

Funeral Sermon of Sister Jane Harris, wife of Elder John M. Harris.

Delivered Tuesday, Nov. 16, 1880, at Upper Coast, Fork, Lane Co., Or., by Elder S. Monroe Hubbard, of Eugene City.

PRELUDE.

To those who heard the sermon I will simply say that a sermon delivered and a sermon to be read are two things. Hence the changes, yet including the main facts of the Gospel truth.

S. M. H.

"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 labors; and their works do follow them."

INTRODUCTION.

These are sacred words; they are the fruits of an inspiration, higher than that by which those who penned the volume of Truth were usually guided. They were heard from heaven by the beloved disciple, when in a vision, he was looking upon its glories. They were confirmed by the testimony of the Divine Spirit, emphatically given, consequently there is a peculiar charm and impressiveness connected with them; and it is not surprising that we often find ourselves repeating them when we are bending over the couch of the dying Christian, or standing by the grave of an eminent Saint. They assist greatly in reconciling us to the departure of the righteous, and awaken emotions of the deepest gratitude over the blessed lot of those who have left a world of trials and of labor, having devoted all their energies and their strength to the service of their Master. These words teach us that goodness as well as severity is made to appear in the movements of Divine providence; that, if we "die in the Lord" mercies are dispensed in the blow that closes our earthly existence. Promises are like the bow that spans the storm cloud. They teach us that peace will follow the derangements and agitations that break up the accustomed order of our lives.

The Revelator, before penning the words of my text, describes some of the trials, woes and sufferings that awaited the devoted followers of Christ, in the persecutions with which the church was soon to be visited. He drew a dark picture, which, it pleased God to relieve, by pointing to coming triumphs and future blessedness. It was seemingly his design, in that portion of the chapter which precedes the assurance of the blessedness of the pious dead, to relieve the anxieties of his faithful ones, and to sustain them when passing through the fiery storm.

In the vision, John was permitted to behold, he saw "The Lamb standing upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." "And he heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and he heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps; and they sang as it were a new song." And he also saw the vision of an angel flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and kindred and tongue and people. He saw another angel who proclaimed the glad tidings that Babylon, a mighty persecuting power, had fallen. A third angel followed, who announced the final overthrow and destruction of all in sympathy with, and upholding the great anti-christian power, represented by the beast, the power that was, "drunken with the blood of the saints." Then came the voice from heaven, saying, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Comforting, indeed, are these assuring words; they were necessary to sustain those who would be exposed to the violence of a martyr's death, or who should witness their friends removed by the rude

hand of the persecutor. Nor is the great blessing announced limited to those who are borne upward in a chariot of fire; it is the inheritance of all who "die in the Lord." They may be spared unto a good old age, as was our beloved sister; the tabernacle may be worn out in a peaceful service, and loving friends may minister at the bedside of dying saints, bestowing kind acts of affection as they accompany them almost to the gate of heaven. They are blessed. "They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." The voice from heaven, to which the apostle listened, and whose testimony he has recorded, affirmed that those who "die in the Lord are blessed." Wonderful is that grace, manifested in the redemptive work of Christ, which raises the dead to so exalted a condition. Death is co-existent with life; there is not a tree that grows, nor a bird that sings, nor a flower that blooms, nor a child that laughs, nor a man that toils, nor anything that lives, but it is doomed to die. Of Adam's race it is said, "Death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." It is when death extends his ravages to man that it rises into a curse; "for the sting of death is sin." We naturally dread the approach of death; it is because so much is connected with it that is sad. It severs us from those we tenderly love; it cuts off many fondly cherished hopes. And the grave looks cold, cheerless and uninviting as a place of rest. Hence, that system of religion is glorious that makes it desirable to depart and will lead the soul into possession of infinite blessedness, although the way thither conducts us through death's dark portals. Strange as it may appear to many persons, "the day of death is better than the day of one's birth."

But we ask first upon what condition may we receive the blessing announced in our text? We reply, that we "die in the Lord." But we still ask, What does this expression imply? First, it is evident that those who thus die are his friends, that they are closely united to him in the bonds of affection, and that their relations to him are of the most intimate character. It can also be said of them that they "walk with God," are in sympathy with him, "delighting in his commandments," and rendering him a cheerful obedience.

