

LIFE IN EARNEST

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He did it with all his heart and prospered.”
2 Chronicles 31:21.

This is no unusual occurrence; in fact, it seems to be the general rule of the moral universe that those men prosper who do their work with all their hearts, while those are almost certain to fail who go to their labor leaving half their hearts behind them. Look around you in business. Who are the young men who rise in the establishment? Not your men who sleep behind the counter, who are glad to avoid a customer. Employers soon discover those who throw energy into their work, and they like a young man who has “push” in him; he is sure to be promoted, and in time will become a trader on his own account. Who are the merchants who succeed in this busy time of competition? Your lazy sluggards? No. Your men who are diligent in business, do what they do with both their hands, breast the current with all their strength, scorning to be carried down the stream to the cataract of bankruptcy. Who are your men who rise to eminence? Men do not go to bed and wake up in the morning to find themselves famous, at least not until they have encountered many stern labors; for God does not at this day give harvests to idle men except harvests of thistles, nor is He pleased to send wealth to the man who will not dig in the field to find its hidden treasure. It is universally confessed that if a man would prosper, he must be diligent in business; for at this day, beyond every preceding age it is true, “In the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.”

The same thing is true if we leave mercantile pursuits, and survey any other of the walks of life. If a man would make discoveries in science, he does not hit upon them by accident; but, being in the way, science meets with him. If a man would become eminent as a physician, he must walk the hospitals. If he would attain position at the bar, he must give days and nights to the folios of law. There is no hope for a man in these times, in anything, unless he proceeds to it with all his heart! It is the same in religion as it is in other things. I would not have you treat religion as though it were a business, but I would have you put as much force, and power, and energy, and heartiness, and earnestness into religion as ever you do into business, and, I might add, that it deserves far more! How is it that false religions have spread? What made Mohammedanism once so mighty in the earth? It was because Mohamed himself, when he preached, was as sincerely deluded as any of his followers—when he was pelted in the streets, he still persevered, and when assassins dogged his footsteps, he counted not his life dear unto him that he might proclaim what *he* thought to be a Revelation from Heaven. As for his followers, they were not sleepy professors; they drew their scimitars from their scabbards, and swore that they would not rest till they had brought men by edge of steel to the faith of their prophet! On they dashed, till their religion, like a mighty rising ocean, swept all before it, nor could its rising wave be driven back till it was met by an equal enthusiasm to withstand its progress! Look again on Roman Catholic missions. How was it that Romanists did what we have never done, and what I fear we never shall do till we have changed our men? How was it that Francis Xavier carried his faith into India, preached in Burma, obtained great influence in China, and even entered into the recesses of Japan, till everywhere you might see a Catholic convent or nunnery, and a crucifix lifted up, with devotees bowing before it? Because Xavier’s spirit was full of fire! He seemed to be a flash of lightning flaming from one end of Heaven to the other.

Now mark, as it has been with false religions, so must it be with the true. Under God, the Holy Spirit, our only hope for the increase of the Church, and for the conversion of the world lies in the development of energy within us, in the bringing out of earnestness in Christian souls. Oh, it was not scholarship that converted the heathen world at first, for on the slabs in the catacombs we have decisive evidence that the first Christians could scarcely spell their own names! It was not the pomp of learning, the pride of philosophy, or the power of eloquence which made the early confessors so mighty; it was their singular earnestness. The Church was all on fire! She was like a volcano; she might not be high and lofty as some of the surrounding hills, but they had summits clothed with frost, while she sent forth earnest Truths of God like

