

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

The Certainty of Death

A Funeral Sermon by Samuel Davies, April 22, 1758.

"O wicked man—**you shall surely die!**" Ezekiel 33:8

Men love themselves, and therefore delight to hear things favorable to themselves. A benevolent mind, whenever he occasions pain to any of his fellow-creatures, would delight to dwell upon such pleasing subjects. And as to the happy few, who are really the sincere servants of God, and are holy in heart and life, I may safely gratify this benevolent inclination, and publish the most joyful tidings. I am authorized to "say to the righteous, it shall be well with him!" Isaiah 3:10. "Comfort, comfort my people: speak comfortably to Jerusalem." Isaiah 40:1, 2. This is the gracious command of God to all his ministers. And oh! how delightful an office to perform it! This alone should be the pleasing business of this hour, could I stretch my charity so far as to conclude, that all this promiscuous crowd, without exception, are indeed the holy people of God.

But was there ever such a pure assembly upon our guilty earth? Upon our earth, where an accursed Ham was found in the little select family of Noah, the best in the whole world? Where a Judas mingled among the chosen twelve, the first followers of Jesus? Where the tares and the wheat grow together in one field until the harvest? And where we are expressly told, "many are called—but few are chosen." Matthew 20. 16. In such a corrupt world, the most generous charity, if under any rational and Scriptural limitations, must hesitate at the sight of such a mixed multitude as this—must be jealous over them with a godly jealousy, (2 Corinthians 11:2,) and stand in doubt of them, (Galatians 4:20,)—must fear, lest there is one, yes, more than one, wicked man among them.

And if there be so much as one wicked man among us, I would, as it were, single him out from the crowd, and discharge this pointed arrow from the quiver of the Almighty against his heart, to give him, not a deadly wound—but a medicinal wound: "O wicked man—**you shall surely die!**"

I am obliged, at my peril, to denounce this doom against you—and I dare not flatter you with better hopes, unless I would be accessory to your death, and at once ruin both myself and you. For observe the context, which contains the instructions of the great Jehovah to his minister Ezekiel, which are equally binding upon all the ministers of his Word in every age. "O Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man—you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways—that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood!"

This phrase, "I will hold you accountable for his blood!" signifies, "I will look upon you as guilty of his murder, and I will punish you accordingly." Therefore, if I would not incur the guilt and punishment of murder, soul-murder, the most shocking kind of murder; if I would not destroy you and myself—in order that you may enjoy the sorry pleasure of flattery, and that I may enjoy the short-lived trifling reward of a little popular applause—I am obliged to tell such of you as are wicked, in the most pungent manner, and as it were by name, "O wicked man—you shall surely die!" whoever you are; however rich, or powerful, or honorable; however bold and presumptuous; however full of flattering hopes; however sure of life in your own conceit—if you are wicked—you shall die! You shall surely die; or, to use the force of the Hebrew phrase, "dying you shall die; in death you shall die indeed!"

You shall surely die, says the Lord, and not man: it is the declaration of eternal truth, which cannot fail: it is the sentence of the Lord Almighty, who is able to carry it into execution. That it is his sentence, and not man's, you may see by the connection: "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man—you shall surely die!" When I say, that is, when I, the Lord Almighty, say this.

Let this, therefore, be regarded, not as the rash sentence of censorious mortals—but as the unchangeable constitution and authentic declaration of a wise and righteous God, which must infallibly stand good, whoever may oppose; "O wicked man—you shall surely die!"

But here two important questions occur:

WHO are the wicked? and,

what kind of DEATH shall they die?

If we should not first inquire, WHO the wicked are, I would but speak to the air; for hardly any would apply the character to themselves. It is an odious character; and that alone is the reason why many try to persuade themselves, it is not theirs. But, my friends, many things that are very disagreeable, are, notwithstanding, true. And it may be our interest to know them, however painful the discovery may be: for now, while we are in a mutable state, we may, through divine grace, change characters. Those who are now wicked, and consequently exposed to eternal death—may yet become righteous, the favorites of heaven, and the heirs of eternal life! And the first step towards such a happy change—is, a clear, affecting conviction, that their present character and condition are bad and dangerous.

Let us, therefore, submit ourselves to an impartial trial, and endeavor to discover whether the character of the wicked man belongs to us or not. I would by no means desire or expect, that you would pay me so extravagant a compliment, as to form a judgment of yourselves merely upon my assertion. I refer you to a higher authority, to your own reason and conscience, and especially to the Holy Scriptures. By the Bible, you must be tried at last—by the Supreme Judge; and by that infallible test, I would have you try yourselves now.

