

When
CHRIST
Returns

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WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's note:

The author's selection of Bible versions has been retained whenever possible, including the Revised Version when it was originally cited. The text of this book, however, has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (RV) are taken from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible.

WHEN CHRIST RETURNS

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Contents

1. An Awful Premonition.....	7
2. The Great White Throne	35
3. The Watchword for Today.....	61
4. The Final Judgment	90
5. Jesus Glorified in His Saints.....	115

Chapter One

An Awful Premonition

*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here,
which shall not taste of death, till they see
the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

—Matthew 16:28

I confess that I have frequently read this verse with only a vague sense of its poignancy and have passed over it rapidly because I have not understood it clearly. Although I am well acquainted with the usual interpretations, none of them has ever really satisfied me. This text seems to arouse the reader's surprise without suggesting a simple, obvious meaning. Bible commentators have thus invented explanations and offered suggestions that are widely divergent, but all are equally obscure and improbable.

Lately, however, in reading a volume of sermons by Bishop Horsley, I have met with an altogether new view of the passage, which I firmly believe to be the correct one. Though I do not suppose I will be able to

When Christ Returns

convince all of you of this interpretation, yet I will do my best to elicit from our text the terrible charge that I believe the Savior has left here on record.

With His own cross in mind, Jesus had just admonished His disciples to steadfastness and appealed to them to take up their crosses and follow Him at any sacrifice, which He followed with a portrayal of the inestimable value of the soul and the horror of a soul being lost. (See Matthew 16:24–26.) The full force of that doom was (and is) impossible to comprehend until He “*shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels*” (Matthew 16:27). Then He stopped, looked on some of the company, and said something like this: “Certain people are standing here who will never taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

Now, what did He mean by this? Obviously, it is either a marvelous promise to some who were His disciples indeed, or else it is a portent of woe to others who would die in their sins. How do the popular interpretations of our learned commentators view this statement of our Lord?

Some say it refers to the Transfiguration. It certainly is remarkable that the account of the Transfiguration immediately follows this verse both in Mark and in Luke, as well as in this record of Matthew. However, can you for a moment convince yourself to believe that Christ was describing His Transfiguration when He spoke of “*the Son of man coming in his kingdom*”? Can you see any connection between the Transfiguration and the preceding verse that says,

An Awful Premonition

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

(Matthew 16:27)

I grant you that Christ was in His glory on Mount Tabor, but He did not “*reward every man according to his works*” there. Neither is it at all fair to call that a “coming of the Son of Man.” He did not “*come*” on Mount Tabor because He was already on earth. It is a misuse of language to construe that into an advent.

Besides, what would be the reason for such a solemn introduction as “*Verily I say unto you*”? Does it not raise expectations merely to cause disappointment, if He intended to say no more than this: “*There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see’ Me transfigured*”? That scene took place only six days later. The next verse tells you so.

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.

(Matthew 17:1)

You see, the majesty of the prediction, which carries our thoughts forward to the last days of the world’s history, makes us shrink from accepting an immediate fulfillment of it. Thus, I cannot imagine that the Transfiguration is in the slightest degree referred to here. Further, I do not think that anyone would have thought of such a thing unless he had been confused and utterly perplexed in searching for an explanation.

When Christ Returns

Although it seems almost incredible, some learned scholars endorse this view. Moreover, they say that it also refers to the descent of the Holy Spirit. I am staggered at this thought. I cannot think how any man could find an analogy with Pentecost in the context here. Pentecost took place six months after this event. I really cannot comprehend why Jesus Christ would say, “Truly I say unto you, there are some standing here who will live six months.” It seems to me that my Master did not waste people’s time by speaking such inanities.

Who, reading this passage, can think it has any reference to the descent of the Holy Spirit?

