

# Sermons From Sainly Deathbeds No. 783

by C.H. Spurgeon

*C.H. Spurgeon teaches that believers should live prepared for death by faithfully serving God and valuing the ministry, drawing lessons from the peaceful and purposeful death of Jacob and other saints.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 49:33, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:7

**Topics:** "Christian Death", "Faithful Ministry", "Preparation for Eternity"

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## Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon reflects on the death of Jacob and the passing of faithful ministers to encourage believers to live prepared for death and to value the ministry of the Church. He highlights the peaceful submission of Jacob at death and the lessons that the departures of godly men teach about readiness, prayer for ministers, and dependence on God. Spurgeon calls the Church to honor and support faithful ministry as essential for spiritual vitality and unity.

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## Transcript

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."- Genesis 49:33.

JACOB did not yield up the ghost until he had delivered the last sentence of admonition and benediction to his 12 sons. He was immortal till his work was done. So long as God had another sentence to speak by him, death could not paralyze his tongue. Yet, after all, the strong man was bowed down, and he who had journeyed with unwearied foot full many a mile, was now obliged to gather up his feet into the bed to die. His life had been eventful in the highest degree, but that dread event now came upon him which is common to us all.

He had deceived his blind father in his youth, but no craftiness of Jacob could deceive the grave. He had fled from Esau, his angry brother, but a swifter and surer foot was now in pursuit from which there was no escape. He had slept with a stone for his pillow and had seen Heaven opened, but he was to find that it was only to be entered by the ordinary gate. He had wrestled with the Angel at the brook Jabbok, and he had prevailed—but this time he was to wrestle with an angel against whom there was no prevaience. He had dwelt in Canaan in tents, in the midst of enemies and the Lord had said, "Touch not My anointed, and do My prophets no harm," and therefore he had been secure in the midst of a thousand ills.

But now he must fall by the hand of the last enemy, and feel the great avenger's sword. It was appointed to the Patriarch to die as meaner men must do. From the wording of the text it appears very clearly that

Israel did not dispute the irrevocable decree, nor did his soul murmur against it. He had long before learned that few and evil were his days, and now that they came to an end he joyfully accepted their conclusion. He was not like a bull dragged to the slaughter, but he gathered up his feet by a voluntary act of submission, and then, bowing his head, he yielded up the ghost. Like a man weary with a long day's toil, he was glad to rest and therefore most cheerfully he attended to the great Father's summons, and was peacefully gathered unto his people and his God.

As this is to be our lot by-and-by, we may contemplate in our meditations the departure of this mighty man and ask that our death may be like his, that we, also, may finish our course with joy. May we—

"So live, that when our summons comes to join

The innumerable caravan that moves

To that mysterious realm, where each shall take

His place appointed by the just decree,

That you, sustained and soothed, approach your grave

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch

Around him, and lies down to pleasant dreams." It is remarkable, my Brothers and Sisters, that the Holy Spirit has given us very few deathbed scenes in the Book of God. We have very few in the Old Testament, fewer still in the New—and I take it that the reason may be because the Holy Spirit would have us take more account of how we live than how we die—for life is the main business.

He who learns to die daily while he lives will find it no difficulty to breathe out his soul for the last time into the hands of his faithful Creator. If we fight the battle well, we may rest assured of the victory. If, enlisted under the banner of Truth, resting in Jesus Christ, we finish our fight and keep the faith, we need not fear but that our entering into rest will be a blessed one. Perhaps the Holy Spirit would also show us that it is not so much to our profit to have our feelings harrowed by recitals of dying experiences.

Certain preachers, in their sermons, are very fond of extorting tears from their hearers by dragging before them the funerals of friends—painting the deathbed scenes of parents, unwrapping the winding sheets of little infants—and exhibiting the skeletons of buried relatives. This may be of some use—preachers may have used these scenes to work through the natural affections to something deeper. But this is not the way the Holy Spirit has selected. If the teachers of the Gospel will study the Holy Spirit's model they will learn that we are to strike at conscience rather than at the natural affections, and teach men holy principles rather than remind them of their sorrows.

