

DYING TESTIMONIES OF THE ANCIENTS

A SERMON

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“Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.” Psalm 39:4

MY own daughter Mary Ann departed this life last Monday morning, at 25 minutes past 8, rejoicing in the God of her eternal salvation. I have sent a concise outline to the editor of the Earthen Vessel, which account will be out next month¹, of that revelation the Lord was pleased to make of himself under my roof in her departing hours. While my feelings would not allow me to speak thereof in detail in public, I could not altogether withhold from Christians her testimony of the presence of that God whom she had known from her very infancy. And every Christian feels it a great honor, yes, the greatest honor, next to his own salvation, that can be put upon him, to see his children brought to know the Lord. For how full of uncertainty is human life! We are every day witnessing that. And what the feelings of those Christian parents could have been, or are, who are called upon to undergo bereavement in relation to those their children that know not the Lord, I know not; it must be distressing to the last degree. And may the Lord make use of all these events to solemnize our minds, and to make us pray with increased earnestness the prayer contained in our text. “Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure, of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.”

First, *the Christians end*; second, *the Christian's desire to know that end*; third, *the helps which the after clauses imply*, “the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.” A consciousness of this helps us to understand more clearly our end. And then the fourth and last thing suggested is *the helplessness of the creature*. “Lord, make me to know.” As though the Psalmist should say, The attractions, and cares, and sorrows, and anxieties, and responsibilities of the world would take away all real, and living, and abiding concern about my soul and its destiny,

¹ The Web version of this document on her death can be found at:

<https://www.surreytabernaclepulpit.com/files/Other%20Documents/Death%20of%20Mary%20Wells.html>

You can also go to the main other documents page to get the other file types at:

<https://www.surreytabernaclepulpit.com/files/Other%20Documents/>

if you do not in your mercy condescend to make me know my end. So that the Lord alone can lay these things home to the heart, and keep the heart somewhat alive to them.

First, then, *the Christian's end*. That is to say, the Christian's death; how a Christian in death is distinguished from other people. And here I enter, as you will readily see, upon a most solemn and infinitely important matter, and I may say, perhaps, as difficult to clear up as it is important; because it is a truth that great numbers die apparently very happy. There is the wicked man: he comes to his dying hour; there are no bauds in his death; he is passive, and quiet, and happy; he thinks that there are people that have been worse than himself, and he hopes, therefore, the Lord will take but little notice of his sins; and so he dies, apparently happy. And then comes another that has a little religious tendency, and he, perhaps, sends for the minister, and takes a little bread and wine the ordinance, and from that he concludes that the Lord will receive him, and he dies apparently very happy; perhaps quotes a scripture or two, or a hymn or two, and seems very happy. And then we come to another whose life perhaps has been strictly moral, though, perhaps, that morality has arisen from mere covetousness; that is, he has found a path of morality is a path by which he can save money, and from that motive, never having been liberal in his time, he has been very moral; he dies apparently very happy. There is another who has been very benevolent and very liberal, he comes to a dying hour, and dies very happy. And, indeed, all sects and all parties, if we look into the matter, and I have seen a great deal of this in my day, apparently die happy. You will sometimes see a man that we believe to be a mere professor, or a man that is no professor at all, will die happier than a real child of God. Now these are circumstances that are coming before us every day. How, then, shall we distinguish the death of the child of God from others? How shall we know, in a dying hour, that that man's happiness that seems happy is the happiness of the real Christian, or the happiness of the deluded man? How shall we know whether, in his dying hour, it is really the comfort of the eternal Spirit of God, or whether it is the work of Satan, who, in a dying hour, can appear as an angel of light, and minister false comfort, and delude the soul until the very moment it lifts up its eyes in hell? You will thus see, then, that a person being happy in a dying hour is not always a proof that he is a Christian; not the least evidence, indeed, by itself, whatever. Persons may die apparently exceedingly happy, and yet he lost at last. Now I shall enter, on this solemn occasion, as far as the Lord will enable me, closely into this matter. I will first bring before you the testimonies of dying men, as recorded in the Scriptures, as the test by which to try persons in their dying hour, as to whether they are Christians or not. And then, when I have done that, I will bring the testimony of one that was called at the eleventh hour, and let us see what his testimony is, and let us see the ground of his faith, the kind of faith upon which he entered heaven. We must test everything by the truth of God, whether in life or whether in death. There are two essentials, when we come to a dying hour; the man who professes to be a Christian, there are two things essential for him to show in his dying hour; that is, if he is favored to speak at all: And the one is that he must show himself in possession of God's truth, there must be a possession of new-covenant truth; and the next essential is, he must possess the love of that truth. And then the third is not an essential, but only that which the Lord is pleased in some cases to withhold, and in other cases to add, namely, the enjoyment of the truth. First, then, there must be a belief of the truth. Let us bring the testimony of a dying man. Here is one comes to his dying hour; what is his testimony? That "God has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." Therefore, it is, if you profess to be a Christian, and I visit your dying hour, my question is, What is your faith? Do you believe in Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant, and do you believe the truth concerning Christ? Let us here,

