

Sermon the Eighteenth.

THE BLESSED DEAD.*

"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.

THE present would not be a fit occasion to attempt an exposition of the deep mysteries of the deep book of Revelation, were the preacher even fit for such a task. I must content myself, and may the Lord grant that I may profit you, with a few plain observations upon our text—a text obviously of deep importance, being the language of the God of truth upon a subject the most stirring—Death. But as if to give it greater weight, it was uttered just as John was gazing upon the mournful picture of Babylon in ruins, and beholding the deep anguish of the worshippers of the beast, and the smoke of their torments ascending up before God; and just as he was contemplating the patience that had been vouchsafed to suffering saints, whose blood Babylon had drunk as a delicious cup—just as thus the deepest sympathies of his soul were stirred, his sympathetic reverie was broken in upon by a voice from heaven, announcing, and bidding him write the annunciation, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," &c. So that, in addition to his general commission to write the things which he saw in a book, he received a *special* commission to write this sentence, as a sunbeam illuminating beforehand the gloom of the valley of the shadow of death, and as a balm for the bereaved breast, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;" and then to add the solemn "yea" of the Holy Ghost, to show the value and verity of the sentences he was commissioned to write: "Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

If, then, our text be one about which a special commission was given, and one upon which a special seal of certainty was stamped by the unerring Spirit of God,

* A funeral sermon.

surely it is one that claims—and, oh, may it have—our most earnest attention.

I shall endeavour to comprehend some of the great truths in our text under the following simple divisions:—

- I. *The characters whom the voice from heaven pronounces to be "blessed"—"the dead which die in the Lord."*
- II. *The things named in which their blessedness consists: "They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."*

I. *The characters whom the voice from heaven pronounces blessed are "the dead which die in the Lord."*—It is obvious a person can never die in a position he has never occupied; an individual must be first in the Lord before he can die in Him.

1. The Church is in Christ *eternally*, chosen in Him before the foundation of the world: He the Head, and they the members; He the Foundation, they the building; He, as it were, the Sheepfold, and they the sheep; He the Root, and they the branches. Time only *manifests*, not *makes*, sheep and sons. Jesus said of those "not of this fold," they were His "other sheep" (John x. 16). Paul says, "Because ye were sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son in your heart."

2. The people of God are in Christ *vitally*. He that is quickened into spiritual life, has not only a secret and unchanging union with Christ, but a vital union with Him. There are two great heads, Adam and Christ. He who only thinks and feels naturally, has only manifest union with the former; but he that thinks and feels supernaturally, has union with the latter. This is the grand difference between those that "are born after the flesh," and those who "are born after the Spirit." The former are corrupt scions, in connection with a corrupt root, bearing therefore only corrupt fruit; while the latter are made spiritual branches, connected with a spiritual root, and bear spiritual fruit. How fearful the thought that an omnipotent arm is uplifted, grasping the keen axe of infinite justice, ready to cut down the corrupt tree and its branches; and how solemn the thought that there may be many listening to my voice this day still in union with this doomed tree! Perhaps, however, I have those before me who, though they have a vital connection with the Lord Jesus, through dark-

ness of mind and unbelief question whether they are in so blessed a position as the being "in Him that is true." It is one thing to *be* vitally in Christ, and another thing to *know* that you are in Christ. If you have ever felt anything which natural people do not feel, you are vitally in Christ. "What," you anxiously ask, "what have I felt that natural people do not feel?" You have felt a hatred to sin. Nature does not feel this. You have felt, as well as read, we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags. You have felt your need of Jesus, and His full and free salvation, though you could never grasp Him and call Him your own. Yet is not the feeble hand of your faith stretched out towards Him, and does it not emphatically reject everything else, and there seems written on its open palm, "None but Jesus—none but Jesus"? Though your eye has never so steadily gazed on Him as to entirely lose your load, yet is it not towards His cross you are more or less continually casting a longing eye? Can any other sight but a sight of Jesus, as your Mediator, give you the settled peace you want? Though your weary feet have never yet stood firm while the new song was in your mouth, yet whither do you bend your course? Is it not to Him? Is not this the language of your heart—

"I go to Jesus; though my sins
Have like a mountain rose,
I know His courts I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose"?

