

# SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

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BY

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## SERMON III.

THE DYING CHRISTIAN COMMITTING HIS SOUL TO GOD.

PSALM xxxi. 5.

*Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me,  
O Lord God of truth.*

THESE words were spoken by David in an hour of trouble. His enemies were seeking to destroy him; he knew that his life was in danger; and he here flies for refuge to his God. He commits his spirit or life into his hands, in the full persuasion that the same power and goodness which had often rescued him before, would rescue him again, and uphold and preserve him.

The words of the text then were originally the words of an afflicted saint, committing his natural life to the care and disposal of his God. We shall however be doing no violence to them, if we consider them as the language of a departing Christian, commending his immortal soul to his heavenly Father. We know that they were thus regarded by Christ, for he made them his dying prayer. His martyr Stephen too employed them in the same sense, and fell asleep with them in his mouth. Thousands of Christians also have been heard to utter them on the bed of death. When flesh and heart have failed, they have taken them as their support and their solace, their prayer and their song.

Viewed in this sacred light, they may lead us to enquire, first, with whom the dying Christian wishes to entrust his soul; secondly, what is implied in his committing it into the hand of God; and, thirdly, what warrant or encouragement he has thus to entrust it to him.

I. *With whom then does the dying Christian wish to entrust his soul?* The text tells us that he is anxious to commit it into the hand of God.

There are only two beings who can take charge of the soul when it leaves the body. The one is the Lord of glory; the other is the prince of darkness. Into the hands of one of these beings our souls must go when we die, and with one of these we must spend eternity.

Now men in general manifest the greatest indifference towards both of these beings; or if they are not altogether indifferent towards them, they have no deep, no abiding concern about them. They hope that when they die, their souls will go to God, and they profess to have a fear of sinking into the dwelling place of Satan; but of what nature are these hopes and fears? They do not touch their affections; they do not influence their conduct. They feel and act, not as creatures full of hopes and fears about eternity, but as creatures who have nothing

to do with eternity, who are equally indifferent about God and Satan, equally regardless of heaven and of hell. We are troubled and concerned about our bodies, anxious to secure them from every trifling inconvenience and danger; but as for our souls, we care not how we endanger them, nor into whose hands they fall.

If we were really Christians, brethren, this indifference would pass away. The soul would become tremblingly alive to its present condition, and full of the liveliest hopes and fears about its future destiny. It would make an immediate choice between God and Satan. It would feel the greatest abhorrence of the one and his dreary kingdom, and as deep and fervent a desire for the other and his glory. It would fly for safety to its God, and cast itself into his gracious hands. Hence, through life, all our hope and confidence would be placed in the Almighty; all our desires would centre in him: and in death it would be the same. Our first fear would be, lest our soul should take its flight to the dwelling of Satan; our highest hope, that it may find shelter in the bosom of its God. This dread of hell, this longing after heaven, would acquire renewed energy as we drew nearer the grave and eternity; and when at length our dying hour approached, with what an earnest desire should we long to be in our Father's hands! not in his kingdom merely, not in his temple only, but in his hands, in his arms, in his bosom! With what an energy of feeling should we say, with a dying Saviour, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

II. The God of heaven then is the Being with whom the Christian wishes to entrust his soul. *What therefore is implied in his committing it into his hands in a dying hour?*

1. There is evidently implied in this act of faith, *a firm persuasion that the spirit will outlive the body*, that it is an immortal spirit.

If the soul did not survive the body, or if the Christian had not a firm persuasion that it survived it, it would be but a mockery of God to profess to commit it to him. Before this profession can be sincere, there must be in the mind a full conviction of its own immortality; not that feeble hope of it which is drawn from reason, nor yet that common belief of it which professes to be founded on the Bible; but a heartfelt belief and conviction of it. The soul must not only know, but feel itself to be immortal. It must have no more doubt of the fact, than it has of its own existence.

The Christian is not brought to this sense of the endless duration of his soul by the light of nature, or by a process of reasoning. These may satisfy a merely speculative enquirer, but they can never satisfy the man who is alive to the importance of eternity, and makes it the subject of his hopes and fears, as well as of his enquiries. Death and the grave laugh to scorn what we call natural religion. There corruption performs her work in triumph; and he who rejects the

Bible, must look on and despair. It is the gospel only, which brings “life and immortality to light;” and it is by an honest belief in the gospel, that the Christian first learns really and habitually to regard himself as the heir of eternity. As he grows in faith and grace, this conviction is strengthened and established by the experience of his own heart, till at length he has a witness of its truth within him, and tastes “the powers of the world to come.”

2. In committing the soul to God in a dying hour, there is implied also *a high value for the soul*, a regarding of everything else as worthless, when put in competition with it.