before I go back to that scripture I have just quoted, consider the words of the Apostle. He says, "We are bound to give thanks unto God, brethren beloved, who has chosen you from the beginning, has chosen you unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Just stop here for a moment. First, here is eternal election, the people were chosen from the beginning; second, that that choice was to salvation; third, that sanctification of the Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit regenerating them, and bringing them to know their need of electing grace, their need of God's salvation; they were thus, through sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth; and what is the truth? Why, this covenant, ordered in all things and sure, is the truth. It is not enough that such believe the Bible; it is something in the Bible that is not revealed to all that you must believe in order to have this first essential proof that you are a Christian. Now the apostle, after showing up this election to salvation, then the work of the Holy Spirit, bringing us to the belief, unites ultimate glory in its certainty with original election; he says, "Whereunto he called you to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now then, when you come to a dying hour, I want to know what you know of Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant; I want to know what you know of the sworn covenant, and what you know of Jesus Christ as the end of the law, as the end of the old covenant; so that you have been from experience necessitated to give up the law, acknowledging that to be spiritual, and you carnal, sold under sin; you have been necessitated from experience to give up all conditional promises, to give up the old covenant, to give up the whole, and to have no hope but in the eternity of Christ's priesthood; to have no hope but in the eternity of God's covenant, to have no hope but in the eternal certainty of the gospel. And then, if you continue therein, that is one evidence, though I shall want another presently, that you are taught of the same Spirit that David was. Such was his dying testimony, and we must try a man's testimony by this. And I only say this, that when I visit the bed of a dying man or dying woman, however much they may speak of their happiness, their peace, or their joy; still, if they are ignorant of the Mediator of the new covenant, and ignorant of that new covenant, and ignorant of the certainties of the gospel, I will not say positively that that man, notwithstanding all his joy in a dying hour, is a lost man; but I will say that it is involved in so much mystery that how that man, though he seem happy and comfortable in the departing hour, how that man can enter heaven, while at the same time he is unacquainted with, and in reality in enmity against, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, I know not. I am commanded to come to the law and to the testimony, and if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them. Then I come to another man, namely, Jacob. What was the kind of gospel revealed to Jacob when he was going to Padan-aram? And is it not said that "All shall be taught of God"? And is not that promise, "All shall be taught of God," in the 54th of Isaiah? and is not the 54th of Isaiah a new-covenant chapter? And when this same Jacob, to whom was revealed the certainty of the new covenant, the certainty of eternal salvation by Jesus Christ, when he came to die he summed up the whole of it like this, "I have waited, O Lord, for your salvation," And if you want to know after what order the salvation was that Jacob waited for, go first to the 28th of Genesis, and there see the yea and amen promises in which the Lord appeared to Jacob; and then hear his testimony in his dying hour, or when his dying hour was approaching; "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me." He knew the promise was yea and amen; he knew the redemption was eternal; he knew God in covenant, in that sworn covenant in which he appeared to his father Abraham. Then again, if you come to Simeon, he stood upon the same ground. "Now let you your servant depart in peace; my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon saw the completeness of it, he saw the certainty of it, he saw that it would carry him with safety and triumph through Jordan. And so the apostle Paul bears testimony to the very same point of the inseparable connection between his present position

