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THE

## IMPORTANCE OF SALVATION.

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BY REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

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IN comparison with salvation, all other subjects are trivial. To waste time in the pursuit of wealth, or in the chase of sensual pleasure, while our salvation is not secure, is more than folly—it is madness. What, would you agree to dwell in the dark dungeon of despair for ever and ever, for the sake of living a few years upon earth in a sumptuous house? Would you consent to endure the sting of the never-dying worm, and the torment of unquenchable fire, to all eternity, for the sake of gratifying your appetites and senses for a moment? No man would deliberately make such a determination; yet such is the language which many speak by their conduct. The world is pursued daily, at the risk of salvation.

The resolution of attending to the concerns of the soul *hereafter*, answers no other purpose than to lull the conscience asleep. Where have we known a person, by virtue of these flattering resolutions, change his conduct? The next day is like the one that preceded it. Every succeeding year passes by, like those that went before. No convenient time for repentance and reformation ever comes. Youth soon runs out in the giddy circle of pleasure and amusement. Middle age is completely occupied with cares and business; and old age, if it ever arrives, finds the heart hardened, the habits fixed, and the conscience seared. Death overtakes the unfortunate wretch. He dies as he lived, either goaded by guilt, or benumbed with stupidity. He dies, and sinks to hell, where there are no amusements

to entertain, no business to engage, no error to becloud the mind. To fall into the hands of the living God, as an avenging Judge, is dreadful beyond conception : to be eternally miserable, overwhelms the thoughts ; and we turn away from it with instinctive horror.

Now, reader, if hell be intolerably dreadful, salvation is important. Can *you reconcile yourself* to such sufferings ? Can you dwell with everlasting burnings ? Only try the torment of fire for a moment, for longer you cannot voluntarily endure it, and you will soon be convinced that the pains of hell are not to be supported with patience, if they are comparable to fire ; but they are worse. Remorse and despair are worse than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, heated seven times. No flames are equal to the raging of unrepented sin ; no strokes of any enemy like the taunts of infernal spirits. If you had to endure this punishment only for a limited time, the hope of deliverance might help you to bear up under the dreadful weight of sorrow ; but although many support themselves by such a hope here, the miserable in hell have no such alleviation ! The darkness which surrounds them is thick and horrible. No ray of light ever penetrates it. No gleam of hope ever mitigates the raging anguish of the lost soul. Consider also, that although your sins may not be openly flagrant ; yet, as you have heard the Gospel and enjoyed many calls and warnings, and also many strivings of the Spirit, these will exceedingly aggravate your misery, and make your hell hotter than that of the miserable inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The more comfortable you are in your worldly circumstances, the more miserable will your condition be. To be cast out from among affectionate friends, to keep company with monsters of depravity : from fine houses, pleasant gardens, fertile farms, and downy beds, to be cast into *a lake of fire !* from well-furnished tables, and generous wines and cordials, to be eternally famished with burning thirst, and no gratification ever obtained ; no, not so much as a drop of water to cool the tongue. This is hell indeed ! Suppose you were

doomed to suffer the torment which a sinner in hell must eternally endure, for one hour, in this world, would not the prospect of this doleful hour mar all your pleasures? In the midst of mirth, would it not make your heart sad; and would it not be ever present in your thoughts? You would be unable to compose yourself to sleep, or to betake yourself to your necessary business. You would consider yourself as an unfortunate wretch; and would perhaps regret that you had ever been born. Your friends would sympathize with you, and all around would look upon you with compassion.

But if, from an hour, the term of your punishment should be enlarged to a year, what would you do; how would you feel? Suppose you could endure the pain of a fiery furnace for a year without dying or losing your sensibility, and you knew that this was your certain doom, could you be at ease; could you contain yourself? Would you not disregard all pursuits and enjoyments which the world could propose; and would you not take up a continual lamentation over your unhappy case? Would you not call upon all to pity you, as the most miserable wretch that ever was born? And would you consider the wealth of a prince, the honor of a conqueror, or the pleasure of an epicure, any compensation for such dreadful sufferings? Would you not despise all these things, and say, "The more I enjoy these earthly delights, and the more I forget the misery which is coming upon me, the more intolerable will be my anguish when it arrives?" Should we be thus affected with an hour's, or year's continuation of such sufferings as must be endured in hell, and shall we be indifferent to these same torments when their duration will be WITHOUT END? O God, what kind of infatuated beings are we? Surely, man, of all creatures, is the most stupid in those things which relate to his salvation. ETERNAL PUNISHMENT! ETERNAL FIRE! EVER-LASTING DESTRUCTION! What awful sounds are these! Who can fully understand their import?

