

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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SUDDEN SORROW.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 8TH, 1877, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

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“Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment.”—Jeremiah iv. 20.

“And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?”—Jeremiah iv. 30.

JEREMIAH was describing the havoc of war, a war which was devastating his country and bringing untold miseries upon the people. He says of it, “My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?” How grateful we ought to be that war is not raging in our own land. We should read those terrible stories which come to us concerning the destruction of human life by the two armies in the East with the utmost regret. On whichever side the victory may turn it is still to be daily lamented that men should slaughter men, and glory in wholesale murder. How true it is neither the elements in their fury, nor wild beasts in their rage, have ever been such terrible enemies to man as men. We should thank God that we dwell apart, and see our harvests ripening without the dread of their being reaped by invaders; we walk our streets without the fear of bursting shells, and seek our chambers without the apprehension of being awakened in the dead of night by the shouts of advancing adversaries. Blessed be the Lord who has given centuries of peace to the fertile hills and valleys of his chosen isle.

“O Britain, praise thy mighty God,  
And make his honours known abroad;  
He bade the ocean round thee flow;  
Not bars of brass could guard thee so.”

No. 1,363.

Let the name of Jehovah our God be praised this morning, for giving peace in our borders, and filling us with the finest of the wheat.

There are, however, in this land, and in all lands, whether at war or peace, many calamities which come suddenly upon the sons of men, concerning which they may bitterly lament, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." This world at its best is not our rest. There is nothing settled below the moon. We call this *terra firma*, but there is nothing firm upon it; it is tossed to and fro like a troubled sea evermore. We are never for any long time in one stay; change is perpetually operating. Nothing is sure but that which is divine; nothing is abiding except that which cometh down from heaven. All things change as they pass before us, and perish in the using. At this moment your ship lies becalmed: be not too secure, for within the next few minutes you may be driving before a hurricane with bare poles. To-day your garden is planted with blooming flowers, which are loading the air with their perfume; rejoice not too much in their sweetness, for within a short time nothing may remain, the spoiler may tear them up by the roots, and your garden may become a desolation. There is nothing bright, beautiful, fair, lovely, or desirable beneath the sun which may not be speedily withered. Even as a vision are all these things; they are, and lo, they are not. They flash upon us as the meteor which blazes in the midnight sky, and then leaves the darkness to be blacker than before. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," yea, boast not thyself of to-day, lest haply on that morrow, or even in this very day, thou mayest have to cry with Jeremiah, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment."

This expression may be, without any straining, very readily applied to many matters, and to three especially. First, *to the sudden spoiling of all human righteousness*; secondly, *to the sudden spoiling of all earthly comfort*; and, thirdly, and this is by no means an unusual thing, *to the sudden spoiling of human life itself*. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditations upon the instability of all earth-born things, that so we may despise the things which are seen and temporal, and follow after the things unseen and eternal.

I. A SUDDEN SPOILING HAPPENS TO HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Beloved, when I put those two words together, "*human righteousness*," I inwardly smile; it sounds like a comedy, or a satire, I scarce know which. "What is man that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous?" Mere human nature and righteousness are two things not easily joined together, and when they are united for a time they soon separate, for they agree no better than oil and water. There is a divine righteousness, wrought out by our dear Redeemer and imputed to all his believing people, which will remain:

"That glorious robe the same appears  
When ruined nature sinks in years;  
No age can change its glorious hue,  
The robe of Christ is ever new."

But the righteousness which comes of man is a dream—how suddenly doth it vanish from our view. Lighter than the gossamer's web, more

subtle than the mist, more fleeting than the wind, the very name of it is vanity.

