

THE DEATH OF GOD'S SAINTS
PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT.

A

Sermon

PREACHED BY

MR. J. S. ANDERSON,

At Mount Zion Chapel, Chadwell Street

On Lord's-day Evening, January 13th, 1888,

ON THE OCCASION

OF

THE

DECEASE

of

~~~~~  
Mr. JOHN HAZELTON,  
~~~~~

THE PASTOR

OF THE CHURCH,

Who fell asleep in Jesus, January 9th, 1888.

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J. BRISCOE, PRINTER, 28, BANNER STREET, BUNHILL  
ROW, FINSBURY.

1888.

## SERMON. I.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

{Psalm 116: 15}.

The Lord in His infinite mercy has placed an opaque veil between us and to-morrow, between us and the next hour; so that we cannot possibly know what events are to transpire during our pilgrimage through this world to the next. If the children of Israel could have foreseen all that they had to experience in the wilderness, and the lengthened period that they had to sojourn there, methinks that Moses would never have been able to lead them out of Egypt. But they, like us, could not foresee one day before them. And if those of us who stood on this platform, and those who sat in the pews about a month ago, could have known what would have called this vast congregation together to-night, how the anticipation would have cast a gloom over that assembly, and over every subsequent moment, from the time it was revealed, to the time it was accomplished : and hence we say that it is a mercy that we do not lose the enjoyment of the present through the anticipation of the future, which the Lord holds in His own hands.

If my departed brother could stand by my side this evening, and be my prompter, I know he would say, "Exalt the Master! Extol Him! Set Him very high! Keep me as much as possible out of sight, and only talk of Him by whose grace I was what I was, and am what I am." But he cannot stand and prompt; yet we know very well that something like that would have been his instruction, could it have been so. And I hope that we shall not forget that we are here to worship God; and may God help us, and sanctify to us all the event that we so keenly feel, and so deeply grieve over: for though we are

forbidden to murmur, the Lord does not forbid us to mourn. When Mary and Martha mourned the loss of their brother, He did not lecture them on the folly of their grief, but rather comforted their hearts by mingling His tears with theirs. While He was able to quicken the dead, and to restore from the grave, He was a Brother that had a heart that could feel for the sufferers.

We shall offer a few remarks this evening on these three particulars— First, the persons referred to—saints ; secondly, the process that they pass through—death ; thirdly, the preciousness of that process unto our God.

First, let us invite your attention to the persons referred to, and notice what they are—“ saints,” holy persons, God-like individuals through sovereign, distinguishing, and almighty grace : and he whose absence, whose departure we lament, was an eminent saint. All those who knew him best felt that he lived in communion and in fellowship with his God, and only at the last anniversary meeting I remember his saying, as I sat by his side on this platform, that all who knew him knew where he lived; and then he quoted the first verse of the 90th {Psalm. 90: 1}, “Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations “and I dwell,” said he, “in God.” Oh what a dwelling-place! What a home! What a refuge for the heart of one who was a sinner, but who has become a saint! They are made saints by sovereign and divine grace, first in the purpose of Jehovah in choosing, in predestinating, and in uniting them federally with their covenant Head, thus setting them apart for Himself, that all His divine perfections may be glorified in their salvation: for God is revealed in the salvation of His people as He is not in any other part of His dominions. We see only parts of His ways in

creation ; but the whole Godhead is concerned in making saints, and in keeping, preserving, and teaching them, and finally, in taking them to heaven. They are, therefore, not only set apart in everlasting love, by choice, but they are called out of the world by the power of the Holy Ghost, and receive, as a free and sovereign gift, a nature that is heavenly, holy, pure, and God-like : and thus they are sanctified by God the Lather, redeemed by the blood of the Son, and quickened by the Holy Spirit, washed in the "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," and made manifestly to differ from their former selves, and from a godless and profane world.

