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THE DESTROYER DESTROYED.

A Sermon

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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

“That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”—Heb. ii. 14.

IN God's original empire everything was happiness, and joy, and peace. If there be any evil, any suffering and pain, that is not God's work. God may permit it, overrule it, and out of it educe much good; but the evil cometh not of God. He himself standeth pure and perfect, the clean fountain out of which gusheth forth evermore sweet and pure waters. The devil's reign, on the contrary, containeth nought of good; “the devil sinneth from the beginning,” and his dominion has been one uniform course of temptation to evil and infliction of misery. Death is a part of Satan's dominion, he brought sin into the world when he tempted our mother Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, and with sin he brought also death into the world, with all its train of woes. There had been likely no death, if there had been no devil. If Satan had not tempted, mayhap man had not revolted, and if he had not revolted, he would have lived for ever, without having to undergo the painful change which is caused by death. I think death is the devil's masterpiece. With the solitary exception of hell, death is certainly the most Satanic mischief that sin hath accomplished. Nothing ever delighted the heart of the devil so much as when he found that the threatening would be fulfilled, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;” and never was his malicious heart so full of hellish joy as when he saw Abel stretched upon the earth, slain by the club of his brother. “Aha!” said Satan, “this is the first of all intelligent creatures that has died. Oh how I rejoice! This is the crowning hour of my dominion. It is true that I have marred the glory of this earth by my guileful temptation; it is true the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain by reason of the evil that I have brought into it; but this, this is my masterpiece; I have killed man; I have brought death into him, and here lieth the first—the first dead man.” Since that time Satan hath ever gloated over the death of the human race, and he hath had some cause of glory, for that death has been universal. All have died. Though they had been wise as Solomon, their wisdom could not spare their head; though they had been virtuous as Moses, yet their virtue could not avert the axe. All have died; and therefore the devil hath boasted in his triumph. But twice hath he been defeated; but two have entered heaven without dying; but the mass of mankind have had to feel the scythe of death; and he has rejoiced because this, his mightiest work, has had foundations broad as earth, and a summit that reached as high as the virtues of mankind could climb.

There is something fearful in death. It is frightful even to him that hath the most of faith. It is only the gildings of death, the afterwards, the heaven, the harp, the glory, that maketh death bearable even to the Christian. Death in itself must ever be an unutterably fearful thing to the sons of men. And oh! what ruin doth it work! It darkens the windows of the eyes; it pulls down the polished pillars of the divine architecture of the body; it turns the inhabitant, the soul, out of its door, and bids it fly to worlds unknown; and it leaves in place of a living man a corpse whose appearance is so wretched that none can look upon it without emotions of horror. Now, this is Satan's delight. He conceives death to be his masterpiece, because of its terror, and because of the ruin which it works. The

greater the evil, the better doth he delight in it. No doubt he gloats over our icknesses; he rejoices himself in our sin; but death is to him a theme of as much delight as he can be capable of in his eternal misery. He, as far as he can, shouteth for joy when he witnesseth how, by one fell deed of his, one piece of treachery, he hath swept the world with the besom of destruction, and hurried all men to the tomb.

And death is very lovely to the devil for another reason—not only because it is his chief work on earth, but because it gives him the finest opportunity in the world for the display of his malice and his craft. The devil is a coward, the greatest of cowards, as most wicked beings are. A Christian in health he will seldom attack; a Christian who has been living near his Master, and is strong in grace, the devil will leave alone, because he knows he will meet his match then; but if he can find a Christian either weak in faith, or weak in body, then he thinks it a fair opportunity for attack.