From the great reticence of the Holy Spirit in this matter, I learn that He would not have us be abundant to superfluity in such things. Moreover, it may be suggested that the Holy Spirit has given us few of these deathbed scenes on paper because, being present with us, He presents them to us frequently in actual flesh and blood, visible to our eyes and audible to our ears. We are to look upon the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the witness of dying men as, in some sense, the continuance of the Holy Spirit's instructive authorship. He has finished yonder Book written with paper and ink, but He is writing fresh stanzas to the glory of God in the deaths of departing saints, who, one by one, are taken from the evil to come singing the Lord's praises as they depart.

If this is not so, at any rate it is true that we have abundant testimonies to the faithfulness of God in the departure of those who, having lived by faith on earth, are now gone to see with their own eyes the King in His beauty, and the land which is very far off. During the past week, as most of you know, God has seen fit to remove from the midst of His Church, a great man and a prince in Israel, a man greatly beloved—one of the excellent of the earth—an amiable, zealous, talented, godly, and valiant man esteemed personally wherever he was known and honored officially wherever his ministry was enjoyed.

Dr. James Hamilton was one of the most fragrant flowers in the Lord's garden of sweet flowers to which the Beloved so often comes to gather lilies. He was not a Boanerges—not after the quality of Knox and Luther—but a Barnabas, a son of consolation, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. He had a singular elegance and refinement of style in which metaphors the most novel and charming abounded, like golden grains in Africa's sunny fountains! In his utterances he gave forth a pleasant sound, as of one that plays well upon a goodly instrument. He was always musical with harmony of poetic illustration, but always musical with the notes of Christ—always sweet with the perfume of the atoning blood. He was a cedar in our Lebanon—but alas, the axe has laid low his glories.

He was a gem of purest ray serene, but he shines no longer in the coronet of the Church below. He was a nursing-father to full many of the Lord's little ones, and now we mourn because they lack his help—may they find in God's Spirit an abundant supply of all-sufficient Grace. Well, he is gone from us—and while men are sad, there is joy beyond the skies! The loss of earth is the gain of Heaven, and if the Church has somewhat less below, she has more above. I think I see him at this moment borne upward to his final resting place as a stone squared and polished, to be built in the wall of the Temple of the New Jerusalem! Do you hear the shouts of, "Grace, grace unto it"?

There is a fresh jewel this moment in the Redeemer's crown! Heaven is lustrous with the beauty of another blood-washed robe! Another voice is added to the everlasting song, another shout to the hallelujahs of those who feast at the eternal banquet! The Church has lost nothing—she has only seen one of her valiant captains pass through the flood to join the triumphal band upon the other side. And as surely as the Church is one, she loses none of her members—as certain as it is the same Church triumphant and militant—so certain is it that Christ loses none of His people, and the Church really none of her strength by death.

The decease of our friend James Hamilton, in connection with another circumstance of a different character which has happened to me this week, led my meditations very much to saintly deathbeds, and I have therefore fastened upon this occasion to talk with God's people concerning their passage out of this world unto the Father. " 'Tis greatly wise," says the poet, "to talk with our last hours." Sacred prudence bids us be familiar with the winding-sheet and the grave, which must soon be our most intimate acquaintances. Let us sojourn awhile upon the borders of the land unknown, to be sobered, at least, if not sanctified.

First, let us consider the departure of great saints, and of God's ministers in particular—what do these teach us? Secondly, the various modes of their departure—what do these teach us, also?

I. First, THE DEPARTURES OF GOD'S SAINTS, AND ESPECIALLY OF HIS MINISTERS—WHAT ARE THEIR LESSONS? The first that lies upon the surface is this, "Be you also ready, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man comes." When in the forest there is heard the crash of a falling oak, it is a sign that the woodsman is

abroad, and every tree in the whole company may tremble lest soon the sharp edge of the axe should find it out. We are all mortal, and the death of one should remind us that death lurks hard by us all.

