

# SERMONS

BY THE

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WITH A

FUNERAL SERMON BY THE REV. SAMUEL FINLEY, B. D.,

HIS SUCCESSOR IN THAT OFFICE,

AND SOME ACCOUNT OF PRESIDENT DAVIES, BY THE REV. THOMAS

GIBBONS, D. D., OF LONDON, AND THE REV. DAVID

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CONTAINING ALSO

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BY THE

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## SERMON XXVII.

### LIFE AND IMMORTALITY REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL.

2 TIM. i. 10.—*And hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.\**

So extensive have been the havoc and devastation which death has made in the world for near six thousand years, ever since it was first introduced by the sin of man, that this earth is now become one vast graveyard, or burying-place for her sons. The many generations that have followed upon each other, in so quick a succession from Adam to this day, are now in the mansions underground. And there must we and all the present generation sleep ere long. Some make a sort of journey from the womb to the grave: they rise from nothing at the creative fiat of the Almighty, and take an immediate flight into the world of spirits, without an intermediate state of probation. Like a bird on the wing, they perch on our globe, rest a day, a month, or a year, and then fly off for some other regions. It is evident, these were not formed for the purposes of the present state, where they make so short a stay; and yet we are sure they are not made in vain by an all-wise Creator and therefore we conclude they are young immortals, that immediately ripen in the world of spirits, and there enter upon scenes, for which it was worth their while coming into existence. Others spring up and bloom for a few years; but they fade away like a flower, and are cut down. Others arrive at the prime or meridian of human life? but in all their strength and gaiety, and amid their hurries and schemes, and promising prospects, they are surprised by the arrest of death, and laid stiff, senseless, and ghastly in the grave. A few creep into their beds of dust under the burden of old age and the gradual decays of nature. In short, the grave is *the place appointed for all living*; the general rendezvous of all the sons of Adam. There the prince and the beggar, the conqueror and the slave, the giant and the infant, the scheming politician and the simple peasant, the wise and the fool, Heathens, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians, all lie equally low, and mingle their dust without distinction. Their beauty in all its charms putrefies into stench and corruption, and feeds the vilest insects. There the sturdy arm of youth lies torpid and benumbed, unable to drive off the worms that crawl through

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\* This Sermon was preached at the funeral of Mr. William Yuille, and is dated Sept. 1, 1756.

their frame, and riot upon their marrow. There lie our ancestors, our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, with whom we once conversed, and who were united to our hearts by strong and endearing ties; and there lies our friend, and sprightly vigorous youth, whose death is the occasion of this funeral solemnity. This earth is overspread with the ruins of the human frame: it is a huge carnage, a vast charnel-house, undermined and hollowed with the graves, the last mansions of mortals.

And shall these ruins of time and death never be repaired! Is this the final state of human nature? Are all these millions of creatures, that were so curiously formed, that could think, and will, and exercise the superior powers of reason, are they all utterly extinct, absorbed into the yawning gulf of annihilation, and never again to emerge into life and activity? If this be the case, the expostulation of the psalmist upon this supposition, seems unavoidable; *Lord, wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* Psalm lxxxix. 47. It was not worthwhile to come into being, if it must be resigned so soon. The powers of reason were thrown away upon us, they were given only for low purposes of the present life.

But my text revives us with heavenly light to scatter this tremendous gloom. Jesus hath abolished death, overthrown its empire, and delivered its captives; and lie *hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.*

Life and immortality here seem to refer both to the soul and the body, the two constituents of our person. As applied to the body, life and immortality signify, that though our bodies are dissolved at death, and return into their native elements, yet they shall be formed anew with vast improvements, and raised to an immortal existence; so that they shall be as though death never had *had* any power over them; and thus death shall be abolished, annihilated, and all traces of the ruins it had made for ever disappear, as though they had never been. It is in this sense chiefly that the word *Immortality* or *Incorruptibility* is made use of in my text. But then the resurrection of the body supposes the perpetual existence of the soul, for whose sake it is raised: therefore life and immortality, as referring to the soul, signify that it is immortal, in a strict and proper sense; that is, that it cannot die at all, or be dissolved like the body; but it lives in the agonies of the dying animal; it lives after the dissolution of the animal frame in a separate state; it lives at the resurrection to re-animate the new formed body; and it lives for ever, like its mortal parent, and shall never be dissolved nor annihilated. In this complex sense we may understand the immortality of which my text speaks.

