

# SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,

BRECKNOCKSHIRE,

AND

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

SURREY.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO., AND T. HATCHARD.

1854.

## SERMON VIII.

### THE FUNERAL AT THE GATE OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 12

*Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother,  
and she was a widow.*

THE Bible is like the world—we cannot look into it without meeting with the traces of human misery. But this is not all we discover in it. The compassion of heaven is as visible and as great. It is greater. Man can suffer much; he does suffer more than it might have been expected so feeble a worm could find strength to bear; but what is the mercy we see and feel? More than angels can understand; more perhaps than they once conceived an infinite God could show.

We see this mercy in one of its most attractive forms in the history before us. We must however look first at the scene of distress which drew it forth. And to this scene, our attention for the present must be confined. The use I purpose to make of it, is simply this—to remind you of the designs of God towards ourselves, in those extraordinary afflictions with which we sometimes behold an individual or a family visited.

In the preceding verse of the chapter, Jesus is described as drawing near with a multitude to the gate of Nain, a small city at the foot of mount Hermon. Another multitude meets him there. “Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”

And are these few words all that St. Luke can spare for a case of suffering like this? There was too much suffering in it for him to say more. Deep grief will not admit of a long description: it must be felt to be understood. The sacred historians knew this: experience had taught it them. It had taught them also how to speak of misery. We sometimes wonder what it is that makes their short and simple narratives so very touching. It is often no more than this—the men who wrote them, were men of sorrows. They reach the heart, because they speak the language of nature, of feeling, and of truth.

But mournful as this scene appears, it does not stand alone, without a parallel, in the history of human woe. Most of us have witnessed similar calamities. We have seen God laying his hand on a family, as though he had singled it out for a spectacle of misery. We have seen him inflicting on it stroke after stroke; sending its members one after another in quick succession to the tomb, till at length hardly one is left to shed a tear for the rest. We have seen the once happy parent made childless; the once flourish-

ing neighbour stripped bare of all his comforts; the man who was once surrounded with “lovers and friends,” moving over the scenes of his former joys, solitary and folorn.

Now this does not happen by chance. It is the work of that God, without whom not a sparrow falls. He does it for our good—to warn us, to make us think and feel, to teach us lessons which, in the midst of friends, and ease, and prosperity, we refused to learn. If we ask what these lessons are, this funeral will point them out to us.

I. Look at that breathless corpse. “Behold, there was a dead man carried out.”

The Jews always buried their dead without the walls of their cities. They were now coming out of Nain to follow to his grave one cut off from among them in his youth and strength. And why was he thus snatched away?

1. To teach them and us the dreadful nature of sin.

When old men die, we almost forget why they die. We look on them as worn out, and regard their death as nothing more than the natural termination of past years of labour and sorrow. But when the young die, we are forced to remember what death really is. We cease to talk of nature. The awful truth comes out—death is the work of sin. It is what the scripture calls its “wages.” It is what we get for loving and serving it so well.

We may not think of this truth, brethren, when the children of our acquaintance or neighbours die; but we shall think of it when the blow comes nearer home. What were Adam’s thoughts when he first saw Abel lifeless on the ground? Was it nothing more than the loss of one son and the cruelty of another, which shook that wondering man? No. The scene that had past long ago in paradise, flashed upon him; the threatening of heaven rang in his ears; he thought of sin and trembled.

And where is the parent who has not trembled, as he has looked on the corpse of a beloved child? But a short while ago, all there was life and health, hope and joy; the heart gladdened as the eye beheld that once glowing countenance and that rising form. What is there before me now? Dear as it is to me, I shall soon be glad to bury it out of my sight. O how I hate the sin which has wrought such a change as this! O how I wonder that in a dying world, dying men should make so light of it! O how precious is that Redeemer who offers me salvation from such a curse!

