

A BETTER WORLD

A SERMON

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“And having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” Luke 23:46

THERE are three things that I wish to say a few words upon this morning. The first is *the abolition of death by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ*; the second is *his transition from this world*; and the third is *the revelation that we have of him as reigning in a future world*.

First, then, *that abolition of death which the Lord Jesus Christ has brought about*. And you will observe that there is a certain order of things in which he has brought about the abolition of death. Let us then look for a moment at that order of things in which Jesus Christ has abolished death; for while he has taken away the sting of death, while he has taken away the bitterness of death, while he has taken away the curse of death, and to his people turned it into a blessing, and therefore for such to die is gain; still, in order to have to pass through the valley only of the shadow of death, we must be brought into the faith. If we die out of the faith, then we die out of the Lord; but if we die in the faith, then we die in the Lord. And I am particular upon this point, because of the importance of our being right, of our souls being right, of our receiving a right spirit, so as to be found at last in the Spirit of the Lord; and to receive a right gospel, so as to be found at last in the truth, for all must be damned that receive not the love of the truth, that we may receive the true Christ, the Christ of God, that we may at last be found where, and where only, we can be blessed. “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord;” and no others can be blessed. And it is a remarkable thing, the apostle is very careful in setting before us the order of things after which Christ has abolished death; and the apostle sets it before us in this way. But before so doing, he reminds us that that gospel, after the order of which Christ has abolished death, has swallowed up death in victory, is that very gospel which is everywhere hated, and which men are naturally ashamed of, and which Satan, by all his agents, has ever striven against in a variety of ways, and ever will. So, said the apostle to Timothy, “Be not you therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” and we shall see presently what this testimony is, “nor of me his prisoner;” Paul being a prisoner for the gospel’s sake, for doctrine’s sake, because he set forth the true Christ of the true God. “But be you a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel;” as partaker of the gospel, you must share in the consequences of being a partaker of that gospel; be you a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Do not lose sight of the power of God. Here is almighty power to sustain you in it; underneath are his everlasting arms; there is no want of strength. Judge not of

your religion by what you feel, but judge of religion by what God is. "Be you a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." Then comes one of the most lucid and beautiful definitions of the gospel that we have in the Bible; a description of that order of things in which Christ has appeared and abolished death, swallowed up death in victory. "Who has saved us;" that is the first thing. "Be you partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us;" that's the first thing: saved us by choosing us in Christ before the world was; by blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the world was; by being beforehand with the enemy then, and by being beforehand with the enemy ever since, and by being beforehand with the enemy now, and will, be beforehand with the enemy down to the end of time, so that all enemies must become his footstool. "Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." What, then, does this mean? Does it mean that we are such poor creatures, that the fall has brought us into such an awfully helpless, corrupted state, that if the Lord had not called us according to his purpose and his grace, we never could have been called at all; and that this grace was given us in Christ before the world was? We thus see how entirely independent the gospel is of man. "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought, life and immortality to light." Now, my hearer, if you feel what a poor creature you are, and are enabled to hold Jesus Christ in the order of the eternity and certainty of his salvation; to hold the Lord Jesus Christ in the order and certainty of God's eternal counsel; to hold the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, that is, to believe on him and rest in him according to his reigning grace (for this grace was given us in Christ before the world was), you will see then how completely he has taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the cup of bitters; how he has taken the sting away, and now that you have nothing to fear. So, then, Jesus, when he gave up his soul into the hands of God, when he gave up life, when he died, he then swallowed up death in victory. I know that death does, the prospect of it does rob many of the Lord's people of many of their comforts, and many do live very much in fear of it; but a word or two more perhaps, at least upon this point, presently. Now, then, this is what the Lord Jesus Christ did in his death. And if we want to go a little further into it, to ask the question how it was that he abolished death? how it was that he swallowed up death in victory? it was because he atoned for sin; he completely atoned for sin. It is a most terrible mistake, a most terrible error, to attempt to associate anything of any kind whatever as a kind of make-up to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Why, we are not to associate even any of the graces of the Holy Spirit as any part of the atonement, or as any part of the reconciliation. We are to let repentance, and prayer, and faith, and love, and all these essential graces of the Holy Spirit have their place, but we must not allow them in the least degree whatever to take up in any degree the place of the atonement of Jesus Christ. His atonement is complete; the reconciliation is complete. And hence you will find, in the 23rd of Leviticus, under the Old Testament dispensation, on the great day of atonement, any man that did any work, any man that did any manner of work (and that at that day was, if there was any difference, perhaps more strictly observed than even the sabbath itself), any man that did any work on that day, and that does not afflict his soul on that day, shall surely be put to death. So, then, Jesus has swallowed up death in victory by the completeness of the reconciliation he has made for sin, the completeness of the atonement he has made for sin, the completeness of his sufferings. He underwent all that there was to undergo; he healed the stroke of our wound; and there is nothing now but the shadow to pass through. The, Lord, no doubt in wisdom, hides from us in a great measure the over whelming and ravishing glories of a future world; for our existence here would not be bearable, if the Lord were to reveal to us more conspicuously what the Savior has done, and