Now it is to the gospel that we owe the clear discovery of immortality in both these senses. As for the resurrection of the dead, which confers a kind of immortality upon our mortal bodies, it is altogether the discovery of

divine revelation. The light of nature could not so much as give a hint of it to the most sagacious philosophers in the heathen world. They did not hope for it as possible, much less believe it as certain. And when, among other important doctrines of pure revelation, it was first preached to them by St. Paul, their pride could not bear the mortification of being taught by a tent-maker what all their studies had not been able to discover; and therefore rejected it with scorn, and ridiculed it as a new-fangled notion of the superstitious Jews. This seems to have been an entire secret to all nations, (except the Jews,) till the light of Christianity dawned upon the world. They had an eternal farewell to their bodies, when they dropped them in the grave. They never expected to meet them again in all the glorious improvements of a happy resurrection. But that divine revelation from whence we learn our religion, opens to us a brighter prospect; it strengthens our eyes to look forward through the glooms of death, and behold the many that sleep in the dust awaking; "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt:" Dan. xii. 2. It assures us, "that the hour is coming, when all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation:" John v. 28. Therefore, be it known unto thee, O Death, thou king of terrors, that though we cannot now resist thy power nor escape thy arrest, yet we do not surrender ourselves to thee as helpless, irredeemable prisoners. We shall yet burst thy bonds, and obtain the victory over thee. And when we commit the dust of our friends or our own to thee, O grave! know, it is a trust deposited in thy custody, to be faithfully kept till called for by Him who was once a prisoner in thy territories, but regained his liberty, and triumphed over thee, and put that song of victory into the mouths of all his followers, *O death, where, is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* 1 Cor. xv. 55.

As for the immortality of the soul, Christian philosophers find it no difficulty to establish it upon the plain principles of reason. Their arguments are such as these, and I think they are conclusive: That the soul is an immaterial substance, and therefore cannot perish by dissolution, like the body; that the soul is a substance distinct from the body, and therefore the dissolution of the body has no more tendency to destroy the soul, than the breaking of a cage to destroy the bird enclosed in it; that God has implanted in the soul the innate desire of immortality; and that as the tendencies of nature in other instances and in other creatures, are not in vain, this innate desire is an indication that he intended it for an immortal duration; that, as God is the moral Governor of the rational world, there must be rewards and punishments, and therefore there must be a future state of retribution; for we see mankind are now under a promiscuous

providence, and generally are not dealt with according to their works; and if there be a future state of retribution, the soul must live in a future state, otherwise it could not be the subject of rewards and punishments. These and the like topics of argument have been improved by the friends of immortality, to prove that important doctrine beyond all reasonable suspicion. And because these arguments from reason seem sufficient, some would conclude, that we are not at all obliged to the Christian revelation in this respect. But it should be considered, that those are not the arguments of the populace, the bulk of mankind, but of a few philosophic studious men. But as immortality is the prerogative of all mankind, of the ignorant and illiterate, as well as of the wise and learned, all mankind, of all ranks of understanding, are equally concerned in the doctrine of immortality; and therefore a common revelation was necessary, which would teach the ploughman and mechanic, as well as the philosopher, that he was formed for an immortal existence, and, consequently, that it is his grand concern to fit himself for a happiness beyond the grave, as lasting as his nature. Now, it is the gospel alone that makes this important discovery plain and obvious to all. It must also be considered, that men may be able to demonstrate a truth when the hint is but once given, which they would never have discovered, nor perhaps suspected, without that hint. So when *the gospel of Christ has brought immortality to light*, our Christian philosophers may support it with arguments from reason; but had they been destitute of this additional light, they would have been lost in perplexity and uncertainty, or at best have been advanced to no farther than plausible or probable conjectures. Persons may be assisted in their searches by the light of revelation: but, being accustomed to it, they may mistake it for the light of their own reason; or they may not be so honest and humble as to acknowledge the assistance they have received.