The first class of wicked men that I shall take notice of, are profane and gross sinners, who indulge themselves in notorious immoralities. Instead of particularizing them myself, I shall produce to you a list of them, which the apostle has given long ago. "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" He seems surprised any should be ignorant of so plain a point as this. "Do not be deceived," says he—do not flatter yourselves with better hope.

But who are the wicked? He tells you particularly; "Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God!" 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. You see the apostle is fixed and unmistakable in it, that sinners of this class are universally excluded from the kingdom of heaven—not one of them all shall ever be admitted there, if they continue such. All such shall certainly perish, or else Paul was an impostor.

To the same purpose he speaks in Galatians 5:19-21, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God!" As SIN is a monster of so many heads, he does not enumerate them all—but comprehends them in the lump; declaring, those who who practiced the vices mentioned, or such like, though not exactly the same, shall be excluded from heaven.

This was not an occasional declaration—but what he had solemnly repeated at various seasons: "I forewarn you now," says he, "as I have done in times past." He denounces the same doom against these vices in his epistle to the Colossians; "Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these—the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived." Colossians 3:5-7

I shall add but one testimony more, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur! This is the second death." Revelation 21:8. These, you see, are the certain symptoms of the heirs of hell: and if they are admitted into a state of everlasting happiness, while they continue such, it is certain your religion must be false; for the Bible, which is the foundation of your religion, repeatedly declares they shall not be admitted there.

It is also observable, that in this black list, you not only find such gross vices as are scandalous in the common estimate of mankind, but also such as are secret, seated in the heart, and generally esteemed but lesser evils. Here you find not only murder, whoredom, idolatry, theft, and such enormous and scandalous sins—but also covetousness, wrath, strife, envyings, unbelief, and such like latent sins, which men generally indulge themselves in, without feeling much guilt upon their consciences, or apprehending themselves in great danger of punishment. These are but foibles and peccadillos—only little, trifling sins, in their esteem. But oh! how different an estimate does God form of them! He pronounces them damnable vices, the practice of which will certainly exclude from his favor. And his sentence will stand, whether we agree or not.

I would be very sorry so much as to suppose, there are any among you of this abandoned character. But I must

propose the matter to your own decision; and at so favorable a tribunal, you will, no doubt, be acquitted, if you are clear. I say, I propose it to yourselves, whether some of you are not drunkards, swearers, liars, whoremongers, extortioners, and the like? Or, if you are free from these grosser forms of vice, do not some of you live in wrath, strife, reveling, and carousing, covetousness, secret immorality, and the like?

If this is your character, I have another thing to propose to you; and that is: whether it is most likely that you shall be excluded the kingdom of heaven—OR that Christ and his apostles, and the other writers of the Holy Scriptures, were deceivers? One or other must be the case; if you are admitted into heaven—then they were certainly deceivers: for they have declared you shall not be admitted. Will you disbelieve their evidence, merely because it is against you? Will you believe nothing but what is in your favor? That would be a strange test of truth indeed.

Thus far you are assisted to judge, who are the wicked; and whether some of you do not belong to this unhappy class. And now I proceed to another class.

Secondly, All those are wicked, who knowingly and willfully indulge themselves habitually in any ONE sin, whether it be the omission of a commanded duty, or the practice of something forbidden. Every godly man is of the same spirit with David, who could appeal to God himself, "Lord, I have respect to all your commandments;" Psalm 119:6; and with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Romans 7:22. And consequently, those who have not practical respect to ALL God's commandments, without exception; and who do not inwardly delight in his law, are of a spirit and character directly contrary to David and Paul; in other words—they are wicked.

The willful and habitual practice of any known sin—and the willful and habitual neglect of any known duty, are repeatedly mentioned in the Scriptures, as the sure signs of a wicked man. "The man who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 2:4. "He who commits sin," that is, willfully, knowingly, and habitually, "is of the devil." 1 John 3:8. "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are:" verse 10; this is the great difference between them; "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God."

Our Lord himself has repeatedly assured us, that all pretensions to love him are vain, unless we keep his commandments. "If anyone loves me—he will obey my teaching. He who does not love me—will not obey my teaching." John 14:23-24.

