

S E R M O N

ON THE DEATH OF

MRS. MARY TAYLOR JENKINS.

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A FUNERAL SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. MARY TAYLOR JENKINS,

PREACHED JANUARY, 1860,

IN THE

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“For here have we no continuing city; but we seek one to come.”—
HEBREWS 13 : 14.

THE Apostle presses on our attention in the context two of the most important facts which are made known to us in the Gospel. The one is, that Jesus Christ the Son of God offered himself on the Cross an expiatory sacrifice for our sins; the other is, that having risen from the dead, he entered into heaven as the High Priest and Forerunner of his followers, to plead the merits of his death for their salvation and to prepare a place for their abode with him there. He has thus laid us under the strongest obligation to love and serve him, since he has set open for us the only way in which we can return to God and find peace. In addition to these considerations he adds another in our text to induce us to devote ourselves cordially to Christ, derived from the shortness of life and the instability and uncertainty of earthly possessions, “for here have we no continuing city; but we seek one to come.”

Our text contains :

I. An assertion applicable to all men : they here have no continuing city.

II An important description of the followers of Christ: they seek a city to come.

I. The Apostle reminds us that "here we have no abiding city." All our earthly possessions are uncertain and perishing, and our lives will soon end.

Nothing is better fitted to teach us the instability of human grandeur and the weakness of human power than the contemplation of the ruin of cities that once astonished mankind by their vastness and magnificence. They were planned by men of the most capacious intellects; and the skill of the most accomplished architects, the toils of thousands and of tens of thousands of workmen and the wealth of mighty empires were all combined and exhausted in their building. Palaces, and temples, theatres and monuments rose in strength and grandeur in the midst of these cities, which were crowded with myriads of inhabitants and encompassed with massive, and, to human imagination, imperishable walls. In the height of his power and the pride of his heart, Nebuchadnezzar, elated by the splendors of his palace and the extent of his empire, exclaimed: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" But where is Babylon now? Where are Nineveh, and Tyre, and Palmyra, and other mighty cities that, by their vast extent, and strength, and wealth, once seemed to bid defiance to every foe? Their glory has long since departed. While the ruins of some of them fill with astonishment the passing traveller by their magnitude and number, of others even the spot on which they stood is unknown.

The history of no other city is more interesting than that of Jerusalem, to which the Apostle directly refers in the portion of Scripture before us. To the Christian

Hebrew it was endeared by ten thousand recollections and associations. It was the metropolis of his nation; the place which Jehovah himself had selected for the seat of his temple; in which, as in his palace, he had dwelt as the Ruler and God of his people Israel. It had been adorned with all that was great, and endeared by all that was venerable and sacred, with the trophies of King David's conquests and the splendors of King Solomon's riches. Here David's enraptured Psalms had been chanted for ages in the temple's service, and here inspired prophets, invested with the grandeur and authority of an immediate commission from God himself, had uttered their predictions and thundered their warnings. Could this city, so sacred and so honored by Heaven, be destroyed? Alas! to all its other crimes it had added that of rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, and the storm of vengeance was already thickening and gathering around it. The Apostle warns his brethren that its destruction was close at hand, that they would soon be driven from their country and become wanderers over the whole earth. Then indeed they would have here no continuing city, and it therefore became them to seek with greater diligence and earnestness an abiding home in heaven.

If the decay and the destruction of cities even the greatest reminds us of the vanity of earthly possessions and grandeur, the scattered condition of their inhabitants also reminds us of the instability and uncertainty of each man's personal dwelling-place and condition. The great majority of men leave the home of their fathers and often change from one abode to another, while but few live and die in the house in which they were born. Constant changes occur, too, in our condition and circumstances. Many who were born in obscurity and

poverty rise to distinction and wealth, and many who, by their birth, were entitled to high rank and wealth, sink into obscurity and poverty. Some enjoy uninterrupted health of body and vigor of mind, and live the possession of almost every earthly good, while others languish in sickness and pain, or are crushed by overwhelming calamities, or pine away and die through want.

