

The Objects, Grounds, and Evidences of the Hope of the Righteous

by Samuel Davies

The sermon explores the objects, grounds, and evidences of the hope of the righteous in death, emphasizing the difference between the righteous man's hope and the common popular hope of the world.

Scripture: Job 8:13, Job 11:20, Job 27:8, Proverbs 10:28, Proverbs 11:7, Proverbs 11:23, Proverbs 24:20

Topics: "Eternal Hope", "True Repentance"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the objects, grounds, and evidences of the hope of the righteous in contrast to the despair of the wicked in death. He emphasizes the importance of having a well-founded hope in God's promises and the necessity of genuine repentance, faith, and holiness as evidence of a true hope. Davies warns against false hopes based on worldly comparisons, neglect of known duties, or unscriptural beliefs, highlighting the dreadful fate of those who die in their sins. He encourages believers to seek a hope that is supported by God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, leading to a peaceful and assured departure into eternal happiness.

Transcript

The Objects, Grounds, and Evidences

of the HOPE of the Righteous

by Samuel Davies, March 6, 1757

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous has hope in his death." Proverbs 14:32

To creatures that are placed here on earth for a few years upon trial for an everlasting state--it is of the greatest importance how they make their departure hence. The gloomy hour of nature's last extremity stands in need of some effectual support; and that support can proceed from nothing then present--but only from past reviews and future prospects; from the review of past life so spent as to answer the end of life; and from the prospect of a happy immortality to follow upon this last struggle.

Now, men will leave the world according to their conduct in it; and be happy or miserable hereafter, according to their improvement of the present state of trial, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness," says the wisest of men; "but the righteous has hope in his death."

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." That is, he dies--as he lived. He lived in wickedness--and in wickedness he dies.

His wickedness sticks fast upon him--when his earthly enjoyments, his friends, and all created comforts leave him forever. The guilt of his wickedness lies heavy upon him--like a mountain of lead, ready to sink him into the depth of eternal misery! And the principles of wickedness, which he indulged all his life, still live within him, even in the agonies of death; nay, they now arrive at a dreadful immortality, and produce an eternal hell in his heart!

He leaves behind him not only all his earthly comforts--but all the little remains of goodness he seemed to have, while under the restraints of divine grace: and he carries nothing but his wickedness along with him into eternity. With this dreadful attendant--his wickedness--he must pass to the tribunal of his Judge! To leave his earthly all behind him, and die in the agonies of dissolving nature--this is terrible. But to die in his wickedness--this is infinitely the most terrible of all!

He once flattered himself that though he lived in wickedness--that he would not die in it. He adopted many resolutions to amend, and forsake his wickedness, toward the close of life, or upon a death-bed. But how is he disappointed! After all his promising purposes and hopes--he died as he lived--in wickedness!

This is generally the fate of veterans in sin. They are resolving and re-resolving to reform all their lives; but after all--they die the same as they lived. They intend to prepare for death and eternity--but just not today. They have always something else to do today; and therefore they put off this work until tomorrow. Tomorrow comes, and instead of reforming, they die in their wickedness. Tomorrow comes--and they are in hell!

Oh! that the loiterers of this generation would take warning from the ruin of thousands of their unhappy ancestors, who have perished by the dread experiment! Friends! are not some of you in danger of splitting upon the same rock? Are not some of you conscious, that if you should die this moment--that you would die in your wickedness? And yet you have but very little fear of dying in this manner! No--you purpose yet to become mighty religious and prepare for death, before you die. Just so have thousands purposed as strongly as you--who are now in hell! The time for repentance was still a 'later' to them--until it was irrecoverably past. They were snatched away unexpectedly, by the sudden hand of death, and knew not where they were--until they found themselves in eternity! And thus they had no time for this work of repentance; or their thoughts were so much engrossed with their pains--that they had no composure for it; or, they found their sins, by long indulgence, were become invincibly strong, their hearts judicially hardened, and all the influences of divine grace withdrawn! So that the work of repentance became impossible. And thus, they died in their sins. And if any of you are so foolhardy as to imitate them in their delays--you may expect to die in your wickedness--just as they did.