streams of lava, which burned their way, and covered all the lands! Christians in those days were Christians, indeed! They believed what they professed; they knew what they spoke; they testified what they had seen; and they spoke with an unconquerable, untamable energy, which smote even the iron power of Rome, and dashed it into shivers! So must it be today, and indeed, so is it. Look around you; who are the most useful men in the Christian Church today? The men who do what they undertake for God with all their hearts! Where is the preacher whom God blesses to the conversion of hundreds in a year? Is he a sleepy, prosaic soul? Does he confine himself within narrow limits? Does he speak sleepy words to a slumbering congregation? We know it is not so, but where God is pleased to give the congregation, it is, whatever it may not be, a proof that there has been earnestness in the preacher! Who are the most successful Sunday school teachers? The most learned? Every superintendent will tell you it is not so. The most talented? The most wealthy? No; they are the most *zealous*; the men whose hearts are on fire; those are the men who honor Christ. Who among you today is doing the most for your Master's Kingdom? I will tell you. Lend me a spiritual thermometer by which I may try the heat of your heart, and I will tell you the amount of your success. If your hearts are cold towards God, I am sure you are doing nothing though you may pretend to do much. But if you can say, "Lord, our soul is all on flame with an agony of desire to do good to the souls of men," then you are doing good, and God is blessing you as He did Hezekiah, who did it with all his heart and prospered!

I feel that very many Christians are not Christians with all their hearts. I feel that perhaps some of you have only given Jesus Christ a dull, cobwebby corner of your hearts, instead of bidding Him sit at the head of the table, and reign upon the throne. And fearing that we are all in danger of getting into a Laodicean lukewarm state, I wish to stir you up this morning, and if I may only stir *myself* up, I shall be thrice happy to go home and think that at least one has gotten some good from the service, for the preacher needs to be kept alive quite as much as the hearers, for there is a danger that even the Lord's servant may lack the live coal upon his lips, and then he will be useless to his hearers.

This morning we shall notice *the effects of whole-heartedness upon the Christian*; I shall then *endeavor to stir you up with many arguments to be earnest in your work of faith and labor of love*; and when I have so done, I shall *address those to whom religion has as yet been a trifling matter*. And God grant that they may be ready to seek the Lord with all their hearts, for then He will surely be found of them!

I. First, then, let us notice THE SPHERE WHICH CHRISTIAN EARNESTNESS OCCUPIES IN THE DIVINE LIFE. Mark, I speak now only to those who are really and savingly converted to God, for if *we* are not first right with God, zeal for God is but a pretense!

One of the first things that thorough earnestness will do for a Christian is to make him *think* very earnestly for his Lord and Master. In the diary of Jonathan Edwards, we find the following account of his feelings towards the Lord's work, "I had great longing for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the world; my secret prayer used to be in great part taken up in praying for it. If I heard the least hint of anything that had happened in any part of the world which appeared to me, in some respect or other, to have favorable aspect on the interest of Christ's Kingdom, my soul eagerly caught at it, and it would much animate and refresh me. I used to be earnest to read public news letters, mainly for that end, to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interest of religion in the world." Now, when we are full of zeal for God, it is the same with us. Our thoughts are continually set upon Divine things; go where we may, we regard our place not as a sphere for business, but as a sphere for usefulness. We make that our very first thought. Why, Beloved, if we are really in earnest for God, we shall begin to think of Christ's work in the world as soon as ever we wake! And when we rest at night, it will still be with the Lord before us, and with His Glory written in our hearts. I am afraid some of you think but very little of Him, and of His cause in the world. How often when our missionary heralds are issued, nobody cares to read them. The annual report of what God is doing in foreign nations is generally the driest and dullest affair that ever comes in our way—not so much dry in itself, but because we of this generation have not been tutored and schooled to think of the advance of the Gospel, and the progress of Christ's cause. Let once this flaming torch of zeal kindle your souls, and you will have Christ's cause upon your hearts at all times!

But when a man has thus had his soul quickened, to consider the cause of Christ, the next thing he will do is to *plan* and to *purpose* for it. What fine purposes some men have at eccentric seasons! After they have listened to some earnest address they go home thinking—"Well, I must do something." And they half resolve they will, but, lacking the whole-heartedness of Hezekiah, the purpose never comes to a definite shape; it still resides in the clouds. As some men build cas-