I trust we do not, by often hearing of death, become callous to it. May we never be like the birds in the steeple which can build their nests when the bells are ringing and sleep quietly when the merry marriage or solemn funeral peals are startling the air. May we regard death as the most solemn of all events and be sobered by its approach. In the old wars of the Danish kings there is a legend that when Harold was contending with his brother Harequin, an arrow was seen flying in the air, quivering as if it scarcely knew its way, and was searching for its victim. Then all of a sudden it pierced the leader's forehead.

A little imagination may picture us as being in the same position as the Danish lord—the arrow of death is flying for awhile above us, but its descent is sure and its wound is fatal. It ill behooves us to laugh and sport while life hangs on a thread. The sword is out of its scabbard—let us not trifle! It is furbished and the edge sparkles with fearful sharpness—let us prepare ourselves to meet it! He who does not prepare for death is more than an ordinary fool—he is a madman! When the voice of God is calling to us through the departures of others, if we do not listen to the warning we may expect Him to follow the rejected word of counsel with a blow of wrath, for He often strikes down right terribly those who would not listen to His reproving messages.

Be ready, ministers! See to it that your Church is in good order, for the grave shall soon be dug for you! Be ready, parents! See that your children are brought up in the fear of God, for they must soon be orphans! Be ready, men of business, you that are busy in the world! See that your affairs are correct—see that you serve God with all your heart—for the days of your terrestrial service will soon be ended and you will be called to give account for the deeds done in the body, whether they are good or whether they are evil. O may we all prepare for the tribunal of the great King with a care which shall be rewarded with the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Secondly, the deaths of righteous men should teach us their value. According to the old saying, we never know the value of things till we lose them. I am sure it is so with holy men. Let me urge young people here to prize their aged godly parents, to treat them kindly, to make their last days happy because they cannot expect to have them long on earth to receive their tokens of affectionate gratitude. Those who have Christian parents little know how great is the privilege they enjoy until they become parents themselves and learn the cares and sorrows of the mother's office and the father's state.

Are any of you favored with friends who have given you instruction in the faith, whose goodly words and holy examples have helped you on the way to Heaven? Thank God much for such good company! Be much with them, treasure up the pearls which drop from their lips. They must soon be gone—value them today as you will do when they are departed. Are you privileged with an earnest, faithful, ministry? Do you hear the Gospel lovingly and honestly proclaimed? Then bless God every day of your life for that faithful ministry. All ministry is not such—all people are not in such a case. Be grateful, then, and show your gratitude by giving earnest heed to the things that are spoken, lest by any means you should let them slip and so should miss the great salvation through lack of earnestness.

I do beseech you, dear Friends, value the Christian ministry! I ask no honor for men, but I do ask honor for the office which Paul said he would magnify. And wherever you see that God has sent an ambassador, and that His ambassador is praying for you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God, turn not away from his entreaties! Close not your ears to his persuasions, but honor the man's office—pay homage to the

King who sent him by yielding up your heart in obedience to the Word which is delivered to you.

Furthermore, I think the departures of great saints and those who have been eminent teach us to pray earnestly to God to send us more of such—a lesson which, I am quite certain, needs to be inculcated often. There is sadly little prayer in the Church for the rising ministry. You pray for those who are your pastors, and rightly so. "Brethren, pray for us." You cannot do us a better favor. But there is so little prayer that God would raise up ministers! Know you not that as surely as the blood of Christ bought the redemption of His people, as surely as the resurrection of Christ was for the justification of the saints, so surely the ascension of Christ was for the distribution of ministry among the sons of men?

Know you not the passage, "He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men and He gave [these were the gifts] some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"? Now, you plead the precious blood when you would obtain pardon. You plead the resurrection and you receive justification. But

how seldom do you plead the ascension, so as to obtain a faithful ministry? Parts of Christendom are becoming terribly deficient in ministry. I have been told, and I have read in the literature of America, that in many parts of the United States one-third of the Churches are devoid of pastors. Believers are struggling and striving after ministers but cannot find them. There must have been, in that case, a failure in the prayer, "Lord, send forth laborers into the harvest."

