

Not Now & not Nigh.

The Day Appointed
and
The Man Ordained.

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NOT NOW AND NOT NIGH.

(NUM. XXIV. 17.)

“**H**E that being often reprov-
ed hardeneth his neck, shall
suddenly be destroyed, and
that without remedy.” (Prov.
xxix. 1.) The history of Balaam is
as remarkable as it is instructive.
It is that of a man who, with special
advantages of an outward character,
trifled with every privilege he pos-
sessed, and, notwithstanding warning
and reproof, sinned with “his eyes
open,” having a conscience seared
with a hot iron, using his knowledge
of God, and the things of God, not
only to his own ruin, but in making
havoc of everything divine, cut off
at length in red-handed opposition
to the Israel of God, dying ingloriously
in the midst of his enemies! This was
the man who, loving “the wages of
unrighteousness,” and rebelling against

the word of the Lord, has risen up early to work wickedness, and whom the dumb ass rebuked for his iniquity, speaking with man's voice, forbidding the madness of the prophet. (2 Pet. ii. 16.) This was the man who exclaimed, in language which has become almost a household word, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. xxiii. 10), yet he perished in the ranks of the Midianites in open antagonism to the God whose prophet he was, the Judas of the Old Testament! This, moreover, was the prophet who delineated the most lovely word-painted picture of the comeliness, grace, and beauty of Israel to the eye of God that is enshrined in scripture; for in the pages of Holy Writ, from one end to the other, there are not to be found such wonderfully sublime and elevated utterances concerning God's people in their order, and dignity, and godliness as those which the son of Beor pronounced in the hearing of Balak, king of Moab, upon the respective heights of Baal, Pisgah, and Peor!

Insensible must be the heart that does not kindle and glow under words like these: "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel; the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! as the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as the cedar trees beside the waters. Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

Endeavouring to curse, he was constrained to bless, for he was that which is worse than a false prophet, he was a true prophet of God, but a wicked one. The Spirit of God spoke through him; thus it detracts nothing from his prophecies, but rather imparts unwonted divine force and value to them, that they were deliverances of the mind and purpose of God, that the prophet was

compelled to make, in spite of himself and his cupidity. The divine afflatus brooked no control. The Spirit of God was imperative that he should bless whom God had blessed, and he proved himself powerless to curse whom God had not cursed. But if "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. xv. 23), it is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in Balaam's wretched course, for though frustrated and baffled again and again in his efforts to curse the people, and coerced into blessing them, he nevertheless succeeds in seducing them, thus bewitching them, as it were, into iniquity and idolatry; for we read that he "taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." (Rev. ii. 14.) Neither sacred nor profane history furnishes a parallel to such terrible turpitude!

After three times blessing Israel against his will, the prophet was dismissed by Balak, with well-merited

indignation and opprobrium. Balaam then gratuitously declared to the chagrined monarch what the eagle eye of prophetic vision descried concerning the Hope of Israel, and His assured victory over every opposing element in a long-distant day. The prelude of this is one of the most remarkable utterances in the word of God; for the prophet's lips open to announce, in the first words of his final prophecy, in the most significant and striking manner, his own dreadful and eternal doom, "I shall see him, *but not now*; I shall behold him, *but not nigh*!" O dear reader, let me ask you if you have ever weighed, with all its consequences, the solemn, searching fact that every one of us must meet Christ, every one of us behold Him! It applies equally to every one born upon the earth, admitting no exception; "every eye" shall yet see the Lord Jesus Christ. Of that there is no question, for scripture is as plain on this point as it is emphatic; the only question is, *when* and *how*. Balaam's language just

quoted may be regarded as the unhappy wail of a lost soul, for he says, "*not now*" and "*not nigh*:" to see Him *now* is the instant effect of faith, and to behold Him *nigh* is its present, and much more, its eternal privilege. The word is, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. lv. 6); "Behold, *now* is the accepted time: behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2); and again, we are "made *nigh* by the blood of Christ." (Eph. ii. 13.) "Now" and "NIGH" thus express the privileges of grace, while "not now" and "not nigh" tell of the eternal retribution of the wicked.

Even now, as the apostle says, the believer sees Jesus (Heb. ii. 9); and when He comes, will be like Him, for then will he see Him as He is. (1 John iii. 2.) Even now, too, he has His company, as He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. xiii. 5); but when He comes, will be eternally shut in with Himself in the holy, happy, unreserved intimacy of

His immediate and manifested presence ! But Balaam, and all the wicked dead, will not see Him for more than a thousand years afterwards ; and then only while He sits upon the great white throne in the immeasurable distance of His unsullied light and holiness, when the earth and the heaven shall flee away from His presence, no place being found for them !