gles in the air, so others build churches there! They educate preachers in the air, they support Christ's ministers in the sky, they send out fresh missionaries in the clouds. All their plans are very beautiful, and all practical schemes are poor affairs compared with their magnificent projects, but then it is all an unsubstantial *dream*—a pleasing picture, a dissolving view, and it soon melts into something which for them is more practical—the world and the affairs thereof! Give him earnestness, and every time he makes a purpose it *is* a purpose; every stroke of the great motive-power within his soul tells, and sets a wheel in motion; he cannot let the blood circulate through him without its carrying life in every drop! But some men have dead blood in their veins, it is going round, going to the heart, and issuing from it, but there is no life in a drop of it. They can talk, and they can sometimes make a resolve, but it never comes to a definite purpose; they never set their teeth and plant their feet down, and say, "God helping me, I will do something. God being with me, I will not live in this world for nothing. I will not be as an oyster which lies in the mud, and opens its shell according as the tide brings round the meal-time! It shall not be said that I live merely to eat and drink, and to accumulate wealth; but, O Christ Jesus, by everything that is true, if You will help me, I will serve You while I live, and, if it must be, will be prepared to die for Your cause!" Only earnest men get so far as to select their purpose and adhere to it. Dear Friends, choose your gun, but mind you, stand to it till every round of ammunition is exhausted!

But we have known persons in a great spasm—in a sort of apoplectic fit of pious enthusiasm, make a huge resolve but they come to their cooler senses long before it is carried out. The blood has run to the head very powerfully, there has even been too much blood; they have rolled over in the spasm of fanaticism; it has never come to a practical effect. Now, when a man's heart is right with God, what he has resolved to do he will do. I can speak for one, when I say I know a man who, when he feels that God has given him a work to do, when he has once resolved it shall be done, would move Heaven and earth but what he would accomplish it. And he would sooner break his heart or destroy his health than he would fail in it; for he feels that if it is God's work, it must be done. Man's work may stop, but God's work cannot; and when any get in his way, or seem to thwart his purpose, that man feels his zeal so boiling over, that for God's sake he forgets everything else; and even dear friendships snap when it appears as if Christ's cause were imperiled! I know this, that when a man gets thoroughly alive for God, he cannot put up with those lazy sluggards who will neither work nor permit others to labor. When once a Believer gets his spirit wholly up to the work, it is now—for God and Christ, follow who may; but as for you who are faint-hearted, go to your homes lest you make the man of God's heart to faint! Stand away, lest the chilling influence of your icy souls should do something to abate our fervor! I think a Christian is never worth much till, having been brought up to the point of resolve, he will achieve the Heaven-born purpose, come what may, and is ready to crash and smash everything earthly and worldly, so that he may accomplish his life-work in the name of the eternal God who called him to it!

This earnestness of purpose will show itself in *perseverance*. The man fell the first time; "Never mind," he says, "It is God's work; we will try again." He breaks down again—but he falls to rise! There he sees the summit of the mountain glittering in the sunlight; and though he has a burden on his back, he vows, "I will climb there." He has fallen down that crag, and he lies there black with bruises, groaning, and moaning. The first thing he does when he wipes his eyes of the dust, is to look up and say, "I will mount there yet." He climbs again—but an antagonist shoves him down! He has not time to stop and examine who it is, and resent the insult, he recommences the ascent. Now and then he runs; when he cannot run, he walks; and when he cannot walk, he creeps. And when it seems impossible to go on hands and knees, he is content to pull himself up by his hands alone, oftentimes even grasping a briar, and sending a thorn into his flesh, but still saying, "It is God's place, and He has bid me climb, and in His Divine strength I will do it. I cannot rest, I cannot be quiet till the deed is done." Perseverance is the sure effect of this whole-heartedness for God!

