

FINAL VICTORY

A SERMON

Preached on the occasion of the death of the late Mister JAMES
CARR,

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by Mister JAMES WELLS

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“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21

THE apostle Paul had been favored with such abundant revelations of the love of God, of the counsel of God, of the person of Christ, and of that glory into which he had entered, that the apostle could, and did, with greater advantage than we can do, contrast the two states of existence; and in contrasting the two states he felt himself, as he here expresses it, “in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.” And then comes out one of the most generous sentiments that a man could hold, namely, that much better as it was for him personally, as far as his own happiness was concerned, to depart and be with Christ; painful as his lot was in this world, bonds and afflictions abiding him in every city, in every place; yet he had a desire, notwithstanding this, simply on behalf of the people, to continue a little longer in the flesh, for the good of their never-dying souls, the advancement of God's blessed truth, and the glory of his great name. And mark how beautifully he here describes that which enabled him to look death in the face without a fear. “For to me to live is Christ.” He knew what Jesus Christ was; therefore, wrapped up in the Savior, and fully satisfied of what he had done, he could thereby look forward and see that death was only a shadow.

I will this evening not be guided quite so much by the order and even language of the text as by the circumstance, the solemn circumstance under which we are placed. I will, in the first place, set before you *some of the characteristics of death, together with the remedy*, which I think will somewhat open up what is meant by death being gain. Secondly, I will notice *the state in which our departed brother died, together with that providence by which he came amongst us*. And then, thirdly, if time should permit, I will notice *the first part of our text as it relates to ourselves*, namely, “To me to live is Christ;” for if we are not living this kind of life now, we shall certainly not die the kind of death that is here described. For you will at once perceive that our text can be true only of the Christian; it cannot be applied to the ungodly man.

First, then, I will set before you *some of the characteristics of death, together with the remedy*. The Lord said to Adam, “in the day you eat thereof you shall surely die;” and because Adam did not then die literally, some have thought that this was not at that time executed. But if you will read the Scriptures carefully upon that question, you will see that the threatening was executed; for you read that we are by nature dead in trespasses and in sins. It is, therefore, a spiritual death. Adam sinned, and that sin corrupted the holiness, the righteousness, the integrity, the goodness, and the uprightness, in which he was created. And this is a very important matter for us to understand, that death was by sin. It is sin entering into the world that has done all the mischief. Where in this department is the remedy? The apostle beautifully sets it forth; for he says that “as by one man’s disobedience many were sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous;” and that where sin has abounded in the sinner, grace, by Christ’s obedience, shall much more abound. So that where the Lord becomes the teacher of a man, he shows that his origin is thus corrupt; and that he needs the Lord Jesus Christ as the remedy there. So then, sin has by the fall reigned unto death, even to eternal death, eternal banishment from God’s presence. Sin has done so virtually and will do so actually with those that live and die in the state they are in by nature. But then, if brought thus to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and to experience that transition from the first Adam unto the last, then that spiritual death by which we are thus dead in trespasses and in sins passes away. The apostle Peter, with no doubt great pleasure, says of those who are called by grace that, “You are born again of an incorruptible seed by the Word of God, that lives and abides forever.” This then, is one aspect of death, by which we are thus dead in trespasses and in sins; by which we are thus far off from God, and by which we are “without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Then the apostle brings in the remedy. “But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.” And then, secondly, not only is death spiritual as well as physical and ultimate by sin, but death is also the wages of sin. “The wages of sin is death.” The sin is represented as a master, and there are the wages which he pays. So that here you have the law of labor entirely reversed. Men, generally speaking, look to the wages as their consolation and their pleasure; but here, in this matter, alas, alas! The pleasure lies in obeying sin, in obeying Satan; the pleasure lies here, and then comes the dreadful wages which sin pays, that “the wages of sin is death;” not only death to the body, but the second death. “Depart from me, you cursed;” so that there is an end then to all hope, like the man that lifted up his eyes in hell. Terrible, then, more terrible than we can describe, is the wages of sin. Ah, let this be seen, and let the testimonies of God be like arrows, enter into a man’s conscience, and convince him of this; why, it will make him what Job describes when he says, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit;” and again David, says, “A fire burns in my bones.” He felt what a poor, lost, ruined creature he was. “The wages of sin.” What is to be done? And you read that not one jot nor tittle of God’s law shall fall. Now do not misunderstand God’s law. What is it? God’s Law, as I said this afternoon, does not mean merely the ten commandments; God’s law means all the threatening’s of the Bible from first to last. Some of you, perhaps, read those threatening’s, and say, “Well, I cannot see that they have been fulfilled, and I should think they would not”, so you wrap it up, so you pass it off, and think the Judge of all, the God of infallible truth, is like yourself. But let me tell you that there is not a threatening in the Bible that shall not be fulfilled. Even those that have been fulfilled temporally have yet to be fulfilled eternally. And when you discover this, you will say, Where is the remedy for this department? Presently you begin to ask, What did Jesus Christ do in dying? Why, he took the wages of sin, whatever sin had entailed; he took that cup of bitterness; he met the avenging sword. He said, in

