

Exposition on Psalm 39

by St. Augustine

The speaker reflects on the fleeting nature of human life and the importance of seeking after the things that are eternal.

Scripture: Psalm 38:2

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Eternal Life"

Description

St. Augustine delves into the Psalms, exploring the significance of being a sojourner with God and a stranger in this world, longing for the eternal home. He reflects on the challenges of life, the need for humility, and the constant battle against sin. Augustine emphasizes the importance of seeking forgiveness, renewal, and remission of sins before departing from this world to ensure eternal refreshment and peace in the presence of God.

Transcript

1. The title of this Psalm, which we have just chanted and proposed to discuss, is, On the end, for Idithun, a Psalm for David himself. Here then we must look for, and must attend to, the words of a certain person who is called Idithun; and if each one of ourselves may be Idithun, in that which he sings he recognises himself, and hears himself speak. For you may see who was called Idithun, according to the ancient descent of man; let us, however, understand what this name is translated, and seek to comprehend the Truth in the translation of the word. According therefore to what we have been able to discover by enquiry in those names which have been translated from the Hebrew tongue into the Latin, by those who study the sacred writings, Idithun being translated is over-leaping them. Who then is this person over-leaping them? Or who those whom he has over-leaped?...For there are some persons, yet clinging to the earth, yet bowed down to the ground, yet setting their hearts on what is below, yet placing their hopes in things that pass away, whom he who is called over-leaping them has over-leaped.

2. You know that some of the Psalms are entitled, Songs of Degrees; and in the Greek it is obvious enough what the word ascend, not of them that descend. The Latin, not being able to express it strictly, expresses it by the general term; and in that it called them steps, left it undetermined, whether they were steps of persons ascending or descending. But because there is no speech or language where their voices are not heard among them, the earlier language explains the one which comes after it: and what was ambiguous in one is made certain in another. Just then as there the singer is some one who is ascending, so here is it some one who is over-leaping....Let this Idithun come still to us, let him over-leap

those whose delight is in things below, and take delight in these things, and let him rejoice in the Word of the Lord; in the delight of the law of the Most High....

3. I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue Psalm 38:1....For it is not without reason that the tongue is set in a moist place, but because it is so prone to slip. Perceiving therefore how hard it was for a man to be under the necessity of speaking, and not to say something that he will wish unsaid, and filled with disgust at these sins, he seeks to avoid the like. To this difficulty is he exposed who is seeking to leap beyond....Although I have leaped beyond the pleasures of earth, although the fleeting passions for things temporal ensnare me not, though now I despise these things below, and am rising up to better things than these, yet in these very better things the satisfaction of knowledge in the sight of God is enough for me. Of what use is it for me to speak what is to be laid hold of, and to give a handle to cavillers? Therefore, I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue. I keep my mouth with a bridle. Wherefore is this? Is it on account of the religious, the thoughtful, the faithful, the holy ones? God forbid! These persons hear in such a manner, as to praise what they approve; but as for what they disapprove, perhaps, among much that they praise they rather excuse than cavil at it; on account of what persons then do you take heed to your ways, and place a guard on your lips that you may not sin with your tongue? Hear: it is, While the wicked stands over against me. It is not by me that he takes up his station, but against me. Why?...Even the Lord Himself says, I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. John 16:12 And the Apostle, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. 1 Corinthians 3:1 Yet not as to persons to be despaired of, but as to those who still required to be nourished. For he goes on to say, As babes in Christ, I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto you were not able. Well, tell it unto us even now. Neither yet now are you able. 1 Corinthians 3:2 Be not therefore impatient to hear that which as yet you are not capable of; but grow that you may be able to bear it. It is thus we address the little one, who yet requires to be fed with kindly milk in the bosom of Mother Church, and to be rendered meet for the strong meat of the Lord's Table. But what can I say even of that kind to the sinner, who takes his stand against me, who either thinks or pretends himself capable of what he cannot bear; so that when I say anything unto him, and he has failed to comprehend it, he should not suppose that it was not he that had failed to comprehend, but I who had broken down. Therefore because of this sinner, who takes up his stand against me, I keep my mouth as it were with a bridle.