The surest way to know what mere unassisted reason can do, is to inquire what it has actually done in those sages of the heathen world who had no other guide, and in whom it was carried to the highest degree of improvement. Now we find, in fact, that though some philosophers had plausibilities and presumptions, that their souls should exist after the dissolution of their bodies, yet that they rather supposed, or wished, or thought it probable, than firmly believed it upon good evidence. The Socrateses, the Platos, and the Ciceros of Greece and Rome, after all their searches, were more perplexed on this point, than a plain common Christian of the smallest intellectual improvements in our land of evangelical light. Whoever reads their writings upon this subject, will find, when they draw their conclusion of the soul's existence after death, it is often from extravagant and chimerical premises; such as the pre-existence of human

souls, their successive transmigrations from body to body, their being literally particles of the Deity, whom they supposed to be the *Anima Mundi*, the universal soul of the world, &c. All these premises want the support of proper evidence; and some of them are directly subversive of the proper notion of a future state, as a state of rewards and punishments. Sometimes, indeed, they seem to reason from better principles; but then they still hesitate about the conclusion, and fluctuate between the presumptions for it and the objections against it. Socrates was confessedly the brightest character in the heathen world, and seemed to have the fairest claim of any among them to the honor of a martyr for the cause of truth and virtue; and yet, even he, when making his defence before his judges, speaks in the language of uncertainty and perplexity. "Death," says he, "either reduces us to nothing and entirely destroys all sense and consciousness; or, as some say, it conveys us from this world into some other region." Thus standing on the brink of eternity, he was not assured whether he was not about to leap into the hideous gulf of annihilation, or to pass into some vital region replete with inhabitants. When he was condemned, his last words to the court were these: "It is time for us to part; I, that I may suffer death; and you, that you may enjoy life; but which of us has the happier lot, is known only to God." Poor honest Socrates! how happy hadst thou been hadst thou but enjoyed one glimmering of that heavenly light which multitudes among us despise! My brethren, let us be thankful for our superior advantages, and let us prize and improve that precious gospel, which gives us full information in this important point, and renders the meanest Christian wiser, in this respect, than Socrates himself.

My present design is not to propose arguments for the conviction of your judgments, which I hope you do not so much need; but I shall give you some idea of immortality, in both the senses I have mentioned, and then improve it.

Let us first look through the wastes and glooms of death and the grave to the glorious dreadful morning of the resurrection. At the all-alarming clangor of the last trumpet, Adam, and the sleeping millions of his posterity, start into sudden life. "The hour is coming, in which all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." John v. 28.

Then, my brethren, your dust and mine shall be organized, and reanimated; and "though after our skin worms destroy these bodies, yet in our flesh shall we see God." Job xix. 26. "Then this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality." 1 Cor. xv. 53.

