

Valedictory Sermon

Acts XX. 32.

Edenton, N. C. Dec. 6th 1840

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Description of the day of Judgment - (Paley)

Terrible & alarming prospect! here the powers of eloquence loose all their effect; and the most elevated genius is far too languid, lifeless, & insipid, to describe a scene so solemn & tremendous. Who, tho' he spoke with a voice majestic as that of an angel, - tho' all the graces of celestial eloquence flowed from his lips - could do justice to a subject so awful and amazing? A scene which so far transcends every picture which the most sublime imagination can form, must certainly baffle every effort of description: but tho' it is impossible to convey any but a faint idea, after all our labor, let us, nevertheless, attempt the task, as it must be highly edifying, & leave a lasting impression on the heart susceptible of good dispositions.

Imagine the day arrived, & all nature waiting, in silent expectation, to receive its last doom; the tutelary & destroying angels to have their instructions, & every thing to be ready for the fatal hour; and then, as upon a signal given, the trumpet sounds; the universe groans at the terrific blast: monuments burst asunder; the tomb surrenders up the dust which has slept there from immemorial time: - the illustrious & the obscure, the virtuous & the bad: Christians, infidels, multitudes of every tribe people & language; all who have ever existed from Adam down to the present moment, - all, all arise! Now, every moment the mighty concourse swells! they pour around like gathering torrents, and overflow the earth, numerous as the drops of rain or stars of heaven; millions crowding on millions; stupendous tumult! it is all inconceivable alarm & consternation. But, who is that sublime & beautiful form descending from the skies, encompassed with unnumber'd hosts of angels? Jesus, the Son of God! the Judge of man! And is this the despised Nazarine, the persecuted wanderer; who, while on earth, had not where to recline his weary head? Is this the man of sorrow, who was barbarously crucified on Calvary, & expired between two thieves, loaded with disgrace, & exhausted with agonies? Yes, it is the same. But what a change! what Majesty! what inconceivable magnificence! Behold those temples, which were once so cruelly torn with thorns, now crown'd with a diadem of glory, too dazzling for mortal sense to bear. Behold that hand into which his murdering foes once put the reed in derision, now holding scepter of the universe! Yet amidst that blaze of grandeur that surrounds him, the amiable meekness which dignified the man of sorrow still appears, while traces of complacency & benevolence conspicuously mark his divine lineaments.

He separates the promiscuous multitude as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats; the good are ranged on his right hand, the wicked on his left: all, even the just themselves, wait in trembling expectation at the dread tribunal - but how different are their sensations from those of the guilty! Pious confidence, hope & joy, arising from a consciousness of their integrity, & the thought of their Redeemer's atoning blood, are mingled with their fears; but what imagination can conceive the horrors of the latter! They already hear the dire sentence thundering in their ears; they anticipate the doom which must soon await them: what will they give now for a few of those moments, which they so imprudently squandered away in gaiety & sensual pleasure, to make their peace with heaven! - the opportunity is gone for ever! And now, behold the Eternal King of glory turning towards the assembly on his right hand, with smiles that inspire inconceivable delight - dignity, blended with mildness, in his brow, he addresses them with a voice that breathes immortal love, & invites them to the enjoyment of those beatific scenes which had been prepared for them before the foundation of the world. What language can describe the effect of these reviving accents on the minds of the just! What gratitude! What triumph! What ecstasy overflow their hearts, & sparkle in their eyes! Tens thousand brilliant convoys from above attend them & angels congratulate them on their happy destiny, & waft them on their soaring wings to the mansions of eternal day. Oh, what inevitable prospects are here! Whatever ancient poets have figured of the Elysian fields; whatever the imagination has formed in her boldest flights, is here more than realized - But how dire a contrast is exhibited in the looks of those at the left hand of ^{their offended} the judge, when darting at them from his lowering & indignant brow, the lightning of his vengeance, he pronounces in their ears the decisive & irrevocable sentence, which consigns them to the regions of endless night.

They cast one farewell look on the beatific regions, & see the heavenly Jerusalem extending her jasper walls far & wide; her Sun the glory of the Deity, shining forth with a degree of lustre which exceeds every thing that the most brilliant fancy can conceive of the astonishing and sublime. This scene of brightness, more than splendour, compared with which, the splendor of ten thousand suns were darkness, but arguments their anguish. These are the abodes of infinite delight but alas! not for them. They deeply feel & lament their loss - but ah! too late! 'tis irreparable! They depart, with inexpressible reluctance, to begin their dire fate in a ruinous world - Now the scene begins, all the treasures of fire in heaven & earth are open! the final dissolution of the world, is begun! Tremendous thunders roll! Piercing lightnings dart from every quarter, blaze crowding on blaze, in rapid succession; the mighty pillars of creation tremble; it is all astonishment, confusion & terror! Dissolved by ^{the} overpowering flame, the solid mountains run down in streams; & contrary to the sacred laws of nature, the rivers reverse their course, & hurry back to their fountain-head - Every promontory & Island is moved out of its place. What a scene does the face of the earth display! Towers, palaces, & temples, all sinking in the dire conflagration! Where are now those mighty Cities, the seats of luxury, pomp, & magnificence, whose stately domes & aspiring turrets seemed to threaten heaven? The melody of the harp & musician, & the enchanting voice of the singer are heard in them no more. But it is not Cities only, the works of men's hands, but the hills, the mountains, & the rocks, are melted, as was before the sun, & their place is no where found. Here stood the Alps, a prodigious range, the load of the earth; this huge mass is dissolved like a tender cloud into rain: here stood Atlas, whose lofty top reach'd the clouds; all these are vanished, & swallowed up in one general destruction; and heaven & earth are mingled together in one prodigious ruin.