

Fleeing from the wrath to come

by

**George
Whitefield**

Flying from the Wrath to come

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Castle-Yard of Glasgow

By the Reverend

MR GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Taken from his own Mouth in short Hand, and published at the
Desire of many of the Hearers.

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A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

CASTLE-YARD OF GLASGOW.

Matt. III. 7.

Who hath warned you to fly from the Wrath to come.

THESE words are part of a short, but withal of a very pathetic sermon, which was once delivered by one of the most thundering preachers that ever had the honour of speaking for God. I am verily persuaded, when I am preaching at *Glasgow*, that I am preaching to numbers of souls that make conscience of reading their bibles; I take it for granted, that I need not tell you who the thundering preacher was, *John* the Baptist, one who had the honour of being the harbinger and forerunner of the Son of God, one who being freed from worldly hopes, and worldly fear, spoke the truth to people of all ranks, and all denominations, a person that was endued with extraordinary gifts, and was blessed in an extraordinary manner. We are told, *v. 5th*, *There want out to him, Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan*. And what did they do? Did they come only to see a man whose raiment was camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins? No, it seems *John's* preaching had some effect upon their consciences, for we are told, *v. 6th*, that they *were baptized of him in*

Jordan, *confessing their sins*. But it seems in this numerous auditory that attended on *John*, when he looked round about him, he saw some that he little expected, and therefore *v. 7th*,

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4

we are told, *when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to fly from the wrath to come*. The *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* were persons of a quite different stamp: the *Pharisees* were the formalists of the day, they had a great deal of religion in their heads, but none in their hearts, they were a self-righteous generation, they were wise in their own eyes, they wore long gowns, they made broad their phylacteries, they tithed mint, annise and cumin, but forgot charity and the love of God: the *Sadducees* were the polite gentlemen of the age, the reasoning club, the *Deists*, they were above believing the bible, and they did not care to believe that there were angels and spirits; but however, it seems curiosity brought some of these learned gentlemen to hear *John*. *John* saw their rotten hearts, he saw the one carried away with reason and infidelity, and the other with formality, therefore he pays them a sorry compliment, *O generation of vipers*. What a dreadful title is here given to a learned body, that looked upon themselves to be the most learned and devout men of the age, says he, *Who hath warned you to fly from the wrath to come*. In the name of God, what brought you hither? How came ye hither to hear a poor Baptist preach? How came ye to be alarmed, of all people in the world.

Thus the words, if we consider them as they were first spoken by *John*. But it is time to leave the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* attending him. I think the words of the text contain a matter of the last importance, and there being a multitude of precious souls come to hear a poor rambler's preaching, I shall, as God shall be pleased to enable me, from these words, *Who hath warned you to fly from the wrath to come*, I shall endeavour,

I. To show you that there is a wrath to come, and in what it will consist.

II. I shall endeavour to show why it is that the great God warns sinners to fly from this wrath. And,

III. I shall endeavour to point out to you, to whom you must fly in order to avoid the wrath to come.

I shall then have an opportunity to drop a word of ap

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5

plication to saints and sinners; and if there are any that never yet began to fly from the wrath to come, it is not too late to begin it.

I. Give me leave to show you that there is a wrath, and a wrath to come, and wherein this wrath consists. The first part of my sermon will be dark and gloomy, I am going, my brethren, to open hell to you, but it is only that you may look in, and go away to night, and never go there. I know that there are some people that would fain persuade us that there is no hell, nor no heaven; and if we were to judge by the lives of a great many, even of those that call themselves Christians, one would imagine that one part of the Christian's creed was, I believe that when I die I shall perish like a beast that perisheth. But my dear brethren, supposing there were no such thing as divine revelation, if there is no wrath to come, if there is no future state, if after death there is no judgment? pray what is the meaning of it, that even those that strive to shake off every thing that is sacred, find conscience very often very uneasy to them? How is it that conscience accuses them when they have done wrong, and excuses and applauds them when they have done right? I heard lately of a famous *Deist*, who carried on the deistical scheme as far as any of his profession, when he was upon his death-bed he was dreadfully frighted: another *Deist* came to him, and asked him what he was frighted for? Said he, *I have felt something of hell within me*. Said the other, *God is infinitely merciful*: but said he, *Is not God infinitely just? and how do I know which of these attributes, mercy or justice, shall be glorified in my poor soul?* If there is no such thing as the wrath to come, what is the reason so many people laid upon a dying bed are so frighted? As a man said to me, when I, asked him how he did, he looked like one at the brink of hell, and said, *I feel the forebodings of hell in my soul*. But my brethren, this book in my hand, called the bible, as it brings life and immortality to light, so it plainly tells us of a wrath to come. And if ye should ask me in what this wrath consists. I answer, it consists in what protestant divines call *pena damni*, and *pena sensus*, the punish-

