

THE  
FOUR LAST THINGS:

DEATH, JUDGMENT,  
HELL, HEAVEN.

BY

**ROBERT BOLTON, B.D.**  
(1572-1631)

PUBLISHED A.D. 1633

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WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

The Four Last Things  
Death, Judgement, Hell, and Heaven  
By Bolton, Robert  
ISBN 13: 978-1-4982-0088-2  
Publication date 7/31/2014  
Previously published by Religious Tract Society, 1633

Reprint of the 1994 Soli Deo Gloria edition

## CONTENTS.

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	Page.
PREPARATION BEFORE DEATH.....	5
ABOUT DEATH .....	67
ABOUT THE LAST JUDGMENT .....	76
ABOUT HELL. ....	82
CONCERNING THE JOYS OF HEAVEN.....	93

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HELPS TO HUMILIATION.....	121
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*Extract from the Life of Mr. Bolton, prefixed to the original publication of "The Four Last Things."*

"About the beginning of September last, 1631, Mr. Bolton was visited with a quartan ague; a disease which brought Calvin to his end, and by the judgment of the best physicians, by reason of the long and grievous paroxysms whereby it afflicts, is ever deemed mortal unto old men: and so it appeared to him, for, perceiving after two or three fits that it mastered his strength, he patiently submitted to endure, what by struggling he could not overcome; and called for his will, which he had made long before, and perfecting some things in it, he caused it to be laid up, and afterward wholly retired into himself, quitting the world, and solacing his soul with the meditation of the joys of heaven, on which he had provided to preach to his people. For having compiled an elaborate discourse, of the Four Last Things, DEATH—JUDGMENT—HELL—and HEAVEN, (an argument that some Jesuits and friars have bungled in,) and having finished the three former, he said that the next day he would treat of heaven; but the day before being Saturday, he was visited with sickness, and never preached after: God then preparing him for the fruition of those inexplicable joys which he had provided for his people in contemplation."—He died December 17, 1631.

The Four Last Things" were published in 1633.

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N.B. In this Edition some obsolete words are exchanged for others of the same meaning.

## THE FOUR LAST THINGS

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### PREPARATION BEFORE DEATH.

*In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah.—ISAIAH XXVI.*

WE have here in this chapter, first, A consolation for God's people in the time of their captivity. The sum whereof is this: Though all things seem to threaten ruin, and tend towards confusion; yet the issue will be, that God will most mercifully rescue and relieve his own; who afterwards will not only themselves acknowledge and magnify his miraculous hand in their preservation and support, but also stir up others to rely wholly upon that mighty Lord, that never did, nor ever will fail or forsake any that put their trust in him. In the seven first verses.

Second, We have here an institution, or instruction, how the godly should carry themselves in the time of crosses and chastisements; and what difference there is between them and the graceless in such cases. From ver. 7 to the end.

In the first part we may take into our consideration these three points.

1. Provision of a comfortable song for the people to carry with them, as it were into captivity, and the fier

l; that in the midst of their

pressures they might be eased and refreshed with the thought, that the day would come, wherein they should joyfully sing the song of enlargement and salvation, ver. 1. Though when they "sat down by the rivers of Babylon," their hearts would not serve them to sing any song of Zion, but fell asunder in their breasts like drops of water, yet assuredly, all God's faithful ones, who believed his prophet and promises, would in the mean time secretly sweeten their sorrows and sufferings with a patient expectation of this happy day, and heavenly mirth.

2. The song itself, ver. 1—3. Wherein we may consider, 1. The time, when the song shall be sung: "In that day," which we may understand, (1.) historically, literally, typically, of the Israelites' deliverance out of Babylon, and the miserable slavery thereof; (2.) Anti-typically, of the blessed enlargement of God's people out of the snares and bondage of the devil; (3.) And mystically also, as some divines think, of the joyful coming of christians out of spiritual Babylon, Rev. xvii. 5. and from under the tyranny of anti-christ; (4.) Comprehensively, of gathering the saints out of this vale of tears, and from the eager pursuit of that great red dragon, and the powers of darkness, into Jerusalem which is above, where they shall joyfully sing triumphant hallelujahs in the highest heaven for ever and ever, Gal. iv. 26. 2. The matter of the song; which is, salvation, ver. 1. peace, ver. 3. holy company, ver. 2. pure pleasure, comfort, sound contentment, &c. 3. An exhortation, or exhortatory apostrophe, to trust in Jehovah. And there is added, "for ever," lest upon God's delay, and respiting relief,

