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174

# F U N E R A L S E R M O N .

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM LATTA, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF GREAT VALLEY AND CHARLESTON, CHESTER COUNTY, PA.

Preached in the Church of Great Valley, Sabbath, February 19th, 1847.

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## S E R M O N .

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The memory of the just is blessed.—Prov. x. 7.

THE providence which has convened this assembly, is peculiarly solemn and instructive. Death has recently been in the midst of this people, and has selected a victim, whose removal has afflicted many hearts, and made a wide breach in the church and community. A venerable minister of Christ, prominent in his church, and long the active, faithful, and useful pastor of this congregation, has fallen beneath his stroke; and his death was preceded only a week and twelve hours by that of his beloved and pious partner. Closely united in life, they were scarcely separated in death. Their bodies now repose together, resting in hope of a glorious resurrection. And their immortal spirits have doubtless become inseparably united in the world of bliss, and with adoring wonder are bending before the throne of God and the Lamb, uniting in the song of redeeming love.

This is a solemn, afflicting, and instructive providence; though, at the same time, attended with many merciful and consoling circumstances. A family has been visited with breach upon breach, in quick succession, and been deprived of both their heads in a few days. A congregation has been bereaved of a long tried, faithful, and useful pastor, and are called to mourn his loss. The Presbytery of Philadelphia, to which our deceased friend belonged, have lost a father, who was almost always in his place at their meetings; whose wise

counsels they highly prized, and whose loss they deplore. And what adds to the affliction of the dispensation in regard to the Presbytery, and the solemnity of the admonitions it administers to his surviving brethren, is, that he was the third member removed by death, in the short space of a little more than three months;\* and the church at large has reason to mourn the loss of one who has been long and usefully devoted to her interests.

The providence which has convened us has doubtless been sent for our instruction and admonition, and while we have great consolation in the death of the departed servant of God, we ought to lay it seriously to heart. It solemnly addresses all of us, and especially the afflicted relatives, and this congregation, and his brethren in the ministry. It solemnly reminds us, that we must part with our friends, however dear, and useful, and necessary they may be to us, and that we ourselves must die; and warns us to be faithful, that we may be prepared to die and render up our account. The just are blessed in their death; and after they are gone, their memory is blessed. Our great concern ought to be, to have and maintain this character, that we may be partakers of this blessedness. "The memory of the just is blessed." These words are suitable to direct our meditations at this time.

In speaking from the text, I will

I. Describe the character of the just; and

II. Show how their memory is blessed.

I. The character of the just. By *just*, is sometimes meant perfectly righteous. But it cannot be so understood in the text. For "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." It expresses the character of the child of God, as distinguished from that of the man, who is yet in his natural state of alienation from God, unjustified, and unsanctified.

The just person is one who is *justified* before God. He is accepted as just or righteous in the sight of God, and is treated as such. His sins are pardoned, and he is delivered from condemnation, and received into the divine favour. The righteous-

\* The other two were the Rev. William Loughridge, and the Rev. Thomas Hoge.

ness by which he is thus justified is not inherent, but imputed. He becomes just, or is justified, not on account of any goodness in himself, or any works of righteousness which he has done; for we read in the word of God, that "a man is not justified by the works of the law;" and that "by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." But sinners become just, or are justified before God, by the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, received by faith in him. "The just shall live by faith." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is by faith the sinner becomes just, as by faith he receives Christ and obtains an interest in his righteousness, on account of which, he is accounted and treated as just in the sight of God.

This is an essential trait in the character of the just person, whose memory is blessed. Sensible that he is a sinner under righteous condemnation, and that he has no righteousness of his own by which he can obtain justification before God, he has renounced all dependence on himself, or any thing he has done, or can do; and has believed in Christ, and cordially received him, and rests upon him for salvation as he is offered in the gospel; and in consequence of his faith, the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to him; and on account of this imputed righteousness, he is accounted in the sight of God, and is treated by him as righteous or just, and is justified.