What is it to be a wicked man—but to work iniquity? And what is it to work iniquity—but to neglect what God has commanded, or practice what he has forbidden. He who does one thing from a regard to God, will endeavor to do everything from the same principle. And willful disobedience to him in one instance, reveals a disposition which would disobey the divine authority in every instance, if there were the same temptations to it.

Be this, therefore, known to you all, as an undoubted truth: that the willful habitual indulgence of any known sin, is the inseparable character of a wicked man. You may plead the infirmity of human nature, the strength of temptation, or the innocence of your hearts and intentions—even in the midst of your sins! You may plead that the best have their infirmities, as well as you: and that many around you, are much worse than you. You may plead these, and a thousand such excuses: but plead whatever you will—all your excuses are in vain; and this still remains an unchangeable truth, that all the habitual practisers of sin are the servants of sin.

It matters not—whether the sin is secret and clandestine, or public and avowed; whether it be of a greater or smaller size; whether you are stung with remorse for it afterwards or not; whether you intend to forsake it hereafter, or not. Such circumstances as these will not alter the case. In spite of such circumstances, if you indulge any one known sin, you bear the infernal brand of wickedness upon you.

I grant, that godly men sin, and that they are far from perfection of holiness in this life. I grant also, that some of them have fallen into some gross sin. But, after all, I must insist, that they do not indulge themselves in the willful, habitual practice of any known sin—or the willful, habitual neglect of any known duty. John expressly tells us, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." 1 John 3:9. That is, he cannot sin habitually; the meaning is, he cannot go on in any one sin as his usual course. But if he falls, it is by surprise; and taking one time with another, he is generally, and for the most part, under the influence of holy principles—these are predominant, or have the mastery within him—and from these, he chiefly acts.

Again, he cannot sin willfully. That is, with full bent of soul. The prevailing inclination and tendency of his soul

is not towards sin: but on the other hand, he really hates it and resists it, even in its most tempting forms. And it is his incessant struggle and honest endeavor to suppress it. He never can abandon himself more to the free, uncontrolled indulgence of the sweetest sin, though it should be only in heart. Both Scripture and Reason renounce those crowds of pretended Christians we have among us, who are under the habitual power of some sin or other—and live in the neglect of some known duty. A servant of Christ, who does not endeavor to do his Master's will, in every known instance, is a contradiction.

And now, are not sundry of you convicted of the character of wicked men, who might not come under the former class of profane sinners? Do not some of you know in your consciences, that there is some little sweet sin (so you esteem it) which you cannot bear to part with? Is there not some Christian duty, which is so disagreeable to you, so contrary to your inclination, to your reputation in the wicked world, or to your temporal interest—that though you are secretly convinced it is your duty—yet you omit it; you put it off; and think God will dispense with your obedience in so slight a manner? Are not some of you conscious that this is your practice? If so, you must be ranked in the numerous class of wicked men. There, indeed, you have company enough: but company is no security against Omnipotence.

Thirdly, all those are wicked, who are destitute of those graces and virtues, which constitute the character of a godly person. Wickedness is a lack of Christian graces and virtues. The lack of faith, the lack of love, repentance, benevolence, and charity, does as really constitute a wicked man—as drunkenness, blasphemy, or any notorious immorality. Certainly I need not particularly mention to you those passages of Scripture, which declare these graces and virtues essential to a godly man, and the lack of them the grand mark and constituent of a wicked one.

A godly man, who does not love God or mankind; a godly man without faith or repentance—is as great a contradiction as a hero without courage, a scholar without learning, a righteous ruler without justice, or a fire without heat.

Therefore, if any of you do not believe, that is, if you have not such a realizing persuasion of the truth and importance of the things contained in the Word of God, as to impress and govern your heart and life; particularly, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, which is the grand requirement of the gospel, if you are not deeply sensible of your guilty and helpless condition; and if, as corrupt, helpless sinners, you do not receive Jesus Christ as your only Savior, and trust in his righteousness alone as the only ground of your acceptance with God; I say, if you have not such a faith as this—you are wicked men!

I say, such a faith as this; for, as to the faith which is fashionable among us, I mean a mere speculative or historical assent to the truth of the Christian religion, and that Christ is the Messiah—this is but the faith of devils, only with this difference, that devils believe—and tremble; whereas, many who have this faith among us, believe—and sin without trembling.