And though you could never say, as you long to say, "who loved me, and gave Himself for me," yet your conscience would not let you say you have never felt any outgoings of affection towards Him, or that there has been no mixture of love to Him with your longings for salvation. Have not His invitations to the weary, to the thirsty, to the penniless, to whomsoever will, been honey for sweetness to your soul, and wine for energy to your heart? Have not His promises raised in your heart expectations of His mercy? Is not His blood felt to be all your hope and plea for pardon and peace? and is not His obedience all you can mention for acceptance with God? Can you not, too, with the evil you find in your heart, and even because of the mighty spring of pollution you find in your nature, cry,

"Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r"?

And can you not in truth say the warmest wish of your heart gushes out in the cry, Give me Christ! give me Christ!—Christ as a Prophet, for I am dark; Christ as a Priest, for I am vile; Christ as a King, for I am wayward. Let His counsel guide me, His sacerdotal work save me, and His mighty sceptre govern me. Now if these be the feelings of your heart, and that they are such conscience can testify, you have vital union with the Lord Jesus. You are, however feeble, a member of His mystical body, and a living branch in Him the living Vine. Say not I want to set you down short of Christ. No. Oh, I believe that you really are in Christ. But I would say still press on after the earnest of the Spirit in your heart:

"Yes, ask the Lord for His receipt,
To show the payment good,
Delivered from the mercy-seat,
And sprinkled with His blood."

3. There is also a being in Christ *believingly*. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Jesus is the Antitype of the ancient cities of refuge, and faith in Him is portrayed in the flight to and entrance into those cities of the pursued manslayer. In the manslayer we see, first, a sense of danger; and none ever will fly to Jesus till made sensible they are exposed by sin to God's just wrath. The manslayer, too, knew the city of refuge was a place of security. None will ever come to Jesus till they know there is in Him salvation. "Faith cometh by hearing." The manslayer, believing there was security within the walls of the refuge city, fled thither; and when once his feet stood within its gates, his palpitating breast would be calmed, and the avenger of blood would be no longer dreaded. So the believer, knowing that in Christ is salvation, is strengthened to Him to fly; and as soon as he can really set his foot within the blood-sprinked precincts of His atoning work, and fully venture for acceptance with God upon His sacrifice, and has the Spirit-wrought consciousness that

he has taken shelter there, than his heart is at rest, and he can enter into that sweet Psalm,

"Blessed is he whose guilt is gone,
Whose sins are washed away with blood;
Whose hope is fixed on Christ alone;
Whom Christ hath reconciled to God."

I do not think that all realize with equal distinctness that peace of God which passeth all understanding. Yet "the Lord will speak peace unto His people."

4. He that is thus in Christ vitally and believingly as the result of being in Him eternally—will *bear fruit in Him*. They are only mere professors who are fruitless branches, whose destiny is to be taken away. And bearing spiritual fruit differs widely from mere outward morality; it is the development in our walk and ways of the graces of the eternal Spirit. It is speaking, acting, praying, preaching, hearing, giving, receiving, as they only can who have the fear of God in their hearts—the life, the love, the faith—in a word, the fruit of the Spirit. Bearing spiritual fruit is the being rightly and practically affected against what is evil and toward what is good.

He that is thus in the Lord, and lives in the Lord, will die in the Lord. There is no being out of the Lord at death if we are in Him in life. The Lord might, if it had been His will, have taken His people to glory without death, for death to them is no longer wages. He might take their bodies, transformed into Jesus' likeness, at once to glory, instead of leaving them mouldering prisoners in the tomb; but He has wisely designed to get to Himself glory, not by eluding; but by breaking the grasp of these foes—not by snatching His people from the jaws of death and the margin of the tomb, but He will thoroughly abase these foes by making them yield up their conquered millions, and then yielding themselves up to shrink to nonentity under the extinguishing word of the mighty Conqueror, the Lord of Hosts. Doubtless, when we view things in the light that glory will shed upon them, we shall clearly see the wisdom, the love that has appointed the time, the manner, and all the circumstances attendant upon His people's passage to their Father's home.