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." He is driven away--in spite of all his reluctance. Let him cling to life ever so strongly--yet he must go! All his struggles are vain, and cannot add one moment to his days.

Indeed, the wicked have so little taste for heaven, and are so much in love with this world, that if they leave it at all--they must be driven out of it--driven out of it, whether they want or not!

When they hope for heaven, they do in reality consider it but a shift, or a refuge, when they can no longer live in this, their favorite world. They do not at all desire heaven--in comparison with this world. They would

live forever in this present world--if they could have their choice. But let them grasp ever so hard--they must let go their hold. They must be driven away, like chaff before a whirlwind --driven away into the regions of misery--into the regions of misery, I say; for certainly the happiness of heaven was never intended for such as are so averse to it; and who prefer this wretched world, with all its cares and sorrows--before heaven itself!

This is the certain doom of the wicked!

But WHO are the wicked? Though the character is so common among us--yet there are few who will own it. It is an odious character--and therefore few will take it to themselves. But there is no room for flattery in the case: and therefore we must inquire, WHO are the wicked? I answer:

all who habitually indulge themselves in the practice of any known wickedness;

all who neglect the God who made them, and the adorable Redeemer;

all who live in the willful omission of the known duties of piety and morality;

all who have never known by experience what it is to sincerely repent and believe;

in a word, all who are in their natural state, and have never felt a change of spirit and practice, so great and important, that it may be called, with propriety, a new birth, or a new creation.

All such, without exception, are wicked!

They are wicked in reality--and in the sight of God; however righteous they may be in their own eyes; or however unblamably some of them may conduct themselves before others.

And are there not some such in this assembly? Is this assembly so glorious and happy a rarity, as not to have one wicked person in it? Alas! I am afraid the most generous charity cannot indulge such a delusive hope. May you make an impartial inquiry, into a matter so important! And if you find the character of the wicked is yours--then you must share in the dreadful doom of the wicked--if you continue such!

But I proceed to that part of my text, which I intend to make the principal subject of this discourse, "The righteous has hope in his death." To have hope in death is to have hope in the most desperate extremity of human nature. Then the spirits flag, and the heart sinks; and all the expectant hopes of blooming health and prosperity vanish. Then all hopes from things below--all expectations of happiness from all things under the sun--are cut off. All hopes of escaping the arrest of death are fled--when the iron grasp of its cold hand is felt.

But even in these hopeless circumstances, the righteous man has hope. The foundation of his hope must be well laid--it must be firm indeed, when it can stand such shocks as these. It is evident the objects of his hope must lie beyond the grave; for on this side of it--all is hopeless. His friends and physician despair of him; and he despairs of himself, as to all the prospects of this mortal life. But he does not despair of a happier life in another state. No! he hopes to live and be happy, when the agonies of death are over--and this hope bears him up under them.

This hope I intend to consider as to:

its objects,

its grounds and evidences,

and its various degrees and limitations.

First, I am to consider the OBJECTS of the righteous man's hope in death. And here I shall only mention:

his hope of support in death;

his hope of the immortality of the soul;

his hope of the resurrection of his body;

his hope of perfect happiness in heaven.

In the first place, the righteous man has a humble hope of SUPPORT IN DEATH. He has repeatedly entrusted himself into the faithful hands of an almighty Savior, for life and death, for time and eternity; and he humbly hopes his Savior will not forsake him now--now, when he most needs his assistance. This was Paul's support, under the prospect of his last hour: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Timothy 1:12. As if he had said, finding my own weakness, I have committed my all into another hand; and I have committed it to one, whose ability and faithfulness have been tried by thousands, as well as myself; and, therefore, I am confident, he will keep the sacred deposit, and never allow it to be injured or lost.

This was also the support of the Psalmist; "Though I walk," says he, "through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me." Psalm 23:4.