If you are destitute of the grace of repentance, if you have not a clear conviction and deep sense of your sinfulness in heart and life, by nature and practice; if you are not deeply sorry at heart for your sins, and hate them—hate them all without exception; if you do not hate them, not only on account of the punishment annexed to them—but because of their intrinsic vileness and their contrariety to the Divine purity; if you do not forsake your sins, as well as sorrow for them; and if you do not fly to the mere mercy of God in Jesus Christ for pardon, and place all your dependence upon his righteousness—I say, unless this is your daily experience and practice—then you are entirely destitute of true evangelic repentance, and consequently come under the unhappy class of wicked men.

If you do not love God with all your hearts, that is, if you have not frequent affectionate thoughts of him; if you do not delight in his service, and in communion with him in divine ordinances; if your love does not produce cheerful, universal obedience, which is the infallible test of love—then you are certainly destitute of the heavenly grace of love; and surely, without this, you will not pretend to the character of godly men! A godly man, without the love of God, is the grossest absurdity.

Finally, if your hearts be not actuated with the generous principle of love and benevolence to mankind; if you do not consult, and endeavor to promote their good as well as your own, and especially the good of their souls by their conversion to God; if you do not habitually observe the rules of justice and charity in your transactions with them, and do to others what you would reasonably desire them to do to you in like circumstances; if you are destitute of this disposition towards mankind—then you are destitute of an essential constituent of a godly man, and consequently are wicked.

Now if all who are destitute of these qualifications should walk off to the left hand, as they must do another day—the final judgment—then would it not thin this crowd? Oh! how few would be left behind! I beseech you to examine yourselves impartially, that you may know your true character.

Fourthly, to sum up the whole, all those are wicked, who still continue in their natural state; who have never been REGENERATED, or experienced a thorough change of their views and dispositions towards God and divine things. Even our own observation of the natural disposition of mankind is sufficient to convince us, though the Scriptures were silent—that they are from their very birth—wicked, disinclined to God and holiness, and bent to that which is evil. Alas! you are stupidly ignorant of yourselves, if you do not know, by experience, that this is your case.

To this the Scriptures also bear abundant testimony. "That which is born of the flesh—is flesh. And those who are in the flesh—cannot please God." John 3:6; Romans 8:8. "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others;" we and others, that is, all, without exception, are by nature children of wrath, and consequently, by nature wicked: for certainly those who are not wicked, cannot be children of wrath. Ephesians 2:3. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart, is only evil continually, from his youth up!" Genesis 6:5; 8:21. And in their flesh dwells no good thing. Romans 7:18.

Upon this corruption of human nature, is founded the necessity of that change of disposition, which the Scripture calls, and which, therefore, we dare to call, the new birth, or new creation. And since this corruption of human nature is universal, it follows, that all are wicked—who have never experienced this divine change.

This must suffice, at present, in answer to the first question, WHO are the wicked? And I hope sundry of you, if you honestly make use of the light you have, have discovered, that whatever flattering hopes you have entertained, you must really place yourselves in the class with wicked men. This is an alarming discovery at any time: but it is much better to receive it now, when the case may be remedied; than in the eternal world, when it will be too late, and your case will be hopeless and desperate.

And now, O wicked man, whoever you are, as Ehud said to Eglon, "I have a message from God unto you!" Judges 3:20. I have a message not unlike to his; and that is, "You shall surely die!" Profane sinner, drunkard, swearer, whoremonger, "you shall surely die!" You, who knowingly, willfully, and habitually indulge yourselves in any favorite sin, "you shall surely die!" You who are destitute of genuine faith, love, and the other graces and virtues essential to a godly man, "you shall surely die!" You, who are still the same in disposition that you were by nature, "you shall surely die!" This is the invariable decree of God—that you shall die!

You may cast death out of your thoughts: but, for all that—you shall die! You may continue unprepared for it—but you must die! Were you as high and bright as Lucifer, as rich as Croesus, as powerful as Alexander—you must die! Your wickedness cannot immortalize you. Though you are wicked men now—you shall be dead men before long! Yes, as surely as you now live—you shall surely die!

But you will perhaps reply, "What is this that you tell us? Is death the lot only of the wicked? Must not all men die, the godly as well as the wicked? How then can death be threatened as the peculiar doom of the wicked?" The answer to this naturally leads me to the second question:

What kind of DEATH shall the wicked man die? It is true, natural death is the universal doom of all mankind. "The wise man dies—just like the fool." Ecclesiastes 2:16. The highest attainments in piety cannot secure an earthly immortality. Peter and Paul are dead, as well as Judas. But though there is no difference in this respect, there is a wide difference in another, and that is, the death of the wicked is quite another thing, or comes under quite a different notion, from the death of the righteous.