the glory that shall follow. It was a good remark, and of course said from personal experience, of Mr. Toplady, he said he felt sure that no mortal could remain long in the body after seeing what he had seen, and after feeling what he had felt, and after enjoying what he had enjoyed. And some Christians, in gone-by days, when they had much more to undergo than we have, have even begged of the Lord to stay his hand, when he has revealed his glory so wondrously, that so far from their wishing to stay here, their soul was on the wing, made like the chariots of Amminadib; such revelations made to them of the completeness of the Savior's work, that he had swallowed up death in victory, and that, in the contrast of the two worlds, the present world, with all its possessions, is not worth a cobweb in comparison of the undying, the pure, untarnished, and untarnishable glories into which the Savior has entered. Here, then, you see the order after which this is done. And so, for you to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, you must take with you the truth that he has saved us; you must take with you the truth that he has called you with a holy calling, because that called you out of sin and uncleanness, and made you one with Jesus, washed, consecrated, sanctified, justified you, and devoted you to God. You must take that with you. And that this was not according to your works, but according to his own purpose and grace, given to you before the world was. You must take that with you. And that Jesus Christ did, in accordance with ancient prediction, see the 25th of Isaiah: he shall swallow up death in victory, and God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. Now, with an understanding of these truths, consciousness of your need of them, and a love to them, take these blessed, testimonies with you, and you will find them now, and you will find them then, to be your shield and your buckler, and you will pass triumphantly through that valley where there is only the shadow of death. Jesus has been there, and Jesus is there, for when we pass through that Jordan, as well as any other, his presence shall be our stay. "I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

But second, the world which the Savior left, this world, had but very few endearments for him. There was no matrimonial tie, no love affair; there were no carnal fascinations, no fleshly charms, no paltry attractions, no delusions, no deceptions. There was not anything in his pure nature that deceitful lusts could take hold of; there was not anything in his pure nature that could bind or tie him to vanity; there was not anything in his pure nature that was earthly, or sensual, or devilish. He passed through the world, his mind pure, his nature pure. No natural endearments for him. His very mother, though a good woman, seemed to stumble at some things he said and did; and his so-called brethren, they did not believe on him. And he had, therefore, but few endearments. He had no prospect of retiring by-and-bye and resting a little; he had no prospect of a mansion, or of anything in this world. He looked forward, and he saw cloud after cloud, tempest after tempest, trouble after trouble, enemy after enemy, sorrow after sorrow, grief after grief, distress after distress, agony after agony. Ah! what was there in this world to charm the Savior? Nothing. There was everything to grieve, everything to oppress, everything to distress, everything to make him what the Scriptures declared he should be, a man of sorrows. So, I say, he had not much to tie him to this world. There were but two things that tied him to this world, and the one was the work which the Father gave him to do, and the other was the ingathering out of this sin-smitten world all his brethren, the ingathering of the objects of everlasting love. But not only was there the absence, then, of any endearments after the flesh, he absence of riches, and the absence of friendship and friends, and the presence of poverty, not where to lay his head, but there was something else as well, namely, that he was everywhere denounced. In public opinion he was a friend of publicans and harlots; in public opinion he was a winebibber and a devil; in public opinion he was an awful deceiver; in public opinion he was not fit to live. And so the rulers inspired the