Observe whose they are. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death His saints." Ah! they belong to Him. "Whoso giveth a cup of cold water, because ye belong to Christ, shall not lose his reward." His people are His patrimony, His portion given to Him by the divine Lather; He speaks of them emphatically as His own. Jesus, "having loved His own,...He loved them unto the end for they became His own, not only by right of creation,—by donation or gift of the Lather,—but by the purchase of His blood. "Ye are not your own," said the apostle. Our brother was not his own, he did not belong to this church only as a loan for a while ; he belonged unto our Divine Lord, who had a right to do with Him whatsoever seemeth Him good, and hence Jesus ever speaks of His people as having a special and peculiar right to them. "I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." Yes, thou art Mine; and how blessed if we can adopt the language of the spouse in the Canticles, and say in the confidence of faith, "I am my Beloved's, and my beloved is mine!" Whatever figure is employed in the Scripture to set forth

the union of Christ and His church, you ever find that union to be very close. The church is His bride, His own bride. He never had but one. He is the Vine, they are the branches; and the branches spring out of the Vine. He is the Shepherd, they are the flock; and you know we read in the 10th chapter of John, of the hireling, "whose own the sheep are not;" who "fieth, because he is an hireling;" but "the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep," because they are His own. They are His saints, and they are spoken of as the stones of a crown; and He says by the Prophet Malachi, that "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it: and a hook of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine in that day when "make up My jewels." Oh then, how unspeakably blessed it is to be found in the Saviours crown—to belong thus specially to the Lord Jesus Christ by an indissoluble bond, a bond that death itself can never dissolve.

II. But let us, in the second place direct your attention to the process that they are called to pass through. u Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." I call it a process, and it is such; for instance, we died, penalty, in the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. By man came sin; by sin came death as its wages ; not only natural, physical death ; —but eternal, or the second death,—the penalty of the law, attached to transgression ; and the people being one, His saints being one with their covenant Head, they lived in Him, they fulfilled the law in Him, and they died in Him, mystically. His death was real; it was an accursed death; it was all sting, nothing but sting, to Him. His soul was stung: His inconceivable agonies arose, not from

the mere pain of physical death, but from the fact that God's curse was in it; and hence that bitter wail—"My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" Beloved, behold Him on the cross, treading alone the wine-press of the fierce wrath of God against sin, after the vials of that indignation had been poured out upon His holy soul in the garden, when His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. None but He Himself can possibly know what He endured; but His people were in Him. "I am crucified with Christ," said the apostle; "nevertheless I live." Think of this, believer; try to realize the precious truth, and remember that it was Jesus who bore for you the curse of the law, and that not one drop of all the curse remains for wretches who deserved the whole.

*"At most we do not taste His cup,  
For He Himself has drank it up."*

For said He; "The cup that My Father hath given Me shall I not drink it?" And, "Ye are dead with Christ," says Paul. "Beckon yourselves to be dead." You died on Calvary in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then the results of it are certain and sure. There can be no failure whatever in the fulfillment of the Divine purposes concerning the objects of His eternal love. I should sink in utter despair if I did not believe that all that God purposed, and all that Christ intended by the purchase of His blood shall be fulfilled ultimately by the exercise of Divine power; and as the result therefore of His death, and our death in Him, mystically on the cross, we die to the world, and to the law, and to sin. "I was alive with out the law once," said the apostle; "but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died,"—died to sin. The question

of our sin, legally and penalty, was settled on Calvary, and it cannot be reopened. I say this advisedly:—the question of the believer's sin, once settled, cannot be reopened; and therefore, reckon yourselves to be dead to the law, dead to sin. "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" but all the vile corruptions of fallen nature; but, legally, sin was put away ; the penalty was endured, and the believer delivered from its guilt, and by the Holy Ghost he is delivered from its power; and as he dies to the world, and to sin, and to the law, he lives unto God. And you find life ever springing out of death. Yes, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit and thus Jesus illustrated the results, the blessed glorious results: own death. He was the corn of wheat, and He died, and from His death our life springs; and as we live to Him, we die to all beside. Our beloved brother—oh how dead he was to the world! As we heard on Friday, the Lord had stopped him when a frolicsome lad, had opened his heart, like that of Lydia, let in the blessed light of that truth, and revealed unto him his need of salvation; then he died to the world; it lost its charms; he could find nothing in it whereon his new life could feed; and increasingly, from that day until last Monday, he was dying a lingering death to the world. And you know, those of you who have sat under his ministry, either stately or occasionally, as well as those of us who have been in close ministerial association and companionship with him—how dead he was to sin. He was preeminently a godly man. Yes, dead to sin—that had lost all its charm. He only knew it to hate it and ever to fight against it; and we know who are acquainted with his ministry how dead he was to the law. Yes, alive in the Gospel, alive through the Gospel, alive to the Gospel. But oh he could sweetly, and did sweetly, realize these precious

lines of Toplady's that some people call blasphemous who know nothing of the secret:

