

Text: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." (Rev.xiv.13)

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This verse has been much on my mind at intervals since I stood by the grave of one of our departed friends on Friday afternoon. I have read this verse not with the intention of preaching what is sometimes called a funeral sermon, nor of saying very much about the departed friend. I knew little of her - I mean Mrs. Rumsey. I once saw her and had a very sweet conversation with her, and I heard enough to convince me that she was a child of God, and therefore, in committing her body to the grave, I felt that it was in sure and certain hope of resurrection unto eternal life. But what is laid upon my mind today is to make a few remarks to the living from this wonderful text. I have to speak to the living, not to the dead. I trust I know something, by divine revelation and the testimonies of God's Spirit in my heart, concerning some of the departed ones - enough to cause me to believe what is recorded here, that they "rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

But there is something to be experienced before we die in the Lord and realize that rest which the departed saints now enjoy. I believe the whole of God's word to be inspired, and we are reminded of its inspiration in a special way in the text; for John said: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write." Then it is not merely his own thoughts or his own notions respecting the departed ones that we find in the text. No; God spoke this to him. He on this side of the grave knew but little of the state and condition of those on the other side. Neither do you nor I. Whatever we may think, we know but little. God knows, and God spoke these words to John, bidding him write them for the comfort and encouragement of all His people.

In looking at the words, I shall not confuse your minds with speculation, but simply take,

- I. The persons, the dead which die in the Lord.
 - II. Their blessedness, which consists in their resting from their labours and their works following them.
- I. The dead which die in the Lord. There is a birth before there is a dying in the Lord. So we may look at the text from this standpoint, and observe that by nature all men are dead

by the Adam fall. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom.v.12). All sinners, then, are dead already. But there has to be another death before there is that glorious experience recorded in my text - dying in the Lord. There is a death when the Spirit of God enters into the heart of a dead sinner. He not only communicates life, but He brings about death, or a separation; for that is what we understand by death. Temporal death is the separation of the soul from the body; spiritual death is the separation of body and soul from God. Eternal death is the perpetual separation of body and soul from God and being tormented with the devil and his angels (Matt.xxv.41). Here, then, is our condition by nature: we are all dead, dead to God, dead in sin. And when the Spirit comes, there is another death. There is a dying to sin. If we do not die to sin, we shall never die in Christ, and we shall never die to sin but by the work of the eternal Spirit of God in our hearts. By nature we are dead in sin; sin does, so to speak, as it pleases with us. We are powerless before this monarch, as he is called; for he is said to reign (Rom.v.21) and therefore must be a monarch. We are under the power of sin; it is not in our power to redeem ourselves therefrom, but it is in the power of God to do it. God has done it by the precious blood of His dear Son. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold" (I Pet.i.18). Gold and silver never redeemed a soul. If a man had all the wealth the world has in it, he could not, by giving that away, redeem his own soul. Man cannot "by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious)" (Psa.xlix.7,8). Blessed be God! He has undertaken the redemption of His people - a number that no man can number. And, as He has redeemed them from sin by blood, the Spirit of God ransoms or delivers them from it by power, and they become dead unto sin (Rom.vi.11). Now the question comes: Have we become dead unto sin, or are we living in it? Is it our element? Is it our pleasure? Can we roll or wallow in it? Or does it cause us to sigh, cry, and groan unto God for mercy and deliverance from it? If so, we are dead unto sin, though sin is yet in us. The apostle says: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (Rom.vi.12). He does not say: "Let not sin live or be there." It lives there; it is there. Sin dwelleth in us. He says: "Let it not reign; let it not sit on the throne of your affections." Where God's Spirit and grace are, there is an unwillingness for sin to sit on the throne. That person wants grace and holiness there - that is death unto sin. And, where there is death unto sin, there is life unto holiness;

and yet this person may not dare to say that he possesses a particle of holiness. But he will dare to say he would like a body of holiness. He would like to be as holy as God is holy. He does say this, and not all the powers of earth or hell can prevent him from saying so. He has a concern about holiness. He knows that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb.xii.14), and yet at times he believes there is not a particle of holiness in him. Still, his desire is to be purged from sin and to be filled with holiness. By this one knows that he is not dead in sin, but dead unto sin and alive unto holiness; and these are the persons who, when they die, die in the Lord - no others.

