

ZIONS GREAT SOLEMNITY

A SERMON

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“And spoke of His decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Luke 9:31

MOSES had been now fifteen hundred years in heaven, and he appears now in glory, as though it was an answer to the prayer he made on earth that he might go over and see this good land; he now appears, and what is his theme? Why, he speaks of that decease that the Savior, the Son of God should accomplish at Jerusalem. Here is Elijah, who had been, in heaven nine hundred years, was perfectly one with Moses in this matter; they both appeared in glory, and they spoke of the same thing. They knew not only that he should achieve the victory, but we learn here that they knew the very place where he should die, and of course well knew that he should rise from the dead. With what eagerness glorified spirits looked to that moment when this wondrous Person should enter into that eternal world! What a moment that must have been that stamped forever the confusion of the adversary, that confirmed forever the glorification of those who were already in heaven, and the salvation of all who, from that moment down to the end of time, should be brought to receive the Son of God as their only hope! But without dwelling upon this part, I come at once to notice our text, and I shall do so under a twofold aspect. First, here is *the decease that he was to accomplish*; secondly, *the reasons why it was to be at Jerusalem*.

First, then, we have to notice *the decease that he was to accomplish*. Now the word *decease* properly means *departure*; and, indeed, the original word, here translated *decease*, does mean *departure*. It is the same word in the original, that is here translated *decease*, that is in the 11th of Hebrews translated *departure*, or *departing*: “Joseph made mention of the departing of the children of Israel.” Thus, then, the word *decease* signifies *departure*. In order to ascertain this, and its bearing upon our present state and standing, we must ascertain where the Savior was; what he had to depart from. It is only a part of the truth, though that would, in one sense, include the whole too, when you speak of his departing from this world. Let us remember, then, in the first place, that it is a self-evident truth that the Lord Jesus Christ certainly was under the sins of his people; that is to say, that sin was laid upon him, that sin was laid to his account, and that sin cannot be laid to the account both of the surety and of the debtor, not if the surety be an honorable surety, and makes good his suretyship responsibility. Now, if we take the sin, then, under which he was, namely, the sin of the people, a number that no man can number, and whatever injury these sins had done unto

the law of God, whatever insults these sins had offered unto the holiness and the majesty of heaven, and whatever injury these sins had done to the souls and bodies of men, Christ had to endure the curse thereof. How, then, is the Savior to depart from one of our sins? for our sins were bound to him by the immutable oath of the great God. I can prove it: "The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest." All the agony and bloody sweat of the Son of God could not make God repent of having laid our sins upon him, could not make God repent of having made him a curse for us, could not make God repent of having raised the sword, the tremendous sword of justice against this innocent Person "The Lord has sworn, and will not repent." Here, then, "if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" Here was Jesus Christ, then, under a sworn vow, under the sworn and immutable oath of the great God. Hear the solemn accents in which the Savior expresses himself upon this solemn position, "I have an immersion" for we ought to translate the word, and I think it is right we should have that part of the Bible translated as well as other parts, and not continue to use the Greek word *baptize*; let us have the English word *immerse*, "I have an immersion to be immersed with; and how am I straitened" that is, shut up, bound, "until it be accomplished!" And does he not, when he approaches this scene of things, say, "If it be possible", the word *possible* there is a kindred word to the word *lawful*, "if it be lawful, let this cup pass from me." But is it lawful for the great God to recall, a positive oath? Is it possible for an unchanging God to change? Is it possible for a God of integrity to say and to unsay? Has not the great God said that he has "sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"? Here, then, we see the solemn oath of God, that the cup could not pass from the Savior. "Not my will, but your will" solemn as that will is, "your will be done." Now, before I enter farther into this matter, just dwell for a moment here. You see how Jesus Christ got away from our sins, how he departed from them; it was by suffering the weight of them, it was by suffering the curse of them, it was by suffering all that they had demerited. Now, then, whether I speak to the Christian or to the man that knows not his need of this, let me tell you that in the sight of God, to the salvation of your soul, to the eternal life of your soul, to the eternal sanctification of your soul, to the eternal justification of your soul, and to the eternal glorification of your soul, you can get away from your sins in no way but by that atonement that has thus atoned for them all. And if the Lord bless you with faith in this, you will see that Jesus has departed, and that you are one with him, and that that vital union which the Holy Ghost forms between your soul and Christ, for the Holy Spirit dwells in the soul, you must not measure the strength of that oneness with Christ by the strength of your faith, nor by the strength of your hope, nor by the strength of the graces of the Spirit, but you must judge of the strength of your oneness with Christ by other ties. First, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "You are born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever," and this unites you to Jesus Christ, by whom you have entire freedom, or will by-and-bye, when you come to die; for the righteous has no hope, only in his death, of being entirely free from corruption; the righteous has no hope of living entirely without sin, only in his death, when he comes to that. Now, I say, when you are enabled to judge of the strength of your oneness with Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, here you see something stronger for you than that which is against you: "Born again of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever." What can cast you out of the hands of the almighty Spirit of God? Second, you are to judge of the strength of this unity by the work of Christ. Why, my hearer, that atonement has entirely overcome everything; that righteousness has entirely swallowed up death in victory, and brought in reconciliation with God: "Justified by faith, we have peace with God." Third, you must judge of the strength of this oneness with Christ by the love of God. God's love is everlasting; his whole heart and all his perfections are in that love. Fourth, you must judge of