4. I became deaf, and was humbled, I held my peace from good Psalm 38:2. For this person, who is leaping beyond, suffers some difficulty in a certain stage to which he has already attained; and he desires to advance beyond, even from thence, to avoid this difficulty. I was afraid of committing a sin; so that I spoke not; that I imposed on myself the necessity of silence: for I had spoken thus, I will take heed to my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue. Whilst I was too much afraid of saying anything wrong, I kept silence from all that is good. For whence could I say good things, except that I heard them? It is Thou that shall make me to hear of joy and gladness. And the friend of the bridegroom stands and hears Him, and rejoices on account of the bridegroom's voice, John 3:29 not his own. That he may speak true things, he hears what he is to say. For it is he that speaks a lie, that speaks of his own. John 8:44 ...When therefore I had put a bridle, as it were, on my lips; and constrained myself to silence, because I saw that everywhere speech was dangerous, then, says he, that came to pass upon me, which I did not wish, I became deaf, and was humbled; not humbled myself, but was humbled; and I held my peace even from good. Whilst afraid of saying any evil, I began to refrain from speaking what is good: and I condemned my determination; for I was holding my peace even from what is good.

And my sorrow was stirred up again Psalm 38:2. Inasmuch as I had found in silence a kind of respite from a certain sorrow, that had been inflicted upon me by those who cavilled at my words, and found fault with me: and that sorrow that was caused by the cavillers, had ceased indeed; but when I held my peace even from good, my sorrow was stirred up again. I began to be more grieved at having refrained from saying what I ought to have said, than I had before been grieved by having said what I ought not. And my sorrow was stirred up again.

5. And while I was musing, the fire burned Psalm 38:3....I reflected on the words of my Lord, Thou wicked and slothful servant, you ought to have put My money to the exchangers, and I at My coming should receive it again with usury. Matthew 25:26-27 And that which follows may God avert from those who are His stewards! Bind him hand and foot, and let him be cast into outer darkness; Matthew 25:30 the servant, who was not a waster of his master's goods, so as to destroy them, but was slothful in laying them out to improve them. What ought they to expect, who have wasted them in luxury, if they are condemned who through slothfulness have kept them? As I was musing, the fire burned. And as he was in this state of wavering suspense, between speaking and holding his peace, between those who are prepared to cavil and those who are anxious to be instructed,...in this state of suspense, he prays for a better place, a place different from this his present stewardship, in which man is in such difficulty and in such danger, and sighing after a certain end, when he was not to be subject to these things, when the Lord is to say to the faithful dispenser, Enter thou into the joy of your Lord, Matthew 25:27 he says, Then spoke I with my tongue. In this fluctuation, in the midst of these dangers and these difficulties, because, that in consequence of the abundance of offenses the love of many is waxing cold, Matthew 24:12 although the law of the Lord inspires delight, in this fluctuation then, (I say), then spoke I with my tongue. To whom? Not to the hearer whom I would fain instruct; but to Him who hears and takes heed also, by whom I would fain be instructed myself. I spoke with my tongue to Him, from whom I inwardly hear whatever I hear that is good or true.-- What did You say?

Lord, make me to know mine end Psalm 38:4. For some things I have passed by already; and I have arrived at a certain point, and that to which I have arrived is better than that from which I have advanced to this; but yet there remains a point, which has to be left behind. For we are not to remain here, where there are trials, offenses, where we have to bear with persons who listen to us and cavil at us. Make me to know mine end; the end, from which I am still removed, not the course which is already before me.

6. The end he speaks of, is that which the Apostle fixed his eye upon, in his course; and made confession of his own infirmity, perceiving in himself a different state of things from that which he looked for elsewhere. For he says, Not that I have already attained, or am already perfect. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended. Philippians 3:12-13 And that you might not say, If the Apostle has not apprehended, have I apprehended? If the Apostle is not perfect, am I perfect?...