Yes, it was upon this support Paul leaned, when he braved death, in that triumphant language, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No! in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us: for I am persuaded," says he, "that death"; which separates our souls and bodies; which separates friend from friend; which separates us from all our earthly comforts, and breaks all our connections with this world, even death itself "shall never separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus!" Romans 8:35-39.

What a faithful friend, what a powerful guardian is this, who stands by his people, and bears them up in their last extremity, and makes them more than conquerors in the struggle with the all-conquering enemy of mankind! How peculiar a happiness is this, to be able to enjoy the comfort of hope--in the wreck of human nature! How sweet to lean a dying head--upon the kind arm of an almighty Savior! How sweet to entrust a departing soul, as a deposit in his faithful hand!

Oh, may you and I enjoy this blessed support in a dying hour! and may we make it our great business in life to secure it! In that gloomy hour, our friends may weep, and wring their hands around our beds; but they can afford us no help--no hope! But Jesus can, as thousands have known by experience. Then he can bear home his promises upon the heart; then he can communicate his love, which is better than life; and by his holy Spirit, bear up and encourage the sinking soul! Blessed Jesus! what friend can compare to you?

But, Secondly, the IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL is an object of the righteous man's hope. He is not like a Bolingbroke, and other infidels, who have made it their interest that there should be no future state, who

consider immortality as an object of fear, and therefore try to reason themselves out of the belief of it, and choose to engulf themselves in the abyss of annihilation. That man has indeed a terrible consciousness of his demerit, who dares not trust himself forever in the hands of a just and gracious God--but wishes to escape out of his hands, though it were by resigning his being. It is not the force of argument that drives our infidels to this. Demonstration and certainty were never so much as pretended for it. And after all the preposterous pains they take to work themselves up to the gloomy hope, that when they die they shall escape punishment by the loss of all the sweets of existence. Yet, if I may venture to guess at, and divulge the secret--they are often alarmed with the dreadful perhaps of a future state. In their solemn and thoughtful moments their hope wavers, and they fear they shall not be more happy than a dog or a stone, when they die. Unhappy creatures! How much are they to be pitied! And were it not for the universal benevolence of that religion which they despise, how justly would they be despised and abhorred!

They are men of pleasure now; they are merry, jovial and mirthful, and give free reign to all their licentious passions and appetites. But how short, how sordid, how brutish the pleasure! How gloomy, how low, how shocking their highest hope! Their highest hope is to be as much as nothing, in a few years or moments hence, as they were ten thousand years ago. They are men of pleasure, who would lose all their pleasures, if they were angels in heaven; but would lose none of them, if they were swine in the mire.

Blessed be God, this gloomy hope is not the hope which the religion of Jesus inspires. No, "he has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Timothy 1:10. He opens to the departing soul, the endless prospects of a future state of being--a state, where death shall no more make such havoc and desolations among the works of God: but where everything is vital and immortal.

Hence the righteous man has hope in his death. He is not driven to seek for shelter in the gulf of annihilation; nor to combat with the blessed hopes which reason and revelation unitedly inspire, as his worst enemies. He wishes and hopes to live forever, that he may forever enjoy the generous pleasure of serving his God, and doing good to his fellow-creatures.

The belief of immortality is not, indeed, peculiar to the righteous: it is the belief of mankind in general, except a few infidels here and there, who are to be regarded as monsters in human nature. But this is not so properly the object of hope, as of fear--to multitudes. They wish it were false, though they cannot believe it is so. They have no joy and peace in believing this; but, like "devils, they believe and tremble." James 2:19. But, to the righteous man, this is properly an object of hope: the prospect is pleasing to him. If it were a dream, which, blessed be God, it is not--it is a pleasing dream. If it were a delusion--it is a harmless and profitable delusion.

