

A Dying Man's Prayer

by Lewis Williams

A man who walks with God and is conscious of his sin at the time of death is not afraid of God's judgment, knowing that he has found redemption through Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 1:18, Isaiah 38:3, Romans 6:23, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Death And Dying", "Repentance And Forgiveness"

Description

Lewis Williams reflects on the rare occurrence of a dying man praying for God to remember his righteous deeds, contrasting it with the usual plea for forgiveness. He shares the powerful impact of witnessing conscious saints at their deathbed, experiencing glimpses of Heaven and praising God in their final moments. Williams recounts a transformative encounter with a professional gambler on the brink of suicide, who found redemption and a new life through earnest prayer and seeking God's forgiveness. He emphasizes that walking with God brings peace and assurance, even in the face of death, as God remembers the righteous deeds of those who have truly repented and turned to Him.

Transcript

It is seldom you hear a dying man pray like that. The majority of men, when dying, if they do any praying at all, beg the Lord not to remember how they have spent their lives. We have, for more than a score of years, been in active service for God for the salvation of men, and have been called to the bedside where men were dying, but in all those visits we never heard one person who begged the Lord to remember how they had spent their time during their life time. One and all would beg Him to not remember how they had lived. But here is a man who thinks his last hours have arrived. God's mouthpiece, Isaiah, the prophet, has just paid a visit to the sick room and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." Then he turned his face to the wail, and prayed, begged, actually besought the Lord to remember how he had walked before Him in truth and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in the sight of the Lord.

It is indeed refreshing to hear a man pray thus. The only person we ever heard pray anything of like character was our aged father; shortly before he died we heard him often remind the Lord that he was ready and asked to be taken home to Heaven.

Not many men are really conscious when they are dying. Generally the doctor, knowing the end is near, leaves medicine to alleviate the pain. The drug that alleviates the pain deadens or dulls the nerves; and that which deadens the nerves beclouds the senses, so that a large number, either saints or sinners, die

unconscious.

It is worth going a long distance to be present at the bedside of a saint of God who is conscious of the fact that he is dying; and because of the way he has walked and lived in this life, God many times draws aside the veil that hides the other world from mortal view and allows him to catch a glimpse of where he is going and of the loved ones he is about to meet. To be present at such a time is like being in the anteroom of Heaven. The very atmosphere seems charged with the presence of God, and sometimes one almost imagines he can hear the "flipping of the angels' wings." Sometimes in such cases they tell us of the things that have opened up to their sight, while at other times they pass the last hours with the praises of God ringing from their lips. They are conscious of the fact that they have "walked before God with a perfect heart and have done that which was good in His sight."

Sinned! We all have; but God has prepared a way whereby we may find a complete pardon for all the wrong doings of our lives, and having our hearts washed clean and made free from all sin, we can walk before Him in truth and with a perfect heart, and come down to our death-bed. with the consciousness that we have done that which was pleasing to Him.

One wet, stormy night, some years ago, we had closed the service and were engaged in talking with a young man who had backslidden. We were standing just in front and had partially turned our back towards the pews, when we felt some one plucking at our sleeve, and turning, saw a man who was in the third seat. He had reached over the seats in order to touch us. The expression on his countenance was such a wild, vacant stare that our first impression was that he was an inmate of the asylum, which was not far away, and had escaped, and in our mind we began to think of how we might send word to the authorities. He leaned across the seats and in a low, but trembling, voice, said, "Is there anything in this religion for me?" Our fear was at once calmed, and sitting down by him, we replied, "Yes, my brother, God says, 'Whosoever will may come.'"

"But you don't know who I am. You do not understand my case," he replied.

"But God does, and He will save you if you earnestly come to Him," we assured him.

"See those hands," he cried; "they have not earned an honest dollar in nine years," and he held up a pair of soft white hands.

"But He saved a dying thief on the cross, and He will have mercy on you if you will come to Him, as you should," we replied. And calling the few who were still in the building, we knelt between the seats and prayed, and urged him to pray. He would try, throwing up his hands and pleading so earnestly, and then he would bury his face in his arms and his whole form would be convulsed in agony. We remained on our knees with him until the clock on the wall pointed to midnight, when he arose to his feet, as we supposed, to testify to having found peace. Taking a ten-dollar bill from his pocket, he said, "Go down to the St. James Hotel, second floor, room fourteen. You will find my traveling overcoat and grip. Bring them away."

"Where shall we bring them?" we asked.

"I don't care," he replied, "only I don't want to see the old gang again."

When we had first taken a seat by him, we had noticed that he held a small diary book and pencil in his hands. We also noticed that he was well dressed, and was wearing a diamond on his shirt front and a diamond ring on his hand. He told us something of his life.