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

(Matthew 16:27)

Did Christ come at Pentecost in the glory of His Father? Were there any angels accompanying Him at that time? Did He “*reward every man according to his works*” then? Scarcely can the descent of the Holy Spirit or the appearance of “*cloven tongues like as of fire*” (Acts 2:3) be called “*the Son of man [coming] in the glory of his Father with his angels [to] reward every man according to his works*” without a gross misuse of our language or a strange violation of symbolic imagery.

Both of these theories that I have mentioned are now rejected as unsatisfactory by those modern students who have most carefully studied the subject.

An Awful Premonition

However, a third explanation still holds its ground and is currently received, though I believe it to be quite as far from the truth as the others.

Carefully read through the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, and you will find nothing about the siege of Jerusalem there. Yet, this is the interpretation that finds favor at present. According to those who hold this view, Christ was referring to the time when Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans. But, why would Jesus have said that some who were standing there would be alive then? Nothing could be more foreign to the entire scope of Christ's narrative or the gospel accounts. There is not the slightest shadow of reference to the siege of Jerusalem. The coming of the Son of Man is spoken of here: "*in the glory of his Father with his angels; [when] he shall reward every man according to his works.*"

Whenever Jesus spoke of the coming siege of Jerusalem, He was accustomed to saying, "*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled*" (Matthew 24:34). Never, however, did He single out a select few and say to them, "*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death,*" until the city of Jerusalem is besieged and destroyed."

If a child were to read this passage, I know what he would think it meant: he would suppose Jesus Christ is to come again to the earth, and there were some standing there who would not taste of death until really and literally He did so. This, I believe, is the plain meaning.

When Christ Returns

“Well,” I hear someone saying, “I am surprised. Do you think, then, that this refers to the apostle John?” No, by no means. The fable that John was to live until Christ came again was current in early New Testament times, you know. However, John himself repudiated it, for at the end of his gospel, he said,

Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? (John 21:23, emphasis added)

This, you see, was setting forth a hypothetical case, and in no sense was it the language of prediction.

Now, beloved, if you are so far convinced of the unreasonableness of each of these theories to resolve the difficulty of interpretation, I hope that you are in readiness for the explanation that appears to me to harmonize with every aspect of the text. I believe the “*coming*” referred to in our text is the coming of the Son of God to judge at the last great and terrible Day, when He will judge all and separate the wicked from among the righteous.

The next question is, Of whom were the words spoken? Are we warranted in supposing that our Lord intended this sentence as a gracious promise or a kindly expectation that He wanted to kindle in the hearts of His disciples? I trust not. To me it appears to have absolutely no reference to any man who ever had grace in his soul. Such language is far more applicable to the ungodly than to the wicked. The sentence

An Awful Premonition

may well have been aimed directly at those followers who would defect from the faith, grasp at the world, endeavor to save their lives but really lose them, and barter their souls.

A TRUE TASTE OF DEATH

At the glorious appearing of Christ, there are some who will taste death, but will they be the righteous? Surely, my dear friends, when Christ comes, the righteous will not die. They will be caught up with the Lord in the air. His coming will be the signal for the resurrection of all His saints.

But, at the time of His return, the men who have been without God, without Christ, will begin for the first time to "*taste of death.*" They will have passed the first stage of dissolution when their souls abandon their bodies, but they will have never known the "*taste of death.*" Until Christ's return, they will not have truly known its tremendous bitterness and its awful horror. They will never drink the wormwood and the gall, to really "*taste of death,*" until that time. This tasting of death may be explained, and I believe it is to be explained, as a reference to the second death of which men will not taste until the Lord comes again.

What a dreadful sentence that was when the Savior said (perhaps singling out Judas as He spoke), "Truly I say unto you, there are some who are standing here who will never know what that dreadful word *death* really means until the Lord comes again. You think that if you save your lives, you escape from death. Alas, you do not know what death means! The

When Christ Returns

demise of the body is but a mere prelude to the perdition of the soul. The grave is but the porch of death. You will never understand the full meaning of that terrible word until the Lord comes.”