and the crown of eternal glory. Now then, if you profess to be a Christian, and after all your profession, when you come to a dying hour, whether you are happy or miserable, whether you die in resignation or whether you rebel against it, whatever your feelings may be; if the truths of God be not with you, then God is not with you; for wherever God comes, he brings his truth, with him. He never did go anywhere without his truth, and he never will; he never did separate himself from his truth, and he never will; and he never will separate new-covenant truth from himself, for he has embodied his whole self in this great matter of eternal salvation; as he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself. Come, then, let us ask the question, Suppose we should be called today to bow our heads, and to come to that solemn, solemn event! Death is a solemn event to witness, and especially when you witness it in those you dearly love, and that are near to you in the ties of nature; you enter then into all their feelings very deeply, oh, it is a solemn hour. Do we, then, possess the knowledge of this truth, do we possess the belief of this truth, and do we hold in our souls these eternal truths as the only way by which we can be saved, the only way in which the Lord ever did or ever will save? Then it is not enough that we accept new-covenant truth, gospel truth, yea and amen truth, the next essential is the love of the truth. For a man may acquire a sound creed, have a theoretical knowledge of the order of things, talk about them, argue about them, dispute about them anywhere, matters not, at the ale-bench, or anywhere else, a man may do all that, at the same time be a lost man; because, while he has the truth in the letter of it, he has it not in the love of it. Now then, if we are brought to feel how frail we are; brought to feel what poor, perishing worms of the earth we are; then, receiving the testimony of what Christ has done in the love of it, we feel a love to him in what he has done, and we feel a love to God the Father in what he has done, and we feel a love to the blessed Spirit in what he has done; we feel a love to the God of our salvation. And we watch more carefully, if possible, the experiences of the people of God than we do their sentiments; because we can soon see whether a man be right in the doctrine or not. Then the next question is with us, How did you come by those doctrines? And when we hear persons state the soul-trouble into which they have been brought; relate the state in which they felt they were; the condemned, lost condition in which they felt they were, and that they were by nature children of wrath and deserved wrath, and that the soul lies in this prison, in this dungeon; by-and-bye, in the Lord's own time, a word comes home with power, touches the soul with a sense of pardoning mercy, peace flows into the heart, the love of God is shed abroad, Christ is endeared, and he breaks forth and says,

“Yes, you are precious to my soul,
My transport and my trust;
Jewels to you are gaudy toys,
And gold is sordid dust.”

Here, then, where there is the truth and the love of the truth, here it is that there is salvation. Let us see, then, by these two things, and of course I mean the possession of the truth, and how we possess it, whether we possess it in the love of it. You know that the Scriptures are full of exceeding great and precious promises to them that love God. Let me quote a scripture upon this matter we have quoted so often before, that “all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose;” Do your sympathies go with that last clause, or do you feel an antipathy to it? “Called according to his purpose.” Not called according to your works, or efforts, or any worth or worthiness in you, but simply according to his purpose. Is that the gospel you really love? If so, you love the truth, and you are a saved man. And then the apostle, lest we

