

REPENTANCE

by St. Ephraim the Syrian

Come, my dearly beloved; come my Fathers and Brothers, the flock chosen of God, soldiers of Christ sealed in your foreheads. Come, My sons, attend to this discourse designed to promote the salvation of your souls. Come and let us communicate while this solemn time and happy opportunity of communicating lasts. Come, let us lay hold of eternal life; come, let us purchase the salvation of our souls. Fill your eyes with tears, and the eyes of your mind will soon be opened. Come all, one with another, rich and poor, princes and subjects, young men and maidens, old men and children, every age and sex, who desire to be delivered from eternal torments and to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

With holy David let us beseech our merciful and most gracious Lord, saying, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law. Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." Let us cry as that blind man did, who sat by the wayside, "Thou Son of the Most High God, have mercy upon me!" And if any rebuke us, or charge us to hold our peace, let us cry the more, a great deal, and never be weary of crying, till Christ, the giver of lights, shall open the eyes of our hearts. Therefore draw near to Him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed. Let us courageously take up just notions and ardent desires for the Kingdom of Heaven and the Paradise set before us, and all the things of this world will soon appear vile in our sight. Exert yourselves now, when it is the eleventh hour; make haste that you will not be shut out. For the evening is at hand, and He that is to distribute wages to all is coming with glory and great majesty to render to everyone according to his works.

My Brothers, let us repent and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance while we have time. Hear what Our Lord says, "There shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents!" Why then, O sinner, do you sit, stupid, listless, and negligent? Why are you disheartened and in despair? If there will be joy in heaven at your repentance, what are you afraid of? The angels are so affected as to feel an extraordinary joy on your account, and how can you remain inactive, unconcerned and unmoved? The King of Angels preaches repentance, and are there any fears which can discourage you? The Holy Undivided and Adorable Trinity invites you to repentance, and is a fruitless sigh or groan all the return you make to It?

Let not the pursuits and lusts of this world bewitch us with their sweetness here, lest hereafter we possess the bitterness of eternal fire, and of that worm which never dies. Let us mourn a little here, that we may not hereafter howl in everlasting torments.

Look well to it, and let nobody be negligent and careless in this matter, for the coming Christ shall be sudden as a dreadful flash of lightning! Does it strike no terror into you, that in that hour everyone shall receive in proportion to his merits, according to his works done in the body? Every man shall then bear his own burden, and everyone shall reap there whatsoever he has sown here. All must then stand naked and undisguised before the Judgement Seat of Christ, and every one of us must give an account of himself to the Judge. In that time and place, none can possibly receive any benefit or assistance from anyone else. One brother or friend shall not be able to help another, nor parents their children, nor children their parents, nor husbands their wives, but everyone shall then stand there with fear and trembling, awaiting the sentence which shall be pronounced by God.

Therefore, why do we lose the present opportunity by living in sloth and idleness, and not laboring to be ready and well provided for? Why are we not more careful, while we still have time, to prepare for making a good defense and acceptable apology at that Tribunal? Why do we so slight and despise the Holy Scriptures and the Words of Christ? Do we not think that His Words and those of the Holy Apostles and Prophets will condemn us in that day, at that tremendous trial, if we have not kept them and done as they commanded us? Hear what Our Lord says to His Disciples, "He that hears you, hears Me, and he that despises you, despises Me and My Father." And again He says in another place, "He that rejects Me, and does not receive My Words, has One that judges him. The Word I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day." But what Word is that which shall judge us in the last day? His Holy Gospel, and the other sacred writings of the Holy Prophets and Apostles. Therefore, my brothers, let us not despise those things which are written. Remember Who says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Words shall not pass away."

Come then, most dearly beloved, before that dreadful and terrible Day overtakes you. Let us cast ourselves upon the abyss of the mercies of God. For God Himself encourages and invites all, saying, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