people, got them on their side, and got them into that opinion; and that public opinion remained even for years, centuries after the Savior's death; even so early after his death as the time of Saul of Tarsus, he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. He was denounced in all the courts of law; the law of the land was everywhere made to speak against him; "He is contrary to our law." And by a perversion of the word of God itself we see how they accused him. Oh, what love must he have had to his people to have endured these contradictions of sinners, to endure these blasphemous mockeries of men! I would that I had grace and gifts to point out to you what a sorrowful life he had, what a sorrowful world this was to him; because, if I had grace and gifts to do so, you would at once see with what an infinity of delight he gave up the ghost; with what an infinity of pleasure he reached the goal; with what an infinity of exquisite, shall I say? rapture of soul as man he could say, "It is finished;" to sigh and sorrow no more forever. And as he was thus denounced, and cast out, and hated in this world, so is his truth now; that is, if you have it in the real purity of it, if you have it in the real completeness of it, if you have it in the real order of it. All sorts of schemes and plans to persecute those that know the truth, and that stand out for it; and they will bring scriptures now. For instance, suppose the Lord opens the eyes of a child, and that child sees what the parents do not see, and that child can distinguish between truth and error; that child feels his need of God's mercy; he can no longer hear a dead minister, he must go to where the truth is. The child is none too young to die, and none too young to feel he is a sinner, God has made him feel that he is a sinner; and none too young to know that salvation is of grace. The parent says, You shall not go there; and the Bible says, "Obey your parents in all things." So, they ought, in all things that pertain to their filial duty, but not in eternal things. When we come to eternal things, however young the child may be, boy or girl, however young, they have no right to obey their parents there. So you read in the Bible, "There shall be five in one house; three against two, two against three;" and the parents putting the children to death, or betraying them to death; and the children the parents. But what necessity for this if the children are to obey the parents in all things? No, no, no. I would say, then, to such parents, and I would say to husbands who persecute their wives for going to hear what their wives know to be the true gospel, or to wives that persecute their husbands, or to children that persecute their parents; or to any, indeed, that persecute others, I would say unto such, Beware lest that come upon you that is written, It were better that a millstone were tied around your neck, and you should be cast into the depths of the sea, than you should offend one of these little ones that believe in Jesus; for their angels do always behold the face of God. And we say to such, Beware that, the heavy judgments of heaven do not fall upon you; for those little ones are dear to God; "and shall not God avenge his own elect, that cry unto him, day and night? I tell you he will avenge them, and that speedily; though he may bear long with them." So, I say, then, as the Savior was then denounced, his truth and real gospel liberty is denounced in the day in which we live. So, then, the wife shall obey the husband in all things that pertain to her character as a wife; but he has no right to lord it over her conscience in eternal things. So, the husband, let him act as a husband; but the wife has no right to lord it over the conscience of her husband; nor parents over children, nor children over parents. We all stand in that respect, as regards eternal things, as separate individuals; and the time will come when all these relationships shall be dissolved, when the married will be as though they had not been married, and when sons and daughters of certain persons will occupy individual positions, irrespective altogether of what their genealogical descent was. It is therefore an individual question is that of real religion, based upon the ground of individual responsibility, based upon the ground of a conscience before God; a matter that lies between God and man, independent altogether of

the creature. How dare a worm of the earth usurp the place and prerogatives of the most high God? Let then, I say, such beware, lest that which is written shall come upon them.

Now the Savior not only, then, was universally denounced in this world, but he had all our sins to bear in this world. Think you that that was ever off his mind? You have, perhaps, sometimes wondered how he could continue all night in prayer. What a long time to be in prayer! The intensity of his sufferings, the range of his work, the greatness of his work, the greatness of the object for which he appeared in the world, would furnish materials for prayer. We know but little of the greatness of the work for which he appeared in our world. I had almost said there was nearly everything to embitter life unto the dear Savior, bless his holy and precious name! and I find it good to dwell upon the same; because every Christian has a considerable number of reasons most heartily to hate this life. Every Christian has a considerable number of reasons, especially when in a spiritual state of mind, to wish his last moment was come, when:

“His inbred foes shall all be slain,
Nor Satan break his peace again.”

So, then, those of you that are sincere, those of you that are pilgrims indeed, those of you that are Christians indeed, those of you with whom religion is not a plaything, or a formal thing, but a living, solemn reality, whatever your trials may be, remember that Jesus' path was much rougher and darker than yours. And if he had promised you that you should have no trouble; if he had told you there should be no thorns in your path; if he had told you that you should be loved of all men, instead of hated of all men; if he had told you that no disappointment should come to you; if he had told you, you should have no tribulation, if he had told you this, you might then call in question, from the darkness of your path, the many trials, and troubles, and perturbations, and castings down, and forebodings, and fears, you might then call in question whether there is not something radically wrong in your religion. But he has not told us so. He has told as the reverse; that we shall have tribulation. And he knows in what way to make them tribulatory; I say, he knows in what way to make them tribulatory. One Christian is apt to think, Well, what an easy life that Christian has! He is not troubled as I am. No; the Lord does not make his path trying in the same way that he does yours; but then he makes his path trying in some other way; so that some one way, and some another, and the Lord does as he pleases in all this, fulfilling his word, “In the world you shall have tribulation.” If we had a little more patience and a little more understanding, we should see it is all to prepare us for our final farewell; it is all to make us willing to depart from that which is not worth possessing, that we may go into the glorious possession of that which is worth possessing.