we should despair, or have recourse to the arm of flesh. Reasons to enforce this exhortation are three. 1. In Him is everlasting strength, ver. 3. a rock of eternity, upon which we may for ever sweetly and safely rest and repose ourselves, amidst the many furious storms and boisterous waves of this troublesome world. 2. He is able to tame, take down, and trample in the mire, the insolence and pride of the most raging persecutors, ver. 5; and to raise his people, though ever so low and languishing, to set them upon a rock of safety and salvation for ever, and to give them the necks of their enemies to tread upon, ver. vi. 3. He weighs and watches over the ways of the just, ver. 7. See Jeremiah xvii. 7.

Now whereas the prophet in the first place doth furnish the people of God before-hand with a strong counter-comfort and cordial against their faintings in the furnace of affliction, we may thence be instructed :

*Doct.*—IT IS A HOLY WISDOM, AND HAPPY THING, TO TREASURE UP COMFORTABLE PROVISION AGAINST THE DAY OF CALAMITY. IT IS GOOD COUNSEL, AND A BLESSED COURSE, TO STORE UP COMFORT AGAINST THE EVIL DAY.

“He that gathereth in summer,” saith Solomon, “is a son of understanding. But he that sleepeth in harvest, is a son of confusion,” Prov. x. 5. If not by an immediate sense, yet by a warrantable analogy and good consequence, this place will bear this paraphrase :

That man, who now in this fair and seasonable sun-shine of his gracious visitation is lulled asleep with the syren songs of these sensual times upon the lap of pleasure; swims down the

temporizing torrent of these last and lowdest days with full sail of prosperity and ease, against the secret wastes and counter-blasts, as it were, of a reclaiming conscience, as thousands do, to their utter undoing for ever; mis-spends his golden time, and many goodly opportunities of gathering spiritual manna, in grasping gold, gathering wealth, growing great, aggrandizing his posterity, clasping about the arm of flesh, satisfying the appetite, and, serving himself. In a word, he who, while it is called "to-day," turns not on God's side, and, by forwardness and fruitfulness in his blessed ways, treasures up comfort and grace against his ending hour, shall most certainly, upon his bed of death, and illumination of conscience, find nothing but horrible confusion and fear, extreme horror, and insupportable heaviness of heart. His soul must presently go down into the kingdom of darkness, and bottom of the burning lake, there to lie everlastingly in tempestuous and fiery torments, the sting and strength whereof doth not only surpass the pens and tongues of men and angels, but the very conception of those who suffer them, which if a man knew, he would not endure one hour for all the pleasures of ten thousand worlds. His body, the pleasing and pampering whereof hath plunged him into such a sea of calamity and woe, must descend into the house of death, a habitation of blackness and cruelty: lie down in a bed of dust and rottenness, covered with worms, guarded and kept full sure by the prince and powers of darkness unto the judgment of the great day: and then the whole man must become the woful object of the extremity and everlastingness of that fiercest

and unquenchable wrath, which, like infinite rivers of brimstone, will feed upon his soul and flesh, without remedy, ease, or end.

But that happy man, who, in the short summer's day of his miserable and mortal life, gathers grace with a holy greediness, plies the noble trade of christianity with resolution and undauntedness of spirit, against the boisterous current and corruptions of the times; grows in godliness, God's favour, and fruits of good life; purchases and preserves, though with the loss of all earthly delights, peace of conscience, one of the richest treasures and rarest jewels that ever enlightened and made lightsome the heart of man in this world: I say that man, though ever so contemptible in the eyes of the worldly-wise, though ever so scornfully trod upon and overflowed by the tyranny and swelling pride of those ambitious self-flattering giants, who, like mighty winds, when they have blustered a while, breathe out into nought, shall most certainly, upon his dying-bed, meet with a glorious troop of blessed angels; ready and rejoicing to guard and conduct his departing soul into his Master's joy. His body shall be preserved in the grave by the all-powerful Providence, as in a cabinet of rest and sweetest sleep, performed by the burial of our blessed Saviour, until the glorious appearing of the great God. And then, after their most joyful re-union, they shall both be filled, and shine through all eternity with such glory and bliss, which in sweetness and excellency doth infinitely exceed the possibility of all human or angelical conception.

