

THE WORLD ON FIRE

NO. 1125

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 3, 1873,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”
2 Peter 3:10, 11.

MEN have frequently inferred liberty to sin from the apparent absence of God from the world. Because the Lord, in His infinite long-suffering, has suffered transgression to go for awhile unpunished, therefore they have wickedly said, “How does God know? The Almighty does not regard us. He will neither interfere to punish men nor to reward them, whether they break or keep His Commandments.” When for a long time no great changes have occurred in the world, no remarkable judgments, no visitations of famine, pestilence, or war, men are very apt to grow carnally secure and to take license to sin from the merciful respite which ought to have led them to gratitude, and through gratitude to obedience. At certain periods it has seemed to the Most High to be imperatively necessary to send great calamities upon mankind lest pride, oppression and profanity should cause society utterly to rot.

The fall of dynasties, the overthrow of empires, devastating wars and dire famines have been necessities of God's moral government, bits in men's mouths, bridles for their arrogance, checks to their licentiousness. The Lord is slow to smite the wicked, for His tender mercy is great and He delights not in the sufferings of men. And therefore He keeps His arrows in His quiver and hangs up His bow. But, alas, men take advantage of His love to grow grossly sinful and to blaspheme His name! Against this spirit the Apostle is arguing in this chapter. The profanely secure had said, “Since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were; where, then, is the evidence of God's existence? The world goes on like a clock, needing no hand to move its wheels or guide its action. There is no God,” they say, “to interfere, and we may live as we like.”

“No,” says the Apostle, “but God has interfered.” And though he might have quoted a thousand lesser instances which I have already hinted at, he preferred to forego them for the present, and to put his finger upon the great event of the flood, and say, “Here, at least, God did interfere.” He could no longer bear the transgressions of mankind and therefore He pulled up the sluices of the great deep and opened the floodgates of Heaven. He bade the angry floods leap forth from their lairs and they swallowed up the earth right speedily. Thus it is plain that all things have not continued in one course—there have been interpositions of Divine Justice. The Apostle then tells the scoffer that there will be another interposition before long. But instead of water, fire shall be the instrument of destruction.

God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds to powder. Justice loiters to commune with Mercy, but it speedily makes up for its lingering. Long is the blow withheld, but when it falls it cuts to the soul. God's wrath is long in kindling, but in the end it shall burn as an oven. We shall speak this morning upon the general conflagration foretold in our text. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

Then, secondly, we shall discourse upon the practical inferences which the Apostle draws from it—“What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”

I. Let us turn our thoughts to THE LAST GENERAL CONFLAGRATION. Information as to the future in Scripture is generally very indistinct in arrangement and though many attempts have been made to form a consistent scheme of prophecy, not one has been even moderately successful. There are, in the Word of God, many clear testimonies as to distinct events in the future, but these cannot easily be arranged in order so as to harmonize with other events.

Neither will the most accurate observer, as I believe, ever make a consistent series of them, so as to map them down. They are perfectly consistent and their order is Divine—but we shall need the actual fulfillment to make the plan clear.

So intricate is the architecture of future history that only the Architect Himself knows where this stone and that and the other are ordained to stand. It is not for us to fling any one of the stones away, or censure it as ill-fashioned. We are but children and our little plans of house-building, like children with their toy bricks, are very simple and elementary, indeed. But God's architecture is of a high class and we cannot, therefore, conjecture where this event will come in, or where that marvel will find its place. But we may rest quite assured that each one will follow in an orderly manner upon the other and, instead of puzzling our brains over projects of interpretation, we may be quite satisfied to take each of the facts separately as we find them, believingly expect them and, above all, deduce from them their legitimate practical conclusions.