the strength of this unity by the immutable oath of the blessed God; for not only did the oath of God bind Christ to suffer, but it bound him to eternal glorification as well. "You are a priest *forever*;" not a priest only to atone for sin, and then pass away. No; honor eternal to his dear name, he has accomplished the sorrowful work, the sorrowful departure, and has now ascended into that of which the apostle speaks when he says of Christ, "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross." Again, Jesus Christ thus, then, as he was under sin, he departed from sin; and the way of our escape before God is by oneness with Jesus Christ. Self-righteousness, I will tell you plainly, you can get away from sin before God only by that which atones for sin; you can get away from sin before God only by that which justifies you from condemnation, namely, the righteousness of God; you can get away from sin before God only by his bringing in the positive promise that he will be your God, and that you shall be his son, and that he will never leave nor forsake you. There is no other way. And though you may live pretty comfortably, those of you that know not the Lord, without such a religion as this; and you may die pretty comfortably without it, too; but as soon as the soul leaves, then you lift up your eyes in hell a damned man, if you are not one with this departure from sin, this decease that Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem. There is no other way of escape. Peter might well say, "There is no other name under heaven given among man, whereby we must be saved." But let us linger a moment or two longer here; "the decease," the departure, "which he should accomplish." There is not one sin can call after Jesus, and say, You did not atone for me. There is not one debt can say, You have not paid me off. There is not one dog can move his tongue and say that Jesus has not conquered the whole. He has accomplished it; not one could hold him fast; no, said the apostle Peter triumphantly upon this, "Having loosed the pains of death," simply because he endured all the pains there were to endure; "for it was not possible that he should be held of it." May the Holy Ghost throw your soul overhead and ears into this river of mercy; may the Holy Ghost immerse your soul into this river where the waters are risen, waters to swim in,

"There shall you bathe your weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest;
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across your peaceful breast."

Ah, my hearer, devils may labor, and tug and toil; but they will never get away from one of their sins. The Pharisee may labor, and tug, and toll; and the Ethiopian may even dream that he has changed his skin; and the leopard may even dream that he has got rid of some of his spots; but it is all delusion from first to last. What a scene was opened up when the Savior came into the world! Thousands upon thousands that made sure they were righteous, and on the way to heaven, when the Savior came to test them by his testimony, he proved them to be nothing but hypocrites, no better than garnished sepulchers, and infinitely loathsome in the nostrils of the most high God. May God the Holy Ghost open our eyes more and more to the infinite worth of Christ, to the unfathomable depths of his sorrows, to the height of his glory, the breadth of his mercy, the strength of his atonement, the glory of his righteousness, the wonders of his person; and thus shall we live more and more concerned to enjoy fellowship with that God who will befriend and stand by us when every other hope shall fail, and when the storms of life shall have swept away every other hiding place, and our poor bodies must die; God will then be the strength of our hearts, and our portion forever.