And may not the prospect alarm us, and set us upon earnest preparation for these important scenes? Shall we take so much care of our bodies in this mortal state, where, after all our care, they must soon fall to dust, and become the prey of worms, and shall we take no care that they may have a happy and glorious resurrection! What does it signify how they are fed or dressed, while they are only fattening for worms, and the ornaments of dress may be our winding sheet? What does this signify, in comparison with their doom at the great rising day, and their state through eternity? My brethren, you must not let *sin reign in your mortal bodies now, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof*, if you would have them raised holy and happy in that awful morning; but you must consecrate your bodies, and keep them holy as the temples of the Holy Ghost; and *yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto God*. Can you flatter yourselves that bodies polluted with filthy lusts and sensual gratifications shall ever be admitted into the regions of perfect purity? It would be an unnatural element to such depraved constitutions. Shall those feet ever walk the crystal pavement of the New Jerusalem, which have been accustomed to run into the foul paths of sin? Shall those tongues ever join the songs of heaven, which have been oftener employed in swearing and imprecation, the language of hell, than in prayer and praise? Shall those ears ever be charmed with celestial music, which have not listened with pleasure and eagerness to the joyful sound of the gospel, but were entertained with the song of drunkards, the loud unthinking laugh, and the impure jest? Are those knees likely to bow in delightful homage before the throne of God and the Lamb on high, which have not been used to the posture of petitioners at the throne of grace on earth? Are those members likely to be the instruments of a heavenly spirit, in the exercise of that blessed state, which have not been “instruments of righteousness unto holiness” in this state of trial and discipline? No, my brethren, this is not at all probable, even to a superficial inquirer; and to one that thinks deeply, and consults right reason and the sacred scriptures, this appears utterly impossible. Therefore, take warning in time. Methinks this consideration might have some weight, even with epicures and sensualists, who consider themselves as mere animals, and make it their only concern to provide for and gratify the flesh. Unless you be religious now, unless you now deny yourselves of your guilty pleasures, not only your soul, that neglected, disregarded trifle, must perish, but your body, your dear body, your only care, must be wretched too; your body must be hungry, thirsty, pained, tortured, hideously deformed, a mere system of pain and loathsomeness. But if you now keep your bodies pure, and serve God with them, and with your spirits too, they will bloom for ever in the charms of celestial beauty; they will

flourish in immortal youth and vigor! they will for ever be the receptacles of the most exquisite sensations of pleasure. And will you not deny yourselves the sordid pleasures of a few years, for the sake of those of a blessed immortality?

But let me give you a view of immortality of a more noble kind, the proper immortality of the soul. And here, what an extensive and illustrious prospect opens before us! look a little way backward, and your sight is lost in the darkness of non-existence. A few years ago you were nothing. But at the creative fiat of the Almighty, that little spark of being, the soul, was struck out of nothing; and now it warms your breast, and animates the machine of flesh. But shall this glimmering spark, this *divinæ particula auræ*, ever be extinguished? No; it will survive the ruins of the universe, and blaze out into immortality: it will be coeval with the angels, the natives of heaven, and the *Indigenæ*, the original inhabitants of the world of spirits; nay, with the great Father of spirits himself. The duration of your souls will run on from its first commencement, in parallel lines with the existence of the Deity. What an inheritance is this entailed upon the child of dust, the creature of yesterday! Here let us pause,—make a stand—and take a survey of this majestic prospect! This body must soon moulder into dust, but the soul will live unhurt, untouched, amid all the dissolving struggles and convulsions of animal nature. “These heavens shall pass away with a great noise; these elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth, and the things that are therein, shall be burnt up;” 2 Pet. iii. 10, but this soul shall live secure of existence in the universal desolation:

“Unhurt amidst the war of elements,  
The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.”—ADDISON.

And now, when the present system of things is dissolved, and time shall be no more, eternity, boundless eternity, succeeds; and on this the soul enters as on its proper hereditary duration. Now look forward as far as you will, your eyes meet with no obstruction, with nothing but the immensity of the prospect: in that, indeed, it is lost, as extending infinitely beyond its ken. Come, attempt this arithmetic of infinities, and exhaust the power of numbers: let millions of millions of ages begin the vast computation; multiply these by the stars of heaven; by the particles of dust in this huge globe of earth; by the drops of water in all the vast oceans, rivers, lakes, and springs that are spread over the globe; by all the thoughts that have risen in so quick a succession in the minds of men and angels, from their first creation to this day; make this computation, and then look forward through this long line of duration, and contemplate your future selves. Still



you see yourselves in existence still the same persons; still endowed with the same consciousness, and the same capacities for happiness or misery, but vastly enlarged; as much superior to the present as the capacities of an adult to those of a new-born infant, or an embryo in the womb. Still will you bloom in immortal youth, and are as far from an end as in the first moment of our existence. O Sirs, methinks it may startle us to view our future selves so changed, so improved, removed into such different regions, associated with such strange unacquainted beings, and fixed in such different circumstances of glory or terror, of happiness or misery.

