"Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him."—John 8:21-30.

DEATH IN SIN OR DEATH IN GRACE A Sermon By Theodor Zahn

WE are now keeping Lent. The Cross on which Jesus died for our sins is lifted up before our eyes. We do not as yet, in our Sunday services, stand beneath the Cross, but we are on the road which leads to the Cross. In our text for to-day, we see the Lord Himself also walking on this road. Six months have yet to pass before His death. But He had already fixed His eyes on death, as the goal of His earthly life. Jesus spoke quite plainly even to those who were afar off. I go My way. The time will soon come when ye will seek Me in vain. Ye yourselves will lift Me up upon the Cross towards heaven. But God is with Me. I go home to the Father who hath sent Me.

No one who is a disciple of Jesus can ever hear this announcement of the death of Jesus without hearing those other words, which the Lord united with it so often, and in so many ways: Follow Me! Come with Me! Go unto death with Me, that thou mayest gain life. We hear Him saying these words to us even now, in tones of deep and piercing earnestness. Jesus was speaking, not only of His own departure by death; He was speaking also of the death of those He was addressing. He was speaking of our death. We are all on the road to death. Yes, "in the midst of life we are in death." How solemnly this has been brought to our remembrance in our own circle during the last few days! Well or ill, young or old, we know that every hour we leave a bit of the way behind us, and even a child has no doubt that it must at last come to that end. The only question is whether we are travelling on the road with Jesus or without Him; whether we are walking on the road willingly, or struggling helplessly; whether we are keeping the goal in view, or driving away all thoughts of it.

It is as marvellous [surprising] as it is commonplace, to see how we men come to terms with death. There is no event so universal to man as death; it is a rule which has no exceptions, and which effaces all distinctions. There is also nothing so personal as death, for none can die in union with others. Though I had to wrestle with death in the same place with hundreds of others, and at the same time, my death would still be my own concern. No dying man, no man dying with me, can help me. Life brings us into society with the evil as well as with the good; society thinks for us, its customs rule us. In death every one is thrown back upon himself. It would seem as though every thoughtful man must concern himself with it, must take up a definite position with regard to it, must always arrange his life with reference to death. How much inclined we are, in other matters, to live for the future, to strive for the future, and to neglect the present in consequence! But the only thing absolutely certain in the future—that we must die sooner or later—most men turn away from as much as they can. We build castles in the air to our heart's content, but we hide the iron gates of death from our view till we stand before them. It is considered improper to speak to any one of the time when he will be no more. Even

though a man may occasionally speak of his own death, he avoids it with those most dear to him. How unnatural it seems, and yet how natural! Let us be honest; we all love life, and fear death. No more striking argument can be used against the talk of the frivolous and the proud, who maintain that they have no fear of death, than the scrupulous silence by which they conceal death from themselves and those they hold most dear. From our very birth, and all through our lives, we are all of us, as the Scripture says, slaves to the fear of death; and there is only One who can redeem us from such slavery that we may live in holy freedom. It is Jesus Christ who has trodden the road to death before us and for us. My beloved, are we redeemed, or are we still slaves, chained by that fear of death which makes men all their lifetime subject to bondage?

Do not let us answer hurriedly, but bethink ourselves during this hour. Let us for once meditate *on our passage through life, in the light of Jesus' departure by death.* Let us first ask: *How did Jesus meet death?* and then let us consider the alternative—*either--or*—*in which Jesus Himself gives us the choice.*

I.

Jesus is more than our example, He is our Redeemer; but He is also our example, and He has become so by the way He went to meet death. But He would have been neither the one nor the other, neither our Saviour, who saves us from death, and the fear of death, nor our example, whom we have to follow in our passage through life to death, if He had not become our Brother, sympathising with us in joy and sorrow, in pain and pleasure, and in fear and hope. Let us thank Him, because He also did not hide His human feelings when He spoke of death. Jesus was much occupied with thoughts of His death. He spoke of it from the very beginning of His public ministry. The Man, after a youth spent in retirement, came forth at last, at thirty years of age, with the consciousness of a mission, transcending all the barriers of human knowledge and human life, and began to speak at once of His violent and no longer distant death. At first He did so enigmatically, then ever plainer. He spoke of it with great dignity and with holy courage; it is not necessary in a Christian community to say that He never spoke of it in the complaining tones of cowardice, or dejectedly, as though unprepared for it. From the first His death had been taken into account in the plan of His life, for it was in itself a part of the task He must and would carry out.