And I should not at all wonder if such a case should happen to England, for I see a dreadful lethargy in the hearts of many of God's people as to the work of praying for preachers and assisting in training them. In olden times, if any men showed the slightest ability in speech, the saints sought such out and tried to instruct them, as Aquila and Priscilla. When they found Apollos, a man eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, they took him and instructed him further. And Paul, when he saw that Timothy was an apt scholar, instructed him further in the faith. Our blessed Lord not only preached the Gospel, but founded a college in which He had 12 students (and more than that), who constantly went about with Him, learning from His example and ministry how themselves to become teachers of others.

But now, indeed, there are wiseacres who talk about "man-made ministers" and despise all attempts to assist our youth to become qualified in the testimony of the Truth of God. May the Lord teach them reason and give them common sense, but let no Christian give one single particle of heeding to their prattling. Let it be our earnest endeavor, both by prayer and every other means, to seek to obtain from God a succession of earnest, faithful, qualified ministers, for, say what you will, it is upon the ministry that God shall send you that which much of the success of the Church must depend.

Those sects which pretend to do without a special ministry (and it is usually a transparent pretense), may prosper for a little while. Their setting up every disciple to be a teacher suits the natural pride of the human heart and Christian men, being grossly deceived, yield to it for a little while. But I know that not one single one of these communities can endure throughout a generation in vigorous existence. With a spasm of excitement and a flush of zeal, they grow awhile—fattening upon those whom they can decoy from other churches—and then they dwindle away to nothing, or divide into little knots, each one agreed in hating the other most fervently. What is everybody's business is nobody's business, and since there is no man set to see after souls, no man does see after them. And the whole flock becomes scattered for lack of a shepherd, who, in God's hand, might have kept them together.

Faithful servants of the living God, as you prize the Church and its ordinances, strive with God that as He takes one by one of His servants away He would send us others that the Church may never lack her standard-bearers, and the flock of God never be destitute of pastors after God's own heart. Pray seven times each day that God may keep alive the name and glory of Christ in the land by faithful teachers of His Truth!

Yet there is a valuable Truth on the other side. We desire always to look at both sides of a question. The taking away of eminent saints from among us should teach us to depend more upon God, and less upon human instrumentality. I was reading, yesterday, the dying prayer of Oliver Cromwell and one sentence in that man of God's last breaths pleased me exceedingly. It was to this effect, I think. I have copied out the words, "Teach those who look too much on Your instruments to depend more upon Yourself." Brave old Oliver was a man upon whom the whole nation rested. He could say with David, "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it."

In a time of terrible anarchy, when men had become fierce with fanatical prophesies and wild with political passions, Oliver Cromwell's iron hand restored peace and kept a tumultuous land in order. And now, when he would be worst missed and could very ill be spared, he must depart, and this is his prayer—"Teach them to depend less upon Your instrument, and more upon Yourself."

You may have observed that frequently, when a man is in the zenith of his power, and people have said, "That is the man who of all others we could least afford to lose," that very man has been taken away. That special light has been quenched. That particular pillar has been removed. The Lord would have all the glory given unto His own name. He has said it, said it often in a voice of thunder, but men will not hear it—"All power belongs unto God." He will honor and bless an instrumentality, for that is His mode of working, but He will not divide the crown with the most honored agency. He will have all the glory redound unto Himself—and by frequently breaking up His battle axes and weapons of war He teaches His Church that He can fight with His own bare arms and win the victory Himself without any instrument of warfare.

Coming back, however, to the old thought—do you not think that the departure of eminent saints should teach each one of us to work with more earnestness and perseverance while we are spared? One soldier less in the battle, my Breth-

ren—then you must fill up the vacancy—you who stand next in the ranks must close up, shoulder to shoulder, that there be no gap. Here is one servant the less in the house—the other servants must do more work. It is but natural for us to argue so, because we wish the Master's work to be done, and it will not be done without hands. If we do not preach the Gospel, angels will not preach it! If we do not win souls for God, we must not expect cherubim and seraphim to engage in this Divine employment. Somebody must do it, and, since we would have all done that can be done, you and I must do the more when helpers are removed!