Now, when death comes with all its terrors, it is usual for Satan to make a fierce inroad into the soul. Usually with many of the saints, if not in the last article of death, yet some little time before it, there is a ferocious onslaught made by the great enemy of souls. And then he loves death, because death weakens the mind. The approach of death destroys some of the mental power, and takes away from us for a season some of those spirits by which we have been cheered in better days. It makes us lie there, languid, and faint, and weary. “Now is my opportunity,” says the evil one; and he steals in upon us. Hence I believe for this reason he is said to have the power of death; for I cannot conceive that the devil hath the power of death in any other sense but this, that it was originated by him, and that he at such time generally displays the most of his malice and of his power. For it is certain my brethren, the devil has not the power over death so as to cause death. All the devils in hell could not take away the life of the smallest infant in the world, and though we lie gasping and sick, so that the physician despairs of us, it is nothing but the fiat of the Almighty that can cause us to die, even in the extremity of our weakness. As far as the cause is concerned, the devil is not the cause of death. We rejoice to believe with Dr. Young, that an angel’s arm cannot hurl us to the grave, even though it be the arm of that fallen archangel Lucifer; and we rejoice to know that afterwards a myriad angels cannot confine us there. So that neither for the unlocking of the door, nor for the securing of it afterwards, hath the devil any power whatever over the Christian in death.

Why, there are many persons here present who have such a notion of religion that they conceive it to be a thing of happiness and pleasure, and delight, and living near the fountain of all bliss, that is their God, their path is filled with sunshine, and their eye sparkles with perpetual happiness. They bear the trials of this life manfully as Christians should; they take afflictions from the hand of God with all resignation and patience. Now the devil says, “It is of no use my meddling with that man with doubting thoughts; he is too mighty for me; he is powerful on his knees, and he is powerful with his God.” “Hands off!” says the Christian to the devil then. But when we begin to be weak, when our mind through the influence of the body begins to be sad, when we have either been starving ourselves by some wicked religious asceticism, or when the rod of God hath bruised us, then in our evil plight the foe will beset us. And for this reason the devil loves death, and hath the power over it, because it is the time of nature’s extremity, and therefore is the time of the devil’s opportunity.

The subject of our discourse this morning is this. *Jesus Christ through his death, hath destroyed what power the devil hath over death.* Ay, and to add a second truth, which shall be our second head, *he hath not only by his death destroyed the power which the devil had over death, but he hath destroyed the devil’s power entirely in every respect by the death which he died.*

I. Let us begin, then, at the beginning. **BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST THE DEVIL’S POWER OVER DEATH IS TO THE CHRISTIAN UTTERLY DESTROYED.** The devil’s power over death lies in three places, and we must look at it in three aspects. Sometimes the devil hath power in death over the Christian, *by tempting him to doubt his resurrection*, and leading him to look into the black future with the dread of annihilation. We will look at that first, and we will endeavour to show you that by the death of Christ that peculiar form of the devil’s power in death is entirely removed. When the poor spirit lieth on the verge of eternity, if faith be weak, and if the eye-sight of hope be dim, the Christian will most likely look

forward into what? Into a world unknown, and the language of even the infidel sometimes rush into the lips of the most faithful child of God.

“My soul looks down on what?
A dread eternity; a dreary gulf.”

You may tell him of the promises; you may try to cheer him by reminding him of the certain revelations of the future; but apart from the death of Christ, I say, even the Christian himself would look forward to death as being a dreary goal, a dark cloudy end to a life of weariness and woe. Whither am I speeding? An arrow shot from the bow of God's creation! Whither am I speeding? And the answer cometh back, from blank nothingness thou camest, and thou art speeding to the same; there is nought to thee; when thou diest thou art lost. Or if reason has been well tutored it may perhaps reply to him, “Yes, there is another world, but reason can only tell him that it thinks so. It dreams of it; but what that other world shall be, what its tremendous mysteries, what its gorgeous splendours, or what its horrible terrors, reason cannot tell.” And the sting of death would be to such a man, who had no view of immortality in Christ, the thought that he was to be annihilated—not to exist—or if to exist, that he knew not how, or where. But, beloved, by the death of Christ, all this is taken away. If I lie a-dying, and Satan comes to me and says, “Thou art to be annihilated, thou art now sinking beneath the waves of time, and thou shalt lie in the caverns of nothingness for ever; thy living, leaping spirit, is to cease for ever and be not.” I reply to him, “No, not so; I have no fear of that; O Satan, thy power to tempt me here faileth utterly and entirely. See there my Saviour! He died—he died really and actually, for his heart was pierced; he was buried; he lay in his grave three days; but, O Devil, he was not annihilated, for he rose again from the tomb on the third day, and in the glories of the resurrection he appeared unto many witnesses, and gave infallible proofs that he was risen from the dead. And now, O Satan, I tell thee, thou canst not put an end to my existence, for thou couldst not put an end to the existence of my Lord. As the Lord the Saviour rose, so all his followers must. ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth,’ and therefore I know that though the ‘worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.’ Thou tellest me, O Satan, that I am to be swallowed up, and be a thing of nought, and sink into the bottomless pit of nonentity. I reply to thee, Thou liest. My Saviour was not swallowed up, and yet he died; he died, but could not long be held a prisoner in the tomb. Come, death, and bind me; but thou canst not destroy me. Come on, O grave; open thy ghastly mouth, and swallow me up; but I shall burst thy bonds another day. When that all-glorious morning shall dawn, I, having a dew like the dew of herbs upon me, shall be raised up and shall live in his sight. Because he lives I shall live also.” So, you see, Christ, by being a witness to the fact of the resurrection, has broken the power of the devil in death. In this respect he has prevented him from tempting us to fear annihilation; because, as Christians, we believe that because Christ rose again from the dead, even so they that sleep in Jesus will the Lord bring with him.