Let us look at the history of human righteousness, and begin in the garden of Eden, and lament *the fall*. Human righteousness existed in the bowers of Paradise, and man was happy with his God. Adam was created sinless, his mind was upon an equal balance, and without tendency to evil. He was placed in a garden of delights, with but one commandment to test him, and that a very simple one, costing but slight self-denial to obey. We do not know how long Adam was in the garden, but we know that man being in honour continueth not, and in a very short time he and our mother Eve were spoiled of all that they had. The serpent crept in and beguiled them; he who was a murderer from the beginning plundered them. How suddenly were their tents spoiled, and their curtains in a moment, for their eyes were opened, and they perceived that they had lost all. The righteousness which covered them much better than a vesture had been taken from them, so that they were utterly naked before the eyes of the living God. He is a cruel spoiler indeed who strips a man of every garment, but thus completely were our first parents robbed and despoiled: they found that they had lost the garden wherein they had lived in such content, lost peace, lost happiness, lost themselves, lost their posterity, lost all. Everything was taken from them except that which infinite mercy stepped in to give them in the form of a gracious promise concerning the restoring seed of the woman. Whenever we think of the Fall we ought to be humbled, and to be restrained from all idea of self-righteousness, for if Adam in his perfection could not maintain his righteousness, how can you and I, who are imperfect from the very birth, hope to do so? If the thieves broke in and stole our ancestor's righteousness, when his tent was pitched amid the sunny glades of Eden, how much more will our curtains be despoiled in this land of the Ishmaelite and the Amalekite? If the old, wily serpent found a way into the unfallen hearts of our first parents, when they had no surroundings to mislead them, how vain is it for us to hope to overcome the evil one so as to attain to everlasting life by the works of the law.

A second instance of this very commonly occurs in *the failure of the moralist's resolutions*. See yonder young people, tutored from their childhood in everything that is good: their character is excellent and admirable, but will it so abide? Will not the enemy despoil their tents? Often is it so. The young man starts in life with the conviction that he is not of the common herd of sinners, and will never descend to their level. He has heard of other youths who have fallen into temptation, and destroyed themselves by dissipation, but he feels certain that he shall do nothing of the kind. Like Hazael, he cries, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" He fancies that his barque can weather all storms, and he plumes himself upon the idea that the record of his life will be very different from that of other men. How truly lovely at first sight he seems! How honest, generous, and true! Even looking upon him with the eyes of Jesus, we might love him, and only mourn that he lacks one thing. The righteousness which he wears is a merely human one, and it is altogether in his own keeping, but he believes that he shall hold it fast, and never let it go. *His tent is so well*

pitched that no wind from the wilderness will ever overturn it. Have not these delusions been sadly dispelled in hundreds of instances? A fierce temptation arises, and the man's resolutions are carried along thereby like thistle-down in the wind. The young man did not think that such a temptation could ever happen to him. He had been kept by his parents and friends like a flower in a conservatory, and he could not believe that the nights could be so bitterly frosty in the cold world outside; but now he has to feel the nipping influence of sin, and he withers speedily. Satan, discovering his weakness, takes him at a tender point, brings before him that lust to which he has the greatest tendency, sets before him that dainty delicacy of sin to which he has the sweetest tooth, and by-and-by the hopeful youth can no longer talk of his virtues nor boast of his purity, for he has fallen low. The ship Boastful has struck on a rock, and is going down. The self-confident young man now finds himself to be human; being human, to be liable to temptation; being tempted, to be ready to yield to sin. "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble," for the cords of resolution are broken and the stakes of principle are loosed. Alas, poor human righteousness, thou art soon smitten on the forehead, and speedily rolled in the dust. How soon does the comeliness of human nature pass away in the hour of trial!

Many a young man and young woman, opening their eyes on a sudden after temptation, have had to cry, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." Ah, ye that think yourselves beyond all danger of falling into sin ye know not yourselves; ye understand not the plague of your own hearts, for if ye did ye would see that ye carry within your souls all manner of iniquity, which only waits for an opportunity to develop itself, and when it finds a fit occasion it will display its deadly nature, and then you will mourn that you did not seek a new heart and a right spirit at the hand of Christ.

My second text says, "And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" And I would earnestly answer it for any of you who have gone through this experience. Do not try to re-establish that righteousness of yours which has been so thoroughly spoiled, but look for something better. Quit the tent for a mansion, flee from the curtains of self to the walls of salvation. Your own resolutions have failed you, therefore leave such a sandy foundation and build upon the rock of divine strength! Go and confess your sin with deep contrition; ask the Lord Jesus to wash you in his precious blood, and then desire truth in the inward parts, and ask that in the hidden part the Holy Spirit may make you to know wisdom. So shall it come to pass that you shall no longer build upon the sand, nor yet with wood and hay and stubble, but on the rock with gold and silver and precious stones.

