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SERMON CCCXXXIX.

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RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINE OF THE THOUGHTS.

“Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—2 Cor. x: 5.

Pious people often are wanting in control over their religious affections. They seem not to have the power of fixing them long on any object. Hence their religious feelings seldom rise into an elevated devotional frame.

Now if the nature of the difficulty in this case is not well understood, mistaken remedies may be applied, and disappointment be the consequence. The chief difficulty generally is in a want of due control over the *thoughts*; for the thoughts and affections are most intimately connected. The heart is able to love only such objects as it sees; and it can look at them only through the medium of the understanding. That is, feeling is awakened, modified, influenced by means of thought. Had the pious man more power over his thoughts, he would have more power over his affections. Could he fix the one on the proper objects of holy love, he would succeed better in fixing the other on the same objects. These objects he loves no more ardently and steadily, because he has them so little in sight. The inquiry suggested by the text, is therefore of great importance, viz:

*How we may succeed in bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*; in other words, how we may acquire a religious control over our thoughts.

And the inquiry is in the highest degree practical, because every one is more or less a thinking being, and has thoughts for which he is accountable, and which it is infinitely important for him to regulate by christian principles.

I propose to illustrate,

I. The nature of this discipline or government of the thoughts.

II. Its importance; and,

III. The manner of acquiring it.

## SERMON CCCXL.

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### A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

“And all the days of Methusaleh were nine hundred sixty and nine years : and he died.” Genesis v: 26.

NINE HUNDRED YEARS! It almost covers the duration of the antediluvian world. We speak of the age of Bacon, the age of Plato, the age of Burke, characterizing ages by the great men that have marked them. Of Methusaleh there is nothing of greatness recorded, besides the begetting of sons and daughters, some of whom were pious, but the roll of nine whole centuries for his mortal life. You may perhaps call him a great man as being the son of Enoch; and inasmuch as he fills up the whole space between the first and the last inhabitant of the antediluvian world, we may fitly speak of that world's duration as the age of Methusaleh. When Noah began to build the ark Methusaleh was living and was 849 years old; Lamech also was living and was 662 years old. Doubtless they were both pious, and probably some of their descendants also. Some of Methusaleh's brethren and sisters likewise, whom Enoch bore after him, and educated as such a man must have educated his children, were in all probability the subjects of divine grace. Noah was not, therefore, entirely alone, not entirely destitute of christian sympathy and succor. His own father Lamech was alive until five years before the deluge, and his grandfather, Methusaleh, was living up to the very year that the deluge came. Nay, if he died a natural death, it could not have been more than a month, if so much, before the deluge. We do not know, indeed, that he did not perish in the deluge, but if not, then the funeral of Methusaleh must have been the very last thing that Noah attended. We go upon the supposition that Lamech and Methusaleh were both pious; and we do it principally because they had such pious sons. The thought is too dreadful for a moment to suppose that Methusaleh, that old, old man, remained among the ungodly scoffers of his grandson. We cling to the belief that he was a child of God, that he supported Noah by his counsels and his example; perhaps he assisted with his own hands in building

the ark; perhaps he lived to the very day when Noah entered into the ark, and blessed him, and took a solemn farewell of him, and then awaited, in holy resignation, his own end, giving himself up to God, even amidst the descending torrents, and seeking, to the last moment, to persuade others to repentance. I conceive that this is not at all improbable;—that he, and what few others of God's people may have been living to the last, would solemnly gather together in prayer and supplication, on the day when the foundations of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, awaiting in that posture, the consummation of the will of Jehovah. And if so, they doubtless prayed for Noah and his family, and thus the breath of prayer from the antediluvian world, even on the eve of its destruction, may have mingled with Noah's own supplications to bear the ark in safety over the waste of waters.

It was a solemn night for Noah and the world. It was a solemn night for the aged Methusaleh and other believing relatives; but how much more so for the unbelieving and ungodly; their last night before the storm of vengeance.

In dwelling upon this interesting text, I shall first take a simple survey of the age and manners of the antediluvian world; and second, I shall draw some important lessons from such a survey.