Here all are encouraged by the patient, the compassionate, the long-suffering Lover of souls, who would have all men be saved. He does not invite and call some particular persons only, but all. Come unto Me, says He, all, whether rich or poor; "And he that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out, and who is it that cometh to me? He that hath My Commandments and keepeth them; he that heareth My words and believeth on Him that sent Me." Blessed, undoubtedly, is he who hears His word and keeps it; but he is miserable who refuses to hear and obey. As it is written, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Repent, my brother, and then rid yourself of all fear. Do the works of repentance, O sinner, confiding in and looking to the infinite goodness and mercy of Christ, who says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Repent therefore, that you may not be confounded at that dread Tribunal where thousands and ten thousands of Angels and Archangels shall wait with trembling; when the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light, and the books will be opened; when men shall be separated one from the other, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. That will undoubtedly be an hour of astonishing fear and horrible dread when the just and terrible Judge shall come to take vengeance for sin. Who will not tremble all over, and who will not be sore afraid at that hour? For the Judge will be unerring and mighty, and the judgement will be severe and inexorable and our words shall be set in order before our eyes. A river of fire shall issue from before Him. On one side shall be heard the incessant hymns of Angels and Saints, and on the other the insupportable wailings and fruitless lamentation of sinners. Then also shall the treasures be opened, and the just receive the reward of their good works and enjoy eternal rest.

And blessed are they who have hungered and thirsted here on earth, because there they shall be filled. But woe to those who have been full here, for there they shall hunger and thirst. And blessed are they who have wept and mourned here, because there they shall laugh and be comforted. But woe to those who laugh now, for there they shall mourn and weep without intermission. And blessed are they who have been merciful here, for there

they shall obtain mercy. But woe to those who have here shut up their hearts to pity and compassion for their neighbor, for there they, in their turn, shall have no mercy shown to them.

You have heard how those are pronounced blessed who have on earth striven lawfully and fought the good fight, and how on the contrary, those are declared miserable and wretched who are careless and negligent. Most dearly beloved, consider all these things and weigh them well in your mind, and make all haste, and use all diligence to be saved; and do not regard those who here continually indulge themselves in ease and pleasures, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither, even as the green herb.

Love not this present world, for it beguiles and ruins those who love it by delighting them for awhile, and then it sends them poor and naked into an eternal state. Listen and attend to the Holy Scriptures, and you will not be imposed upon and deceived by this vain and wicked world. Hear what St. John the Theologian says, "Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of that Father, but it is of the world. And the world passes away and the lusts thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever." Hear what the Lord Himself says, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Consider His Words with fear and diligent attention, because, as you have heard, the Word which He spoke and taught is the same that shall judge us at that Last Day. Is our Lord a liar? God forbid, for He is the Truth itself, and if you are truly persuaded and know certainly that He is the Truth and that in His Words there is no falsehood at all, how, wretched man, can you thus slight them, and go on in this careless manner? What do you wait for? What are your thoughts taken up with? Who will make your defense for you? Do you not know that everyone must give an account to God for himself? Do you not know that everyone shall reap what he has sown, and that everyone shall bear his own burden? Think while you still have time, unbind and shake off the burden of your sins. God, the lover of souls, invites you to this, saying, "Come unto Me, all you that are heavy laden." See, He invites all. Let none refuse or despair; let none dare to say, "I have not sinned." He that says he has not sinned is blind and cannot see far off and is miserable beyond all men. For St. John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we lie, and do not the truth, and we deceive ourselves and make God a liar, for no man is clean from pollution."

And this is the base of our duty to mourn and weep; it is necessary to wash away the filth and guilt of our sins. We should, therefore, sing with the Holy Prophet David "Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." And again, "Every night wash I my bed and water my couch with my tears." He sinned one night, and wept every night, and thereby obtained blessedness. For being a prophet he had a perfect foresight, and some portion of the Spirit of Him who says, "Blessed are they that mourn."

Therefore, mourn for none of the transitory things of this world. Set not your heart upon the delights of the present life, nor covet worldly riches. Take a dislike to soft, effeminate, gaudy dressings, and all the tokens and effects of luxury. Hate the several sorts of paint, dyes for the hair, beautifying preparations, those ornaments that serve only for pride and vanity, harps and pipes and theatrical clappings of the hands, and disorderly and indecent clamours. Avoid such songs as they use in the worship of devils, and which serve the devil's purposes to corrupt mankind. Do you not know, wretched man, that all

these things are the seed of the Devil? All these things the gentiles use, who have no hope of salvation. Let us not therefore be like the gentiles, lest we be condemned with them. Hear this solemn declaration of the Apostle, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that from now on you walk, not as other gentiles walk in the vanity of your mind, having the understanding darkened. Let us therefore forsake the works of the gentiles and not return back to what is behind us, nor do the same things again."