Another liability of human righteousness is one which I must not call a calamity, seeing it is the commencement of the greatest blessing: I mean when the Spirit of God comes to deal with human righteousness, by way of *illumination and conviction*. Here we can speak of what we know experimentally. How beautiful our righteousness is, and how it flourishes like a comely flower till the Spirit of God blows upon it, and then it withers quite away, like the grass in the hot sirocco. The first lesson of the Holy Ghost to the heart is to lay bare its deceivableness, and to

uncover before us its loathsomeness, where we thought that everything was true and acceptable. What a different character you gave yourself, dear friend, before the Spirit of God dealt with you, to what you were compelled to give afterwards. Truly, your beauty consumed away like a moth. You began to mourn over your holiest things, for you saw the sin which polluted them; and as for your transgressions, which you thought so little of, when the Spirit of God set them in a true light you found them to be hideous and horrible offences against the God of love. Aforetime you emblazoned your name in letters of gold, but when you learned the truth you chose a black inscription, and with a heavy hand you wrote out your own condemnation, feeling that you were bound to do so. Now, it is a great mercy when the Spirit of God brings home the truth to the heart and makes a man see the deceptiveness of outward appearances. I pray that it may happen to you all if it never has done so. May your tents be spoiled until you see yourselves to be utterly undone; for you are so by nature whether you see it or not.

I would ask all who are under conviction of sin to answer this question, "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" May you reply, "We know what we will do. We will flee away from self to Jesus. Our precious things are removed, and our choice treasure is taken from us; therefore do we take the Lord Jesus to be our all in all." If such be your resolve, you are fulfilling the end and design of the ever blessed Spirit, who worketh in order to wean man from self and to hide pride from him. For this cause doth he plunge man into the ditch till his own clothes abhor him, for then he turns to Jesus and seeks for that clothing which the matchless righteousness of Christ Jesus alone can afford.

But there will come to all human righteousness one other time of spoiling if neither of those should happen which I have mentioned before. *Remorse* will come, and that very probably in the hour of death, if not before. Apart from the Holy Spirit, conscience often does its work in a very terrific fashion, and tears to pieces before a man's eyes the curtains of righteousness which he had so laboriously woven. Have you never seen a sinner happy and contented, because self-deluded? But on a sudden he has found out that his falsehood and hypocrisy were known to God, and would be all exposed and punished. At such a time instead of turning to God, he has despaired and said, "I am lost, there is no hope for me," and therefore he has plunged into deeper sin and become a worse man, while all the while, like the vulture at Prometheus' liver, conscience has continued tearing away at his heart, eating into his very soul, and drinking the blood of joy out of his life, till he has been dried up by an anguish from which he could not escape. I have seen men die so; the consolations of the gospel have been sounded into a deaf ear, they have lifted up their hands as though they would thrust the minister away, when he talked of mercy they replied that there was none for them, and when he spoke of cleansing they declared that their sin was of more than scarlet hue, and never could be washed away. Oh, how suddenly are their tents spoiled, and their curtains in a moment, and when spoiled thus, what does a man do? What but give himself up to that everlasting despair, which has at last overtaken him. While any man is yet alive I would exhort him still to apply to Christ: though it were the last breath he breathed I would still hold up the Redeemer

before his expiring gaze, but when remorse has fully set in this is seldom of any avail. They cry, "Too late, too late!" they continue to refuse their Saviour, and pass away naked, and poor, and miserable, to stand before God's righteous bar to hear the sentence of their conscience confirmed for ever by the mouth of the Eternal Judge. In that dreadful day their overthrow will be terrible indeed. God save us from this.

I hope, dear friends, that all of us know what it is to have seen all our tents spoiled of all the precious things wherein our pride boasted itself, and that we have now become rich in the riches of the Lord Jesus, and secure in the cleft of the rock which was opened in his side. If we have so done we shall not regret, but greatly rejoice, that our tents were suddenly spoiled, and our curtains in a moment.