But now for a more common temptation—another phase of the devil's power in death. Full often the devil comes to us in our life-time, and he tempts us by *telling us that our guilt will certainly prevail against us*, that the sins of our youth and our former transgressions are still in our bones, *and that when we sleep in the grave our sins shall rise up against us* “They have many of them,” saith he, “gone before you unto judgment, and others shall follow after.” When the Christian getteth weak, and his heart and his flesh do fail him, were it not, I say for the great doctrine of the death of Christ the devil would be able to tempt him thus. “Thou art about to die; I dare not tell thee that there is no future state, for if I do thou repliest to me, ‘*There is*, for Christ rose from the dead, and therefore *I shall*,’ but I will tempt thee another way. Thou hast made a fine profession, but I charge upon thee that thou hast been a hypocrite. Thou pretendest that thou art one of the Lord's beloved: now look back upon thy sins: remember on such-a-day how thy rebellious lusts arose, and thou wast led if not quite to indulge in a transgression, yet to long after it. Recollect how often thou hast provoked him in the wilderness, how frequently thou hast made his anger wax hot against thee.” The devil takes up our diary, and he turns over the page, and with black finger points to our sins; and he reads scornfully, with a leer upon his countenance. “See here saint,” he says. “Saint! Aha! a fine saint you

were. There! Sabbath breaking. There! evil thoughts of unbelief. There! departure from the living God." And he turns over page after page, and he stops over some very black page, and says, "See here!" And he twits the Christian with the thing. "Ah!" saith he, "David, remember Bathsheba; Lot, remember Sodom and the cave; Noah, remember the vineyard and the drunkenness." Ah! and it makes even the saint quiver, when sin stares him in the face—when the ghosts of his old sins rise up and stare upon him. He is a man that has got faith indeed that can look sin in the face, and still say, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth me from sin." But were it not for that blood, were it not for the death of Christ, you can easily conceive what power the devil would have over us in the hour of death, because he would fling all our sins in our teeth just when we came to die. But now see how through death Christ has taken away the devil's power to do that. We reply to the temptation to sin, "In truth O Satan thou art right; I have rebelled, I will not belie my conscience and my memory; I own I have transgressed. O Satan, turn to the blackest page of my history, I confess all.

'Should he send my soul to hell,
His righteous law approves it well.'