The Apostle moreover admonishes us in our text of the sure and speedy termination of our present abode on earth and of our last great change to the other world by death. Some have supposed that God never intended this world for the permanent abode of men even if they had not sinned, and that instead of dying they would each of them, at their appointed time, like Enoch and Elijah, have been translated to heaven. They assign as the reason for this belief, that if men should have increased in numbers as rapidly as they do now, and if none of them should have died or have been translated, they would long since have become too numerous for the world to hold them. However this might have been, certain it is that "death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." No age, no rank is spared. The new-born babe and the hoary head, youth in its freshness and vigor, and manhood in the pride and strength of its maturity; the rich and the poor, the prince and the beggar, the learned and the ignorant, the wise and the fool, the saint and the sinner, are all indiscriminately cut down by the remorseless scythe of death.

Nor is this all. The solid globe itself is hastening to its end; for we are told that "the heavens and the earth which are now kept in store are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment." In that day "the

heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." The sin of man has polluted and infected this whole lower world. From this pollution it will be purified; this infection will be removed by the fires of the last great day; and then, from its renovated mass, "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," will be formed.

The certainty of the decay and final dissolution of all earthly things shows the unfitness of the world to give real and permanent happiness to man, since he is immortal and so destined to exist through immeasurable ages after it has perished. A world limited as to the amount and degree of the bliss it can give, and as to the time of its existence, can not satisfy the desires or the wants of a creature whose capacities for enjoyment are boundless and whose existence is endless. When the earth and all its joys are gone, man will have just begun his career of endless existence. If then this world is the whole of his bliss, how fearful will be his loss! how bitter his disappointment! But none of us shall live till the world shall end. When a few days more have passed away, the hand of death will be upon us, and we shall be called to the world of spirits. If we have no home, no resting-place there, if we have forsaken God, grieved the Holy Spirit, and neglected our souls, wretched indeed will be our condition and prospects for eternity. It was to save us from such delusion and wickedness that the Son of God assumed our nature, dwelt on our earth, and died on the cross. He delivers all who truly believe in him from the love of this present evil world, and by renewing them in the spirit of their mind, he enables them to fix their su-

preme affections on heaven and makes them meet to dwell there. Hence we observe,

II. It is characteristic of the true disciples of Christ that they seek a city to come—that is, an eternal abode with him in heaven.

The facts that Christ, as the Son of God, existed from eternity; that in the fullness of the time he came down from heaven to earth and dwelt among us; that he visibly returned again to it; that agreeably to his promise he sent, a few days after his ascension, the Holy Spirit to dwell in his disciples and qualify them for the work to which he had appointed them, and the promise which he has given that he will return again at the end of the world and take to heaven all his true followers, give to them the fullest assurance of the reality of heaven. “Where it is, and what it is?” are questions which are more easily asked than answered. If the mysteries and the glories of redemption are so great as to exceed the understanding of the wisest of men till God enlightens them by his word and Spirit, much more do the blessings and the glories of heaven exceed the power of the mightiest intellects even to imagine them. We know not where it is, and but little of what it is, for we are told that “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” We know that it is the abode of the spirits of just men made perfect who have entered on a new mode of existence and of employment, and associate with beings who, in power and dignity, and intellectual and moral elevation, are far superior to any of the dwellers on our earth. To give to us, however, the best idea which we can now form of it, God has condescended to represent it to us by earthly images drawn from what we now know. It is a city, but it is far superior to any city that has ever been built on