Mark carefully, that this heart being thus on fire will show its zeal in an entire dependence upon God, and in intensely fervent prayer for God's help, and for God's blessing. Surely a man cannot know himself, who, when he has a high and noble purpose attempts it apart from God, for he is well persuaded that if it is God's work it must be done in God's strength, and as he must have that strength, he goes before God as if he meant to have it, and could take no denial! One of the old Puritans says, "When we pray to God without fervency we do, as it were, ask Him to deny us, but when we can go with fervency, then we must prevail." Oh, those prayers which one has sometimes heard when the man of God seemed like a Samson to get hold of the two pillars of Heaven, bowing himself with all his strength to pull down the mercy, and to destroy his sins, knocks at Heaven's gate as for dear life—the knock of a starving beggar who cannot afford to be un-

heard! Oh, that is prevailing prayer, when we can get a grip of the Angel and wrestle with Him. I saw in one of the Churches in Paris a picture by an eminent artist representing Jacob wrestling with the Angel. I had not exactly conceived it so literally as the artist had, for he has sketched the Patriarch with his foot between the Angel's feet, trying to throw Him down, and wrestling just as wrestlers might do in the ring. There ought to be a practical purpose about our prayer, and as intense an earnestness to win the blessing from the Angel as there is on the part of the wrestler to hurl his foe upon his back. We shall never get true and lasting revival in the Church till we have men who in the supplications do their work with all their hearts, and thus prosper!

My dear Friends, I shall not enlarge further to show you the proper sphere of earnestness—the fact is that it enters into every part of the spiritual man—earnestness quickens his pulse, increases the circulation of his blood, it makes the man in all respects in an healthy state; these holy stimulants make the soul stronger than the giant when he is refreshed with new wine. If you would ask me what fire has to do with the Christian sacrifice, I would answer it has everything to do with it. You may present a sacrifice in the dark, but you cannot consume a sacrifice without flame. You may do with very little light, but you must have fire to burn the whole victim, or else the sacrifice is no offering at all. Oh for more of this fire! Jesus! Master! Baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire! Fill our souls with fervor! Restore unto us the indomitable energy of our ancestors. Give us back the northern iron and steel, to which their resolute natures may be likened; deliver us from these willow days in which men bend before every blast—make us strong men to run the race of righteousness, and mighty men made mighty through Your Spirit, with earnestness to serve You among the sons of men!

II. I shall need your earnest attention while I labor TO STIR YOU UP BY CERTAIN ARGUMENTS WHICH MAY PROVOKE YOU TO THIS EARNESTNESS.

Either our religion is the grossest impostor that was ever palmed upon mankind, or else it is one which deserves the whole life and force and strength of every man who has been blessed by it. I would today, if I were not sure that God's Word is true, and that the precious Doctrines of Grace are the very Revelation of Heaven, renounce them boldly. Oh, I could not, I hope—I speak before God—hold the religion of Christ and yet be sleepy about it! It does seem to me that if religion is worth anything, it is worth everything; and that for man to keep his godliness as some great farmers do their little off-hand farms, which they merely farm for pleasure, while their very life and substance is spent in another place, seems to me to be the height of wickedness, and the topmost ridge of absurdity! Either I would never seek God and His Righteousness at all, or I would seek them *first*. It seems to me to be an insane attack upon everything like wisdom, to put the worst things first, and the best things last—to put the world on our heads and Heaven under our feet—to make Christ second best and to make Mammon chief and lord in our affections. Surely this will never do.

But, Christian Brothers and Sisters, that I may have your hearts warmed this morning, may the Spirit of God take these things and lay them like hot coals to your souls. Remember, my Brothers and Sisters, what solemn things you and I have to deal with. We have to deal with the souls of men, immortal, infinitely precious; we have to deal under God with the eternal interests of Heaven and Hell; we have dealings with the sinner's sin, and long to see it washed away with the precious blood of Christ! We have dealings with man's natural death in sin, and long that men may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Now, if the soul is what Scripture tells us it is—if there is a Heaven and a Hell—if Christ has made an Atonement for sin, these are things that cannot be trifled with! As well dance upon the altar of God, or dabble a harlot's garments in the blood of the Paschal Lamb, as trifle and be half-hearted when we have to deal with such awful things as these!