Men of great projects and sanguine hopes are apt to sit and pause, and take an imaginary survey of what they will do, and what they will be in the progress of life. But then death, like an apparition, starts up before them, and threatens to cut them off in the midst of their pursuits. But here no death threatens to extinguish your being or snap the thread of your existence; but it runs on in one continued everlasting tenor. What a vast inheritance is this, unalienably entailed upon every child of Adam! What importance, what value, does this consideration give to that neglected thing the soul! What an awful being is it! Immortality! What emphasis, what grandeur in the sound! Immortality is so vast an attribute, that it adds a kind of infinity to anything to which it is annexed, however insignificant in other respects: and on the other hand, the want of this would degrade the most exalted being into a trifle. The highest angel, if the creature of a day, or of a thousand years, what would he be? A fading flower, a vanishing vapor, allying shadow. When his day or his thousand years are past, he is as truly nothing as if he had never been. It is little matter what becomes of him: let him stand or fall, let him be happy or miserable, it is just the same in a little time; he is gone, and there is no more of him,—no traces of him left. But an immortal! a creature that shall never, never, never cease to be! that shall expand his capacities of action, of pleasure, or pain, through an everlasting duration! what an awful, important being is this!—And is my soul, this little spark of reason in my breast, is that such a being? I tremble at myself. I revere my own dignity, and am struck with a kind of pleasing horror to view what I must be. And is there anything so worthy of the care of such a being, as the happiness, the everlasting happiness, of my immortal part? What is it to me, who am formed for an endless duration, what I enjoy, or what I must suffer in this vanishing state? Seventy or eighty years bear not the least imaginable proportion to the duration of such a being; they are too inconsiderable a point to be seen; mere ciphers in the computation! They do not bear as much proportion as the small dust that will not turn the balance, to this vast globe of earth, and all the vaster globes that roll in their orbits through the immense space of the universe.

And what shall become of me through this immortal duration? This, and this only, is the grand concern of an immortal; and in comparison of it, it does not deserve one thought what will become of me while in this vanishing phantom of a world. For consider, your immortality will not be a state of insensibility, without pleasure or pain; you will not draw out an useless, inactive existence, in an eternal stupor, or a dead sleep. But your souls will be active as long as they exist; and as I have repeatedly observed, still retain all their capacities; nay, their capacities will perpetually enlarge with an eternal growth, and for ever tower from glory to glory in heaven, or plunge from depth to depth in hell. Here, then, my fellow-immortals! here pause and say to yourselves, "What is like to become of my soul through this long space, for ever? Is it likely to be happy or miserable? What though you are now rich, honorable, healthy, merry, and gay! Alas! terrestrial enjoyments are not proper food for an immortal soul; and besides, they are not immortal, as your souls are. If these are your portion, what will you do for happiness millions of ages hence, when all these are fled away like a vapor? Are you provided with a happiness which will last as long as your souls will live to crave it? Have you an interest in God? Are you prepared for the fruition of the heavenly state? Do you delight in God above all? Have you a relish for the refined pleasures of religion? Is the supreme good the principal object of your desire? Do you now accustom yourselves to the service of God, the great employment of heaven? and are you preparing yourselves for the more exalted devotion of the church on high, by a serious attendance on the humbler forms of worship in the church on earth? Are you made pure in heart and life, that you may be prepared for the regions of untainted holiness, to breathe in that pure salubrious air, and live in that climate, so warm with the love of God, and so near the Sun of Righteousness? Do not some of you know that this is not your prevailing character? And what then do you think will become of you without a speedy alteration in your temper and conduct? Alas! must your immortality, the grand prerogative of your nature, become your eternal curse? Have you made it your interest that you should be a brute? that is, that you should perish entirely, and your whole being be extinguished in death? Then it is no wonder you strive to disbelieve the doctrine of a future state, and your own immortality. But alas! in vain is the strife. The principles of atheism and infidelity may lull your consciences into a stupid repose for a little while, but they cannot annihilate you. They may lead you to live like beasts, but they cannot enable you to die like beasts; no, you must live, live to suffer righteous punishment, whether you will or not. As you did not come into being by your own consent, so neither can you lay down your being when you please. And will you not labor to make your

immortality a blessing? Is there any thing in this world that can be a temptation to you to forfeit such an immense blessing? O that you were wise! that you would consider this!