earth. Its inhabitants are free from every imperfection and evil, and throughout its whole extent there is no sin, no curse, no toil, no hunger, no thirst, no pain, no sickness, and no death; no lamentations are heard, no tears are shed, and no graves are dug. All among them is holy and lovely; all is life, and peace, and bliss. They are exalted to be kings and priests unto God, and are adorned with white robes and crowns of life. They possess exhaustless treasures. They are entertained as with royal nuptial feasts, and songs of rejoicing and praise are continually heard among them. They dwell in the paradise of God, where the tree of life ever flourishes and the waters of life ever flow. It is thus by collecting in our imaginations all on earth that is good, or great, or lovely, or holy, or glorious, and all that possesses superior excellence, and combining them all in an inseparable union and ascribing to them a perfect and endless existence, that we form the best idea that we can of heaven. Still we are compelled to say: "This is not all: this is not heaven. Heaven is more than this; its realities exceed our power even to imagine."

The Apostle represents it in our text as an eternally abiding city. Cities are the centres of earthly grandeur, the abode of monarchs and nobles, of the learned, the rich, and the gay, where are collected all that awakens the ambition and desires of men; and, therefore, to give us a faint conception of heaven, it is called a city. But to show its vast superiority over every earthly city, we are told that "its builder and maker is God." Earthly cities are built by men, and are of earthly and perishable materials which God has provided for them, which they can only shape and arrange anew, which can be easily overthrown and destroyed

by violence, or will certainly decay and perish by time. How different the heavenly city! That is preserved by that almighty power which upholds the universe. No lapse of time, no attacks of foes, no internal principles of decay, no outward violence can affect it. It is the abode of God, and will endure as long as he endures.

The glory or the beauty of no earthly city can compare with it. The Apostle John informs us that in his visions "in the isle that is called Patmos he saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven," and that it was built of the most costly materials and furnished with the highest delights. Its foundation, its walls, and its gates were composed of such costly stones as are most highly valued by the rich and the great, and which glitter as their brightest ornaments in the crowns of kings, such as the jasper, the sapphire, the chalcedony, the emerald, the pearl, the topaz, and others equally precious, while the city itself was "of pure gold like unto glass." Under these symbolical representations God condescends to convey to us some feeble conceptions of the glory and the stability of heaven.

That which gives to it its highest glory is, that it is the place of God's special abode, the metropolis of the universe where he dwells in his palace amid the hosts of holy angels and of redeemed men, and gives to them the highest exhibitions of his infinite perfections. Immense in his being, he is every where present. But he does not every where give the same or equally striking exhibitions of his presence or perfections. These are seen in the insect of a day, but not as they are seen in a man or an angel. They are seen, too, under varied aspects, all of which are designed to awaken within us

varied feelings of love and gratitude, or of veneration and awe, or of fear. They are seen in the loveliness of the landscape, in the balmy fragrance of the morning, and in the splendors of the noon-tide glory of the unclouded sun when "all nature is beauty to the eye and music to the ear." They are also seen in the majesty and terrors of the tempest, in the rapid flash of the lightning, in the terrific crash of the thunder, and in the fury and desolations of the whirlwind and the tornado. God thus gives to us proofs of his presence and perfections sufficient to make us know that he is "great and glorious"—greatly to be feared as well as to be adored and loved.

But he gives us no such exhibitions of himself as he makes in heaven; and it is a striking intimation of his displeasure with our race that he has withdrawn wholly from our view and from direct intercourse with us; nor can any, even the most devout and pious, have immediate access to him. The holy patriarch Job, though "there was none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil," bitterly lamented this exclusion from him. Under the pressure of his sufferings he exclaimed: "Oh! that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat. I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments. . . . Behold I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I can not perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I can not behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I can not see him." This distance, this separation from God exists not in heaven. There they "see him face to face," and hence, in the language of Scripture, to see God means to be with him in heaven. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall

see God." They behold him there by direct intuition, for they are admitted into the most sacred recesses of his temple without any interposing vail to forbid their approach. They have access into the audience-chamber of his palace and see him, the great King of the universe, on his throne arrayed in robes of light and glory, and yet condescending to own and bless them as his children. Often during their abode here on earth the consciousness of their many imperfections and sins caused them distressing fears lest they should never see his face in peace. All these fears are now dispelled. They rejoice in him as "the God of salvation" who guided and guarded them till he brought them safe to their eternal home.