This is the way, and the only way, in which a sinner becomes just, or is justified before God; and all who are seeking and hoping for justification in any other way, are fatally deceiving themselves.

Again: The just person whose memory is blessed, is one who *doeth justly*, or lives a just or righteous life. While he renounces all dependence on his own works for justification before God, relying solely on the righteousness of Christ, he is at the same time careful to maintain good works, and live a just or righteous life. "He that doth righteousness, is righteous." By which we are to understand, not perfection in righteousness or holiness, but a sincere obedience to the law of God, though amidst many imperfections, which are cause of grief.

Considering just or righteous in this sense, as referring to the

Christian's practice, and therefore also to the temper of his heart, which regulates his practice, the just person is one who has experienced a change of heart. For the heart of man is, by nature, destitute of holiness, and totally depraved; and therefore to become holy, and produce holy obedience in the life, must be changed. And this is most explicitly taught in the word of God, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: ye must be born again." And "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." The just person whose memory is blessed, has experienced this great and radical change of heart. And having received a just or righteous temper by the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, he lives justly, desiring and endeavouring to render to all their just due, and do his duty both to God and man, according to the divine law. He feels that he ought to be just to God, as well as to man. He gives God his heart; loves and fears him, puts his trust in him, thanks him for the mercies he receives, prays to him, reads his word, reverences his Sabbath, treads his courts, and waits upon the worship of his sanctuary; submits to his will, obeys his commandments, devotes all he has to him, and makes his glory his chief end.

In his conduct towards his fellow men, he follows the rule of equity laid down by Christ, to do to others as he would they should do to him. Following this rule, he is just in his dealings with all men. He faithfully performs the duties of the stations in which he is placed, and of the relations he sustains. He is the faithful pastor, watching for the souls of his people, as one who must give account. He is the upright magistrate, the good citizen, the affectionate partner, the kind parent, the comforter of the afflicted, and the helper of the poor.

Such is briefly the scriptural character of the just man, whose memory is blessed. It is true he comes short of his duty, but this is cause of grief to him. This man is in favour with God on earth, and has a sure title to heaven; and when he leaves the world, his memory will be blessed. This you have often been told by him, who has long been your spiritual teacher,



whose lips are now sealed in the silence of death; and in the hope of such a just man, he lived and died. I proceed,

II. To show how the memory of the just is blessed. We are told by the Psalmist, "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." This is literally true with respect to God, and the inhabitants of heaven. They have the righteous in everlasting remembrance. None of their labours to do good in the world and promote the divine glory, shall be forgotten, but shall be remembered for ever to the honour, and to the glory of the divine grace, which enabled them thus to act. The memory of the just is blessed in heaven.

And it is also blessed on earth. Even the wicked are oftentimes constrained to venerate the character of the departed saint, though he may frequently have reprov'd and warn'd them while living. And the people of God who survive him, bless his memory. With affectionate regard they remember his prayers, by which blessings from heaven were drawn down upon the church; his holy example, by which they were edified, and the cause of God adorned; his counsels, by which they were assisted in the path of duty; and his active benevolence, by which happiness was diffused around them.

The memory of the just is blessed by the children of affliction, who have had their sorrows removed or alleviated by their sympathies, counsels, prayers, and assistance. And the widow and orphan, whose hearts they have gladdened; the oppressed, whose cause they espoused; and the poor, whose wants they relieved, will venerate their memory, and think of them, and pronounce their names with affection, and call them blessed. And they will especially live in the memory of their friends and families, who were constant witnesses of the uprightness of their character, and were particularly benefitted by their prayers, counsels, and exemplary lives.