It inspires him with noble pleasures, and excites him to glorious deeds, while life lasts: and if it must be entirely given up in death, he will sleep as easy as the most staunch unbeliever upon earth, who lived in the expectation of so terrible a doom. Thus we might argue--even upon the worst supposition that can be made. But we are left in no such uncertainty. This is not a pleasing error--but a pleasing truth. Such it proves to the righteous man: for oh! how pleasing to the offspring of the dust--to claim immortality as his inalienable inheritance! How transporting to a soul, just ready to take its flight from the quivering lips of the dissolving clay--to look forward, through everlasting ages of felicity, and call them all its own! To sit, and prognosticate, and pause upon, its own futurities--to defy the stroke of death, and smile at the impotent malice of the gaping grave! Oh, what a happiness, what a privilege, is this! And this is what the righteous man in some measure enjoys.

Thirdly, the righteous in death has the hope of the RESURRECTION of his body. This glorious hope we owe entirely to Scriptural revelation. The ancient philosophers could never discover it by their reason; and when it was discovered by a superior light, they ridiculed it as the hope of worms. But this is a reviving hope to the righteous, in the agonies of death. Those old intimate friends--the soul and body, that must now part, with so much reluctance--shall again meet, and be united in inseparable bonds. The righteous man does not deliver up his body, as the eternal prey of worms, or the irredeemable prisoner of the grave; but his hope looks forward to the glorious dreadful morning of the resurrection; and sees the bonds of death bursting; the prison of the grave flying open; the mouldering dust collected, and formed into a human body once more--a human body, most gloriously improved.

This prospect affords a very agreeable support in death, and enables the righteous to say with Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes! I am overwhelmed at the thought!" Job 19:25-27.

"For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:53-55. This is an illustrious victory indeed; a victory over the conqueror of conquerors, and of all the sons of Adam. And yet, thus victorious shall the frail dying believer be made, over that terror of human nature.

Fourthly, the perfect and EVERLASTING HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN is an object of the righteous man's hope in death. He hopes to drop all his sins, and their attendant train of sorrows, behind him; and to be perfectly holy, and consequently happy, forever. He hopes to see his God and Savior, and to spend a happy eternity in society with him, and in his service. He hopes to join the company of angels, and of his fellow-saints of the human race. He hopes to improve in knowledge, in holiness, and in capacities for action and enjoyment, in an endless gradation. He hopes to see the face of his God in righteousness; and to be satisfied, when he awakes, with his image. Psalm 17:15.

In short, he hopes to be as happy as his nature will possibly admit through an endless duration. Oh, what a glorious hope is this! This has made many a soul welcome death with open arms. This has made them desirous to be with Christ--which is far better. Phil. 1:23. And this has sweetly swallowed up the sensations of bodily pain. Indeed, without this, immortality would be an object of terror--and not of hope: the prospect would be insupportably dreadful. For who can bear the thought of an immortal duration spent in an eternal banishment from God and all happiness, and in the sufferance of the most exquisite pain? But a happy immortality--what can charm us more!

Having thus shown you some of the principal objects of a godly man's hope in death, I now proceed.

Secondly, to show you what are the GROUNDS and EVIDENCES of such a hope.

It is evident, it is not every kind of hope, that is intended in my text; it is a hope peculiar to the righteous: and it is a hope that shall never be disappointed, or put to shame. This, alas! is not the common popular hope of the world. Job speaks of the hope of the hypocrite: Job 8:13; 27:8, and one greater than Job tells us, that many will carry their false hopes with them to the very tribunal of their Judge. When he assures them that he never knew them, they hardly think him in earnest: "Strange! do you not know us? Have we not eat and drunk in your presence, and have you not taught in our streets?" Luke 13:26. Paul also tells

us, that while some are crying "peace and safety, and apprehend no danger, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape!" 1 Thess. 5:3.

This is likewise evidently confirmed by observation: for how often do we find in fact, that many not only hope for immortality--but for immortal happiness, who give no evidence at all of their title to it--but many of the contrary? Here, then, is a very proper occasion for self-examination. Since there are so many false hopes among mankind, we should solicitously inquire, whether our hope will stand the test. To assist us in this inquiry, let us consider what are the peculiar grounds and evidences of the righteous man's hope.