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6

ment of loss, and the punishment of sense. The punishment of loss consists in the stings of a self-condemning conscience. It seems the heathen had some view of this, for I remember the punishment of *Prometheus*, one of their great offenders, is said to be, that lying on the side of a river, a vultur was to be perpetually feeding on his liver, and

as fast as the vultur took a part of his liver, it grew again. This was only some scrape that the heathens got from divine revelation, and therefore we have an account of the worm that never dies.

I know some people tell us there is no such place as hell, it's nothing but an evil conscience, dost thou know, O man, what an evil conscience is? A wiser man than any here hath put the question, which the wisest of us all cannot answer, *a wounded spirit who can bear?* Supposing there was no other hell in the other world, but a self-condemning conscience, it will be enough; a person accusing and condemning himself for being the author of his own misery. Not long ago there were two persons of great reputation condemned to die in *London*, one of them got a pardon, the other was executed, and I saw him led to execution, his friends came to take their last farewell of him, as he was a person of great reputation; when he came to take his last farewell of his wife, of his aged mother and his friends, he cried out, that it was his own folly brought him to such an untimely end. And if such is the fate only of a man going to be hanged, what must the case be of those that are going to hell? Hence it is, that we are told by Jesus Christ in the parable of *Dives* and *Lazarus*, that he saw *Lazarus* in *Abraham's* bosom, and cried out, *I am tormented in these flames*. It was a hell to *Dives* to see *Lazarus* in *Abraham's* bosom. This I have thought would be one part of the damned's misery, they will see Christ, only to see what a Christ and heaven they have lost; and this is what divines call the punishment of loss. But then there is a *pena sensus*, there is the punishment of sense, that will prey upon the body. Where hell will be, no body can tell. One endeavours to prove that there is no local hell, that the sun that enlightens the world will torment those

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that would not let the Son of righteousness arise with healing under his wings upon them: but perhaps that is only a mere conjecture. That there will be a real fire that will prey upon the body, as well as the lashes of conscience to lash the soul, is plain, I think, from what our Saviour says, that it is better to go to heaven having but one hand, or one eye, than to go to hell, where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched. I know there are some, as archbishop *Tillotson*, that deny, or give insinuation that they deny the eternity of hell torments, and they think it inconsistent with the goodness of God to punish sin with eternal pains, and that tho' the scripture tells us of eternal torment, that the words for ever and ever,

in some places only denote a long, not an infinite duration; yet our Saviour expresseth himself sometimes in such strong terms, that it is impossible to doubt of the perpetuity of the torments of the damned, the smoke of their torment is to ascend for ever and ever. *Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, and the worm is said never to die, and the fire never shall be quenched: and therefore it may be called properly *wrath to come*, not merely to come after death, but to be always coming; so that when the damned have been there millions of years, the damned will cry out, *My wrath is but coming yet*. The great Mr. *Bolton*, who at his awakening had much of the terrors of the law, and was therefore instructed to preach powerfully; his description of the torments of the damned is something to this purpose, supposing all the mountains in the world were mountains of sand, and that there was an angel to come, and take a grain of sand out of all these mountains once in a thousand years; well, tell the damned that after so many thousands, and millions of thousands of years after the last grain of sand was picked up, they would be released out of hell, how would they leap for joy. But this wrath will be always coming, and that made *Dives* say, *I am tormented in these flames*, these black flames, these corroding flames, these tormenting, never never dying unquenchable flames; and he wanted his brothers not to come there, not out of love, for there is not one