The right way of knowing anything is to know how to act in consequence of it. And in *spiritual* things a man knows nothing until he lives what he knows. If you and I know the Truths with regard to the future, each one as we find them in Scripture, and then act according to the inferences fairly to be drawn from them, we shall be wiser men than if we became inventors of elaborate schemes. In this Epistle of Peter there is one Truth of God very plainly taught, namely, that this present world is to be consumed by fire. We learn, also, that this conflagration will take place in connection with the Judgment, for, "the heavens and the earth which now are, are kept in store, unto fire, against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

The former destruction of the world by water was in consequence of sin and was a declaration of God's wrath against it. It did not happen as an accident, or occur without design. Man sinned, was warned and sinned again, until God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. The amalgamation of the people of God with the world was the crowning offense of all, for, "the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose." Thus were Church and State set up and the Church and the world were blended till the Lord's Spirit was grieved and would no longer strive with man. Floods of sin called for floods of destruction. So will it be with the last fire. It will not happen as an inevitable result of physical causes, but because God intends to purge this material world from all traces of *sin*.

It has been defiled and whenever He makes it into a new Heaven and a new earth, He will cleanse it as by fire. Under the Levitical dispensation the cleansing of vessels which had been defiled was effected by passing them through the fire, as a type of the intense energy needed to remove sin and the Lord's abhorrence of it. Even thus shall this earth dissolve with fervent heat and thus the Lord shall proclaim to the whole universe that He hates even the *garment* spotted by the flesh. When a house was defiled with leprosy it was destroyed and so must this earth be, for the plague of sin has polluted it. We gather, also, from our text that this fire will burn up all the works existing upon the earth—everything which man has constructed shall perish. We have heard architects speak of building for eternity! Aha! Aha! They have built but for an hour and their noblest fabrics will disappear like children's castles of sand upon the sea beach.

Down will go the vast cathedrals and the towering palaces in one common crash! Whole cities will flame upon earth's funeral pyre, while forests and melting mountains blend their smoke. The pride of power, the pomp of wealth, the beauty of art, the cunning of skill—all, all, must go! The sea of flame will overwhelm and devour everything without exception. The massive masonry and rock-like foundations of our vast engineering works shall run like wax in the tremendous heat! So fierce will be the flames that everything capable of being burned will be utterly consumed and the elements, or the solid portions of the earth shall be liquefied by the intense heat—rocks, metals, everything shall dissolve—and the atmosphere, itself, shall burn with fury when its oxygen shall unite with the hydrogen and other gases liberated by the intense heat.

Chemists tell us that the great noise which Peter speaks of would certainly accompany such a combustion. The whole world shall become one molten mass, again, and this terrestrial firmament shall cease to be. "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment." God has impressed Nature with His seal today, but He will melt it down, and then, as we hope, pour out the molten matter and stamp upon it a yet more lovely image than it has ever borne before. We may here, note, that the prophecy that the earth will thus be consumed with fervent heat is readily to be believed, not only because God says it, but because there are evidently the means at hand for the accomplishment of

the prophecy. Pliny was known to say that it was a miracle that the world escaped burning for a single day and I do not wonder at the remark, considering the character of the district in which he spent much of his time.

In visiting the country around Naples, the same thought constantly occurred to me. Yonder is Vesuvius ready at any moment to vomit fire and continually sending up clouds of smoke. Ascend the mountainside, clambering over ashes and masses of lava—all beneath you is glowing—thrust in your staff and it is charred. Then go across to the Solfatara on the other side of Naples. Stand at the vent of that ancient volcano and listen to the terrible rumblings which attend the rush of steam and sulfur. Then stamp your foot or dash a stone upon the ground and hear how the earth resounds—it is evident that you are standing over a vast cavern! Look around you and remark how the earth steams with sulfuric exhalations. Observe, also, how the earth in some places has risen and fallen, again and again.

Down there at Puteoli in the Temple of Serapis there are pillars which have sunk below the tide mark and then have risen above it several times, as you can see for yourself by the mark of the sea worms. In a single night vast hills have risen in one place like bubbles upon the baker's dough, while in other localities there have been equally sudden subsiding of the surface. Yet this volcanic region around Naples is but one of the many vent holes of the great fires which are in the bowels of the earth—300 or more burning mountains have already vomited flame. According to the belief of many geologists, the whole center of the earth is a mass of molten matter and we live upon a thin crust which has cooled down, and is probably not so much as one hundred miles thick.