Consider *the greatness of the work we have to deal with*. Have any of you a glimpse of an idea of this one city of London? Three millions! Three millions! As many as the Scottish nation, with some 60,000 added to the number every year—more added than we add accommodation in places of worship to receive them, so that if our Churches grow, still not in the same ratio as the population. It is said that we have more than half a million inhabitants in this city who are heathens—as positively heathens as though they lived under the sway of the king of Dahomey, or dwelt in the very center of Tartary—without God and without Christ, never listening to the Gospel, never entering a place of worship from the beginning of the year to the end of it. This is the work for which we must gird up our loins. Oh, dear Brothers, we cannot afford to be half-hearted here! If there is some happy city somewhere in the world where all men hear the Word of God, and where the most are converted, even there coldness is inexcusable! But here, here in this awful city with so much to do, asleep?! Oh, God, forgive us that we are not more awake! Think how few there are to do the work. There are, perhaps,

many so called laborers, men who wear the robes of priesthood, but who know not Christ in the power of His Gospel! How few there are of the faithful among men who are ready to spend and be spent! When I look at the great harvest—enlarge your thoughts for a moment, the field is the world—when I see corn field after corn field, a thousand million immortal souls; and in some countries one missionary to two millions, and in others, not even one to ten millions immortal souls—one may wipe the sweat from his brow in the hot and sultry day, but only the cold-hearted will stop to rest, for there is so much to do! “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.” And shall those laborers sleep? O Lord, we beseech You, have pity upon us, and help us never to sleep again, but to be in earnest for poor souls!

Think, I pray you, how earnest Satan is. If *we* slumber, *he* never does; if we are idle, certainly he never is. As Hugh Latimer said, the devil is the most busy prelate in the land; he traverses his diocese; he is always visiting his flock; he is instant in season and out of season to destroy! See the activity of the infidel and the Romanist, of those who hold false doctrines, how zealously do they compass sea and land to make one proselyte! What are we doing? I say, Brothers, what are we doing? Call it nothing, and you have not called it by too small a name; they are alive, and we are half dead; they are boiling in fervent heat, and we are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

And, oh, I pray you, my Hearers, think, and let this move you—think of the responsibilities which lie upon us as a Church. I speak not egotistically, to glorify either myself personally or myself in you. But there has never been a congregation—certainly never a dissenting congregation—which has been more favored than we have been! What has God worked! What a dew from Heaven has rested upon the Word! What multitudes have been added to the Church! What manner of people ought we to be! Indeed, Brothers and Sisters, I do not need to censure, for your obligations are felt, and the Holy Spirit is helping you to fulfill them. There are men and women in the midst of this Church of whom I dare speak in any and in every company, and say that Apostolic days scarcely produced men and women superior to them! I have the felicity and the honor to see some in this Church who are patterns of everything that is good, and they not only spend their time for Christ, but who beyond what I ever expected to see of mortal men, give labor, substance, and talent to Christ and His cause. Those I always look upon with joy as being the honorable product of the Truth of God fully, fairly, and faithfully preached. But there are many others of whom this could not be said. Oh, we were speaking lies in hypocrisy if we said of all of you that you were doing what you could do, or half what you can do! Yes, and in some cases a hundredth part of what you will wish you had done when you come to lie upon your beds! God has been pleased to give a congregation, and to give to that congregation a ministry upon which the Spirit has rested, as is manifested in the many—the *very many* conversions which *daily* take place in our midst! The Christian world has looked upon us and said, “How God has favored that Church!” And if *we* sleep, what base ungrateful wretches shall we be? If God has brought us to the Kingdom for such a time as this, and we prove unworthy, deliverance will come from some other quarter to this land, but we shall have to write Ichabod upon these walls, for the Glory of God will depart! God will leave us to our own devices. We have had opportunities of doing good that have been seldom offered to any body of Christians, and if we do not avail ourselves of them, the most withering curse that ever came upon a Christian community must most certainly fall upon us! Oh, may God help us to be found faithful to our charge!