There is one hand less—we must stretch out our hands more often to execute the sacred work. Behold, a reaper falls in the corner of the field and all the harvest must be gathered in before the season is past! Brothers, sharpen your sickles, gather up your strength, toil more hours in the day, throw more strength into your toil—above all, pray for a greater blessing upon what is done! If there is less bread, then we must have a larger benediction to multiply it, to make it sufficient for the tens of thousands! If there are fewer laborers, we must ask the Master to give those laborers more strength, that the work may still be done and nothing be marred for lack of effort.

I wish I had the strength, this morning, mental and physical combined, to urge this upon you as I have strived to urge it upon myself. I have sought before the Lord that He would teach me to live an active, earnest, laborious, heavenly life. Very few of us understand what life is. Baxter at Kidderminster, from morning to night spending and being spent for the Master's service! Whitfield, all over England and America, toiling and laboring without the thought of rest, instant in season and out of season! These are the men we should emulate. But, alas, we do a little and then we fold our hands with ridiculous self-satisfaction. Now and then we arouse ourselves to something like zeal—and then we fall back into a state of carelessness.

It ought not to be! With diligence and perseverance we ought to live as having death in view and the near approach of the time when the night comes where no man can work. I must leave those lessons with you. I cannot enforce them. Only the Holy Spirit can.

II. Come with me to the second part of my discourse. Much may be learned from the MODES OF DEPARTURE of God's servants. All Believers fall asleep in Jesus and in Him they are all saved. The precious blood has washed them. The hands of Christ keep them. The earnest of the Spirit is with them and the everlasting gates are opened to receive them. But unto them all there is not ministered the same abundant entrance into the kingdom. Neither do all their faces shine with those gleams of glory which rest upon the highly favored.

To some of God's own children the dying bed is a Bochim, a place of weeping. It is melancholy when such is the case, and yet it is often so with those who have been negligent servants. They are saved, but so as by fire—they struggle into the Port of Peace. Their entrance is like that of a weather-beaten vessel which has barely escaped the storm. It enters into harbor leaking so terribly as to be ready to founder—without her cargo—for she has thrown that overboard to escape the waves. Her sails are torn to ribbons, her masts gone by the board, barely able to keep afloat. Thousands enter into Glory as Paul and his companions in peril landed at Melita—some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. All come safe to land, but it is as it were by the skin of their teeth.

In the dying beds of some Believers that text is sadly illustrated, "If the righteous scarcely are saved." We have known them lying on the brink of eternity, bemoaning themselves after this fashion—"God has forgiven me, but how can I forgive myself? I am saved, but, oh, that I had made a profession of religion more plainly and boldly! Would God that I had not been so slow in serving my Master! I have prayed so little, given so little, done so little. I am a most unprofitable servant. Woe is me, for I have been busy here and there, and have forgotten my life's work. I have made money, but have won no jewels for Christ. I have taken care of my family, but alas, I have done next to nothing for the cause of Christ.

"I shall have no means of serving the cause of God when I enter Heaven. I cannot then succor the poor, feed the hungry, or clothe the naked or send the Gospel to the ignorant. I might have done much when I was in health and strength, but now I can do little or nothing for I am weak and languishing upon this bed. Would to God that my Sabbaths had profited me more, and that I had walked more in nearness to God." Such dolorous heart-breaking confessions have we heard, varied occasionally by the lament, "Would to God I had brought up my children better, for now I am obliged to say with David, 'My house is not so with God,' though I know that He has made with me an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure."

Many a dying pillow has been wet with the penitential tears of saints who have, then, fully seen their formerly unobserved shortcomings and failures and laxities in the family, in the business, in the Church

and in the world. Brethren, it is beautiful to see the repentance of a dying saint—travel far as you may, you will not readily behold a more comely spectacle. I have seen it, and have breathed the prayer, "Lord, give me a humble and contrite spirit, like that which I see before me, and help me now to feel the like brokenness of heart."

