

# The Great Concern



# The Great Concern

Preparation for Death

Edward Pearse



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*The Great Concern*  
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## TO THE READER

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If you are one who indeed lives in the belief of a future life, an eternity of happiness or misery, when time and day shall be no more, I am confident the ensuing discourse will be grateful and welcome to you. I make no apology for its plainness, nor am I at all solicitous touching the censures I may fall under for publishing it. If you will read it with an upright heart, I question not but through a blessing from above it may do your soul good. Sure I am, you will find the argument most weighty and the concern thereof most important. And woe be to that soul which misses the design it tends to and aims at.

When men come to die, and to find themselves launching forth into the vast ocean of eternity, at least when once they find themselves encircled in that ocean (which quickly they do, when once death makes its approach), then they see that their great interest lay beyond this poor, vain, perishing world and the things thereof; then they see that their great concern was to have looked and lived beyond time and days, and have made provision for an eternal state; but alas! alas! then it is too late. Then they cry out, O eternity, eternity! O miserable souls that we are! How did sin and the world blind and bewitch us, that we could not ere now, when it is too late, see the weight of an eternal interest! O blind and brutish creatures that are

merely taken with carnal and sensual things pleasing only to a sensual appetite, and forgot God, the chief good, the things of heaven and a blessed eternity, which would have made us happy forever.

Now to prevent these doubtful lamentations, and such a dismal and remediless shipwreck of eternal souls, as also to show them the path of life and to engage them to make sure of a blessed eternity, while time and days last, is the design of the ensuing discourse and of the dying author in it. And the Lord, the God of all grace, prosper it in order thereunto. God has kept me for a full half year by the grave side. One while lifting me up, then casting me down, and now He seems to be speedily finishing my days. To whom, through the infinite riches of free grace, I can with some comfort and boldness say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen." And now, farewell, vain world; farewell, friends and relations; farewell, eating and drinking; and, blessed be God, farewell, sin and sinning. Within a few days I shall sin no more, nor ever be in a possibility of sinning, but shall be like my Lord, and shall see Him as He is. And lastly, farewell, reader.

—E. P.



## CHAPTER 1

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# *Are You Prepared to Die?*

*Which contains an introduction and an explication of the words of the text, with the general truth of them, and thereto the foundation of our intended discourse.*

*O spare me, that I may recover strength,  
before I go hence, and be no more.*

—PSALM 39:13

To walk with God here on earth while we live, and to be ready to live with God forever in heaven when we come to die, is the great work we have to do, the great concern we have to mind, in our present pilgrimage. To grow great and high in the world, to build our names and families, to live a life of sensual pleasures and delights, spending our days in mirth—these are low and mean poor things, things infinitely beneath the dignity of a soul and altogether unworthy of the least of its care and solicitude. But to know God, to obey God, to love God, to delight in God, to contemplate the glorious excellencies and perfections of God, to live upon God, and to live to God—upon Him as our chief good and happiness, and to Him as our life's end, and withal to be found ready at last to live with Him forever, to enter upon the beatifical vision, and to pass into the life of love and holiness, which the saints and

angels live above, being made perfect in the vision and fruition of the God of glory—this is truly noble; this is worthy of the care and solicitude of souls. To promote those things, and especially the latter, is my design in fixing my meditations on this Scripture, which I am the rather induced to do because I am apprehensive that the time of my going hence, when I shall be seen no more, is drawing very nigh. The words are a holy and prophetic wish and desire breathed out into the bosom of God by the man after His own heart, and that when under sore and heavy afflictions; under sickness, say some; under great straits and distresses, by reason of Absalom's rebellion and conspiracy against him, say others. In this wish or desire of his, you may note three things.

- (1) What that is which he wishes for or desires of God, and that is, sparing mercy. "O spare me."
- (2) The end of this wish or desire of his, and that is the recovery of strength. "O spare me, that I may recover strength."
- (3) The ground or motive which induced him to make this desire for this end, and that was the near approach of his death in these words, "Before I go hence, and be no more" seen. I will briefly paraphrase the words for the opening of them and then give you the sum of them, as also my intention for them, in one general proposition.

"O spare me," that is, cease to smite and afflict me, give me the relaxation, a breathing time, so one expounds. "Deal gently and mildly with me," says another. "Withdraw Thy hand a little from scourging me and mitigate the violence of my afflictions," say others. "That I may recover strength, that I may recruit myself a little," says one. "That I may have a breathing time before my death and, being well composed, may lay down my Spirit and commit it into Thy hand," say others. "That I may grow strong in grace and holiness," say others. "That I may

finish my course, and fight a good fight, obtaining the victory through a happy death," say others. The sum is that I may set things right in my soul and get into a more ready posture for my death and dissolution, which seems to be near at hand.

"Before I go hence and be no more"—that is, before I die, never more to return into this life, before I quit this world and bid adieu to this mortal life, to be no more in the land of the living, to be no more in this world, to do anything for God or my soul. For (as one well observes) David does not here suppose death to be the utter end, or annihilation of man, the putting of a man out of being. But his meaning is that if God did still go on to afflict him as He had done, he must suddenly die, suddenly go off the stage of this world, and go down to the bars of death, to the gates of the grave, where as to anything that is to be done for God, or a man's soul, it is as if he were out of being, and where he will be kept forever from returning any more to this life or any opportunity of ever doing anything for another world.

It is a phrase like to and of the same importance with that of Job 16:22, where Job speaks of himself, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." "Not return," that is, not any more to this life, not returning to do anything for God or my soul. The sum of the whole seems to be thus: the good man's afflictions were so pressing and heavy upon him that they did ever bow him down to the grave, and he really looked upon himself as a dying man, as one going down to the dust of the earth where he knew full well nothing was to be done for another life, and from whence there was no return to this life to be expected anymore. Therefore, he requests a breathing time, a little space wherein to recover himself out of all present distempers and discomposure of heart and to set all things right in the matter of his soul, thereby fitting and preparing himself the better for his departure out of this world; he begs a time of

respite wherein to prepare himself and make ready for a dying hour. This is the sum of what he drives at and pleads with God for, according to the observation, and therein the sum of my intention shall be this:

That it is a very desirable thing, and a business of the highest moment and importance to the children of men, to have all things set right, well ordered, and composed, in the matters of their souls before they leave this world, to get all the spiritual concerns of their souls into the best posture they can before a dying hour comes.

David, a holy man, a man in covenant with God—yea, a man after God's own heart—does yet (you see) pray for sparing mercy, for a breathing time, a time of respite here in this world before he goes off the stage. And why so? That he might recover strength, that he might set things right in the matters of his soul, that he might make himself more ready and get his spiritual concerns into a better posture for a dying hour; and this he looked at, and made out after, as that which was most desirable and of the highest importance to him, as indeed it is to all. You have a Scripture not unlike to this: "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death" (Job 10:20–21). That I may take comfort a little, that I may recover a little, that I may have a breathing time, that I may recover myself and gather up my spirits. So I find the phrase expounded. He seems to desire a breathing time, the better to compose himself, and the matters of his soul, for a dying hour. And indeed it is the concern of us all, to set all things right in our souls and to get into the readiest posture that possibly we can, for when a dying hour comes. I shall first briefly evince this truth and then make some practical improvement of it.