II. The words of our text are exceedingly applicable to **THE SPOILING OF ALL EARTHLY COMFORTS.** *Sudden destruction to all our earthly comforts is common to all sorts of men.* It may happen to the best as well as to the worst. Did it not so occur to Job, who on a certain morning was amazed by messenger after messenger hastening to tell him that all his property was swept away? Last of all came one who told him that his entire family had been destroyed by tempest. Sudden sorrow happened also to rebellious Pharaoh as well as to pious Job, for at the dead of night he was aroused to bewail the firstborn of him that sat upon the throne, and heard throughout all the land of Egypt a chorus of lamentations on account of a similar calamity which had happened to every household. Neither the just nor the unjust can tell when tribulation will befall them. David returns from among the Philistines and he finds Ziklag burned with fire, and his wives and his children carried away captive; yet not to the righteous only are such trials, for Belshazzar feasts in his palace in Babylon, but that same night was Belshazzar slain. An arrow pierces the heart of wicked Ahab, but gracious Josiah fell in the same manner; with impartial foot doth calamity come to the door of all kinds of men. As darts the hawk upon its prey, so does affliction fall upon the unsuspecting sons of Adam. As the earthquake on a sudden overthrows a city, so does adversity shake the estate of mortals.

*Sudden trial comes in various forms.* Sometimes it is the loss of property, as in the instance of Lot when the kings came and took him captive and all that he had: then was he utterly spoiled. The same thing has happened in ordinary commerce, as in the case of Jehoshaphat when he made ships to go to Tarshish and they were broken at Ezion-gaber. His letters were opened one morning and the merchant, who thought himself rich as a prince, found that he had become a bankrupt. These are but common things in days of panic and convulsion. Frequently the calamity comes in the form of the loss of one dear to us. So came it to the Shunammite, whose child had been such a comfort to her, but it fell on a day that he went into the field unto the reapers, and he said, "My head, my head," and very soon the little gift from heaven had left a childless mother to weep over his little lifeless form. So happened it to Jacob, who sent his darling son away with a kiss, but ere many hours had passed he saw his garment covered with blood, and exclaimed, "An evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." You cannot be sure of child, or wife, or husband. The fondest

lover may be torn from your side, and the dearest babe may be rent from your bosom. Here below nothing is certain but universal uncertainty. One way or another God knoweth how to bring the rod home to us, and to make us smart till we cry out, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment."

*Now, this might well be expected.* Do we wonder when we are suddenly deprived of our earthly comforts? Are they not fleeting things? When they came to us did we receive a lease of them, or were we promised that they should last for ever? Jonah sat under his withered gourd wringing his hands and complaining of God, but if you and I had been there we might have said "What aileth thee, man? Art thou surprised that gourds wither?" "I murmur," said he, "because I have lost the shade which screened me from the sun." "But, man, is it not the nature of a gourd to die? It came up in a night, dost thou marvel that it perished in a night? A worm at the root of a gourd surely is no novelty. O prophet, be not angry with thy God, this is what thou shouldst look for from such a growth." If our tents are spoiled, we should remember that they are tents, and not fortresses; curtains, and not bulwarks. The thief can readily enough enter and spoil the habitation which is made of such frail material. Do you wonder that your offspring die? Why so? Across your children's brows there is written the word "mortal," if you read aright. Did you expect a mortal mother to bring forth an immortal son? Did you, a dying father, expect to be the parent of a daughter who would never see death? Your love is astonished, but your reason is not; your affection counts it strange, but your understanding judges it to be according to the frequent course of nature. Your children came to you, and you received them into your home and heart, with the knowledge that they were mortal, and therefore you are not deceived. Bow, therefore, to the divine will and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

You lament that you have lost your riches. Are you surprised at that? Do you keep birds? Do you wonder when they fly away? What are riches but birds of golden feather? They take to themselves wings, we are told, and fly away. It is not the most marvellous thing in the world if your boy has a tame bird if he comes to you and says, "Father, my bird has taken wings and fled away." "Dear child," say you, "I always wondered that it did not do so before." So may you say to the merchant who has lost his property in trading—the marvel is not that wealth departs but that it stays by any man, seeing it is the nature of winged things to fly away. Clouds dissolve, bubbles burst, snow-flakes melt, and even so do this world's treasures waste away.