*"The terrors of law and of God,  
With me can have nothing to do;  
My Saviour's obedience and blood,  
Hide all my transgressions from view.' "*

The saints die in Christ, and die by the power of the Holy Ghost unto the the world, and sin, and to the law. And then they die literally and physically, but not as other men die. There is not a drop of penal wrath connected with their death; and have you not noticed that the Scriptures speak of it—the New Testament Scriptures especially,—very rarely as being death at all. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." " After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep" "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others who have no hope," [or ground of hope in salvation.] The Old Testament describes it very blessedly too as being "gathered to their people," or being "gathered to their fathers." Yes, it seems to me to take away a great deal of the gloom when we think of these descriptive passages concerning what we call "death." But Peter the Apostle speaks of it as a going out, an exodus. Those who understand the Greek language tell us that the word " deceased" is a compound word, and signifies the same as the word " exodus," going out; and Peter forewarned those to whom he wrote concerning his decease, and then very blessedly as "putting off this my tabernacle," putting it off like

a worn-out garment. And Paul speaks of it as an earthly house, or a "tabernacle being dissolved," where we have the same idea—worn-out, tumbling down. So our dear brother's earthly tabernacle was literally worn-out by the hard work in the cause of Him he loved so well; for he often preached when, humanly speaking, he should have been in bed ; and he preached because he loved the Master, and he loved the work, and he loved the pulpit. Hence, when the last attack came, his constitution was too weak to resist it. But the saints do not die as others, because their death is a step in advance: it is a promotion, a departure to be with Christ, a transfer to a higher class in the school, and a bringing of the beloved one and Jesus more closely together, to have sweeter fellowship with Him, and to learn yet more concerning Him. Yes, brethren, it is a real promotion; hence Paul says, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: "absent from the body, present with the Lord." Would we bring Brother Hazelton back again? Ah I no ; much as we miss him, much as we loved him, deeply as we grieve over his departure, we would not bring him back to the sufferings which he has endured for the last eight or ten years. To be with Christ is "far better—some old copies read "best of all." Oh, it is best of all to see Jesus, to see His face, to hear His voice, to receive the glad welcome, "Come, ye blessed of my Father;" or, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

III. But once more, let us direct your attention to the preciousness of this process of dying. You see it is a process the saints pass through— which is precious in the Lord's sight. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Oh, will not this help you, beloved, to dry your tears, to wipe

them away, to look up to Him. We know from this declaration of Holy Writ, that that which we mourn, that which is exceedingly painful to us who are left behind, is most precious in the sight of the Lord. But how can it be? I have thought that this death is "precious in the sight of the Lord," because they are precious to Him. Every regenerated soul is unspeakably dear to the heart of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget this. What a price they cost Him! He was rich, and who can tell how rich! Mark you, he was rich in the possession of glory that He could relinquish for a time—that was not His Godhead;—no, whatever it was, it was not His Godhead: He never laid that aside, He was never undeified, He was God when manifest in the flesh—but He was rich. Surrounded by the seraphic host, that never sinned, who hymned His praises, flew on His errands, honored Him as co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Oh, how rich, and how independent! The Lord hath looked down from heaven. He could see a long way—He hath looked down. Yes, and He "wondered that there was none to help," and His "own arm brought salvation!" He came down; "for your sakes He became poor." He made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, Mark you, His character was unspotted, but His reputation, He was content to forego. There is a vast difference between real character and reputation. A bad man, from policy may manage to keep up a fair reputation, and be esteemed in the world, while He is deceiving all around him—there is real villainy beneath the cloak that he wears. A good man may make a false step, and his reputation may be damaged, as was the case with David. Bless God; our brother's reputation was never damaged, any more than his character. But Jesus, while His character was perfect, "made Himself of no reputation for your sakes He became poor; that

ye through His poverty might be made rich." Oh! How He must have loved us!