the 42nd Psalm, "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your water-spouts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me." And Jesus Christ was made sin, was made a curse, that is, the curse was laid upon him, and he has borne the curse away. Ah, you will begin to read the 53rd of Isaiah, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way;" and then comes the testimony that "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," and you begin to enter a little into the language of John, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." Oh, you will say, here I can see how I have gained by the fall of man, how I have gained by that death, for if I receive Jesus Christ as the last Adam, if I receive him as my eternal life in contrast to the death I have in the first Adam, there I gain infinitely and eternally. Even that death, or that department of death, is gain. Then when I come to the solemn fact that the wages of sin is death, and Jesus Christ has endured the curse and taken that curse away, by him the Lord blesses us with victory, and enables us to say, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks, be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." You say, I shall gain by this also. See what a victory we gain here see what a standing and what a glory we gain here. Hence it is said, "You shall not see evil anymore." And when you are led to see what Jesus Christ has suffered, you will stand amazed at the clear light that will come into your understanding, for he is the light, and the Savior said, "He that follows me shall not abide in darkness." Hence you will realize in your own soul the fulfilment of that scripture in Isaiah, "the light of the moon", descriptive of the progression of gospel light in the souls of those that are thus taught of God, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun." Now that does not mean the moon or sun literally; it is figurative language to denote the progression of light unto perfection. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days" denoting completeness, "when the Lord shall make up the breach of his people, and when he shall heal the stroke of their wound." Frightful is the wound, the eternal wound, that sin has made, wounding the soul, and wounding us unto eternal perdition. But Jesus Christ has made up the breach, healed the wound. And when you are brought to realize a little of the blessedness of it, and you will indeed say, with one of old "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving-kindness's and tender mercies; who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." So, then, to die is gain, because by death we gain full and eternal possession of all these things. But again, not only is death by sin and for sin, but death also is an enemy; it is called an enemy, the last enemy. Those of you that know not what it is to be born of God, that doctrine of the Bible has never sunk down deep into your mind; you have never trembled lest you should not be found among the spiritually living; you have never cried for mercy; no, you go on contented from time to time as long as your bodily needs are supplied, and you are comfortable in your circumstances. So, you go sleeping on. What a fearful enemy death is to you! What will you have left when that thief comes? for death will come as a thief, rob you of everything. You sink into hell, cannot carry a farthing with you, cannot carry a drop of water with you, cannot carry a morsel of bread with you. We brought nothing into this world, we can carry nothing out. Oh, you may well be afraid to die! You may well send for your medical man every time you are a little out of order; you may well read the advertisements and be anxious from time to time to know which of all these advertisements contains a medicine that will put you right. Ah, you may well do so, for your state is frightful beyond all description. And yet, alas, alas! you are not seeking the right remedy; no, you are going, as I have said, sleeping on. So that death to you,