Yet at the sight of such instances it has struck me that the fruit, though precious, was scarcely seasonable. It must be acceptable to God for He never rejects repentance anywhere, but yet a brighter state of soul would have glorified Him more in dying moments. We regret to see mourning of soul as the most conspicuous feature in a departing Brother. We desire to see joy and confidence clearly manifested at the last. We are glad to see contrition anywhere because it is evermore a lovely work of the Spirit, but we should have preferred to see it sooner—when regrets would not have been unavailing, when the repentance would have brought forth practical fruit in a change of life.

I say, thank God if there is a deep repentance on the dying bed, but this is not the highest or best thing. To enter into life halt or maimed is not the grandest or most comely mode of departing out of this life into another. To die in the dark with Jesus is safe, but to have light at the last is better. We remember reading of a popular minister, (and the reading of it has struck through our heart), who, when he was dying, said to those about him, "I die in great bitterness of mind, for I have been one of the most admired trees in God's vineyard. And yet when I look back upon my past life I fear I have brought forth many blossoms and many leaves, but very little fruit unto God's glory."

Ah, it will go hard with us ministers if we have to sorrow thus in our last hours! You Sunday school teachers, and other beloved laborers for Christ—I trust you will not have to cry at the last, "Our harvest is past, and our summer is ended, and none of our children are saved! Oh that we had talked to our boys and girls more solemnly! Oh that we had entreated them with tears to flee from the wrath to come!" I pray God that such may not be your dying lamentations, but that each one of us may live for God at the rate which eternity will justify.

When Zeuxis, the old painter, was taking much pains with his painting—pausing over every tint and touch—they asked him why he worked so carefully. He answered. "I paint for eternity." So let us take good heed in all that we do for God—not offering to Him that which costs us nothing, nor going out to His service at random—without prayer for His blessing and fitness for His work. Let us take earnest heed to ourselves that we live for eternity—for so shall we wish to have lived when we come to die.

It has not infrequently occurred that the dying scene has been to the Lord's departing champions a battle, not perhaps by reason of any slips or shortcomings—far from it—for in some cases the conflict appeared to arise by very reason of their valor in the Lord's service. Who among us would assert that Martin Luther failed to live up to the light and knowledge which he had received? So far as he knew the Truth of God, I believe he most diligently followed it. Beyond most men he was true to conscience. He knew comparatively little of the Truth, but what he did know he maintained with all his heart, and soul, and strength. And yet it is exceedingly painful to read the record of Luther's last few days.

Darkness was round about him. Thick clouds and tempest enveloped his soul. At the last the sky cleared, but it is very evident that among all the grim battles in which that mighty German fought and conquered, probably the most tremendous conflict of his life was at its close. Can we not guess the reason? Was it not because the devil knew him to be his worst enemy, then, upon the earth and therefore, hating him with the utmost power of infernal hate, and feeling that this was his last opportunity for assaulting him, he gathered

up all his diabolical powers and came in against him like a flood, thinking that maybe he might at the last overcome the stout heart and cow the valiant spirit?

Only by Divine assistance did Luther win the victory, but win it he did! Is this form of departure to be altogether deprecated? I think not. It is to be dreaded in some aspects, though not in others, for is it not a noble thing for the knight of the Cross to die in harness? A blessed thing for the Christian soldier to proceed at once from the battlefield to his eternal rest? The like was the case with John Knox, the Scottish Luther, whose bold spirit feared the face of no man. He was beset with a temptation which seemed a strange one to trouble him, namely, a temptation to self-righteousness. He had always denounced all trust in works and yet that error assaulted him at the last. He had a long and bitter conflict, though it ended in joyful victory.