This can have no reference to the saints, because in the gospel of John, you find this passage:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. (John 8:51–52)

No righteous man, therefore, can ever “*taste of death.*” Yes, he will fall into that deep, oblivious sleep during which the body sees corruption, but that is another experience, very different from the bitter cup referred to as a “*taste of death.*” When the Holy Spirit wanted to use an expression to set forth the equivalent for divine wrath, what wording was used? “*Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for suffering of death...by the grace of God should taste death for every man*” (Hebrews 2:9).

The expression “to taste of death” means the reception of the true, essential death that kills both the body and the soul in hell forever. The Savior said, “*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*” If this is the meaning (and I hold that it is in keeping with the context), it explains the verse, sets forth the reason why Christ

An Awful Premonition

invoked breathless attention with the word *verily*, answers both the grammar and the rhetoric, and will not be moved by any argument that I have ever heard. And if so, what amazing indictments are contained in this text! May the Holy Spirit deeply affect our hearts and cause our souls to thrill with its solemnity.

What thoughts this idea stirs up! Compared with the doom that will be inflicted upon the ungodly at Christ's return, the death of the physical body is nothing. Further, compared with the doom of the wicked at His return, even the torment of souls in a separate state is scarcely anything. The startling question then arises: Are there any reading this who will have to taste of death when the Lord comes?

COMPARING PHYSICAL DEATH AND FINAL DOOM

The sinner's death is only a faint foreshadowing of the sinner's doom at the coming of the Son of Man in His glory. Let me endeavor to show the contrast.

In Regard to Time

We can only make a little comparison between the two as to time. Many men meet with death so suddenly that it can scarcely involve any pain to them. Perhaps they are crushed by machinery, or a shot sends them to find a grave upon the battlefield, or they are poisoned with a quick-acting toxin.

Even if they are upon the bed of sickness for hours, days, weeks, or months, yet the real work of

When Christ Returns

dying is short. It is a weary sort of living, rather than an actual process of dying, while hope lingers, though only in fitful dreams.

Dying is but the work of a moment. If it is said to last for hours, yet the hours are brief. Misery may count them long, but with what swift wings do they fly. To die, to fall asleep, to suffer, may seem endless, yet to pass away from the land of the living into the realm of shadows takes only a moment!

However, the doom that is to be brought upon the wicked when Christ comes is a death that never dies. Here is a heart that palpitates with eternal misery. Here is an eye that is never clouded over by the kind finger of generous forgetfulness. Here is a body that never will be stiffened in apathy, never will be laid quietly in the grave, rid of sharp pains, wearying disease, and lingering wretchedness. To die, you say, is nature's kind release, because it brings ease. To a man, death becomes a farewell to his woes and griefs—for this world at least.

Yet, there will be no ease, no rest, no pause in the destination of impenitent souls. "*Depart from me, ye cursed*" (Matthew 25:41) will ever ring along the endless aisles of eternity. The thunderbolt of that tremendous word will follow the sinner in his perpetual flight from the presence of God. From its deadly influence he will never be able to escape—no, never. A million years will not make any more difference to the duration of his agony than a cup of water taken from the sea would change the volume of the ocean. When a million years have rolled their fiery orbits over his

An Awful Premonition

poor, tormented head, he will be no nearer to the end than he was at first.

Talk about physical death! I might even portray it as an angel of mercy when I compare it to the terrors of the wrath to come. Soon come, soon gone, is death. That sharp scythe gives only one cut, and down falls the flower that withers in the heat of the sun. But, who can measure the wounds of eternity, who can fathom the depths of its gashes? When eternity wields the whip, how dreadfully it falls! When eternity grasps the sword, how deep is the wounding and how terrible the killing!

To linger in eternal pain,
Yet death for ever fly.

You are afraid of death, sinner; you are afraid of death. However, were you wise, you would be ten thousand times ten thousand times more afraid of the Second Coming and the Judgment of the Son of Man.