He was a professional gambler and had been away from home about fifteen years, having spent much of his time on the Pacific Coast. He had written his mother he was coming home, and when arriving in that city had some ten thousand dollars on his person, but had lost it all during the past two days. That evening he had left the gambling hall with his fortune gone and concluded to kill himself and end his career. Going up the street he had passed the building where we were singing, which had a light in the vestibule that shone out across the pavement. He had passed by, going on in the dark, when he thought he would write down who he was and the secret order of which he was a member, so that his body would have a decent burial. Remembering the light in the vestibule, he came back, and stepping inside to write, was attracted by our voice as we were speaking. He became interested and came in, taking a seat near the rear of the building.

Later, he said, "During the altar service you spoke to the lady occupying the seat in front of me and the gentleman behind me, but you did not speak to me. You closed the meeting and I left and walked about half a block away, but something seemed to say, 'Go back and speak that man.' I returned and came up near the front."

When we had risen to our feet, he said, "I don't want to see the old crowd anymore." We called a young man to our side, saying, "Take this man home and keep him over night." Then to the man, we said, "You call and see me in the morning. You will find me in the little brick cottage in the rear of the church." We sent to the hotel and got his coat and grip.

While at breakfast the following morning, the doorbell rang and, on going to the door, we found him standing there with a face as haggard and white as a dead man. The moment the door was opened he stepped in hurriedly and we could see he was laboring under great mental excitement. We gave him our Bible, telling him to look over it until we finished breakfast, and stepping into the dining-room, closed the door. Our appetite was gone, but we wanted him to calm down so we could deal with him.

In a few moments we returned to the room and found him down on the floor, going through that Bible in a very excited way. He began begging us to tell him what the Bible said about a murderer -- if a murderer could go to Heaven. We tried to calm him the best we could, and read him such passages as Isaiah 1:8: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sin be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" and I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"But you don't know how wicked I have been, and how deep I have gone," he would say; and springing to his feet, would walk back and forth across the room. Finally he told us the story of his life as follows:

"My home was in a New England state. My mother was a fashionable woman and card parties were frequently held in the home. My mother taught me to play cards. I became an expert and brought disgrace upon my name. It killed my father, and my mother ordered me to leave home and never return until I could come back a gentleman. I came to this city and started in at honest employment, but I could not let the cards alone. I finally devoted all my time to gambling.

"One day, I was in a game of three, two supposedly traveling men and a rich cattleman. It was played upstairs over a saloon. When the door was broken in no one was there but the body of the cattleman. In our haste I dropped my revolver which had the initials on the ivory handle. We were arrested, but through the secret order of which I was a member, the jury was fixed, and the judge belonging to the same order, I was pronounced not guilty, when before God my hands were red with human blood. I left this city and for

several years have been on the coast, gambling all the time. Three times I have written to mother telling her I was coming home a gentleman; but when I arrived in the city three days ago, I thought I would have one game more with the boys, but they got all I had, and I thought I might as well end all by committing suicide. Gamble I will, and I can't help it.

"You know the rest. Is there any hope for me?"

And in his excitement and misery he would spring from his chair and pace the floor. We stepped across the room and turned the key in the door, to keep him from running out on the street. He tried to take the key from us, but others came in and for hours we talked, plead, prayed and asked God to have mercy. We have never heard a man cry as he did nor seen such agony, but God answered our prayers and the light came. It was so real that we wept and shouted for joy. He was so happy, and would hold up his hands which were so white and soft, and say, "See them; they haven't earned an honest dollar in nine years; but they shall never touch another card."

He got a position in a blacksmith shop. We shall never forget when, after his first day of labor, he came in and up to the platform holding up his hands. He had been using a heavy sledge all day and the palms of his hands were covered with big blood blisters. "See them, see them," he cried; "they came there honestly. I would not take a twenty-dollar gold piece for each one of them."

He sought the blessing of a clean heart, married, and entered evangelistic work. He spent one winter in a mining district and had seen several hundred miners converted to God. Then we heard no more of him until a number of years passed, and we were conducting a series of meetings in a city during the holidays. One afternoon a lady came up to the platform and asked,

"Are you the Williams that held the meeting some years ago at D____?" naming the place we had been. When we replied in the affirmative, she asked,

"Don't you know me?" After a second look, we replied, "Yes, I do; where is S____, your husband?"

"Dead, several years."

"Tell me, how did he die?"

"He had a cancer form in the stomach," she replied; "and suffered terrible agony, but through it all kept saying, 'Jesus, you know best,' and his last few days he seemed so happy to think he could soon be with Jesus."

We say unto you, friends, a man that walks with God is not afraid when the hour of death approaches. No matter what his life may have been, if he finds God and walks with Him, God will not part company with him when he comes to the river's brink; and with God by his side, he is not afraid for Him to remember how he has lived.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/lewis-williams/a-dying-mans-prayer/>

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