Moreover, our earthly comforts were never given to us to be held for ever by a covenant of salt. They are always loans, and never gifts. All that we possess here below is God's property; he has only loaned it out to us, and what he lends he has a right to take back again. We hold our possessions and our friends, not upon freehold, but upon lease terminable at the Supreme Owner's option; do you wonder when the holding ceases? Do you know the parable of the wise Jewish woman? When her husband, the Rabbi, had gone out to teach his disciples, certain neighbours in great sorrow brought home to her the corpses of her only children, two sweet boys, who had been drowned. She took them upstairs, and laid them

upon the bed, and covered them with a sheet, and waited in her deep affliction till her husband came home, grieving most of all for the sorrow which would overwhelm *him*. She stood at the door and mournfully said, "My husband, dost thou know that a great tribulation has happened unto me? A friend had lent me a treasure, and, while I have had it, it has been a great joy to me, but this day he has taken it back again, and I know not what to do." "My beloved," said the Rabbi, "Speak not so. Can it be a sorrow to thee to return that which thou hast borrowed? O daughter of Abraham, thou canst not harbour dishonesty in thy soul. If the treasure hath been lent, be grateful to him who permitted thee the loan, and send it back with cheerfulness." "Sayest thou so?" said she; "Come hither." Then she turned back the coverlet, and he gazed upon the cold faces of his two children, and he said "Thou hast spoken wisely, O woman, for I understand that God hath lent these children unto me, and that I must not complain because he hath taken back his own." See ye not how natural it is that loans should be returned to their lender in due season. Say not, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath," as though thou wert the chief or the only sufferer, for in this thing there hath no trial happened unto you but such as is common to men." Cry not in dismay, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment!" for when war is raging it is little surprising that tents should be spoiled. It is according to the nature of things that in a world which bringeth forth thorns and briars in all its furrows some of the sharp points should pierce thy flesh.

Once more, we live in a world that is full of thieves, and it is no wonder if our joys are stolen. Our Master has warned us that our habitations here below are not thief-proof; he forbids us, therefore, to lay up our treasure where thieves break through and steal. The mud-houses of the East are very soon entered by burglars; they break a hole wherever they please, and steal a man's wealth while he sleeps, and this present life is of the same fashion. This world swarms with thieves such as false friends and deceivers, slanderers and cavillers, losses in business and crosses in our expectations, unkindness of enemies and fickleness of acquaintances, and especially sickness and death. We must not marvel, therefore, if some thief or other should take away the dear delight which makes our tent so happy.

Beloved, since these calamities may be expected, *let us be prepared for them*. "How?" say you. Why, by holding all earthly things loosely; by having them as though you had them not; by looking at them as fleeting, and never expecting them to abide with you. Love the creature in the measure in which the creature may be loved, and no more. Mortal things may only be loved in their proportion; never make them your gods, nor suffer your heart to live upon them or stay itself upon them, for if you do you are preparing sorrow for yourself, and "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" Thou wilt cry with Micah, "They have taken away my gods." If you suffer your heart to be filled with earthly things while you have them, you will have your heart broken when they are taken away.

*Let us take care to make good use of our comforts while we possess them*. Since they hastily fly by us, let us catch them on the wing, and

diligently employ them for God's glory. Let us be careful to place our chief treasure in heaven, for, as old Swinnock says, "A worldling's wealth lieth in the earth, therefore, like wares laid in low damp cellars, it corrupts and moulders; but the godly man's treasure is in heaven, and, like commodities laid up in high rooms, it continues sound and safe." Treasure in the skies is treasure indeed. Where moth and rust and thief can enter is no fit place for us to store our treasures in. Let us commit our all to the custody of God, who is our all in all. Such a blessed thing is faith in God that if the believer should lose everything he possesses here below he would have small cause for sorrow so long as he kept his faith. If a great landed proprietor in walking down the street were robbed of his handkerchief, he would not lie down in despair, nor even make a great noise over his loss. "Ah," says he, "they could only steal a mere trifle, they could not rob me of my parks and farms, and yearly incomings." Believers invest their true wealth in a bank which never breaks, and as for their earthly substance it is not theirs at all, but their Lord's, and they desire only to employ it for his cause; so that if he takes it away they are bound to look upon themselves as no losers, but as in some measure released from responsibility, and they may thank their Lord for such relief. Be sure thou use this world as not abusing it, and fix all thy joy and love and hope and trust in the eternal God, and then, happen what may, thou wilt be safe. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

