

# Two Exhortations to Theodore After His Fall - Part 1

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of hope and the power of repentance in overcoming the desolation of a sacred soul.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 13:9, Isaiah 34:4, Isaiah 35:10, Daniel 7:9, Malachi 3:2, Malachi 4:1, Matthew 24:29, Matthew 25:34

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Judgment"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of repentance and the eternal consequences of our choices. He emphasizes the severity of exclusion from the glory of the other world as a punishment worse than hell itself. Chrysostom vividly describes the awe-inspiring scenes of the final judgment, the joy of being in the company of Christ, and the eternal blessings awaiting those who have lived a righteous life. He urges listeners to repent, turn away from sin, and strive for the incorruptible glory of the kingdom of Heaven.

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## Transcript

Oh! That my head were water, and my eyes a fountain of tears! Jeremiah 9:1 it is seasonable for me to utter these words now, yea much more than for the prophet in his time. For although I am not about to mourn over many cities, or whole nations, yet shall I mourn over a soul which is of equal value with many such nations, yea even more precious. For if one man who does the will of God is better than ten thousand transgressors, then you were formerly better than ten thousand Jews.

Wherefore no one would now blame me if I were to compose more lamentations than those which are contained in the prophet, and to utter complaints yet more vehement. For it is not the overthrow of a city which I mourn, nor the captivity of wicked men, but the desolation of a sacred soul, the destruction and effacement of a Christ-bearing temple. For would not any one who knew in the days of its glory that well-ordered mind of yours which the devil has now set on fire, groan, imitating the lamentation of the prophet; when he hears that barbarian hands have defiled the holy of holies, and have set fire to all things and burned them up, the cherubim, the ark, the mercy seat, the tables of stone, the golden pot?

For this calamity is bitterer, yea bitterer than that, in proportion as the pledges deposited in your soul were far more precious than those. This temple is holier than that; for it glistened not with gold and silver, but with the grace of the Spirit, and in place of the ark and the cherubim, it had Christ, and His Father, and the

Paraclete seated within. But now all is changed, and the temple is desolate, and bare of its former beauty and comeliness, unadorned with its divine and unspeakable adornments, destitute of all security and protection; it has neither door nor bolt, and is laid open to all manner of soul-destroying and shameful thoughts; and if the thought of arrogance or fornication, or avarice, or any more accursed than these, wish to enter in there is no one to hinder them; whereas formerly, even as the Heaven is inaccessible to all these, so also was the purity of your soul.

Now perhaps I shall seem to say what is incredible to some who now witness your desolation and overthrow; for on this account I wail and mourn, and shall not cease doing so, until I see you again established in your former lustre. For although this seems to be impossible to men, yet to God all things are possible. For it is He who raises the poor from the earth, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set him with the princes, even with the princes of his people. It is He who makes the barren woman to dwell at home, a mother rejoicing over her children.

Do not then despair of the most perfect change. For if the devil had such great power as to cast you down from that pinnacle and height of virtue into the extremity of evil doing, much more will God be able to draw you up again to your former confidence; and not only indeed to make you what you were before, but even much happier. Only be not downcast, nor fling away good hopes, nor fall into the condition of the ungodly. For it is not the multitude of sins which is wont to plunge men into despair, but impiety of soul.

Therefore Solomon did not make the unqualified statement every one who has entered into the den of the wicked, despises; but only he who is ungodly. For it is such persons only who are affected in this way when they have entered the den of the wicked. And this it is which does not suffer them to look up, and re-ascend to the position from which they fell. For this accursed thought pressing down like some yoke upon the neck of the soul, and so forcing it to stoop, hinders it from looking up to the Master.

Now it is the part of a brave and excellent man to break this yoke in pieces, to shake off the tormentor fastened upon him; and to utter the words of the prophet, As the eyes of a maiden look unto the hands of her mistress, even so our eyes look unto the Lord our God until He have mercy upon us. Have pity upon us, O Lord, have pity upon us, for we have been utterly filled with contempt. Truly divine are these precepts, and decrees of the highest form of spiritual wisdom. We have been filled, it is said, with contempt, and have undergone countless distresses; nevertheless we shall not desist from looking up to God, neither shall we cease praying to him until He has received our petition.

For this is the mark of a noble soul, not to be cast down, nor be dismayed at the multitude of the calamities which oppress it, nor to withdraw, after praying many times without success, but to persevere, until He have mercy upon us, even as the blessed David says.

2. For the reason why the devil plunges us into thoughts of despair is that he may cut off the hope which is towards God, the safe anchor, the foundation of our life, the guide of the way which leads to heaven, the salvation of perishing souls. For by hope it is said, we are saved. Romans 8:24 For this assuredly it is which, like some strong cord suspended from the heavens, supports our souls, gradually drawing towards that world on high those who cling firmly to it, and lifting them above the tempest of the evils of this life. If any one then becomes enervated, and lets go this sacred anchor, straightway he falls down, and is suffocated, having entered into the abyss of wickedness. And the Evil One knowing this, when he perceives that we are ourselves oppressed by the consciousness of evil deeds, steps in himself and lays upon us the additional burden, heavier than lead, of anxiety arising from despair; and if we accept it, it

follows of necessity that we are immediately dragged down by the weight, and having been parted from that cord, descend into the depth of misery where you yourself art now, having forsaken the commandments of the meek and lowly Master and executing all the injunctions of the cruel tyrant, and implacable enemy of our salvation; having broken in pieces the easy yoke, and cast away the light burden, and having put on the iron collar instead of these things, yea, having hung the ponderous millstone from your neck. Where then can you find a footing henceforth when you are submerging your unhappy soul, imposing on yourself this necessity of continually sinking downwards? Now the woman who had found the one coin called her neighbors to share her joy; saying, Rejoice with me; but I shall now invoke all friends, both mine and yours, for the contrary purpose, saying not Rejoice with me but Mourn with me, and take up the same strain of mourning, and utter the same cry of distress with me. For the worst possible loss has befallen me, not that some given number of talents of gold, or some large quantity of precious stones have dropped out of my hand, but that he who was more precious than all these things, who was sailing over this same sea, this great and broad sea with me, has, I know not how, slipped overboard, and fallen into the very pit of destruction.