II. *We come now to speak of the blessedness of those who die in the Lord.*—Blessed ones: they always were blessed.

Blessed in Christ ere time began; blessed with a name in the register of the heavenly family; blessed with a place in the heart of Jesus, and an interest in His covenant purposes and promises; blessed with a part in that wondrous work, redemption through the obedience, sweat, blood, and agonies of the Man in union with Godhead; blessed while in a state of nature with the Lord's watchful and persevering care over them; blessed with divine life implanted in their souls; blessed even when sinking in the horrible pit and in the miry clay; blessed with "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" blessed through all the changes of their tribulative pathway—on the mount, in the vale, in the sunshine, in darkness, in prosperity, in adversity, in health, in sickness, in rest, in toil, in life, in death—unchangeably blessed. But having reached glory, they have entered into the glorious realization of their blessedness. There they have not only a blessed interest, but are in blessed circumstances; not only are they blessed in Christ, but they are blessed *with* Christ.

But there are two features of their blessedness named in our text which call for our especial contemplation. First, they rest from their labours. Secondly, their works do follow them.

1. *Rest from their labours* is the circumstance especially connected with the declaration of their blessedness. "They die in the Lord," says our text, "that they may rest from their labours." This is one grand reason why they leave this tabernacle, that they may cease to groan and toil, that they may enter into rest; this is why the great Pilot conducts His vessels from the wide tempestuous sea of life through the stormy straits of death, that they may enter that peaceful sea of rest where not a threatening billow heaves, where every tide is a tide of peace, and every wind a breeze of bliss. This is why their heavenly Guide conducts His pilgrims across the bridgeless river, that they may enter the abodes of rest, and in everlasting recumbency on His bosom rest from all the toils of their weary pilgrimage. Death is the last war that the Christian soldier engages in: he fights this battle that he may be conquered into victory. Henceforth his sword is for ever sheathed, and the hand that grasped the sword exchanges it for a palm; the helmet is put off that a crown may be worn. Oh, heaven is the

pilgrim's tranquil home, the sailor's calm haven, and the soldier's quiet repose.

They rest from their labours.

(1.) *They rest from their share in the common lot of earth's toiling sons*.—"By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread." Whatever position a person occupies in this world, he finds that more or less of the weight of earth's sweating cares rests on his shoulders. "All things are full of labour." The brow may sweat with cares under a diadem as well as under the labourers' hat. There is literary sweat, political sweat, and artistic sweat, as well as commercial and mechanical sweat. While here, the people of God must have their share in "the sweat of the brow." Earthly care becomes to the heaven-born soul peculiarly *labour*, because of its tendencies to rouse his rebellion, fretfulness, peevishness, and the sordid evils of his earthly flesh, and because of its tendency to clog his heaven-bound feet, clip his soaring wings, and give him many a cause to cry, "Quicken thou me, O Lord, for my soul cleaveth unto the dust."

From all this toil the believer who has died in the Lord for ever rests. Oh, unfathomable mercy, to be a child of God! Graceless men and women, battling with the waves of earthly care, whither are you sweating your way—to the regions of eternal darkness? Careworn children of God, it will soon be said of you as we say of our dear sister, "They rest from their labours."

(2.) *They rest from their part in the ordinary trials of the desert*.—A son of trouble man may be called from the womb. See a smiling babe in the arms of its mother, and, without claiming prophetic impulse, you may say, "Unthinking babe, as sure as the sparks from that fire fly upward, so sure are you born to trouble." Certainly some drink larger draughts of the cup of human woe than others; but afflictions, bereavements, disappointed hopes, lost treasures, hollow joys, and substantial sorrows, are the certain lot of fallen man. How differently the believer, however, may, with truth, comment upon the trials of his pathway from the worldling! If the graceless man were to tell himself the truth, he would say, "Living and dying Christless, these woes are but the horror rumble before the earthquake—the falling drop before the pelting shower—the distant cloud before

the dreadful storm—the earnest of God's everlasting displeasure; whereas the believer has cause to sing—

“Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food;
Though painful at present, 'twill cease before long,
And then, oh! how pleasant the conqueror's song!”