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8

spark of it in hell, but he wanted his brothers not to come there, for thinks he, I have been the elder brother, I invited them to balls, I invited them to assemblies, I invited them to cards and hunting, or taught them the way to hell, and if my five brothers come here, then my furnace will be heated five times hotter, and I think it is hot enough already. But this subject is too dismal for a minister to dwell upon, when I think upon it, my blood runs cold within me; but it seems sinners must be told of it, *John* the Baptist spoke of it; Christ speaks of it, and so must we, God knows, my brethren, what this wrath to come is, therefore out of love, therefore out of tender mercy, the great and glorious God warns of it, *who hath warned you*, says *John* Baptist, *to fly from the wrath to come*.

If any of you should ask me, how it is that God warns us? If God shall be pleased to enable me this night, I shall endeavour to give you an answer to this.

1. I answer, that the great God warns us by the slings of natural conscience. Bad as the world is, it would be infinitely worse if there was

not some remains of the candle of the Lord, yet almost in every human heart. I know there are some that would stifle conscience if they could. I am sure when God began to work upon my heart, I endeavoured all I could to stifle the clamours of conscience, I strove to play them away, yet there was something would always follow me to my bed, and ring a pale in mine ears, whether I would or not. Thus, my brethren, the great God often warns us by conscience: and I question whether there be any here that ever committed secret acts of uncleanness, tho' he was never so careful to hide them, but before his conscience was feared as with a hot iron, his conscience said to him, *If you go on this way, you will go to the devil*. Therefore, my brethren, God warns us by the light of our natural conscience. And I mention, this, because ye should take care, especially you that are young, to listen to the motions of conscience, which begin in youth very early, and happy they that take warning by it.

But as God warns us by Conscience, so God warns us,

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9

by his providence. I am afraid some are of an *Epicurean* temper. I remember *Horace* laughs at the circumcised *Jews*, says he, *Let the Jews believe I have been taught another creed*. The gods do not trouble themselves with us on earth. Poor fools, what a world should we have if God did not govern it. Some are for owning a general providence, which is as if a person would say, here a fine long chain, yet it is not composed of links. No, I believe God is in this respect always busy with his creatures, and from morning to night God is giving his creatures warning by his providence. I do not know what ye may think of it, but I think *Scotland* hath had warnings to repent. You that are shearers, and going to morrow to the fields to cut down the corns, hath not God given you warning by the showers of rain to repent and turn to him? Hath he not threatned you with a famine of bread? and if God had continued the rain a little longer, what a poor condition would the people of *Scotland* have been in? He warns us by death, famine, thunder and lightnings. He warns us by his particular providences and dealings with us in our own houses. Hath God stopt you in your career? Hath God taken away your children? They are all so many kind warnings to fly from the wrath to come, and get an interest in Christ. And as God warns us by these things, so he warns us by sickness. Some people get sick, and get well again, and when they get well, they often abuse the goodness of God. As I knew a poor

creature that was struck, dumb with an oath in his mouth, I went to him, he trembled like one going to the devil; God gave him his tongue again, and the first word he spake was a dreadful oath against the blessed God. But when ye come to die, ye will find every piece of sickness had a warning to turn to Christ.

And as God warns us by conscience and by providence, so God warns us by his word, especially the word preached. Some people go to sermon as they go to a play, they go to see what sort of a man preached, and if they get the text, they do not care whether they remember any more of the sermon or not. But give me leave to tell you, that God notes every sermon ye hear

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10

in his book. And when I hear an affectionate minister warn poor sinners, as I heard one this day, warning sinners to prepare for death, my heart trembles lest sinners should not take the warning. *John Baptist* was sent to warn People, and our business is to warn you, we are watchmen, we are to lift up our voices like a trumpet, therefore ye should not be angry when we are in earnest calling you to repent and believe. If there was a fire near your houses, you would not be angry if I spoke a little louder, and bid you go away. And how earnest should we be with you, when hell fire is about you, and we on-ly bid you to fly to Christ.

