

# Waiting for Death.

by Edward Payson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of waiting for death and living in expectation of it, rather than trying to hasten it or ignore it.*

**Scripture:** Job 14:14, Psalm 90:12, Matthew 24:42, 1 Corinthians 15:51, Revelation 21:4

**Topics:** "Mortality And Eternity", "Spiritual Preparation"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches about the inevitability of death as a significant change in our existence, emphasizing the need to patiently wait for God's appointed time for our transition. He highlights the belief in the immortality of the soul and the future state of existence after death. Payson discusses the great changes that occur in our bodies, mode of existence, perception, objects of perception, employments, and state and situation at the moment of death. He urges listeners to prepare for this ultimate change by cultivating a spiritual mindset, focusing on heavenly treasures, and desiring to be in the presence of God.

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## Transcript

"All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

Joshua 14:14

are the words of Job. The resolution which they express was formed by him when he was in the most wretched state, to which a good man can be reduced. The overwhelming weight of his afflictions, combined with the sudden and surprising manner in which they assailed him, lead previously extracted from him some passionate wishes for a speedy dissolution; and even in this chapter, he cries to God, O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave! But in our text he seems to correct himself, and resolves, whatever might be his afflictions, to bear them patiently, till God's appointed time for removing him from this world should arrive: All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.

My friends, we are all like Job, mortal; like him we may be assailed by severe afflictions, and tempted to wish impatiently for death; but we ought, like him, to check these impatient wishes, and resolve to wait till our change comes. In meditating on this passage I propose, To consider death as a change. To show that there is a time appointed for us to continue on earth, at the expiration of which, this change will take place. To state what is implied in waiting all the days of this appointed time.

I. We are here led to consider our death as a change. The word is very impressive and full of meaning. It strongly intimates Job's belief in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of existence. Were it not for this belief, he would have described death by some other name. He would have called it the end of his being, the termination of his existence. But he speaks of it only as a change; thus plainly intimating that he expected to live after death, though in a different manner.

But though death is not the extinction of our being, it is a change; a change so great and important, that perhaps no other figurative expression can be found, more strikingly descriptive of it. In the first place, it is the commencement of a great change in our bodies. To this Job alludes in the context; thou destroyest, says he, the hope of man; thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. What this change is, I need not inform you. Suffice it to say, that so great is it in itself; so loathsome and shocking in its consequences, that it irresistibly impels us, as it did Abraham, to bury the bodies of our deceased friends out of our sight, however dear they were to us while animated with life; a change, which may well occasion us to say, with Job, to corruption, thou art our father, and to the worm, thou art our mother and our sister.

In a word, it is the fulfillment of the sentence, Dust thou art and to dust thou shall return. Look at the body while glowing with health and vigor; look at it again after the animating spirit has fled; look at it when it becomes food for worms; look at it when nothing but a little dust remains; and you will see what a change death occasions in this respect. 2. Death is the commencement of a great change in our mode of existence. Until death, our spirits are clothed with a body, but after death, they exist in a disembodied state, the state of separate spirits.

Indeed, death essentially consists in the separation of the soul from the body. Did it produce no other change than this, it might well be called a great change. While in the body, our mode of existence resembles that of the irrational animals around us. Like them, we hunger, and thirst, and are weary; like them, we need daily supplies of food and rest to support life: and our existence, like theirs, is measured by days and weeks, seasons and years. But after death, our mode of existence will resemble that of angels.

We shall no more hunger, nor thirst, or be weary; we shall no more require food or sleep, nor will our existence be measured by the measures of time; for with us time will then have ended. We shall have entered on eternity, on that ocean which has no shore, landmarks, or divisions, to inform us how far we have proceeded. There, a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. This change in our mode of existence, will be accompanied by a corresponding change in our mode of perception.

Here we perceive objects only through the medium of our senses. While in the body, our souls are like a man in prison, through the walls of which a few openings are made, to permit him to discern what passes without. But at death, the walls are thrown down, and the prisoner bursts forth into open day. Then we shall see without eyes, hear without ears, and feel without touch. So far as the nature of the objects which we shall then perceive requires it, the soul will probably be all eye, all ear, all feeling; and its perceptions will, of course, be incomparably more clear and distinct than they now are. 3.

At death a great change will take place, not only in the mode, but in the objects of perception. We shall in effect experience a change of place. It is true that, in strictness of speech, spirits cannot be properly said to remove from one place to another, because place has relation to matter, and with matter, disembodied spirits have no connection. Still, as we have no method of designating place, but by referring to the objects which mark that place, and as at death we shall be introduced to an entirely new class of objects, it may without impropriety be said, that death occasions a change of place.