When the miner descends no further than 45 feet he finds that the heat has increased one degree of Fahrenheit, so that it is easy to see how small a distance down the solid shell extends. There is no known rock which would not be entirely liquefied by the heat produced at 60 miles depth. The probabilities are that the whole internal mass is in a liquid and, perhaps, in a gaseous state. It is well known that the earth is flattened at the poles, just to the amount it would be by rotation on its axis had it been a liquid mass, and therefore there is every probability that it was once liquid and is cooling down. Everyone who is at all acquainted with the condition of the globe knows that it only needs the Lord's will and the fiery sea, of which yonder volcanoes are but the safety valves, would burst forth and flood the earth with flame. Or, if God so willed it, the thin crust which divides the ocean of water from the ocean of fire might soon be broken through and the result would be disruption and destruction.

Astronomers tell us that within the last 200 or 300 years some 13 fixed stars have disappeared and, according to their belief, they have been burned up. They have watched them blaze up in clear flames in quarters of the heavens where no star had ever been seen before and then they have disappeared forever, being, as it is wisely conjectured, burnt out. If such things happen in other worlds, is there anything improbable in the belief that the like will occur to us? But if there were no internal sea of fire and no instance of other worlds being consumed by fire, who can guess the power which lurks in electricity and other subtle forces? Faraday said that there was enough latent electricity in a single drop of water for an ordinary flash of lightning. What reserves of destructive force there must be in and around the globe!

God's dreadful armies lie in ambush everywhere. What if I say God's bodyguard is sleeping in His guard chamber? He has but to speak the word and the servants of His Omnipotence will rise, terrible in their destructive power. He spoke to His ancients of the sea and they marched in gigantic might till they had covered the mountain tops and laid the race of men dead at their feet! Let Him speak to His ministers of flaming fire and they will at once subdue the globe by quenchless burnings. Earth is as a pile of wood and the torch-bearers stand ready to kindle it at any moment! There has always been a cry of fire among men and the cry grows louder every century, for the burning is near. But if there were no such arrangements as these, we should still be bound to believe what God has said—and it is His solemn declaration that the day shall come when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear as a thief in the night. And the heavens, that is the atmosphere, shall pass away with a great noise, while the elements, or rudimentary substances of the globe, shall melt with fervent heat. The earth, also, and the works that are therein, or thereon, shall be burned up.

We gather from our text that this will happen at a time when it will be very little expected. The dread hour will come as a thief in the night. It was not expected in Noah's day that the world would be destroyed. That was not for any lack of warning, but because men could not conceive it possible. They argued against Noah that all things had continued as they were from the days of their first father, Adam, and that so they would be. They thought Noah a fool for going up and down the world proclaiming an absurdity and frightening people with a bugbear. Thus speak they now, when God's Word declares that the whole world will be destroyed by fire. They reject the testimony and continue in sin, in

worldliness and in rebellion against God! And so will they do up to the very moment when the shrill sound of the trumpet shall convince them that the Lord has come and that the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men has arrived.

No preaching will, of itself, avail to make ungodly men expect the coming of Christ, however clear, bold, consistent and long continued it may be. The world is mad upon its idols. Its ears are too dull to hear the Truth. Charm we never so wisely, this adder will never listen to warning. Men's eyes are blinded. They will not see and so they hurry on to their doom. And then, "when they shall say, 'Peace and safety,' sudden destruction shall come upon them, as pain upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." It is well for us to remind you, again, that the long time which has intervened since Peter foretold the destruction of the world by fire is to be understood in the sense of Infinite Mercy. We are not to interpret it according to the wicked suggestion of unbelief, for the Lord will surely be revealed in flaming fire. We are to read it with the eyes of faith and gratitude.