You have once renounced Satan and his angels, and have entered into covenant with Christ before many witnesses. Consider Who it was you engaged with in that covenant, and by no means make light of Him or it. Moreover be assured of this, that the Angels at that time recorded your words, your covenant, and the renunciation you made; and this record they laid up in Heaven against that dreadful Day of Judgement. Does not this thought make you afraid? Do you not tremble at it? In the Day of Judgement, the Angels shall produce your bond and the words of your mouth, before that formidable bar, where even the Angels themselves shall stand with trembling. Then must you hear those cutting words, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." Then you will lament indeed, and weep bitterly in that hour, but then it will do you no good.

Therefore, have pity on yourself now, and do not hate your own soul. Open your eyes and see in what way great number fight the good fight. See how they labor with all earnestness to be saved, and how they force themselves to every good work. How carefully they guard themselves from all envy, from evil speaking, from malice and hatred, from immodest mirth, from fornication, from luxury, from fightings and quarrelings. They have chosen the straight and rough way, fasting, watching, suffering afflictions and adversities, mourning and weeping. They have trimmed their lamps and made them shine. See how their mouth at all times sings hymns and praises to their immortal Bridegroom. Their eyes are continually fixed upon His beauties, and their souls rejoice and triumph in Him.

Consider and see: He is at hand, and will not tarry. He shall come to rejoice the hearts of those that love Him. He shall come to comfort those who here mourn and weep, not for their dead friends, or loss of temporal goods, but for the evil of sin cleaving to them, and the loss of that Kingdom of which there shall be no end, and of those blessed delights of Paradise from whence we were cast out by transgressing the Commandment of God; whither those return again, who here mourn and weep. He shall come to crown those who have here striven lawfully, and have loved the narrow and rough way. He shall come to have mercy on the merciful. He shall come to make those rich and happy who have suffered poverty for His sake. He shall come to fill those with good things, who for His sake have hungered and thirsted. He shall come to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and to make manifest the counsels of all hearts. In a word, He shall come to render to everyone according to his works. He shall come, but no more in a state of humiliation from the earth as before, but from the heavens, with power and great glory. Then shall the trumpets sound from Heaven, and the powers thereof shall be shaken. The whole earth shall tremble before the presence of His Glory, as the waters of the sea before the wind. A river of fire shall flow before Him to purge the earth from iniquities. Then shall there be a sudden cry, behold, the Bridegroom cometh; behold, now the long expected Joy cometh; behold now, the glory and triumph of the righteous, the Sun of Righteousness cometh; behold, the King of kings cometh, of whose Kingdom there shall be no end; behold, the righteous Judge cometh; lo, He cometh, go ye out to meet Him.

Then shall they go forth with joy, who have their lamps burning, and their garments unspotted and shining. They shall hear the voice of the Bridegroom, saying to them, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Upon the hearing of this cry, I say, they who have their lamps burning shall from all parts of the world go out to meet Him cheerfully and joyfully with much confidence and good hope, because their lamps are not gone out. Then you, (every impenitent and careless soul) shall find yourself in huge distress and anguish under a most dreadful calamity and insupportable necessity. And feeling your lamp gone out, shall say, with the utmost shame and confusion, "My brothers, lend me a little oil, for my lamp is gone out." And they shall answer and say, "Not so, lest there would not be enough for us and you; but go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourself." Then you shall go away with great afflictions, sorrow and lamentation, bitterly weeping and groaning because you can find no place to buy oil, for now the market is over, the time of life, which is the only opportunity for this traffic, is past and gone, and every living soul shall shake and tremble as the waters of the sea. Even the poor, who used to sit at the church doors and sell oil, are gone away too. Then, not knowing what in the world to do, and pressed on every side with anxiety and dismay, you will say, "I will go and knock at the door of the mercies of Christ my Lord; who knows but that He may open to me?"