Now when the children of Israel, by the paschal lamb and by that divine interposition which is there described, departed from Egypt and there was a chasm, a space, a valley, between them and Egypt; unhappily that chasm, that space, that valley, became filled up again; the separation ceased. They had not been in the wilderness long before up sprang an Egyptian spirit, crying out for leeks and onions; up came an Egyptian spirit, crying out for a golden god. and for the gods of the nations; and thus, their departure was nullified, it became a thing of nothing. But not so either with the Son of God or with the true people of God. No; the blessed Redeemer dies no more; he has formed an infinite distance between his people and their sins; "far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." That chasm can never be filled up, that space can never be filled up, that mighty distance must remain to all eternity. Our sins, if I may use such a form of speech, hardly applicable, because in eternity they will be annihilated, yet we are obliged through the infirmity of language to avail ourselves of every possible aspect and circumstance to represent these things, that our sins will to eternity, I was going to say, be receding from us, and we proceeding in an opposite direction; so that so far from the chasm being filled up, if such a thing were possible, it will become broader and broader. And as Jesus Christ dies no more, comes under sin no more, under the law no more, so those of you that are one with him, take you back to Egypt? Impossible. Take you back to the leeks and onions of the religions of this world? Utterly impossible. Take you back again into enmity to God; take you back again into ignorance of God; set up golden calves or human devices for you to worship? Impossible. No; once brought truly and experimentally into the liberty of the gospel, he that begins this good work will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ. I do not think it is possible for the best orator under the canopy of heaven to lay emphasis enough upon the word "foolish" used by the apostle to the Galatians. "O foolish Galatians." What for? Why, they had, for want of experience, downward experience, began to substitute a few worn-out ceremonies into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?" "Stand fast," said the apostle, "in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."

Now, then, Jesus Christ accomplished the decease, accomplished the departure. But we have not done yet. Now one sin says, and another sin says, and they all say, "Well, we must let him go, for he has killed us all." Well, then, say you, you are making dead people speak. Well, I cannot help it, friends; infirmity of language must so speak. There is a voice, you know, sometimes that does not speak more powerful than the voice that does speak. And therefore, sin has borne its testimony that Christ has taken the life out of it; and the sting of death is sin; Christ has taken the sting away; "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory;" and therefore, says sin, I must let him go. But Jesus Christ was under Gods law; how did he get away from that? I cannot myself find out but two ways, or two things, as the way of his release from that. First, that his righteousness must be the righteousness of his complex person, because, if his righteousness was the righteousness merely of man, it could justify a man for creature purposes if it was imputed to him, and that is all it could do. If Christ's righteousness were the righteousness of a more man, it could justify, if imputed to a man, a man for creature purposes; but a mere human righteousness could not entitle a man to life supernatural, to an inheritance supernatural, to a glory that is divine.

His righteousness, therefore, in order to bring us to God, his righteousness must be of God; yes, further, in order for his righteousness to bring us to God, he himself in that righteousness must be Jehovah our righteousness, must be of God; yes, further, in order for his righteousness to bring us to God, he himself in that righteousness must be Jehovah our righteousness; "not robbery to be