7. And the number of my days, what it is. I ask of the number of my days, what it is. I can speak of number without number, and understand number without number, in the same sense as years without years may be spoken of. For where there are years, there is a sort of number at all events, also. But yet, You are the same, and Your years shall not fail. Make me to know the number of my days; but to know what it is. What then? That number in which you are, think you that it is not? Assuredly, if I weigh the matter well, it has no being; if I linger behind, it has a sort of being; if I rise above it, it has none. If, shaking off the trammels of these things, I contemplate things above, if I compare things that pass away with those that endure, I see what has a true being, and what rather seems to be, than really is. Should I say that these days of mine are; and shall I rashly apply this word so full of meaning to this course of things passing away? To such a

degree have I my own self almost ceased to be, failing as I am in my weakness, that He escaped from my memory, who said, I AM HE THAT IS. Exodus 3:14 Hath then any number of days any existence? In truth it has, and it is number without end....Everything is swept on by a series of moments, fleeting by, one after the other; there is a torrent of existences ever flowing on and on; a torrent, of which He drank in the way, who has now lift up His Head. These days then have no true being; they are gone almost before they arrive; and when they have come, they cannot continue; they press upon one another, they follow the one the other, and cannot check themselves in their course. Of the past nothing is called back again; what is yet to be, is expected as something to pass away again: it is not as yet possessed, while as yet it is not arrived; it cannot be kept when once it has arrived. He asks then concerning the number of his days, which is; not that which is not: and (which confounds me by a still greater and more perplexing difficulty) at once is, and is not. We can neither say that is, which does not continue; nor that it is not, when it has come and is passing. It is that absolute IS, that true IS, that IS in the true sense of the word, that I long for; that IS; which is in that Jerusalem which is the Bride of my Lord; Revelation 21:9 where there will not be death, there will not be failing; there will be a day that passes not away, but continues: which has neither a yesterday to precede it, nor a tomorrow pressing close upon it. Revelation 21:25 This number of my days, which is, this (I say), make Thou me to know.

8. That I may know what is wanting to me. For while I am struggling here, this is wanting unto me: and so long as it is wanting unto me, I do not call myself perfect. So long as I have not received it, I say, not that I have already attained, either am already perfect; but I am pressing towards the prize of God's high calling. This let me receive as the prize of my running the race! There will be a certain resting-place, to terminate my course; and in that resting-place there will be a Country, and no pilgrimage, no dissension, no temptation. Make me then to know this number of my days, which is, that I may know what is wanting unto me; because I am not there yet; lest I should be made proud of what I already am, that I may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness. Philippians 3:9 ...

9. Behold, you have made my days old Psalm 38:5. For these days are waxing old. I long for new days that never shall wax old, that I may say, Old things have passed away; behold, things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Already new in hope; then in reality. For though, in hope and in faith, made new already, how much do we even now do after our old nature! For we are not so completely clothed upon with Christ, as not to bear about with us anything derived from Adam. Observe that Adam is waxing old within us, and Christ is being renewed in us. Though our outward man is perishing, yet is our inward man being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore, while we fix our thoughts on sin, on mortality, on time, that is hastening by, on sorrow, and toil, and labour, on stages of life following each other in succession, and continuing not, passing on insensibly from infancy even to old age; while, I say, we fix our eyes on these things, let us see here the old man, the day that is waxing old; the Song that is out of date; the Old Testament; when however we turn to the inner man, to those things that are to be renewed in place of these which are to be changed, let us find the new man, the new day, the new song, the New Testament; and that newness, let us so love, as to have no fears of its waxing old....This man, therefore, who is hasting forward to those things which are new, and reaching forward to those things which are before, says, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the number of my days, which really is, that I may know what is wanting unto me. See he still drags with him Adam; and even so he is hasting unto Christ. Behold, says he, you have made my days old. It is those days that are derived from Adam, those days, I say, that you have made old. They are waxing old day by day: and so waxing old, as to be at some day or other consumed also. And my substance is as nothing before You. Before You, O Lord, my substance is as nothing. Before You; who see this; and I too, when I see it, see it only when before You.

When before men I see it not. For what shall I say? What words shall I use to show, that which I now am is nothing in comparison of That which truly IS? But it is within that it is said; it is within that it is felt, so far as it is felt. Before You, O Lord, where Your eyes are; and not where the eyes of men are. And where Your eyes are, what is the state of things? That which I am is as nothing.