I shall now accommodate my subject to the present melancholy occasion, and endeavor to make a particular improvement of it.

Do you expect a character of our deceased friend? This is not my usual practice; and I omit it, not because I can see nothing amiable in mankind, nor because I would enviously deny them their just praises, but because I have things of much greater importance to engage your attention. The dead have received their just and unchangeable doom at a superior tribunal; and our panegyrics or censures may be often misapplied. My business is with the living; not to flatter their vanity with compliments, but to awaken them to a sense of their own mortality, and to a preparation for it. However, if you must have a character, I will draw it to you in the most important and interesting light. Here was a youth in the bloom of life, in the prime of his strength, with a lively flow of spirits, who seemed as secure from the stroke of death as any of us; a youth that had escaped many dangers by sea and land; a youth launched into the world with, no doubt, the usual projects and expectations of that sanguine age. But where is he now? In yonder grave, alas! lies the blooming, promising flower, withered in the morning of life. There lies the mortal body, mouldering into dust, and feeding the worms. Come to his grave, ye young and gay, ye lively and strong, ye men of business and hurry, come and learn what now may, and shortly must, be your doom. Thus shall your limbs stiffen, your blood stagnate, your faces wear the pale and ghastly aspect of death, and your whole frame dissolve into dust and ashes. Thus shall your purposes be broken off, your schemes vanish like smoke, and all your hopes from this world perish. Death perpetually lurks in ambush for you, ready every moment to spring upon his prey. “O that Death!” (said a gentleman of large estate, strong constitution, and cheerful temper,) “I do not love to think of that Death; he comes in and spoils all.” So he does indeed; he spoils all your thoughtless mirth, your idle amusements, and your great schemes. Methinks it becomes you to prepare for what you cannot avoid. Methinks, among your many schemes and projects, you should form one to be religious. You may make a poor shift to live without religion, but you can make none to die without it. You may ridicule the saint, but he really has the advantage of you. “Well, after all,” said a celebrated unbeliever, “these Christians are the happiest people upon earth.” Indeed they are; and if you are wise, you will labor to be of their number.

But was our departed friend nothing but an animal, a mere machine of flesh? Is the whole of him putrifying in yonder grave! No; I must draw his

character farther. He was an immortal; and no sooner did he resign his breath, than his soul took wing, and made its flight into the regions of spirits. There it now dwells. And what amazing scenes now present themselves to his view! what strange, unknown beings does he now converse with! There also, my brethren, you and I must ere long be. We too must be initiated into those grand mysteries of the invisible world, and mingle in this assembly of strangers. We must share with angels in their bliss and glory, or with devils in their agonies and terrors. And our eternal doom shall be according to our present character, and the improvement we make of our opportunities for preparation.

And do you, sirs, make it your main concern to secure a happy immortality! Do you live as expectants of eternity? or do you live as though this world were to be your eternal residence, and as if your bodies, not your souls, were immortal! Does your conscience approve of such conduct! Do you really think it is better for you, upon the whole, to commence fashionably wicked, or perhaps ringleaders in debauchery and infidelity, in a country overrun with all manner of vice? Is this better than to retain the good impressions you might perhaps receive in youth, and to act upon the model built for you in a religious education? Which do you think you will approve of in the hour of death, that honest hour, when things begin to appear in a true light? And of which, think ye, will you be able to give the most comfortable account at the supreme tribunal! Brethren, form an impartial judgment upon this comparison, and let it guide your conduct. Behave as “strangers and pilgrims on earth, that have here no continuing city behave as expectants of eternity, as candidates for immortality; as “beholding him that is invisible, and looking for a city which has foundations, eternal in the heavens.” In that celestial city may we all meet at last, through Jesus Christ. Amen!