equal with the Father.” Well might the Psalmist say, when he looked at the dignity of this righteousness, and seeing himself accepted therein, “My foot stands in an even place; I will go in the strength of the Lord God. and I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only.” The law lets him go; its magnified, more than satisfied. Another thing, another quality, I should say, of his righteousness essential to his departure from the law was the eternity of his righteousness. If Jesus Christ had excluded, if such a thing had been possible, if he had brought his personal deity in, and had it been possible for him to exclude the eternity of his deity from his righteousness, then the law would have said, Well, you have magnified me up to a certain age, it might be so many thousands of years, then the law would say, When those thousands of years are past, I must either call upon you, the Surety, or else I must demand those men back again out of heaven; for they are entitled to continue there only so long; for you have magnified the law only up to such an age, and there it stops. But wonder, O heaven, and be astonished, O earth, he is Jehovah our righteousness; he has magnified the law to all eternity. Let endless cycles run around, our title will be the same, our bliss will be the same, our welcome will be the same, our standing will be the same, our God will be the same; because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And therefore, the time will never come when your lease is out, the time will never come when you will have warning to quit your mansions. It is an everlasting righteousness; as we have been reading this morning, “My salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.” He has achieved that that is worthy of a God; he has achieved that that shall make all heaven ring with an eloquence louder than ten thousand thunders, and that to eternal ages. “The decease which he should accomplish.” We have fallibility in ourselves, and in one thing and the other, and if we had not something like an eternity here, what a poor gospel the gospel would be! But, bless the Lord, it is an everlasting gospel; all its properties, aspects, features, combinations, relations, all bear the stamp of eternity, because Christ is the sum and the substance thereof. Think not I am going too far, think not I am what people call enthusiastic; those of you that do not know very deeply your need of such a Jesus as this now, you will by-and-bye, you will by-and-bye. Ah, if the Holy Ghost should put the question close to home to you, “If you have run with footmen,” common troubles and circumstances of life, and they “have wearied you then how can you contend with horses?” the horses of Sinai, if God should set them against you by the terrible threatening’s of his voice; “and if in the land of peace, wherein you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling of Jordan?” The answer, if you know the Lord, will be, How shall I do? The presence of the ark of the covenant, the presence of the mercy-seat, the presence of my great High Priest, and the presence of the great God with me; by that High Priest I shall pass clean over, I shall go triumphantly over, I shall go over dry-shod, and sing as I pass through that valley, “O my soul, you have trodden down strength.” He has accomplished the warfare, then. But I have not done yet, hardly begun, indeed; there is something else to be considered; there is another side to this question which it is well for us to remember, namely, the new covenant. Jesus Christ would not depart without ratifying that. The dear Savior must not fall out with the new covenant, must not complain of it, he must be in entire keeping with it and unless he has sealed every promise, sealed every item, of that covenant, he cannot be admitted into heaven; yes, he cannot depart from the gloomy grave unless he has sealed every item of the new covenant. If he has had left one part weak, one part uncertain, one part conditional, one part resting with the creature, he cannot depart from the grave. But he does depart from the grave; and how did he depart from the grave? “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the lasting covenant.” Here is the great secret, then; he sealed the covenant. And David, who was ever a lover of the Messiah; David, who, after, course, I mean, he

was called by grace, was ever a lover of this great Melchisedek, was ever a lover of the Son of God, he foresaw that he would accomplish his departure in this department also; therefore said, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire." I cannot desire any peace, life, light, liberty, blessedness, kingdom, inheritance, friendship, favor; I cannot desire anything to make me eternally happy but that that is included in this covenant: "this is all my salvation, and all my desire, though he made it not to grow." Exclude the world, exclude mortal life, take it all away, and leave me with a covenant God; I am a king forever, I am happy forever, triumphant forever, beyond what human language can ever describe. Thus, then, if you take that threefold view of his departure, how he departed from sin by atoning for it completely; how he departed from the law by magnifying it by the complexity of his person and bringing in a righteousness that will last as long as the kingdom lasts, kingdom without end, and how he departed from the completing of the covenant by completing it; ceased from his own works, as God did from his; and God did not cease from his works of creation till he had finished them; and Christ did not cease from his works of salvation until he had finished them. He has entered into his rest because he has finished his work of salvation, as God finished the work of creation: all finished, and I trust most of us can say our souls approve it well.