3. Now if any should attempt to divert me from mourning, I shall reply to them in the words of the prophet, saying Let me alone, I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me. Isaiah 22:4 For the mourning with which I mourn now is not of a kind to subject me to condemnation for excess in lamentation, but the cause is one for which even Paul, or Peter, had they been here, would not have been ashamed to weep and mourn, and reject all kinds of consolation. For those who bewail that death which is common to all one might reasonably accuse of much feebleness of spirit; but when in place of a corpse a dead soul lies before us, pierced with innumerable wounds, and yet even in its death manifesting its former natural comeliness, and health, and beauty now extinguished, who can be so harsh and unsympathetic as to utter words of encouragement in place of wailing and lamentation?

For as in the other world the absence of mourning is a mark of divine wisdom, so in this world the act of mourning is a mark of the same. He who had already mounted to the sky, who was laughing to scorn the vanity of this life, who regarded bodily beauty no more than if it had been in forms of stone, who despised gold as it had been mud, and every kind of luxury as mire, even he, having been suddenly overwhelmed with the feverish longing of a preposterous passion, has ruined his health, and manly strength, and the bloom of his youth, and become a slave of pleasure.

Shall we not weep then, I pray you, for such a man and bewail him, until we have got him back again? And where do these things concern the human soul? It is not possible indeed to discover in this world the means of release from the death of the body, and yet even this does not stay the mourners from lamenting; but only in this world is it possible to bring to naught the death of the soul. For in Hades we read, who will confess you? Is it not then the height of stupidity that they who mourn the death of the body should do this so earnestly, although they know that they will not raise the dead man to life by their lamentation; but that we should not manifest anything of the kind, and this when we know that often there is hope of conducting the lost soul back to its former life?

For many both now and in the days of our forefathers, having been perverted from the right position, and fallen headlong out of the straight path, have been so completely restored as to eclipse their former deeds by the latter, and to receive the prize, and be wreathed with the garland of victory, and be proclaimed among the conquerors, and be numbered in the company of the saints. For as long as any one stands in the furnace of pleasures, even if he has countless examples of this kind before him, the thing seems to him to be impossible; but if he once gets a short start upon the way out from thence, by continually

advancing he leaves the fiercer part of the fire behind him and will see the parts which are in front of him, and before his footsteps full of dew and much refreshment; only let us not despair or grow weary of the return; for he who is so affected, even if he has acquired boundless power and zeal, has acquired it to no purpose.

For when he has once shut the door of repentance against himself, and has blocked the entrance into the race-course, how will he be able while he abides outside to accomplish any good thing, either small or great? On this account the Evil One uses all kinds of devices in order to plant in us this thought (of despair); for (if he succeeds) he will no longer have to sweat and toil in contending with us; how should he, when we are prostrate and fallen, and unwilling to resist him?

For he who has been able to slip out of this chain, will recover his own strength and will not cease struggling against the devil to his last gasp, and even if he had countless other falls, he will get up again, and will smite his enemy; but he who is in bondage to the cogitations of despair, and has unstrung his own strength, how will he be able to prevail, and to resist, having on the contrary taken to flight?

4. And speak not to me of those who have committed small sins, but suppose the case of one who is filled full of all wickedness, and let him practice everything which excludes him from the kingdom, and let us suppose that this man is not one of those who were unbelievers from the beginning, but formerly belonged to the believers, and such as were well pleasing to God, but afterwards has become a fornicator, adulterer, effeminate, a thief, a drunkard, a sodomite, a reviler, and everything else of this kind; I will not approve even of this man despairing of himself, although he may have gone on to extreme old age in the practice of this great and unspeakable wickedness. For if the wrath of God were a passion, one might well despair as being unable to quench the flame which he had kindled by so many evil doings; but since the Divine nature is passionless, even if He punishes, even if He takes vengeance, he does this not with wrath, but with tender care, and much loving-kindness; wherefore it behooves us to be of much good courage, and to trust in the power of repentance. For even those who have sinned against Him He is not wont to visit with punishment for His own sake; for no harm can traverse that divine nature; but He acts with a view to our advantage, and to prevent our perverseness becoming worse by our making a practice of despising and neglecting Him. For even as one who places himself outside the light inflicts no loss on the light, but the greatest upon himself being shut up in darkness; even so he who has become accustomed to despise that almighty power, does no injury to the power, but inflicts the greatest possible injury upon himself. And for this reason God threatens us with punishments, and often inflicts them, not as avenging Himself, but by way of attracting us to Himself. For a physician also is not distressed or vexed at the insults of those who are out of their minds, but yet does and contrives everything for the purpose of stopping those who do such unseemly acts, not looking to his own interests but to their profit; and if they manifest some small degree of self-control and sobriety he rejoices and is glad, and applies his remedies much more earnestly, not as revenging himself upon them for their former conduct, but as wishing to increase their advantage, and to bring them back to a purely sound state of health. Even so God when we fall into the very extremity of madness, says and does everything, not by way of avenging Himself on account of our former deeds; but because He wishes to release us from our disorder; and by means of right reason it is quite possible to be convinced of this.

