne of God,  
And fit to cheer the mind.”*

But the *fourth act* of the drama is before us, and *they who buy* demand our attention. The merchant is neither a mourner nor a man of mirth, in the eyes of certain Mammonites he is attending to the one thing needful, the most substantial of all concerns. Here feast your eyes, you hard, practical, earth-scrappers. There are his money bags, hear how they thump on the table! There are the rolls of bonds, the banker's books, the title-deeds of estates, mortgages and securities, and the solid investment in his country's own consols.

He has made a good thing of life, and still he adheres to business, as he should do, and like a painstaking man, he is accumulating still and piling up his heap, meanwhile adding field to field, and estate to estate, till soon he will possess a whole county. He has just now been buying a large and very fine house, where he intends to spend the remainder of his days, for he is about to retire from business. The lawyer is busy making out the transfer, the sum of money is waiting to be paid, and the whole thing is as good as settled.

“Ah! now,” says our friend, who is looking on at the play, “you are not going to tell me that this is all a shadow? It is not. There is something very solid and real here, at least, something that will perfectly satisfy me.” We tell him we dare say there is something that will satisfy *him*, but *our* desires are of a larger span, and nothing but the infinite can fill them.

Alas for the man who can find satisfaction in earthly things! It will be only for a time, for when he comes to lie upon his dying bed, he will find his buyings and his sellings poor things wherewithal to stuff a dying pillow. He will find that his gainings and his acquisitions bring but little comfort to an aching heart, and no peace to a conscience exercised with the fear of the wrath to come.

“Ah, ah!” he cries, and sneers sarcastically, putting us aside as only fit for bedlam, “Let me trade and make a fortune, and that is enough for me, with that I shall be well content!” Alas, poor fool, the snow melts not sooner than the joy of wealth, and the smoke of the chimney, is as solid as the comfort of riches.

But we must not miss the *fifth act*. See the rich man, our friend whom lately we saw married, whom we then saw in trouble, afterwards rejoicing and then prospering in business, has entered upon a green old age, he has retired and *has now come to use the world*.

You will notice that in my text this is the last act of the drama. The world says he has been a wise man and has done well, for all men will praise you when you do well for yourself. Now he keeps a liberal table, a fine garden, excellent horses, and many servants. He has all the comforts in fact that wealth can command, and as you look around his noble park, as you gaze at his avenue of fine old trees, or stay a day or two at the family mansion and notice all its luxuries, you hear your friend saying, “Ay, there is something very real here, what do you think of this?”

When we hint that the grey hairs of the owner of all these riches betoken that his time is short, and that if this be all he has he is a very poor man, for he will soon have to leave it, and that his regrets in leaving will make his death more pitiable than that of a pauper, our friend replies, “Ah! ah! you are always talking in this way. I tell you this is not a play. I believe it is all real and substantial, and I am not, by any talking of yours, to be made to think that it is unsubstantial and will soon be gone.”

O world, you have fine actors, to cheat men so well, or else mortal man is an easy fool, taken in your net like the fishes of the sea. The whole matter is most palpably a mere show, but yet men give their souls to win it. Wherefore, O sons of men, are you thus beside yourselves? “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?”

Dear friends, I have put before your mind's eye a fair picture of that which men who live by sight and not by faith regard as being the chief end of man and the real object of his being. It is to be married, to pass through the trials and joys of life with decency, to trade and grow rich, and at last to use the comforts of this world without abuse.

A very comfortable and quiet picture, by no means the representation we should have to present before you of the profligate, the profane, the dissolute, or the debauched. There is nothing here but what is proper and right, and yet everything is improper and everything becomes wrong at once if these are thought to be the substantial things for which an immortal spirit is to spend its fires, and for which an undying soul is to exhaust its powers.

## II. Let us now take the CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THIS DRAMA.

“Life *is* real, life is earnest,” it is real thus far to the Christian, it is real for work and activity for God, it is real in the solemn responsibility which it brings, it is real in the gratitude which we owe to God for the comforts which He is pleased to bestow. It is real to us so far as we can see God therein, and can turn everything to God’s glory. The unreality of this world to a Christian, is found in the fact that *time is short*. This is the wand which torches the substance and makes it, before the eye of wisdom, dissolve into a shade. Time is short!