I. As to the age and manners of the antediluvian world. The youth of the world was the season of man's greatest age; perhaps also it was the season of man's greatest wickedness. Three things we know with certainty, amidst all the darkness that hangs over the life of the antediluvians; they lived to a great age, they rose to a great height of depravity, and except Enoch, they all died. The assurance of a very long life would be to any man either a great temptation to sin, or a great means of holiness; most likely the former. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.* The character written for our instruction of the race of man in the world before the flood, *that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*, corresponds unerringly with the inspired declaration by the mouth of Solomon. The sentence of death deferred for so many ages, was almost unknown, and came at length to be utterly discredited; they thought not of it; nay, so hardy and secure had long centuries of vigorous existence made them, that, as long as Adam lived, they might have dreamed of indefinite centuries yet to come, the limit of man's life, in all probability, not having been made the subject of precise revelation. For more than seven antediluvian generations no death is recorded in the scriptures. There may have been mortal diseases, and even the crime of Cain may have been not unfrequently repeated, for *the earth was filled with violence.*

But, for aught we know, the funeral of Adam was the first which his posterity attended for nearly a thousand years. There was, indeed, another funeral; the murdered Abel was buried; but the parents were the only mourners. With his own hands Adam dug the grave of his

youngest, best beloved son ; with his own hands he buried him ; and Eve planted the sacred inclosure with flowers, and watered it with her tears. The simplest things were then matters of revelation ; death and its consequences were so little known, that the angels would have to show Adam what he must do with the bleeding corpse of Abel ; the language of Abraham, *bury my dead out of my sight*, could only spring from experience ; for if death left the bodies of those we love as uncorrupted and as beautiful as life, we should wish to keep them by us, though inanimate and lifeless. The ancient Egyptians had a strange custom of doing this, as it was. They sometimes kept the dead bodies of their friends standing upright in their houses, embalmed so carefully, that every feature remained as it was in life ; they kept them, Diodorus tells us, "in costly habitations, for the pleasure of beholding them for ever."

When Methusaleh was born, Adam was six hundred and eighty seven years of age. When Adam died Methusaleh was two hundred and eighty two. The oldest man lived in the society of the first man 282 years. Methusaleh was the grandfather of Noah ; and when Noah was born, Methusaleh was 369 years old. Methusaleh and Noah were therefore contemporaries during the long space of 600 years. Noah had never seen Adam ; the father of the second race of mortals had never seen the father of the first. But Lamech, Noah's father, and the first born of Methusaleh, had lived while Adam was yet alive, 95 years ; and he, as well as Methusaleh, could describe to Noah, from personal knowledge and recollection, the teachings and the venerable grandeur of the Father of them all.

We cannot tell how many of the posterity of Seth were men of piety ; we may hope that at least this was the case with the first born, whose names are recorded in the scriptures. The generations so recorded are the first born of the first born : in that line came Enoch and Noah, the first translated without seeing death, and the second preserved amidst the universal deluge to be the second father of the world. Enoch was the father of Methusaleh, and was translated when his first born son was 300 years of age. Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God ; and the period for Methusaleh's education was sufficiently long for both himself and his own son Lamech to be moulded by the piety of their translated progenitor. The character of Enoch is sufficient pledge that the education of Methusaleh would be that of a child of God. Perhaps it was to make up for the taking away of Enoch from the world so early that the son of Enoch was permitted to live in the world so long. As the father was translated that he should not see death, the son was left to a longer life than that of any other mortal ; and the example of the father's piety was probably transmitted and continued in the piety of the son.