if it finds you as you are, what a frightful enemy it will be! It will not listen to your cries, nor to your tears, nor to your sighs, nor to your groans. It will pay no attention to your friends, your wife, your husband, your brothers, your sisters, your parents, your children, whoever they may be that may weep over you. Death comes in this merciless form, cuts you down, and it says, "Return, you children of men unto destruction." "Dust you are, and unto dust you shall you return." What a frightful enemy! But with you that is not all. Death is not the last enemy with such. No, there is another enemy and that is Satan. Satan beyond death is a greater enemy than he is on this side of death or in death. Here Satan acts as a serpent to beguile you, but there, in hell, he roars and reigns as a dragon over those that have lived and died in his service. And then again hell; that is before you. So that death is indeed an enemy to the unbeliever. But to the real Christian this frightful monster is tuned into a friend. Oh, how great the revolution the dear Savior has brought about in swallowing up death in victory. Here is the Christian; when he comes to die, this enemy, death, is to him a friend. Now death does these four things for the Christian: First it releases him certainly from all his personal infirmities and troubles, and in the place of these infirmities and troubles is substituted the presence of the Lord, for "absent from the body, present with the Lord;" secondly, while death takes away our, natural endearments, because the Christian in dying does not always feel easy at the thought of parting with those that he loves, there is sometimes at the very last moment a great clinging to life. Yet as soon as ever the soul leaves the body, that instant, in a moment like the change at the last day, which those that are alive shall undergo, endearments are put into the place of these natural endearments, endearments that surpass the natural as far as the Creator surpasses the creature, as far as the last Adam surpasses the first Adam, as far as the love of God surpasses the love of man. "If you, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" Here, then, death to the Christian is thus a friend. But no thanks to sin, no thanks to death, no thanks to Satan, no, no; these are all enemies. Let us place the crown upon the Savior's head. He it is that has changed the scene, he it is that has turned the tide, he it is that has held these winds in his fists and makes them subservient to our eternal welfare. And then the next thing that death does to the Christian is that it enables him to see that all the dealings of the Lord with him have been right. I will not go very far into this question, especially on a solemn occasion like this, because it has been my lot a considerable number of times to be misunderstood, and I wish therefore to speak clearly. I say this that when the soul enters heaven, and knows even as it is known, it can look back then and see that everything is right, that God has done everything right, that there was a purpose of mercy in everything that he permitted, in everything that he suffered. Now you all know that, according to the account of some, we ought to have had a very different Bible from what we have. But God has given us the Bible, and he has given us that book according to his own infinite wisdom; and therefore, the fault lies not in the book nor in its Author, but the fault lies with us in stumbling at some of the things recorded therein. Oh, how many things now, upon mere remembrance, make us weep; how many things now, upon mere remembrance, make us unhappy; how many things, upon mere recollection, now make us gloomy? But not so then, when the soul enters heaven. Ah, you may reflect then upon all that you befell, and sing:

"I know in all that me befell,
My Jesus has done all things well."

And then the last thing I here name of death is that it brings the soul into perfect satisfaction. "I shall be satisfied" though David speaks of the time of the resurrection but let us apply the words