When the apostle declares that *they that have wives* should be as though they had none, he does not teach us to despise the marriage state, but not to seek our heaven in it, nor let it hinder our serving the Lord. It is supposed that there are some things which a man without a wife and family can do—those things the man with a wife and family should do. It is supposed that a man without a wife can give his time to the cause of God. The man with a wife should do the same, and he will not find it difficult to do so if God has blessed him with one who will second all his holy endeavors.

It is supposed that a man without a wife has no care. A man with a wife should have none, for he should cast all his cares on God who cares for him. “He that careth not for his own house is worse than a heathen and a publican,” and yet the apostle says, in the verse following my text, “But I would have you without carefulness,” for we should learn to live by faith.

The man who has a large family, and many things to exercise his mind, should yet, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, live as quietly and comfortably as though he had none, depending and resting by simple faith upon the providence and goodness of God.

Then again, it is supposed that an unmarried man will find it easier to die, for there will be none of that sorrow at leaving his beloved family. The man with a wife and family *should*, by faith, find it just as easy since the promise runs, “Leave thy fatherless children, and let thy widows trust in me.” Full of the same faithful tenderness and affection which another husband would exhibit, and even excelling in love and kindness, yet the Christian should look up to the divine Lord who is the husband of the widow, and with confidence leave his offspring, and bid them trust in his God.

May God the Holy Ghost teach us how to walk in our households, loving ever and yet remembering that all our kindred shall pass away.

Again, there is the second act—*weeping*. Every Christian man must weep, but the apostle says that our sorrows are to be regarded by us, because time is short, *as though they were no sorrows at all*. A man who knows that his trials will not last long, can be cheerful under them.

If he sees a Father’s hand in the midst of every adversity, and believes that when he is tried he shall come forth like gold from the furnace, if he knows with the psalmist that “weeping may endure for the night, but that joy cometh in the morning,” why then grief has lost its weight, and sorrow has lost its sting, and while the man weeps he rejoices, seeing the rainbow of the covenant painted on the cloud.

Happy man, who, under bereavement, under crosses, and losses, can still cast his burden upon God, and can say, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation!”

The Christian man is bound to live above his sorrows, he weeps, for “Jesus wept,” he may mourn, for the faithful have been mourners often, but he must not so mourn and weep as to be eaten up with grief. Over the tops of the rolling waves he must see the haven of peace, and rejoice evermore.



So is it in the third part. The Christian has his *rejoicings*, and he is not forbidden to be happy, indeed, he is commanded to rejoice. And the things of this life he may freely enjoy with the double zest of the mercy itself, and of the God who gave it to him.

But still, believer, in all your joys, *remember to hold them with a loose hand*. Never so hold your joys as if they were all in all to you. Though it be wife, or child, or property, or health, or wealth, or fame, still ever stand ready to surrender all into your Father's hand, feeling that these, after all, are not your joys; that you have better springs to drink from than those which earth's summers can dry up, and that you have rivers of pleasure deeper and broader than any which earth's winter shall be able to freeze.

Do you still stand steadily to this, that, as earth cannot cast you down to despair, so it cannot lift you up so as to make you forget your God. Learn in these things to rejoice as though you had them not, and let this be your solace, that your name is written in heaven.

So, too, in the matter of *buying and possessing*. It is not wrong for a Christian to trade and to trade well. I cannot see any reason why a Christian should be a fool, in fact, those who are fools in business are very often a great dishonor to the Christian religion, for a fool is very often first cousin, if not father, to a knave.

But still, while we buy and sell it should always be thus—"This is not my real trade, this is not the way in which I really get rich, for my treasure is beyond the skies, where moth devours not, and where rust cannot consume."

Handle these things, brethren, knowing that they take to themselves wings and fly away. Look at them as transient objects which are to be used and sanctified in the passing, not your own, but lent to you for a time, to be repaid at last, with interest, in the day when the Master saith, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou may be no longer a steward."

A man may be as rich as Croesus, and his wealth will never hurt him if he does not hold it with a tight hand, and a man may be as happy as happiness can make him here, and yet it will not hurt him if he learns to keep it under his feet.

