

Meditation on Death

Imitation of Christ - Thomas A' Kempis (1379 or 1380 to 25 July, 1471) Chapter 23, pages 55-59

Very quickly there will be end of the here; see therefore to thy state: today man is; tomorrow he is gone.

And when he is out of sight, quickly he is out of mind.

O the stupidity and hardness of man's heart, which thinketh only upon the present, and doth not rather care for what is to come!

Thou oughtest so to order thyself in all thy thought and actions, as if today thou wert to die.

If thou hadst a good conscience, thou wouldest not greatly fear death.

It were better to avoid sin, than to escape death.

If today thou art not prepared, how wilt thou be so tomorrow?

Tomorrow is uncertain, and how knowest thou that thou shalt live till tomorrow?

What availeth it to live long, when there is no small amendment in us?

Alas! Length of days doth not always better us, but often rather increaseth our sin.

O that we had spent but one day in this world thoroughly well!

Many there are who reckon years of conversion; and yet full slender oftentimes is the fruit of amendment.

If to die be accounted dreadful, to live long may perhaps prover more dangerous.

Happy is he that always hath the hour of his death before his eyes, and daily prepareth himself to die.

If at any time thou hast seen another man die, make account that thou must also pass the same way.

When it is morning, think that thou mayest die before night;

And when evening comes, dare not promise thyself the next morning.

Be thou therefore always in readiness, and so lead thy life that death may never take thee unprepared.

Many die suddenly and when they look not for it; for the Son of Man will come in an hour when we think not.

When that last hour shall come, thou wilt begin to have a far different opinion of thy whole life that is past, and be exceeding sorry that thou hast been so careless and remiss.

O how wise and happy is he that now laboreth to be such an one in his life, as he will desire to be found at the hour of his death!

A perfect contempt of the world . . . a fervent desire to go forward in all virtue . . . a love of discipline . . . a laborious repentance . . . a ready obedience . . . a denying of ourselves . . . and an endurance of any affliction whatsoever for the love of Christ, will give us great confidence that we shall die happily.

Whilst thou art in health thou mayest do much good: but when thou art sick, I see not what thou wilt be able to do.

Few by sickness grow better and more reformed; so also they who wander much abroad, seldom thereby become holy.

Trust not to friends and kindred, neither do thou put off the care of thy soul's welfare till hereafter; for men will forget thee, sooner than thou art aware of.

It is better to look to it betime, and to send some good before thee, than to trust to other men's help.

If thou be not careful for thyself now, who will be careful for thee hereafter?

Time now is very precious: now is the day of salvation; now is the accepted time.

But alas! that thou shouldst spend time so idly here, in which thou mightest purchase life eternal.

The time will come, when thou shalt desire one day or hour to amend in, and I know not that it will be granted thee.

O beloved, from how great danger mightest thou deliver thyself, from how great fear free thyself, if thou wouldst be ever fearful and mindful of death!

Labor now so to live, that at the hour of death thou mayest rather rejoice than fear.

Learn now to die to the world, that thou mayest then begin to live with Christ.

Learn now to contemn all things, that thou mayest then freely go to Christ.

Chastise thy body now by repentance, that thou mayest then have assured confidence.

Ah! fool, why dost thou think to live long, when thou canst not promise to thyself one day.

How many have been deceived and suddenly snatched away like a shadow.

How often dost thou hear these reports, Such a man is slain . . . another man is drowned . . . a third has broken his neck with a fall from some high place . . . this man died eating . . . and that man playing! One perished by fire . . . another

by the sword . . . another of the plague . . . another was slain by thieves. Thus death is the end of all, and man's life suddenly passeth away like a shadow.

Who shall remember thee when thou art dead? And who shall pray for thee?

Do now, even now, my beloved, whatsoever thou art able to do; for thou knowest not when thou shalt die, nor yet what shall befall thee after thy death.

Now, whilst thou hast time, heap unto thyself everlasting riches.

Think on nothing but the salvation of thy soul, care for nothing but the things of God.

Make now friends to thyself by honoring the saints of God, and imitating their actions, that when thou failest they may receive thee into everlasting habitations.

Keep thyself as a stranger and pilgrim upon the earth, who hath nothing to do with the affairs of this world.

Keep thy heart free, and lifted up to God, because thou hast here no abiding city.

Send thither thy daily prayers and sighs together with thy tears, that after death thy spirit may be found worthy to pass in felicity to the Lord. Amen.