5. Now if any one should dispute with us concerning these things we will confirm them out of the divine oracles. For who, I ask, became more depraved than the king of the Babylonians, who after having received such great experience of God's power as to make obeisance to His prophet, and command offerings and incense to be sacrificed to Him was again carried away to his former pride, and cast bound

into the furnace those who did not honour himself before God. Nevertheless this man who was so cruel and impious, and rather a beast than a human being, God invited to repentance, and granted him several opportunities of conversion, first of all the miracle which took place in the furnace, and after that the vision which the king saw but which Daniel interpreted, a vision sufficient to bend even a heart of stone; and in addition to these things after the exhortation derived from events the prophet also himself advised him, saying Therefore, O king, let my counsel please you, and redeem your sins by alms, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; it may be that long suffering will be shown to your offense.

Daniel 4:27 What do you say O wise and blessed man? After so great a fall is there again a way of return? And after so great a disease is health possible? And after so great a madness is there again a hope of soundness of mind? The king has deprived himself beforehand of all hope, first of all by having ignored Him who created him; and conducted him to this honour, although he had many evidences of His power and forethought to recount which occurred both in his own case and in the case of his forefathers; but after this again when he had received distinct tokens of God's wisdom and foreknowledge, and had seen magic, and astronomy and the theatre of the whole satanic system of jugglery overthrown, he exhibited deeds yet worse than the former.

For things which the wise magi, the Gazarenes, could not explain, but confessed that they were beyond human nature, these a captive youth having caused to be solved for him, so moved him by that miracle that he not only himself believed, but also became to the whole world a clear herald and teacher of this doctrine. Daniel ii Wherefore if even before having received such a token it was unpardonable in him to ignore God, much more so was it after that miracle, and his confession, and the teaching which was extended to others.

For if he had not honestly believed that He was the only true God he would not have shown such honour to His servant, or have laid down such laws for others. But yet after making this kind of confession, he again lapsed into idolatry, and he who once fell on his face and made obeisance to the servant of God, broke out into such a pitch of madness, as to cast into the furnace the servants of God who did not make obeisance to himself. What then? Did God visit the apostate, as he deserved to be visited?

No! He supplied him with greater tokens of His own power, drawing him back again after so great a display of arrogance to his former condition; and, what is yet more wonderful, that owing to the abundance of the miracles he might not again disbelieve what was done, the subject upon which He wrought the sign was none other than the furnace which the king himself kindled for the children whom he bound and cast therein. Even to extinguish the flame would have been a wonderful and strange thing; but the benign Deity in order to inspire him with greater fear, and increase his dismay, and undo all his hardness of heart, did what was greater and stranger than this.

For, permitting the furnace to be kindled to as high a pitch as he desired, He then exhibited his own peculiar power, not by putting down the devices of his enemies, but by frustrating them when they were set on foot. And, to prevent any one who saw them survive the flame from supposing that it was a vision, He suffered those who cast them in to be burned, thus proving that the thing seen was really fire; for otherwise it would not have devoured naphtha and tow, and fagots and such a large number of bodies; but nothing is stronger than His command; but the nature of all existing things obeys Him who brought them into being out of nothing; which was just what He manifested at that time; for the flame having received perishable bodies, held aloof from them as if they had been imperishable, and restored in safety, with the addition of much lustre, the deposit entrusted to it.

For like kings from some royal court, even so did those children come forth from the furnace, no one having the patience to look any longer at the king, but all transferring their eyes from him to the strange spectacle, and neither the diadem nor the purple robe, nor any other feature of royal pomp, attracted the multitudes of unbelievers so much as the sight of those faithful ones, who tarried long in the fire, and then came out of it as men might have done who had undergone this in a dream.

For the most fragile of all our features, I mean the hair, prevailed more mightily than adamant against the all-devouring flame. And the fact that when they were cast into the midst of the fire they suffered no harm was not the only wonder, but the further fact that they were speaking the whole time. Now all who have witnessed persons burning are aware, that if they keep their lips fast closed, they can hold out for a short time at least against the conflagration; but if any one chances to open his mouth, the soul instantly takes its flight from the body.

Nevertheless after such great miracles had taken place, and all who were present and beheld were amazed, and those who were absent had been informed of the fact by means of letters, the king who instructed others remained himself without amendment, and went back again to his former wickedness. And yet even then God did not punish him, but was still long-suffering, counselling him both by means of visions and by His prophet. But when he was not made anywise better by any of these things, then at last God inflicted punishment upon him, not by way of avenging himself on account of his former deeds, but as cutting off the occasion of future evils, and checking the advance of wickedness, and He did not inflict even this permanently, but after having chastised him for a few years, He restored him again to his former honour, without having suffered any loss from his punishment, but on the contrary having gained the greatest possible good; a firm hold upon faith in God, and repentance on account of his former misdeeds. Daniel iv

6. For such is the loving-kindness of God; He never turns his face away from a sincere repentance, but if any one has pushed on to the very extremity of wickedness, and chooses to return thence towards the path of virtue, God accepts and welcomes, and does everything so as to restore him to his former position. And He does what is yet more merciful; for even should any one not manifest complete repentance, he does not pass by one which is small and insignificant, but assigns a great reward even to this; which is evident from what Esaias the prophet says concerning the people of the Jews, speaking on this wise: On account of his sin I put him to pain for a little while, and smote him, and turned my face away from him, and he was pained, and walked sorrowfully, and then I healed him, and comforted him.