The death of the wicked, like an officer, from their offended sovereign, strikes off the fetters of flesh—that they may be carried away to the place of execution! But the death of the righteous, like a friendly angel, only opens the doors of their prison, and dismisses them from their bondage in sinful flesh!

The righteous, in death, enjoy, more or less, the consolations of an approving conscience, the sweets of the love of God, and the kind supports of an Almighty Savior's hand. But the wicked die as criminals by the hand of justice; their guilt is unpardoned, and this gives death its sting! They have no almighty Friend in death. But Jesus, who alone can relieve them, is their enemy! They have no reviving sensations of divine love; but guilty reflections and shocking prospects; or, if they entertain hopes of eternal happiness, which most of them probably do, alas! they are but short-lived delusions, which will vanish like a dream in the morning, as soon as the light of eternity flashes upon them.

Death dismisses the righteous from all their sins and sorrows, and conveys them into a state of perfect and everlasting holiness and happiness. But the death of the wicked cuts them off from all enjoyments, from all the means and hopes of salvation, and fixes them in an unchangeable, everlasting state of sin and misery! Death to them is the gate of hell, the door of their infernal prison, and a sad farewell to all happiness! Then, farewell, a long, an everlasting farewell to the comforts of this life, and all its agreeable prospects! Farewell to friends! Farewell to hope and peace! Farewell to all the means of grace! Farewell God, and Christ, and all the blessedness of heaven. Now, nothing awaits them—but wrath and fiery indignation. Thus, O wicked man—you shall die: and is not this a very different thing from the death of the righteous?

Realize this prospect, sinners, and surely it must startle you. The time is just at hand, when the cold hand of death shall arrest you; when the vital pulse shall cease to beat, and your blood to flow; when your jaws shall fall; the shadow of death hover over your eyes; a ghastly paleness overspread your countenances; and a deadly numbness creep over your frame, and stupefy your active limbs; when the unwilling, lingering soul must be torn from its old companion of flesh; must bid adieu to all the enjoyments and pursuits of this mortal life, and shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away; when it must pass into the immediate presence of God, mingle among the strange, unacquainted beings that inhabit the unseen, untried world, and be fixed in an unchangeable state; when your bodies, like that of our deceased friend, must be laid in the cold and gloomy grave, to moulder there, and feed the worms you were accustomed to tread upon; when you must leave your riches, your honors, your pleasures, which you pursued with so much labor and eagerness, and go as naked out of the world as you came into it!

When you are reduced to this extremity, think, O wicked man, think seriously how miserable your condition will be! Then no comfortable reviews of past life! no supporting whispers of conscience within! no God, no Jesus, no Savior to support you! no encouraging prospects before you! or none but the delusive, vanishing, confounding encouragement of a false and flattering hope! No relief, no gleam of hope from heaven or earth, from God or his creatures! Nothing but . . .

a guilty life behind you!

a corrupt heart, utterly unfit for heaven, and a clamorous, gnawing conscience, within you!

an angry God, a frowning Savior, and a lost heaven above you!

a boundless, burning ocean below you!

Oh! what a tragic exit, what a melancholy end is this!

This is to die indeed! And thus, "O wicked man—you shall surely die!" Such a death will be the certain doom of persisting, impenitent wickedness. I need make no exception at all—but only that which I have already hinted at, namely, that many a wicked man dies with a self-flattering apprehension that he is not wicked, and with expectant hopes of heaven. This is a common case, especially with people that have not lived under a faithful ministry, to inform them honestly of the nature of true religion, and the prerequisites of salvation.

But alas! what a sandy foundation is this! What does it avail to enjoy a little delusive relief in the hour of death, when the first entrance into the eternal world will cause the dream to vanish forever, and leave you to perish without hope, in all the confusion and consternation of eternal disappointment! Thus shall every wicked man among you die, if you still continue such.

But even this, as dreadful as it is—is not all. There is, besides this, that dreadful something, called the second death, Revelation 21:8; 2:11; 20:6, 14, which you, O wicked man, must die. Besides that death, which will put an end to this transitory life—you will have another death to suffer; a death, which will immediately commence when the first is over: a death, which will not be over in a few moments like the other—but the agonies of which will continue—an everlasting death—a state of misery, which will render life worse than death; or being worse than annihilation.