Thus you see, in short, what a deal of confusion that miserable man heaps up for his precious soul

against the day of wrath, who spends the span of his transitory life after the ways of his own heart : and how truly he is a son of understanding, who, in the few and evil days of his short abode upon earth, treasures up grace and spiritual riches against the dreadful winter night of death.

For I would have you understand, that by comfortable provision, I mean not lands, livings, or large possessions ; I mean not wealth or riches : alas ! “ These will not profit in the day of wrath,” Prov. xi. 4. They certainly make themselves wings, and, in our greatest need, will “ fly away as an eagle towards heaven,” Prov. xxiii. 5. I mean not silver or gold : they shall not “ be able to deliver in the day of the Lord’s wrath,” Zeph. i. 18. “ Will he esteem thy riches ? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength,” Job xxxvi. 19.

I mean not top of honour, or height of place : this, without religion, serves only to make the downfall more desperate and remarkable. They are raised on high, saith the poet truly, that their ruin may be more irrecoverable. But why do I meddle with the poet, the prophet is plain and peremptory against the pride of ambition : “ Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rocks, that holdest the height of the hill : though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord,” Jer. xlix. 16.

I mean not the arm of flesh, or princely favours. Assuredly, that man who gratifies great ones to the wounding of his conscience by the formal slavery of baseness and insinuation, or any ill offices of ambitious servitude in feats of irre-

ligious policy, injustice, cruelty, turning Turk and traitor to those that trusted him, &c. shall at last receive no other recompense of such abhorred villany, when divine vengeance begins to take him in hand, than that which justly fell upon Judas in the extremity of his anguish and sorrow, from the chief priests and elders, Matt. xxvii. 4. If ever great men, or earthly potentates, did take their flattering slaves out of the hands of God at that highest tribunal, or were able to free a guilty soul from eternal flames, it were something to grow rich, and rise by vile accommodations, and serving their turn in the mean time. But such a man shall certainly, in the day of his last and greatest need, be cast, with horrible confusion of spirit, and incurable grief of heart, upon Wolsey's rueful complaint, and cry out when it is too late: "Had I been as careful to serve the God of heaven, as my great master on earth; he had never left me in my grey hairs." Favours of greatness may follow a man in fair weather, and shine upon his face with goodly hopes and expectation of great things; but in shipwrecks even of worldly things, where all sinks, but the sorrow to save them; or especially upon the very first tempest of spiritual distress, they steer away before the sea and wind, leaving him to sink or swim; without any possibility of help or rescue, even to the rage of a wounded conscience, and gulf (many times) of that desperate madness, which the prophet describes: "He shall fret himself, and curse his king and his God, and look upward. And he shall look unto the earth: and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish, and he shall be driven to darkness," Isa. viii. 21, 22.

By comfortable provision, therefore, I mean treasures of a more high, lasting, and noble nature: the blessings of a better life, comforts of godliness, graces of salvation, favour and acceptance with the highest Majesty, &c. They are the riches of heaven only which we should so hoard up, and will ever hold out in the times of trouble, and day of the Lord's wrath. Amongst which, a sound faith, and a clear conscience, are the most peerless and invaluable jewels; able by their native power, and infused vigour, to pull the very heart, as it were, out of hell, and with confidence and conquest to look even death and the devil in the face. There is no darkness so desolate, no cross so cutting, but the splendour of these is able to enlighten, their sweetness to mollify.

So that the blessed counsel of Christ, doth concur with, and confirm this point: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal," Matt. vi. 19, 20.

