

DELIVERANCE FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE CITY OF RALEIGH,

ON

FEBRUARY TWENTY-SECOND, MDCCL,

AT THE

FUNERAL OF MRS. ANNE WHITE.

BY REV. R. T. HEFLIN,

(Of the North Carolina Conference.)

RALEIGH:

THOMAS J. LEMAY & SON.

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TO THE MISSES WHITES:

I cannot refuse your request to furnish the sermon delivered at the funeral of your venerated mother, Mrs. White, that you may have a few copies printed for private circulation. It is proper however for me to state, in palliation of inaccuracies which may be observed, that it was written out from brief notes, under a pressure of engagements, several months after it was delivered.

Very respectfully

Your friend and pastor,

R. T. HEFLIN.

SERMON.

“And deliver them, who, through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.” Heb. 2d c., 15th v.

In discoursing upon these words, let our prayerful attention be directed to a consideration,

I. OF DEATH, AND OF THAT FEAR OF DEATH WHICH MOST MEN ENTERTAIN.

II. OF THE DELIVERANCE HERE SPOKEN OF.

I. *What is death?* All we know of it is, its attendant circumstances and its results. And these we only know in part. We are told that death is the cessation of life: but what is life? Life, like death, is known to us by its effects; but what is life itself—what is the cause of these effects? Men have searched for it by carefully dissecting every part of the body, and patiently tracing every movement of the mind—but have searched in vain.

To tell us, therefore, that death is a cessation of life, is to multiply words without knowledge. Life itself is a mystery, and death is no less so. Eternity alone can explain them. And yet there are some things connected with death which we may know, which we ought fully to understand.

All *must die*: all *know* they must die! And it is not less true that all *fear* to die—“through fear of death are all their life-time subject to bondage.” The fear of death, however it may be disguised or concealed, is, at some time or other, felt in every heart, and overshadows the brightest prospects of earth with its gloom. But let us calmly inquire, what ground is there for this fear?

1. Is the *pain of dying* so great we need fear it?

The common opinion is, that death is painful beyond any conceptions of the living. And hence many good men who fear not to part with earth and meet the Judge of quick and dead, yet fear the *pain* of dying. And others, around the couch of one that dies in the Lord, weep, bitterly weep, not because he is going home to heaven, nor solely because he leaves loved ones behind him, but chiefly because of the agony he is supposed to endure in dying.

This sorrow for those who die, this fear of death because of the excessive pain to be endured, is founded upon an error.

The pain ordinarily endured in dying is not to be compared to what has been realized while living. Pain is not pain unless it is *felt*. But, in most

cases, that which produces death also blunts the sensibility to suffering; as death approaches, consciousness of suffering diminishes, until it ceases altogether.

In all cases of sudden or instant death, by violence or otherwise—as by a dagger in the heart, a bullet in the brain, a stroke of lightning or of apoplexy, but little if any pain is felt; that which destroys life, also destroys sensibility, and the disembodied spirit finds itself, unwarned of approaching dissolution by an instant's suffering, in the eternal world. Men who have been by violence suddenly deprived of consciousness, and afterwards resuscitated, have no remembrance of pain—no pain was felt. In drowning or strangulation the inhalation of air by the lungs is prevented, and death ensues. But, although death from this cause is more gradual than in the cases mentioned before, very little, if any, suffering is realized. This opinion is sustained by well authenticated statements of persons hanged or drowned until they were supposed to be dead, but afterward restored to life. The case of Dr. Adam Clarke, thrown by a horse into the surf of the sea, and apparently drowned, but afterwards restored to consciousness, is too well known to need repetition.