And we might cite as another witness that most ungodly king, who was given over to sin by the influence of his wife: yet when he only sorrowed, and put on sackcloth, and condemned his offenses, he so won for himself the mercy of God, as to be released from all the evils which were impending over him. For God said to Elias Do you see how Ahab is pricked in the heart before my face? I will not bring the evil upon him in his own days, because he has wept before me. And after this again, Manasses, having exceeded all in fury and tyranny, and having subverted the legal form of worship, and shut up the temple, and caused the deceit of idolatry to flourish, and having become more ungodly than all who were before him, when he afterwards repented, was ranked among the friends of God.

Now if, looking to the magnitude of his own iniquities, he had despaired of restoration and repentance, he would have missed all which he afterwards obtained: but as it was, looking to the boundlessness of God's tender mercy instead of the enormity of his transgressions, and having broken in sunder the bonds of the devil, he rose up and contended with him, and finished the good course. 2 Chronicles 33:10-19 And not

only by what was done to these men, but also by the words of the prophet does God destroy the counsels of despair, speaking on this wise: Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

Now that expression today, may be uttered at every time of life, even on the verge of old age, if you desire it: for repentance is judged not by quantity of time, but by disposition of the soul. For the Ninevites did not need many days to blot out their sin, but the short space of one day availed to efface all their iniquity: and the robber also did not take a long time to effect his entrance into Paradise, but in such a brief moment as one might occupy in uttering a single word, did he wash off all the sins which he had committed in his whole life, and received the prize bestowed by the divine approval even before the Apostles. And we also see the martyrs obtain glorious crowns for themselves in the course, not of many years, but of a few days, and often in a single day only.

7. Wherefore we have need of zeal in every direction, and much preparation of mind: and if we so order our conscience as to hate our former wickedness, and choose the contrary path with as much energy as God desires and commands, we shall not have anything less on account of the short space of time: many at least who were last have far outstripped those who were first. For to have fallen is not a grievous thing, but to remain prostrate after falling, and not to get up again; and, playing the coward and the sluggard, to conceal feebleness of moral purpose under the reasoning of despair.

To whom also the prophet spoke in perplexity saying Does he who falls not rise up, or he who turns away not turn back? Jeremiah 8:4 But if you inquire of me for instances of persons who have fallen away after having believed, all these things have been said with reference to such persons, for he who has fallen belonged formerly to those who were standing, not to those who were prostrate; for how should one in that condition fall? But other things also shall be said, partly by means of parables, partly by plainer deeds and words.

Now that sheep which had got separated from the ninety and nine, Luke 15:4-5 and then was brought back again, represents to us nothing else than the fall and return of the faithful; for it was a sheep not of some alien flock, but belonging to the same number as the rest, and was formerly pastured by the same shepherd, and it strayed on no common straying, but wandered away to the mountains and in valleys, that is to say some long journey, far distant from the right path. Did he then suffer it to stray?

By no means, but brought it back neither driving it, nor beating it, but taking it upon his shoulders. For as the best physicians bring back those who are far gone in sickness with careful treatment to a state of health, not only treating them according to the laws of the medical art, but sometimes also giving them gratification: even so God conducts to virtue those who are much depraved, not with great severity, but gently and gradually, and supporting them on every side, so that the separation may not become greater, nor the error more prolonged.

And the same truth is implied in the parable of the prodigal son as well as in this. For he also was no stranger, but a son, and a brother of the child who had been well pleasing to the father, and he plunged into no ordinary vice, but went to the very extremity, so to say, of evil, he the rich and free and well-bred son being reduced to a more miserable condition than that of household slaves, strangers, and hirelings. Nevertheless he returned again to his original condition, and had his former honour restored to him.

But if he had despaired of his life, and, dejected by what had befallen him, had remained in the foreign land, he would not have obtained what he did obtain, but would have been consumed with hunger, and so

have undergone the most pitiable death: but since he repented, and did not despair, he was restored, even after such great corruption, to the same splendour as before, and was arrayed in the most beautiful robe, and enjoyed greater honours than his brother who had not fallen.

For these many years, says he do I serve you, neither transgressed I your commandment at any time, and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but when this your son has come who has devoured your living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf. Luke 15:29-30 So great is the power of repentance.

8. Having then such great examples, let us not continue in evil, nor despair of reconciliation, but let us say also ourselves I will go to my Father, and let us draw near to God. For He Himself never turns away from us, but it is we who put ourselves far off: for I am a God we read at hand and not a God afar off. And again, when He was rebuking them by the mouth of this prophet He said Do not your sins separate between you and me? Inasmuch then as this is the cause which puts us far from God, let us remove this obnoxious barrier, which prevents any near approach being made.

But now hear how this has actually occurred in real instances. Amongst the Corinthians some man of mark committed a sin such as was not named even among the Gentiles. This man was a believer and belonged to the household of Christ; and some say that he was actually a member of the priesthood. What then? Did Paul cut him off from the communion of those who were in the way of salvation. By no means: for he himself it is who rebukes the Corinthians countless times, backwards and forwards, because they did not bring the man to a state of repentance: but, desiring to prove to us that there is no sin which cannot be healed, he said again concerning the man who had transgressed more grievously than the Gentiles: Deliver such an one to Satan for destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:5 Now this was prior to repentance: but after he had repented Sufficient, said he, for such an one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many 2 Corinthians 2:6 and he charged them by a letter to console the man again, and to welcome his repentance, so that he should not be got the better of by Satan. Moreover when the whole Galatian people fell after having believed, and wrought miracles, and endured many trials for the sake of their faith in Christ he sets them up again. For that they had done miracles he testified when he said: He therefore that supplies to you the Spirit and works miracles among you: Galatians 3:5 and that they endured many contests for the sake of the faith, he also testified when he says: Have ye suffered so many things in vain if it be indeed in vain. Galatians 3:4 Nevertheless after making so great an advance they committed sin sufficient to estrange them from Christ concerning which he declares saying: Behold, I Paul tell you, that if you be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing: and again ye who would be justified by the law are fallen away from grace: and yet even after so great a lapse he welcomes them saying my little children of whom I am in travail again until Christ be formed in you Galatians 4:19 showing that after extreme perversion it is possible for Christ to be formed again in us: for He does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be convened and live.