But O fiend, let me tell thee my sins were numbered on the scape-goat's head of old. Go thou, O Satan, to Calvary's cross, and see my substitute bleeding there. Behold, my sins are not mine; they are laid on his eternal shoulders, and he has cast them from his own shoulders into the depths of the sea. Avaunt, hell-hound! Wouldst thou worry me? Go thou and satisfy thyself with a sight of that Man, who entered the gloomy dungeons of death, and slept awhile there, and then rent the bars away, and led captivity captive, as a proof that he was justified of God the Father, and that I also am justified in him." Oh! yes, this is the way that Christ's death destroys the power of the devil. We can tell the devil that we care not for him, for all our sins are passed away, covered in the thick cloud, and shall not be brought against us any more for ever. "Ah!" said an aged saint once who had been much teased by Satan, "at last I got rid of my temptations, sir, and I enjoyed much peace." "How did you do it?" said a Christian friend who visited him. "I showed him blood, sir; I showed him the blood of Christ." That is a thing the devil cannot endure. You may tell the devil, "Oh! but I prayed so many times." He will sniff at your prayers. You may tell him, "Ah! but I was a preacher." He will laugh in your face, and tell you you preached your own damnation. You may tell him you had some good works, and he will lift them up and say, "These are your good works—filthy rags: no one would have them at a gift." You may tell him, "Ah! but I have repented." He will sneer at your repentance. You may tell him what you like, he will sneer at you, till at last you say,

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;"

And it is all over with the devil then; there is nothing now that he can do, for the death of Christ has destroyed the power that the devil hath over us to tempt us on account of our guilt. "The sting of death is sin:" our Jesus took the sting away, and now death is harmless to us, because it is not succeeded by damnation.

Once more, you may suppose a Christian who has firm confidence in a future state. The evil one has another temptation for him. "It may be very true," saith he, "that you are to live for ever and that your sins have been pardoned; but *you have hitherto found it very hard work to persevere, and now you are about to die you will be sure to fail.* When you have had troubles you know you have been half inclined to go back again to Egypt. Why, the little hornets that you have met have worried you, and now this death is the prince of dragons; it will be all over with you now. You know that when you used to go through a cart-rut you were crying for fear of being drowned: what will you do now that you have got into the swellings of Jordan? Ah!" says the devil, "you were afraid of the lions when they were chained: what will you do with this unchained lion? How will you come off now? When you were a strong man and had marrow in your bones, and your sinews were full of strength, even then you trembled at me: now I shall have at you, when I get you in your dying-time and your strength fails, and if I once get the grip of you

'That desperate tug your soul shall feel,
Through bars of brass and triple steel.'

"Ah! you will then be overcome." And sometimes the poor faint-hearted Christian thinks that is true; I shall surely fall one day by the hand of the enemy. Up gets the Arminian divine, and says, "That is a very proper sort of feeling, my friend; God often does desert his children and cast them away." To which we reply "Thou liest, Arminian; shut thy mouth, God never did desert his children, neither can he, nor will he."

And having answered the Arminian we turn to answer the devil, and we say to him, "O fiend, thou temptest us to think that thou wilt conquer us; remember Satan, that the strength that has preserved us against thee has not been our own; the arm that has delivered us has not been this arm of flesh and blood, else we had long since been overcome. Look thou there, fiend, at him that is Omnipotent: his Almightyness is the power that preserves us to the end; and, therefore, be we never so weak, when we are weak then we are strong, and in our last hour of peril we shall yet overcome thee."

But please to notice, that this answer springs and arises from Christ's death. Let us just picture a scene. When the Lord Jesus came down to earth, Satan knew his errand. He knew that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, and when he saw him an infant in the manger, he thought if he could kill him and get him in the bonds of death what a fine thing it would be! So he stirred up the spirit of Herod to slay him; but Herod missed his mark. And many a time did Satan strive to put the personal existence of Christ in danger, so that he might get Christ to die. Poor fool as he was, he did not know that when Christ died he would bruise the devil's head. Once, you remember, when Christ was in the synagogue, the devil stirred up the people, and made them angry; and he thought, "Oh! what a glorious thing it would be if I could kill this man; then there would be an end of him, and I should reign supreme for ever." So he got the people to take him to the brow of the hill, and he gloated over the thought that now surely he would be cast down headlong. But Christ escaped. He tried to starve him, he tried to drown him; he was in the desert without food, and he was on the sea in a storm; but there was no starving or drowning him, and Satan no doubt panted for his blood and longed that he should die. At last the day arrived; it was telegraphed to the court of hell that at last Christ would die. They rung their bells with hellish mirth and joy. "He will die now," said he; "Judas has taken the thirty pieces of silver. Let those Scribes and Pharisees get him, they will no more let him go than the spider will a poor unfortunate fly. He is safe enough now." And the devil laughed for very glee, when he saw the Saviour stand before Pilate's bar. And when it was said, "Let him be crucified," then his joy scarce knew bounds, except that bound which his own misery must ever set to it. As far as he could, he revelled in what was to him a delightful thought, that the Lord of glory was about to die. In death, as Christ was seen of angels, he was seen of devils too; and that dreary march from Pilate's palace to the cross was one which devils saw with extraordinary interest. And when they saw him on the cross, there stood the exulting fiend, smiling to himself. "Ah! I have the King of Glory now in my dominions; I have the power of death, and I have the power over the Lord Jesus." He exerted that power, till the Lord Jesus had to cry out in bitter anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But ah! how short-lived was hellish victory! How brief was the Satanic triumph! He died; and "It is finished!" shook the gates of hell. Down from the cross the conqueror leaped, pursued the fiend with thunder-bolts of wrath; swift to the shades of hell the fiend did fly, and swift descending went the conqueror after him; and we may conceive him exclaiming—