Again: The memory of the just may be said to be blessed on account of the benefits which result from their pious labours and example, after they are gone. They leave blessings behind them. What they have done in the world often proves a blessing for many succeeding generations. And the pious labours and examples of some of the saints, will have a blessed influ-

ence on posterity, and on the world, down to the end of time. Blessed has been, and still is, and will be, the memory of Abraham. His pious example has edified the church in all ages since he lived, and his prayers are still pleading for his degenerate posterity, scattered over the world. They are still beloved as a people for the father's sake; and in virtue of their connexion with him, rich blessings are still in store for them. Blessed also, in this sense, is the memory of the Scripture saints, whose doctrine, example, and experience, have enlightened, directed, strengthened, and comforted the church in all succeeding ages. Blessed also is the memory of the confessors and martyrs, who, by their faithfulness amidst sufferings, and even unto a violent death, have left to future generations a testimony of the excellence of the religion of Christ, and have inspired succeeding servants of God with a holy boldness in his cause, and a holy confidence in him.

Blessed, in this sense also, is the memory of the pious writers, who, though long since dead, yet speak in their published works, to the conviction of the careless, the direction of the inquiring, and the edification, strength, and consolation of the people of God. Blessed is the memory of Watts, and Doddridge, and Baxter, and Flavel, and Bunyan, and Matthew Henry, and Edwards, and Scott, and a multitude of other worthies. Their praise is, and long will be, in the churches. And blessed also is the memory of every faithful and successful minister of the gospel. The most important benefits, the effects of such labours, often remain long after the labours themselves have ceased. The holy walk, and spiritual consolations of those who have been converted, and instructed, and strengthened, and comforted under their ministry, are its blessed fruits; and they often sow seed which springs up and bears fruit, in the conviction and conversion of some who were careless when their labours ceased. Nor do the blessed fruits of a faithful and successful minister's labours terminate with the generation who enjoyed these labours. Their spiritual children are often made instrumental of bringing others to the knowledge of the truth, and these again others; and so through many generations, and in some instances, this will doubtless be the case down to the end of time.

To the long list of the just whose memory is, and will be blessed, we may doubtless add our departed father. Of this there are doubtless many living witnesses in this audience, and elsewhere, who have, through his instrumentality, been brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and been built up in faith, and holiness, and comfort, and are on their way to join him in heaven. And from the precious seed he has sown in hope, saving fruit may yet arise from among those for whose good he laboured, but whom he left in an unconverted state. And that his memory is and will be blessed, without referring to living witnesses, we may confidently infer from a review of his life, and labours, and death. Let us take a brief review of these.

The Rev. Dr. WILLIAM LATTA was born at Deep Run, in Bucks county, Pennsylvania, May, 1768. His father was the Rev. James Latta, D.D., who was a very respectable and prominent man in the church in his day. He was first settled as pastor of the Deep Run church, where he continued seven years; and then of Chesnut Level church, Lancaster county, of which he was pastor thirty-five years. In the year 1793, he was Moderator of the General Assembly.

Dr. James Latta had four sons, all of whom became ministers of the gospel. In this fact, we have one out of numerous evidences of the truth of our text, that the memory of the just is blessed. Of these four sons, one only now survives.\* The Rev. Dr. William Latta, your late pastor, was the second son of the Rev. Dr. James Latta. His studies, preparatory to entering college, were pursued under the direction and instruction of his father, who prepared his own sons for college, and at the same time educated a number of other youth, who afterwards became useful members of society. His collegiate course he passed in the University of Pennsylvania, in the city of Philadelphia, where he graduated.