Now it is this that brings us near to God. You must pray in this way to the Lord, and you must look to the promises in this way. And when the precept reproves you, do not blink at it, and say you will be better tomorrow; do not be a fool. Why, say you, would not you, would not you? No, you would only make a fool of yourself. What should I do, then? Do? why, as John said, "If any man sin," he ought to promise to be better, and beg the Lord will accept your little bit of fleshly amendment as an atonement, anything rather than Christ? No, said John, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Ah, say some, that is how you get out of it. Why, that is an honorable way of getting out of it; that is God's way of getting out of it, and a soul-profitable way of getting out of it. I would never look to any other way. Then you do not promise the Lord to be better. I did before I knew Jesus Christ; but I never kept my promise; I kept making promises and breaking them, making them and breaking them; and so, at last I left off making them, and consequently left off breaking them, because I had left off making them. And so I want no fleshly promise, I want the good old-fashioned promise, the good old corn of the land; I want to plead the Savior's name, and rejoice in what he has done; to confess that I am compassed with infirmities; but at the same time to rejoice that the power of Christ shall rest upon me, and the all sufficiency of the grace of God by that power shall still keep me in the hope of the gospel, till life shall swallow up death, and my soul be happy forever. I do not much wonder at my having dwelt rather longer upon this part than I intended, because it is so deeply interesting. There is nothing under the heaven so interests my soul as my covenant God; but I must have that covenant God after his own order. When he is represented in that shillyshally, say and unsay, legal, fleshly way that men represent him, I say to myself, That is not my God, that is not my God; so I turn away from such a representation, and look to my covenant God, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you."

I know my God, I know my beloved, I can distinguish him; all the others are common trees, common religions, but "my beloved is as the apple tree among the trees of the wood; I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

I now proceed to notice the second part, which will be all I shall have time to do this morning. This wondrous achievement was to be at Jerusalem, and how little have I said of what he achieved! Why was it to be at Jerusalem? I will mention three reasons out of many that could be named. The first is a very simple one, and a self-evident one, namely, because God was pleased it should be there. God chose, originally chose, Jerusalem, and he chose the spot where the Savior should die. Let us look at this doctrine, and you will see that the Lord chooses (for all these things are suggestive to us) he chooses places for us. When he has a purpose of mercy, for instance, he will take particular care to choose the place for the person, in order that he may meet with the mercy that the Lord intends for him. The Lord intended mercy for Rahab; by his providence he placed her on the wall, her house on the wall, just where the spies should come; very convenient for the spies, and very convenient for the Lord, for he intended Rahab to obtain mercy, and so he placed her where the messengers of mercy should meet her, and where she should listen to the tidings, and where the reality of her faith should be tested; so by faith she perished not with them that believed not. The Lord had a purpose of mercy towards Naaman, and so it falls that he is led to receive into his house as a slave a little captive maid. This little captive maid carried with her a sense of the greatness of the God of Israel, that the God of Israel was above all other gods. "Would that my master were in Israel!" there is a God there would free him from his leprosy. And you know how the event turned out; the Lord chose the place. And many, many instances we may name of the Lord choosing places where his people should be, in order to bring about the purposes of his mercy. Some of you, I dare say, can recollect this very well. I have known several instances within the limits of our own congregation. There is a young man, he goes and lodges in a house; the people say, "I don't know what sort of man he is; he is very sober, and very steady, and very attentive; he goes to chapel very constantly." And some in the house have been wrought upon, curiosity has led them to see where he goes to, and the Lord has blessed them with the knowledge of the truth. Young women the same, I have known instances of that, lodge in a house, "I wonder what she is? she is very particular, always at religion, chapel two or three times a week, and two or three times a Sunday; seems all religion, and I think she is one of what they call the elect." Well, the word works, and by-and-bye mercy appears there. Yes, time would fail me to enumerate the ten thousand ways in which the Lord chooses places where his people shall live, where he has for them and by them purposes of mercy. Elimelech and Naomi never would have gone to Moab if they could have helped it, but the Lord had a purpose of mercy towards Ruth and they must go; and the plucking of her soul from hell was more than a reward for all they could suffer. So, then, when things look against us and we are crossed here, and crossed there, and placed in what we consider adverse circumstances, do not let us be too rash; the Lord knows where it is best for us to live, and he knows whether it is best for us to break down or to prosper; he knows whether this is best for us, or whether the other is best; he shall choose our inheritance for us, and shall choose our way to that inheritance. So, Jesus Christ died at Jerusalem because it was the place the Lord had chosen. The second reason, for I must just name the other two, was that that was God's own nation, and that was God's service; and where should the antitypical priest be but where the typical priests were? so that he should atone for sin in a way that would demonstrate, at least to his own people, that he was the Mediator of the sworn covenant; God was taking away the first, that he might establish the second. Hence, amidst the other wonderful circumstances that attended his death, that of the rending of the veil of the temple in two from top to bottom was a kind of demonstration that the Jewish dispensation was done with. There was Jesus Christ, there and then, by his death to abolish that ceremonial law, and to establish and bring in, in the very face of that dispensation, a better covenant, with better promises. But the last reason I assign, which I should