"Traitor! this bolt shall find and pierce thee through,
Though under hell's profoundest wave thou div'st,
To find a sheltering grave."

And seize him he did—chained him to his chariot wheel; dragged him up the steep of glory; angels shouting all the while, "He hath led captivity captive, and received gifts for men." Now, devil, thou saidst thou wouldst overcome me, when I came to die. Satan I defy thee, and laugh thee to scorn! My Master overcame thee, and I shall overcome thee yet. You say you will overcome the saint, do you? You could not overcome the saint's Master, and you will not overcome him. You once thought you had conquered Jesus: you were bitterly deceived. Ah! Satan, thou mayest think thou shalt overcome the little faith and the faint heart;

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but thou art wondrously mistaken — for we shall assuredly tread Satan under our feet shortly; and even in our last extremity, with fearful odds against us, we shall be “more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

You see that thus, my brethren, Christ's death has taken away from Satan the advantage which he has over the saint in the hour of death; so that we may joyfully descend the shelving banks of Jordan, or may even, if God calls us to a sudden death, glide from its abrupt cliffs, for Christ is with us, and to die is gain.

II. But now, I want just a moment or two, whilst I try to show you that not only has Christ by his death taken away the devil's power in death; but HE HAS TAKEN AWAY THE DEVIL'S POWER EVERYWHERE ELSE OVER A CHRISTIAN. “He hath destroyed,” or overcome, “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Death was the devil's chief intrenchment: Christ bearded the lion in his den, and fought him in his own territory; and when he took death from him, and dismantled that once impregnable fortress, he took away from him not only that, but every other advantage that he had over the saint. And now Satan is a conquered foe, not only in the hour of death, but in every other hour and in every other place. He is an enemy, both cruel and mighty; but he is a foe who quakes and quails when a Christian gets into the lists with him; for he knows that though the fight may waver for a little while in the scale, the balance of victory must fall on the side of the saint, because Christ by his death destroyed the devil's power.

Satan, my brethren, may to-morrow get much power over you, by tempting you to indulge in the lusts of the flesh, or in the pride of life; he may come to you and say, “Do such-and-such a thing that would be dishonest, and I will make you rich; indulge in such-and-such a pleasure, and I will make you happy; come,” saith Satan, “yield to my blandishments; I will give you wine to quaff that shall be richer than ever came from the wine-vats of Holy Scripture; I will give you bread to eat that you know not of. Eat thou the tempting fruit; it is sweet; it will make thee like a god.” “Ah!” saith the Christian, “but, Satan, my Master died when he had to do with thee, and therefore I will have nothing to do with thee. If thou didst kill my Lord, thou wilt kill me too if thou canst, and therefore away with thee! but inasmuch as thou layest down silver for me, and tellest me I can have it if I do wrong, lo, Satan, I can cover thy silver with gold, and have ten times as much to spare afterwards. Thou sayest I shall get gain if I sin. Nay, but the treasures of Christ are greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Why, Satan, if thou wert to bring me a crown, and say, ‘There! thou shalt have that if thou wilt sin.’ I should say, ‘Poor crown! Why, Satan, I have got a better one than that laid up in heaven, I could not sin for that, that is a bribe too paltry.’” In he brings his bags of gold; and he says, “Now, Christian, sin for them.” The Christian says, “Why, fiend, that stuff is not worth my looking at; I have an inheritance in a city where the streets are paved with solid gold; and, therefore, what are these poor chinking bits to me? Take them back!” He brings in loveliness, and he tempts us by it; but we say to him, “Why, devil, what art thou at? What is that loveliness to me? Mine eyes have seen the King in his beauty and the land that is very far off; and by faith I know that I shall go where beauty's self, even in her perfection, is excelled—where I shall see my Saviour, who is ‘the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.’ That is no temptation to me! Christ has died, and I count all these things but dross, that I may win Christ and be found in him.” So that you see, even in temptation, the death of Christ has destroyed the devil's power.