His theological course, I have understood, he pursued under the direction and able instruction of his father. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Newcastle. He was admitted on certifi-

\* Rev. James Latta, of Upper Octorara, Chester county, Pennsylvania.



cate from that Presbytery, under the care of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, as a licentiate, April 16th, 1799. The next day a call from the congregation of Great Valley and Charleston, was presented to him, which he accepted. He was then examined for ordination, and his examination was approved. His ordination took place in the Second Presbyterian church in the city of Philadelphia, June 13th, 1799. Four other ministers were ordained at the same time, viz. Messrs. Jacob J. Janeway, Thomas Picton, John Blair Linn, and Buckley Carl. His installation as pastor of the church took place in this house October 1, 1799. He was installed by a committee of Presbytery, consisting of Messrs. Blair, Smith, Green, Irwin, Janeway and Linn. From the preceding facts and dates, it appears that Dr. Latta was pastor of this congregation forty-seven years four months and nineteen days. In addition to this time, I suppose he had preached and performed pastoral duties a number of months previous to his installation. He had but one charge. This people was the object of his earliest and latest ministerial affections and care. Among you he laboured nearly half a century. A rare case, honourable to you, as well as himself.

Dr. Latta was a student, and a scholar. He was abundant in labours. He loved his people, and his earnest desire and endeavour was to be instrumental of their salvation. He was faithful in warning sinners; and his preaching was adapted to edify, and build up, in faith, and holiness, and comfort, God's people. His preparations for the pulpit were made with close study and care. He could not satisfy himself, and he desired not to satisfy his people, with that which cost him little or nothing. He was careful to bring beaten oil to the sanctuary. As to the matter of his preaching, after the example of Paul, Christ and him crucified, was his great theme; he loved, and he preached the humbling doctrines of the cross. As was to be expected under such preaching, and such faithful labours, his ministry was blessed. This church, during his ministry, was blessed with several precious revivals of religion.

In his Presbytery, and in the higher judicatories of our church, Dr. Latta was highly esteemed. This was manifested

by his appointment to several places of honour and responsible trust. He was very frequently appointed by his Presbytery to represent them in the General Assembly; and this was especially the case in the years in which there was the great struggle, that finally issued in the division of the Presbyterian Church into two separate bodies. He also, by the appointment of the General Assembly, for many years held the office of a Trustee of that body; and also of a Director of the Theological Seminary at Princeton; both of which offices he held at the time of his death.

The death of this servant of God was, as might be expected from such a life, peaceful and triumphant. It was his earnest desire that he might preach the gospel to the close of life, which desire was gratified. He preached, as you know, the last Sabbath but one of his life; and the last text on which he preached was, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." This sermon, say they who heard it, was characterized by all the mature wisdom of age, and delivered with all the fervent energy of youth. A few days after, he was smitten with the disease which quickly proved fatal.

The death-bed scene was highly instructive and consoling. It is described in an article in *The Presbyterian*, written by one who doubtless knew. From this article, I beg leave to quote. He struggled to the bed-side of his dying wife; and was much refreshed and cheered by his last solemn interview with her on earth. When, after this, he was told by a friend that he was probably dying, he exclaimed, "Can this be death? O how sweet!" And then he commenced and continued, as his strength would allow, for two successive days and nights, till his voice was hushed in death, a strain of rapturous expressions, such as had never before been heard by any who stood around his death-bed. At one time, he requested those near him to open wide his arms, and leave them extended till the closing scene, that he might be thus prepared to meet and embrace his Saviour. On being asked whether he would rather recover or depart, he repeated in the most emphatic manner, three several times, "I would a great deal rather depart, and be with Christ." He was again asked, whether he felt that he had already caught

a view of the glories of the eternal world? "Yes," said he, "I think I have—I see a light;" and then stretching his feeble arms to their utmost extent, he exclaimed, "O take me to that light—I see the Saviour in his glory—I think I see his chariot wheels." Again, he said, "Often have I prayed that God would enable me to glorify his Son, my Saviour, on my death-bed, and he has heard and granted my request." He died with the name of Jesus on his lips, February 19th, 1847; aged, seventy-eight years and nine months.

Thus lived, and thus died, the Rev. Dr. William Latta. He was a just man, and his memory is, and will be blessed.