10. But, verily, every man living is altogether vanity. But, verily. For what was he saying above? Behold, I have already leaped beyond all mortal things, and despised things below, have trampled under foot the things of earth, have soared upwards to the delights of the law of the Lord, I have been afloat in the dispensation of the Lord, have yearned for that End which Itself is to know no end, have yearned for the number of my days that truly is, because the number of days like these has no real being. Behold, I am already such a one as this; I have already overleaped so much; I am longing for those things which abide. But verily, in the state in which I am here, so long as I am here, so long as I am in this world, so long as I bear mortal flesh, so long as the life of man on earth is a trial, so long as I sigh among causes of offense, as long as while I stand I am in fear lest I fall, Job 3:25 as long as both my good and my ill hangs in uncertainty, every man living is altogether vanity....

11. Albeit man walks in the Image Psalm 38:6. In what Image, save that of Him who said, Let Us make man in Our Image, after Our Likeness. Genesis 1:26 Albeit man walks in the Image. For the reason he says albeit, is, that this is some great thing. And this albeit is followed by nevertheless, that the albeit which you have already heard, should relate to what is beyond the sun; but this nevertheless, which is to follow, to what is under the sun, and that the one should relate to the Truth, the other to vanity. Albeit, then, that man walks in the Image, nevertheless he is disquieted in vain. Hear the cause of his disquieting, and see if it be not a vain one; that you may trample it under foot, that you may leap beyond it, and may dwell on high, where that vanity is not. What vanity is that? He heaps up riches, and knows not for whom he may be gathering them together. O infatuated vanity! Blessed is the man that makes the Lord his trust, and has not respected vanities, nor lying deceits. To you indeed, O covetous man, to you I seem to be out of my senses, these words appear to you to be old wives' tales. For you, a man of great judgment, and of great prudence, to be sure, are daily devising methods of acquiring money, by traffic, by agriculture, by eloquence perhaps, by making yourself learned in the law, by warfare, perhaps you even add that of usury. Like a shrewd man as you are, you leave nothing untried, whereby you may pile coin on coin; and may store it up more carefully in a place of secrecy. You plunder others; you guard against the plunderer; you are afraid lest you should yourself suffer the wrong, that you yourself do; and even what you do suffer, does not correct you....Examine your own heart, and that prudence of yours, which leads you to deride me, to think me out of my senses for saying these things: and tell me now, You are heaping up treasures; for whom are you gathering them together? I see what you would tell me; as if what you would say had not occurred to the person described here; you will say, I am keeping them for my children? This is the voice of parental affection; the excuse of injustice. I am keeping them (you say) for my children. So then you are keeping them for your children, are you? Did not Idithun then know this? Assuredly he did; but he reckoned it one of the things of the old days, that have waxed old, and therefore he despised it: because he was hastening on to the new days....

12. For He, by whom all things were made, Colossians 1:16 has built mansions for all of us: there He would have that which we have go before us; that we may not lose it on earth. When, however, you have kept them on earth, tell me for whom you are to gather them together? You have children: add one more to their number; and give something to Christ also. He is disquieted in vain.

13. And now Psalm 38:7. And now, says this Idithun,-- looking back on a certain vain show, and looking up to a certain Truth, standing midway where he has something beyond him, and something also behind him, having below him the place from which he took his spring, having above him that toward which he has stretched forth--And now, when I have over-leaped some things, when I have trampled many things under foot, when I am no longer captivated by things temporal; even now, I am not perfect, I have not yet apprehended. Philippians 3:13 For it is by hope that we are saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Romans 8:24-25 Therefore he says: And now what wait I for? Is it not for the Lord? He is my expectation, who has given me all those things, that I might despise them. He will give unto me Himself also, even He who is above all, and by whom all things were made, Colossians 1:16 and by whom I was made among all; even He, the Lord, is my Expectation! You see Idithun, brethren, you see in what way he waits for Him! Let no man therefore call himself perfect here; he deceives and imposes upon himself; he is beguiling himself, he cannot have perfection here, and what avails it that he should lose humility?...

And my substance is ever before You. Already advancing, already tending towards Him, and to some extent already beginning to be, still (he says) my substance is ever before You. Now that other substance is also before men. You have gold, silver, slaves, estates, trees, cattle, servants. These things are visible even to men. There is a certain substance that is ever before You.

