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SERMON LXIV.

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THE SINNER'S IMMINENT DANGER.

MATT. vii. 13.—*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.*

It is a fact, plainly and frequently stated in the Bible, that all men are divided into two, and only two, classes. There is no third class recognised, consisting of neutral characters, too amiable for the bottomless pit, and yet too unholy for heaven. The one class embraces all who have never been *born of God*, who neither believe in Christ, nor repent of their sins. The other class embraces all whose hearts are regenerated by the Spirit and the truth of God. In perfect accordance with this fact, we have the assurance that there are two states, and only two, in the world of spirits: a state of happiness for the righteous, and a state of punishment for the wicked. As there are no neutral characters among men, so there is no middle state between the joys of heaven and the agonies of despair.

Leading to these two states, in the future world, there are two ways; the one, *broad*, with an easy, inviting entrance, through a *wide gate*; the other, *narrow*, entered only through a *strait gate*: the one, crowded with vast multitudes who are led on from pleasure to pleasure, from one pursuit to another, without a serious thought respecting the end of their progress; the other, travelled by a *few*, who are often beset with difficulties and trials; but strengthened by the Comforter, and animated by the blessed assurance, that the way in which they are struggling onward and upward *leadeth unto life*. While these, under the guidance of the truth and Spirit of God, are safe; what will become of those gay, and busy, and thoughtless multitudes who are in the *broad road*? Ardent

as they now are in their pursuits, and cheerful as they seem to be, the way in which they are urging forward *leadeth to destruction*.

Many of you, my friends, are in this *broad road*; for you do not even profess to have been *born again*, to be the sincere and humble followers of Christ. And some of you who make this profession may not have scriptural evidence to believe that you are in the *narrow way*. You are not aware of your danger, and are, therefore, not pursuing that course which a due regard to your future prospects would require. It is the design, therefore, of this discourse, through Divine aid, affectionately to point out **YOUR REAL DANGER, AS SINNERS AGAINST GOD.**

I. Your danger is **GREAT**; inconceivably *great*. Every reason which proves that God will punish sinners at all, proves, with equal force and clearness, that this punishment will be in exact proportion to their guilt; and this guilt will be in proportion to the number and aggravation of their crimes. How numberless are your sins! you have sinned in thought, in word, and in deed. Every year, month, day, and hour, from the first moment of your moral agency to the present, you have sinned; you have done nothing but sin. Your daily vocation, your profession has been to commit sin. Every thought, every train of reasoning, every conclusion, every purpose of your understanding; every affection, every desire, every imagination of your heart, has been *evil, and only evil, and that continually*. Every word which you have uttered has been sinful. You may have spoken the language of kindness to your friends, given useful instruction to your children, salutary advice to your neighbors; but in the sight of God, every word has been sinful. You may hesitate in admitting the truth of this declaration; for it is calculated to produce alarming apprehensions. But you will acknowledge what has come under your own observation; that *a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit*; that an impure fountain cannot send forth a pure stream. It is equally true, that *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*. If, then, the heart is not right in the sight of God,—and it is not, unless it is purified by faith,—the words flowing from it in succession are all sinful. Your conduct, your daily actions are the result of the desires and affections of the heart, as these are of the thoughts, conclusions, and purposes of the understanding. Hence, every action of your life has been sinful. You may have fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and attended, with decency, the public worship of God; but we know, from the highest authority, that these same actions, in the pharisees, were sinful. So this part of your conduct, though blameless, and even useful in the sight of men, is criminal in the sight of God, your Judge; because it flows from a sinful and wicked heart; from a *carnal mind*, which is *enmity against God*. Before the tribunal of Heaven, therefore, it deserves and can receive nothing but condemnation.

As you have not the *spirit of Christ*, you are *none of his*, and nothing spiritually good and holy can belong to you. If your thoughts, words, and actions are not sinful, they must be indifferent, neither good nor bad. But if this could be affirmed of one thought, word, and action, it might of others, and of others again; and thus a whole character might be formed, neither righteous nor wicked, which might go from the judgment seat neither into happiness nor misery. This, you know, contradicts the plain declarations of Scripture, and especially the decision of Christ himself; *he that is not with me*, designedly and actively with me, *is against me*. Indifference, if it were possible, is here judged and condemned as criminal. There is, therefore, no escaping the conclusion, that all your thoughts, words, and actions are sinful.