Now it will be universally granted, that God best knows whom he will admit into heaven, and whom he will exclude--that it is his province to appoint the ground of our hope, and that constitution according to which we may be saved--that none can be saved--but those who have the characters which he has declared essentially necessary to salvation; and that none shall perish, who have those characters. And hence it follows, that the righteous man's hope is entirely regulated by the divine constitution, and the declarations of that holy Word, which alone gives us certain information in this case.

This I say is the grand test of a true hope: it expects what God has promised: and it expects it in the way and manner established by him. It is a humble submissive hope: it does not expect happiness, as it were, in spite of him who is the author of it; but it expects happiness just in the manner which he has appointed.

Now what has God appointed to be the ground or foundation of our hope? Paul will tell you, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11. God himself proclaims, by Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." Isaiah 28:16. Jesus Christ then, is the only sure ground of hope; appointed by God himself.

Or, in other words, the free mercy of God, which can be communicated only through Jesus Christ, or, for his sake--is the only sure ground of hope for a sinner. It is upon this, and not upon his own righteousness, that the righteous man dares to build his hope. He is sensible that every other foundation is but a quicksand. He cannot venture to hope on account of his own merit, either in whole, or in part. It is in the mercy, the mere mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, that he trusts. He is gratefully sensible, indeed, that God has wrought many good things in him, and enabled him to perform many good actions: but these are not the ground of his hope--but the evidences of it. I mean, he does not make these any part of his justifying righteousness; but only evidences that he has a saving interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can procure him the blessings he hopes for. Which leads me to add,

That the evidence of this hope is, the righteous man's finding, upon a thorough trial, that the characters which God has declared essentially necessary to salvation, do belong to him.

"Has God declared, that the regenerate, that believers and penitents, that they who are made holy in heart and life--and none but such, shall be saved? Then is my hope true and sure, when I hope for salvation, because I find these characters belong to me. I know the God of truth will keep his Word: and therefore, poor and guilty and unworthy as I am--it is no presumption for me to hope for everlasting happiness from him, if I find myself to be such as he has promised everlasting happiness to."

This, friends, is the only valid evidence of a good hope. And is this the evidence that encourages you in this important affair? Alas! the world is overrun with delusive hopes, that are so far from being supported by this evidence, that they are supported in direct opposition to it.

God has declared, in the plainest and strongest terms, that no drunkard, nor swearer, nor fornicator, nor any similar characters, shall inherit his kingdom! And yet what crowds of drunkards, swearers, fornicators, and the like will maintain their hopes of heaven, in spite of these declarations!

He has declared, with the utmost solemnity, that "except a man is born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." John 3:3. And yet what multitudes presume to hope they shall enter there, though they still continue in their natural state, and have no evidences at all of their being born again!

God has declared, that "except you repent, you shall all perish," Luke 13:3, 5, like the infidel Jews; and that "he who believes not shall be damned." Mark 16:16. And yet, how many hope to be saved, though they have never felt the kindly relentings of sincere, evangelical repentance, nor the work of faith with power wrought upon their hearts?

What can be more plain than that declaration, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord!" Hebrews 12:14. And yet multitudes that hate holiness in their hearts, hope to be saved, as well as your precise and sanctified creatures, as they call them!

In short, the hopes of many are so far from being supported by the authority of the Scriptures, that they are supported only by the supposition of their being false! If the Scriptures are true--then they and their hopes must perish together! But, if the Scriptures are false--then they have some chance to be saved; though it is but a very dull chance after all: for if they have to do with a lying, deceitful Deity, they have no ground at all of any confidence in him: they must be anxiously uncertain what they should hope, or what they should fear, from his hands.

Hence you see, that we should vindicate the truth of God in these declarations, even by way of self-defense: for if the divine veracity fails in one instance--then it becomes doubtful in every instance, and we have nothing left to depend upon. If they may be saved--whom God has declared shall perish; then, by a parity of reason, they may perish--whom he has characterized as the heirs of salvation. And consequently, there is no certainty that any will be saved at all. Thus, sinners, while establishing their own false hopes, remove all ground of hope, and leave us in the most dreadful suspense!