Do you need anything else to stir you up? Behold before you today the stream of death washing away myriads of souls—behold, I say, before you this morning, the dying souls of men. Listen! Their moans are going up to Heaven now, the groans which they utter in their last agonies are accusing you before the Most High. “None cared for my soul,” is the cry of many. “Great God, I lived in a Christian land, but none cared for my soul! I lived in a court or in an alley, and Christian people passed the entrance of that alley to go to Chapel, but they never thought about me! I lived next door to a Christian man, but he never prayed for me. I lived in a top room of the very house where there lived a man of God, but he never thought of *me*!” Oh, hear those last cries, I say, as the Spirit for the last time reflects upon the cold Church which cared not for her children! Hear the accusation of the angel as he cries, “The sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaves to the roof of his mouth for thirst; the young children ask for bread, and no man breaks it unto them.” Hear, I beseech you, and let it startle you into earnestness—hear the shrieks of the damned spirits for a moment. Another soul has gone to Hell, and while we speak, another, and another, and another! Listen to the solemn fall, the moving of the black waters as they close around the sinking spirit. As roll the masses of water down Niagara’s steep, so roll the waves of souls into Perdition!

And you, you are the men whom God has sent to be the saviors of the world—will you waste the moments and neglect your charge? Black night has settled upon the nations and you, you only, are the men who carry the flaming torch into the thick darkness—followers of Christ, disciples of Jesus; you are to be the deliverers of those who sit in the Valley of the Shadow of Death bound in affliction and iron, and will you sit still, will you fold your arms, will you give to the world and self that which belongs to Christ? Let my tears influence you! But what are these if shrieks of doomed souls cannot awaken us? What hearts of stone we must have, not to feel while the terrors of Hell are around us! What granite heart must we have received if we believe that men are being lost, and yet never care for them! Oh, sits there a Christian anywhere around me, above, or beneath, who cares not for man's soul? I pray God to send into his ears one piercing shriek from Tophet, and let that abide in his memory, and ring in his soul until he says, "I *must* do something to win sinners to Christ."

But once more, and if I fail here I break down altogether. I conjure myself and you to serve God with all our hearts, because of that love which we have received of Jesus. Look, there He hangs—my eyes behold Him. His head is crowned with thorns; His feet are pierced with nails; His hands are dripping with blood. Jesus, Master! You are dying for me! That precious heart's blood of Yours is flowing for my Redemption, and for my cleansing. At Your feet I fall and kiss You. O Lover of my soul, I cannot but love You, You have won my heart! The love of Christ constrains me! And do You, Lord, bleed for sinners, for rebels, for enemies, for those who would not have You to reign over them, and shall I not adore You? Yes, but when I rise from my knees, shall I go forth into the world and forget You? Thorn-crowned head, shall I forget You? Pierced hands and feet, shall I forget You? Mangled body, shall I forget You? Slaughtered Emmanuel, shall I forget You? God forbid!—

*"Sooner than not my Savior love
Oh, may I cease to be!"*

Beloved, what do you say, will you look into His face and never weep for souls? Will you look upon His wounds and your heart never be wounded for poor dying men? Will you live unto yourselves and die unto yourselves? Sirs, the infidel is not far wrong when he tells us that our religion is hypocrisy, if we can be half-hearted over it! Go, go you enemy of the Church, tell it in Gath; publish it in the streets of Ascalon, till we become a hissing and a reproach if you shall find us living, as though the Truth of God were a lie, and as though the Doctrines revealed of God were but a delusion and an impostor! Wake up, Church of God, why are you given to slumber? O for a voice like thunder! How would I make you wake up! But what am I, more than half asleep myself? As I read the life of such men as Alleine of Taunton, and Baxter of Kidderminster, Grimshaw of Haworth, and Whitefield of Everywhere, I blush at my cold heart! Especially when perusing the life of our Apostle Paul, I blush a thousand times to think how idly I have lived! Sinners, these were men—the tears streamed down their cheeks when they thought of sinners lost forever; their words froze not like icicles upon their lips, they spoke, and every word was power. Oh how they pleaded! How Paul could say, "Night and day with tears," (hear how he puts it), "as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's place, be you reconciled to God." *He* surely could not accuse himself that he had not poured out his soul for men. No, these men *lived*. We dare not say we live. Oh, the long-suffering, and the tender mercy of God, that He has had compassion on such a Church as that of the present day, and that He continues to have mercy upon us, when we are so dull and sluggish in the service of Christ.