But, again, there is not only a death in sin and a death unto sin, but there is a death in Satan. Yet there must be a death unto Satan. By nature we are as much dead under the power of Satan as we are dead under the power of sin. It is not what men will, but what God will; for the apostle says that men are "taken captive by him (the devil) at his will" (II Tim.ii.26). By his will, then, we are under him as powerless as dead men. He does just what he pleases in the hearts of the children of men. Some he leads in one way and some in another; and some he blinds with the delusion of mere morality, causing them to believe that thereby they can save their never-dying souls. What folly! The devil can lead men as an angel of light or as an angel of darkness, and men are willing to be led by him. To try to change their hearts - you might as well try to make a world! They go their own way because the enemy inside them has full control; and so, till God destroys his power in the heart and affections, they continue living in sin. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke xi.21,22). When the Lord, in the power of His Spirit, enters, then there is a change. The devil is dethroned; his power in the heart is destroyed. One knows then, as he never knew before, that there is a devil and that one has been led captive by him. One knows that he was dead in Satan, but now is dead to him and to his ways. He now hates him and his ways. He is now alive unto God, whereas before He was dead unto Him. I was the devil's captive for years, and if I had been sent to be with him for ever, it would have been no more than I deserved. This changed man now wants to be with God, not with Satan; wants God, not Satan, to be with him on earth; wants God's ways, not Satan's; God's truth, not Satan's lies. What a change there is when God the Spirit works in a sinner's heart!

Now, my friends, do we know anything of this death to sin and this love to God? If there is not a love to God before our souls leave our bodies, we shall not die in the Lord. If we love the devil, we shall die in the devil and be for ever with him; there can be no mistake about it.

Again, the dead which die in the Lord have become dead to the world. "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (I John v.19); and by nature we are in the world and in its vanities. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John ii.15). Now that is decisive; it is not my word, it is God's. Those who die in the world will be for ever with the world. Now every one of God's dear people trembles at the thought, and, with the psalmist, pleads: "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men" (Psa.xxvi.9). By nature I am not a bit better, and I no more deserve to go to heaven, than the worst of them. I have done nothing to merit heaven, but much to deserve eternal damnation. These trembling ones frequently feel they are not fit to be among the people of God or to be numbered with them; they stand back whilst others are very forward. The trembling ones are generally backward in coming lest they should be presuming. And yet these persons, backward as they are, cannot keep away from God's people, because God's people have got into their hearts and affections. The trembling ones are on the better side. Better to be on the side of fearing than on the side of presuming. Now how is it with us? Who are our companions? Are they worldlings, or are they children of God? Watts says:

"There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns" (361)

These want to be among the children, not to put themselves, but they want God to do it. These are very solitary, and feel unfit to come before the church; but God, in His own time, takes the solitary ones and sets them in His own family among the children (Psa.lxviii.6). He bears with their spirit that they are His children (Rom.viii.16). These persons will die in the Lord. It does not matter what comes between now and then, or what may befall them; they will die in the Lord.