Then the soul will be forever dead to God and holiness—dead to all the means of grace, and all the enjoyments of this life—dead to all happiness and all hope—dead to all the comfortable purposes of existence—dead to everything that deserves the name of life; in short, dead to everything, but the torturing sensations of pain. To these the soul will be tremblingly alive all over, to eternity! But, alas! to be alive, in this sense—alive only to suffer pain, is worse than death, worse than annihilation. This is the import of that dreadful phrase, "the second death."

As life, in the language of Scripture, frequently signifies a state of perfect, everlasting happiness; so death often signifies a state of misery. And the "second death" signifies that second state that follows upon this, which is our first; a state of total, everlasting misery! as full of death and misery—as heaven is of life and

felicity. Thus, O wicked man, shall you surely die! For remember, you have not the character of those who are safe from the "second death." Their character you have in Revelation: "He who overcomes, shall not be hurt of the second death." Revelation 2:11. It is only the Christian hero, the brave soldier of Jesus Christ, who is enabled by divine grace to conquer his sins within, and all temptations from without. It is he, and he alone, who shall escape unhurt by this dreadful king of death.

As for others, particularly the "fearful, the unbelieving, whoremongers, and all liars," you are expressly told, "they shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." Here, also, you may see a Scripture definition of the "second death." Revelation 21:8; it is to lie in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. What a shocking image is this!

And now, when you see the dreadful import of this denunciation, may it not spread terror through this assembly to hear, "Oh, wicked man—you shall surely die!" Are your hearts armored against the thunder of his threatening? Are you so foolhardy, as not to be concerned, whether life or death, eternal life or eternal death—be your doom?

Is there no wicked man in this assembly so much affected, as at least to inquire, "Is there no way to escape? Must I die without relief? Is the sentence past beyond repeal?"

No, blessed be God, you are yet alive; and while there is life—there is hope. The gates of eternal despair are not yet shut and barred upon you! Therefore, in the name of God, I assure you, there is hope, there is a possibility of escaping.

But in what way? Suppose you sin on, as you have done hitherto, and herd in the crowd of wicked men; suppose that you still continue thoughtless about the great concerns of eternity, neglect the Lord Jesus, and attend upon the means of grace in a careless, formal manner—but still remain hard, impenitent, in love with sin and the world, and destitute of the love of God—suppose that you resist the strivings of the Holy Spirit and your own consciences, flatter yourselves with vain hopes of safety, and shut your eyes against the light of conviction—suppose that you should abandon yourselves to the pursuit of this world with your usual eagerness, and drown all serious thoughts in the bustle and confusion of secular affairs; I say, suppose that you should take this course—then is there any hope? No! in this way there is nothing but despair. If you should live as long as Methuselah, and continue in this course—you would still continue wicked, and never become more fit for heaven than you now are; nay, like a body tending to corruption, you would corrupt and putrefy more and more.

Consult your reason, consult your Bible, consult anything, except the self-flattering heart of man, and the father of lies; and they will all tell you, that if you persist in this course—that you shall surely die! Not one who ever went on in this course has entered into heaven: but in this downward road those crowds persisted, who are now with Judas and Dives, in the place of torment; and, if you tread in their steps—then you shall certainly, before long, be among them.

But if you will attend, I will endeavor to show you what you must do to be saved, and point out to you the way of life and hope. Hear me, O wicked man! who is under the sentence of death; hear me, and I will direct you how you may procure a repeal of the sentence, and live forever. Blessed Spirit! we need your assistance in this attempt. Oh! bear home my feeble words with resistless energy upon the hearts of sinners, that this day they may pass from death to life. Let me again demand your attention to the following directions:

If you would escape death in its most dreadful form, and enter into life, then:

First, Betake yourselves immediately to serious thoughtfulness. No more of your levity and froth; no more of your mirth, and vanity, and dissipation of thought. But now, at last, begin to THINK; to think seriously and sadly of your sins, of your guilty and wretched condition, of your danger of being forever miserable, and of the best means of deliverance.

Secondly, Break off from those things that hinder your conversion. No more of your drunkenness, swearing, and other vices. No more mingle in the company of sinners, nor run with them into the same excess of riot. Break off from your over-eager pursuit of the world; and act as if you thought it infinitely worse to be lost forever, than to be low and poor in this life.