At least, it removes its from one world to another. Our bodies, while they bind us to this world, separate us, like an interposing veil, from the world to come. But at death the veil will be rent. The stroke which separates our souls from our bodies, will separate us, at once and forever, from this world and all its perishable objects, and introduce us to a new world, and to new objects of perception. The world to which we shall then be introduced is spiritual and eternal; of course we shall there perceive nothing but spiritual and eternal objects.

There will be no color, no sounds, no shapes, nothing that we can touch; yet every object will appear incomparably more real, substantial and durable, than any of the objects which we now perceive. As we now perceive all material, so shall we then perceive all spiritual objects. Of course, we shall then most clearly, constantly and forever perceive God, the Father of spirits and of the spiritual world. This is the first object which will burst upon the aching sight of the soul when it leaves the body.

In a moment it will find itself in the presence of the great Sun of the universe, whose beams, like a torrent, pervade immensity and eternity. Still, moon and stars will all have vanished. Earth and its objects will appear to have been suddenly annihilated, and God, God alone, will rush in upon the mind, and fill every faculty, occupy every thought. Above and below, behind and before, wherever the mind can turn itself, or whithersoever roam, it will still find itself in the immediate presence of God; nor, if I may so express it, call the eyelids of the soul ever close for an instant, to shut out the dazzling refulgence of his glory.

As companions in admiring, or in shrinking with despair from these glories, the soul will perceive itself to be surrounded by myriads of created spirits, of opposite characters, and will quickly find, that the same God who, to holy spirits, is a refreshing, animating light, is, to the unholy, a consuming fire; that what is heaven to the one, is belt to the other. 4. At death a great change will take place in our employments, and in the mode of spending our existence. While we dwell in these frail, dependent bodies, they necessarily engross much of our attention, and much of our time; and a large proportion of our exertion is directed to the supply of their wants, the preservation of their health, and the promotion of their comfort.

It is well if much time is not wasted in pampering and indulging them, in making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof: In addition to this, another portion of our time and exertion is directed to the bodies of our dependants; to the wants and concerns of our relatives, and to the general interests of the community. But at death, all these employments will cease. We shall no longer have bodies to provide for, families to care for, or social and relative duties to perform: nor will any part of our existence, as much of it now is, be lost in sleep.

Of course all our employments will be of a spiritual nature. We shall be constantly engaged in thought, in reflection, in meditation, in the most intense exercise of feeling; and our feelings and meditations must of course be pleasant or painful, according to our characters. Here, our attention is diverted from ourselves by a thousand objects, so that after a long life, men often die ignorant of their own character. But there, our attention will be turned to ourselves. Then, if not before, we shall be made to know ourselves, and shall be our own constant companions.

Here, we can fly from uneasy thoughts, from the reproaches of conscience, froth guilty fears, to scenes of business and pleasure. But in the world to which death removes its, there will be no buying and selling, no planting or building, no places devoted to business or amusement, no possibility of escaping from ourselves for a single moment. What a change is this, to the thoughtless unreflecting part of mankind! 5. At death, a great change will take place in our state and situation.

This world is a world of trial. While we remain in it, we are in a state of probation. Our days are days of grace. We enjoy seasons and offers of grace; we hear the gospel of grace, and are permitted and invited to approach the throne of grace. But at death, this state of trial and probation terminates, and we enter on an unchangeable state, a state of reward and retribution. Then the Sun of righteousness sets; the day of grace ends, the door of mercy is shut, and Christ exchanges, with respect to us, his character of Saviour, for that of Judge.

Death, then, is not only a great change, but in a most important sense, our last change. Everything in the other world is, like that world, unalterable. Death stamps our characters as he finds them, and sets upon them the seal of eternity, and while he fixes the seal, the unchangeable God exclaims, Let him that is unjust, be unjust still; and let him that is filthy be filthy still; and let him that is righteous be righteous still; and let him that is holy be holy still. But though death will thus stamp our characters and fix them unalterably, yet there is, 6.

One sense in which it will produce in them a great change; a change however, not of kind but only of degree; a change not from bad to good, or from good to bad, but from good to better, and from bad to worse. While men remain in this world, there is a mixture of imperfection in the characters of the good, for they are here renewed but in part; and on the contrary there are many appearances of goodness in the characters and conduct of the wicked. They may have kind relative and social affections, together with what are called amiable, natural dispositions.