Friends! let us regulate our hopes according to God's declaration, who has the objects of our hopes entirely at his disposal. When we pretend to improve upon divine constitutions, or, as we think, turn them in our favor--we do in reality but ruin them, and turn them against ourselves. Make that, and that only, the ground and evidence of your hope, which God has made such! Your hope is not almighty, to change the nature of things, or reverse God's appointments: but his constitution will stand, and you shall be judged according to it, whether you want--or not.

Do not make that the ground or evidence of your hope, which God has not so made, or which he has pronounced the characteristic of the heirs of hell. You hope, perhaps, to be saved, though you live in the willful neglect of some known duty, or in the willful practice of some known sin. But has God given you any reason for such a hope? You know he has not--but the contrary. You hope he will show mercy to you, because his nature is mercy and love, and he is the compassionate Father of his creatures; or because Christ has died for sinners. But has he given you any assurances, that because he is so merciful--because he is so compassionate a Father--because Christ has died for sinners, therefore he will save you in your present condition?

You hope to be saved, because you are as good as the generality, or perhaps better than many around you. But has God made this a sufficient ground of hope? Has he told you, that to be fashionably religious, is to be sufficiently religious; or, that the way of the multitude leads to life? This may be your hope; but is it the authentic declaration of eternal Truth? You know it is not--but quite the contrary. I might add sundry other instances of unscriptural hope; but these may suffice as a specimen.

And I shall lay down this as a general rule, which will enable yourselves to make farther discoveries, namely, those hopes are all false, which are opposite to the declarations of God in his Word. Certainly, this needs no proof to such as believe the Divine authority of the Scriptures. And, as for the infidels, it is not the business of this day to deal with them. You who acknowledge the Scriptures as the foundation of your religion, with what force can you entertain hopes unsupported by them, or contrary to them? Hopes, that must be disappointed--if God is true; and that cannot be accomplished--unless he proves a liar? Can you venture your eternal all upon such a blasphemous hope as this? But I proceed,

Thirdly, to consider the various DEGREES and LIMITATIONS of a good hope in death.

A good hope is always supported by evidence; and, according to the degree of evidence, is the degree of hope. When the evidence is clear and undoubted--then it rises to a joyful assurance. But when the evidence is dark and doubtful--then it wavers, and is weakened by dismal fears and jealousies. Now, I have told you already--that the evidence of a good hope is a person's discovering, by impartial examination, that those characters, which God has pronounced the inseparable characters of those who shall be saved--do belong to him: or, that he has those graces and virtues, which are at once his preparation for heaven, and the evidence of his title to it.

Now different believers, and even the same people at different times, have very different degrees of this evidence. And the reason of this difference is, that sundry causes are necessary to make the evidence clear and satisfactory; and, when any of these are lacking, or do not concur in a proper degree, then the evidence is dark and doubtful.

In order to be fully satisfied of the truth and reality of our graces, it is necessary we should arrive to some eminence in them: otherwise, like a jewel in a heap of rubbish, they may be so blended with corruption, that it may be impossible to discern them with certainty. Hence the weak Christian, unless he has unusual supplies of Divine grace, enters the valley of the shadow of death with fear and trembling: whereas he, who has made great attainments in holiness, enters it with courage, or perhaps with transports of joy.

It is also necessary to a full assurance of hope, that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God, Romans 8:16, or, that he excites our graces to such a lively exercise, as to render them visible by their effects, and distinguishable from all other principles. And therefore, if a sovereign God sees fit to withhold his influences from the dying saint--then his graces will languish, his past experience will appear confused and doubtful, and consequently his mind will be tossed with anxious fears and jealousies. But if he is pleased to pour out his Spirit upon him, it will be like a ray of heavenly light, to point out his way through the dark shades of death, and open to him the transporting prospects of eternal day, that lies just before him.

Another thing that occasions a difference in this case, is, that an assured hope is the result of frequent self-examination; and, therefore, the Christian that has been diligent in this duty, and all his life been laboring to make all sure against his last hour, generally enjoys the happy fruits of his past diligence, and enters the harbor of rest with sails full of the fair gales of hope. But he who has been negligent in his duty,

is tossed with billows and tempests of doubts and fears, and is afraid of being shipwrecked in sight of the port.