God waits that men may be saved. He tarries that, in this long time of waiting, hundreds everywhere may believe in Jesus and enter into eternal life. And while we may consistently desire to hasten the coming of the Lord, we may be equally content that Mercy's day should be lengthened. While I have prayed, "Come quickly," I have often felt inclined to contradict myself and cry, "Yet tarry for awhile, good Lord! Let Mercy's day be lengthened! Let the heathen yet receive the Savior." We may desire the coming of the Lord, but we ought, also, to be in sympathy with the tarrying of the Most High, to which His loving heart inclines Him. Although we read of the world being burned with fire, we are not told that it will be annihilated. We know that nothing has been annihilated yet. No fire has yet been able to destroy a single atom of matter. There is upon the face of the earth, at this moment, just as much matter as when God created it—fire changes form, but does not obliterate substance.

This world, so far as we know, will not cease to be. It will pass through the purifying flame and then it may be the soft and gentle breath of Almighty Love will blow upon it and cool it rapidly—and the Divine hand will shape it as it cools into a Paradise more fair than that which bloomed upon the banks of Hiddekel. We believe from various things which are hinted at in Scripture, though we would not dogmatize, that this world will be refitted and renovated. And in that sense we expect new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. Luther used to say that the world is now in its working clothes and that, by-and-by, it will be arrayed in its Easter garments of joy. One likes to think that the trail of the old serpent will not always remain upon the globe and it is a cheering thought that where sin has abounded God's Glory should yet more abound.

I cannot believe in that world being annihilated upon which Jesus was born and lived and died. Surely an earth with a Calvary upon it must last on! Will not the blood of Jesus immortalize it? It has groaned and travailed with mankind, being made subject to vanity for our sake. Surely it is to have its joyful redemption and keep its Sabbaths after the fire has burned out every trace of sin and sorrow. Whether or not it shall be so matters little to the saints, for we shall be with Christ where He is, and behold His Glory! And, as to the future—"Forever with the Lord" may well satisfy us!

II. The Apostle has drawn PRACTICAL INFERENCES. "Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" What does he mean by this? What connection can there be between the burning of the globe and holy conversation and godliness? The first connection is this. Our position as Christians is, at this moment, like that of Noah before the destruction of the world by water. What manner of person ought Noah to have been? He said to himself, "This fair and beautiful world in which I dwell will soon be covered with the ooze and slime of a tremendous deluge."

He looked upon his fellow men and he thought and said of them, "Except these men fly to the ark and are sheltered with me, they will, every one of them, be drowned." He saw them marrying and given in marriage, feasting and trifling at the very hour when the flood came and he felt that if they would believe as he did they would find something other to do than to be engrossed in carnal pleasures. When he saw them heaping up money he would almost laugh yet weep to think that they should hoard up gold to be submerged with themselves in the general flood. When men added to their estates acre after acre, I have no doubt the Patriarch said to himself, "The flood will sweep away all these landmarks and as it carries away the owner so will it destroy all vestige of his barn and his farm and his fields."

I should suppose such a man, daily expecting the rain to descend and the flood to burst up from beneath, would lead a life very free from worldliness, a life the very reverse of the rest of his fellow men. They would reckon him to be very

eccentric. They would be unable to understand him. And, indeed, his conduct would be such that no one *could* understand it except upon the theory that he believed in the destruction of all around him. Now our life ought to be like that of Noah. Look around on the beauties of Nature and when you enjoy them, say to yourself, “All these are to be dissolved and to melt with fervent heat.” Look up into the clear blue and think that yonder sky, itself, shall shrivel like a scroll and be rolled up like a garment that has seen its better days and must be put aside.

Look on your fellow men, your own children and your household, and those you pass in the street or meet with in transacting business, and say, “Alas, alas, unless these men, women and children fly to Jesus and are saved in Him, they will be destroyed with the earth on which they dwell, for the day of the Lord is surely coming and judgment awaits the ungodly.” This should make us act in a spirit the opposite of those who now say, “Go, let us buy and sell and get gain. Let us heap together treasure. Let us live for this world. Let us eat and drink, and be merry.” They are of the earth, therefore is their conduct and conversation earthy. They build here, on this quicksand, and after their own sort they find a pleasure therein—but you whose eyes have been opened know better—and you, therefore build upon the Rock.