It has been quaintly said that, "Sometimes God puts His children to bed in the dark." When our heavenly Father sends the rider upon the pale horse to fetch us home from the school of this life's tribulation, he comes riding down the

street making such a clangor with his horse hoofs that we are alarmed—until we come to know that he is sent by our Father—and then we are glad. God permits the Jordan to overflow its banks when some of His best children are passing through, for He designs to magnify His Grace in the last trial of their faith, and thus to show to men and angels, and devils who are looking on, how He can triumph in His servants when flesh and heart are failing.

Beloved, I think these instances are rare compared with others which I am now to mention. To many saints their departure has been a peaceful entrance into the fair haven of repose. The very weakest of God's servants have frequently been happiest in their departing moments. John Bunyan observed this fact in the description of Mr. Feeble-Mind's passage of the river, "Here also I took notice of what was very remarkable. The water of that river was lower at this time than ever I saw it in all my life. So he went over at last wet not much above his ankles."

Heaven's mercy tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and gives to babes no battle because they have no strength for it—the lambs calmly rest on the bosom of Jesus and breathe out their lives in the Shepherd's arms. What encouragement this ought to be to you who are the tender ones among us! What cheering tidings for you who are weak in faith! Like Mr. Ready-to-Halt, you shall cry, "Now, I shall have no more need of these crutches, since yonder are chariots and horses for me to ride on."

There died a few weeks ago one who may be known to some of you by name, Mr. James Upton, late pastor of the church in Cotton Street. He was more than 25 years laid aside from the ministry by a most terrible depression of spirit which caused him one long unbroken night of soul. He could not engage in any form of devotional exercise so frightfully was he depressed in spirit—doubtless by some form of mental derangement. But during the last few hours of his life, when he was speechless and could therefore give no verbal testimony, the gloom which had always been manifested in his countenance was removed and he was evidently, at the last, enjoying profound peace of mind.

If God does not take away melancholy from the Believer till the last, He will at the last. If He suffers His people to live for years in winter, their summer shall begin at the last hour. When the death damp is heaviest, then shall the light burn the brightest, and, as the body decays and weakens, the soul shall arise in her strength! Many of the saints have gone farther than this, for their deathbeds have been pulpits. Not to all of them was it so given, for Mr. Whitfield desired to bear a dying testimony for Christ, but did not do

so, somebody remarking to him, "You have borne so many living testimonies to so many thousands that your Master wants no dying testimony of you."

If you have read Brainerd's Journal, what wonderful things he speaks of there when all his last thoughts were delightfully fixed upon eternity and the world to come! Thus he wrote in his diary, "Oh, how sweet were the thoughts of death to me at this time! Oh, how I longed to be with Christ, to be employed in the glorious work of angels, and with an angel's freedom, vigor, and delight." At another time he wrote, "'Tis sweet to me to think of eternity, but oh, what shall I say to the eternity of the wicked? I cannot mention it or think of it! The thought is too dreadful!" His thoughts, however, were all taken up with the joyful eternity belonging to Believers into which he entered with holy triumph.

Then there was that dear man of God, Mr. Payson. His last expressions were weighty sermons. He says, "I suppose, speaking within bounds, I have suffered 20 times as much as any martyr that was ever burnt at the stake through the painfulness of my disease. And yet, frequently, day after day, my joy in God has so abounded as to render my sufferings not only tolerable but welcome." When Mr. Matthew Henry was dying, Mr. Illidge came to him and he said, "You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men. This is mine, 'A life spent in the service of God and in communion with Him is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in the world.' "

Well spoken! Our pulpits often lack force and power. Men suppose that we speak but out of form and custom, but they do not suspect dying men of hypocrisy, nor think that they are driving a trade and following a profession. Hence the witness of dying saints has often become powerful to those who have stood around their couch. Careless hearts have been impressed. Slumbering consciences have been awakened and children of God quickened to greater diligence by what they have heard!