But oh! when one's rejoicings or possessions get the upper hand of us there is as dreadful a drowning in a sea of pleasure as in a sea of misery. Keep before your mind the words of our sweet singer—

*"To Thee we owe our wealth and friends,  
And health, and safe abode;  
Thanks to Thy name for meaner things,  
But they are not my God.*

*What empty things are all the skies,  
And this inferior clod!  
There's nothing here deserves my joys,  
There's nothing like my God."*

The last scene *is the using of the things of this life*. The creatures of God are given us to be used. John the Baptist may be an ascetic, but the Son of man is come eating and drinking. The Christian man knows that the mercies which God has given him are to be used, but while he uses them *he must use them as though he did not use them*.

That is a high philosophy which I fear not many of us have learned, the philosophy of the apostle when he said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound." That man is the full grown and true Christian whom circumstances cannot alter! He trusts in God when he is penniless, and he trusts in his God just the same when he is rich. He rests on God when he can enjoy nothing, and he rests on Him just the same when he can enjoy everything. He learned to build on the Rock of Ages when he had no comfort, and he builds on the Rock of Ages now, when he has every comfort!

This, I take it, is where the apostle would have us brought. To the true Christian the things of this world are only real so far as they involve responsibility, but seeing that time is short, he looks on life as men look upon a play—he sees a monarch strut, and he says, “Ah! he is to pull off his robes behind the stage!” He sees a peasant or a beggar, and he smiles and thinks of the time when the king and the peasant shall be equal, and the servant and his lord shall stand before one tribunal to give an account of the things done in the body.

Send your soul’s longing after real and unchanging joys, for these splendid, gaudy, shifting scenes, mock the beholder and delude his hopes. Gorgeous as the colors of the bubble, and quite as frail, farewell you worthless things, our spirit leaves you for eternal mansions in the skies.

**III.** And now, dear friends, I want your attention a few minutes while I point you to THE CURTAIN WHICH IS SOON TO DROP UPON ALL THESE THINGS, it bears this short device, “TIME IS SHORT.”

It is very difficult to keep men in mind of the fact that they are mortal. We confess that we are mortal, but we profess by our actions that we are immortal. Said a man of eighty-two concerning another of seventy, when he wanted to buy his land and could not get it at the price he wished—“Never mind, So-and-so is an old man, he will soon be dead, and then I’ll buy it.” Though he was ten or twelve years older than the other, yet the other must of course soon die, while he, in his own thoughts, must live for many a year.

How short time is! Do we not, dear friends, get more and more that impression? I am but young compared with very many of you, yet the impression constantly grows upon my mind. Why, it seems but the day before yesterday when I plucked the first early primrose of spring, while the flowers were breaking up from under the earth, and the buds were ready to burst from the sheath!

It was only as yesterday that we were walking in the fields and were remarking that the corn was just beginning to be tinged with the golden hue of harvest! Only a few Sabbaths ago I was talking to you of Ruth in the harvest fields, and of the heavily laden wagon that was pressed down with sheaves, and now the leaves are almost all gone, but few remain upon the trees.

These frosty nights and strong winds have swept the giants of the forest till their limbs are bare, and the hoar frosts plate them with silver. Then, before we shall have time to burn the winter’s log, we shall see the snow drops and the yellow crocus heralding another spring!

At what a rate we whirl along! Childhood seems to travel in a wagon, but manhood at express speed. As we grow older, I am told that the speed increases till the grey-headed old man looks back upon all his life as being but a day. And I suppose, if we could live to be a hundred and thirty we should feel the same, till, like Jacob, we should say, “Few and evil have been the days of thy servant!” and if we could live as long as Methuselah, I doubt not our life would appear shorter still.

How time flies, not only by the measurement of the seasons, but by *ourselves*! A few days ago I trudged with my satchel on my back to school or joined in boyish sport. How lately was it when the boy became a youth, and must be doing something, and was teaching other boys as he had been taught in his day?

It was but yesterday I came to Park Street to address some few of you, and yet how time has fled since then, till now some nine years of our ministry have passed. No weaver’s shuttle, no arrow from a bow, no swift post, no meteor seems to fly at a rate so wonderful as does our life!

We heard of one the other day who had seen Wesley preach, and so we find ourselves side-by-side with the last century. And those old people have known some others in their youth who told them of the yet older time. And you find that going through the history of some ten or twelve persons you are carried back to the days of William the Conqueror, and you see our country taken by the Normans, and then you fly back to ancient British times as with a thought. You no longer say, “How long the nation has existed!” for it is as a sleep.