As to Loss

Regarding loss, there is no comparison. When a sinner dies, it is not tasting death in its true sense, for what does he lose? He loses wife and children and friends. He loses all his hearty meat and his sweet desserts. Where are his violin and his lute now? Where are the merry dances and the joyful company? For him there is no more pleasant landscape or gliding stream. For him the light of the sun by day or the light of the moon and stars by night shines no more. At one stroke, he has lost every comfort and every

When Christ Returns

hope. The loss, however, as far as physical death is concerned, is but a loss of earthly things, the loss of material, temporary comforts. It is wretched enough to lose these, but he might put up with that kind of loss.

Nevertheless, let your imagination follow me, faint as my power is to describe the everlasting and infinite loss of the man who is found impenitent at the last great Judgment Day. What does he lose then? The harps of heaven and the songs thereof, the joys of God's presence and the light thereof, the jasper sea and the gates of pearl. He has lost peace and immorality and the crown of life.

Moreover, he has lost all hope. When a man has lost that, what remains for him? His spirit sinks into a terrible depression, more frightening than a madman ever knew in his wildest moods of grief. Never to recover itself, his soul sinks into the depths of dark despair, where not a ray of hope can ever reach him. Lost to God, lost to heaven, lost to time, lost to the preaching of the Gospel, lost to the invitation of mercy, lost to the prayers of the gracious, lost to the mercy seat, lost to the blood of sprinkling, lost to all hope of every sort—lost, lost, forever lost! Compared with this loss, the losses of death are nothing. Thus, the Savior said that lost souls will not even "*taste of death*" until He comes and they receive their sentences.

Concerning Terror

Neither does death bear any comparison with the Judgment concerning terror. I do not like to describe the terrors of the deathbeds of unawakened men.

An Awful Premonition

Some, you know, glide gently into their graves. In fact, it is often the mark of the wicked that they have no troubles in dying, but their strength stays firm. They are not distraught as other men are. Like sheep they are laid in the grave. Yet, a peaceful death is no sign of grace. Some of the worst men have died with smiles on their faces, only to have them exchanged for eternal weeping.

However, other men of exquisite sensitivities, educated men, cannot seem to die like brute animals do. They have intense fears and terrors when they are on their deathbeds. Many an atheist has cried out to God when he was experiencing the pangs of death. Many an infidel, who previously bragged and spoke high things against God, has found his cheek turn pale and his throat grow hoarse when he has come to the throes of death. Like the mariner, the boldest man in the great storm of death reels and staggers like a drunkard and is at his wit's end, because he finds that it is no child's play to die.

I try sometimes to picture that hour when we will be propped up in bed, or perhaps lying down with pillows all around us, being diligently watched. As loved ones hush their footfalls and gaze anxiously on, there is a whisper that the solemn time has come. Then there is a grappling of the strong man with one stronger than he. Oh, what must it be to die without a Savior—to die in the dark without a light except the lurid glare of the wrath to come!

Horrors there are, indeed, around the deathbed of the wicked, but these are hardly anything compared

When Christ Returns

with the terrors of the Day of Judgment. When the sinner wakes from his bed of dust, the first thing he will see will be the Great White Throne and the Judge seated upon it. (See Revelation 20:11.) The first sound that will greet his ears will be the trumpet sounding this call:

Come to judgment, come to judgment,
Come to judgment, sinner, come.

He will look up to see the Son of Man on His judgment throne with the King's officers arranged on either side, the saints on His right hand and angels round about Him. Then the books will be opened (Revelation 20:12). What creeping horror will come upon the flesh of the wicked man! He knows his turn will arrive in a moment; he stands expecting it. Fear grips him while the eyes of the Judge look him through and through. He cries to the rocks to hide him and the mountains to fall upon him. (See Revelation 6:16.) Happy would he be now to find a friendly shelter in the grave, but the grave has burst its doors and can never be closed upon him again. He would even be glad to rush back to his former state in hell, but he must not. The Judgment has come; the indictment is set. Again the trumpet rings,

Come to judgment, come to judgment,
Come to judgment, come away.