Of Balaam's four prophecies, in the first he says, " Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his ;" while in the last he says, " I shall see him, but not now ; I shall behold him, but not nigh." How truly does this illustrate the case of many who begin with pious resolves, and have no desire to die the death of the wicked, infinitely preferring a happy deathbed, lit up with the hope of a heaven " in the eternal azure beyond," but who go on, nevertheless, with the world, according to the prince of the power of the air, seeking to serve God and mammon, reaching at length the awful and unmitigated end, the weeping,


and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! Never yet have the eyes of the miserable prophet, the wretched, self-condemned Balaam, looked upon Him who shall by-and-by be manifested as the Star of Jacob. While Israel shall be in the lavish enjoyment of millennial blessing, fulfilling to the enraptured eye of Jehovah all that Balaam by divine inspiration portrayed, every enemy subdued, and the beauty of the Lord her God upon her as the mantle of her adorning; the self-destroyed prophet will be yet in the nether darkness and gloomy remoteness of the furthest Hades, the echo of his own words of yet unfulfilled prophecy never ceasing to ring in his ears, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh!"

O dear reader, that his case may be a warning to you, if you have not yet fled for safety to Christ! You may tell me, and truly enough, that you have never sought to curse His people, nor desired to make money by betraying them into sin; but have you not

enjoyed singular advantages, God speaking to you in a hundred different ways, and again and again, for many a long day, to win you to Christ; not only in the preaching of the gospel, but in His word, and by books, tracts, magazines, or, it may be, more directly by the faithful voice of some servant of His appealing personally to your soul? You have had more than Balaam's advantages, and your soul, evade it as you may endeavour to do, is under a corresponding responsibility. How have you answered to it? Have you listened to His word? Have you accepted His invitations? Have you received the gift of His grace? When God speaks, are we not bound to give heed? When He invites, are we not bound to respond? When He is before us as a giving God, are we not bound to possess ourselves of what His love bestows? The Saviour-God beseeches you to be reconciled, invites you to come to Him, presents Himself before you as God's unspeakable gift! His words to you are *now* and *nigh*. He would bring you

now, this very day, to know the fulness of His grace; He would bring you *nigh* through His precious blood, so near, you could not nearer be to His own blessed Person, to find Him your all for time and eternity!

The rich man in Luke xvi., lifting up his eyes in hell, beheld Lazarus "afar off," for between them was "a great gulf fixed." The Lord Jesus said to His beloved disciples, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John xiv.) In the one case was an impassable gulf; in the other, a prepared place in the Father's house, to be enjoyed together by *the Son*, and the many sons brought unto glory! May His precious mercy and grace be so known to your soul in realised salvation, that *now* and *nigh* may be the simple and fitting expressions of your present and perfect blessing!



THE DAY APPOINTED, AND THE MAN ORDAINED.

(ACTS xvii. 31.)

“There is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: *and there is no discharge in that war*; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” “For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare: so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth *suddenly upon them*.” “For God shall bring every work into *judgment*, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (ECCLES. viii. 8; ix. 12; xii. 14.) “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this *the judgment*.” (HEB. ix. 27.)

MOST persons instinctively shrink from death. It is only natural for all to do so, for it is characteristic of fallen man, and distinguishes him from the lower animals, which are never so disturbed. Man, with all his boasted superiority, has ever before him, either in a near or

a distant horizon, the revolting prospect of death, inexorable death; and whatever path he takes, every footfall therein is a step toward that inevitable doom, that fatal vortex! Can we wonder that unsaved souls should regard it with habitual dread, being all their lifetime in bondage through fear of it? But after death, dear reader, there is something still more terrible to follow for those who know not Christ. It is "*the judgment,*" ever looming before the unclothed soul, amid the deep and dismal darkness of Hades, which no ray of light or beam of hope shall ever penetrate! Relentless death has carried the unsaved soul thither, only to be harrowed with the unrelieved certainty of a session of judgment to follow, the issue of which is a foregone conclusion. The evidence is complete in one point and in all, and no defence is possible, for in that dread hour the guilty sinner, finding no avenue of escape, is overwhelmed, "*speechless!*" The wicked have no prospect but to die as they have lived—"without God;" only, how-

ever, to find themselves at last *with God* in judgment, and "speechless" in His presence! And yet there is more to be told. Oh, poor sinner, are you aware that God has appointed the *very day* on which you are to stand (unless through grace you are first led to believe unto salvation) before the throne of eternal judgment! We who have believed sometimes exultingly sing :

“ And God has fix'd the happy day
When the last tear shall dim our eyes ;
When He will wipe those tears away,
And fill our hearts with glad surprise.”

And if God has fixed that day, just as certainly has He fixed the other also, and every sunrise and every sunset hastens its sure approach. How many or how few may be the days between this and that, is known to God with positive certainty. He has the exact number under His eye, as it were ; every sand in the glass is counted ; and when the last has fallen, then in unrelenting righteousness, inflexible justice and holy horror and hatred of sin, will

God bring before His bar those who have rejected His grace and spurned His love and mercy. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." (Prov. i. 24-27.)