But let me solemnly remind you that *in times when we meet with sudden calamity God is putting us to the test*, and trying the love and faith of those who profess to be his people. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" You thought you loved God: do you love him now? You said he was your Father, but that was when he kissed you; is he your Father now that he chastens you? The ungodly kick against God; they can only rejoice in him while he gives them sweet things, but his true children learn to kiss the rod. Can you believe in Jesus when distress is upon you, and when want assails you as an armed man? You talked of your faith in summer weather: have you faith now in the long, wintry nights? Can you trust the Lord when the fierce winds from the wilderness threaten to overturn your tent? Has the Holy Ghost given you the faith of God's elect, which can bear a strain? That faith which cannot endure trial is no faith at all, and if the death of a child, or the loss of wealth, or being smitten down by disappointment or sickness shall make thee doubt thy God, what wilt thou do when thou comest to die? If in running with footmen thou art wearied, what wilt thou do when thou contendest with horses? If these minor trials overwhelm thee, what wilt thou do in the last dread day, when all things pass away from thy sight? This is a trying time for your heart, a testing time for your graces. If all things be right within us, when our tents are spoiled we shall live closer to God than ever, and thus we shall be gainers by our loss, because it has increased our spirituality and our peace. It would be a blessed thing to be like the planet Venus, of which it is certain that the earth can never come between her and the sun. The world often hides our God from us, and when our comforts are swept away there is all the less likelihood of its doing so. If our bereavements bring us into

the clear and ever-abiding sunlight of the Lord's own face, we may be thankful to lose that which aforetime caused the eclipse.

“Nearer, my God, to thee!  
Nearer to thee!  
What though it be a cross  
That raiseth me,  
This still my cry shall be,  
Nearer to thee, Nearer to thee!”

Blessed is he who is resolved with Job, and by grace is enabled to abide by it, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” We should learn to give up everything that is dear to us in this present life, and find our comfort in the hopes of the next world; so that, like David when his darling child had been taken away, we may say, “I shall go to him: he shall not return to me.” Happy and blessed is the man who acteth thus. He shall not be cast down in the cloudy and dark day; “he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”

Oh, you worldlings, what will you do in the time of trouble? How will you comfort your hearts in the day of visitation? Most of you young people are full of fun and mirth, and I am glad you have happy times; but the holidays of youth last not for ever, your tents will be spoiled one of these days, as surely as you live, and what will you then do? All the joy which you can draw from this world's wells will turn to brackish water ere long, and you will loathe it: what will you then do? Nothing will remain of all this momentary mirth when the heyday of your youth is over and the evil days come, and the days draw nigh when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them. Why, then, are you so taken up with fickle, fleeting joys? I beseech you seek substantial happiness. Ask for eternal blessings. Draw nigh to God by Jesus Christ and seek unfading bliss in his abiding love.

III. In the third place there may come A SUDDEN SPOILING OF LIFE ITSELF. In a moment prostrated by disease and brought to death's door, frail man may well cry out, “How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment!” *It is by no means unusual for men to die on a sudden.* One does not wish to suggest an unhappy thought, but this is so salutary a consideration that it ought never to be absent from us,—we are but dust, and may be dissolved in an instant by death. We are continually surprised that one and another have suddenly been called away; yet it is more strange that so many remain.

“Our life contains a thousand springs,  
And fails if one be gone,  
Strange that a harp of thousand strings  
Should keep in tune so long.”