That you may feel how far the number of your crimes exceeds comprehension, take a single day; consider the vast multitude of thoughts, feelings, words, and actions of this one day; every one of which, as some of you have been taught in childhood, "deserves God's wrath and curse both in this life and that which is to come." In this manner you have added day to day, till you have filled up a week; and then week to week, till you have reached a month; and then month to month, till you have completed a year! At the close of that day, under what danger did you give your eyes to sleep! At the close of the week, it was *seven* times greater; at the close of the month it was *thirty* times greater; at the close of the year, it was more than *three hundred and sixty* times greater! Multiply the sins and the danger of that one day by the number of days you have lived in this manner, and how amazing the danger to which you are, at this moment, exposed! Surely none but God, against whom you have sinned, can comprehend the *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*, which await you!

But your danger has not increased merely by the ratio of simple addition; by adding sin to sin, day to day, and year to year, each one being equal, and no more than equal, to the preceding; but according to the compound ratio of the aggravation of the guilt of your sins. This aggravation, this increase of guilt, arises from the circumstances in which you have sinned. Every day the goodness of God has supplied your wants and preserved you from death; every day you have been warned of your danger, called to repentance, and invited to the fountain of mercy. Conscience has often reproved, and the Spirit has, in some degree, enlightened your mind and convinced you of sin. In short, you have enjoyed the clear light and precious privileges of the gospel. The guilt of your sins must, therefore, be aggravated in proportion to the light and the privileges you have enjoyed; for *where much is given, much will be required*. On this principle it is that Sodom and Gomorrah,

Tyre and Sidon, though guilty, are yet less so than Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. That sin which you indulged,—the neglect of prayer, for instance,—at the commencement of the year, must be more criminal at the close, in proportion to the divine goodness which has followed you, the forbearance which has waited with you, and the frequency and earnestness with which you are called to repentance. If you had, one day and one year, done nothing but repeat the sins of the preceding, yet the guilt of those sins must be estimated according to the increasing power of the motives to repentance which you have resisted. If this rule is applied to you, as it was to the cities of Galilee, how inconceivably great must now be the amount of your guilt, and the degree of your danger. That river, whose waters flow from day to day, and collect in one place, must, in the course of years, become a great lake; but if that river increase in size and rapidity, every moment, every hour, every month, into what a vast ocean must it swell, in a course of years equal to the years of your life! According to this compound ratio has your guilt been increasing, and will continue to increase with every moment you remain impenitent. If you hear this truth with indifference, this indifference will be more criminal than at any former time, and will thus enhance your danger.

II. Your danger is **CERTAIN**; absolutely *certain*, while you are influenced by an *evil heart of unbelief*. That broad road, in which you are pressing forward, *leadeth to destruction*. Follow its course, and you will soon come to this destruction. Remain impenitent, and you **certainly** perish. Live and die without faith in the Son of God, and you must be condemned.

Your punishment is certain, because your sins *deserve it*. The law which you have transgressed, is *holy, just, and good*. All its requisitions, all its prohibitions, are perfectly reasonable. Your transgressions, therefore, are most unreasonable and wicked. The design and tendency of this law is, to promote the happiness of those who delight in it. Your disobedience, therefore, necessarily involves your own misery; *for the wages of sin is death; the soul that sinneth, it shall die*. The tendency of your opposition to the law is to prevent and destroy, as far as your influence extends, all the happiness which would be the result of obedience. You are justly, therefore, accountable for all the consequences which your rebellion is calculated to produce. Your transgressions of the divine law deserve punishment on account of the deep injury which they inflict on the moral community: and what you **deserve**, you will most assuredly receive; *for the Judge of all the earth will do right*.

But if your transgressions against the law deserve punishment, much **more** do you deserve it for sinning against the gospel. God, *for the*

great love wherewith he loved us, has sent his Son, his *beloved Son*, into the world to die for the salvation of sinners. This Saviour, with all the blessings procured by his death, has been frequently and graciously offered to you; and, with unequalled kindness and perseverance, you have been entreated, and urged to receive him. You have, at the same time, been warned of the danger from which the cross might save you. And yet you have rejected this Saviour; frequently and deliberately rejected the only Saviour. For the truth of this, we appeal to your own conscience. The subject has often engaged your attention; and after pondering it, the conclusion has been deliberately formed, that you *would not have this man to reign over you*. In accordance with this conclusion, you remain to this hour in the *broad road*. At this moment,—when the appeal is again made to your own conscience,—you have no serious intention of submitting immediately to Christ, as your Lord and Saviour. The proof, then, that you have frequently and designedly rejected the Saviour, is clear and abundant. Now, if you were requested to judge in this case, although it is your own, what would you say that this rejection of the Saviour deserves? Can you possibly believe that God ought to view it, and that he does view it, with approbation? If it be true, as it certainly is, that *the Father loveth the Son*, does he also approve and love those who dishonor and reject his Son? Or can you believe that God looks on your conduct with indifference? He once proclaimed from heaven; *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. And does he now look with indifference on those who discard this object of his affection and delight? Selfish as you are, and blinded as you are by the love of sin, you cannot believe this of the infinite God. If the human mind can form an idea of fitness, propriety, and justice, it must see that this persevering rejection of the Saviour deserves a punishment such as the hand of Omnipotence alone can inflict.