You understand that the things which are seen are but a dream, that the things unseen are, alone, substantial. Therefore set loose by all things below the moon and clutch as with the grasp of a dying man the things immortal and eternal which your God has revealed to you! Such conduct will separate you from your fellow men, as there is down deep in your heart an objective different from theirs. And as you set a different estimate on all things, your conduct will be wide apart from theirs. Being swayed by different motives, your life will diverge from theirs and they will misunderstand you. And while trying to find motives for you, as they do not know the true motive, they will ascribe ill motives to you.

But so it must be. You must come out from among them, be separate and touch not the unclean thing. And the fact that all these things are to be dissolved should make it easy for you to do so, no, *natural* for you to do so, as it must have made it both easy and natural to the Patriarch Noah. I will, however, not dwell longer upon that thought, but remark further that the nearness of the Lord as suggested by the fact that the world is to be destroyed, according to His Word, suggests holiness. The sinner finds a reason for sin when he says, “God is not here. Everything goes on in the ordinary way. God does not care what men do.” “No,” says the Apostle, “He is not away, He is here, holding back the fire. He is reserving this world a little while, but by-and-by He will let the fires loose and the world will be destroyed. He is not far off. He is even at the door.”

If I give the Greek rendering, it should be, “All these things are dissolving.” They are even giving to dissolve. They are in the *process* of dissolution. God is close upon us, can you not hear His footsteps? Christ is returning. He is on His journey now. Faith hears the tramp of His steeds as they hurry on the chariot of His vengeance. “Behold, I come quickly,” is the word which rings over the mountains of division. The King is coming! He is coming to His Throne and to His judgment. Now a man does not go up to a king’s door and there talk treason! And men do not sit in a king’s audience chamber, when they expect Him to enter any moment, and there speak ill of him! The King is on His way and almost here. You are at His door. He is at yours. What manner of people ought you to be? How can you sin against One who is so close at hand? How can you rebel against One whose eyes of fire behold and whose hand of vengeance is uplifted to smite the sinner?

The words of the text are very forcible. The Apostle says, “What manner of persons ought you to be? “Remember he was talking to *saints* and he teaches us that even saints ought to be more saintly than they are. He is not saying to the *ungodly*, “What manner of persons ought *you* to be”! He might have so spoken, but with how much greater force does he address those who profess to be loved with the everlasting love of God, to have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus, to be affianced unto Christ in eternal wedlock, to be members of His body, parts of Himself? “What manner of persons ought you to be?” He implies that they are *not* what they should be and I am afraid there is no man of God but what will grant the truth of the implication in his own case. We have not attained to what we ought to be and I may say to the best child of God here this morning, “Dear Brother and Sister, there is a lot beyond.”

Yes, Brethren, and the text is so broad in its expression that it plainly teaches the limitless nature of Christian holiness. “What manner of persons ought you to be?” As if he could not tell what sort of persons they ought to be. As if holiness had in it no Ultima Thule, no pillars of Hercules beyond which the adventurous mariner might not go. There is a lot beyond for us all, if we are to be holy as God is, His is infinite holiness and where can a limit be imagined? He does not say, “You ought to be kind, just, loving, prayerful, truthful,” and the like. But as if he held up his hands in wonder

and could not express the obligations of the Christian, he cries, “Because these things are all passing away, what manner of persons ought you to be?”