9. Let us then turn to Him, my beloved friend, and execute the will of God. For He created us and brought us into being, that He might make us partakers of eternal blessings, that He might offer us the kingdom of Heaven, not that He might cast us into Hell and deliver us to the fire; for this was made not for us, but for the devil: but for us the kingdom has been destined and made ready of old time. And by way of indicating both these truths He says to those on the right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: but to those on the left Depart from me, you cursed, into fire everlasting prepared (he no longer says for you but) for the devil and his angels.

Matthew 25:34 Thus hell has not been made for us but for him and his angels: but the kingdom has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world. Let us not then make ourselves unworthy of entrance into the bride-chamber: for as long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offenses: but when once we have departed to the other world, even if we display the most earnest repentance it will be of no avail, not even if we gnash our teeth, beat our breasts, and utter innumerable calls for succour, no one with the tip of his finger will apply a drop to our burning bodies, but we shall only hear those words which the rich man heard in the parable Between us and you a great gulf has been fixed.

Luke 16:26 Let us then, I beseech you, recover our senses here and let us recognize our Master as He ought to be recognized. For only when we are in Hades should we abandon the hope derived from repentance: for there only is this remedy weak and unprofitable: but while we are here even if it is applied in old age itself it exhibits much strength. Wherefore also the devil sets everything in motion in order to root in us the reasoning which comes of despair: for he knows that if we repent even a little we shall not do this without some reward.

But just as he who gives a cup of cold water has his recompense reserved for him, so also the man who has repented of the evils which he has done, even if he cannot exhibit the repentance which his offenses deserve, will have a commensurate reward. For not a single item of good, however small it may be, will be overlooked by the righteous judge. For if He makes such an exact scrutiny of our sins, as to require punishment for both our words and thoughts, much more will our good deeds, whether they be great or small, be reckoned to our credit at that day.

Wherefore, even if you are not able to return again to the most exact state of discipline, yet if you withdraw yourself in a slight degree at least from your present disorder and excess, even this will not be impossible: only set yourself to the task at once, and open the entrance into the place of contest; but as long as you tarry outside this naturally seems difficult and impracticable to you. For before making the trial even if things are easy and manageable they are wont to present an appearance of much difficulty to us: but when we are actually engaged in the trial, and making the venture the greater part of our distress is removed, and confidence taking the place of tremor and despair lessens the fear and increases the facility of operation, and makes our good hopes stronger.

For this reason also the wicked one dragged Judas out of this world lest he should make a fair beginning, and so return by means of repentance to the point from which he fell. For although it may seem a strange thing to say, I will not admit even that sin to be too great for the succour which is brought to us from repentance. Wherefore I pray and beseech you to banish all this Satanic mode of thinking from your soul, and to return to this state of salvation. For if indeed I were commanding you to ascend to your former altitude all at once, you would naturally complain of there being much difficulty in doing this: but if all which I now ask you to do is to get up and return thence in the opposite direction, why do you hesitate, and shrink, and make a retrograde movement?

Have you not seen those who have died in the midst of luxury and drunkenness, and sport and all the other folly of this life? Where are they now who used to strut through the market place with much pomp, and a crowd of attendants? Who were clothed in silk and redolent with perfumes, and kept a table for their parasites, and were in constant attendance at the theatre? What has now become of all that parade of theirs? It is all gone -- the costly splendour of their banquets, the throng of musicians, the attentions of flatterers, the loud laughter, the relaxation of spirit, the enervation of mind, the voluptuous, abandoned,

extravagant manner of life -- it has all come to an end.

Where now have all these things taken their flight? What has become of the body which enjoyed so much attention, and cleanliness. Go your way to the coffin, behold the dust, the ashes, the worms, behold the loathsomeness of the place, and groan bitterly. And would that the penalty were limited to the ashes! But now transfer your thought from the coffin and these worms to that undying worm, to the fire unquenchable, to the gnashing of teeth, to the outer darkness, to affliction and straitness, to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, who although the owner of so much wealth, and clothed in purple could not become the owner of even a drop of water; and this when he was placed in a condition of such great necessity.

The things of this world are in their nature no-wise better than dreams. For just as those who work in the mines or suffer some other kind of punishment more severe than this, when they have fallen asleep owing to their many weary toils and the extreme bitterness of their life, and in their dreams see themselves living in luxury and prosperity, are in no wise grateful to their dreams after they have awaked, even so that rich man having become rich in this present life, as it were in a dream, after his departure hence was punished with that bitter punishment.

Consider these things, and having contrasted that fire with the conflagration of desires which now possesses you, release yourself from the furnace. For he who has thoroughly quenched this furnace here, will have no experience of that in the other world: but if a man does not get the better of this furnace here, the other will lay hold of him more vehemently when he has departed hence. How long a time do you wish the enjoyment of the present life to be extended? For I do not suppose indeed that more than fifty years remain to you so as to reach extreme old age, nor indeed is even this at all assured to us: for how should they who cannot be confident about living even to the evening rely upon so many years as these?

And not only is this uncertain, but there is the uncertainty also of a change in our affairs, for often when life has been extended for a long period, the conditions of luxury have not been extended with it, but have come, and at the same time hastily departed. However, if you like, let it be granted for argument's sake, that you will live so many years, and will not sustain any reverse of fortune what is this compared with the endless ages, and those bitter deed and intolerable punishments?