Ah! there does indeed remain a rest for the people of God—a rest in a city whose walls, great and high, for ever exclude all the howling winds of the desert.

(3.) *Each one rests from the peculiar trials of his own appointed pathway.*—“The heart,” indeed, in these respects, “knoweth its own bitterness:” each one has his own cross to carry. The special cross of some is bodily, and of others mental, of others relative trial. Tried believer; your peculiar trial will soon cease to be yours; soon you will have no longer to mourn your singular woes and solitary sorrows—your own sore, your own grief. Soon you will exchange solitary woes for social bliss.

(4.) *They rest from their perpetual labours against sin, temptation, doubt, &c.*—If when the Lord put grace into the heart, He drove corruption from the flesh, the labours I refer to would never be known by the Christian, nor would Paul ever have had cause to write his conflict chapter, the 7th of Romans. Many of the Lord's people, when first the sin-subduing love of God is shed abroad in the heart, are prone to think they may sing a requiem to all their corruptions, and may apply to their evils God's promise about the drowned Egyptians: “Your enemies that ye see to-day, ye shall see them no more for ever.” However, but few live long in this world without learning that what appeared to be the death of corruptions was but the crouching of the forest beast into their dens before the light of the sun. The Christian is no show soldier to adorn a parade or embellish a palace. If God give him the helmet of salvation, it is to shield him from actual blows; if He give him the shield of faith, it is to blunt darts, not merely read of in the sixth of Ephesians, or in the published experience of the saints, but actually shot at his own soul. If the Lord arm him with the sword of the Spirit, that sword is not merely to dangle in a showy sheath on his thigh, but is to be actually grasped and used in real fight with all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Oh, who can tell the

sword-cuts, the heavy blows, the painful wounds of the Christian soldier! He may, in converse with the saints, uncover much; but his chief sorrows, his bitterest woes, are poured out, and his hottest battles fought, before the Lord. Truly, “we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened”—burdened with the ordinary workings of sin, and temptations of the foe; and many of the saints are shot at and sorely grieved by the extraordinary temptations of Satan. The religion that is of God is just contrary to the sin that dwelleth in us—is just the flame that the devil would gladly stamp upon and extinguish. Natural religion nature may side with. A “name to live” the foe has no objection to; but he has unmasked hatred against that religion that is a celestial exotic which could never exist, not to say thrive, a single hour, but that He who plants it shields it: “I will water it every moment; I will keep it night and day.” And how sadly many of the saints of God are oppressed with unbelieving doubts about the safety of their states! It is one thing for the mere surface professor, who has never felt either the reality of sin or of salvation—either the certainty of hell or heaven—to glibly say, “I have many doubts and fears;” and it is another thing for one with whom the soul's worth is somewhat felt, and to whom eternity has become a reality, to labour under grievous fears about whether the solemn voyage of life is taking him to heaven or hell. Oh, it is a solemnly painful thing to tremble lest you should prove a fruitless branch, and be “taken away,” “cast into the fire and burned;” or whether, like the foolish virgins, you shall be found at last destitute of the “oil” of true grace, and shut out when the Bridegroom comes. What do all the “fear nots” of Scripture imply but that the saints may be harassed with many a fear? I do not plead the cause of unbelieving doubts, and make them evidences of salvation; if I did, you would listen in vain for Scripture proof; but as every grace in the Christian's soul is met by its opposing corruption in his flesh, no wonder if his faith should have to make a foot-to-foot wrestle with unbelief. Who that has ever been engaged in a battle with serious doubts as to whether the fire of hell or the bliss of heaven will be his eternal portion, but could sympathize with a Christian thrust sore at with gloomy fears that there is something wanting in his religion

to make it saving? It is true the true believer has no ground to doubt, but has every ground, and is exhorted, to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, for "He is faithful that has promised;" but it is also true that he has no ground to be puffed up with pride, although prone to this. David had the sure promise of the ever-faithful God that he should sit on the throne of Israel; so that he had no ground to doubt he should "one day fall by the hand of Saul." He was immortal until God's promise was fulfilled, and it was nothing but his sinful unbelief made him doubt. Zaccheus, the father of John, had no ground to doubt his having the promised son, but through his unbelief he did do so, and this was a sin, as was proved by the chastisement of dumbness until the angel's "words were fulfilled in their season."