As to that numerous progeny of the antediluvians undistinguished by name in the scriptures, but embraced in the general appellation of sons and daughters (as it is stated of each successive patriarch that he lived after he had begotten his first born, some hundreds of years, and

begat sons and daughters) it seems probable that but too many of them from the earliest period had corrupted their way before God. They would naturally leave the parental roof, and go forth to make progress in the world, somewhat as in after time Esau did, while the first born remained in the house of his ancestors. Removed from the care and example of pious parents, they gradually became more and more degenerate, and, together with the posterity of Cain, filled the world with such wickedness, that it repented God that he had made man upon the earth. Perhaps by the communion of the sons of God with the daughters of men is represented the mixture of the pious race of Adam through Seth with the lovely race of females springing from the loins of Cain. Be this as it may, the world increased in depravity as it grew in population and in age; and when the Patriarch Noah commenced building the ark, it is probable there were few men living on the earth who feared God. His father Lamech, at the age of 777 years, was taken from the evil to come; and for a while Noah was left, perhaps, the only pious parent, and almost the only pious individual, in the world. Some of his sons at that period may have been converted in answer to the prayers of Noah, but we have reason to believe that the race of the people of God was limited to a very few persons; and except these, Noah had none to commune with, and had to rest for consolation and support, amidst the scoffs of an ungodly age, solely upon God.

The death of Adam took place just eighty-seven years before Noah's birth. Of the death of Eve no mention is made in the Scriptures. How long she remained on earth with our great father, by what angelic messengers or revelations from the Almighty they were both prepared for their departure, or what blessings and prophetic warnings they left with their posterity on leaving the world, we know not. Of all possible circumstances we have but one, and that the universal record of man, *he died*. Nor is the name of any woman of the posterity of Adam, from Seth to Noah, handed down to us, nor any glimpse of information as to the part which the wives of the antediluvian patriarchs might have played in the education of their children. Who was the mother of Methusaleh? and what the lessons taught him in his infancy? Was the help-meet of Enoch chosen for her piety? and did she walk, like him, with God? are questions which curiosity, pausing upon the life of the world before the flood, would be glad to have answered. But not a ray of information comes down to us, nor is even a loop-hole left for conjecture, save that the character of men like Enoch and Noah is sufficient ground for the supposition, that so far as their minds were left to be moulded by their mothers, the example set before them, and the influence exerted upon them, must have been holy.

And now, could we call up the shades of Methusaleh, and converse with the oldest man, what would be the lessons of his experience? Would they be greatly different from ours? Would the thoughts and feelings, the events and circumstances, of men whose life was of a

thousand years' duration, be very diverse from those of ordinary mortals, whose span is only threescore years and ten, or would one little limit of existence vary from theirs only as a miniature does from a portrait, where the features, the passions, the expression, are the same, and only the dimensions of the canvass, the size of the painting are different? The temptations of Methusaleh must have been like ours; his christian conflict was the same; his faith was the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. But were his trials as heavy as ours, or has the primeval curse gathered a strength in the progress of six thousand years not known in the world's infancy? What indeed was affliction, disease, old age, with the antediluvians? Were their trials spread over a larger portion of existence than ours? Did colds and fevers rack the body with pain for a time proportionally longer? Ere the close of life did the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they were few, and were those that looked out of the windows darkened? Was their infancy extended into our childhood, and their childhood into our manhood, so that their youth was our age, and the child died being an hundred years old? Was the flight of time with them as rapid as with us, and notwithstanding their long life, did they leave it with as strong unwillingness, with as deep regret, with as many plans incomplete, and purposes betrayed, as we do ours? The unerring truth of Scripture has made one thing certain; that, as they grew in years they grew in wickedness, despising the goodness of God, and filling up life with impiety, till all flesh had corrupted their way, and become fitted only for the destruction of the deluge. Their passions were the same as ours, and they gave them their full swing of indulgence; and in the long sweep of nine hundred years they must have gathered a prodigious power, and raged and burned like a volcano. It is surprising that with so much wickedness they should have lived so long. It is not surprising, under such circumstances, that when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, so few, if any, should have listened to the warnings of the preacher of righteousness. It might have been expected, at least, it might have been hoped, of those in early life; but what *could* have been expected of men who had lived eight or nine hundred years in the unrestrained gratification of every evil propensity? *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?* Then may those who have been accustomed to do evil learn to do well. There was no alternative but their destruction.