But we should be drawing an absolutely untrue picture for ourselves, if we strove to find that the typical grandeur of the mind in which Jesus faced death consisted in fearlessness, in determined courage, and in insensibility to the terrors of death. If in that consisted the true, the really human attitude with regard to death, which is well pleasing to God, we should have to find some other example instead of our Lord; for in this respect others appear almost more sublime than He. With what indifference Socrates took the cup of poison, and watched death drawing nearer and nearer! His last words to his friend were: "We owe the God of healing a sacrifice. Do not forget it!" He meant that death was like recovery from a long illness to him. The Emperor Augustus, in whose reign our Lord was born, said to his friends when on his deathbed, "Have I played my part well?" and then he invited them to applaud him by clapping their hands, as he left the stage. And how many an unknown man has apparently met death with indifference! Criminals have mounted the scaffold with the vanity of dancers, and with unshaken bravado. We have lately read with horror of an instance of this, in all the German newspapers. If any one thinks that this is sublime and great, he will end by marvelling at the death of the malefactor on the cross, at Golgotha, who was ready even in his last agony to scoff at Jesus, with whom he was crucified, and will set him on a higher level than the Holy One by his side, who gave vent to the anxious question and complaint: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" who confessed to His disciples in the garden, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and who wrestled in agony with His God, and prayed three times, "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from Me."

Our Saviour tasted the bitterness of death, and He knew and felt the fear of death. And that, not only on the last day, when death drew near to His soul, but often, when thinking of His death long before. He once said to His disciples, some time before: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And do we not feel that, underlying His words in our text for today, there is a dread of the dark pathway of death? The Lord foresaw, and said beforehand, that the hearers of His words would be His murderers. All would forsake Him. He must tread the dark pathway alone. Therefore He said, in order to encourage Himself: "He that sent Me is with Me." The Father hath never yet forsaken Me. He will not leave me alone; neither will He forsake me when He withdraws His Almighty hand from Me, that I may become the prey of grim death. In the words of our Lord we hear an echo of the Psalmist's old prayer: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." This is the comfort of the holy in the presence of death, and it was the comfort of the only Holy One when He trod the pathway of death. We need such an example when we are assailed by the fear of death, whenever we think seriously of dying. We need such a Saviour, who has been tempted in all points like as we are, who felt, as we do, how terribly unnatural death is, and who openly acknowledged it, yea, who bore our weakness as His own weakness, and overcame it by faith in the love and faithfulness of His Father. This is truth without the deceptive appearance of art, holy and natural, well pleasing to God, and worthy of man, and that which makes it so comforting is, that it is possible for man.

Jesus knew where He was going when He left the world, He knew that He was returning to His Father's House. No power on earth, no weakness of His own, no alien sin, no death, and no kingdom of death could hold Him fast and hinder Him from entering the heavenly glory that He had with the Father before the world was. Thus He overcame death and the fear of death. The thought of death did not prevent His working as long as it was day. The Jews who heard Him speak so certainly of His death, asked: "Will He kill Himself?" Sorrow and heartache had been caused Him in abundance by those to whom He came. He would indeed have had much to judge and to complain of, if He had wished to speak of all the sin and folly, the wickedness and spiteful contradiction He had met within the few years of His ministry among His people. It was, humanly speaking, an almost useless struggle, an unequalled search for love, without any perceptible results.

Jesus felt this sorrow so deeply, because He was burning with love for those who rejected Him. Once He sighed, and complaining even of His disciples, cried out: "How long shall I be with you! how long shall I suffer you!" But that He could ever take His own life could only be imagined by those who did not know His heart. The zeal for the honour of God, which glowed in the heart of Jesus Christ, was pure from all the vain ambition which could make sinning against one's own life seem like the deed of a hero. The love for man, which filled His large heart, was strong in faith that no good could ever be useless, and that nothing true could be transitory. By faith He saw the victory of His work as the completion of His own life. In the love which believes all things and hopes all things, He knew that some even of those who now opposed Him would acknowledge Him after His death and would thank Him for His love. He praised God for every sinner willing to be converted by Him. He rejoiced over every immature soul of man, to whom God's counsel of love had been revealed by Him. Therefore, in patience, yea, with joy, He spake before all the world, even unto the end, of all that He had heard from the Father, and had done in the world, as the Father had commanded Him. Thus Jesus went forth to meet death, thinking often of death, overcoming by faith His natural terror of death, certain by faith of the glorious goal, active in love till His last breath, and blessed in hope in the midst of this world of sin and of death.

My beloved, let us look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, that we may so pass through life unto death, as to attain life by death.

It is necessary for us to look unto Him by faith, and to order our goings by His, for otherwise we shall die in our sins. I know well that this is a hard saying, but it is the word of my Lord, who is Lord of us all. Let philosophers philosophise, let poets romance, let fine orators speak of what they do not know and do not believe! But woe be to the Christian preacher, who here in the pulpit, or by the sick-bed, or at the grave, speaks otherwise than he has heard the Lord Jesus speak. Three times, in our text, the Lord said to the Jews, who did not believe on Him, and the last time very plainly: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." None of us can die without sin: it cleaves to us as long as we breathe; it makes even those who are sick unto death unwilling to prepare for their last journey. But to live in sin as in our own element, without either hating or condemning it, seeking for release from it or renouncing it, thus to live in it and thus to die in it means sinking down into an abyss, into which no ray of hopeful love can penetrate, for it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment.