2. Learn here too one lesson more—the truth you so often hear and find it so hard to credit—None are too young to die. This young man died. Those around him needed probably such a warning. Your friends and neighbours also may need a blow, and a God of mercy may send it them by opening a grave for you. What if it should be so? Are you ready? Are you

prepared to go from this church to your bed, and from your bed to your tomb? If, before another sabbath comes, we lay your dead body in the earth, where will your soul be? We know that it will be in eternity; but will it be lost or saved there, happy or wretched, with Satan or with God?

II. The evangelist now calls our attention to another object. This young man had a mother and she is now weeping near his corpse. But this is not all; she had wept for another before she wept for him. "She was a widow." There are widows still, and some as desolate as this poor sufferer. And why are they left amongst us? Why are they kept in a world from which all that made that world pleasant to them, is departed.

1. They are living witnesses of the uncertain hold which we have of all our earthly comforts. It is marvellous how prone we are to lose sight of this simple fact. Some of us never think that our children and friends are mortal. Even when sickness comes, when the stroke of death is plain to others, we cannot see it; the thing appears so unnatural and strange. In almost every instance, the last that expect the sick to die, are they who love them most. But when the work is done, then we awake. One friend is gone; we see that others too may go. We leave one child in the grave; and then we look around to discover in our remaining children the seeds of disease, and the forerunners of corruption.

And if we are wise, we stop not here. Our language now is, "Why did I lean for happiness so long on what I could not keep? Why do I still bind so closely to me the objects which death may tear from me in an hour? I will strive to wean this bleeding heart of mine from a dying world. I will not love it as I have done. I will seek my comforts in things which death cannot reach. I will not rest in any thing below my God." O that the sufferings of others could teach all of us this language! Force not God to teach it you, brethren, in the bitter way in which many learn it. Have you children? Have you friends? Be thankful for them; they are lent you to be valued and enjoyed; but think of Job, think of Naomi, think of this Jewish wife and mother. Your mercies are fading, dying mercies. They may be gone so unexpectedly and so suddenly, that though you see them go, their loss may seem to you for a time like the illusion of a dream. And the more you love them, the more likely you are to lose them. It is the gourd of which we are "exceeding glad," that earliest withers. It is the dearest friend, the most beloved, the only child, that soonest dies.

2. The son over whom this widow wept, had evidently been very dear to her. But a short time before she had probably leaned on him as her prop, and rejoiced in him as her solace. What does she find him now? A source of the keenest misery.

As it was with her, it may be with us—Our dearest earthly comforts may become the occasions of our heaviest sorrows. Before they go, they are sometimes embittered to us; we wish that we had never seen them. And what if their sweetness continue to the last? It will only inflict on us at the last a sharper pang. We shall lose them; lose them perhaps when, like this widow, we most need them; when we are clinging to them, as if we thought the world without them were a blank.

Perhaps we have already made the discovery; if not, we shall all sooner or later learn, that our severest griefs spring from the objects we love the best; that whatever brings joy to the heart, will in the end bring sorrow also. The fault is not in the things themselves; it is in us, in our own earthly hearts. We love the creature too well; we put it above our God; and this is the way in which he casts it from its throne. He suffers the reed we lean on to pierce us as it breaks; he allows the idol which drew our affections from him, to wound as well as fail us; and then our eyes are open. Our misery brings us to ourselves. We remember that none can satisfy the soul, but he who had power to create, and was wealthy enough to ransom it. We turn away from our broken idols, and say with David, “And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee.”

III. But this dead man and his weeping mother do not complete the mournful scene we are contemplating. There is a multitude near. “Much people of the city,” we are told, “was with them.”

We can be at no loss to discover the motive which brought them here. The Jews have ever been remarkable for the honours they pay to the dead, and for the compassion they manifest for their surviving friends. Hence we find that when Lazarus died, “many of them came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.” And the sympathy which they showed on these occasions, was of no ordinary kind; for St. John tells us that when Mary wept, the Jews also wept “which came with her.” It was not likely then that such a people would be regardless of this desolate woman. Suspending their busy cares, the inhabitants of the city where she dwelt, follow her sorrowing to the burying place of her son. And as they follow her, they remind us of another end which signal calamities are designed to answer—they are intended to call into exercise our compassion.