should misunderstand him, goes on to give us the whole, gospel in few words: "Whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." What! you an enemy to divine predestination and enter heaven? "Them he also called." You an enemy to effectual calling, and yet enter heaven? "Them he also justified." You an enemy to justification freely by his grace, and enter heaven? "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Oh, I shudder, I tremble at the thought that we have hundreds, yes, thousands of ministers, so called Christian ministers, in this land, that have the daring and the blasphemy to tell us that it is not safe to man to preach such truths. There are no parts of the Bible lie so near to Gods heart as those very gospel parts that men so despise. If you, being evil, know how to delight in the security of your children, how much more does our God delight in the security of his children! If you, being evil, would carry out every good purpose, that your children may escape evil and do well, how much more your heavenly Father has devised that plan by which all the sheep of Christ shall come to Zion, shall be saved in the Lord with eternal certainty! "Make me to know my end." Have you this oil, then? What is the oil? The new-covenant truth of God, that is the oil. And your lamp will go out; Jordan will care nothing for your doings; Jordan will care nothing for yea and nay promises; Jordan will care nothing for anything but the entire triumph of the dear Savior; the warfare is accomplished; the promise is yea and amen. This is the way the saints have ever overcome, and shall I just wish some of these ministers had been in my house, and heard my little girl preach to them. She had the whole Bible pretty well at her fingers ends. I wish I could preach half as well. She had all her lifetime been living in these things. I never spoke more strongly, I never spoke more decidedly, of these truths of the new covenant than my poor child did; and she got them not from my forcing them into her mind, she obtained them by divine teaching. Though a lover of books, yet no book did for her as the Bible and good hymn books. I must abide by it, that wherever the Lord is the teacher, he will teach the truth, and guide us into the truth.

So, then, these are two essentials to a dying hour: first, to be led into the bond of the new covenant. 25th Psalm, "The secret of the Lord" (that is, the counsel what the Lord means to do) "is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." What is the cry of men? Dangerous, dangerous, dangerous! say they. I am more confirmed than ever, can understand now more clearly than ever how it was the great Toplady died such a triumphant death. He lived in these glorious truths, and loved them, with all his soul he loved them; they were dearer to him than life; and, therefore, when he came to a dying hour, and at eventide it was light, every cloud passed away, and the great and good man said, "No mortal can live after having seen the glory that I have seen, and felt the joy that I have felt." A great many of the Lord's people die just where I am now describing, in the belief of the truth, and in the love of the truth; perhaps unable, during their last day, to say much about any enjoyment. They die in hope, they die in faith, the enjoyment is not essential; it is a great comfort, certainly. And here, again, many of the children of God, as well as other people, are so overwhelmed at the last with disease, perhaps unable to speak at all, perhaps some disease that may take away their mental powers, they die delirious. But in them was the truth, and the love of the truth; and, therefore, no state in which they can die, no disease, however overwhelming, and however silently they may pass from the world that is seen to the world that is unseen, this does not in the least alter their state. Happier they that enjoy and can speak of the Lord's presence, but not more secure than those that die in the confidence of faith. So that all die in the confidence of faith, and some die in the triumphs of faith; but all lays entirely with the Lord. Just the same as in one sermon; there is, perhaps, a sermon, and that sermon shall rejoice the hearts of some, but not rejoice the hearts of others. God is sovereign here as much in our dying as in our living days. So,

then, those of you that have lost relatives, if disease hindered them from speaking, or if they were not hindered from speaking, and could not speak of much sensible enjoyment in their departing hours, if you could see in them these two things, their possession of the truth, and their love to it, satisfy your mind upon those two things, and be not discouraged. You would have liked to have had such a testimony as that with which I have been favored; but then it lies entirely with the Lord. Bless the Lord, then, as the apostle says, "these all died in faith." So, then, my hearer, everything must be tested by the truth of God. If I profess to be a Christian, and am a Christian really, I shall be led into the new covenant, I shall understand it, I shall receive it, I shall abide by it, and I shall love it, and love it more and more; I shall hate every false way, I shall repudiate every false gospel, and shall sympathize with the apostle when he says, "If an angel from heaven bring any other gospel than that we have preached, let him be accursed." Such, then, is the way in which we are to distinguish a good man in life as well as in death, his possession of the truth, and his life of practical love to the truth. This love of the truth leads them to sympathize with the cause of God, and with the poor of the Lord's people. And what the Savior will say, the doctrine or order of things which he will present to them at the last day, exactly accords with what they had during their lifetime in their souls, exactly accords with their faith in a dying hour. "Come, you blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for *you*." When, Lord? After we did something towards it; after we had made ourselves fit for it? After we have taken some step that gained us divine approbation, and stood as a ground of favor and mercy? Just the reverse: "prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Where did you see poor creatures that loved the same truths, if they were sick, you visited them as far as you could; and if they were in prison, you went in unto them; if they were strangers, you took them in; if they were hungry, you gave them meat; if they were thirsty, you gave them drink; if they were naked, you clothed them. Well, Lord, we do not know that we have ever done any good: we have been poor creatures; but we have been led in that world into these same eternal truths. Well, "inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." Here, then, my hearer, is the truth, and here is the love of the truth. I hope there is not one in the place this morning that will make light of these matters, and run away with a notion that it does not matter what doctrines you believe. I say to such a one, that there is not a greater contrast between God, and the wicked one than there is between the truth of God and the lies of Satan. A lie concerning God, in the eternal salvation of the soul, is that which is infinitely hateful to God. Not anything that makes a lie can enter that, celestial world. God increase us in earnestness to know the truth, and love the truth, and walk in all the happy consequences of that love, the love of Christ constraining us.