It is also necessary to the enjoyment of a comfortable hope in death, that the mind be in some measure calm and rational, not clouded with the glooms of melancholy, or thrown into a delirium or insensibility by the violence of the disorder. And, according as this is, or is not the case, a godly man may enjoy, or not enjoy, the comforts of hope.

These remarks will help us to discover with what limitations we are to understand my text, "The righteous has hope in his death." It does not mean that every righteous man has the same degree of hope; or that no righteous man is distressed with fears and doubts in his last moments. But it means, in the

First place, that every righteous man has a substantial reason to hope--whether he clearly sees it, or not. His eternal all is really safe; and as all the false hopes of the wicked cannot save him, so all his fears cannot destroy him, though they may afford him some transient pangs of horror. He is in the possession of a faithful God, who will take care of him; and nothing shall pluck him out of his hands. He sees fit to leave some of his people in their last moments to conflict at once with death and with their more dreadful fears: but even this will issue in their real advantage. And what an agreeable surprise will it be to such trembling souls, to find that death has unexpectedly transported them to heaven!

Secondly, when it is said, "the righteous has hope in his death," it means, that godly men, in common, do in fact, enjoy a comfortable hope. There never was one of them that was allowed to fall into absolute despair, in this last extremity. In the greatest agonies of fear and suspicion, the trembling soul has still some glimmering hope to support it; and its gracious Savior never abandons it entirely. And it is the more common case of the saints, to enjoy more comfort and confidence in death, than they were accustomed to do in life. Many, who in life were accustomed to shudder at every danger, and fly at the shaking of a shaking leaf, have been emboldened at death to meet the king of terrors, and to welcome his fiercest assault. The soldiers of Jesus Christ have generally left this mortal state in triumph; though this is not a universal rule. And who would not wish and pray for such an exit? that he may do honor to his God and Savior, and to his religion, with his last breath; that he may reveal to the world, that religion can bear him up, when all other supports prove a broken reed; and that his last words may sow the seeds of piety in the hearts of those that surround his dying bed; this every godly man should pray and wish for; though it must be left in the hands of a sovereign God to do as he pleases.

Thirdly, when it is said, "the righteous has hope in his death," it may mean, that the hope which he has in death shall be accomplished. It is not a flattering, delusive dream--but a glorious reality; and, therefore, deserves the name. His hope shall not make him ashamed, Romans 5:5--but shall be fulfilled, and even exceeded. However high his expectations, death will convey him to such a state, as will afford him an agreeable surprise; and he will find, that it never entered into his heart to conceive the things that God has laid up for him, and for all who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9.

This is the glorious peculiarity of the godly man's hope. Many carry their hope with them to death, and will not give it up, until they give up the spirit. But as it is ungrounded, it will end in disappointment and confusion. And oh! into what a terrible consternation will it strike them--to find themselves surrounded with flames--when they expected to land on the blissful coasts of Paradise! To find their Judge and their conscience accusing and condemning, instead of acquitting them! To find their souls plunged into hell under a strong guard of devils, instead of being conducted to heaven by a glorious convoy of angels! To

feel the pangs and horrors of everlasting despair succeed, in an instant, to the flattering prospect of delusive hope! To fall down to hell--from the very gates of heaven! Oh! what a shocking disappointment, what a terrible change is this!

Therefore, now, my friends, make sure work. Do not venture your souls upon the broken reed of false hope. But "give diligence to make your calling and election sure." 2 Peter 1:10. Now, you may make a profitable discovery of your mistake: if your hope is ungrounded, you have now time and means to obtain a good hope through grace. But then it will be too late: your only chance, if I may so speak, will be lost; and you must forever stand by the consequences. O, can you bear the thought of taking a leap in the dark into the eternal world; or of owing your courage only to a delusive dream? Why will you not labor to secure so important an interest, beyond all rational possibility of a disappointment? Have you anything else to do, which is of greater, of equal, or comparable importance? Do you think you will approve of this neglect upon a dying bed, or in the eternal world?