Then the Book of Life is opened, and the dreadful sentence is pronounced. We discover this in the words of Scripture:

An Awful Premonition

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:14–15)

The condemned sinner never knew what death was before. The first death was just a flea bite, but this is death indeed. The first death he might have looked back upon as a dream compared with this taste of death, now that the Lord has come.

As to Pain

From what we can glean darkly from hints in Scripture, the pains of death are not at all comparable to the pains of the Judgment at the Second Advent. Who could speak in a minimizing manner of the pains of death? If we should attempt to do so, we know that our hearts would contradict us.

In the shades of night, when deep sleep has enveloped you, you sometimes awake abruptly. You are alarmed. The terror by night has come upon you. You expect something—you hardly know what it coming—but you are half-afraid that you are about to die. You know how the cold sweat comes over you suddenly. You may have a good hope through grace, but the very thought of death brings a peculiar shudder.

Again, when death has really come into view, some of us, with terrible grief, have observed the sufferings of our dearest friends. We have heard the belabored gasping for breath. We have seen the face all pallid and the cheeks all hollow and sunken. We

When Christ Returns

have sometimes seen how every nerve has become a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on, and how every vein has become a canal of grief. We have marked the pains, moans, groans, and dying strife that frighten the soul away. These, however, are common to man.

Not so are the pangs that are to be inflicted both on the body and on the soul at the Son of God's return. They are such that I want to veil them, fearful of the very thought. Let the Master's words suffice: "*Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him*" (Luke 12:5). Then the body in all its parts will suffer. The members that were once instruments of unrighteousness will now be instruments of suffering. The mind, which has sinned the most, will be the greatest sufferer. The memory, the judgment, the understanding, the will, the imagination, and every power and passion of the soul will become a deep lake of anguish.

I want to spare you these things. Do spare yourself! God knows with what anguish I even touch on these horrors. If they did not have to be addressed (and they must be, or else I must give my account at the Day of Judgment as a faithless servant), and if I did not have to express them now in mercy for your soul, poor sinner, I would just as soon forget them altogether, seeing that my own soul has a hope in Him who saves from the wrath to come.

However, as long as you will not have mercy upon yourself, I must lay this ax at your root. As

An Awful Premonition

long as you will make a mockery of sin and consider the terrors of the world to come as nothing, I must sternly warn you of hell. If it is hard to write about these things, what must it be to endure them? If a dream makes you quiver from head to foot, what must it be to endure, really and personally, the wrath to come?

Beloved, if I were to address you now as I should, my knees would be trembling and knocking together. If you were to feel as you should, there would not be an unconverted person reading this who would not cry, “*What must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30). I urge you to remember that death, with all its pangs, is but a drop in a bucket compared with the deep, mysterious, fathomless, shoreless sea of grief that you must endure forever at the coming of the Lord Jesus, unless you repent.

In Regard to Discovery

Death makes great discoveries. The sinner thought himself to be wise, but death drew the curtain, and he saw written in large letters, “You fool!” He thought he was prudent as he hoarded up his gold and silver and kept back the wages of his laborers (see James 5:3–4), but he discovered that he had made a bad bargain when the question was put to him: “What did it profit you to have gained the whole world, but to have lost your soul?” (See Mark 8:36.)

Death is a great revealer of secrets. Many men are not believers at all until they die, but death comes and makes short work of their skepticism. Death deals one

When Christ Returns

blow to the head of doubt, and it is all over. The man believes then, but his belief has come too late. Death gives to the sinner the discovery that there is a God, an angry God, and that punishment is wrapped up in the wrath to come.

Even so, how much greater are the discoveries that await the wayward one on the Day of Judgment! What will the sinner see then? He will see the Man who was crucified, sitting on the throne. He will hear how Satan has been defeated in all of his craftiest undertakings. When those mysterious books are read, the secrets of all hearts will be revealed. Men will understand how the Lord reigned supremely even when Satan roared most loudly. They will finally grasp how the mischief and folly of man brought forth the great purposes of God in the end. All of this will be in the books.