Now you will say, What has this to do with your text? Why, in order to point out the scene of things which the dear Savior left. As I have before said, there were but two ties he had in this world, and these two are included in the one; namely, the achievement of the work for which he appeared in the world, and ingathering of all his people. There was never any confusion in the Savior's mind as to the object that he had in view; always clear upon that. He knew every evening in what way to pass the night; he knew every morning in what way to employ the day; he knew what to say, he knew what to do, he knew where to go, he knew how much to do in one place, and how much to do in another. And when he came to the most solemn place of all, Calvary's cross, he knew what he had to do there, and what he had to do he did, and said, “It is finished.” Bless his holy name, then, for thus becoming a man of sorrows. And remember (and you will certainly not

recognize the excellency, or appreciate it, unless you remember) that this life of sorrow he lived was not for himself; it was for you. He lived this life of privation for you; he sorrowed for you; he was out all night in prayer for you; he travelled and was weary for you; he endured all that men and devils could inflict upon him for you. None of this was done for himself; it was done for you. How insignificant are the greatest kindnesses that one Christian may do another in comparison of the loving-kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ! I say not this, of course, to reproach any; but only just to remind you that there it is our gratitude must center, there it is our praises must rest, upon the head of this Wondrous Person, to crown him Lord of all.

But the time comes when the opinion of the world cannot affect him; when judicial sentences against him cannot affect him, when poverty cannot affect him. "And he gave up the ghost." His side was pierced after that, and when his side is pierced it is done, done! Not one instance of indignity done to his person after that. Now the side is pierced the enemy is vanquished. Prediction set this before us; and when his side was pierced, it was done. In steps the man that God had appointed; the Lord had made Joseph of Arimathea rich, and given him a rich heart too, and made him rich in faith; placed him in that position. In steps Joseph of Arimathea; there is the final piercing of the Savior's side; the most savage act perhaps, but it was nevertheless the last act, that the enemy could perpetrate. And all this for us. Here, then, we see the Man of Sorrows bearing our sins, bearing our sorrows: we see him through it all, free from sin. We see him at Calvary's cross; we hear the words, "It is finished we see the grounds, which you must read in my last Sunday morning's sermon to understand, those of you that have not seen it, upon which the Savior commended himself to God; and here we have him willingly yielding up the ghost, yielding up his spirit, yielding up his life unto the blessed God.

Now I have noticed, then, the order of things in which he has abolished death, and noticed the fact that this world, this life, was a life of sorrow to him. And I have said these things hoping to endear the Savior. I have had two or three ends in view; the one is, I have pointed out his life, in order to endear him to you, because it was done for you; and the second end I have in view is to uproot you, more and more from the things of time. There is an everlasting tendency to look to human life for more comfort than it ever can, or ever will, be able to afford. Let us pray for grace and wisdom to look at it as what it is. It is only a path, that is all, to a certain end; it is only a wilderness through which we are travelling; it is only a means to an end; it is only the mere title page of our existence; we have the book yet to come, the book of eternity, and its glorious contents, yet to be unfolded and to be enjoyed forever. I find a wonderful difference myself between now and four or five and twenty years ago. I think, if I had no family responsibilities to attend to, you might stick me into a couple of rooms, just one to sit in and one to sleep in. I should care not a single rush about the comforts of life beyond that; just food and raiment and that is all; keep out of debt, and out of prison, and out of danger, as well as I can, and just a crust of bread and cheese. When I stop here a whole Sunday, I have a crust of bread and cheese, and a glass of water. Dear me, why doesn't he have something better? Why, what is there really better than a bit of good bread, and a bit of good cheese, and a glass of good water? I enjoy that ten times more than some of you do all your good, things. I know, and I am as well and fresh as can be. It is astonishing how true it is, only we are not ready to act upon it, that:

"Man wants but little, nor wants that little long."