here to the soul in heaven, “when I awake with your likeness;” for the soul does enter heaven by the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of Christ, and by the word of Christ, and enters into perfect satisfaction. So that, if our departed brother could return, he would have no desire to do so; he is satisfied with the past, he is satisfied with the present, he is satisfied with the future, satisfied with it all. As the Savior sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied, so is everyone there eternally satisfied, eternally happy. One more word upon death, and it is this, that it is called with the saints of God “falling asleep.” And if our departed brother could have foreseen, which of course he could not, how the Lord would be with him in his departing hour, he never would have had a single care in a way of distress or anxiety at the thought of departing. It was simply falling asleep. The apostle says, “Some are fallen asleep.” It is a very beautiful representation. But I shall just make a remark or two upon this. Now you know that many of our fellow-creatures, who know not the Lord, are very fond of evening pleasures, some one thing and some another. But these evening pleasures, drink, and various things, they bring generally a very gloomy morning. And therefore, those who are blessed with self-denial, and who can content themselves to spend a solemn, careful, rather dull evening, they generally feel all the better for it in the morning. Now let me apply this, in the most solemn way. Let us call our mortal life the evening; let us call the resurrection day the morning. And every wise man says overnight, how will it be with me in the morning? What sort of a morning will it be? So, with us, if we are blessed with sober mindedness; What sort of a morning will it be with me at the resurrection? What sort of a life am I now living? Am I now living a life of faith upon the Son of God? Am I mourning, and weeping, and sighing, because the Lord so much hides his face? While the world is rejoicing, and going on with its paltry pleasures, do I feel my need of something better, and that I would rather weep now and laugh hereafter than laugh now and weep hereafter; that I would rather hunger now and be filled hereafter, then be full now and hunger hereafter; that I would rather thirst now than be satisfied with the pleasures of this world, and have the thirst of hell when time shall be no more! Each sober-minded man will say, How will it be with me at that tremendous day when the globe itself shall be burned, when the Savior shall descend in flaming fire, how will it be with me then? The world may go on rejoicing now; it may have a merry evening; but it will have a gloomy morning, a tempestuous morning, a fiery morning. So then, I say, happy is the man that is made sober now, that is humbled now, that is broken down now, and brought to seek the Lord; for blessed are they that weep, they shall eternally laugh.

After thus viewing death as by sin, and for sin and as an enemy, and the people of God falling asleep until they shall be awakened up at the last day, I now come to *our departed brother*. Perhaps I might as well name, in the first place how he came among us just to show the providence and the grace of God towards him, and to encourage you all that love the Lord to put your confidence in the Lord. On the 23rd of May, 1839, I was led by the providence of God to preach two sermons at an anniversary at Tenterden, in Kent. My text was, both morning and evening (for I preached on that day from the same text both times), the 4th verse of the 55th chapter of Isaiah: “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.” That was the first time our departed brother heard me, twenty-eight years ago, the 23rd of last May. And there was something in those two sermons that so took him that were it not myself, but were it some other minister, I should say that he heard the gospel in a way he never heard it before, and he felt he could make almost any sacrifice, in reason, to be where he could from Sunday to Sunday, and from week to week, hear such a gospel as that. Then I went with him that night over to a place called Cranbrook, in the same county, and the next day I preached there, and my text then was the 2nd