The sinner will stand there defeated, terribly defeated, ruined at every point, baffled, foiled, stultified in every act and every purpose by which he thought to do well for himself. Moreover, he will be utterly confounded in all the hostility and all the negligence of his heart toward the living and true God, who would and who did rule over him.

Too late, he will realize the preciousness of the blood he despised, the value of the Savior he rejected, the glory of the heaven that he lost, the terror of the hell to which he is sentenced. How dreadfully wise he will be when fully aware of his terrible, eternal destruction! Thus, sinners will not discover what it truly means to taste of death until the Lord returns.

An Awful Premonition

A FULL TASTE OF DEATH

In the case of those who have physically died, they have not fully tasted of death, nor will they do so until Christ comes again. The moment a man dies, his spirit goes before God. If he is without Christ, his spirit then begins to feel the anger and the wrath of God. This is like a man being taken before a magistrate. He is known to be guilty, and so he is remanded to prison until his trial is scheduled. Such is the state of souls who are apart from their bodies. They are spirits in prison, awaiting trial.

There is not, in the sense in which the Catholics teach, any purgatory, from which there is a possibility of escape. Yet, there is a place of waiting for lost spirits that in Scripture is called "hell." It is one room in that awful prison in which spirits who die impenitent and without faith in Christ are doomed to dwell forever.

Bodily Suffering

Just consider why those of our departed countrymen who die without Christ have not yet fully tasted of death, and cannot do so until the Second Coming. First, their bodies do not suffer. The bodies of the wicked are still the prey of the worms, but they feel nothing. The atoms are still the sport of the winds, traversing their endless cycles until they will be gathered up again into their bodies at the sound of the last trumpet—at the voice of God.

The ungodly know that their present state is to have an end at the Last Judgment, but afterwards, their state will have no ending. It is then to go on and

When Christ Returns

on, forever unchanged. There may be half a hope at present, an anticipation of some change, for change brings some relief. But, to the finally damned, upon whom the sentence has been pronounced, there is no hope even of a change. Forever and ever there will be the same ceaseless wheel of misery.

The Shame of Public Sentencing

The ungodly, too, in their present state, have not as yet been put to the shame of a public sentence. They have, as it were, merely been cast into prison, the facts being too clear to admit any doubt as to the sentence. They are their own tormentors, vexing and paining themselves with the fear of what is yet to come. They have never yet heard that dreadful sentence: “*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matthew 25:41).

While studying this subject, I was surprised to find how little is said about the pains of the lost while they are merely souls and how much is said concerning the pains they will have when the Lord returns. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we see that the soul is already being tormented in the flames. (See Luke 16:19–31.) But, if you read the parable of the tares in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, we find it is at the end of the world that the tares are to be cast into the fire.

The Eternal Lake of Fire

Following the parable of the tares comes the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47–50. When the

An Awful Premonition

dispensation comes to an end, the net is to be dragged to shore, and the good are to be put in vessels while the bad are to be cast away. The Lord said,

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

(Matthew 13:41–42)

We read in Matthew that memorable description of those of whom Christ will say, “*I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink*” (Matthew 25:42). This event is prophesied to occur “*when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him*” (v. 31).

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul, too, tells us plainly that the wicked are to be destroyed at Christ’s coming by the radiance of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). The recompense of the ungodly, like the reward of the righteous, is anticipated now, but the full reward of the righteous will be at His coming. They will reign with Christ. Their fullness of bliss will be given when the King Himself sits on His throne in all His glory. So, too, the wicked will have the beginning of their heritage at death, but the terrible fullness of it will be thereafter.