*"Oh for this love, let rocks and hills,  
Their lasting silence break;  
And all harmonious human tongues  
The Saviour's praises speak "  
"Down from the shining seats above,  
With joyful haste he fled."*

And what for? "The Son of man is come to seek and to save not them that were lost, though that is true ; but He came " to seek and to save that which was lost:"—that treasure of His, those saints of His, they are dear to His heart, precious in His esteem, as the " precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold." Believer, try and think of this. Whatever the world thinks of you as an individual, the world thinks very little of you as a believer—very little indeed. Ah! the world does not esteem you as a Christian. Ah! No! They know us not, because they knew Him not. But oft times the child of God is persecuted, and despised, and down-trodden, and oppressed, simply because he is a saint. Never mind, so was the Master; and His saints are precious to Him; and because so precious to His heart, because they cost Him such a price, their death is precious in His sight.

In the next place, because it is a grand conquest. It is a blessed triumph of His grace. Life is a battle, not only commercially, but spiritually; the Christian has to fight the battle with indwelling sin; for though Christ has put it away

penalty and legally, it is there as a root of evil, and is ever budding forth; and life, therefore, is a battle with sin, Satan, the world, and self: and what is it, beloved, that sustains and upholds, and enables us to keep up the conflict? Grace, the grace of God. No sooner do we attempt the warfare in our own strength, than we fail. Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death." "Lord, I will lay down my life for Thy sake!" That arose from self-confidence and pride; and you know what a disastrous fall he had. If we stand a moment against these foes, it is by the grace of God. And that grace is precious to Jesus; and the trial of the Christian through that grace, the victories obtained, are all precious to Jesus, and when these victories are complete, when every battle has been fought, and every foe vanquished in His name, and through His strength; and the soul is released from its body of clay, methinks it is precious in the sight of the Lord. Beloved, I say again, dry your tears; that which you grieve over is precious in Christ's esteem.

But once more: the death of the saint is precious in the sight of the Lord, because He loves to have them near Him. He is happy in their happiness, his enjoyment is their enjoyment; and when they pass through the change that we call death, they are released from their labors. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." They do not go before them,—their works do follow them. And the Lord bids them welcome to the mansions in the sky, and rejoices in their deliverance from sickness, sorrow, pain, conflict, and temptation; and rejoices to have them with a numberless host, around His mediatorial throne, rejoices in their songs of praise and thanksgiving unto

Himself; while they cry, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins, in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father ; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Yes, " Precious in His sight is the death of His saints' because they are released from all suffering, and admitted within the pearly gates, to enjoy the fellowship of the church above, and await the grand day when salvation shall be complete, in their resurrection from the dead, for it is only a question of time. On Friday afternoon, we left the emaciated frame in the cold and dark tomb, committing "earth to earth, and dust to dust, and ashes to ashes but as we said then at the graveside, it was not common dust. No, it belongs to Christ; it is a part of the purchased possession, and He will watch over it while he sleeps. It is a dreamless and calm sleep; and in the morning of the resurrection, He who said to the dead, "Lazarus, come forth!" will again speak, and all the nations underground shall hear the voice; for we read "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Thus, dear friends, you see their spirits are still living, and still making fresh discoveries of His glory, and receiving a higher education for eternity, and waiting there in the hope of rejoining their clay tenements, when they shall be rebuilt in the glorious image of the Lord. And oh how happy they are! How happy is Christ! And how precious to Him is their departure to be with Him! Aye! With God,—

*"Far from a world of grief and sin,  
With Christ eternally shut in."*

But are all my hearers' saints? Have you all been brought by the power of the Spirit to realize your need of Christ? Have you fallen at His feet, as self-condemned, penitent sinners? And are you resting by faith upon His blood and righteousness—the blood to atone, the righteousness to justify? And are you looking up to Him for grace to help you in the time of need? Then you are saints. But are you resting in outward forms, in mere duties, self-deceived! Our brother has taught all who sat under his ministry that God alone can convert a sinner into a saint, and I would warn you this evening, that this privilege, this honor, this blessedness is not to be obtained by any creature performances. Ah! no; O that God the Eternal Spirit may awaken such I and signalize this service by the outpouring of His influence into your hearts, both saints and sinners ; for Jesus, the Redeemer's sake. Amen.