II. We may reduce the lessons to be gathered from this survey under several specifications.

1. We may learn an appalling lesson as to the agglomerative tendencies of human depravity. In order to people the earth speedily, it was necessary that the life of the antediluvians should be extended over a period more than twelve times the limit of human existence afterwards assigned in the Scriptures. It was also requisite for a full and fair experiment of human nature, and afforded scope and oppor-

tunity for the most rapid growth in knowledge and goodness. The example and instructions of Adam were continued nearly a thousand years; and with him for their teacher and priest, together with all the successive acquisitions of his numerous posterity accumulating contemporaneously for their use, had they been disposed to goodness, they might well nigh have retrieved the ruins of the fall, redeeming earth from its primeval curse by the holiness of its inhabitants. But the experiment resulted so miserably, that the destruction of the whole race proved necessary. Had it been much longer continued, the wickedness of human beings, in combination with the increase of their numbers, would have made earth well nigh a hell in all respects but its penal inflictions. Instead of growing better, they grew worse with every score of years added to their existence, and filled society with crime, which made it a fellowship of guilt through all its ramifications.

Now here is a lesson in human experience, which one would think might silence forever the advocates of the theory of human perfectibility. The race of antediluvians were blessed with all possible capacities and facilities for indefinite improvement in knowledge and happiness. Their age was not a mere hand's breadth, but the full deep circle of nine centuries. They were not called to die when they had just begun to live, nor to quit their investigations forever, when they had just learned how to study. Men's minds might have been formed and disciplined in the revolution of nine hundred years under an accumulation of influences and circumstances in the highest degree powerful and favorable. What would we give, what might not we become, if only a seventy years' experience could be carried into seventy years more of life, health, and vigor! What might not be done, if a Newton, instead of leaving merely the results of his own labors in books, could have continued his investigations personally, with the full powers of his mind, seventy years longer, and seventy more after that, having all the while gathered in through the whole period, along with his own thoughts, the thoughts of other minds, and the cumulative wisdom of contemporary ages! But the antediluvians might do this, not for one threescore years and ten merely, but for twelve times that period. They could form vast designs without fear of interruption. A plan that needed a hundred years for its execution, was only the work of childhood to a man assured of life nine times as long. Then too they were all of one speech; they possessed one universal language, the immediate gift of God. They had teachers who had seen and talked with God; the father and mother of the human race were with them. They were strong in body, and noble in stature and in mind. The mixture of the sons of God with the fairest of earth's daughters, was in their composition; a proud, renowned race, eminent in shape and gesture, and with intellectual faculties probably quite as gigantic as their size. They might have grown to a knowledge of God, and a height of moral loveliness, which might almost have evaded the sentence of mortality, and caused the translation of the

whole race, like that of Enoch. A ladder was let down to them from heaven; but instead of rising thither, they employed every endowment of being, and every capability of life for growth in wickedness, and corrupted themselves to such a height before God, that their sufferance on the earth was no longer possible. So much for human perfectibility! Such is fallen, wretched, graceless, human nature!