God has also been pleased to tell us of the majestic character, and holy, unsullied purity of His judicial throne. (Rev. xx. 11.) He has sought to impress our souls with the positive reality of these things, that we may face the stern and solemn fact of what God will inflexibly bring to pass! Let us remember, too, that judgment would have fallen centuries ago, but that God is rich in grace, and desires not that any should perish. But though it has lingered long, it will not less surely fall. Nothing can be more certain than that

the actual day is fixed, by divine decree, which cannot be annulled, God having Himself declared it as His definite appointment, and having taken means to afford such absolute proof of it as by anticipation to silence for ever every cavil man might dare to make. Of this proof we will speak presently, for we want you, dear reader, just now to understand further that God has determined *who shall be the judge* that terrific day. You are, doubtless, aware that every year it is determined which of her Majesty's judges shall go on circuit, and the circuits they shall respectively take. Thus, the criminal in his cell may possibly learn beforehand the date of his trial, and the judge before whom he shall appear. And God has permitted guilty souls to know this, for He has said, who shall be their judge that fearful day. Yes, poor sinner, and it is indeed the very Man who left the glory of God to which He had been eternally entitled, for He was Himself God, that He might save the world. The very One who, at so wondrous a cost as the

endurance of the cross and the shame, Himself *bought you* for His own glory, having given Himself a ransom for all; the very One whom you have so long refused and rejected, if "not reviled! And further, God has told us by the lips of the judge Himself, the evidence which will convict the lost soul that solemn day. That blessed One when here on earth dropped these striking words, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: *the word that I have spoken*, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John xii. 48.)

How startling and how searching is what God has told us of all this! (1.) The very day is appointed. (Acts xvii. 31.) (2.) The majesty and purity of the judicial throne declared. (Rev. xx. 11.) (3.) The Man is ordained who shall be the judge. (Acts xvii. 31.) (4.) The absolute authority vested in Him is announced. (John v. 22-27; Matt. xxviii. 18.) (5.) The evidence which will convict. (John xii. 48.) He has also declared (6.) the sentence

which shall be pronounced (Rev. xx. 14, 15); and (7.) the very persons who, among others, shall be fellow-prisoners for eternity in the lake of fire. (Rev. xx. 10.)

Nor is this all that God has done to impress us with what Paul calls "the terror of the Lord." He has taken His own emphatic way of silencing even now all who might venture to raise an objection. He has given, once for all, an irrefutable proof or assurance to *all* of the divine certainty of that which He has indicated by raising up from the dead the Lord Jesus, the God-man whom He has ordained as judge, the Man of His counsels from eternity; thus giving positive and final proof, conclusive to all who are not wilful opposers of truth, that He will do what He has said! And, moreover, we read—for God is not mocked—"If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. xxii. 19.)

Oh, dear reader, I entreat you to face these tremendous but divine utterances about impending judgment *now*, that you may not *then* have to face the eternal realities they present. I beseech you to consider the magnitude of the mighty issue! Is it the lake of fire—oh, terrible thought—towards which your feet are directed? Oh! flee for your life; stay not one moment longer in such a terrible path. Another day, another hour, and it may be too late to flee, for your eternal doom may be irrevocably fixed! Who can answer for your safety a single moment? You are in jeopardy every instant, sleeping, as it were, on the edge of a precipice, on the brink of an eternal volcano! Nothing whatever is there between your soul and an eternal hell but the forbearance of God, which you have taxed to the uttermost, and which may be withdrawn the next moment! Arouse yourself—may God Himself do it—to your awful, imminent danger, and flee for refuge to a Saviour's blood! Do I need to tell you of your sins?

No, you know them well enough ; conscience speaks only too loudly for your peace, and you cannot escape the conviction that if hell were ever deserved, it is deserved *by you* ; for you have sinned against the goodness and forbearance of a Saviour-God, and persisted in it ; yes, in the very teeth of His revealed mercy and love ! But, oh ! how ready is the blood to cleanse the conscience ; how ready the Saviour to pardon the sinner so soon as the spark of faith is kindled in the heart ; how ready the Father to embrace His child, His penitent one ; yea, how ready to fall on his neck, and to kiss him ! May He lead you, dear reader, now at length, after so long and so stubborn a resistance, to bow your heart before Himself in faith and repentance without one moment more of delay, that you may escape the wrath of the Lamb, for whether you believe it or not, He, who cannot lie, has said that *the day is appointed and the Man ordained.*

W. R.

“ LORD JESUS! to tell of Thy love
Our souls for ever shall delight,
And sing of Thy glory above
In praises by day and by night.
Wherever we follow Thee, Lord,
Admiring, adoring we see
That love, which was stronger than death,
Flow out without limit, and free.

“ Descending from glory high,
With men Thy delight was to dwell,
Contented our Surety to die ;
By dying to save us from hell,
Enduring the grief and the shame,
And bearing our sins on the cross,
Oh! who would not boast of this love,
And count the world's glory but loss ?”

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