And then he goes on to specify two branches of holy life. “In all holy conversation,” that is to say, all holy behavior towards men. “And godliness,” that is, all pious dealing towards God. True religion, by no means, depreciates the duties of the second table of the Law. Some professors think very little of the common virtues of daily life, but they err greatly, and will find themselves in an evil plight at last. My Brother, if the grace you possess does not make you honest, God have mercy on you and take such grace away from you. If you have a kind of grace which does not keep you chaste and make your behavior decent. If you have a sort of grace which lets you cheat and lie. Which allows you to take undue advantage in trade—away with such grace! It is the grace of the devil and not the Divine Grace of God, and may you be saved from it! If our religion does not make us moral, it is a millstone about our necks to destroy us! If you have not reached morality, how can you dare to talk about *holiness*, which is a far higher and loftier thing? The best morality in the world will not prove a man to be a Christian! But if a man has not morality, it proves that he is not a child of God.

And then as to God—the duties of the first table are not to be neglected. We are to fulfill all manner of godliness. God is to be worshipped by us devoutly and we are to take pains to worship Him in His own way. How many people have a kind of—what shall I call it?—a happy-go-lucky religion? Whatever their mother or their father was, that are they. A great many of you go to certain places of worship, not because you have ever enquired whether the denomination you belong to is right or not, but because you have drifted that way and there you stick! How few take the Bible and search for themselves. Yet no man has obeyed God aright who has not done so. If I could not honestly say, “I am a member of this denomination because I have weighed the Truths of God which are held by my Brethren and I believe them to be according to God’s Book,” I could not feel that I had done right towards the Most High.

The idea that there are good people in all denominations is well enough, but a great many have perverted it into an excuse for never caring what God’s Truths or ordinances are. Rest assured that he who neglects one of the least of Christ’s ordinances and teaches men so, the same shall be least in the kingdom of Heaven. Every Truth of God is important. Trifling with conscience is the sin of the present age. Men have even come to occupy pulpits in churches when they do not believe the fundamental doctrines of the Church. We have heard them even claim a right to retain their pulpits after they have denied the doctrines of the denomination to which they belong. From any power to believe in such a conscience may God deliver every one of us! Be right even in little things! Be precise—you serve a precise God. Charity towards others is one thing, laxity for yourselves is quite another thing.

Believe that your brother is conscientious though he may be in error, but as for yourself use your conscience and practice your judgment in the careful study of the Truth of God, and then whatever your conclusions, carry them out at all hazards. Though you should lose everything thereby—you will lose nothing in the long run! If you count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, you have made a wise choice and will rejoice in having made it! Oh, when I think that all I see about me is to be consumed, there remains nothing worth living for but to glorify God! If we were to live here forever and this world were all, we might, perhaps, think it some gain to sin. But if we are soon to pass away and all around us is to dissolve in smoke, there is nothing to do, if we are wise, but to do our duty in the station in which God has placed us, both towards God and man, resting in the precious blood of Christ for our pardon, and in His righteousness for our acceptance.

For these things will endure when we are dead, according as it is written, “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yes, thus says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them.” The evanescence of all things around us suggests our looking away to eternal things. I saw yesterday with much solemnity of mind the spot where the Bishop of Winchester met with sudden death. A cross is cut in the turf to mark the place. The spot is in the midst of the most lovely scenery conceivable. I have often walked hard by, full of delight at the fair prospect. It is a spot too fair to be darkened by so dark a cloud. Death seems hardly congruous with the beauty which everywhere charms the eye. I could only imagine if anyone knew that he should die just at that moment, what would be his conversation? Riding over the downs what would be the conversation of a man of God who expected to die in the valley below?

Such ought to be our constant conversation. We should live always as if we might die in a moment. Mr. Wesley once said, “Now, if I knew I should die tomorrow morning, I would do exactly what I have planned to do. I should take the class meeting at such an hour, preach at such an hour, and be up at such a time in the morning to pray.” That good man’s life was spent in prospect of sudden departure and it was therefore active and holy. Is ours the same? The motive for holiness becomes stronger,

still, if the thought is not merely that I shall die, but that all these things around me shall be dissolved. That breezy down, that towering hill, yonder lofty trees and this overhanging cliff, these rich meadows, the ripening harvest, all, all will, in a moment, be on a blaze!