Your danger is certain, because the character and government of God require the infliction of this punishment. Without it the glory of his character would be obscured, and the foundation of his government shaken. The infinite holiness of God is the object of most ardent love, and the source of sublimest joy to all the inhabitants of heaven. But sin is in direct opposition to this holiness, as darkness is to light. Sin is, therefore, infinitely hateful and displeasing to God. This displeasure must be manifested in a manner and degree adapted to the capacity of finite creatures; otherwise they will not perceive the glory of this holiness. This displeasure is manifested in the death of Christ, in behalf of all who believe in him. But you do not believe in him; for you are yet in the *broad road*. The divine displeasure, therefore, must be manifested in your everlasting condemnation. For should you

escape with impunity, the inhabitants of heaven would not see the purity of the divine character and government, so far as it depends on your case. Their love would, of course, become less ardent, and their joy be diminished. But if they see you publicly condemned in the judgment, and thence *departing into everlasting fire*, in the smoke of your torment ascending up for ever and ever, they will see the glory of infinite holiness, and the stability and equity of the divine government, manifested in such a manner and degree as will secure their warmest love and firmest confidence. If, therefore, God is holy, if he exercises a guardian care over the happiness of his faithful subjects, you cannot escape.

III. Your danger is **NEAR**, very *near*. If a thousand ages were to roll away before destruction should overtake you, yet, as it is certain, it would merit your serious consideration. But when it is near, what madness to waste a moment in thoughtless indifference!

To your own view, this subject may appear very differently. Successive years may stretch out before you, to the end of which you seldom look, and the end of which you seldom attempt to realize. But the whole amount of time, from the first to the last moment, is short, is absolutely nothing, when compared with that eternity which you are to spend in *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*. Indeed, a comparison cannot even be supposed between the longest period which is limited, and that duration which is literally endless. You may compare a single drop with the vast ocean, a single grain with the whole earth; but you cannot compare time, with all its millions of years, with eternity. Probably, however, the Apostle's meaning is, that human *life is short*; a truth very obvious, indeed, but very much forgotten and neglected. To some of you, this period is already shortened by *ten, twenty, forty*, or perhaps *sixty* years. How short, then, is *your time*! It is almost certain, that not one who now hears me, will number seventy years from this day. This may appear, when viewed in prospect, a long period. But go to the dying bed of one who is closing the last moments of seventy years, and ask him how time appears in his view. He will tell you, with a faltering tongue, *time is short*; like a watch in the morning. But be assured, my friends, his decision, so near the bar of God, is more rational than yours, while you seldom think of that bar.

That danger, to which your attention is earnestly directed, it is true, will not overtake you till death. But what then? Wise and good men, in every age, have been accustomed to view death, at all times, as very near. A few days, a few years at most, in their estimation, is the whole amount of human life. *Behold*, says the Psalmist, *thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth*. This is all the distance between you and

death. When you have passed over this single span, this one hand-breadth, then *destruction cometh upon you*. How short is the continuance of the morning vapour! *It appeareth but for a little time, and then vanisheth away*. This short space, this little time, is all you have to spend on earth; and then, *terrors will take hold on you as waters*. These representations include the whole amount of human life. But each and all of you have spent a part, some of you the greater part of life, already. Two-thirds, or one-fifth, or one-tenth, or perhaps one-hundredth part of this single hand-breadth, is all you have now to pass over; and then you *shall die in your iniquities*. This vapour, for days and years past, has been wasting away; only a part, perhaps a very small part, yet remains; when this has vanished, then you *shall lie down in sorrow*.

In estimating the nearness of your danger, you must not forget the frailty and uncertainty of life. The vigor and bloom of youth, the most perfect state of health may be wasted by a few days' sickness; or some unforeseen, unexpected stroke, sudden and violent as lightning from heaven, may bring you in a moment to the dust; and then your *spirit shall return to God who gave it*. There may be but a *step*, a single *step*, *between you and death*. Then your account is sealed up, and the pangs of the *second death* commence.