2. I have spoken of the darkness that hangs over the life of the antediluvians. The extreme conciseness and paucity of detail in the sacred history concerning them are remarkable. We may draw from it a salutary lesson. Their space in the world's existence amounted almost to one-third of its whole being thus far; for, of the sixty centuries that have nearly elapsed, from creation's dawn to the present moment, their busy transit occupied not much less than two thousand years; and of the four thousand years over which the Bible ranges its sacred perspective, the wickedness of the antediluvians consumed almost half; and yet not a two hundredth part of the inspiration of the Scriptures is conceded to their notice. If they themselves could have drawn up for future times even an abridgment of all that they expected to be known, and thought worthy to be known in regard to them, the history of the world before the flood, would have occupied more space than that of all ages since; and we should have had an antediluvian Bible, emblazoned all over with the record of their glorious achievements; and doubtless it would have been a most striking, a most extraordinary history. All elements of human greatness, as well as of human wickedness, would have entered into its composition; for there can scarcely be a doubt that the intellectual faculties of men wrought on a scale as gigantic as their passions, so that, by the time the flood came, the earth must have been covered with memorials of most surpassing grandeur. The very first born of Adam, the murderer of his brother, when the volcano of passion had a little burned out, and he had somewhat recovered from the tempest of madness and remorse of conscience, *buildded a city*, impressing upon its stupendous architecture all the energy of a mind of gigantic strength, and instead of giving it a name that might have connected it sacredly with heaven, indulged a mixture of paternal fondness and ambition, and called it after the name of his first born son. But of all the grandeur that might have grown in time to be characteristic of the first city, and of all the countless temples and palaces whelmed beneath the deluge, not a vestige was preserved for after admiration, even in description; and of all monuments of genius, in history, poetry, biography, or whatever other shape the mind of antediluvian antiquity might choose for its creations, though there may have been libraries larger than that of all the Ptolemies, it is doubtful if Noah deigned to take one solitary leaf into the ark, to be preserved amidst the waste of waters. Over all achievements of fame, all wonders of genius, all events of history, in which the actors anticipated an immortality of glory, the pen of inspiration draws a blank; it is a parcel of insignificant rubbish; it is like the chaos of an unformed world; it

is all passed over in forgetfulness, and the record of their life is comprehended in the merest affirmation of mortality—*he died*.

Only one event is recorded alike of them all, no matter what may have been their situation in life, whether princes of the earth, surrounded with grandeur, or beggars in rags upon the dunghill. They may have amassed wealth beyond the possibility of computation, they may have enlarged the bounds of science, and filled the world with the fame of their discoveries, they may have traveled into distant lands, and brought back volumes of knowledge, they may have possessed an eloquence like that of angels, they may have written poetry worthy the abodes of Paradise, they may have founded empires, and given systems of law to communities, they may have been poets, orators, statesmen, philosophers, they may have done all that makes the name of mortals great, they have been the Homers, the Virgils, the Newtons, the Bacons, the Shakspeares, the Miltons of their age;—but with all this, the history of their life is reduced down to the bald, unvaried epitaph, *he died*. There would be all varieties of existence among them as among us; some whose rank and connexions in life would place them at the summit of society, and others whose powers of conversation made them the admired in every circle, and others whose days were crowded with events of wonder, and others whose domestic relations were full of beauty and of tenderness, and others of a glowing imagination, and others of a vast reach of mind, and others of angelic symmetry and strength of body;—and yet it is all annihilated in that one simple record, *he died*.

There would be, in the progress of antediluvian existence, all materials that ever combine to raise the record of a man's days from obscurity and insignificance, all that we ever look upon as constituting fit stuff for the tissue of a magnificent history, or a grand and glowing biography; they must have attained all that in the world's view is worth living for; they must have accomplished all, that in the eye of ambition constitutes a ground for that immortality of fame, which the fallen mind thirsts after; actions to draw a world's applause, inventions and discoveries of surprising ingenuity, systems of science and philosophy, all forms of greatness realized;—and yet it is all disposed of and confined within the annals of two words, *he died*.

Once in the flight of ages past,  
There lived a man:—and who was he?  
—Mortal! howe'er thy lot be cast,  
That man resembled thee.

He saw whatever thou hast seen,  
Encountered all that troubles thee;  
He was—whatever thou hast been,  
He is—what thou shalt be.

The annals of the human race,  
Their ruins since the world began,  
Of him afford no other trace  
Than this,—THERE DIED A MAN.