Again, I take an instance of one that was called at the eleventh hour; and you take particular notice of the spirit of which that man was, and of the ground upon which that man went to heaven. The first feeling in that man was a terror of the judgment to come; he felt that he was about to approach the great tribunal of the Judge of all. His eyes were opened, but the eyes of his fellow-malefactor were still closed. "Do you not fear God?" are you so blind still seeing that you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly;" we receive the due reward of our deeds; "but this man," now comes the sinlessness of Christ, that must make the dear Savior stand out as the Rose of Sharon, as the apple tree amidst the trees of the wood: a sinless person was never known in this world yet since the fall, except the dear Savior, "this man has done nothing amiss." And the very moment that the eye of faith recognized the sinlessness of the Savior, the eternal deity of Christ broke in upon the mind of the dying thief; he at once worshipped, prayed to him as God; "Lord" here is the revelation of the godhead of Christ; so that the thief died not a Socinian, nor an

Arminian, nor a duty-faith man; “Lord.” The thief also saw that this same Lord of all was a King, the King of Zion; he also saw that this Sinless One was there shedding his blood to put away the sin of the sinful ones; he saw that this Person was about to enter into an eternity of glory, and that in that eternal glory he was about to plead the cause of sinners. “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom;” an everlasting kingdom, an indestructible kingdom, an immoveable kingdom. And when I find a man called at the eleventh hour, if he be thus brought to see his need of this sinless Substitute, brought to see into the eternal deity of the Savior, the eternity of his kingdom, his intercession, and cast his eternal all upon this wondrous Person, there is a saved man “I say unto you, Verily;” that is, truly; no hesitation about it, no uncertainty about it, no indifference about it, no coldness about it, no misunderstanding about it, no want of decision about it; “Verily, I say unto you.” Ah, your sorrow will soon be over, your agonies won’t last long. Some of us know what it is to watch with aching hearts and trembling limbs the last agonies of those near and dear to us in their departing moments. “Today shall you be with me.” Ah! if the sentence had stopped there, how it would have left us in the dark! “Today shall you be with me,” not without me, but with me, “in Paradise;” into which, Paradise some years after the apostle Paul was caught up, and heard unspeakable words; and so happy was that man of God, that whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell; caught up into this Paradise of God. Now mark this dying thief, hear it, all; all this assembly, listen to it, that this dying thief entered the Paradise of God in the faith of a yea and amen promise, as independent of any good or bad, or worth or worthiness, about the creature, I was going to say, as though the creature did not exist. “Today shall you be with me in Paradise.” There was the poor, dying, malefactor’s security; he believed that, rested upon that, died in the strength of it, went to heaven in the strength of it, lives in the strength of it; there he is, and there forever. “Make me to know my end.” Ah, then, am I brought into the bond of this covenant? When I come to a dying hour, shall covenant blood be my plea, the blood of the everlasting covenant be my plea, the righteousness of Jesus be my plea, hid yea and amen promise be my plea? And do I love this gospel? Is it the joy and rejoicing of my heart? Has it my best affection and do I feel, the Lord keeping me, I could part with anything and everything rather than part with one particle of the same? Buy the truth, as we say, at any price; sell it at no price. So, the thief, then, at the eleventh hour, was nevertheless led into the truth. I linger upon that last part; namely, the positive promise the Savior gave. He did not say, If you continue to pray; if you continue in the faith. No *if* in the matter. “Today,” the matter is settled and done,” “Today shall you be in Paradise with me.” Now what else can sustain us in that hour but God in covenant? Your sins here, in this order of things, are swallowed up as in a mighty ocean, and shall no more testify against you than a dead Egyptian could raise himself from the dead and again be an enemy to the Israelite. Sins are blotted out as a thick cloud; the skies are cloudless; they are forgotten, passed by; he will not behold iniquity in you, nor see perverseness in you; but the Lord your God will be with you, and the shout of a king shall be near unto you.