verse of the 4th chapter of Colossians: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving," and which, through God, he was enabled to do even unto his happy end; these two texts seemed almost prophetic, for he heard so much of Jesus Christ in the first two sermons, what Jesus Christ had done; and then in the third sermon he heard what he was to do, that he was to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." And oh! how much had he to be thankful for. Well, he could not forget those sermons; he could not rest. The fact is nobody to him could preach like your humble servant. He is the man; to London I must and go to London I will. Now you observe his age was fifty-six when he died, we will call it that; he was not quite fifty-six, but we will call it so for the sake of convenience. Well, he was twenty-eight years old when I thus met with him, and he was fifty-six at his death; so, he lived twenty-eight years before I met with him, and twenty-eight years since. He thus spent one-half of his life in the country, and the other half in London. Now Moses' life was divided into three parts. He spent forty years in Egypt; then forty years with Jethro, and then forty years with the Israelites; and when he died, at the age of one hundred and twenty, his eyes were not dim, nor his natural force abated. Well, our brother came to London. And his father was a good man, but amazingly cautious. "John," he says, "mind what you are about. I am afraid that Wells is rather dangerous. He goes very high, and goes along way; and" he says, "I must come to the Surrey Tabernacle and hear him, and then, John, I will advise you." But the fact is, it was too late now. The gospel had got John's ear, and got John's heart and John's soul, and while his father loved him, and he loved his father, and paid him every respect, yet in these things he was obliged to be his own judge. And when the father came, as though there was something, as it were, detrimental, as though our brother John himself had almost cause for regret, my text was, "They have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Well, one object of my sermon that night was to show that that was old covenant language, and that no real Christian could do what was there described; because the people had changed their God for them that were no gods, which no real Christian could do. "Ah," said the father, "John," he says, "that is something new to me; I cannot get over it. But whatever you do, be cautious." So, I was going just after that into Kent again. "Now, John," he says, "I will go and hear him at the anniversary." So, he went to hear me. "Well," he says, "after all, Wells is a better man than I thought he was. He preaches a good gospel after all. You will do very well with him, John." And so, he left him to do so. Dear old man, when he came to London, he never hesitated where to go to; ours was the place where he came, and there the Lord blessed him. Well now, our departed brother came to London, and he took a very humble position. I may just say that his parents were highly respectable people, and in a good position in the world. Our departed brother came to London, and, being determined not to trust in anything but his own hands, he took a very humble position, I believe something like a pound a week. Well, he worked on, and worked on, until he raised himself by his sobriety, his industry, and his gifts; and he worked on and worked on till by and by the Lord opened a way for him to take a warehouse and to establish a business, and the Lord has blessed him very greatly indeed, and blessed his family altogether. So, you see he lost nothing by that little sacrifice that he made in leaving the country and coming to London for the sake of the gospel. And he is not the only person that has made a very good thing of it, leaving the country to come to the Surrey Tabernacle for the sake of the gospel. I could point out several that were not worth a penny when I first met with them, but they are something now of great importance. Why, it is the blessing of the Lord. And this is nothing new, no. The Lord took Abraham up as a poor man, and he blessed him temporally as well as spiritually. And he took Jacob up as a poor man. Jacob says, I had but this staff, I suppose nobody would give above two pence for it, if they would give that; that is all I had. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan and

now I am become two bands.” Ah, the Lord has been so good to him that I am sure our dear brother might say, I came to London as it were with only my staff, like Jacob, and now I am become two bands, The Lord has blessed him, and he has blessed many of us also. Be not then afraid to make sacrifices for the gospel, be not afraid of honoring the Lord, for “them that honor me I will honor.”

I may just also observe that no man, I think could by any possibility be more interested in the welfare of this cause than he was. He abode by us all these twenty-eight years, He waited, I think, four or five years before he was baptized. He has been a deacon fifteen years. And he was a large subscriber towards the building of this chapel, and from time to time; you will not forget some of his speeches. Shall I say how enthusiastic he was? With all his heart and all his soul did he speak of what the Lord had done for us. And you will recollect one meeting, the first what I may call powerful meeting, in prospect of a new chapel. I do believe, as firmly as I believe I am standing here, that we had that night the presence of the Lord in our midst: you will recollect his words then, they seemed to electrify the whole of you, that:

“Faith laughs at impossibility,
And says, It shall be done.”

Here we are, and it is done. He repeated the words several times afterwards; but like preaching the old sermons again, not quite so much power afterwards. They were powerful at first because spoken in the spirit and power of the Lord. Ah when a voice speaks from God's throne there is sure to be something electric, something that shall make the fire burn, when it comes forth from the presence of the Lord.

And his attendance at the house of God, how many pounds it has cost him I cannot say, to get here of a night, however weary, however afflicted, if he could at all hold his head up, away from business, into a cab or omnibus, he would be here. Sundays and weekdays alike. His attention to the house of God has been really very pleasing; indeed, just as a deacon's should be. Also, I need not say that there was perfect unanimity between him and his brother deacons, and they worked on and went along together very nicely indeed. And we all loved, as we do love, the same blessed truths, and if there be some little differences sometimes, why, there are none worth speaking of. There are agreements that overcome those differences, and those agreements are founded upon the unity of the Spirit, the Spirit of the gospel, the Spirit of the new covenant.