Now it is scarcely possible to read a more affecting and instructive lesson than the Holy Spirit has thus transmitted for our consideration, as to the worthlessness of all mere mortal grandeur in the eye of God. The pleasure, wealth, power, knowledge, glory, of ten centuries crowded into one life, with all the changes and shows of a human existence, continued through a period which with us suffices for the transit of nearly thirty generations, are just as unnoticed as if they had never had an existence. Except so far as these things bear upon our eternal destiny, (the point which with most men is left as utterly out of consideration as if there were no eternal destiny,) it is absolutely regarded as of no account whatever, whether a man were poor or rich, learned or unlearned, lofty or lowly, wise or ignorant, whether he were a Newton or a Hottentot, a Milton or a chimney-sweep, a Bacon or the inmate of a mad-house, an Alexander or a beggar in the street. Considered apart from the fact of his probationary state, the enjoyments or events in the life of the most distinguished of mortals, though it were protracted to a period beyond that of the oldest antediluvian, are absolutely of no more importance, in comparison with the idea of an endless duration, than the movements of a new-born babe the first day of its existence. You might compress the possession of all the royalty and luxury of all the monarchs of the earth, and all the glory of the whole world's warriors, statesmen and nobility, and all the wisdom and fame of all the world's poets and philosophers, into the experience of one mind, and the period of one life, and yet, in itself, and for itself, without reference to God, it is nothing, absolutely not worth naming; considered with reference to eternity, it dwindles to a point; with reference to happiness, it is gone like the ticking of a clock, and is of no more value than the pulsations in the veins of the smallest microscopic insect. The only thing of absolute value is that which connects us with God, and makes us partakers of his holiness; all things else are baubles. Crowns are playthings, dukedoms and dominions of no more importance than the grains of sand that go to make up an ant hill.

3. The consideration of the great age of the antediluvians, and its effect upon their state on earth, might lead to some faint conception of what an Apostle calls the power of an endless life.

It may do this in two ways;—first, the power of such a life for the increase of holiness;—second, in the progressive accumulation of depravity. Enoch lived 365 years; as many years as there are days in the year; an existence beyond the period of three centuries and a half;—and by the faithful improvement of his privileges through the grace of God during this short period, short in comparison with the ordinary antediluvian age, though long in comparison with our age, for a saint's earthly walk with God, he became so holy, that in the strikingly simple and energetic language of the scriptures, *God took him*. He passed into God's immediate and blissful presence, without passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death. He became so holy, that perhaps death was not needed to set the final seal of perfect puri-

ty upon his immortal spirit. But if this were the case in a world of sin, temptation and opposition to holiness, what will be the rapidity of his increasing resemblance to God by *the power of an endless life*, in that world where God, in the infinite perfection of his attributes, is all in all; where every hindrance is removed, and a progression takes place that knows no limits, can never diminish, can have no end.

On the other hand, the whole race of antediluvians who lived in wickedness, became so wicked in the progress of less than a thousand years, that it was absolutely necessary for God to destroy them. This was in a state of probation, a limited period of human existence. But, if, in the space of nine centuries, men will become so depraved on earth, even amidst all restraints and inducements to the contrary, all mercies received, punishments forborne, and obligations of gratitude daily incurring, so depraved that creation must be eased of its burthen by the destruction of the race, what will that depravity be, when its increase goes on in the bosom of eternity, unrestricted, unalleviated, uncombined? The human mind is not adequate fully to form or entertain the dread conception. Change time into eternity, remove restraint, and let despair take the place of hope, and you have simply human wickedness, endlessly progressive, without accompanying pleasure. In every age the wickedness of man needs only eternity to act in, and it constitutes hell.

4. We are all naturally as wicked as the race of mankind destroyed by the deluge. The great wickedness of the antediluvians was principally owing to the multiplication of their years; it was probably no greater than we ourselves should arrive at, if our life were as long as theirs. It is remarkable how scripture answers to scripture in regard to the character of man. "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets,*" said our Lord, through the mouth of Abraham, "*neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*" We are apt to think that in such or such circumstances, if we had been situated in the place of other men, we should have done very differently. The Jews said so, and perhaps thought so, in regard to the persecution of the prophets, when they were themselves contriving the crucifixion of the Savior; if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. We think it strange that in the very presence of Adam, with one for their teacher that had seen God, with those before them who had walked and talked with angels, had been driven out from Paradise on account of sin, and from personal experience, as well as by the spirit of God, could warn their whole posterity like immediate messengers from heaven, the race of man should become so universally and deeply wicked. It argues great depravity, doubtless, but no greater than that which made the Jews idolaters at the foot of Sinai, no greater than that revealed by the crucifixion of the Messiah, and certainly no greater than that which leads multitudes now, in defiance of God's word, an enlightened conscience, a preached gospel, and the strivings of the Holy Spirit, to persist in the indulgence of their sins, and rush down to per-

dition. And doubtless it will be more tolerable for the antediluvian world at the Day of Judgment, than for that world of the ungodly, who, under the preaching of the gospel, reject the Savior from their hearts, and die impenitent.