You need not be told that man does not always feel as he ought for his fellow-man. There are some hearts which seem insensible to pity, and there are times when even the tenderest heart is cold. Our neighbours die, and we have hardly a sigh to give them as we see them passing to their graves; our friends suffer, and we leave them to weep alone. Our own families, our own cares, perhaps our own griefs, absorb all our thoughts. And yet though we heed not the miseries of our fellow-worms, there is One who never for-

gets them; One who marks every tear they shed, and numbers all their pangs. We cannot see him; but we may see his pity for the wretched in the commands which he has left us, that we should pity them. "This is my commandment," said he to the friends whom he was about to leave in trouble, "that ye love one another;"—and how? "as I have loved you." And when he sent down his Holy Spirit from heaven to teach them, his language was the same; "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted." "Bear ye one another's burdens." "Weep with them that weep."

Neither does he deem these commands sufficient. He sometimes enforces them by his providence. He brings misery before us in such a form, that it triumphs over us. Our selfishness gives way; the heart is forced to melt; for a time, at least, we feel as men. And thus the woes of earth are lightened, and our evil passions checked. A kindness received in affliction is seldom lost. Its influence is often great and lasting. It binds man to man. Though but a word or even a look of pity, it has been the beginning of a long and deep affection, and sometimes of an eternity of love. Our best friendships are generally formed in the hour of trouble; and it is then also that our bitterest enmities are subdued.

IV. There is yet a fourth object of attention in this melancholy throng. The Lord Jesus draws near and joins it. And O what a joyful change in it did his presence make! We must not however turn away from the misery he relieved.

Connecting it with him, we learn that great sufferings are often designed to bring honour to him who sends them, to manifest the glorious perfections of the great Lord of all. This was the chief end why this young man died and this widow mourned. We are accordingly told that before Jesus left them, all this assembled multitude "glorified God." How this effect was produced in this instance, the sequel of the history will inform us. It was the result of a wonderful display of love and power. In other cases of affliction, the blessed Saviour manifests the glory of other perfections of his divine character.

1. We see in some of them his fearful holiness. There is sin in a family, great sin, perhaps known, open sin. "I will visit their transgression with the rod," the Lord says, "and their iniquity with stripes." The promised scourge comes. Calamities, sickness, death, proclaim the displeasure of a holy God. Thus was old Eli dealt with. "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The Lord slew them; and scarcely had the ears of their father tingled at the news, when he fell down and died. "Thou hast given," said Nathan to David, "great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." And how did the Lord silence their blasphemies? He first struck

the infant that was dearest to the monarch's heart, and then came blow after blow on David's house, and made it at last a proverb on the earth.

Sometimes the iniquity is secret. The world sees in the chastisement nothing more than the hand of an afflicting Father; but it is not sorrow only, which bows that mourner down. There is a sting within the man. His "sin has found him out." He sees in the desolation around him, in lost comforts and opened graves, an avenging God. While others tell him of a Father's pity and a Saviour's love, there is a louder voice sounding in his ears, "I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth."

2. But peculiar afflictions are not always the effects of peculiar sins. "Master," said the disciples to Jesus, "who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." And this is the way in which the Lord sometimes makes himself manifest in the depths of trouble—he shows us the supporting and conquering power of his grace.