Am I ready to be caught away to be with my Lord in the air? Or shall I be left to perish amidst the conflagration? How ought I to live! How ought I to stand, as it were, on tiptoe, ready when He shall call me, to be away up into the Glory, far off from this perishing world! It makes us look upon all these things in a different light and upon eternal things with a more fixed eye—and a more stern resolve to live unto God. Observe, if sin, even on the inanimate world, needs such a purging by fire as this—if the fact that sin committed here makes it necessary that God should burn it all up—what a horrid thing sin must be! O to be purged from it! Refining fire, go through my heart! Spirit of the living God, sweep with all Your mighty burnings through and through my body, soul and spirit till You have purged me of every tendency to sin.

This ought to be the prayer of the Christian. If all these things will have to be purged, what manner of persons ought we to be in daily purging ourselves by a holy jealousy and a sacred revenge from every unclean wish, every false word and everything that would be inconsistent with that life of God which is in our nature? And if, again, God is so angry with sin that when He comes to judge it He will come with flaming fire and if the terrors of God against the wicked will be utterly overwhelming, what gratitude ought you and I feel for pardoned sin? What joy for safety in the Lord Jesus Christ?

And then, again, as the result of that, what a detestation of the sin which made it necessary that Christ should die to save us from the wrath to come! Oh, Believer, you will never have to say—“Rocks hide me, mountains fall on me.” Believer in Jesus, you will never have to escape from those tongues of flame which will lick up the sea! You will not be alarmed at the melting mountains—you will be safe—not a hair of your head shall be singed! Oh, what do you owe to Sovereign Grace for such an escape as this? Bless the Lord Jesus! Fall down at His dear feet and adore Him! And then, rising up, say, “What can I do to glorify You? O Lord, keep me clear of the sin which would have destroyed me and help me to live such a life as becomes one who has been saved from the wrath to come.” Is there not much force in the Apostle’s inference? I only trust we may all feel it.

Once more, he meant us to feel that the suddenness of all this ought to keep us on our watchtower. This conflagration will come with no signs to herald it which the ungodly will observe. You who are on the watch will observe them. You will see the tokens of His coming. You will rejoice to go forth to meet Him. But to the ungodly His coming will be as much unawares as was His first Advent which happened in the night, when all the world was wrapped in sleep. Men will still be buying and selling, and getting gain, and thinking of nothing so little as of the last Advent. And then the Lord will appear. Christian, let not that day come upon you as a thief! Stand ever watching. Live as if you said to yourself, “Today everything I have may be burned up. Today all my lands may run like lava. All my gold may melt like molten lead. Today I, myself, may have done with this world and the world may be consumed.” Live such a life as that.

“Why,” says one, “then we should be pilgrims and strangers.” That is just how you should be! “Then,” says another, “we should not be minding much about the stock in the bank and laying in for the future.” Just so. That is how the Master would have you live—He would have you duly prudent and provident, but not covetous or anxious. If you feel that all these things are to be dissolved, you will then do all things as in the Presence of God. You will wish to use everything you have as not abusing it and as reckoning that it will perish in the using. God grant you, Brothers and Sisters, so to live.

I would to God that all here present were prepared for the future. You remember John Bunyan makes Christian sit in the City of Destruction at ease until he hears from one called Evangelist, that the city was to be burned up. And then he cries, “Alas, alas, woe is me, and I shall be destroyed in it.” That thought set him running and nothing could stop him. His wife bade him come back, but he said, “The city is to be destroyed, and I must be away.” His children clung about his garments to hold him, but he said, “No, I must run to the City of Safety, for this city is to be burned up.” Man, it will all go! If all you love is here below, it will all go! Your gold and silver will all go!

Will you not have Christ? Will you not have a Savior? For if you will not, there remains for you only a fearful looking for judgment and of fiery indignation! Tempt not the anger of God! Yield to His mercy now! Believe in His dear Son. I pray that you may this day be saved and God be glorified in your salvation. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Peter 3.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.