At the present moment, death and hell are not yet cast into the lake of fire. Death is still abroad in the world, slaying men. Hell is yet loose. The Devil is not yet chained. He still is going “*through dry places,*

When Christ Returns

seeking rest, and find[ing] none" (Matthew 12:43). At the Last Day, at the Second Coming, "*death and hell [will be] cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death*" (Revelation 20:14). We do not completely understand the symbolism, but if it means anything, one would think it must mean that on that Day the scattered powers of evil, which are to be the tormentors of the wicked but which have hitherto been wandering throughout the world, will all be collected together. Then, indeed, it will be that the wicked begin to "*taste of death*" as they have never tasted of it before!

My soul is bowed down with terror while I write this. I scarcely know how to find suitable words to express the weight of thought that is upon me. Beloved, instead of speculating about these matters, let us try to shun the wrath to come.

What can help us to do that better than to weigh the warning words of our loving Savior? He tells us that at His coming such a doom will pass upon impenitent souls that, compared with it, even death itself will be as nothing. Christians swallow death in victory (see 1 Corinthians 15:54) through their faith in the risen Lord; but if you die as an impenitent soul, you swallow death in ignorance. You do not feel its bitterness now. But, unless you repent, that bitter pill has yet to work its way, and that dire potion has yet to be drunk to the dregs.

EXAMINE YOUR HEART

Does our study of these awful terrors prompt a question in you? Jesus said, "*Verily I say unto you,*

An Awful Premonition

There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” Are there any of you reading this who will taste of death when the Son of Man returns?

O beloved, try your own hearts, and since you may fail in the trial, ask the Lord to search you. As the Lord God lives, unless you search yourselves and find that you are on the right path, you may come to sit at the Lord’s table presumptuously. (See Matthew 22:11–14.)

Deceitful Sinners

In that little group addressed by the Savior stood Judas. He had been trusted by his Master, and he was an apostle, but he was a thief and a hypocrite after all. He, “*the son of perdition*” (John 17:12), would not taste of death until Christ should come into His kingdom. Is there a Judas reading these words?

Many of you are members of Christian churches, but are you sure that you have made sound work of it? Is your belief genuine? Do you wear a mask, or are you honest? You may be self-proclaimed among His people here on the earth, but you may have to taste of death when the Lord comes. You may deceive them, but you cannot deceive Him.

Even if you are a preacher, you can reflect that you may be mistaken, that you may be self-deceived. If it is so, may the Lord open your eyes to know the truth of your own state.

Will you offer a prayer of repentance for yourselves, you who profess to know Christ? Do not be too

When Christ Returns

bold or too quick, you who say you are Christ's. Never be satisfied until you are absolutely sure. The best way to be sure is to go again, just as you went at first, and seize eternal life through the power of the blessed Spirit and not by any strength of your own.

Careless Sinners

No doubt, however, there stood in that throng around the Savior some who were careless sinners. He knew that there had been some during His entire ministry and that there would still be some. Thus, they would taste of death at His coming.

Are there not some careless, unconcerned people reading this right now? You who rarely think about religion, you who generally view Sunday as a day of pleasure or who lounge around in your sports clothes the whole day, you who look upon the very name of religion as a monster to frighten children with, you who mock God's servants and condemn the very thought of earnestly seeking after the Most High—will you be among the number of those who taste of death when the Son of Man comes in His kingdom? Must I ring your death knell now? Must my warning be lost upon you?

I urge you to recollect that you must either turn or burn. I entreat you to remember this:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

(Isaiah 55:7)

An Awful Premonition

By the wounds of Jesus, sinner, stop and think! Since God's dear Son was slain for human sin, how terrible must that sin be? Since Jesus died for you, how base are you if you are disobedient to the doctrine of faith? I implore you that, if you think of your body, give some thought to your soul.

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. (Isaiah 55:2)

Carefully focus on God's Word, and eat of that which is good, real, substantial food. Come to Jesus, so that you may live eternally.