For here indeed both good and evil things have an end, and that very speedily: but there, both are coextensive with immortal ages, and in their quality differ unspeakably from the things which now are.

10. For when you hear of fire, do not suppose the fire in that world to be like this: for fire in this world burns up and makes away with anything which it takes hold of; but that fire is continually burning those who have once been seized by it, and never ceases: therefore also is it called unquenchable. For those also who have sinned must put on immortality, not for honour, but to have a constant supply of material for that punishment to work upon; and how terrible this is, speech could never depict, but from the experience of little things it is possible to form some slight notion of these great ones.

For if you should ever be in a bath which has been heated more than it ought to be, think then, I pray you, on the fire of hell: or again if you are ever inflamed by some severe fever transfer your thoughts to that flame, and then you will be able clearly to discern the difference. For if a bath and a fever so afflict and distress us, what will our condition be when we have fallen into that river of fire which winds in front of the terrible judgment-seat. Then we shall gnash our teeth under the suffering of our labours and intolerable pains: but there will be no one to succour us: yea we shall groan mightily, as the flame is applied more severely to us, but we shall see no one save those who are being punished with us, and great desolation.

And how should any one describe the terrors arising to our souls from the darkness? For just as that fire has no consuming power so neither has it any power of giving light: for otherwise there would not be darkness. The dismay produced in us then by this, and the trembling and the great astonishment can be sufficiently realized in that day only. For in that world many and various kinds of torment and torrents of punishment are poured in upon the soul from every side. And if any one should ask, and how can the soul bear up against such a multitude of punishments and continue being chastised through interminable ages, let him consider what happens in this world, how many have often borne up against a long and severe disease.

And if they have died, this has happened not because the soul was consumed but because the body was exhausted, so that had the latter not broken down, the soul would not have ceased being tormented. When then we have received an incorruptible and inconsumable body there is nothing to prevent the punishment being indefinitely extended. For here indeed it is impossible that the two things should coexist. I mean severity of punishment and permanence of being, but the one contends with the other, because the nature of the body is perishable and cannot bear the concurrence of both: but when the imperishable state has supervened, there would be an end of this strife, and both these terrible things will keep their hold upon us for infinite time with much force.

Let us not then so dispose ourselves now as if the excessive power of the tortures were destructive of the soul: for even the body will not be able to experience this at that time, but will abide together with the soul, in a state of eternal punishment, and there will not be any end to look to beyond this. How much luxury then, and how much time will you weigh in the balance against this punishment and vengeance? Do you propose a period of a hundred years or twice as long? And what is this compared with the endless ages?

For what the dream of a single day is in the midst of a whole lifetime, that the enjoyment of things here is as contrasted with the state of things to come. Is there then any one who, for the sake of seeing a good dream, would elect to be perpetually punished? Who is so senseless as to have recourse to this kind of retribution? For I am not yet accusing luxury nor revealing now the bitterness which lurks in it: for the present is not the proper time for these remarks, but when you have been able to escape it.

For now, entangled as you are by this passion, you will suspect me of talking nonsense, if I were to call pleasure bitter: but when by the grace of God you have been released from the malady then you will know its topics for another season, what I will say now is just this: Be it so, that luxury is luxury, and pleasure, pleasure, and that they have nothing in them painful or disgraceful, what shall we say to the punishment which is in store for us? And what shall we do then if we have taken our pleasure now, as it were in a shadow and a figure, but undergo everlasting torment there in reality, when we might in a short space of time escape these tortures already mentioned, and enjoy the good things which are stored up for us?

For this also is the work of the loving-kindness of God, that our struggles are not protracted to a great length, but that after struggling for a brief, and tiny twinkling of an eye (for such is present life compared with the other) we receive crowns of victory for endless ages. And it will be no small affliction to the souls of those who are being punished at that time, to reflect, that when they had it in their power in the few days of this life to make all good, they neglected their opportunity and surrendered themselves to everlasting evil.

And lest we should suffer this let us rouse ourselves while it is the accepted time, while it is the day of salvation, 2 Corinthians 6:2 while the power of repentance is great. For not only the evils already

mentioned, but others also far worse than these await us if we are indolent. These indeed, and some bitterer than these have their place in hell: but the loss of the good things involves so much pain, so much affliction and straitness, that even if no other kind of punishment were appointed for those who sin here, it would of itself be sufficient to vex us more bitterly than the torments in hell, and to confound our souls.

11. For consider I pray the condition of the other life, so far as it is possible to consider it; for no words will suffice for an adequate description: but from the things which are told us, as if by means of certain riddles, let us try and get some indistinct vision of it. Pain and sorrow and sighing, we read have fled away. Isaiah 35:10 What then could be more blessed than this life? It is not possible there to fear poverty and disease: it is not possible to see any one injuring, or being injured, provoking, or being provoked, or angry, or envious, or burning with any outrageous lust, or anxious concerning the supply of the necessaries of life, or bemoaning himself over the loss of some dignity and power: for all the tempest of passion in us is quelled and brought to nought, and all will be in a condition of peace, and gladness and joy, all things serene and tranquil, all will be daylight and brightness, and light, not this present light, but one excelling this in splendour as much as this excels the brightness of a lamp.

For things are not concealed in that world by night, or by a gathering of clouds: bodies there are not set on fire and burned: for there is neither night nor evening there, nor cold nor heat, nor any other variation of seasons: but the condition is of a different kind, such as they only will know who have been deemed worthy of it; there is no old age there, nor any of the evils of old age, but all things relating to decay are utterly removed, and incorruptible glory reigns in every part.