Not that it is sinful to feel, when we are about to die, some degree of concern about our bodies. Nature will often prevail even here, and cause our poor dust and ashes to become objects of our care. But then, if we are really Christians, this care for our bodies will be as nothing, when compared with our concern for our souls. Whether we are buried here or there, whether our bones moulder away in this grave or in that, are points of but little interest. Where will my soul be lodged? in hell or in heaven? with Satan or with God? This is the great subject of the dying Christian’s enquiries. His soul is his treasure, and it is his main solicitude and care to have that safe in the hands of his Lord. He does not, it is true, wish to lose the casket; he would rather have it preserved; but as for the jewel, that must be saved.

3. There is implied too in this expression, *a lively sense of the serious and awful nature of death*, a conviction of our need of support and protection in a dying hour.

This is an hour, brethren, from which nature shrinks. The grave and the worm are appalling to the heart, and fill it with fearful apprehensions. “Through fear of death,” thousands are “all their lifetime subject to bondage.” From this undue degree of fear the Christian is delivered. The terrors of the grave are so touched by the consolations of the gospel, that they lose their power to harass and affright. But still, even to the Christian, it is a serious, a solemn thing to die. There are a thousand things connected with death, which clothe it with awful importance. Some indeed, who have made a profession of religion, have thought it a mark of a high degree of grace to make light of this last enemy of man; but there is reason to fear that the Bible would call this boasted grace a high degree of folly. No man will think lightly of death, who has ever thought himself near death. Let sickness and disease, let that dreadful weakness and sinking which generally precede death, once touch his frame, and he will feel that he needs an almighty arm to support him. The soul, in such an hour, will cling more closely to its God. There may be faith, there may be hope and joy, there may be the language of David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;” but there will still be the language of prayer; “Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

4. There is implied, lastly, in committing the soul to God, *a belief that God is willing to receive the soul*, as well as able to protect it.

There must be a sense of reconciling, pardoning love in the heart, before we can in good earnest commend our souls to God in our dying moments. There must have been a previous acquaintance with him as a God in Christ; as a God “pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin as a God who is our covenant God, our reconciled Father, our mighty Redeemer. Hence it is, that to a dying saint the cross of Christ becomes so precious. He no more dares to cast himself into the hand of God without looking to the atoning sacrifice of his Son, than he dares approach a consuming fire. But when he sees the infinite worth of that atonement, when he thinks of the all-prevailing efficacy of that sacrifice, he is enabled to say with humble confidence, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

III. But *what encouragement, what warrant has the Christian thus to commit his soul into the hand of God?* This is our third enquiry, and the text answers it; “Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”

1. The psalmist here tells us, first, that *God is the Christian's Redeemer*; that he has purchased his soul, acquired a property in it, and made it his own.

The souls of all men are, in one sense, the property of God. They are his by creation. But man makes himself over by sin to another lord; he goes into voluntary captivity to Satan; and becomes his property and his slave. This is the natural state of all men, and this was once the state of the servants of God; but they have now been delivered from this vile bondage. The Father of their spirits has paid the price of their freedom; and hence he has acquired a more endearing claim to them, than he had before. He is now their Redeemer, no common Redeemer, paying a common price for their ransom, redeeming them “with corruptible things such as silver and gold;” but a Redeemer who has paid for them a price more costly than all the riches of the universe, even “the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” We know not the reasons which led the Almighty to purchase so worthless a people at so costly a price; but we know that he has thus dearly purchased them; that he gave up for a season the richest treasure in heaven, that he might have a people on earth to show forth his praise.

This wonderful display of divine love is our encouragement to commit our souls to God in the hour of death. “O Lord,” the dying Christian may say, “I am thine; save me. I am not only thine by creation, but thine by purchase; thou hast bought me with a price. True, I am vile and worthless, but thou hast redeemed me; and wilt thou refuse to take the wretched soul which thou hast ransomed? Wilt thou cast away that for which thou hast paid so dear? Shall that which the blood of thine own Son has purchased, be despised? O Lord, thou hast redeemed me; and into thy hand I will commit my spirit.”

2. The second ground of encouragement mentioned in the text, is *the faithfulness of God*. He is here characterized as the “God of truth,” as one faithful to his word and engagements.