Willful Sinners

Around Jesus were some of another class: the willfully unrepentant Bethsaida and Capernaum sinners. (See Matthew 11:21–24.) Likewise, there are some of you who constantly occupy church pews and sit in services Sunday after Sunday. The same eyes look at the pastor week after week. The same faces salute him often with a smile when Sunday comes. Yet, how many of you are still without God and without Christ?

Have we preachers been unfaithful to you? If we have, forgive us, and pray, both for us and for yourselves, that we all may mend our ways. But, if we have warned you of the wrath to come, why do you choose to walk in the path that leads to it? If we have preached

When Christ Returns

Christ Jesus to you, how is it that His charms do not move you and that the story of His great love does not bring you to repentance? May the Spirit of God deal with you, for man cannot. Our hammers do not break your flinty hearts, but God's arm can do it. May He turn you yet.

Of all sinners over whom a minister ought to weep, you are the worst, for while the careless perish, you perish doubly. You know your Master's will, and yet you do not do it. You see heaven's gate set open, and yet you will not enter. Your vicious free will ruins you. Your base, wicked love of self and sin destroys you. Jesus said, "*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*" (John 5:40). You are so stubborn that you will not turn even though Jesus woos you. I do pray that you will let the terror of the Judgment presented here stir you now as you have never been stirred before. May God have pity on you even if you will have no pity on yourselves.

Prostituting Sinners

Among that company perhaps there were some who held to the truth, but who were behaving immorally. Some of you who are reading this may be like those people. You believe in eternal election, as I do, but you make it a cloak for your sin. You hold to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but you still continue in your iniquity. Perhaps there is no worse way of perishing than perishing by making the doctrines of grace an excuse for one's sins. The apostle Paul has well said of such that their "*damnation is*

An Awful Premonition

just” (Romans 3:8). God’s condemnation of any man is just, but to a sevenfold degree is it just for such a person.

I would not have you forget this doctrine, nor neglect it, nor despise it. But, I beg you, do not prostitute it. Do not turn it to the vile purpose of making it pander to your own carnal desires. Remember, you have no evidence of election except that you are holy, and you have no right to expect you will be saved at the last unless you are saved now. A present faith in a present Savior is the key.

Redeemed Sinners

May my Master bring some of you to trust Him right now. The plan of salvation is simple. Trust Christ, and you are saved. Rely upon Him, and you will live. This faith is the gift of God, but remember that although God gives it, He “*worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).

God does not believe for you; the Holy Spirit does not believe for you; you must believe, or else you will be lost. To say that it is also the act of man is quite consistent with the fact that it is the gift of God. You must, poor soul, be led to trust the Savior, or you can never enter into heaven. Are you saying, “I want to find the Savior now”? Do not go to bed until you have sought Him. Seek Him with sighs and with tears until you find Him.

I think now is a time of grace. I have painted a picture of the law and the terrors of the Lord for you, but now will be a time of grace to the souls of some

When Christ Returns

of you. My Master kills you so that He may make you alive. (See 1 Samuel 2:6.) He wounds you only so that He may make you whole. (See Jeremiah 30:14–17.)

I feel an inward whisper in my heart that there are some of you who even now have begun your flight from the wrath to come. Where should you flee? Run to Jesus. Hurry, sinner, hurry. I trust you will find Him before you retire to your bed. Or, if you lie there, tossing about in doubt and fear, then may He manifest Himself to you before the morning light.

I would freely give my eyes so that you might see Christ, and I would willingly give my hands so that you might lay hold of Him. I implore you, do not put this warning away from you, but let it have its proper work in you and lead you to repentance. May God save you, and may the prayer of my heart be answered, that all of you be found among His elect at His right hand on that great and terrible Day.

Our Father,

Save us with Your great salvation. We pray, do not condemn us, Lord. Deliver us from going down to the pit, for You have found the ransom. May we not be among the company that shall taste of death when the Son of Man comes. Hear us, Jesus, through Your blood. God be merciful to us sinners. Amen.