Jesus is not speaking here of the generations of men who lived before Him, and who never knew of the salvation which had arisen in Him for dying and sinful men. He is not speaking either of the countless millions who were then living far from Him without even hearing of Him. He is speaking only of those, and to those, who hear His Word and refuse to believe in Him. But even so this Word is a two-edged sword, which pierces through joint and marrow. All those whom we follow to the grave have heard the Word of Jesus, at all events, in their youth; they have heard the church-bells all their lives; they have known of the existence of a community of the faithful, and they have desired to be buried in their churchyard. They are therefore all concerned in the great alternative: Either they have died in faith in the Vanquisher of death, or they have died in their sins. Again--the living that we meet daily, have they not nearly all been baptised and confirmed, and have they not been hearers of the words of Jesus, and have remained so for a time? And they are all on the same road with us, of which the goal for some is dying in their own sins, and for the others, dying in faith in the Son of God. But the death is in accordance with the life which preceded it. Who is there amongst us who has not in this world, and in the world beyond, many very closely connected, perhaps very amiable and dear ones, with reference to whom this great alternative—either--or—makes him tremble? As men, we do not know the hearts of men, but we should have neither heart nor understanding if, when desiring to be Christians ourselves, we did not often look around on our so-called Christian surroundings with the deepest grief. How many Christians there are, travelling through this short life towards certain death, who only remind us now and then by some trait or other in their character of our great Pattern; who though often thinking of death, certain of a blessed end, and overcoming by faith the fear of death, work unweariedly as long as it is day! On the other hand, how many we see who are slaves to the fear of death, hiding their faces from the King of Terrors till extreme old age, and striving vainly to flee from him! How few there are who, free as the children of God, seek their Father's face at all times, as long as they are here below, and then show their joy to enter into their Father's House, as soon as their Father calls them to Himself!

But nearer than our nearest friends, our old parents and our young children, nearer than all others are we to ourselves. How do we then, who are gathered here, stand in relation to the holy Pattern set before us to-day? Every one, with any sense, will allow that it would be extreme folly to live as though there were no death. Every one will allow that it is useless, and even harmful, to be afraid of death and to flee from it. And who does not feel that it is grand and dignified, yea, even glorious and enviable, to pass through life and to meet death as Jesus did? I maintain that there is not one amongst us who can gaze attentively for some time on this picture of a holy and yet truly human life, without the thought arising in his heart: "Oh, who would not so live, so go to meet death, and so die like Jesus!"

But there is something in His own words which will scare away the hope that we can ever be like this picture of Him. For on what does Jesus ground the certainty that His death must lead to His exaltation to heavenly glory? He said to the Jews: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I

am not of this world." And on what does He ground His faith that God would not forsake Him in the terrors of the last conflict with death? He could say, and He also did say: "I do always those things that please God." But this is just what none of us can repeat after Him without lying; and the picture which drew us on by its beauty seems now to drive us away, and even to vanish away itself in unattainable distance. But this is not the fault of the Lord who speaks to us to-day, and who asks us whether we will die in our sins, or die and live with Him. He does not threaten in order to drive us away, but only to show us how needful it is to cleave to Him. He says: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye will die in your sins." By this He would also say, and did say, even to His murderers, "Only believe." His love indeed hoped that many of them would confess Him, when He had gone His way even unto the end. And this bold hope began to fulfil itself from that same hour. These very words of His convinced many. We read at the end of our text: "As He spake these words many believed on Him." Faith bridges the chasm which separates us sinful mortals from the heavenly Son of God; and not some peculiar kind of faith that we invent for ourselves, but faith in Him, who has shown Himself so worthy of faith, gives us strength to follow Him. Without faith in the truth of our ideal, there can be no striving, in any province of human life, which will bring us nearer to our pattern, but only dreams and fancies which are even more fleeting than this life. But why should any one wish to refuse faith to the sacred Pattern and Example, called Jesus Christ? This is no phantom, an invention of man's imagination. It is a living Man who bids us follow Him. His heart is full of love for the slaves of sin and death. It is His mouth in which there was no deceit and guile, which cries to us: Believe only, and follow Me; then ye will not die in your sins, but live while dying.

> "Is it too hard for thee To tread where I have trod! Smoothing the way to God, Ready thine aid to be."

Yes, He has led the way; not only going before, but also for us He has fought the fight of life and the fight of death, and has conquered. The true Man, who, as our Example, cries to us to follow after Him, is also the Son of God, who came down from above into our poor sick and erring life. If it were not so, He would not be the holy and true Man to whom we can look up in faith and trust. But now the Son of God, the free-born, has allowed our chains to be laid upon Him; He has borne them in patience and faith that He might then break them by the might of His indissoluble Divine life. We can also follow Him even unto death, for He went on our way as a Man who had tasted the fear and bitterness of death. And we can believe on Him, for, because He was from above, and never denied His heavenly descent in thought, word, or deed, the door of *His* Father's House was obliged to open to Him when He returned home. Whosoever believeth in Him must cling to Him in life, and this is not so hard as it seems to those who as yet have never tried it. For the Lord Jesus, the free-born Son of God, remembers, in His Father's House, His brethren in a strange land, whom He has made the children of God, and He considers how He may make them yet more fully the free children of God. He holds us fast when all else forsakes us. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Whoever so lives, lives well; whoever so dies, in dying is blessed. Amen.