Thirdly, Diligently use all means that may instruct you in the nature of true religion, and teach you what you

should do to be saved: particularly, read the Scriptures, and other good books, and attend upon the most faithful preaching as you have opportunity.

Fourthly, Earnestly pray to God. If you have hitherto had prayerless families, or prayerless closets, let them be so no longer: this evening consecrate them to God by prayer. Pray, particularly, for the Holy Spirit, who alone can thoroughly convert and sanctify you.

Fifthly, Endeavor to receive and submit to the Lord Jesus as your only Savior. It is through him alone, that you can be saved: therefore, make use of him as your only mediator, in all your transactions with God.

Finally, Do not delay to follow these directions. Alas! if, with Felix, you put it off to a more convenient season, (Acts 24:25.) there is very little hope. "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Hebrews 2:15.) "Now is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2.) Therefore, now, this moment, begin the work. Now dart up a prayer to heaven, "Lord, here is a poor wicked creature, who must die before long, unless you have mercy upon me: have mercy upon me, O God of mercy." Thus pray, and keep your souls, as it were, always in a praying posture until you are heard.

And now, my dear friends, what is your resolution upon the whole? Are you resolved to use these means for your deliverance—or are you not? If you are, you have great reason to hope for success. But if not, I defy you to find one encouraging word to you in all the Bible. On the other hand, I am commanded, upon my peril, to warn you; and therefore I would once more sound this dreadful alarm in your ears, "O wicked man—you shall surely die!" And if, when you hear the words of this curse, you bless yourselves in your hearts, and hope better things—then God foresaw there would be such self-flattering, presumptuous sinners in the world, and he has prepared his terrors against them.

"Let none of those who hear the warnings of this curse consider themselves immune, thinking, 'I am safe, even though I am walking in my own stubborn way.' This would lead to utter ruin! The LORD will not pardon such people. His anger and jealousy will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will come down on them, and the LORD will erase their names from under heaven. The LORD will separate them from all the tribes of Israel, to pour out on them all the covenant curses recorded in this Book of the Law!" (Deuteronomy 29:19-21.)

What a tremendous threatening is this! and you see it stands in full force against those who presumptuously flatter themselves with false hopes of impunity: and it will certainly have a dreadful accomplishment upon such of you as disregard this repeated warning, "O wicked man—you shall surely die!"

I doubt not but there are some of you to whom the character of the wicked does not belong, and therefore are in no danger of dying their death. To you I would speak a few parting words of encouragement.

You must die; but oh! death to you will be a harmless, stingless thing. Death is but your Father's messenger to fetch you home—that you may be forever with him. You will have good company in death; Jesus, your faithful and never-failing friend, will then be with you, and support you: and his angels will wait round your dying beds to receive your departing souls, and conduct them to eternal rest. Death will be your birthday; then you will be born, not a helpless, weeping infant, into a world of sin and sorrow—but a perfect immortal, into a world of consummate happiness and glory!

Death will be the last enemy that ever you shall conflict with; after that, you will be conquerors, more than conquerors, forever. Death to you will be a blessing, and not a curse: so that as to you, I may change the threatening in my text, into a promise, "O godly man—you shall surely die!" Yes, blessed be God, you shall die in spite of earth and hell; you shall not be doomed to live always in such a sinful wretched world as this; but death, your friend, will set you free, and convey you to the place where Jesus is, and where your heart is gone before you.

This may, perhaps, seem strange language, that death should become a blessing: but such strange things does Jesus perform for his people. O may we all "die the death of the righteous; and may our last end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10.)

For a more immediate improvement of this funeral occasion, instead of haranguing upon the virtues of the dead, many of which, I doubt not, deserve commendation; my business is with the living—who alone can receive advantage from what I say; and to them I would suggest a few solemn reflections.

The Certainty of Death

First, how uncertain and frail are the nearest ties of relation, and all our domestic and relative happiness! Therefore, how much should we be concerned, to contract immortal friendships, and secure a never-dying happiness!

Secondly, Such bereavements should be made occasions of exercising resignation to the will of God.

Thirdly, Let this instance of mortality put us in mind of our own. Shall others die—to warn us that we must die? and shall the warning be in vain?

Fourthly, Let us rejoice that though our friends die—yet the Lord lives, and blessed be our rock! 2 Samuel 22:47. Psalm 18:46.