“Make me to know my end.” There are four things here I will just hastily notice. First, it means recognition; that is, to recognize our departure from this world. It must come presently; cannot be long: the longest life is but a vapor, appearing for a little time, and it is gone. And what can be a sweeter thought than to feel that, come when it may, you are, by your knowledge of the truth, by your love to the truth, prepared to meet it? I have sat here sometimes, and heard you sing; I have thought, Well, I believe there are some that can sing that authentically, some not,

“Come, welcome, death: I’ll gladly go with you.”

Such, then, that have this in the love of it, are prepared for heaven. And it is a great thing to recognize the valley as only a shadow: the substance is gone; Jesus has taken the sting of death away. The second thing in knowing our end is that of reconciliation; to be reconciled to it; that is a wonderful thing! It has always been wonderful to me. Reconciliation, how kind the Lord is in this! Sat there by the side of my poor child, reconciled. The thought of continuing in this world any longer would have been, after what she had enjoyed, distressing. Reconciliation. "Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come." was the language of her dying lips; longing for the veil of mortality to be rent from top to bottom, and to go at once into glory's full possession. Reconciliation. Ah! farewell, world; farewell, poor afflicted body; wearisome nights, sorrowful days, gloomy times; Satanic darts, and temptations, and trials. No more groanings, no more rebellions; the inhabitant shall not say, "I am sick;" no pain, no sorrow, and they die no more, the throne of God and the Lamb established there. Reconciliation. And then it means, anticipation; to live in anticipation of it. Jesus always lived in anticipation of it; his departure was always present with him. "For the Joy set before him, he endured the cross." "To this end was I born." He anticipated it, and all the circumstances connected therewith; it was with him, "The Son of man shall be put to death, rise the third day." And then it means earnest expectation. "I reckon", this was one of the triumphant expressions at times of my poor child, "the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God, when the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

If we notice *the helps*; "Know the measure of my days." I would not say a word to lessen your diligence in business, nor to lessen your careful attention to the responsibilities of life; but I would that all of you were as anxious every evening over the books of the Bible as you are over your shop books. How much have I taken, today? Let us count up what have been the profits. I have had a very poor day today; go to bed rather dull. Good day today I go to bed rather cheerful. I say nothing against that in its place; by no means whatsoever. But what a good thing if we could reckon up, at least sometimes, at the end of the day, Well, what have been my thoughts today? Where have my affections been today? How far had my soul gone out to God today? What scripture has given me any light, or life, or comfort today. What communion have I had with God today? If talents of truth have been committed to me, what have I gained by trading with them? Have I seen the Lord today? And if I lie down tonight, and I should die before morning, have I gained that in fellowship with God today that will give me, if I should die before the morning, an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? Ah, how poor the paltry gains of silver and gold in comparison of that for which the apostle thirsted when he said, "That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection, fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord." So, the Lord will come, reckon with his servants, and see how much each has gained by trading. It is a good thing when we can do so, and thus, from day to day, recognize the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of death. It is a help to us. We are subject to vanity, and although "it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of laughter, yet our natural tendency is to be light and trivial.