“You will not yield, will you?” says the devil. “You cannot be tempted! Ah! well,” says he, “if you cannot be drawn aside, I'll pull you aside. What are you, that you should stand against me? A poor puny man! Why, I have made angels fall, and I am not afraid of you. Come on!” And he puts his foot to our foot, and with his dragon yell he frights the echoes till they dare not reply. He lifts his blazing sword, and thinks to smite us to the ground. You know, my brethren, what the shield is that must catch the blow. It is the shield of faith in Christ that died for us. He hurls his darts, but his darts hurt not, for lo, we catch them also on this all-powerful shield, Christ and his cross. So that, let his insinuations be never so direful, the death of Christ has destroyed the devil's power either to tempt or to destroy. He may be allowed to attempt either the one or the other, but he can be successful in neither. The death of Christ has “destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Some people say they don't believe in a devil. Well, I have only to tell them

I don't believe in them; because if they knew themselves much they would very soon find a devil. But it is quite possible that they have very little evidence of there being any devil; for you know the devil never wastes his time. He comes up a street, and he sees a man engaged in business, hoarding, covetous, grasping. He has got a widow's house in his throat; he has just swallowed the last acre of a poor orphan's lands. "Oh," says the devil, "drive by, I shall not stop there; he does not need me; he will go to hell easily enough." He goes to the next house: there is a man there, a drunkard, spending his time in riotousness: he marches by, and says, "There's no need for me here; why should I trouble my own dear friends? Why should I meddle with those whom I am sure to have at last? There's no need to tease them." He finds a poor saint upon his knees, exercising but very little power in prayer. "Oh!" says the devil, "I shant have this creature at last; I'll howl at him now." There is a poor sinner just returning from his evil ways and crying, "I have sinned and done evil in thy sight; Lord, have mercy upon me." "Losing a subject," says Satan; "I'll have him; I'm not going to lose my subjects like this." So he worries him. The reason why you don't believe there is a devil, very likely is, that the devil very seldom comes to you because you are so safe that he does not take any trouble to look after you, and you have not seen him, because you are too bad for him to care about, and he says, "Oh no, there's no need for me to waste time to tempt that man; it would be carrying coals to Newcastle to tempt him, for he is as bad as he can be, and therefore let him alone." But when a man lives near to God, or when a man's conscience begins to be aroused, then Satan cries, "To arms! to arms! to arms!" For two good reasons: first, because he wants to worry him, and secondly, because he wants to destroy him. Well, we bless God that though the devil may direct his utmost scorn and craft and malice against the Christian, the Christian is safe behind the rock Christ Jesus, and may rest secure.

And now, in conclusion, suffer a word or two of comfort to the people of God, and a warning to those that know him not.

O children of God! death hath lost its sting, because the devil's power over it is destroyed. Then cease to fear dying. Thou knowest what death is: look him in the face, and tell him thou art not afraid of him. Ask grace from God, that by an intimate knowledge and a firm belief of thy Master's death, thou mayest be strengthened for that dread hour. And mark me, if thou so livest, thou mayest be able to think of death with pleasure, and to welcome it when it comes with intense delight. It is sweet to die: to lie upon the breast of Christ, and have one's soul kissed out of one's body by the lips of divine affection. And you that have lost friends, or that may be bereaved, sorrow not as those that are without hope; for remember the power of the devil is taken away. What a sweet thought the death of Christ brings us concerning those who are departed! They are gone, my brethren; but do you know how far they have gone? The distance between the glorified spirits in heaven and the militant saints on earth seems great; but it is not so. We are not far from home.