When disease is of long continuance, and medical skill fails to arrest its progress, there is a point at which the patient is said to be dying; and he is then supposed to endure an agony of pain incomparably greater than any he has known before. But if the opinions advanced be correct, this is not so. When the presence of death is made manifest by those symptoms which are popularly supposed to indicate great sufferings, the bitterness of death, so far as it consists in physical pain, is past. The very causes which produce those symptoms, blunt the sensibility to suffering; and, with few exceptions, the physical sufferings endured in the hour of death bear no comparison to the pains of lingering disease that have preceded and introduced that solemn event. The restless tossing to and fro, the groans, the contortions of the body in the hour of death, are involuntary, but do not indicate the degree of pain endured. The effects of great bodily suffering continue, after the sensation of pain has diminished, or ceased forever. The ocean is still agitated for a time after the tempest is gone.

From these and other considerations which our present limits forbid us to notice, we conclude that the *pain* of dying under ordinary circumstances, is not a sufficient ground for that fear of death which thinking men generally entertain.

2. But let us inquire farther, is the pain of parting from earth a sufficient reason for the fear of death?

There are none so desolate and so isolated as to be unloving and unloved. It makes us sad to contemplate the severance of the ties that bind us to earth and to friends. And yet the pain of parting is not the sting of death, does not, through fear, bring us into bondage.

The Christian, a citizen of heaven, is an exile, a stranger and a pilgrim;

and whether he leave a hovel or a palace behind him, is assured of a better inheritance beyond the skies; the anticipation of death excites in his bosom, not the fear of mental agony to be endured in a final separation from a world of toil and sin and woe; but rather inspires him with the triumph of a soldier whose warfare is over, of the mariner, whose voyage is ended in the haven of his rest. Though it is painful in death to part with the loved ones of earth, it is felt in the hour of parting that it will be joyful to meet them again in a better land.

But there are others "without God and without hope in the world." They, too, must die: and they *fear* to die. Whence is this fear? Is it because they dread the physical sufferings of death? Why should those fear to die, who have suffered, and continuing to live, must be liable again to suffer, many times the pain of death, if, dying once, they shall die no more? If it be painful to die, it is yet more so to thousands of our guilty race, to live. Why then do those who are not holy, not happy, and not cowards, fear to die?

3. It is not the fear of death itself, *but of that which may be after death* that makes men afraid to die.

It is deemed unnecessary and irrelevant to enter into a discussion here of the soul's immortality, and the resurrection of the body: but upon the admission of these truths, the inquiry arises, in view of the relations we sustain to God and to eternity, is there reason to fear that death which is to introduce us to his presence, and to fix our doom, beyond the probability of change?

In this connection there is one truth, every where taught in the word of God, and enforced by universal observation and experience. As a race, our nature is polluted, and we have added transgression to sin—we are all guilty before God. In proportion as the day of reckoning is supposed to be distant, the cares, the pleasures of life, press in upon the mind, and exclude a proper sense of our accountability to the Judge of quick and dead. But when we reflect upon approaching death, not only or chiefly in its connection with bodily sufferings, and the mental agony of parting with all of earth, but in its relation to our eternal destiny, we may well fear—as *sinner*s, it would be madness in us not to fear to die. The God of heaven is holy—heaven, the place of his abode, is holy—all the inhabitants of heaven must be holy; without holiness none can enter there. To die in sin, therefore, is to die in a state that must forever exclude us from heaven and from happiness. Not only the holiness, but also the justice of Almighty God is a proper ground for the fear of death, in view of the fact that we have sinned against him.

As our Creator, just and holy, he has given to man a law which he declares to be "holy, just, and good." That law is enforced by a penalty; a law without a penalty ceases to be law; the design of the penalty is not punishment as an ultimate object, but by a denunciation of punishment,

and, by the example of its infliction, to deter men from rebellion, to afford the strongest motives to moral agents to obey. Every consideration, therefore, which could prompt our Maker to give us law, with a penalty annexed, goes to sustain an antecedent probability in favor of the greatest possible penalty. That penalty we accordingly find revealed in the word of God, as eternal death.

All admit that a law without a penalty is an absurdity, that man is under law to God, and that upon its violation, punishment is justly merited.