Again, God's children become "dead to the law" (Rom.vii.14). Men are naturally dead in the law. The apostle says: "I was alive without the law once" (Rom.vii.9) - that is the same as being dead in it. He thought that the law was going to save him and that the way to heaven was by keeping the commandment by his own doings. Thousands of our fellow creatures are like

that, saying, "Lord, incline our hearts to keep this law." The apostle became dead to the law, and, sooner or later, so does every heaven-born soul. "I through the law am dead to the law" (Gal.ii.19). He means that, through the application of the law to his conscience, he had become dead to it. He read the law, thought that he could keep it, and that he could not get to heaven without keeping it. When the law read me, "sin revived, and I died" (Rom.vii.9). We may sit in our rooms and read the laws of our land, but when the laws of our land come to read a man or woman who is standing before a tribunal, it is another thing. And so we may read the laws of God, but when those laws come to read us, how they search us; how they discover our hidden sins, how they tell us that we have been guilty of this, that, and the other which had been buried for years. The sins of our boyhood, youth, and manhood come before us. Then we feel this - that, in the Adam fall, all of us had broken the law, and therefore that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Rom.iii.20).

Then, again, we are "dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom.vii.4). That is a sweet truth, "by the body of Christ." It is a wonderful thing to be dead to the law through that law being applied in its spirituality to our conscience. It puts us, so to speak, in the condemned cell. But, when led to see that we are "dead to the law by the body of Christ," we are brought out of the condemned cell, and placed at liberty. It is the message of life from the Son of man that this condemned one is to be released, that he is to be delivered: "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom" (Job xxxiii.24). And what is the ransom? The body of Christ: His Person, His work, His blood and righteousness - His righteousness for our sins of omission, His blood for our sins of commission. Oh, then, how this man will admire the Person and work, the blood and righteousness, of Jesus Christ, that have procured justification, sanctification, and eternal life. How this man's heart and affections will be fixed upon the Lord Jesus and upon the way in which He has rescued His soul from going down to the pit! He will say:

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head" (103)

It may be suggested: "What! a criminal like you? Consider what you have done! And dare you show your face?" Yes! and before a world or a million worlds in Christ's Person, work, blood, and righteousness; for -

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness" (1106).

And so one becomes "dead to the law by the body of Christ" and alive to the gospel. The gospel is to us infinitely more than the law. Not that we despise the law, for it is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom.vii.12). The law is the administration of admonition, while the gospel is the administration of justification.

Further, there is a death, spoken of in God's word, unto self. This takes place with a living soul. Has there not been something of it in you, my friends, since God delivered you from the law by the body of Christ! You have had to pass through sore things for the death and destruction of self and of the flesh. At times the life of the Spirit seems to have slain it; but again it comes to life. Nevertheless, it will one day be slain, and it will die to live no more.

These are the persons which the apostle speaks of: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." There is in these persons, as I have said, a death to sin, a life to holiness; a death to the world, a life to the Son of God; a death to Satan, a life to God; a death to the law, a life to the gospel. And there is also a desire to glorify God. You want to live manifestly in Him, and then to die in Him. You want to live in Him by precious faith, and thus to die in Him - to die in His everlasting arms, upon His loving breast, and then that your spirit shall be carried by Him into the mansions of eternal bliss. For the Redeemer Himself comes to fetch all His ransomed people home. All the family are fetched by the everlasting Father, as He says: "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." Every time a child of God dies, the Lord comes, and that child dies in the Lord's arms, dies on His breast, and is taken by Him to glory. He will receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John xiv.3).

Now just a few thoughts bearing upon the word "blessed." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" - that is, from the time of their death. Roman Catholics teach that they go to Purgatory; then they are not blessed from henceforth. And the teaching of many more is that there is a sort of Purgatory, a place where the dead are prepared for heaven, and where they have to remain for countless ages before they are taken to heaven. If that were true, then those who died in the Lord would not be blessed "from henceforth." "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom.iii.4). Those who die in the Lord are blessed with Christ, they are blessed with eternal glory. "Yea, saith the Spirit." It was the Lord the

Spirit that spake, the third Person in the glorious Trinity. It was not an angel from heaven; it was not an arch-angel's voice, but it was God the Spirit's voice. "That they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." What are their labours?