But greater than all these things is the perpetual enjoyment of intercourse with Christ in the company of angels, and archangels, and the higher powers. Behold now the sky, and pass through it in thought to the region beyond the sky, and consider the transfiguration to take place in the whole creation; for it will not continue to be such as it is now, but will be far more brilliant and beautiful, and just as gold glistens more brightly than lead, so will the future constitution of the universe be better than the present: even as the blessed Paul says Because the creation also itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Romans 8:21 For now indeed, seeing that it partakes of corruption, it is subject to many things such as bodies of this kind naturally experience: but then, having divested itself of all these things, we shall see it display its beauty in an incorruptible form: for inasmuch as it is to receive incorruptible bodies, it will in future be itself also transfigured into the nobler condition. Nowhere in that world will there be sedition and strife: for great is the concord of the band of saints, all being ever in harmony with one another.

It is not possible there to fear the devil, and the plots of demons, or the threatenings of hell, or death, either that death which now is, or the other death which is far worse than this, but every terror of this kind will have been done away. And just as some royal child, who has been brought up in mean guise, and subject to fear and threats, lest he should deteriorate by indulgence and become unworthy of his paternal inheritance, as soon as he has attained the royal dignity, immediately exchanges all his former raiment for the purple robe, and the diadem and the crowd of body-guards, and assumes his state with much confidence, having cast out of his soul thoughts of humility and subjection, and having taken others in their place; even so will it happen then to all the saints.

And to prove that these words are no empty vaunt let us journey in thought to the mountain where Christ was transfigured: let us behold him shining as He shone there; and yet even then He did not display to us all the splendour of the world to come. For that the vision was accommodated to human eyes, and not an

exact manifestation of the reality is plain from the very words of the Evangelist. For what says he? He did shine as the Sun. Matthew 17:2 But the glory of incorruptible bodies does not emit the same kind of light as this body which is corruptible, nor is it of a kind to be tolerable to mortal eyes, but needs incorruptible and immortal eyes to contemplate it. But at that time on the mountain He disclosed to them as much as it was possible for them to see without injuring the sight of the beholders; and even so they could not endure it but fell upon their faces. Tell me, if any one led you into some bright place, where all were sitting arrayed in vestures of gold, and in the midst of the multitude pointed out one other to you who alone had garments wrought with precious stones, and a crown upon his head, and then promised to place you in the ranks of this people, would you not do everything to obtain this promise? Open then even now in imagination your eyes, and look on that assembly, composed not of men such as we are, but of those who are of more value than gold and precious stones, and the beams of the sun, and all visible radiance, and not consisting of men only but of beings of much more dignity than men, -- angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers. For as concerning the king it is not even possible to say what he is like: so completely do his beauty, his grace, his splendour, his glory, his grandeur and magnificence elude speech and thought. Shall we then, I ask, deprive ourselves of such great blessings, in order to avoid suffering for a brief period? For if we had to endure countless deaths every day, or even hell itself, for the sake of seeing Christ coming in His glory, and being enrolled in the company of the saints, ought we not to undergo all those things? Hear what the blessed Peter says; it is good for us to be here. Matthew 17:4 But if he, when he beheld some dim image of the things to come, immediately cast away all other things out of his soul on account of the pleasure produced in it by that vision; what would any one say when the actual reality of the things is presented, when the palace is thrown open and it is permitted to gaze upon the King Himself, no longer darkly, or by means of a mirror, 1 Corinthians 13:12 but face to face; no longer by means of faith, but by sight?

12. The majority it is true of those who are not very sensibly minded propose to be content with escaping hell; but I say that a far more severe punishment than hell is exclusion from the glory of the other world, and I think that one who has failed to reach it ought not to sorrow so much over the miseries of hell, as over his rejection from heaven, for this alone is more dreadful than all other things in respect of punishment. But frequently now when we see a king, attended by a large bodyguard, enter the palace, we count those happy who are near him, and have a share in his speech and mind, and partake of all the rest of his glory; and even if we have countless blessings, we have no perception of any of them, and deem ourselves miserable when we look at the glory of those who are round about him, although we know that such splendour is slippery and insecure, both on account of wars, and plots, and envy, and because apart from these things it is not in itself worthy of any consideration.

But where the king of all is concerned, he who holds not a portion of the earth but the whole circuit of it, or rather who comprehends it all in the hollow of his hand, and measures the Heavens with a span, who upholds all things by the word of His power, by whom all the nations are counted as nought, and as a drop of spittle -- in the case of such a king I say shall we not reckon it the most extreme punishment to miss being enrolled in that company which is round about him, but be content if we merely escape hell?

And what could be more pitiable than this condition of soul? For this king does not come to judge the earth, drawn by a pair of white mules, nor riding in a golden chariot, nor arrayed in a purple robe and diadem. How then does He come? Hear the prophets crying aloud and saying as much as it is possible to tell to men: for one says God shall come openly, even our God and shall not keep silence: a fire shall be kindled before Him, and a mighty tempest shall be round about Him: He shall call the Heaven from above

and the earth that He may judge His people.

But Esaias depicts the actual punishment impending over us speaking thus: Behold the day of the Lord comes, inexorable, with wrath and anger; to lay the whole world desolate, and to destroy sinners out of it. For the stars of Heaven, and Orion, and the whole system of the heaven shall not give their light, and the sun shall be darkened in its going down, and the moon shall not give her light; and I will ordain evils against the whole world, and visit their sins upon the ungodly, and I will destroy the insolence of the lawless, and humble the insolence of the proud, and they who are left shall be more precious than unsmelted gold, and a man shall be more precious than the sapphire stone.