IV. Your danger is *HASTENING*; rapidly *hastening*, nearer and nearer, every moment. It comes with all the rapidity of time, whose movement nothing can arrest or retard. Consult the Sacred Volume on the subject, and what is its decision? *Thou carriest them away as with a flood*. This flood, rushing along, bears you on its wave to the ocean of eternity. How swiftly do the *ships, driven of fierce winds*, pass through the deep! With equal swiftness are your days passing away. With what urgency does the *post*, charged with messages of public importance, hasten to his destination! With still greater urgency are your days hastening to their close. How quickly does the *weaver's shuttle* pass through the web! More quickly are your minutes flitting away. With what almost instantaneous flight does the *eagle* dart on his prey! More speedy is the flight of time, which will soon deliver you a *prey to death*. See the rapidity with which your danger is approaching! In your eager pursuit of pleasure, you may chide what seems to be the tardy movement of time; but did you view it as inspired men have done, you would see that your chidings are unnecessary. In wishing to hasten the movement of time, you are, in fact, though you think not so, wishing to hasten your own destruction. O, what deep delusion! This, without your wishes, will come soon enough! When at the last moment, with amazement, with anguish of spirit, you will lament how rapidly time has passed, and death has come!

To the view of your mind, perverted and blinded by unbelief, your

days may seem to have no end, because you do not think of that end. According to your estimation, *to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant*. But in the view of God, your life is not an indefinite period, but accurately defined, limited, and short. *Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth? Are not his days like the days of an hireling? Man's days are determined; the number of his months is with thee; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass. God hath determined the times of men, before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.* He who shut up the sea with doors, and said—*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed;*—has also said respecting each of you; thus long shalt thou live, but no longer; thus far shall thy minutes flow, but no farther. The waves of the ocean have rolled, and dashed, and broken against its barriers for ages; but these barriers still remain firm and impassable as the decree of Heaven, which gave them their place. Thus absolutely immoveable are the bounds which limit the duration of life. The day, the hour, the moment of your death is appointed. It is folly, it is infidelity, it is downright atheism, to think otherwise. He, *in whose hands your breath is*, certainly knows, because his wisdom has determined it, when he will *take away this breath*. The moment of your death, which is yet future, with equal certainty is known to Him, *in whom you live, and move, and have your being*, with the moment of your birth, which is past. This your appointed time on earth has been shortened by the years, and days, and moments you have already lived. This day, this hour, this moment will shorten so much the more your remaining time. How rapid, and how ceaseless is the flight of these moments! All numbered with as much certainty as are the *hairs of your head*; each one, as it hurries away, giving you the solemn and earnest admonition, that *the time, the moment of your departure is at hand*. How incessant is the heaving of your lungs! But every effort of this kind leaves one less to be made. How quick and regular the pulsations of the heart! But

“Every beating pulse you tell, leaves but the number less.”

At the moment of your birth, your danger was not very distant; but how much nearer is it now? It is nearer this day, this hour, this moment, than it ever was before; and will be nearer to-morrow, should you live, than it is to-day. Solemn and impressive thought!

There now stands a line of men, definite and precise in number, between you and the angel of death; these he is despatching with unwearied diligence; they are falling, in most rapid succession. *One of them, according to calculation, dies every second, sixty every minute, three thousand six hundred every hour, eighty-six thousand four hundred every day, and upwards of thirty millions every year.* At your birth, this line

consisted of a certain number; this number has been diminishing by upwards of thirty millions every year you have lived; and it is now growing less and less by sixty every minute, and by one every second. While you breathe again, while the pulse beats again, while you pause to make the reflection, another is gone! How incessantly, how rapidly is your danger approaching! How soon, how unexpectedly may it overtake you! The one who stands next you, in this line, will soon fall; and then, your eyes are closed! your breath is gone! your end is come! The sun will dawn on the earth; but no more for you! The Sun of righteousness will continue to shine; but you will be *in the blackness of darkness*, where his cheering beams never come!

Such is the *broad way*. In your mistaken view, it may be safe and filled with pleasures; but in the view of God, and of all good beings, it is perilous in the extreme. *The end of these things is death. Be wise now, therefore, and ponder the path of thy feet, lest thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!*

“**SINNERS**, behold that downward road
Which leads to endless wo;
What multitudes of thoughtless souls,
The road to ruin go!

But yonder see that narrow way
Which leads to endless bliss;
There see a happy chosen few,
Redeem'd by sovereign grace.

They from destruction's city came,
To Zion upward tend:
The Bible is their precious guide,
And God himself their friend.

Lord, I would now a pilgrim be—
Guide thou my feet aright;
I would not for ten thousand worlds
Be banish'd from thy sight.”