The law. - There is a labour under the law, and is it not labour? It is compared to a woman in travail; there is no labour more acute than that. This is labour - hard, heavy, painful, distressing labour. It can never be forgotten by those who have experienced it. It is usually short. It may sometimes be only momentary, but it makes us say: "What shall we do to be saved?" Is not that hard labour? Such are willing to do anything for the salvation of their souls; willing to part with their lives if thereby their souls might be saved with an everlasting salvation; to suffer anything so that they might be saved from hell and taken to heaven. I can carry my mind back to the time when this was a labour, burden, and trouble to my soul. But there is a rest from the labour, a rest of hope when one is resting in God's mercy, though it is not such a full resting place as the soul desires. The soul desires something more than the rest of hope; but meanwhile the eye rests upon the incarnate God, the arm rests upon the living, mighty arm of Jehovah-Jesus, as a feeble wife leans upon her husband. But she longs for even more than that, and presently she will have more. Yes; she wants to get nearer, and she gets to Him sooner or later. She wants to refresh her weary soul. As one says:

"There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast" (474)

Temptation: - There is also a labouring and being heavy laden. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.xi.28). After the Lord has given us rest by faith in some degree, how frequently He permits the devil to disturb that rest, and at times the Spirit's grace in our hearts seems to be destroyed; every green thing seems to be eaten up by the enemy of our souls. But they are not; if they are concealed from our view, they are not eaten up.

Trial. - The Lord also permits His people to come into the labour of trial, the trial of faith. He does it for the proving of love. Then it is hard labour with them. How they labour in sighs, groans, cries, tears, prayer, and supplication. They labour from day to day. They wrestle, plead, and struggle, and yet seem to get no further, no nearer to what they desire.

They are under the trial of faith - ready to perish sometimes, ready to halt, to sink, to give everything up; and they plead with God like this: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? will He be angry for ever? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? (Psa.lxxvii.9). Some of us know what it is to be brought here, and tried as by fire. How long does this last? It lasts, more or less, all our lives; it reminds me of Berridge. He said he would try a man for seven years, and then try him for seven more, and so on as long as he lived. And this is how God tries the righteous; for as long as they live He tries them. He does not leave them in the trials, but He helps them up. He secretly and imperceptibly supports them under the burden. He lends a helping hand; He gives a secret look, and He is the Author of every one of those sighs and cries. The weary soul wants no other God but this God; and I bless God that He keeps me labouring in this spiritual sense - not in a creature-power sense. The apostle says: "Wherefore we labour" (II Cor.v.9). He does not mean after the flesh; he means in sighs, groans, meditations, in reading the scriptures, in searching for God under the influence of His blessed Spirit in the heart. God says: "At evening time it shall be light" (Zech.xiv.7). It shall be well with the righteous in death; they shall enter into glory and shall know as they are known (I Cor.xiii.12).

"They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." What are their works? Their works are the works of Jesus for them, and the works of the Holy Ghost in them. These are their works, and they do not care to talk about any other works than these. The works of Jesus are made theirs; the works of the Holy Spirit are wrought in their hearts. These are their works, and they shall follow them. God can work, and it is made manifest in the hearts of His people on this side Jordan. They are absorbed in God's good works: for instance, His work of repentance, His work and labour of love. For the apostle says: "Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope" (I Thess.i.3). Now how much faith have you, how much love, how much patience? And when you get it, where does it come from? Is it made by you? Can you manufacture faith, love, hope, patience, or any other grace? It comes from God. The Holy Spirit works it in your heart, by this you endure unto the end; and so you will appear before God - not in yourself, but in Christ. You live in Him, you die in Him, you will be found in Him. At last you will stand at His right hand; and to such He will say: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Then He talks about the works: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me" (Matt.xxv.34,36). Have we done anything that we can talk about? If anything is rightly done, we move under the influence of God's grace and Spirit - not building upon ourselves, but upon Jesus Christ. We build upon what He has done for us, and what the Spirit is doing. Jesus uses His people as instruments in these things. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (verse 40). He watches our movements, and He knows what we do unto the least of His brethren. May He add His blessing!