"One gentle sigh the spirit breaks,
We scarce can say 'tis gone,
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its station near the throne."

We measure distance by time. We are apt to say that a certain place is so many hours from us. If it is a hundred miles off and there is no railroad we think it a long way; if there is a railway, we think we can be there in no time. But how near must we say heaven is? For it is just one sigh and we get there. Why, my brethren, our departed friends are only in the upper room, as it were, of the same house; they have not gone far off; they are up stairs, and we are down below. Yea, more as the poet says,

"Ten thousands to their endless home,
This solemn moment fly,
And we are to the margin come,
And soon expect to die."

And then he describes them.

"Half of the host have crossed the flood."

There they are, on the other side the banks. Here is another part, deep in the stream. Here are we on the margin, just about to step down. They are all one army; there is not one gap, right down from Abel to the one that is now departing; and they never shall be but one, till the pearly gates are shut for ever, and they are all secure.

“E’en now by faith we clasp our hands,
With those that went before,
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
Upon the eternal shore.”

And now I close by saying this word to the sinner O thou that knowest not God, thou that believest not in Christ, death is to thee a horrible thing. I need not tell thee that; for thine own conscience tells it to thee. Why, man, thou mayest laugh sometimes at religion; but in thine own solitary moments it is no laughing thing. The greatest brags in the world are always the greatest cowards. If I hear a man saying, “Oh, I am not afraid of dying, I don’t care about your religion,” he does not deceive me; I know all about that. He says that to cover up his fears, when he is alone of a night. You should see how white his cheek is if a leaf falls against the window. When there is lightning in the air you should look at him. “Oh that flash” he says. Or if he is a strong man perhaps he does not say a word, but he feels in such horror all the time the storm is on. Not like the Christian man: not like the man who has courage. Why, I love the lightnings; God’s thunder is my delight; I never feel so well as when there is a tremendous thunder and lightning storm. Then I feel as if I could mount up, and my whole heart sings. I love then to sing—

“This awful God is mine,
My Father and my love,
He shall send down his heavenly powers
To carry me above.”

Yes, you are afraid of dying I know; and what I shall say to you is this—You have good need to be afraid of dying, and you have good need to be afraid of dying now. Because you have escaped many times you think you shall never die. Suppose we should take a man and tie him to that pillar, and a good marksman should take bow and arrows and shoot at him. Well, one arrow might glance and strike some one that sits at the right, and another might glance and strike some one that is to the left; one might go above his head, and another beneath his feet, but you cannot suppose that man would laugh and mock, when the arrows were flying about his ears; and if he was quite certain that it only wanted the marksman to take an aim at him, and he would be shot, then, my friends, you cannot conceive how he would tell you what terror he would experience. But certainly there would be no laughter. He would not say, “Oh! I shall not die; see, the man has been shooting all these others.” No, the risk of dying would be enough to steady him, and the thought that that marksman had an eye so true and a hand so steady that he had but to pull the string, and the arrow would certainly reach his heart, would be enough at least to sober him, and keep him always watchful; for in a moment, when he thought not, that arrow might fly. Now, that is you to-day, God puts the arrow to the string: your neighbour is dead on the right, and another on the left; the arrow will come to you soon, it might have come before, if God willed it. Oh, mock not at death, and despise not eternity, but begin to think whether you are prepared for death, lest death should come and find you wanting. And remember, death will make no delays for you. You have postponed the time of thought: death will not be postponed to suit you, but when you die, there will be no hour allowed for you in which then to turn to God. Death comes with its first blow; damnation comes afterwards, without the hope of reprieve. “He that believeth and is immersed shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” Thus do we preach the Gospel of God unto you as God would have us. “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” “Go ye and teach all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Behold, I tell you, faith in Jesus is the soul’s only escape; profession of that in immersion is God’s own way of professing faith before men. The Lord help you to obey him in the two great gospel commandments, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.