Then you go and knock, and the Bridegroom answers from within, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Depart from Me, you worker of iniquity. You have showed no mercy to others; therefore you shall now find no mercy from Me. You would not hear the cry of the poor, neither will I now hear your cry. You heard My Holy Scriptures, and laughed at them; and therefore I will not allow you to enter here. You received not My Prophets and Apostles, and therefore the Word which they spoke shall condemn you in this last day. Depart from me, for the strait gate cannot admit you. You have fed your flesh, but you have killed your soul. Why then would you enter here, and defile my Kingdom? You have defiled the garment of your flesh. You have filled your mouth with arguing and evil speaking. You have hated your neighbor. You have fulfilled the will of the Devil, but My will you have rejected. And now do you beg to enter here, where you have sent nothing before you? Where you have no treasure laid up, neither tears, nor mourning, nor fastings, nor watchings, nor regular singing of Psalms and Hymns to God, nor chastity, nor patience, nor alms; having sent none of these treasures hither before you, what would you have here? This is the habitation where those dwell who have embraced poverty for My sake. This is the kingdom of the merciful. This is the consolation of those who have mourned in the world. This is the joy of those who have repented of their sins, and bewailed them. This is the rest of those who have watched and fasted. This is the life of the true widows and orphans. Here, they who in the world have hungered and thirsted, rejoice and triumph to Eternity. But you, in your life. Have already received your good things; depart from Me into everlasting fire."

Upon hearing these words, you shall stand astonished with shame and confusion. And as you so stand there, you shall hear from within the voice of joy, thanksgiving and triumph. You shall be able to distinguish the voices of every one of the companions and friends and then you will bitterly lament and say, O miserable and wretched man that I am, how have I been deprived of this Glory, and separated from my companions and friends by my abominable and wretched works? I cannot but confess that the Judgement of

God is righteous. Undoubtedly I suffer most justly, for they lived in the greatest temperance and abstinence, but I pursued a course of feasting and reveling. They sang the praises of God, but I was silent. They prayed with fervor and attention, but my vain and light mind wandered after unimportant trifles. They humbled themselves but I was proud and insolent. They despised themselves, but I set myself up, and boasted of myself and my performances. They wept, but I laughed. Therefore they rejoice and triumph now, but I mourn and lament. They right with Christ for ever and ever, but I am condemned to everlasting fire with Antichrist! Alas! Wretch that I am, what a calamity is befallen me! What immensely good things have I lost, only that I might for a little time fulfill the will of the Devil! Now I understand fully that everyone receives according to that which he has done, whether it be good or bad. Now I am sensible that I have been cheated and ruined by a most vain world. Of what unspeakable blessedness have I deprived myself! What misery and confusion have I pulled upon my own head!

These things are more to the same purpose shall you speak with bitter lamentations, but you do yourself no manner of good by it, for there repentance is too Late, and avails nothing. For this reason it is that the Holy Scriptures of the Apostles and Prophets testify that eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered in to the heart of a sinful man the good things which God has prepared for them that love him.

Again, you have heard Our Lord say, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather fear him who is able to kill both soul and body in Hell." And in another place He says, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for my sake." For the same reason the Apostle says, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall reap of the flesh corruption, but he that sows to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. For they that her sow in tears, there shall reap in joy!"

Therefore, my brothers, attend to and remember those things that are written. The sower went out to sow his seed. Who was it that went out and sowed? The good Householder, Our Lord Jesus Christ. But what did He sow? The Word of His Gospel, and His Holy Precepts. But where did He sow, and upon what ground? In the hearts of men, even to all the ends of the earth. But all do not obey the Gospel, neither do all break up their fallow ground that when the seed of the Lord has fallen upon them it may bring forth fruit. But being uncultivated, stony or thorny ground, they receive the Word indeed, but go and allow themselves to be beguiled and choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this world, and bring no fruit to perfection. Therefore, do you, beloved, rectify and prepare your hearts for the reception of the Gospel, and then excessive carefulness for the things of this world shall not choke your souls. Let us run or labor for necessities, not for delicacy or luxury. If you seek for and will be content with only what is sufficient, you will have rest, and will not need to labor overmuch. But if you will gratify your luxury and greed, the consequence must be abundance of toil, the rendering your Christian course dangerous by temptations and snares and hurtful lusts--a life of boundless sorrows and innumerable cares and anxieties.

My brothers, Our Lord assures us that one thing is needful, but yet it is necessary that some of our care and labor should be given to the things of this life in a reasonable measure and at proper times to supply the necessities of the body. But our spiritual interests are to be pursued, with incessant zeal and diligence in order to secure the salvation of our souls; for nothing is more precious and excellent than the soul.