As God warns us by his word, so the great God warns us by his Spirit. O may the Spirit of God be busy among you to day. For my part, I may as well call upon the stones, and warn dead bodies as speak to you, unless God send his Spirit with the word home to some of your hearts: without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. *Paul* may plant, *Apollos* may water, but unless the Lord give the increase, and open your heart, as he opened *Li-dia's* heart, *Paul* and *Apollos* may preach and labour in vain. The Spirit of God warns by convictions. I re-remember when I was but ten years old, when I was rising in the morning a strong impression came upon my soul, and bid me examine myself, I did not care to set about it, fearing if I did examine myself, I would find myself in a bad condition, fain would I have put it off, but the Spirit of God followed me on till I examined myself, and from that time, I hope God carried on his work more and more upon my heart. And I believe you have many such warnings, the Lord Jesus Christ help you to improve them, and keep you from quenching God's blessed Spirit speaking to your soul.

Well does God warn us by our conscience, by his providence, by his word, and by his Spirit? What does he warn us to do? He warns us to fly from the wrath to come. Well, how must we fly from the wrath to come? Now I am coming to preach the gospel. All I have said is but to make room for preaching Christ Jesus, my Lord, therefore, my brethren, I will not keep you

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long in suspense; it is meet you know how ye must fly, and to whom ye must fly. I answer, you must fly to Christ. *Who are these*, says the evangelical prophet, *that fly like doves to their windows?* Now, this flying from the wrath to come, takes in more than some people think. Flying from the wrath to come implies, that the soul that does fly is really convinced that there is a hell; he is really convinced that there is a wrath to come.

If any should tell me they believe there is a hell, and yet never fly to Jesus Christ to avoid it, you must excuse me if I call such Infidels.

Flying from the wrath to come implies that we believe there is an angry God, that we believe there is a hell, and that we are in danger of it, unless we get an interest in Jesus Christ. Flying from the wrath to come implies that we are in earnest to avoid it, and that we are determined, by the strength and grace of Jesus Christ, that we will work out our salvation with fear and trembling. When the angel came to call *Lot* from *Sodom*, what did he say? Fly, fly for thy life; and when he lingred, the angel having mercy on *Lot*, took hold of him, and made him make more haste. A person that flies from the wrath to come, he sees hell following him, he sees hell opening ready to receive him, sees an angry God brandishing his sword over his head, sees the flaming sword turning every way, it is something like one seeing the avenger of blood at his heels. And flying from the wrath to come, implies that the sinner has got a sight of Christ, that he believes that Christ can deliver him, that he believes Jesus Christ will deliver him, and therefore he flies to Jesus Christ as his only refuge. One day when I went to pay a visit to a man in *Edinburgh*, it was in the abbey, where persons may be safe from their creditors, he took me out and shewed me his mark and boundary, when he came to the utmost boundary where his creditors might have apprehended him, he ran from it, got over, and said, *Catch me if ye can*. It is just so with the sinner, the great God points out a place of refuge, that refuge

is Christ. There is a mark that every body may know what to fly from, there is a bloody mark where the creditor comes to seize

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12

the poor creature, then the creature at last seeing damnation ready to seize him, he runs to Christ's blood, runs to Christ's wounds, as a poor creature runs top the abbey, and when he is got into Christ, says he, *Now let the devil, the law and hell catch me if they can, I am safe sheltered in the blood of my Redeemer.* Flying, therefore, from the wrath to come, implies that we heartily embrace Christ, that we receive him in all his offices, that we take him to be our king, priest and prophet. And this is what I am called upon this night, by the providence of God, to warn you to fly to; and the wrath to come is what I am called upon, by the providence of God, to warn you to fly from.