I extend my views forward to *the day of judgment*; but this great day, instead of bringing these sufferings to an end,

is the date of their beginning in all their terror. What shall be endured before, is nothing to what comes after. The fire will then be kindled around both soul and body, which will never cease to burn. The sufferings of the soul in a separate state, will be like the anticipations of a criminal, who is conscious of guilt, whilst confined in a prison, before the day of trial. They shall then *go away into everlasting punishment*. Only put yourself, for a moment, in the place of one of those who are commanded by the Judge to depart, under the vengeance of an everlasting curse. The feeling mind recoils from such suppositions, with such repulsive violence, that it is almost impossible to induce men to fix their thoughts steadily on such subjects. But try, for once, the experiment. Overcome your natural reluctance, and imagine yourself to be in the company that will be driven off, by the command of the Judge, from the awful tribunal, into outer darkness, *where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth*. May I venture to suggest a few reflections which would probably arise in your mind, in such a situation?

“Well, the scene is ended—I now know, I feel the misery of my situation! Hope, my last comforter, is eternally fled. Despair has full possession; all is lost, eternally lost! All that I now have is a miserable, accursed existence! O that I could sink into nothing, and thus escape the wrath of my avenging enemy! But I wish in vain; exist I must. Hell is my portion! I already feel its overwhelming horrors! I am tortured with agonies, and rent with pangs which no words can describe. All passions assist in increasing my misery. I see others glorious and happy, but the sight greatly enhances my woe. I feel my envy and malice raging against them, and against their God and Saviour; but my wrath is impotent; it recoils upon myself, and inflicts new wounds on my tormented soul. Was this the price at which I purchased the world and its pleasures? O wretch and fool that I was! We are commanded to go away. Ah, whither can we go? Is there any secure, or even obscure retreat for us? No, no. We sink in flames.

We go into *everlasting misery!* We go to be companions of devils! We plunge into the dark abyss, never to rise again! And these bodies, our old companions in sin, must be also tormented. They are made strong and incorruptible, to bear their part in the unquenchable fire!"

But we cannot describe the anguish and despair of a lost sinner. The mere possibility of falling into such a state of indescribable anguish ought to fill us with trembling; and so it would, were not our minds blinded by the god of this world. Now, reader, do you feel no concern about your salvation; or have you some method of easing your mind under these thoughts? I beseech you to consider well what the nature of that resource is.

The first thought which occurs, by way of relief to your mind, is, perhaps, that *these things cannot be so*; that such torments will never be inflicted by a good and merciful God. This ground appears to many very plausible, and they rest upon it with the greater confidence, because it has the appearance of honoring the character of God, at the same time that it promises safety to themselves. But before you lean on this prop, look well, I beseech you, to its foundation. Consider, that before you can derive any rational comfort from this consideration, you must be able to demonstrate that the tremendous denunciations of God's word against sinners are false; or that he will forfeit his veracity, and never execute his own threatenings. Wretched, indeed, is that subterfuge, the safety of which depends on proving the God of truth a liar. No, sinner! God will not deny himself for the sake of your ease; he will not suffer his word to fall to the ground, to enable you to realize your vain and impious hopes. "He will by no means clear the guilty. Surely, O God, thou wilt slay the wicked. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, this shall be the portion of their cup."

If you have imbibed the pernicious heresy of those false teachers who tell you that there is no future punishment for

transgressors, even if they should die in the commission of the most atrocious crimes; if you believe these men who dare contradict the plain declarations of God's word, your delusion will afford you only a temporary relief. It will be like shutting your eyes, when borne by an irresistible torrent towards a frightful cataract. Your own conscience, if it has not lost all sensibility, will intimate to you, too plainly to be misunderstood, that there is punishment reserved for the wicked in the world to come. Lean not, then, I beseech you, on this broken reed, which will not only fail to support you, but will pierce you to the heart.