Now this expression sends us back to some previous transaction between God and the Christian; to some promise or pledge which Jehovah has given to him, and which his faithfulness constrains him to regard. It reminds us of that covenant, by which the Lord Jehovah graciously binds himself to cast out no guilty sinner who comes to him through his Son; to pardon the sins of every contrite believer in his blood; to take him as his child; to receive his soul in the hour of death, and to save it in the day of judgment. As soon as the sinner once embraces by faith the offered mercy of the gospel, these promises become his own—as much his own, as though they were immediately addressed to him from the throne of God. Will the Lord then fail to make good the words of his lips? Will the God of truth forget the promises of his covenant, in those awful seasons when the fulfilment of them is most needed? Is he “a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent?” No. “The Lord thy God,” says the prophet, “he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him.” When he sees a trembling sinner whom he has redeemed and whom he has engaged to save, coming to him in the fearful hour of death, with all the confidence of a child desiring to cast itself into a parent’s bosom, he cannot refuse to receive such a suppliant; he cannot hesitate to take the treasure which he wishes to commit to his hands. A message of love shall be sent down from heaven to that sinner’s heart. He shall hear a voice saying to him in the bitterness of death, “Fear not; I have redeemed thee. Thou art mine.”

The subject which we have thus briefly considered, may remind us, first, of *the great value of Christian faith*; its value, not merely as it saves the soul from everlasting destruction, but as it saves it from fear and despair in a dying hour.

We must all die, brethren, and those of us who have felt much of bodily weakness, know that it is a fearful thing to die. Others may for a season think lightly of death, but the hour will come, when we shall be all agreed on this point, that the soul of a dying sinner needs comfort and support. Now a simple, honest, heartfelt belief in the gospel can bring this support and comfort to him; it can make the pillow of a death-bed easy? it can do for a dying sinner many sweet offices which nothing else can do for him; and enable him to die as peacefully, as the wearied labourer lays down his head to sleep. This is the same faith that first leads the sinner to flee for refuge to the Saviour, that afterwards purifies his heart and regulates his life. It is that faith which is the gift of God, and which must be sought for by humble, fervent prayer. It is a gift which can make the most sinful man holy, the most wretched man happy, the most needy man rich. It can save the vilest sinner from destruction, and carry his soul in triumph to

the temple of his God.

Here too in the text, is a *source of comfort under the loss of friends*.

Our friends may have been wrested from us by the hand of death; they may have been taken from our arms; but if they are the redeemed of the Lord, where are they now? In the arms and in the bosom of their God. And are they not better there, than in such a world as this? Are they not happier with God, than they could be with us? If a wish could bring them back again to the scene of their former cares, and pains, and troubles, would you dare to offer it? Would you dare to bring their glorified spirits from that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, to that state of sorrow and tribulation in which you are struggling? O no! Rejoice then that they are gone to God. If you could but know all their blessedness, your tears of sorrow would be turned into tears of joy. You would take down your harps from the willows whereon you have hung them, and sing a new, and fervent, and lasting song of gratitude and love.

We may draw another inference from the words before us. If the believer may safely commit his soul into the hand of God, *how confidently may he commit into the same hand all other things!*

It is a strange fact, that some among us, who seem to trust God for the salvation of our souls and for the concerns of eternity, have not yet learned to trust him for the preservation of our bodies, and the concerns of this mortal life. We live too much by sense and too little by faith, and hence proceeds that unbelief which brings so many harassing anxieties and so much sin into our souls. We should struggle against this unbelief; we should mourn over it; and humble ourselves on account of it. We should endeavour to trust God as implicitly for time, as we do for eternity. Can we commit our souls into his hands, and yet refuse to trust him with our lives, our comforts, our families? He has not only said, "He that believeth, shall be saved but he has said also, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." He has written this plain declaration in our Bibles; "All things work together for good to them that love God."

We are taught, lastly, by the words of the text, *the great importance of our becoming now the redeemed of the Lord*.

We all need this redemption. A very little acquaintance with the Bible and our own hearts would convince us, that we are not in that state in which, as immortal and accountable creatures, we ought to be; that some great change must take place in our condition and character, before we can be happy with God. It is only the gospel of Christ, which can effect this change. In the redemption proposed to sinners in this gospel, the ground of our peace in death and of our hope in eternity, must be laid. If we are not made partakers of this redemption, we may profess on the bed of death to commit our souls into the hand of God, but he will spurn the offering. The soul indeed must fall into his hands as a Judge and Avenger, but it must go into other hands for its wages and reward.

If we serve Satan here, no matter how decently and decorously we serve him, we must live with him and suffer with him in another world. Our souls may have what our neighbours may call a happy release from the body; our dust may be honoured by as pompous a funeral, as folly and pride can furnish; but our souls will perish. We shall go from death to judgment, and from judgment to a world of anguish. O then who would not seek redemption now? There is no safety, no hope, no salvation, without it. Every unredeemed sinner will be a lost sinner.

But where is this redemption to be found? No prayers, nor tears, nor fancied works of goodness, can purchase it. The most decent and righteous are as unable to pay the price of it, as the most profane and sinful. It is treasured up in Christ, and must be sought at his cross. There all who would have it, must seek it; there all who seek it with an humble and contrite heart, shall obtain it, and with it all the riches of grace and all the treasures of glory.