So that what a nice thing it is to feel that just enough to keep you going, and to regard all beyond that as toil, and labor, and vanity and vexation of spirit! Some of you are smiling, and saying to yourselves, Ah, it does very well for the pulpit; we do not believe it though. No, I don't believe you do; I, believe, that firmly; no question about it. I dare say I shall not get you into it exactly, but, nevertheless, I will tell the truth at any rate; and it is the truth too, for, after all, happiness lies in fellowship with God, in real godliness. Oh, what can cheer the heart like a contemplation, spiritually so, of what Christ has done? What can cheer the heart like the sweet assurance that God is on our side? and if God be for us, who can be against us?

But I must hasten on into the other world, where I should like to dwell for half an hour instead of five minutes. Now then, this wonderful Person, that has thus, according to the economy of the new covenant, swallowed up death in victory, this wonderful Person, that was not only a substitute, but also an example; he has left us an example of suffering, this wonderful Person, let us look at him in a future world. Now, John, you saw the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yes, I did. And you leaned on his bosom at the holy supper. Yes, I did. And you saw his agony in the garden. Yes, I did. And you stood by the cross when his mother was committed to you; you stood there, and witnessed his agony, as far as you could, and heard the wondrous words, "It is finished," and witnessed the testimony of his enemies around, that this was a righteous man. Should you not like to see this person again, John? What would you do? Oh, I would lean on his bosom as I did before; I would sit at his feet as I did before; I would talk with him as I did before. I think not, John; I think not. Oh yes, I would! yes, I would! But John could not. John is taken to the isle of Patmos; presently heaven is opened; here appears a person clothed with a garment down to the foot, girt about the waist with a golden girdle, and the hairs of his head were white as snow, as pure wool; his feet as if they burned in the furnace. Ah, the poor woman could not anoint and kiss them now, no. His feet in all the majesty of his wondrous person; and his eyes as a flame of fire; and his voice, not the voice in the weakness of man, but his voice as the sound of many waters; and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength. There he stands, holding the seven stars in his right hand, showing that he has all his ministers at immediate command. Now, John, here is the same Jesus. John seems at first at a loss to know what it was, or who it was; and he fell at his feet as dead. Why, John, what are you afraid of? It is the same Jesus. Never can he the same. It is the same, it is the very same; and though so majestic in his person, and appearance, and state, his loving heart and his kind hand were as gentle, compassionate, and interested as ever; and he took John by the right hand, and lifted him up. See the gentleness, see the kindness! John never forgot that honor, you may depend upon it. I say, John never forgot that honor, you may depend upon it. Took him by his right hand, and lifted him up, and said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that lives, and was dead;" I am the same person, John; "and, behold, I am alive for evermore." And you know, John, that one of my doctrines is, that because I live, so shall you live; and you know, John, that another of my doctrines is, that what I am, that you shall be too. By-and-bye your head shall appear as mine does; by-and-bye you shall be clothed in this robe of immortality, and girded with this golden girdle; by-and-bye your eyes shall be as a flame of fire; by-and-bye your voice shall be as the sound of many waters; and by-and-bye your feet shall be as fine brass, as if they burned in the furnace; and by-and-bye your countenance shall be as the sun that shines in his strength. "I am he that lives, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Ah, it was for the joy set before him that he lived; it was for the joy set before him that he willingly gave up the ghost. And if time here and space would permit, how I should like to go on into the 7th of the Revelation, and to see the Savior there with Jews and

Gentiles, or those who had been Jews and Gentiles, to see him there in the midst of the throne, and to see them all there, without fault, before the throne, to see them in their white robes, and palms in their hands, and to see them led to living fountains of waters. And had time and space permitted, gladly would I have gone on from the 7th to the 10th chapter, and have seen there how he appears the mighty Angel, the mighty Messenger, to denote that the message of the everlasting Gospel should go forth mightily, should go forth with power. See how he appears in the cloud, the anti-typical cloud! As the ancient cloud attracted, interposed, illuminated, overshadowed, directed, so Christ appears in all these forms to denote how he will deal with his people. See him there with a rainbow upon his head; see him again with his face as the sun; see him again with his feet as fine brass; see him in the universality of his dominion, one foot upon the sea, the other upon the land; his hand raised to heaven, Jewish time ended, Christian time established; the seventh trumpet sounded, the mystery of redemption completed, the mystery of salvation completed, and Jesus entered into his government, entered to his throne, entered to his glory, comforted on every side. But there, these things are altogether unspeakable. May the Lord help you in the contrast of the two; may he help you, and enable you to think less and less of the world that now is, and more and more of that which is to come, for his blessed name's sake.