5. The mere duration of years does not constitute a long life, but the fulfilment of life's purposes. *Hoc est vivere bis, vita posse priore frui.* It was some distinction to have been the oldest man; it would have been a greater distinction still to have been the wisest man; but a greater than all to have been the holiest man. It is only a well spent life that can be enjoyed over again in the recollection. When Enoch was translated, he had lived longer in living to God, than the whole antediluvian race put together, who lived only for their own pleasure. And so, if Methusaleh had lived but one year like his father, *having this testimony, that he pleased God*, that little year would have been longer, than all the other nine hundred and sixty-eight years of his life united. No man lives long, who does not live to God's glory; but he who does that, LIVES ETERNALLY. When it is said of such a one *he died*, it means he began to live. It is true, that the christian then begins life, when the will of God lives in him; but he does never realize the full blessedness and power of that existence, till his soul, unfettered by the body, and no more measuring time by mortal years, has winged its flight where time, and sense, and sin, are known no longer. And so, when a man leaves the world impenitent, he only begins to die; entering upon an eternal existence of positive death. He knows not what death is, till his soul is driven from the body, and has the wages of sin paid to it. He began to die, indeed, to God and all goodness, when he first began to sin; but the completion of that death, the conversion of life into death, and the full realization of its misery, do not commence, till the experience, in eternity, of wickedness without pleasure, duration without time, justice without mercy.

6. There was a time in the life of every ungodly antediluvian, in which his wickedness had reached such a point, his long habits of sin had gained such strength, that all hope of his salvation departed. At such a moment, though long before the close of his mortal career, it might have been said with awful emphasis, *he died*. It is not probable that there ever was a single death-bed repentance in the world before the flood; for when the passions of men had flowed nine hundred years in a course of rebellion against God, though a man rose from the dead, or an angel stood by the bed-side, it would have had no effect over the departing spirit.

There is probably such a time in the life of every ungodly individual now; a time when man's evil habits have become so confirmed, and his heart so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, that it is morally impossible he should ever after be converted. The lateness, or the comparative earliness of such a period, depends, doubtless, upon the opportunities of salvation already rejected, the influences of the spirit of God resisted, the revivals of religion passed through untouched, the dealings of God's providence disregarded, and a multitude of circum-

stances, of which none but an omniscient Being can be supposed to have cognizance. But if that period were known in heaven, as we have reason to think the repentance of returning prodigals is known, with what compassionate intensity of interest would it be viewed by those ranks of spiritual spectators. The angels, for example, who are watching on errands of mercy in the assemblies of God's people, as they hover over the congregation, and witness the indifference of some, the carelessness of others, the dread insensibility of others, with what awe and mournful shuddering would they mark the plague spot on the soul! Methinks we might almost hear them whispering to each other, as they collect in solemn sadness around such an individual, Our business here is ended: he is dead. And if the awful fact were made legible to others, by some appropriate mark upon the forehead, some brand of spiritual death upon the features, like that which designated Cain, to the fearful gaze of society, what a spectacle would our congregations exhibit!