You stand by some old cliff and see a deposit of shells, and as you remember that it may have taken a million years to have formed that bed, you think—“What is man? and what is time? It is not here, but

gone!” We have only to think of what time is to conclude at once that time is not! It is but a little interlude in the midst of the vast eternity, a narrow neck of land jutting out into the great, dread, and unfathomable sea of everlastingness!

But while time is thus short, *its end is absolutely sure*. That curtain yonder must fall soon! *It must fall*, it is inevitable. I cannot prevent my death by the most regular habits of life, the most skillful physician cannot preserve my life for me. A host of angels, should they swear to make me immortal, could not! When the time comes, die I must!

And as my death is inevitable, so it may be *very near*. Let each man remember that! How soon it may be we cannot tell! Every Sabbath there are some in this house who are dead before the next Sabbath. I am not now venturing a guess, it is a matter of fact, a matter of fact too, that comes under my own cognizance very frequently. According to our population and the gradual number of deaths, there must be some out of this congregation here this morning who will have gone the way of all flesh before next Sabbath day!

There was one—I look at her seat now, and a brother sitting near by looks there with sorrow!—who was with us one Sabbath day, and we soon heard that she had gone to enjoy the Eternal Sabbath! At a church meeting last week, no less than three of our sisters were reported as having fallen asleep in Jesus within a week.

Ah! how near is death to us! Perhaps he now stands looking over your shoulder, young man, God holds back his hand, but the dart of death is close to your heart, and soon—ah, how soon!—may you be taken to the place appointed for all living!

Go, you strong man, and remember that you are a mass of feebleness! Go, you young man, and remember that death reaps green corn! Go, you old man, and expect the sickle! And go, you rich man, and remember that you shall soon leave everything that you have, and then where are you if you have no treasure in heaven, if you have not laid up in store for immortality?

And I must add here that, to those who have no God, death, while inevitable and very near, *will be most awful and tremendous!* There was a dreadful story told in the papers of this last week. At the seaport town of Garliestown one day last week, certain workmen were busy preparing a better berth for a vessel which seems to have taken the ground a little too soon. On a sudden some one raised a cry that the ship was listing over, and while some four men were able to escape, one poor fellow was unable to do so, and the ship fell upon his lower extremities and loins.

Now this was thought, perhaps, to be no great danger, for they could take away the sludge and extricate him. So they began to shore the ship, and willing hands brought ropes and blocks, and wedges, and earnest strength. But they soon discovered that the thing was impossible from the nature of the bottom of the river, and from the position of the cargo, which, I suppose, they could not speedily remove. The man was jammed under the bulwarks, and must remain fixed there without hope.

There was just one awful hour before the coming tide would reach the spot. Well might a solemn hush succeed the frantic labors of the townsmen as death was seen riding on the advancing flood. The poor creature had to lie there that hour as the tide came gently in. A minister stood by his side praying with him, let us trust that his soul found peace with God! But O the terror of his position, well might he say, “Cover my head, that I may not see the water.” Steadily the cold unpitying waters flowed on until a corpse was hidden where an hour or so before a strong man labored.

This is a graphic picture of the position of every ungodly man! He does not know it, but the waves of time are coming up about him now, and *we* cannot help him to escape. The load of his sins is on his loins, he cannot deliver himself. The great waters of God’s wrath must swallow him up quickly.

O, sinner, would that I could save you! Alas, it is not in my power! But there is an arm that can deliver you, there is one who can lift the burden off you, and say to you, “Be free!” Believe in Him and thou shalt never die! Trust you in His power and rest yourself on His love, and you shall escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, and when death comes it shall be no death to you, but a peaceful



migration from the land of shadows to the world of substance. God help us to be wise, that we may remember our latter end!

I would say a few more words to the sinner. I cannot think, O worldling, why you should love this world so much when it is so soon to vanish! In the old Greek cities they had a king every year, and because it was so poor a thing to be a king for only one year and then to be a common man again, all the citizens dreaded to be kings. How can you long to be rich, when you are only to be rich for so short a time?