They may feel religious impressions, in a greater or less degree; and by the influence of a pious education, of conscience, of human laws, and of a regard to the opinions of others, they may be induced to live a moral and even apparently a religious life. But at death, all the imperfections which here mar the characters of the righteous, and all the fair appearances of goodness which adorn the characters of the wicked, will be forever removed. To him that hath, says our Saviour, shall more be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.

Then the graces of the Christian, which had previously been opposed, and fettered, and thwarted by various causes, connected with their situation in this world, will rise at once to the perfect standard of heaven; while the various passions and propensities of the wicked, which here only bud and blossom, will, in consequence of the removal of all restraint, bring forth their ripe but deadly fruit; so that while, from the death bed of a Christian there will rise up an angel, with an angelic song in his mouth, from the death bed of the sinner there will start up a fiend, with the blasphemies of hell bursting from his lips.

Hence we may add, lastly, that at death we shall experience a great change with respect to happiness and misery. We shall bid a final adieu to one or to the other; we shall feel in a higher degree one or the other, as soon as we leave the body. How great, how happy was the change which the beggar Lazarus experienced, when he was freed in a moment from his wounds, and from his wants, and carried by angels from the rich man's door to the mansions above. How great, how terrible was the change which the rich man suffered, when he was torn from his wealth, his habitation, his banquets and gay companions, and the next moment lifted up his eyes being in torments.

Similar changes take place whenever the righteous and the wicked die. It is true that, even in this life, holiness tends to produce perfect happiness, and sin to occasion perfect misery. But with respect to both, the tendency is here opposed in various ways. The bodily infirmities and the outward trials and afflictions of the righteous, their remaining sinfulness and ignorance, the prevalence of sin in the world around them,

and anxiety for the salvation of their friends, cause them, while in this tabernacle, to groan being burdened.

But from all these evils, death frees them in a moment. It removes them from all that they hate or fear. It brings them to all which they love or desire, and of course renders their happiness complete. On the other hand, many causes conspire to prevent the wicked from being completely wretched, and even to give them something like happiness in the present life. They love this world, and in some degree they enjoy it. They find a sort of pleasure in the gratification of their appetites and passions; in the success of their enterprises; in the accumulation of property, and in the society of their sinful companions; and they contrive, in various ways, to avoid those things which would disturb their false peace.

They can without much difficulty banish reflection, quiet their consciences, and maintain a delusive hope that all will be well with them at last. But at death, all these sources of enjoyment will be dried up. They will be torn from all that they loved, deprived of every gratification, and separated from all their present pursuits and employments. Their false hope will be succeeded by despair; conscience will become a wakeful, immortal worm to gnaw them forever; a distinct and vivid recollection of their sinfulness, folly and madness will fill them with agonies of shame and remorse, while the constant sight of that infinite, eternal Being whom they have disobeyed and slighted, together with the sense of his anger, will scorch and blast them like a consuming fire.

Such is the change which takes place at death. II. There is an appointed time allotted to each of us on earth, at the expiration of which the change will take place. This is a truth which our text plainly intimates, and which is fully confirmed by other passages of revelation. We are told that the number of our months is with God; that he sets us bounds which we cannot pass; that man has a day which he must accomplish; that our times are in God's hand, and that he has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation.

Indeed, we must allow that God has set to every man an appointed time, or deny the providential government of the universe. For when we consider the important influence which the continuance or termination of a life often has over the concerns, not only of individuals but even of nations, we cannot fail to perceive, that if we take such an event out of God's hands and counsels, we do in effect deprive him of the government of the world, and reduce him to the condition of a mere spectator.

Indeed, had he not given men an appointed time on earth, he could not foresee and predict as he often has done, the day and hour of their death. Man then has an appointed time to continue on earth, at the expiration of which the change of which we are speaking will take place. This leads us to inquire, III. What is implied in waiting all the days of our appointed time. This evidently implies, 1. Waiting till God shall see fit to release us, without voluntarily hastening our death, either in a direct or indirect manner.

There have been frequent instances in which persons who were weary of life, but who did not choose to die by their own hands, have thrown themselves in the way of danger, or exposed themselves to infectious disorders, or refused, when ill, to use any means for their recovery, with a view to hasten the approach of death. For all these indirect methods of suicide, as well as to direct acts of violence upon our own lives, the resolution in our text is evidently opposed; and since it is not lawful to wish for what it is not lawful to attempt, it is equally opposed to all impatient, passionate wishes, that death would hasten his approach.