2. It is also implied that they possess the evidence of his love and favor. This could not be without a union with him, such that the spiritual life derives all its inspiration from that glorious source, and every hope of the soul centers in him. He who thus loves and walks and "abides in Christ," will bear him constantly in his thoughts. It is his language, "I accept him," that is Christ, "as my guide, my deliverer, my atoning God, who bore for me my sins upon the cross, and delivered me from their penalty; and since my life is spared to me, by him, I give to him that life again. I do truly believe we love each other; I, a speck, a particle, a mere beginning of something that is yet to be glorious when the warmth of God's bosom shall have been a summer for my growth; and he, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." When such an experience is attained, Christ will be very near to us every day, and every hour; and when death approaches, he is still nearer. The light of his love is brighter, his voice is more tender as he says, "Fear not, for I am with thee." His arm, in supporting us, is felt to be stronger. He accompanies us with a more sensible presence all the way through the clouds, the gloom and the dark billows of death, till we are seated at his side, and on his throne. It is thus that we "die in the Lord." And if we thus die, we are blessed; an assurance the apostle would impress on every Christian

heart. Henceforth, or from that time, all who should die in Christ, might know and fully understand that theirs would be a blessed future.

The expression that next follows in our text is, "Yea, saith the Spirit." He spoke in response to the voice that came from heaven, announcing that those who "die in the Lord are blessed." It was the Holy Spirit, the highest of all authority. By his command it was to be recorded for the encouragement of all who should suffer for Christ's sake; or who should believe on the name of the Son of God and keep his commandments. He not only confirmed the announcement already made, but specified, in part, the nature of the blessings the faithful ones should receive, "That they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Yes, rest follows both physical and spiritual labors. Man, on earth, is doomed to a life of toil. When the progenitors of the human family transgressed the Divine commandment they were driven from paradise into a world cursed with thorns and thistles; consequently a life of bodily toil was before them, and such has been the lot of all their posterity. Repose in the cool shade during the mid-day heat and refreshing sleep are peculiarly welcome to the laborer. Thus will be the rest of heaven when the toils of life are over. It is a promise we hail with delight, that points to freedom from toil, and to the absence of fatigue in our heavenly home. Yes, man can have within him, in spite of death, the elements of eternal hope; principles of truth so powerful, so bright, so cheering that he can tread the mazes of this life and the valley between time and eternity as if it were not visible, and see beyond the sun-lit peaks of the better land that sparkle in the rays of the sun of righteousness. However great may be our desire to rest from physical labor it will be more joyful when we are released from spiritual conflicts. They are necessarily frequent and severe while we tabernacle in the flesh. The soul requires special culture and a watchfulness that are sometimes wearisome. Its enemies surround us, seeking opportunities to sow the seeds of rebellion in the heart, striving to awaken lusts and passions, and laboring to prevent the growth and spiritual increase we desire. They watch for some opportune moment or unregarded avenue to the heart, that they may enter in and lead it astray. There are also inward corruptions that strive for the mastery, necessitating conflicts that are long and severe. They compose, in part, those tribulations through which we are raised to a higher life and are ripened for the employments of the saints before the throne. Both spirit and body are weary here in spiritual conflicts. O, how much before, with the faithful apostle, we can truthfully say, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith; I have finished my course." Besides these inward conflicts and strife for the mastery to which we have referred, abundant labors are appointed us as servants in the vineyard of the Master. They embrace all the kind and sympathizing acts a self-denying love would impart; the warm and tender appeals we utter, earnest prayer, and special, constant and persevering efforts put forth to secure the salvation of men. The faithful laborer will be opposed at almost every step. He will encounter great obstacles, and will sometimes turn back from the hardened unbeliever with a sad and bleeding heart. Gathering new strength, he will return to the conflict, perhaps victorious, perhaps to find himself again delayed, that the "trials of his faith" may be made to appear. Nor will such employment cease till he obtains the victor's crown.

2. From how much then does he rest who "dies in the Lord?" He rests from bodily toil; no more will

he be overborne and weighed down with fatigue; no more will he lie down on a bed of agony and suffering; no longer will he be conscious that he possesses a diseased and weakened frame. The fountain of tears will not be unsealed again. Affliction will not again wring his heart with anguish. He will mourn no more because of the infirmities of his nature and wanderings from him "whom his soul loveth." He will not any more meet the skeptic and the scoffer. He will not go to the enemy of his Savior and hear his best friend spoken against. He will not be pained in seeing his neighbor pressing onward, resisting all his entreaties and warnings, down to the gates of death eternal. His rest will be perfect. He will cease from all conflicts, and will repose upon the bosom of infinite love. When the Christian comes to die, the summons is not "Go down into the grave, but come up to God the Father." Thanks be unto God for the "rest of faith," which, as Christians, we now enjoy; but ten thousand thanks to God for the rest we shall enjoy when freed from earth. There are no weary heads and hearts on the other side of the river. The value of eternal rest will be enhanced by the troubles of time; the rest of heaven will be all the sweeter for the toils and sorrows of earth. Rest from sin, rest from conflict; the very rest that Jesus enjoys. We shall not only be like him, but we shall be with him. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, they rest from their labors and their works do follow them." The abode of the saints will be adapted to that rest. It will be a home of joy and peace. It is made known to us under the figure of a city with pearly gates and golden streets; there flows the river of the water of life in gladdening streams, and on its banks is the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. The shades of night will never gather there. Blissful will be the employments of the redeemed. They will praise God and adore him with their glad songs. You are conscious that earthly pleasures are refreshing after the toils and fatigues of the day; but no comparison can be drawn between them and those joys that thrill the soul in paradise. Happy will they be who are borne to those peaceful shores where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