7. Our subject teaches the danger of religious procrastination. At the beginning of the year, to which God in his mercy has spared us, this lesson comes with unusual solemnity. The habit of procrastination would be dreadfully dangerous, even if life were lengthened out to the farthest period of antediluvian existence; its indulgence would harden a man's heart, and carry him, long before the day of his death, beyond the confines of his day of grace. I believe that the older a man grows, the less he expects to die, and consequently, the more unwilling he is to prepare for death. This is prodigiously strange and absurd. Certainly, every new year that a man commences, there is a greater probability that in the course of it he will die, than there has been in any previous year of his existence. John Foster has pursued this thought in one of his sermons, in so striking a manner, that I shall apply a part of his language in its enforcement here. Let a man know that a thing which he is to find is in one of a hundred places, if he looks into ten or twenty, and finds it not there, he certainly has a greater probability of finding it in the next than in any former one, because the number is so much less of those in which it may be found. If any event will certainly take place in a hundred days, as one day after another passes away, and it does *not* take place, there is the greater probability that it will take place in the next. If a person has passed through ninety days, it will be deeply impressed that the next will be the one. Now apply this to life. We know there is one extraordinary event that we are to meet; it is in the number of our days; it must happen soon, it may happen any day; and the more time there has already passed away, the more probably the next day or hour will be the time.

The time must come when we shall meet our God, shall quit these wonted scenes, this earthly tabernacle, shall close this succession of terrestrial days and common events in our existence, and enter an unseen world. The time must come. A great many days in our appointed existence have already passed by, and we have not yet found

the great uncommon event, that is to change our days into eternity. More days have passed with us, than with a great many persons who have already met that event, and been taken from us. They have found it in fewer days than we. This makes it more probable still that we are close upon it. The next place we look in, we may find it. All the days between us and the great day are removing out of the way; as in a journey, the hill once before the traveler, is put behind him; the villages between him and the capital are taken from anticipation and put in retrospection, and every hour he is some miles nearer. So rapidly and certainly we are coming to the day of death.

Now it is a solemn question for some of those who hear me, (it is for us all, but especially for those who have no portion in God.) Does your approach to that day make you feel more sensibly its nearness? As you stand in the opening of a New Year, your eager foot just crossing its first step, is the idea of death, as more probable for you this year than the last, one of the images before your mind, or does the King of Terrors appear to be retreating in the distance? Do you find that the distractions of the world, and the love of its pleasures, and the allurements of sin, lose any of their power as you grow older, and overtake, one after another, the different periods to which you have, from time to time, put off a preparation for eternity? Are you not more fertile in suggesting excuses, and more ingenious in expedients to stifle your conscience, and to blind your soul's moral vision, than you ever were before in any period of your life? Does not your disposition to procrastinate increase in its paralyzing power, with every day in which you continue to indulge it, while at the same time a thicker mist of insensibility envelopes your feelings at every new interval, in which you cast your thoughts over the prospect in eternity? And does not every successive movement of your soul towards its eternal destination, restrict its vision more entirely to the world you are leaving, and cast into more alarming indistinctness the world you are entering? Oh, be wise, and arrest in your own soul the progress of this mighty evil, and to-day cast yourself as a penitent sinner at the foot of the cross, and in Jesus Christ be reconciled to God.

We should feel the value of our days, not so much by the rapidity with which they are passing, though that is a solemn consideration, as by what they are doing for us, what they are laying up in store before us. They are so many rapid messengers, whom we send into eternity beforehand; and we are to meet our days again; we do not, cannot annihilate them. We have only sent them before us, to prepare us a mansion in heaven, or to make us a bed in hell. We shall meet them in eternity, for time is eternal, and even now is waiting in eternity to bear its testimony in regard to us. O, how solemn is this thought! The soul of time, if I may so speak, travels with our souls into eternity.

Now! It is gone. Our brief hours travel post,  
 Each with its thought or deed, its why or how:—  
 But know each parting hour gives up a ghost,  
 To dwell within thee, AN ETERNAL NOW!

Dear friends, what report shall the hours of this year, which even now have begun their rapid flight, bear from us and for us into the eternal world? Surely we ought all to say with Hezekiah, spared to begin a new year, "I will walk softly before God all my days." May God help us so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom; so to number our days, that now, henceforward, according to that common, but most meaning phrase, we may, by divine grace, spend them all *as we shall wish we had done when we come to die.*