Waiting all the days of our appointed time for this change, implies, 2. An habitual expectation of it. No man can be said to wait for an event which he does not expect, nor can we be properly said to wait all our days

for death, unless we live in habitual expectation of it. This expectation must be sufficiently strong to influence our conduct, to make us live in some measure as frail, dying creatures, who have such a change before them, ought to live; to induce us, in the words of the apostle, to weep as though we wept not, to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, to buy as though we possessed not, and to use the world as not abusing it; knowing that our time is short, and that the fashion of this world passeth away.

He, who, instead of this, seldom thinks of, and perhaps never realizes his mortality, who lives as if he expected to live here forever; who weeps for worldly afflictions, as if he had lost his all; who rejoices in temporal prosperity, as if it were eternal; who buys and grasps worldly objects, as if he were never to lose them; call with no shadow of propriety, be said to wait till his change shall come. 3. Waiting for this great change implies habitual care to preserve and maintain such a frame of mind, as we should wish to be in when it arrives.

This I presume none will deny. A man who is waiting for the arrival of any person, or for the occurrence of any event, always takes care to be ready and prepared for it. Much more, then, may it be expected that he who is waiting for such a change as we have been describing, a change which can take place but once, and which in its consequences is to last forever, will take measures to prepare for it; to acquire and maintain such a state of mind as he would wish to be found in at its arrival.

Whatever preparation is necessary he will take care to make. Whatever work is to be performed, he will be careful to have done; or at least to have it in such a state that he can, at any moment, if called, give it up into his master's hands, without incurring the charge of indolence or unfaithfulness. But what, it may be asked, does all this imply? What is the necessary preparation, what is the frame we ought to be in at death? My friends, let your own reason answer, and if reason is at a loss, let revelation assist her.

It is abundantly evident from what has been said of this change, what preparation is necessary for it, what frame of mind we ought to cultivate. If at death our bodies are to return to their dust, then our bodies ought evidently not to engage all our attention. If we are at death to be removed from this world to another, then we ought to think more of that world than of this. We ought to obtain all the information respecting it which is in our power; we ought not to lay up all our treasure, nor even the chief part of our treasure here, but if possible to lay up treasure and secure friends, in the world to which we are hastening; and where we are to live forever.

If we are at death to leave all worldly employments, and to spend our time, or rather our eternity, in spiritual employments, with spiritual objects; we ought to acquire a relish for such objects and employments. We ought to be able to spend time happily in solitude, in religious contemplations, in prayer and praise; for if we cannot spend a day, or even an hour, happily, in these employments on earth, how can we spend a happy eternity in them, beyond the grave? Above all, if at death we go into the immediate presence of God, and if that presence will be a source of infinite, eternal happiness or misery to us, according to our characters, we ought to acquire that character with which God is pleased, the character of a penitent believer in Christ; a character in which that holiness which is the essence of God's moral perfections, decidedly predominates.

In a word, we must, like the apostle, count all things else as loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith, looking and waiting for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. In this way alone, can we obtain the pardon of our sins and the favor of God; in this way alone become meet

to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

He who has made this preparation, he who has lived like a pilgrim and stranger here on earth, looking not at things seen and temporal, but at things unseen and eternal, whose treasure and whose heart is in heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and who is daily uttering the language, anticipating the employments, singing the songs, and breathing the spirit of heaven; he is in the proper frame, the very frame in which every truly wise man would wish to be found when death comes.

Lastly. Waiting for our change may be justly considered as implying some degree of desire for it. This desire will not of course be impatient; or prompt a wish to control the will, or alter the purpose of God respecting us. Still, he who is waiting for such a change as the Christian will experience at death, cannot but wait with some degree of desire. His treasure is in heaven. How can he but desire to possess it? His heart is in heaven. How can he but desire to be where his heart is?

His nearest, friends and relatives are in heaven, friends and relatives to whom he is bound by everlasting bonds. How can he but desire to join them? Perfect freedom from all the evils which now afflict, perfect holiness and happiness await him in heaven. How can he but desire to possess them? Above all, his God and Saviour, he of whom he can say, whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there on earth which I desire beside thee? this God, this Saviour is in heaven; and how call he but desire to be with them?