They there dwell with Christ and behold his glory. While they were here, not having seen him, they loved him; but they had no adequate conception of his glory in heaven. There they see him in the glory of his person as "the Mediator between God and man," the Son of God and the Son of man, one with the Father and yet dwelling in the man Christ Jesus, uniting the divine and human natures in one person. Of his glorious appearance in heaven he gave a slight exhibition in his transfiguration on Mount Tabor, when "his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light." The beloved disciple John, too, who was favored with close and intimate friendship with him during the days of his humiliation, and who lay in his bosom when he instituted his last supper, in the visions which he had in the isle of Patmos, saw his glory in his state of exaltation in heaven; but he tells us that "when he saw him he fell at his feet as dead." The spirits of the redeemed in heaven continually see him in this his glorious state sitting at the right hand of

his Father, exalted to supreme dominion over all things, adored by angels and feared by devils.

In his intercessory prayer just before his crucifixion, Christ said : " Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." To this prayer the hearts of all who truly believe in him respond with deep emotion. They know that there they shall not only be with him, but like him, free from sin and all the ills which it has brought upon us, and perfectly and eternally holy and happy.

Such is the condition, such are the desires and prospects of sincere Christians. They seek a city to come.

We now proceed to consider :

III. How they seek this city.

1. They seek it under the influence and guidance of faith, relying with humble but firm confidence on the promises of God. The Apostle describes this faith as " the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is the strong persuasion of the truth of what God has revealed to us concerning future and eternal things, accompanied with a vivid apprehension of the deep interest which we have in them and the good hope that we shall attain eternal life in heaven. This faith is the gift of God. It is the first act of a renewed and sanctified mind, and it must be sought for by the habitual and devout reading of the Holy Scriptures and fervent prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Where it exists it produces so deep a conviction of the infinite importance of our obtaining peace here and an abode hereafter with God as makes all earthly pursuits, and possessions, and pleasures vain and contemptible in the comparison. The Apostle

describing its actings and its efficacy, says: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens."

This faith exerts a powerful influence over the temper, the actions and the whole life of him who possesses it. It receives and rests on the Sacred Scriptures as given to us by inspiration of God, assenting to its doctrines, obeying its commands, fearing its threatenings, and rejoicing in its promises as addressed to us by God himself.

2. The immediate effect of this faith is a life of holy obedience, for it is only by walking in the paths of righteousness that we can reach the heavenly city. We are commanded to "follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Repentance and faith are inseparably connected. This repentance, however, is not simply the remorse of a troubled conscience nor mere reformation of conduct. It is such a sense of the evil of sin and hatred of it as an offense against God, together with such an apprehension of his mercy and grace in Christ as causes us to turn to him with full purpose of heart to love and obey him all our days.

Hope, too, is the companion of faith, and the hope of a sincere Christian is that he shall be with and like God. But we are told that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

While he relies wholly on the merits of Christ for obtaining the forgiveness of his sins and eternal salvation, he feels the strength of his obligation to love and obey God not only because he is his Creator, and Preserver, and Benefactor, but especially because of his infinite compassion and grace in giving his only begotten Son to die for him. Redeemed from death and hell by the blood of Christ, he acknowledges that he "is not his own," that "he is bought with a price," and should therefore "glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are God's." He now takes the law of God as the rule of his life. He delights in it as holy, and wise, and good, and just, and obeys it from the heart. His obedience, however, though sincere, is imperfect, and he grieves and is self-abased because of his sinful infirmities and short-comings. These compel him to relinquish all dependence on his own righteousness for justifying him before God and teach him to rely wholly on the merits of Christ. He feels, too, his need of the assistance and grace of Christ, and in reliance on these he endeavors to follow him in his obedience to all the commandments of God and to imitate his purity, his humility, his self-denial, his love to truth, his temperance, and meekness, and active benevolence, and heavenly-mindedness.