When the sailor is just about to furl his sail because he is near the port, he will not fret himself with some little inconvenience in the ship, and wherefore art thou so sore vexed with all these little trials, when you are so near the eternal haven? When men buy property on a short lease, they will not give much for it, for they are only to have it for a brief term, wherefore spend you your soul to buy this world? What will it profit you if you gain it, if your soul be lost?

When men have a house and they are soon to leave it, they will not lay out much in repairing it, wherefore then, care you so much for your body? Why mind you so much *this* life, the bell is even now trembling to toll for you and the grave is yawning that it may swallow you up. Oh man! Oh man! I would that you were wise! You are to live forever, forever, forever, either—

*“In flames that no abatement know,  
Though briny tears forever flow.”*

or else in joy beyond degree.

Which shall it be with you, man? If you die as you are, O sinner, remember, there remains nothing for you but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation! I pray you by the love of God, to consider your ways. Thus saith the Lord unto you this day by my lips, as truly as He spoke to Hezekiah by the prophet of old, “Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.”

How will you stand, sinner, in the day when the Lord comes to make inquisition for sin, and to avenge their iniquity upon the heads of the unpardoned? Fly, sinner, God help you by His grace to fly now to yonder open door, where Jesus waits to receive you and to put away your sin. Whosoever believeth on Him is not condemned. Like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of man is lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

**IV.** Come, come, you wise men, rise and leave this theater, we have seen enough of it. “The fashion of this world passeth away,” and for you and for me happy shall it be when it shall have passed away forever. **BUT IS THERE NOTHING REAL?**

Can I do nothing real here? Is there nothing I can do that shall last forever? Yes, *the soul* is lasting. Then let me see to my own soul. Let me make my calling and election sure, for I shall have been of all fools the most mad, if I shall have trifled with these things and yet have neglected my soul.

The Roman emperor, Claudius, once invaded Great Britain, but his performance only consisted of gathering pebbles and shells from the sea coast. This shall be my triumph, this my sole reward, if here in this world I live only to gather wealth. At the last I shall be as though I gathered pebbles, for these things shall be of no value to me if my soul shall perish. O Lord, by Your rich grace set me upon a sure foundation, and make me right before Your face.

Yes, there are some real things besides my own soul. There are *other men’s souls*. What am I doing for them? Am I teaching, am I preaching, or if I am not doing this, am I helping others to preach? Am I doing my best to add to the kingdom of Christ by the ingathering of immortals? Have I a sphere in the ragged school or in tract distributing, or am I helping in some way or other to do good?

For, if not, my life is a play, I am doing nothing real, I am only hurrying here and there, and when it comes to the last I shall have been as a workman that has neglected his own work to play with children in the streets! Dig up your buried talents, O idlers. Work while it is called today, O ye who are given to slumber.

Yes, there is something real—*there is Christ's church*. The church that is to shine like the stars in heaven forever, the Bride of the Lamb—what am I doing for her? Do I seek the good of Jerusalem? As a member of the church, do I contribute to its strength? Do I give of my substance to her efforts, and of my talents to her doings? Do I cast myself wholly into the arms of Christ, and work for Him!

Yes, there is something real—*Jesus is so*. Am I glorifying Him here on earth? When I see Him in His poor people, do I feed Him? When He shivers at my door in the garb of poverty, do I clothe Him? When I know that He has need, do I visit Him? If so, I am doing real things. If I devote my life to God, to Christ, to His church, to the souls of men, and if my own soul is saved, then I am living, but if not, I am dead while I live. "*Let us live while we live!*"

Alas! how many are dying while they live, driveling while they live! Oh! the scores of pounds we spend on ourselves, the hundreds we give to our own comfort! And where is that? It is gone like smoke! But that which is given to God lasts and endures, it is treasured up in God's bank, that which is given to the poor and needy is made—though unrighteous mammon—to be treasured up in heaven!

But I know many practical persons will say, "Yes, this is a very pretty speech for a young minister, but these ministers do not understand business, they cannot be expected to understand temporal matters."

I would to God you understood them half so well, for our understanding in this matter we know is sound, and when you shall come to see these things in the light of eternity streaming between the curtains of your dying bed, you will understand then, that there was nothing worth living for but God, and Christ, and His church. And you will give your verdict then with mine to this, that truly to live must be Christ, or else to die never can be gain!

God add His blessing, and may some be led to trust in Jesus this morning!

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Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).