Therefore, my brothers, let us work for our souls; let these employ our pains and study, and vigorous application every day. Let us not spend all our time in the care of the body, but whenever the body is hungry and desires nourishment, think at the same time that your soul requires its necessary and proper provision. And as the body, without taking food, cannot live, so likewise the soul must certainly die unless nourished with spiritual wisdom. Man is made up of two parts, a soul and a body, upon which account Our Saviour said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Do you therefore, as a good steward, give to your soul food proper for your soul, and to your body food proper for your body. Do not feed your body only, and leave your soul desolate and starving. Be sure you do not allow your souls to be destroyed by famine, but feed and nourish it with the word of God, with Psalms and Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, by frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures, with fastings, with watchings, with prayers, with tears, with the hope of and meditation upon the good things to come. These and such things as these, are the nourishment and life of the soul.

Take heed, my brothers, that none of you be found unfruitful; for he who in his flesh sows the enjoyments of the world, luxury, feasting and entertainments, shall from the flesh reap corruption. But he who in his spirit sows prayers and fastings and watchings, shall from the spirit reap life everlasting. Consider and see that no one can praise those who live in pleasure, who are vain and insolent, and distracted with the impertinent trifles and the immodest mirth of the world, for these things gentiles do. But this is our Law, and the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the merciful; blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake; blessed are they who are reviled and evil spoken of for the sake of Christ; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are they who practice abstinence and continence; blessed are they who have kept their baptism undefiled, blessed are they who have renounced this world for Christ, blessed are they who live in virginity, blessed are they who having wives, are as though they had none, blessed are those who watch and pray, blessed are they who look for Him that is coming to judge the quick and the dead, blessed are they who pour out their supplications with tears. This is the sense of the Holy Scriptures, these are maxims of true believers.

But I ask you, what Scripture promises blessedness to those who revel with pipes and harps; who indulge themselves in pleasure, in luxury and drunkenness and dancings; who love the world and the things that are in the world? These our Law does not advise; these things Our Lord has not taught. On the contrary He has declared that they shall be attended with misery and woe, saying "Woe unto those that laugh now, for they shall mourn and weep! Woe unto you that are full for you shall hunger. Woe unto you that are rich." And again He says, by the Prophet, "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Woe unto them that justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may swallow strong drink, that continue until night, until wine inflames them. The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands. These and the like are the practice of the lovers of the world, and the lovers of the flesh, but not of those who love and are beloved by Christ.

Now you will hear a few of the sentiments of the friends of Christ, those who walk in

the narrow way. Listen to these expressions of the Apostle. In all things approving ourselves as the ministers (servants) of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distress, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults or tossings to and fro, in labors, in watchings and fastings, and so on. And again Our Lord says, "Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Why then, dearest brothers, do you not pay the obedience you owe to this command? Lo, you have heard that they are declared to be blessed, who walk in the narrow way, and how woes are pronounced against those who take the broad and spacious way. Come then, and leave the broad way that leads to destruction. Let us labor a little while, that we may reign to endless ages. Having always before our eyes Him that is coming to judge the quick and the dead, and meditating continually upon that eternal life, and that immortal Kingdom where we shall dwell with choirs of Angels, and converse with Christ Himself.

Consider well, and keep it continually in mind that this life has nothing in it but tears, misrepresentations, mockings and reproaches, laziness and negligence, labors and cares, diseases, old age, sins, and death, and love not this world. Let not this world get possession of your heart and place not your delight in it. Let it not beguile and supplant you, and send you away naked into that other world. Remember Who says, "Pray without ceasing." Be not too much taken with the gaieties of life, nor trust in the bloom in flower of your age. Let the praises of God be perpetually in your mouth, for when God is named, He puts to flight the evil spirits. And if you set your hand to any work, let your tongue sing Psalms, and your spirit pray. Our Lord Himself, in His Own Person, teaches and exhorts us immediately to prepare ourselves, and if any of us have sinned and fallen, let us apply a remedy by our tears, while we have time for repentance. The time for penitential exercises is very short, but the Kingdom of Heaven has no end.

We do well to admire the blessedness of the saints and desire to be crowned as they are, but we are unwilling to imitate their labors and combats. Do you think that they were drowned without labors and afflictions in the same manner as you desire to be? Will you hear what kind of rest the saints had in this life? Some of them were tortured, others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, even more of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted and tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Lo, you have heard a few particulars out of many. Such were the accommodations and repose of the saints in this life; and they bore these things with all joy because they looked for those eternal good things which are laid up for them in the heavens, which eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man.