This punishment must be inflicted either here, or hereafter. If inflicted in the present state, it must be upon the body, in temporal circumstances, or the infliction must be mental, by remorse of conscience. To say that the equivalents of divine justice are rendered in this world by bodily pain, is to fix good health as the standard of moral character—an absurdity sufficiently refuted, by naming it. To assert that divine justice rewards every man according to his deeds in this world, by the temporal circumstances in which it places him, is to affirm the criterion of moral character to be “success in life:” a maxim, it is true, by which the world too often fixes its opinion; but for which none are so bold as to claim divine authority.

But is not the full penalty of the law inflicted upon the sinner in the present world, by remorse of conscience? This opinion is more absurd than either of the other two. Remorse of conscience is a conviction of guilt—it is not atonement for it. Justice requires that the more a man sins, the greater shall be his punishment: but, in point of fact, the more a man sins, he feels, proportionably, less remorse. By repetition of crime his conscience becomes “seared as with an hot iron, past feeling.” Moreover, remorse of conscience, is based upon a *fear of future punishment*. So soon, therefore, as a sinner becomes convinced that in the remorse of conscience which he feels is included the *whole* penalty of the law he has broken, it becomes impossible for the penalty to be inflicted in that way! the foundation upon which is based his only hope of heaven sinks beneath his feet, and he is *afraid to die*, because after death comes the judgment! If there is nothing in speculations of this nature to alleviate the fear of death, still less is there in the Word of God to encourage the finally impenitent to hope for heaven. “God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire.” When the pains of death, and the still sharper agony that pierces the soul now leaving forever the loved ones of earth, are all forgotten in the overwhelming sense of guilt unpardoned, and of divine wrath impending; the word of God, neglected, violated, its promises finally rejected, proclaims “A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn into the lowest hell.” “Hell is moved to meet thee at thy coming.” “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be upon every soul of man that doeth evil.”

“Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when

your fear cometh ; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as the whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you."

Oh! in such an hour, when life is ebbing fast, and the last hope is sinking to rise no more, not all the sorrows of earth fused into one pang can equal the earth-quake throb of black despair, that pushes the soul into a future, all rayless and hopeless—and to be thus forever! But why, upon an occasion like this, call your attention to an event so sad and so awful? Because, by the solemn scene before us, the great lesson of our mortality and accountability to God, is driven home upon our souls; and we are persuaded that faithfulness to God and to you is not incompatible with the Providence that has called us to this house of mourning, nor with the tender regard we all feel for the memory of the venerated dead. Soon, each in this assembly shall taste the bitter cup, shall pass the solemn ordeal.

It has been my design, thus far, to remove from your minds that fear of death which is not founded in reason, to point out a real danger, far transcending the wildest ravings of imagination; and it is now my delightful task to proclaim to you "deliverance from bondage."

"Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

II. *The deliverance here spoken of* next claims our attention. It is a deliverance from the fear of death. But this fear is based upon a well grounded apprehension of punishment in a future State, incurred by sin committed in the present. Our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, proposes to deliver us from the fear of death by removing its cause—*sin*.

1. And this he is enabled to do in consequence of having made an atonement for sin, by suffering in our stead and for us the penalty due to our transgressions. Although he endured a mental agony, to be accounted for only by the pressure of the weight of a world's guilt upon his soul, and suffered death by a mode of execution more painful than any other ever invented by the cruelty of men or devils, we do not understand that his sufferings were equal in degree or amount, to the aggregate of pain merited by mankind; but that his sufferings were equivalent in value to those deserved by all the guilty for whom he died. His atonement derives its value or merit from his character, as a *sinless Man—the divine son of God, equal with the Father*.

The design of God in punishment is chiefly to express his disapprobation of sin. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is equal to the punishment due to a guilty world, because, in it and by it, God's disapprobation of sin is expressed more strongly than it would have been by sinking all its myriads to quenchless fires.

2. God can, therefore, be just; and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Through him, and upon condition of faith in him, pardon, free

and full pardon of sin is offered to all. Without money and without price, whosoever will may come freely and obtain remission of sins through faith in his blood. Concurrent with justification, or pardon of sin, the heart is changed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, the soul is delivered from the bondage of sin and fear, and led into the liberty of the children of God.