By moth and rust those two greedy and great devourers of gay clothes, and glistering treasures, two capital vanities upon which worldlings dote, and two of the greatest enchanterers of mortal men, are insinuated and signified unto us all those iron teeth, and devouring instruments of mortality, by which corruption eats into the heart of all earthly glory, wastes insensibly the bowels of the greatest bravery, and even at length consumes into dust the strongest sinews of the most imperial sove-

reignty under the sun. The Lord of heaven hath put a frail and mortal nature, a weak and dying disposition, into all worldly things. They spring, and flourish, and die. Even the greatest and goodliest politic bodies that ever the earth bore, though animated with the searching spirit of profoundest policy, strengthened with the resolution and valour of the most conquering commanders, sighted with eagle eyes of largest depths, foresights and comprehensions of state, crowned with ever so many warlike prosperities, triumphs, and victorious achievements, yet, like the natural body of a man, they had, as it were, their infancy, youthful strength, man's state, old age, and at last their grave. We may see, Dan. ii. 35. the glory and power of the mightiest monarchies that ever the sun saw, shadowed by Nebuchadnezzar's great image, sink into the dust, and become like the chaff of the summer's thrashing-floors on a windy day. Here a wise and noble writer, speaking on this wise, though for another purpose: "Who hath not observed, what labour, what practice, peril, bloodshed, and cruelty, the kings and princes of the world have undergone, exercised, taken on them, and committed, to make themselves and their children masters of the world? And yet hath Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Macedon, Carthage, Rome, and the rest, no fruit, flower, grass, or leaf, springing upon the face of the earth, of those seeds. No, their very roots and ruins do hardly remain. All that the hand of man can make, is either overturned by the hand of man, or at length by standing and continuing consumed." What trust, then, or true comfort in the arm of flesh, human greatness, or

earthly treasures? What strength or stay in such broken staves of reed? In the time of need, the worm of vanity will waste and wither them all, like Jonah's gourd; and leave our naked souls to the open rage of wind and weather; to the scourges and scorpions of guiltiness and fear. It transcends the sphere of their activity, as they say, and passeth their power to satisfy an immortal soul, to comfort through the length of eternity; either to corrupt or conquer any spiritual adversaries. For couldst thou purchase to thyself a monopoly of all the wealth in the world; wert thou able to empty the western parts of gold, and the east of all her spices and precious things, shouldst thou enclose the whole face of the earth from one end of heaven to another, and fill this wide world's circumference with golden heaps and hoards of pearl: didst thou in the mean time sit at the stern, and hold the reins in thine hand of all earthly kingdoms, nay, exalt thyself as the eagle, and set thy nest among the stars; nay, like the sun of the morning, advance thy throne even above the stars of God; yet all these, and whatsoever else thou canst imagine, to make thy worldly happiness complete and matchless, would not be worth a button unto thee upon thy bed of death, nor do thee a half-penny worth of good in the horror of that dreadful time. Where did that man dwell, or of what cloth was his coat made, who was ever comforted by his goods, greatness, or great men, in that last and sorest conflict, in his wrestlings with the accusations of conscience, terrors of death, and oppositions of hell. No, no: it is matter of a more heavenly metal, treasures of a higher tem-

per, riches of a nobler nature, that must hold out and help in the distress of soul, in the anguish of conscience, in the hour of death, against the stings of sin, wrath of God, and last tribunal. Do you think that ever any glorified soul did gaze with delight on the wedge of gold, that tramples under foot the sun, and looks almighty God in the face? No, no. It is the society of holy angels, and blessed saints, the sweet communion with its dearest spouse, that unapproachable light which crowns God's sacred throne, the beauty and brightness of that most glorious place, the shining body of the Son of God, the beatifical fruition of the Deity itself, the depth of eternity, and the like everlasting fountains of spiritual ravishment and joy which only can feed and feel the restless and infinite appetite of that immortal thing with fulness of contentment, and fresh pleasures, world without end.

Thrice blessed and sweet, then, is the advice of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, who would have us to turn the eye of our delight, and eagerness of affection, from the fading gloss and painted glory of earthly treasures; wherein naturally the worm of corruption and vanity ever breeds, and many times the worm of an evil conscience attends; the one of which eats out their heart when we expect a harvest; the other seizes upon the soul in the time of sorrow, and sinks it into the lowest hell; and as men of God, and sons of wisdom, to lift our thoughts, and raise our spirits, and bend our affections, to things above; which are as far from diminution and decay, as the soul from death; and can be no more corrupted or shaken, than the seat and omnipotence of God surprised. For, besides that they