In this large congregation death's work is very manifest to one who stands upon this central tower of observation. During the last few days we, as a church and congregation, have lost several from our midst. I will not point out the seats which are to-day occupied by others, where old friends have sat for many years, but so it is, that some have gone quite suddenly from us, and their graves are scarcely filled in. Who will be the next? It frequently happens that those who

are apparently very hale and strong men are among the first to fall. Our friends who are continual invalids remain with us, some of them many months, and even many years after we have sorrowfully given them up. Consumption keeps many for long months lingering slowly into everlasting life, while strong, hearty persons are in an instant taken away. It is therefore no new thing for men to die suddenly.

*Not one man or woman here has a guarantee that he or she shall live till to-morrow.* It is almost a misuse of language to talk about life insurance, for we cannot insure our lives; they must for ever remain uninsured as to their continuance here. If I could be a prophet this morning, and point out one and another and say, "That man will be dead before next Sunday," or "That woman will not live a week," I should feel I had a very painful duty to discharge; but is it not wise for us to reflect that it may happen to any one of us? There are no reasons by which we can prove that we shall escape the mighty hunter for another day. We are ready enough to think of this for others, for all men think all men mortal but themselves; but practical wisdom would lead us to suggest to ourselves that *we* are mortal, and that perhaps the death-bolt which has just left the bow of God may be aimed at our hearts. The question is, "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" When on a sudden the curtains of our tent shall rend in twain, and the tent pole shall be snapped, and the body shall lie a desolate ruin, what shall we then do? I will tell you what some of us know that we shall do. We know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. As poor, guilty sinners we have fled to Christ for refuge, and he is ours, and we know that he will surely keep what we have committed to him until that day: therefore are we not afraid of all that the spoilers can do. We are not afraid of thee, O Death, for thou art the porter that shall open the gates of immortality. And you, ye worms, we are not afraid of you; for though ye devour this body, yet ye shall not destroy it, for in our flesh shall we see God. O Grave, we are not dismayed at thy gloom, for what art thou but a refining pot, out of which this poor earthy body shall arise set free from all corruption. Time, we fear not thy trials! Eternity, we dread not thy terrors. Our soul shall dwell at ease, come what may. Glory be to the blessed name of the Lord Jesus we shall rise because he has risen, we shall live because he lives, and reign because he reigns.

We are not afraid of the spoiler; but O, worldling, when thou art spoiled, what wilt *thou* do? Rich man, your acres will be yours no longer; no park for you to roam over, no fine trees to boast of, nor ancestral halls in which to glorify yourselves. You will have nothing left you; no barns, no ripening harvests, no noble horses or fattened sheep: you must leave them all, and if these are your treasures, what will you do when God requires your soul of you? Then the largeness of the amount invested will only make it all the harder to die, and palaces and gardens will make the pang of separation yet more keen. You will find it a dreadful wrench to be torn away from that in which your heart so much delighted. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" Thy money bags will not ease thy conscience: all the leases, and title deeds, and mortgages that thou canst heap upon thee will

not warm thy dying heart into the life of hope. What wilt thou do? Alas, what wilt thou do?

And you, ye worldlings, who have no wealth, but live for present pleasure,—where then will be your wine cups and your dances? Where your draughts of mighty ale, your oaths and blasphemies? Where now your midnight revelry and wantonness? When ye shall appear before the Judge of all the earth, what will be left to you? When all these unhallowed pleasures are swept away, what remains? Yes, thou lover of pleasure, make merry and rejoice to-day, but “when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?” With thy children about thee, rejoice in thy home and live at ease without God, but “when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?” Despise religion if thou wilt, and count it all a dream invented to make men sour and wretched, but when thou art dying, and thy pulse is faint and failing, what wilt thou do? What canst thou do? Opportunities over, and space for repentance nearly run out,—what wilt thou do? The thought mayhap will seize you then, “Too late, too late! you cannot enter now.” The voice which saith, “Behold the bridegroom cometh,” will startle you in the midnight of your ignorance just as you are about to die, and then you will wring your hands in everlasting despair, because you did not in due time seek him who can save you from the wrath to come. Awaken, I beseech you, your sluggish hearts, and look forward to your latter end. I pray that I may leave one or two solemn thoughts upon the minds of the careless; better still, I pray God the Holy Spirit to lead them now to believe on the Lord Jesus to the saving of their souls.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxi.

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HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—73 (Part III.), 74, 196.

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