In our natural state we are represented as morally bound, helpless, deaf, dead. And yet deliverance is offered upon condition of that faith which cometh by hearing. Can the deaf hear? or the dead believe? How then shall the purchased salvation be made available to us. By his sufferings and intercession he sendeth "the spirit to help our infirmities," "to work in us both to will and to do of the good pleasure of God." And thus we may exclaim in the language of Paul: "We have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, the heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ." "Being, therefore, justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But the Christian knows that the sting is extracted, and is not afraid to die; death is swallowed up in victory. And thus, "the chamber where the good man meets his fate is privileged beyond the common walks of life, quite on the verge of heaven." Death is stripped of its terrors, the grave of its gloom. Christianity has its living witnesses; and borne upon the stream of the church's history, a rich legacy to coming generations, is the example and the testimony of the faithful dead, whose star of hope, the star of Bethlehem, has beamed all the brighter, when the night of death was around them. From a full conviction of the power of the Gospel to sustain in the hour of death, its promise of rest to the weary, and of eternal life to the dead, let us draw comfort and encouragement amid our present afflictions.

Mrs. ANNE WHITE, whose sudden decease has covered a widely extended family circle in mourning, and shrouded this whole community in gloom, was born, December 4th, 1766; and at the time of her death (Feb. 20th, 1850,) her age was 83 years, 1 month, and 16 days. She was a daughter of Richard Caswell, an officer in the Revolutionary war, distinguished for his services in the counsels of the State and of the Nation, and Governor of North Carolina; a man whose name is embalmed in the history of our country. In all the trials and vicissitudes of a long life, she proved worthy of her lineage. She was married on the 4th February, 1783, to John Fonville, who died on the 6th of January following; she continued in a state of widowhood until August 14th, 1787, when she was united in wedlock to William White, who was for many years Secretary of State for N. Carolina. This marriage was dissolved by the death of Mr. White, on the 8th Nov. 1811. Thus, during a number of years, were devolved upon her the cares

of a large family, and the management of a property not inconsiderable. She was the mother of ten children; four of whom preceded her to the tomb, while six survive, to mourn their irreparable loss.

A singular coincidence perhaps should be mentioned. Her death occurred on the fifty-first anniversary of her arrival to reside in this city. During the more than half a century she resided among you, her example, quiet and unobtrusive, but commanding, has shown that in every relation social and domestic, what a woman should be, she was. At the first Conference in Raleigh, during which services were held in the State-house, long before Methodism was established here, she professed to find peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and united herself with the Methodist Episcopal Church: a step which, in the state of our Church at that time in this community, illustrates, at least, her sincerity and firmness. Perhaps not more than three persons who were members then survive until now. Most of those who stood with her then, have gone before her to their reward. She informed me, not long before she died, that when she was young, the house of her father, Gov. Caswell, was a resting place for the Methodist preachers in their weary pilgrimage; and that she could distinctly trace her earliest religious impressions to the influence of that eminent servant of God, Bishop Asbury.

In her religious profession, she was firm, decided and consistent; loving all the good of every name; a friend to the poor; in a word, an intelligent Christian lady of the old school. Her best eulogy is found in the unaffected grief of this large assembly, in the deep affliction felt by her bereaved family, in the tearful faces of her servants, who press to take a last long lingering gaze at that once loved form. She was called away suddenly, but, not to herself, unexpectedly. Two days ago she was in her usual health—in a few moments her spirit had passed away. She did not outlive her faculties of mind, nor the affections of those that had loved her. She lived beyond the usual limit of human life to a green old age, respected and loved by all.

And now what shall I say to her afflicted family? Follow her as she followed Christ. We commit all that was mortal of this mother in Israel to the grave, with deep heart-felt sorrow—but also with hope. For we believe that when the angel's trump shall wake the sleeping dead, she shall rise, clothed with immortality; and shall she then say "Lord, here am I, and the children which thou hast given me?" May the grace of God sanctify this affliction to them all; and may those whom death and distance now divide, form at last an unbroken family in heaven!



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