like to have had an hour upon instead of three minutes; I don't know of anything that more solemnly, that more wonderfully, puts a negative upon false doctrine, than the death of Christ among the professed people of God. Here you will perceive at once we need an hour to enlarge upon the solemnity of this matter. Had they have possessed the doctrines of the prophets unperturbed, would they have been ignorant of the Messiah, would they have despised him, would they have crucified him? I think I am safe in imputing their crucifixion of Christ, their treatment of the Savior, entirely to false doctrine. You say it was the carnal mind. Carnal mind and false doctrine are one; I say false doctrine. They had got rid of the doctrine of regeneration, as our Puseyites have; they had got rid of the doctrine of the 110th Psalm, to which we have referred, this great high priest; they had got rid of the doctrine of substitutional righteousness, and they had got rid of the doctrine of the new covenant. Having got rid of these doctrines that represent the Messiah, and having adopted those traditions recorded in the New Testament, when the Messiah came, he did not answer to their doctrines, and not answering to their doctrines, they said, "We must maintain our doctrines, he doesn't answer to them, he runs counter to them; he not only puts a negative on them, but he has pronounced eight woes upon our doctrines. We must abide by our doctrines, and if we abide by it honestly, we shall get rid of this Jesus of Nazareth." Now can anything more solemnly put a negative upon false doctrine than Christ being put to death by the professed people of God? I have said they got rid of the doctrine of the new covenant; and so, in the Christian world I am perpetually meeting with remarks like the following I did the other day at a cemetery from a gentlemanly man; he was so far so good that has nothing to do with religion. "Ah, sir," he said, "the time will soon come now, I hope, when all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." I said, "What *all* does that mean, sir?" "Why, all the world, to be sure," he said. I said, "Are you sure of that?" "Why," he said, "if it says *all*, that's enough, isn't it?" I said, "Will you bear with me for a moment?" "Oh," he said, "I have come to my conclusion, and I can't be moved." "No," I said, "I can't move you, but the Lord can." "Well, what have you to say?" "Well." I said, "don't be in a passion; just take it easy a moment, and it reads thus, sir: 'The days come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.'" "Ah, that's Jewish," he said. "Yes, sir, spiritual Jews, the 2nd chapter of Romans describes the Christian Jew as one who is one inwardly; the 1st chapter of John describes the Christian Israelite as one that is without guile; and therefore, Israel and Judah there are not Jewish Israel and Jewish Judah, but Christian Israel and Christian Judah. 'I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, and I will put my law into their hearts, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more; and they shall no more teach every man his neighbor, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me.'" "Oh, then," he said, "you confine it to Christian Israel and Christian Judah." "Certainly, sir, that's the *all* sir, that's the *all*, sir; that's the *all* that believe, and that's the *all Israel* that's to be saved." And yet the profound ignorance that you have pretty well everywhere of this new covenant!