Even while I am preaching thus I feel sorry that we should have need of such a sermon. When the Spartans went to battle, every Spartan marched with songs, willing to fight; but when the Persians went to the conflict, you could hear as the regiments came on the crack of whips, as the officers drove their soldiers to the fight! You need not wonder that a few Spartans were more than a match for thousands of Persians, that in fact they were like lions in the midst of sheep. So let it be with the Church, never needing to be flogged to action, but full of an irrepressible life which longs for conflict against everything which is contrary to God! Then we should be like lions in the midst of herds of our enemies, and nothing, through God, will be able to stand against us. Play no longer, men! Cease your piping and dancing in the market places! Come, lift up your hands from those childish toys! Come away men, come away from the dormitories where you sleep so luxuriously, and from the playgrounds where you sport so merrily! Get to something that is worth doing, to something that is high, and noble, and heavenly, befitting your birth. You say, "What is this you are calling play?" Why your work, your business, your cares, unless they are sanctified to God! I tell you, Sirs, that in the light of eternity all thing except serving God are mere child's-play, mere theatricals, mere masquerading. They are but the mummeries of a

carnival, the jests of a comedy, the laughter of a pantomime. It is only serving God that is doing immortal work; it is only living for Christ that is living at all!

III. And now I must draw to a conclusion—may God give me fresh Grace while I undertake the solemn work OF DEALING WITH CARELESS AND UNCONVERTED SOULS.

When Mr. Whitefield was preaching in the parish church of Haworth, he said when he came to the point of self-examination, “I was about to address the ungodly, but I suppose that after the faithful ministry to which you have listened in this church, there is very little need for me to say anything about this.” Mr. Grimshaw thereupon rose and said, “Brother Whitefield, don’t flatter them, I fear that half of them are going to Hell with their eyes open.” And I must say this morning, blessing God for all the conversions that have taken place here, yet for God’s sake we dare not flatter you! There are many of you still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity, as far from God as ever you were. Though we have wept over you, and preached to you again, and again, yet your hard hearts will not break. Up to now you have been proof that *we* can do nothing, and unless the Spirit of God shall come upon you, we fear that you will remain the same; but now in God’s name let us talk to you.

And so, my Hearers, you think that the things of God are not worth serious thought, at least not yet; if they are not altogether trifling things, they are of such secondary importance that any time will do. The scraggy end of your life will suffice, you think, for them. Now let me remind you who may be sporting with these things, that this is inconsistent with reason and sense! You will find dying to be very earnest work. It will be no amusement to be smitten by the hand of death, to go to your deathbed with your physician’s voice in your ear, “Nothing can be done for you, you may linger for a little while, but you must die.” When the death struggle comes on, when death gets you, when the grim monster shakes you till you feel every bone rattle, when they wipe the death sweat of the last conflict from your brow, when the darkness steals over your eyes, when your extremities chill with death, when the voice is choked, when the death rattle is in your throat, oh, Sirs, you will not laugh, then! You will not say these things are fancies! You will have no hard words in those last moments against those who warned you. Men laughed at Noah when he built his ark upon dry land, but when they were climbing to the mountaintops to escape the inundating waves, they had no material for jest and satire. Then their tears, and cries, and groans proved that they felt the truth of Noah’s preaching of righteousness! It will be so with you; mark, whoever shall be the witness of it; you will find death no child’s play.