In the beginning of August our brother went into the country, hoping that it would revive his health, but it did not. And when he returned, I thought within my own mind, Well, now is coming what I have been looking for. That affliction under which he has labored certainly must terminate very soon in death. He did not think so. Well, when this affliction came on, he was rather low in his mind, and he could not realize the Lord's presence, nor his interest in his love. And when you come into affliction so serious as that, with such feelings as those, and such fears, it is very solemn. Well, I visited him first, went and prayed with him; but I do not think it did him any good. The moment was not yet come. But eight days before he died, one of our deacons visited him; and he himself, our departed brother, made sure it was his last day; and I being informed of the same, acted accordingly. Some of you will recollect the Wednesday evening, eight days before his death, when, after hearing that he could not last many hours, one of our deacons saw him. And the peace, the love, the joy, the light, the dignity, the glory, the happiness, were all that an angel could desire.

Not a shadow of a fear. He made sure then that he was dying; called his family together and spoke to them rather as though he was going a journey to some other part of the earth than as though he was going out of this world, never to return to it again; and blessed his children in the name of the Lord, and made sure he was dying. But the Lord spared him eight days after this; and he got a little lower again, a little of the joy left him. I saw him on the Wednesday morning, the day of our anniversary, and I felt in my own mind then it would be the last time that I should see him. I conversed with him and prayed with him, and in praying with him I felt myself pretty near to the gate of heaven, pretty near to the Lord: there was a loftiness, a power, and a savor. When I left him, he took hold of my hand as though he did not wish to let go of it again. He seemed in holding my hand and bidding me farewell, he seemed to recollect as it were, almost in a moment the way in which he met with me, the way in which he was brought among us, how he has been among us, how useful he has been, how he has been respected, and how he has respected the people, and the place, and everything pertaining to it. And then there were some hymns, the two hymns we have sung this evening and the other we shall sing, they were chosen at the request of the family. He repeated some of these lines, and sang them too, a few hours before he died, and with very great emphasis:

“I’ll raise my fainting voice and say,
Let grace triumphant reign.”

And so, the other we sang as well:

“O happy saints, that dwell in light!”

and the one with which we shall close presently, the 69th Hymn, three verses of which he sang a few hours before his death. Now the Lord was pleased thus to bless him, and to bless, very much bless, the visit of one of the deacons to him. And so, the last day he continued in this happy state of mind. He spoke of the covenant in which he was interested; he spoke of the rock, and of his belief that he was on the rock; he spoke of Christ’s work in the completeness of it, and felt sure that that work was his, was imputed to him, and that he wanted nothing altered, but was perfectly satisfied. He died a happy man! My hearer, you may depend upon it the nearer on we to God the happier you will live, and the nearer you are to him, the happier you will die. So then, not that we should have been at all doubtful of his state had he not been thus favored in his last hours. We should have been perfectly satisfied that he was a Christian, and that he was now in the presence of the Lord. Still, it is, at the same time, very pleasing, and very encouraging to see the children of God in their last hours so honored and so favored, it is a sweet thought that, “all is settled.” And happy the man that can say, “And my soul approves it well.”

I have given but a very scanty outline of the happiness, peace, and joy, of our departed brother in his dying hour. He was placed just among the right people. He loved the truth, and he was placed among those that have been now for many years as iron pillars as brazen walls, and as a defended city. And I hope and trust we can all feel that anything and everything may go rather than one particle of gospel truth shall go. We need it all, we want it all, we must have it all, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Truth is a substitute for everything, but there is nothing that can be a substitute for that.

Now, friends, I have borne, I confess I have, a very feeble testimony indeed as a tribute of respect to our departed brother, he is gone down into the grave with an unblemished reputation, he lived in Christ, and died in Christ; a good deacon, a good friend to the poor, a good friend to the cause, and an enemy, so far as I am aware to none. I have paid a poor tribute of respect to his memory. I hope therefore, the family and the friends will kindly take the will for the deed. It means respect, however poor; an angle's testimony can mean no more.

I may just mention-somewhat singular, that this Tabernacle was opened on the 19th of September 1865, and on the 19th of September 1867, exactly two years afterwards, our brother died.

May the Lord prepare us all for that that lies before us, for his name's sake.