Let this subject strengthen the hope of such of you, whose hope will stand the Scripture-test. You must die, 'tis true; your bodies must be the food of worms! But be of good courage--your almighty and immortal Savior will support you in the hour of your extremity, and confer immortality upon you. He will also quicken your mortal bodies, and re-unite them to your souls, and make your whole persons as happy as your natures will admit. Blessed be God, you are safe from all the fatal consequences of the original apostasy, and your own personal sin.

Death, the last enemy, which seems to survive all the rest, shall not triumph over you: but even death itself shall die, and be no more. Oh, happy people! who is like unto you, a people saved by the Lord! Deuteronomy 33:29.

Let me now CONCLUDE with a melancholy contrast: I mean the wretched condition of the wicked in a dying hour. Some of them, indeed, have a hope, a strong hope, which the clearest evidence cannot wrest from them. This may afford them a little delusive support in death; but upon the whole, it is their plague--it keeps them from spending their last moments in seeking after a well-grounded hope. And as soon as their souls are separated from their bodies, it exposes them to the additional confusion of a dreadful disappointment.

Others of them live like beasts--and like beasts they die! That is, they are as thoughtless, as stupid, about their eternal state--as the brutes that perish! Oh! what a shocking sight is the death-bed of such a stupid sinner!

Others, who, with a great deal of pains, made a shift to keep their consciences easy, in the mirthful hours of health and prosperity, when death and eternity stare them in the face, find this sleeping lion rousing, roaring, and tearing them to pieces! They had a secret consciousness before, that they had no ground for a comfortable hope; but they suppressed the conviction, and would not regard it. But now it revives, and they tremble with a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation. This is especially the usual doom of such as lived under a faithful ministry, and have had a clear light of the gospel, and just notions of divine things forced upon their unwilling minds. It is not so easy for them, as for others, to flatter themselves with false hopes, in the honest, impartial hour of death. Their knowledge is a magazine of arms for their consciences to use to torment them. Oh! in what horrors do some of them die! and how much of hell do they feel upon earth!

Nay, this is sometimes the doom of some infidel profligates, who flattered themselves that they could despise the bugbear of a future state, even in death. They thought they had conquered truth and conscience--but they find themselves mistaken--they find these are unsuppressible, victorious, immortal: and that, though with mountains overwhelmed, they will, one day, burst out like the smothered fires of Mount Aetna; visibly bright and tormenting. Of this the celebrated Dr. Young, whose inimitable pen embellishes whatever it touches, gives us a most melancholy instance, related in the true spirit of tragedy--an instance of a youth of noble birth, fine accomplishments, and large estate, who imbibed the infidel principles of deism, so fashionable in high life, and debauched himself with sensual indulgences; who, by this unkind treatment, broke the heart of an amiable wife, and by his prodigality, squandered away his estate, and thus disinherited his only son. Hear the tragic story from the author's own words:

Men may live fools--but fools they cannot die. Death will make them wise, and show them their true interest, when it is too late to secure it. Ignorance and thoughtlessness, or the principles of infidelity, may make them live like beasts; but these will not enable them to die like beasts--May we live as candidates for immortality! May we now seek a well established hope, that will stand the severest trial! And may we labor to secure the protection of the Lord of life and death, who can be our sure support in the wreck of dissolving nature! May we live the life--that we may die the death of the righteous; and find that dark valley a short passage into the world of bliss and glory! Amen.

"The hope of the godless will perish." Job 8:13

"For what hope do the godless have--when God cuts them off and takes away their life?" Job 27:8

"But the wicked will lose hope. They have no escape. Their hope becomes despair." Job 11:20

"The hopes of the godly result in happiness, but the expectations of the wicked are all in vain!" Proverbs 10:28

"When the wicked die--their hopes all perish!" Proverbs 11:7

"The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath!" Proverbs 11:23

"The evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out!" Proverbs 24:20

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