For the heaven shall be disturbed and the earth shall be shaken from its foundations by reason of the fury of the wrath of the Lord of Sabaoth, in the day when His wrath shall come upon us. Isaiah 13:9, 13 And again windows he says shall be opened from the Heaven, and the foundations of the earth shall be shaken: the earth shall be mightily confounded, the earth shall be bent low, it shall be perplexed with great perplexity, the earth shall stagger grievously like the drunkard and the reveller; the earth shall shake as a hut, it shall fall and not be able to rise up again: for iniquity has waxed mighty therein.

And God shall set His hand upon the host of the Heaven in the height in that day, and upon the kingdoms of the earth, and He shall gather together the congregation thereof into a prison, and shall shut them up in a stronghold. And Malachi speaking concordantly with these said Behold the Lord almighty comes, and who shall abide the day of His coming or who shall stand when He appears? For He comes like a refiner's fire, and like fullers soap: and He shall sit refining and purifying as it were silver, and as it were gold.

Malachi 3:2-3 And again, Behold, he says, the day of the Lord comes, burning like an oven, and it shall consume them, and all the aliens, and all who work iniquity shall be stubble, and the day which is coming shall set fire to them says the Lord almighty; and there shall be left neither root nor branch. Malachi 4:1 And the man greatly beloved says I beheld until thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days was seated, and his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head was pure as wool: His throne was a flame of fire, and the wheels thereof burning fire: a stream of fire wound its way in front of Him.

Thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The judgment was set and the books were opened. Then after a little space I beheld, he says, in a vision of the night and behold with the clouds of Heaven, one came like the Son of Man, and reached unto the Ancient of Days, and was brought near before Him, and to Him was given rule, and honor, and the kingdom, and all the people, tribes and tongues serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom shall not be destroyed.

As for me Daniel, my spirit shuddered within me, and the visions of my head troubled me. Then all the gates of the heavenly vaults are opened, or rather the heaven itself is taken away out of the midst for the heaven, we read shall be rolled up like a scroll, Isaiah 34:4 wrapped up in the middle like the skin and covering of some tent so as to be transformed into some better shape. Then all things are full of amazement and horror and trembling: then even the angels themselves are holden by much fear, and not angels only but also archangels and thrones, and dominions, and principalities and authorities.

For the powers we read of the heavens shall be shaken, because their fellow-servants are required to give an account of their life in this world. Matthew 24:29 For if when a single city is being judged before rulers in this world, all men shudder, even those who are outside the danger, when the whole world is arraigned before such a judge as this who needs no witnesses, or proofs, but independently of all these things

brings forward deeds and words and thoughts, and exhibits them all as in some picture both to those who have committed the sins and to those who are ignorant of them, how is it not natural that every power should be confounded and shake?

For if there were no river of fire winding by, nor any terrible angels standing by the side of the throne, but men were merely summoned some to be praised and admired, others to be dismissed with ignominy that they might not see the glory of God, (For let the ungodly we read be taken away that he may not see the glory of the Lord ) and if this were the only punishment would not the loss of such blessings sting the souls of those who were deprived of them more bitterly than all hell itself?

For how great an evil this is cannot possibly be represented now in words; but then we shall know it clearly in the actual reality. But now I pray add the punishment also to the scene, and imagine men not only covered with shame, and veiling their heads, and bending them low, but also being dragged along the road to the fire, and haled away to the instruments of torture and delivered over to the cruel powers, and suffering these things just at the time when all they who have practised what is good, and wrought deeds worthy of eternal life, are being crowned, and proclaimed conquerors, and presented before the royal throne.

13. Now these are things which will happen in that day: but the things which will follow, after these, what language can describe to us -- the pleasure, the profit, the joy of being in the company of Christ? For when the soul has returned to the proper condition of nobility, and is able henceforth with much boldness to behold its Master it is impossible to say what great pleasure it derives therefrom, what great gain, rejoicing not only in the good things actually in hand, but in the persuasion that these things will never come to an end.

All that gladness then cannot be described in words, nor grasped by the understanding: but in a dim kind of way, as one indicates great things by means of small ones, I will endeavour to make it manifest. For let us scrutinize those who enjoy the good things of the world in this present life, I mean wealth and power, and glory, how, exulting with delight, they reckon themselves as no longer being upon the earth, and this although the things which they are enjoying are acknowledged not to be really good, and do not abide with them, but take to flight more quickly than a dream: and even if they should even last for a little time, their favour is displayed within the limits of this present life, and cannot accompany us further.

Now if these things uplift those who possess them to such a pitch of joy, what do you suppose is the condition of those souls which are invited to enjoy the countless blessings in Heaven which are always securely fixed and stable? And not only this, but also in their quantity and quality they excel present things to such an extent as never entered even the heart of man. For at the present time like an infant in the womb, even so do we dwell in this world confined in a narrow space, and unable to behold the splendour and the freedom of the world to come: but when the time of travail arrives and the present life is delivered at the day of judgment of all men whom it has contained, those who have been miscarried go from darkness into darkness, and from affliction into more grievous affliction: but those which are perfectly formed and have preserved the marks of the royal image will be presented to the king, and will take upon themselves that service which angels and archangels minister to the God of all.

I pray you then, O friend, do not finally efface these marks, but speedily restore them, and stamp them more perfectly on your soul. For corporeal beauty indeed God has confined within the limits of nature, but grace of soul is released from the constraint and bondage arising from that cause inasmuch as it is far

superior to any bodily symmetry: and it depends entirely upon ourselves and the grace of God. For our Master, being merciful has in this special way honoured our race, that He has entrusted to the necessity of nature the inferior things which contribute nothing much to our advantage, and in their issue are matters of indifference, but of the things which are really noble He has caused us to be ourselves the artificers.

For if He had placed corporeal beauty also under our control we should have been subjected to excessive anxiety, and should have wasted all our time upon things which are of no profit, and should have grievously neglected our soul.

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