My brethren, give me leave to look round, perhaps the sight of you may make me preach better. God forbid you should all come only to hear a poor rambling creature preach. I am leading a rambling life, I am a rambling preacher; but what shall I do? People have rambled away from God, and I must ramble after them to fetch them back. My brethren, I think I can say the love of God brought me once more to *Glasgow*. When I was here ten months ago, I little thought to see you so soon, and perhaps when I go shortly again to *America*, as I intend, it may be sometime before I return; but however, now that I am here, God's providence hath brought me here, the Lord help me to give warning, and the Lord Jesus Christ help you to take it. To whom shall I address myself first? If you please, I shall begin with the young ones, the little ones. Young ones, I can tell what the devil will tell you, he will tell you it is time enough to fly from the wrath to come when you are twenty-five or fifty, but he will not tell thee that thou mayest be in hell before that time. I warn little ones of this, and when I am warning them, their parents should pray for them. I once preached to fifteen hundred children at once, I told them as long as children were brought to balls; as long as they showed their parents how finely they had behaved themselves at them, I told them I should have a ball too, and their parents should stand by: when I was preaching to them, the parents wringing their hands,

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13

and praying over them, there was one or two of them that were awakened then, and in a short time afterwards went to glory. O that the little ones of *Glasgow* would take warning. You that are parents rejoice when your children come into the world, but if you do not take care, they will make your hearts ache when they are grown up. Take care of the fashionable way of bringing them up, that way of education is just the way to hell and the devil. One would imagine that the devil had held a council in hell, met his fellow-spirits on purpose to suggest a fine way of education to train up children for his service. I beseech you, therefore, that ye would beseech your little ones to fly from the wrath to come, catechise them, instruct them, do not let them go to balls, do not let them go to assemblies, do not let them adorn themselves too much, do not teach them the way to hell, lest when ye come to judgment ye will hear them say, we may thank you for being in hell. You that are young men, I exhort you, I charge you, I intreat you by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, fly from the wrath to come. Here are a great many young apprentices, I have compassion upon you, I know how it was with me when I was about your age, I minded plays and balls, and assemblies, and used to think I was going on in a bright way, but God stopt me in my career; and may the Lord God of his infinite mercy stop your career. Dear young men, do not be angry with me, I am sure you will not be angry with me in another world; you will be angry with yourselves for not taking warning, but you will not be angry with me for giving you it. I do not know you, but wherever you are in any part of the congregation, may the Lord Jesus cause an arrow dipped in his blood reach your heart. Young men, dear youths, what, will you give your health, your strength to the devil? Will you be so unkind to God that made you? Will you be so unkind to God that preserves you? so ungrateful to God that sent his Son to redeem you? I know what you will say, we will fly from the wrath to come when we are old, we will repent by and by, when we can sin no longer. Will ye so? that is strange divinity. There was one that said, he would be good be

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14

fore he died; but he died in three hours: and how do ye know but that may be your case? And if ye do not fly to Christ now, ye will have no Christ to fly to afterwards, but only to Christ to damn you eternally. For God's sake, dear young men, fly for your lives; fly from the wrath

to come, lest you be in hell to-morrow. It is but a few weeks ago when I was preaching at *Moorfields* in *London*, and exhorting them all to fly to Christ, for ye know not but ye may die at midnight, and one that heard me went home, and was a dead corpse before night; and how do you know but that may be your case? And you young women, that are neglecting your souls, I warn you to fly from the wrath to come. I know the devil will bid you go to balls and assemblies; and I warrand some are preparing against the next publick meeting; the devil wants to divert you from taking care of your souls by these diversions. But we are your friends that warn you against them, and they are your enemies that encourage you in them. I therefore warn you, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to fly from the wrath to come. What signifies adorning the body, and the soul as black as hell itself? You middle-aged people, ye worldly people that are too busy to fly to Christ, that want to get five, or six, or ten thousand pounds, and then think to fly to Jesus Christ in coach and six. But O fly to Christ now, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. And as for you old people that are grayheaded, just dropping into the grave, when God Almighty shall please, I warn you to fly from the wrath to come; tho' ye are old and feeble, yet do not despair, but say as a good woman said, that God was pleased to make me an instrument of awakening eighteen years ago, *I have begun late, but by the grace of God, I will work the harder*. The arms of Jesus are open ready to receive you, the angels are waiting to sing an anthem over you. My brethren, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, I warn you all to fly from the wrath to come.