14. Deliver me from all my transgressions Psalm 38:8. I have over-leaped a great deal of ground, a very great deal of ground already; but, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8 I have over-leaped a great deal: but still do I beat my breast, and say, Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:12 Thou therefore art my expectation! my End. For Christ is the end of the Law unto righteousness, unto every man that believes. Romans 10:4 From all mine offenses: not only from those, that I may not relapse into those which I have already over-leaped; but from all, without exception, of those on account of which I now beat my breast, and say, Forgive us our debts. Deliver me from all mine offenses: me being thus minded, and holding fast what the Apostle said, As many of us as be perfect, let us be thus minded. Philippians 3:15 For at the time that he said that he was not already perfect, he then immediately goes on and says, As many of us as be perfect, let us be thus minded....Are you then, O Apostle, not perfect, and are we perfect? But has it escaped you, that he did just now call himself perfect? For he does not say, As many of you as are perfect, be ye thus minded; but As many of us as be perfect, let us be thus minded; after having said a little before, Not that I have already attained; either am already perfect. In no other way then can you be perfect in this life, than by knowing that you cannot be perfect in this life. This then will be your perfection, so to have over-leaped some things, as to have still some point to which you are hastening on: so as to have something remaining, to which you will have to leap on, when everything else has been passed by. It is such faith as this that is secure; for whoever thinks that he has already attained, is exalting himself, so as to be abased hereafter. Luke 18:14 ...

15. You have made me the reproach of the foolish. You have so willed it, that I should live among those, and preach the Truth among those, who love vanity; and I cannot but be a laughing-stock to them. For we have been made a spectacle unto this world, and unto angels, and unto men: 1 Corinthians 4:9 to angels who praise, to men who censure, us; or rather to angels, some of whom praise, some of whom are censuring us: and to men also, some of whom are praising, and some censuring us....Both the one and the other are arms to us: the one on the right hand, the other on the left: arms however they are both of them; both of these kinds of arms, both those on the right hand, and those on the left; both those who

praise, and those who censure; both those who pay us honour, and those who heap dishonour upon us; with both these kinds I contend against the devil; with both of these I smite him; I defeat him with prosperity, if I be not corrupted by it; by adversity, if I am not broken in spirit by it.

16. I became dumb; and I opened not my mouth Psalm 38:9. But it was to guard against the foolish man, that I became dumb, and opened not my mouth. For to whom should I tell what is going on within me? For I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me; for He will speak peace unto His people. But There is no peace, says the Lord, to the wicked. Isaiah 48:22 I was dumb, and opened not my mouth; because it is Thou that made me. Was this the reason that you opened not your mouth, because God made you? That is strange; for did not God make your mouth, that you should speak? He that planted the ear, does He not hear? He that formed the eye, does He not see? God has given you a mouth to speak with; and do you say, I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because You made me? Or does the clause, Because You made me, belong to the verse that follows? Remove Your stroke away from me Psalm 38:10. Because it is Thou that hast made me, let it not be Your pleasure to destroy me utterly; scourge, so that I may be made better, not so that I faint; beat me, so that I may be beaten out to a greater length and breadth, not so that I may be ground to powder. By the heaviness of Your hand I fainted in corrections. That is, I fainted while You were correcting me. And what is meant by correcting me? Except what follows.

17. You with rebukes have chastened man for iniquity; You have made my life to consume away like a spider Psalm 38:11. There is much that is discerned by this Idithun; by every one who discerns as he does; who overleaps as he does. For he says, that he has fainted in God's corrections; and would fain have the stroke removed away from him, because it is He who made him. Let Him renew me, who also made me; let Him who created me, create me anew. But yet, Brethren, do we suppose that there was no cause for his fainting, so that he wishes to be renewed, to be created anew? It is for iniquity, says he, that You have chastened man. All this, my having fainted, my being weak, my crying out of the deep, all of this is because of iniquity; and in this You have not condemned, but hast chastened me. You have chastened man for sin. Hear this more plainly from another Psalm: It is good for me that You have afflicted me, that I might learn Your righteousness. I have been afflicted, and at the same time it is good for me; it is at once a punishment, and an act of favour. What has He in store for us after punishment is over, who inflicts punishment itself by way of favour? For He it is of whom it was said, I was brought low, and He made me whole: and, It is good for me that You have afflicted me, that I might learn Your righteousness. You chasten man for iniquity. And that which is written, You form my grief in teaching me, could only be said unto God by one who was leaping beyond his fellows; You form my grief in teaching me; You make, that is to say, a lesson for me out of my sorrow. It is Thou that formest that very grief itself; Thou dost not leave it unformed, but form it; and that grief, that has been inflicted by You, when formed, will be a lesson unto me, that I may be set free by You. For the word finges is used in the sense of forming, as it were moulding, my grief; not in the sense of feigning it; in the same way that fingit is applied to the artist, in the same sense that figulus is derived from fingere. You therefore have chastened man for iniquity. I see myself in afflictions; I see myself under punishment; and I see no unrighteousness in You. If I therefore am under punishment, and if there is no unrighteousness with You, it remains that You must have been chastening man for iniquity.