Where can we find on earth a nobler monument to the Redeemer's praise, than in the house of mourning? A child of the dust "stricken of God and afflicted," stripped of all that upholds and gladdens his fellow-men, and yet not sinking, unhurt, calm; feeling the weight of sorrow even more than others feel it, but not cast down by it; triumphing over feeling; reigning the lord of griefs, which have fired the brain and broken the heart of thousands; kissing the rod which wounds him, and even blessing the hand which holds it;—brethren, this is a victory which none but a believer in Christ can attain, and nothing but his almighty grace can give. It is the most glorious spectacle that is seen on earth; and no place but the earth affords it. It is not found in heaven; it is not even heard of in hell. The Bible however is continually displaying it. That sacred book is one long, crowded record of the triumphs of a Saviour's grace over the woes of man. And the history of the church, in every age, exhibits the same triumphs. Not an earthly trouble can we think of, which this grace has not overcome. Nay, it has upheld many a sufferer, even when a sense of guilt has combined with outward trials to sink him into despair. He may not, with the blameless Paul, have rejoiced in abounding tribulation, for a wounded conscience knows no joy; but, with righteous Job, he has blessed the name of the Lord, who has made him desolate. The guilty David, under a stroke which, he says, "consumed" him, was "dumb," submissive. And think again of Eli. The judgments with which he was threatened, were appalling. None but a Christian father who has groaned over the loss of an ungodly child, can understand them. Yet what was that old man's language? "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

Let us turn now from the gate of Nain to ourselves. Have the things we have seen and heard made any impression on us? Does sin appear to us more fearful, than we thought it an hour ago? Shall we leave these walls more mindful of death, than we were when we entered them? As we look on our children and friends, are we more ready to look on them as fading comforts, as blessings which our abuse of them may turn into scourges? Have we felt here one throb of pity, or put up a single prayer for one afflicted soul? We have heard of the holiness of Christ; have we stood in awe of it? We have heard of his triumphant grace; has our prayer been, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father?" Alas, brethren, with a suffering and dying world before us, how easy is it to give instruction, but how difficult to get these hearts of ours practically affected by it! The tidings of deaths, and funerals, and afflictions, reach us every day; we do not hear of them with total unconcern; but where is their fruit? Look for it in the parish which these things have overspread with sadness—you look in vain. Go for it to the house which they have turned into a house of sorrow—you cannot find it. Unveil the very heart which they have torn the most—it is not even there. And why is this? We have not called upon God. We forget the desperate wickedness of our hearts; we forget their hardness. Either we care nothing about the matter, or we trust to afflictions, and warnings, and judgments, to accomplish a work which nothing short of omnipotence can perform. The consequence is, the work is not accomplished; we are the very men we ever were. We behold affliction, and we ourselves endure it; we move about among the sorrowing, the dying, and the dead; but nothing changes us. The great God still comes seeking fruit, and he finds none.

It is an awful truth, that suffering never can convert the soul; no, not even when that suffering is our own. Take from amongst ourselves the man of the liveliest feeling and the tenderest heart; rob him of every earthly blessing; put "lover and friend far from him, and his acquaintance into darkness heap on his head all the calamities which man, in his wretchedness, ever bore;—what have you done? Have you brought him near to God? Have you forced him to seek grace and rest in Christ? No; you have wrung his heart, but you have not changed it. Not one right, not one holy feeling in it have you excited. It is a broken heart perhaps, but yet an earthly, sensual, evil one.

Our need of the special grace of the Holy Ghost is plain and urgent. Nothing can be done without it. The scripture tells us so. Our own experience confirms the testimony. It follows then that we must pray or perish. We must cease to trust in the temporary impressions which the sight of death or the anguish of tribulation can make. We must seek the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit; we must trust in the grace of the living God.

Go then and beseech him to work effectually in you. Implore him to turn away your eyes from beholding vanity; to make you feel that all you love and see is passing away, that death is certain and near, that you will soon be in the same world whither the dead are gone, that none can make you happy there but Christ, that none but Christ can save you from destruction. Once united by a living faith to him, justified by his righteousness and cleansed by his Spirit, all things will “work together for your good.” The sufferings of others will teach you how to suffer; your own will “turn to your salvation” and your Redeemer’s glory. The death of friends will be made the means of preparing you to die; and what, brethren, will your own death do for you when it comes? It will admit you into a world of light, and life, and joy; a world in which there is no sickness, no pain, not a tear nor a grave; a world in which, for the first time, you may say, “I am safe; I am free; I am blessed.”