And you that through grace, have taken the warning, you that through grace are flying from the wrath to come, the Lord Jesus Christ help you to fly faster; make more haste

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15

to him: see how bold the devil's children, are, see how industrious they are; they never weary of their diversions, they never weary of giving money to pamper their bodies, and to adorn themselves, and why should ye that are God's children weary of his work.

O that God would enable me to sound an alarm not only in the ears, but in the hearts of some sinners. O my brethren, do not break my heart to night, do not send me weeping home, do not let your ministers turn your accusers. O my God, must I appear in judgment against any to whom I am now preaching? I think I could preach till I dropt down

dead in this place for you; but I cannot bear the thought of appearing against any of you in judgment. O God, take this bitter cup from me; it makes us wish sometimes that we were never ministers: but we must appear against some we dearly love. O good God, what a parting will there be among us by and by, some of this congregation going to the devil, and others carried by the angels to *Abraham's* bosom. And will ye go to hell? Will ye be damned? Will ye fly into hell, when hell is open before you? Will ye sell your birthrights for a mess of pottage? Will ye in spite of all God's invitations be damned? Then, my brethren, I pity you from my soul, ye are dead creatures, and ye must pardon me if I weep over you. O *Glasgow* hearers, O *Scotland* gospel ordinances-hearers, ye had better never been born, better ye had been toads, better ye had never seen the light of yonder sun, than to live in *Glasgow*, to live in *Scotland*, and hear Christ preached, and yet live and die in unbelief. My brethren, night is coming on, and some of you have a good way to go, and methinks there is something awful before you. O do not be angry with me, I may never have another sunday with you. For my part, when I was with you about an year ago, I never thought to see you again. I have been waiting for death since I was twenty years of age, and I do not care if I am kept out of heaven some time longer, if I could this night bring one of you to Jesus. O come away with me, fly to Jesus; I beseech you to fly, I command you to fly; the Judge is coming. O my brethren,

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16

when I heard the trumpets sounding to-day, when I looked out and saw the judges walking, and their attendants about them, it put me in mind of the great trumpet. It is something august to see earthly judges walking along the street, what must it be when the trump of God shall sound, and the judge of quick and dead shall come? O think ye never upon your never-dying souls? Think of it how soon ye may appear to judgment. And if ye have not fled from the wrath to come on earth, there is no flying from the earth to come after death. Well, I have sounded the alarm, I leave it with you, I hope I can say so far, that I am free from the blood of all of you: I have invited you to Jesus, and I would rather ye took me out of the pulpit, I would rather ye trampled me under your feet, than that one soul should go away, and trample my Master under their feet. Do with me what ye will, take my name, take my body, I do not care what the world do with me, or say of me, but it strikes me to

the heart, it sometimes almost kills me to think that my dear Jesus should be thus slighted in the house of his friends. In the name of God, what has Christ done to you? In the name of God, let me hear what ye have got to say why ye will not fly from the wrath to come. If you have got any thing to say, in the name of God I will answer it. Why will ye not fly? Ye may say ye intend to fly by and by. In the name of God, why will ye not fly to-night? By and by may never come, ye may have no heart to fly to-morrow, and ye may go into hell before ye awake; and when ye come to judgment, it will be no excuse, to say, *I intended to fly to-morrow*. O says the devil, *I have got thee to hell now*. Turn the text into a prayer, Lord Jesus help me to fly from the wrath to come, Lord Jesus send forth thy light and thy truth into my heart, that when I am going to another world, I may see my Saviour ready to embrace me, that I may live eternally with thee hereafter. The Lord grant this to every one of your precious souls. *Amen* and *Amen*.

FINIS