He will, he must desire it, but he will desire it patiently, submissively. If we hope for that we see not, their do we with patience wait for it. Having thus shown what is implied in waiting for our change, I will state some reasons, why we should wait for it in this manner. 1. As a reason why we should so far wait for our change, as not to desire it impatiently, or hasten it by violence, I shall only mention one passage of Scripture. Wo unto you that desire the day of the Lord, to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is as darkness, and not light.

As if a man fled from a bear, and a lion met him; or as if he fled into the house, and leaned upon the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light, even very dark and no brightness in it! I need not tell you that by the day of the Lord, is here meant the day of death. Let this passage be a warning, should you ever be tempted to hasten its approach. As a motive which should induce us to wait for this change in the manner above described, I would mention, 2.

The perfect reasonableness of so doing. It is reasonable that we should wait for death on account of its certainty and importance. It is reasonable that we wait habitually and constantly for it, because it may come at any moment. It is reasonable that we should wait all the days of our appointed time, for if we fail in this respect, if we are not found waiting when death comes, we lose all. It is only those who endure to the end that will be saved. It is only to him who is faithful unto death, that Christ promises a crown of life.

So perfectly reasonable indeed is this duty that I shall add but one more reason for performing it, viz: 3. The command of Christ, with its attending promises and threatenings. Stand, says he, with your loins girt about, and your lamps trimmed. Be ye like servants who wait for their Lord, that when he cometh ye may open to him immediately for ye know not at what hour the Son of man cometh. Blessed is that servant whom he shall find so doing. My brethren, through the great change we have been considering, you must all pass.

Your bodies must be changed. In a few years, of all the bodies which now fill this house, nothing but a few hands full of dust will remain. Your mode of existence will be changed. Some disembodied, but still living

spirits, will pass into a new and untried state of being. Your place of residence will be changed. The places which now know you will soon know you no more. Another assembly will fill this house. Other inhabitants will dwell in your habitations. Other names will glitter over the marts of business, and yours will be transferred to the tombstone.

And when this world has lost you, another will have received you. After you are dead and forgotten here, you will be alive, and capable of exquisite happiness or misery elsewhere. After you are removed from all the objects which now affect you, a new world, new objects, new beings will rise upon you, and affect you in a manner far more powerful than you are or can be now affected. Above all, when this world and all that it contains sink from your view, God, that Being of whom you have heard so much, and perhaps thought so little, that being who formed and now invisibly surrounds and upholds you, will burst in upon and fill your mind, fill it with delight inconceivable, or agony unutterable, according to the state of your moral character.

And as it affects you the moment after death, so it will continue to affect you forever; for neither his character nor yours will ever change. Long after all remembrance of you shall have been blotted from the earth, during all the remaining centuries which the still may measure out to succeeding generations of mortals, you will still be battling with delight, or writhing in agony, in the beams of Jehovah's presence. And even after this world shall have ceased to exist, when sun and stars are quenched in endless night, you will still continue the same individual, conscious being that you now are, and will still bear, and through eternity will continue to bear, that stamp of moral character with all its consequences, in which you are found, and in which you will be unchangeably fixed by death.

Choose, then, now, my hearers, what you will be; for now you have an opportunity. And in making a choice, remember that it is for eternity. Remember, too, that the temper, the employments, the associates which you choose on earth, you choose forever. Say, then, what shall be your employment on earth? Shall it be spiritual and heavenly, or sinful and earthly? Shall it consist in the service of God, or of sin? Who shall be your associates on earth? shall they consist of the servants of the neglecters of Christ?

What shall be your temper and spirit on earth? Shall it be the spirit of the world, or the spirit that is of God? In a word, what will you be through eternity? A spirit of light, or a fiend of darkness? If you hesitate in your choice, pause a moment, and look back to those who have passed through the great change before you. Think of the patriarchs who died before the flood. They have been perfectly happy for more than four thousand years, yet their happiness has but just commenced.

Think of the sinners who died before the flood. For more than four thousand years they have been completely wretched, and yet their misery has but just commenced. So, my hearers, there will come a time when you will have been happy or miserable for four thousand, or four times four thousand years, and yet your heaven or your hell will be but beginning. Who then can pretend to describe or conceive the greatness, the importance of the change which is before you, or the consequence of the choice which you have to make?

If you make the choice, and adopt the resolution of Job, and wait all the days of your appointed time, till your change come, that change will be a happy one, and you will be able at Christ's second coming to say, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. But if you make a different choice, if you compel Christ still to say of you, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; your change will be

unutterably dreadful. Fear will come upon you as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; then you will call on God but he will not answer; you will seek him early, yet you shall not find him.

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