3. The love of God rules in him, and this is ever accompanied with love to man; and it is by cherishing and exhibiting these that he seeks a city to come. The Apostle declares this love to be the greatest of the Christian graces. He says: "Now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three; but the greatest of these is charity." We lost the love of God by the sin and fall of the first man Adam, in whom we all sinned and fell, and we recover it only through the mercy and grace of

Christ, the second Adam, who, by the merits of his death and the power of the Holy Spirit, restores to us the knowledge and true holiness, that image and likeness of God in which man was at first created. The Apostle specifies as one of the effects of our being justified by faith in Christ that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This love constitutes the very essence of obedience, for the Apostle declares that "love is the fulfilling of the law." To him in whose heart it dwells, the chief attraction of heaven is, that he shall there be with and like God; that he shall see him in his glory, and serve him with all his powers, and bask in the full sunshine of his favor. He cherishes while he is here on the way to the heavenly city the habitual remembrance of him and desire to obey and please him. He delights to meditate on his infinite perfections and to offer to him his humble worship. He trusts in his mercy and grace; he loves the Sabbath and all the ordinances of worship, and looks forward with hope and joy in the anticipation of joining in the worship which is offered in heaven.

It was in the faith of Christ as her Redeemer that our departed Christian sister, MARY TAYLOR JENKINS, lived and died. She was admitted on the confession of her faith to the full communion of the First Reformed Dutch Church of the city of New-Brunswick, in the year 1822, and to the day of her death adorned her profession by a consistent walk and conversation. It falls to the lot of but few to perform splendid actions that draw the attention and awaken the applauses of the world; nor is it thus that the great mass of his followers are called to glorify Christ. They have their conflicts with temptation and sin, and they have their

victories, which are known only to themselves and to God. It is by a silent, unostentatious performance of daily duties, by subduing unholy passions, and by cherishing Christian graces and intercourse with God in the duties of daily devotion that they give the best evidence of the sincerity of their profession. It was thus with our departed friend. Her life was retired from the observation of the world; but it was adorned by the exhibition of that Christian temper and conduct which showed that she held intercourse with God in the duties of daily private devotion. Convinced that, in common with the whole race, she was a fallen and sinful creature, she renounced all dependence on her own good works as entitling her to heaven, and sought all her salvation out of herself in Christ. Him she loved and obeyed. To him she committed her all for eternity, and from him she drew every hope of her salvation. I am informed that her favorite hymn, which she frequently repeated, was that which begins with the words, "Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly." Death came upon her unexpectedly, and her disease prevented her conversing with her friends in her last hours. But though dead, she yet speaketh, and her past life should awaken in her children grateful remembrances and lead them to follow her as she followed Christ. She, we trust, has entered that abiding city which she sought, and we humbly implore the blessing of God upon you, that you may meet and dwell with her there.

If we would reach that heavenly city we must seek it with all our hearts and make the attainment of it the great object of our lives, and by "a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honor, and immortality." Thus shall we be able to meet death

without fear. He will come to us as an angel of mercy sent to call us to our home, and the grave will be our pathway to the city of God. The true follower of Christ rejoices in God as the fountain of life and bliss and of all that can adorn and elevate an intelligent and immortal creature. He contemplates with delight his infinite perfections, his universal presence and supreme dominion over all; and with his whole heart he responds to the exclamation of the Psalmist: "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." At times he gives wings to his imagination and enters the heavenly city and sees God in his temple and on his throne; and while he gazes with awe and rapture on his glory, he joins the Seraphim in their worship, and in lowly adoration responds to their cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." At such seasons he has transient glimpses of the heavenly city and sweet foretastes of its bliss as the pledge that God is guiding him to it as his abiding home and rest.