But it is more probable that you seek relief from the apprehension of the wrath to come, in a *vague hope of the mercy of God*, of which so much is said in Scripture. The mercy of God is, indeed, a sure refuge for sinners; but it is never extended to the impenitent, who refuse to forsake their evil ways. If you will repent and believe the Gospel, then will the Lord most graciously and freely forgive all your sins; but if you depend on the mercy of God to save you from hell, without being saved from sin, you trust to that which has no existence. God will not show mercy to obstinate rebels. The whole tenor of his word assures us of the certainty of this truth.

But perhaps you expect and intend to *turn from your sinful ways hereafter*, and thus bring yourself within the influence of God's pardoning mercy. Well, if you should become a true penitent, and humble believer in Jesus, you will be saved: but before you cry peace to yourself from this expectation, I beg you to consider that your continuance on earth is uncertain. What is your life? It is a vapor. We have ocular demonstration that death comes upon many very unexpectedly; and although they had entertained the same hope of future repentance, we have awful reason to fear that it was never realized. They died as they lived, and went to meet their Judge with the guilt of all their heinous sins upon their heads. And very often men are taken suddenly away, and have not a moment

allowed for that last hope of the sinner, a death-bed repentance. And in other cases, reason is bewildered, and the feelings are stupefied; so that the person who lived carelessly, has no bands in his death. And when it is otherwise, and alarm seizes the guilty person, no help or comfort can be obtained, and he dies in fearful horror and despair.

But if you should live for scores of years, you will never see the day when there will not be as many obstructions to your turning to God as there are now; and as many inducements to cleave to the present world. Do you see men, commonly, forsaking the courses to which they have long been habituated? Or do you observe that disinclination to piety becomes less, by increase of years? You may live to be old and gray-headed, and yet remain unconverted, and go down to hell with a double curse on your head. There is no greater, nor more dangerous delusion among men, than the procrastination of their conversion. While thousands lose their souls in consequence of it, not one ever puts his resolution into practice, unless some other influence than his own former purposes operates on him. Reader, awake! Eternity is just before you; heaven or hell will soon be your abode. For the first, you know, you are not prepared. If you were admitted to that holy place, the exercises and employments of the inhabitants would be no way in accordance with the state of your heart. You love not the service and worship of God here, and death will make no reformation in the sinner's heart. Then, you must be excluded from heaven, by the necessity of the case, unless you acquire new principles and a new taste. "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*"

What you intend to do, do quickly, for *the time is short*. While you are halting between two opinions, the door of mercy may be shut for ever. Seize the present moment; break off your sins by repentance; renounce all confidence in your own good deeds or righteousness, and trust alone in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. "Whosoever believeth in



him shall not be ashamed." Cry mightily to him for mercy, and for the Holy Spirit to sanctify you and aid you in every duty.

Search the Scriptures daily. Attend on the preaching of the word. Make one among the company who surround the throne of grace in social prayer. Avoid ensnaring company and dissipating amusements. Forsake all known sin; and see that you perform those external duties which have hitherto been neglected. If you have wronged or injured any, make restitution, or give satisfaction, as far as is in your power. Abandon all quarrels and strife with your neighbors, and promote piety and good order in your own house, by reading the Scriptures, and calling upon God; and requiring all within your gates to observe with reverence the Lord's day.

But never think that external duties, or attendance on means and ordinances, however exact, is an evidence that your soul is saved. Never rest satisfied with your spiritual state, until you have evidence in a heart-felt sense of the burden of your sins, that you have in truth *fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel*. The Lord Jesus Christ, apprehended and received by faith, is the only safe sanctuary for a soul pursued by the demands of a broken law.

O man, flee to this dear refuge, before the storm, which is black and lowering, overtake you. "LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE." "NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION." See, the door of reconciliation is open. Jesus invites you to come to him for rest, and promises that he will not cast you out; yea, complains that you will not come unto him, that you may have life. Others are entering in at the strait gate—why do you delay? Instead of losing by the change, even in this world, you will gain a hundred-fold. *Godliness with contentment is great gain.*