Christians may grievously doubt—and a painful load to carry is a load of unbelieving fears—but the blessed dead who die in the Lord cease from this labour. Oh, never in that ever-sunny region of bliss shall the tiniest cloud of doubt dim those bright skies. All the saints on the other side of the river rest from every fear, though

"Once they were mourners here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard as we do now
With sins, and doubts, and fears."

Yes, whatever labour the Christian meets with here, he will leave all his toils and woes at the brink of the bridgeless stream, and rest, unbroken rest, will be his portion. Oh, how different his lot from that of the worldling! His heaviest woes begin where the Christian's sorrows end. Blessed "*weepers now*," you shall soon laugh; cursed "*laughers now*," you shall soon "mourn and lament." Dear labouring burdened ones, you are journeying on to the land

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

But our text goes on to say, "*and their works follow them*." What a mercy it is not their sinful works; these will follow the Christless as the leaden load that will sink their souls in a sea of eternal despair. The atoning

Red Sea has already sunk the sins of saints to endless night. No, it is not their works as in the first Adam that follow them; their Surety has dissolved their connection with their sins. It is their works as "IN THE LORD," in whom they have lived and died, that follow them. It is their fruits as branches in the living Vine.

(1.) Their works may be said to follow them as in their savour and results they linger about their footsteps. Those who are left behind a Christian, who have grace to do so, find they have left the incense savour of their spirit in their track. Their patience, faith, charity, &c., do not die at once out of the remembrance of their companions in tribulation. "The memory of the just is blessed." Many an Elisha is often left longing for "a double portion" of the spirit of the departed Elijahs to rest upon them. Besides the savour of their graces, the effect of their examples, their liberality, exhortations, reproofs, writings, spreadings of the Gospel are following after them. Such works as Paul's, Augustin's, Luther's, Bunyan's, Whitfield's, and a host of others, are still travelling after them—following, in the crops they yield, those heaven-sent sowers of the word.

(2.) Again, their works follow them before God. They do not *go before them*. No, it is a finished work that goes before them. They enter heaven in the track of the Redeemer's rising chariot. *His* works go *before them*, and the fruits of His own grace implanted in them *follow them*—not for them to see. No, they are behind their backs, but He who meets and welcomes them can see them. They are services that He will own. They shall have His "Well done," for He Himself "wrought them in them." The fact of the Apostle connecting *SERVICE* and *REWARD* does not make heaven less of grace. "Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." It is a reward of grace, not of debt. Grace is the source of our life, and grace the source of our strength; all we do, we do in the strength of grace, and from a principle of grace. So that,

"He makes the believer, and gives him his crown."

When the ransomed sheep shall stand on the right hand, the King shall see their gracious works, and own them, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the

kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, 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). What a proof that "Their works follow them," and are under the eye of the King. But their reply is a full proof that their works only *follow them*, and do not *go before them*, for "Then shall the righteous answer, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (verses 37—40). The righteous were not looking at even the fruits of grace in them; these were behind them—only following them; and much less would they be looking at their own filthy, ragged, legal righteousness: this had been wholly burnt up.

Oh, my hearers, if this sermon were being preached on the occasion of your funeral, would you be weeping in woe or singing in bliss? *Are you in Christ?* Are you labouring against sin, Satan, and "all that is in the world—the lust of the eye and the pride of life"? Are you serving the Lord Christ? If you must in truth answer "No," then I tell you if your body were in a grave, your soul would be in hell. But if you could in truth say "Yes," or indeed if you have scriptural ground to say "Yes," though your fears would choke your utterance of that great word, if your body were in a shroud, your soul would be clad in the "fine linen, clean and white," of Jesus' righteousness, and would form a part of those blood-washed palm-bearing choristers on high about which the voice from heaven says, "Write, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Amen. So let it be with us. Amen; and again I say, Amen.*

* An account was then given of the experience and death of the departed, which need not here be recorded, as chiefly of interest to immediate friends.