If you desire to escape eternal torments never speak evil of, nor rail at, nor abuse anyone. Woe to the ungodly and unrighteous man, for when all are enlightened he is reserved for the blackness of darkness. Woe to the blasphemer, for his tongue is bound, and unable to make any apology before the Judge. Woe to the greedy rich man, for his riches fly away, and his portion shall be in eternal fire. Woe to the lazy and negligent, for he shall seek for that time which he has wickedly misspent, but with all his seeking shall never recover it. Woe to the whoremonger, because he defiles his wedding garment, and shall, with shame and infamy, be cast out from the marriage feast of the Great King. Woe to the scurrilous detractor, and together with him, to the drunkard, for they shall have

their portion with the murderers, and be tormented with the adulterers. Woe to him that spends this short life in luxury and pleasure, for he shall be sought out and dragged like a fatted calf to the slaughter. Woe to the hypocrite, for the Shepherd shall deny him, and the wolf shall seize and devour him.

But blessed is he that travels on in the narrow way, for he shall be crowned, and bearing his crown, ascend into Heaven. Blessed is he who lives an exalted life, and yet entertains humble thoughts of himself, for he imitates Christ, and shall sit down with Him. Blessed is he who has been bountiful to many poor men, for he shall find many patrons when he comes to be judged. Blessed is he that does violence to his own desires in everything, for the violent take the Kingdom of Heaven by force.

Therefore, my brothers, let us force ourselves to every good work. Let us continually admonish and exhort and encourage one another, and edify one another, even as also you do. Let your discourse be about the Judgement and the account you must give, and how you may make the best defense. Whether you are doing any work, or walking by the way, or sitting at your meals, or lying upon your beds, or whatever else you are about, seriously meditate upon the judgement and the glorious coming of the righteous Judge; and let the thoughts and study of your hearts and your discourses with one another be on such questions as these: What is the nature of that outer darkness? What are the properties of that fire which is not quenched and that worm which sleepeth not? What kind of torment is gnashing of the teeth? Talk with one another about these things perpetually, night and day. Which way will that river of fire run, which shall issue from before Him, and purge the earth from the iniquities of them that dwell in it? How shall the heavens be rolled together as a scroll? How shall the stars fall as leaves from a fig tree? How shall the sun be darkened and the moon cease to give her light? How shall the heavens be rent asunder at the commandment of the Lord? How shall the Judge descend from Heaven with lightning and thunder? How shall the powers of Heaven be shaken and run before Him? In what manner shall the dreadful and terrible tribunal be made ready? How exceedingly shall the footstool of it quake at the approach of the Judge, to set His foot upon it? How shall the trumpet sound? How shall the tombs be thrown open? How shall the graves be ransacked? How shall all that have ever died from the beginning of the world be raised again, as if were from sleep? How shall the souls of men fly to their own proper bodies? How shall the saints run to meet their Lord? How shall they who are read be permitted to enter with Him? How shall the bride-chamber be shut against the negligent and careless?

To meditate on these things is good and profitable; to be careful and felicitous about these things, night and day, is absolutely necessary. He that is always mindful of death shall, scarce ever do amiss. Let not the whole time of our life be spent in laboring to provide meat and drink and clothes; thus the gentiles do, who have not the hope of life eternal. Let us not therefore be like them, but let us listen to those words of Our Lord, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Let us seek, my brothers, that kingdom of which there shall be no end. Let us seek that joy which shall continue for a boundless eternity. Let us pray, my beloved, with earnest attention and sorrow of heart, with sighs and groans and tears lest we fail of that glorious call, "Come ye blessed!" Away with the luxury and delights of this world, that in the other world we may gain the delights of paradise. Let us weep a little here that we may laugh there. Here let us hunger, that there we may be satisfied.

Here let us enter in at the strait gate, and choose the narrow way, that there we may walk at liberty, and our feet be set in a large place. And again I repeat it: See that this life does not supplant you, and beguile and abuse you, and send you naked and miserable into that other life, for the deceitfulness of this world has supplanted many, has beguiled and abused many, has blinded many. But let us, my brothers, take heed to ourselves. Let us obey this call of Our Lord, "Come ye all after me!" Let us leave all and follow Him alone! Let us despise all the joy of this world, for it mocks all those that are fond of it. But let us make all haste, and use all diligence to lay hold on eternal life, to be admitted among the Choirs of Angels, and to abide forever with Christ. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be Glory and Power throughout all ages. Amen.