And then comes the judgment. The heavens are on fire, the earth is shaking; the Judge is sitting, and the books are opened. Will you laugh then when you hear your name proclaimed with the addition, “Come to judgment, come away,” when the eyes of the Judge shall be fixed upon you, and He shall turn to that page which records your deeds, and shall solemnly read them while men and angels hear—Sinner! Sinner! It is enough to drive the laughter out of you this morning if you would but hear even the distant echo of the awful voice which shall pronounce the sentence, “Depart you cursed, into everlasting fire in Hell, prepared for the devil and his angels.” After the judgment, what comes then, Sinner? Then comes wrath without end! God will deal with you. His bare arm shall smite you. Beware, lest He tear you to pieces, and there be none to deliver you! In eternity, Mercy’s gates are shut—God’s long-suffering is then over—Justice commences its awful work. Soul, you will have no merry jests in Hell; you will find no laughter there at God’s mysteries. Oh, you may go on trifling now, my Hearers, but *then* you will not! You may say a little more sleep, and a little more slumber today—but there will be none of it then. Oh, how you will look back upon the misspent past and wish, but wish in vain, that you had never been created, sooner than that you should have lived to lose your only hope of salvation, your only time in which you might find salvation! O God, my God, I beseech You plead with men, for we are weak; plead with them, and make them feel that death, nor judgment, nor Hell are things to be trifled with!

Will you remember, you who are the butterflies of the day, the insects who flit from flower to flower, remember that Christ did not trifle when He came into the world to save souls. His was no life spent in the polished refinements of gaiety; His was a stern, awful life; His was a zeal that ate Him up. When He sweat great drops of blood, it was no light burden He had to carry upon those blessed shoulders, and when He poured out His heart, it was no weak effort He was making for the salvation of His people. Ah, Sinner! Ah, Sinner! Was Christ in earnest and are *you* foolish? Was Christ in earnest, I say, and do *you* despise, do *you* forget, do *you* neglect this great salvation? I may add, the ministers whom God sends are in earnest. I can say at this moment, I do feel a longing for the conversion of my hearers, such as I cannot describe. I would count it a high privilege if I might sleep in death this morning, if that death could redeem your souls from

Hell. But why is it that we can feel? Oh, that we felt more—why is it that we can weep when you do not? What is your soul to us, compared with what it must be to you? If we warn you, and you perish, your blood will not be required at our hand; it is only if we are cold and indifferent, that we shall be held responsible. But when we have poured out our heart unto you, when we have stretched out our arms, and like a loving mother with a child, have sought to bring you to the arms of Jesus, we have done all that we can do—we must leave the rest with God. But how is it, why is it, that *you* can trifle? It is your *own* salvation, not mine; it is your own eternal state; it is *you* who will lie forever in the pit of Hell, or joyously climb to Heaven; it is you, Sinner, you, not your neighbor, not the person that is sitting next to you, but *you*, standing there in the crowd, or you yonder—each of you personally! Oh, why should *we* be earnest and *you* be dull? God forgive you this sin, and forbid you to trifle any longer!

But lastly, you will find God to be in earnest when He comes to punish you. When He lets loose His terrors on you, you shall find it no sport; when the arrow which is today fitted to the string shall fly, you shall find it to be no baby's toy; when the sword which has been long in furbishing, and which is bathed in Heaven, shall begin to cut, you may say to it, "Oh, Sword, when will you rest, when will you be quiet?" But it will know no rest, for it will be awfully and solemnly in earnest with you, punishing you for your sins. Would now that one could awake you! Would that every heart here felt the need of whole-heartedness towards God! But you will not mind it—you will go away, and I shall be unto you as one who plays a tune upon a goodly instrument, and it will all be forgotten. There was a tear just now—perhaps rather a tear of sympathy excited by earnestness, than a tear from your own hearts, for your own case, but you will go away and forget it all, and you will come again and forget it again! And we shall go on praying with you, and preaching to you, but you will forget it; and one day it will be said, "So-and-So is dead, he died without a hope." And though it will be some consolation, yet what a sad one for the minister to be able to say, "Well, as in the sight of God, I did all I could, I did warn, teach, exhort, and plead with him."

Oh, how much better if God shall bless the Word to you, and we shall hear you tell that He took you up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a Rock, and established your goings! "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Faith in Christ is the great way of salvation. Trust Jesus, trust Him with all your heart, and you are saved this morning, and your sins are gone! And when you are saved yourself, I pray you forget not what I have tried to instill this morning—that if we serve God with all our hearts we shall prosper in His ways; and that we cannot expect to see His blessing upon anything that we do, unless we do it as unto the Lord, and not unto men.

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