3. The fact of especial interest which constitutes, in part, the blessedness of the saints is, "Their works do follow them." This is a blessing for which we should be exceedingly grateful. It meets a want in the soul, a yearning desire that could in no other way be realized. When the Christian dies he drops out, as it were, from the company of laborers in the earthly vineyard. But his works are immortal, they live and continue to produce grand results. When he is languishing on his pillow, and is passing away, the activities of the business world are not lessened; all things seem to move on as though he was not called by his Master; when his body is borne to the place of burial the streets may be thronged with those engaged in their usual employments; perhaps the sound of the hammer and the voice of the merchant are heard. Every one except the group of bereaved friends and sympathizing neighbors performing the last sad acts of kindness and respect, are intent on fulfilling their own cherished purposes of life. But God has so appointed that works will follow. This is a comforting assurance, and aids us in our submission to Providences that seem strange and mysterious. The faith of the early martyr, Abel, lives. "Though dead he yet speaketh." The faith of Abraham lives, inspiring confidence in a thousand hearts, and strengthening their implicit obedience. Thus it is with every child of God. He is a starting point, a source of influence that is widening and will continue to honor him as long as time

shall endure. The thought is an interesting one, that the results of Christian labor are greater after one's departure from this world, than his after life, if we may so express it, is the most useful. The cedar is the most useful when dead. It is the most productive of good when its place knows it no more. There is no timber like it, firm in the grain and susceptible of the finest polish, the tooth of no insect will touch it, and time itself can hardly destroy it; diffusing a perpetual fragrance through the chambers which it coils, the worm will not corrode the book it protects, nor the moth corrupt the garment it guards. All but immortal in itself, it transposes its amaranthine qualities to the objects around it.

In conclusion, every Christian is useful in his life, but those we may term goodly cedars are the most useful afterwards. Luther is dead, but the Reformation lives; Campbell is dead, but his vindication of a pure Gospel will never die; Knox is no more, but Scotland still retains the Lord's day, a Christian peasantry and a Bible in every family; Bunyan is gone, but his bright spirit walks the earth in his "Pilgrim's Progress;" Baxter sleeps in his narrow home, but the "Saint's Rest" still quickens the soul of thousands on earth; Robert Raikes closed his earthly labors long ago, but Sunday schools march on in their heaven-honored mission; Cowper is dead, but he lives in those majestic words, "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonder to perform." And like results follow the labors of the sainted dead in all ages. All may not be as prominent or conspicuous as the examples quoted; for their sphere of influence may have been narrower, but none the less certain. It is a law experience has clearly proved that the fruits of their labors are perfected and become greatest after they are in their graves. Blessed thought, though we must die, that we can continue to exert an influence that shall mould character and sanctify hearts that will bear with love to God in all coming times. Stars will shine in our crown when we arrive at the gate of heaven, and they will increase in number as time rolls on, and successive generations will be sanctified and saved through the blood of Christ.

But, before we close this sermon, it is important that we understand clearly the items or essentials that make up the influence that is there set in motion.

The first is personal example. It is first seen under the teaching of the Gospel of Christ in a thoughtful and rational decision to give to Christ the heart, the whole life, and the energies of the spirit and body. The example becomes more potent as that purpose is carried out. Every duty should be taken up in Gospel order; having heard of, and believed in Christ as the Christ and Savior, and having exercised repentance toward God for past sins committed against him, then follows "being baptized into Christ," when the precious result of obedience is realized, namely, pardon, joy and peace in believing. Membership in some congregation is secured, the vows of God are taken, and a subsequent life of constant and cheerful obedience to his word are regarded first and greatest. The conviction on the minds of men is unavoidable that such a person is a true and faithful child of heaven. There is power in his or her example.

2. Prayer is another element of moral power exercised by him who is "blessed in his death." You will find him with the people of God praying for the prosperity of Zion. The family altar is not wanting in sacrifices. The closet is regularly and constantly visited, where he "wrestles with the angel of the covenant."

3. Active labors, in harmony with the spirit and example of the Great Teacher are put forth. Not only does

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