Brethren, do you never find dying beds to be thrones of judgment? Have you never seen the hoary saint stayed upon the pillows prophesying like a seer concerning the things of this world and of the world to come? Have you never heard him deliver sentences as weighty as the verdict of a judge? "What?" says he, "What are all these earthly things to me now, now that I am about to leave them? They are all bubbles and emptinesses." Solomon in his life could not moralize with such force as holy men do in their deaths. And then, as they point the finger to eternity and tell of worlds to come, and of the need of being prepared for the tremendous day of the great assize, they appear as if, clothed in their white raiment, they were performing a rehearsal of the last dread judgment!

Many who care not for the voice of the ministry, nor even for the witness of God's written Word, have felt the power of the speeches of men standing on the borders of eternity. And, Brethren, to bring this to a close, lest I should weary you, we have known not infrequent cases (no, commonly this is the case), when the dying bed has become a Pisgah, from the top of which the saint has viewed his inheritance while his couch has glowed all of a sudden into the chariot of Amminadab—a flaming chariot such as that in which Elijah was borne away to dwell with God! Saints have frequently been in such triumphant conditions of mind that rapture and ecstasy are the only fit words in which to describe their state. "If this is dying," said one, "it is worthwhile living for the mere sake of dying!"

Dr. Payson, in his dying hours, wrote to his sister, "Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I should date this letter from the land of Beulah of which I have been for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The Celestial City is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its odors are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ears and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of Death

which now appears but as an insignificant stream that may be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission.

"The Sun of Righteousness has gradually been drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as He approached. And now He fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory in which I seem to float as an insect in the beams of the sun, exulting, yet almost trembling, while I gaze on this excessive brightness, and wondering, with unutterable wonder, that God should deign thus to shine upon a sinful worm. A single heart and a single tongue seem altogether inadequate to my needs—I want a whole heart for every separate emotion, and a whole tongue to express that emotion."

It has been sometimes said these excitements are produced by delirium or caused by drugs, yet there are multitudes of clear cases in which men have had no delirium and have been altogether untouched by drugs. Take the case of Halyburton, who said, "I know that a great deal from a dying man will go for canting and raving. But I bless God, He has kept the judgment I had, that I have been able to reflect with composure on His dealings with me. I am sober and composed, if ever I was so. You may believe a man venturing on eternity. I have weighed eternity this last night—I have looked on death as stripped of all things pleasant to nature—and under the view of all these, I have found that in the way of God they gave satisfaction—a rational satisfaction that makes me rejoice."

Halyburton, indeed, broke forth into such ecstatic expressions that I fear to quote them, lest I should spoil them! Among his words were these, "If ever I was distinct in my judgment and memory in my life, it is since He laid His hands upon me. My bones are sticking through my skin, and yet all my bones are praising Him. O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? I am now a witness for Christ, and for the reality of religion. I have peace in the midst of pain! And oh, how much of that I have had for a time past! My peace has been like a river—not a discomposed thought. Strange that this body is going away to corruption, and yet my intellectuals are so lively that I cannot say there is the least alteration, the least decay of judgment or memory. Such are the vigorous acts of my spirit towards God and things that are not seen."

When drawing near his end, one remarked to him, "Blessed are they that die in the Lord." He replied, "When I fall so low that I cannot speak, I'll show you a sign of triumph if I am able." And when he could no longer speak, he lifted up his hands, clapped them as in token of victory, and in a little while departed to the land where the weary are at rest. Oh, it is grand to die like this! To get Heaven here below in foretastes! To partake of dainty dishes brought from off the tables of immortals! To stay our souls while lingering here! This shall be your portion, and this shall be my portion, if we are faithful unto death, continuing diligent in service.

I have already told you if we believe in Christ, we shall die safely, but we may not necessarily die in this triumph—this blessing is given to those who are faithful, earnest and diligent—a special reward which God reserves to some men who, like Daniel, are greatly beloved, or who, like John, are indulged with special visions of the New Jerusalem before entering upon the scene!

Brethren, as I close my sermon I can but utter the present yearning of my ardent spirit—

"Oh, if my Lord would come and meet. My soul should stretch her wings in haste, Fly fearless through death's iron gate, Nor feel the terrors as she passed."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/sermons-from-saintly-deathbeds-no-783/>

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