18. And by what means have You chastened him? Tell us, O Idithun, the manner of your chastening; tell us in what way you have been chastened. And You have made my life consume like a spider. This is the chastening! What consumes away sooner than the spider? I speak of the creature itself; though what can be more liable to consume away than the spider's webs? Observe too how liable to decay is the creature

itself. Do but set your finger lightly upon it, and it is a ruin: there is nothing at all more easily destroyed. To such a state have You brought my life, by chastening me because of iniquity. When chastening makes us weak, there is a kind of strength that would be a fault....It was by a kind of strength that man offended, so as to require to be corrected by weakness: for it was by a certain pride that he offended; so as to require to be chastened by humility. All proud persons call themselves strong men. Therefore have many come from the East and the West, and have attained to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 8:11 Wherefore was it that they so attained? Because they would not be strong. What is meant by would not be strong? They were afraid to presume of their own merits. They did not go about to establish their own righteousness, that they might submit themselves to the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3 ...Behold! You are mortal; and you bear about you a body of flesh that is corrupting away: And you shall fall like one of the princes. You shall die like men, and shall fall like the devil. What good does the remedial discipline of mortality do you? The devil is proud, as not having a mortal body, as being an angel. But as for you, who have received a mortal body, and to whom even this does no good, so as to humble you by so great weakness, you shall fall like one of the princes. This then is the first grace of God's gift, to bring us to the confession of our infirmity, that whatever good we can do, whatever ability we have, we may be that in Him; that He that glories, may glory in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:31 When I am weak, says he, then am I strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10

19. But surely every man living disquiets himself in vain. He returns to what he mentioned a little before. Although he be improving here, yet for all that, every man living disquiets himself in vain; forasmuch as he lives in a state of uncertainty. For who has any assurance even of his own goodness? He is disquieted in vain. Let him cast upon the Lord the burden of his care; let him cast upon Him whatever causes him anxiety. Let Him sustain you; let Him keep you. For on this earth what is there that is certain, except death? Consider the whole sum of all the good or the ill of this life, either those belonging to righteousness, or those belonging to unrighteousness; what is there that is certain here, except death? Have you been advancing in goodness? You know what you are today; what you will be tomorrow, you know not! Are you a sinner? You know what you are today; what you will be tomorrow, you know not! You hope for wealth; it is uncertain whether it will fall to your lot. You hope to have a wife; it is uncertain whether you will obtain one, or what sort of one you will obtain. You hope for sons: it is uncertain whether they will be born to you. Are they born? It is uncertain whether they will live: if they live, it is uncertain whether they will grow up in virtue, or whether they will fall away. Whichever way you turn, all is uncertain, death alone is certain. Are you poor? It is uncertain whether you will grow rich. Are you unlearned? It is uncertain whether you will become learned. Are you in feeble health, it is uncertain whether you will regain your strength. Are you born? It is certain that you will die: and in this certainty of death itself, the day of your death is uncertain. Amidst these uncertainties, where death alone is certain, while even of that the hour is uncertain, and while it alone is studiously guarded against, though at the same time it is in no way to be escaped, every man living disquiets himself in vain....

20. Hear my prayer, O Lord Psalm 38:12. Whereof shall I rejoice? Whereof should I groan? I rejoice on account of what is past, I groan longing for these which are not yet come. Hear my prayer, and give ear unto my cry. Hold not Your peace at my tears. For do I now no longer weep, because I have already passed by, have left behind so great things as these? Do I not weep much the more? For, He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow. Ecclesiastes 1:18 The more I long for what is not here, do I not so much the more groan for it until it comes? Do I not so much the more weep until it comes?...

21. For I am a sojourner with You. But with whom am I a sojourner? When I was with the devil, I was a sojourner; but then I had a bad host and entertainer; now, however, I am with You; but I am a sojourner still. What is meant by a sojourner? I am a sojourner in the place from which I am to remove; not in the place where I am to dwell for ever. The place where I am to abide for ever, should be rather called my home. In the place from which I am to remove I am a sojourner; but yet it is with my God that I am a sojourner, with whom I am hereafter to abide, when I have reached my home. But what home is that to which you are to remove from this estate of a sojourner? Recognise that home, of which the Apostle speaks, We have an habitation of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. 2 Corinthians 5:1 If this house is eternal in the Heavens, when we have come to it, we shall not be sojourners any more. For how should you be a sojourner in an eternal home? But here, where the Master of the house is some day to say to you, Remove, while you yourself know not when He will say it, be thou in readiness. And by longing for your eternal home, you will be keeping yourself in readiness for it. And be not angry with Him, because He gives you notice to remove, when He Himself pleases. For He made no covenant with you, nor did He bind Himself by any engagement; nor did you enter upon the tenancy of this house on a certain stipulation for a definite term: you are to quit, when it is its Master's pleasure. For therefore is it that you now dwell there free of charge. For I am a sojourner with You, and a stranger. Therefore it is there is my country: it is there is my home. I am a sojourner with You, and a stranger. Here too is understood with You. For many are strangers with the devil: but they who have already believed and are faithful, are, it is true, strangers as yet, because they have not yet come to that country and to that home: but still they are strangers with God. For so long as we are in the body, we are strangers from the Lord, and we desire, whether we are strangers, or abiding here, we may be accepted with Him. 2 Corinthians 5:9 I am a sojourner with You; and a stranger, as all my fathers were. If then I am as all my fathers were, shall I say that I will not remove, when they have removed? Am I to lodge here on other terms, than those on which they lodged here also?...

22. Grant me some remission, that I may be refreshed before I go hence Psalm 38:13. Consider well, Idithun, consider what knots those are which you would have loosed unto you, that you might be refreshed before you go hence. For you have certain fever-heats from which you would fain be refreshed, and you say, that I may be refreshed, and grant me a remission. What should He remit, or loosen unto you, save that difficulty under which, and in consequence of which, you say, Forgive us our debts. Grant me a remission before I go hence, and be no more. Set me free from my sins, before I go hence, that I may not go hence with my sins. Remit them unto me, that I may be set at rest in my conscience, that it may be disburthened of its feverish anxiety, the anxiety with which I am sorry for my sin. Grant me a remission, that I may be refreshed (before everything else), before I go hence, and be no more. For if you grant me not a remission, that I may be refreshed, I shall go and be no more. Before I go there, where if I go, I shall thenceforth be no more. Grant me a remission, that I may be refreshed. A question has suggested itself, how he will be no more....What is meant then by shall be no more, unless Idithun is alluding to what is true being, and what is not true being. For he was beholding with the mind, with which he could do so, with the mind's eye, by which he was able to behold it, that end, which he had desired to have shown unto him, saying, Lord, make me to know mine end. He was beholding the number of his days, which truly is; and he observed that all that is below, in comparison of that true being, has no true being. For those things are permanent; these are subject to change; mortal, and frail, and the eternal suffering, though full of corruption, is for this very reason not to be ended, that it may ever be being ended without end. He alluded therefore to that realm of bliss, to the happy country, to the happy home, where the Saints are partakers of eternal Life, and of Truth unchangeable; and he feared to go where that is not, where there is no true being; longing to be there, where Being in the highest sense is! It is on account of this contrast then, while

standing midway between them, he says, Grant me a remission, that I may be refreshed before I go hence and be no more. For if Thou grantest me not a remission of my sins, I shall go from You unto all eternity! And from whom shall I go to all eternity? From Him who said, I Am HE that Am: from Him who said, Say unto the children of Israel, I Am has sent me unto you. Exodus 3:14 He then who goes from Him, in the contrary direction, goes to non-existence....

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