I will now close this discourse with a few practical inferences and remarks. It furnishes a motive to piety and diligence in duty. Would we have our memories blessed in heaven and upon earth? Do we desire to be useful, and to leave behind us, when we are called from this world, lasting blessings? let us then seek after true religion, and abound in works of piety; let us be diligent in our several stations to promote the cause of God in the world; and let us be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises. Then our memory will be blessed.

Our subject also affords consolation under the loss by death of pious, active, and useful friends. Such have met with a heavy loss; and they have great reason to be deeply afflicted. But they have much to support and comfort them under it. Their loss is the unspeakable gain of their departed friends; and their friends yet live in the memory of others; and their memory is blessed. They are had in everlasting remembrance in heaven; and on earth, their memory is venerated even by the wicked, who are constrained to say, or to feel the sentiment, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." They live in the affectionate remembrance of the people of God, who have been benefited by their pious labours. Though dead, they still forcibly speak to us on earth in their prayers, counsels, admonitions, examples, and good works. Let us hearken to their voice. Especially, let the children and other relatives of our deceased friend, now

think of the prayers he has offered for them, the counsels he has given them, and the example he has set them, and profit by them; and then this heavy affliction will prove a benefit to you; and when you leave this world, your memory, as his is, will be blessed.

To his brethren in the gospel ministry, this providence loudly calls, and should quicken them to greater diligence in the work of the just and faithful servant of God, that they may leave blessings behind them, and their memory be blessed. In the large Presbytery to which our deceased friend belonged, we have had, for a number of years, no breaches made by death; and in consequence of this, we have probably reflected less on our own mortality than we otherwise would have done. The scene has changed. We have been visited with breach upon breach, in quick succession. God, in his providence, is solemnly reminding us that the shepherd must die as well as the sheep. If the brethren of the Presbytery were here, I would say to them—and to other brethren in the ministry, and to my own soul—our account is rapidly hastening on, and we will soon hear from our Master the call, Give an account of your stewardship, for you can be no longer stewards. Let us, therefore, be quickened in our work. All that we do in the world, to glorify God, do good to our fellow men, save immortal souls, and prepare for our own account, must be done quickly. May the Lord so sanctify to surviving ministers the death of their brethren, that they may be quickened to greater diligence and zeal in the all-important work in which they are engaged.

In the close of this discourse, permit me to address a few words to the people of this congregation. God, in his providence, has visited you with an afflicting stroke. He has taken from you your spiritual guide and teacher. While you mourn your loss, be thankful that he has continued him so long with you. Almost all of you have grown up, and spent your days under his ministry. Few congregations have been so long exempted from such a bereavement as causes you this day to mourn. This goodness of God claims your gratitude. But gratitude is not all your duty on this solemn occasion. You ought this day solemnly to ask yourselves, how you have im-



proved his ministry. He has gone to give account of his faithfulness to you, and you must soon follow him, and give account of your improvement of his ministrations. There are doubtless many who have reason to bless God for his labours, to whom his memory, as their spiritual father, is, and will be precious while they live; and who will, through eternity, be his crown of rejoicing. Let such continue in the doctrines and precepts which they received from his lips, and be faithful unto death, and they will soon join him in a better world, and with him wear a crown of eternal glory.

But have all this congregation savingly profited under the ministry of their departed pastor? Has he not left some behind him, to whom he preached, for whom he prayed, and over whom he wept, who are yet in an unconverted state? Ought not such to pause, and think, and be alarmed. Your minister who was sent to you as an ambassador of Christ, and who has often besought you in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God has finished his mission among you, and been called home without effecting your reconciliation. You must soon appear at the bar of God, and answer for the manner in which you have received the messages of the servant he sent to you. And if then you shall be found to have continued in a state of rebellion, your minister will be a swift witness against you. All the counsels he gave you, the prayers he offered up for you, the tears he shed over you, and the sermons you heard from him or might have heard, will witness against you, and condemn you.

Yes, my hearers, the ministry of your pastor is closed; and he has gone to give account of his faithfulness to you; and you must soon follow, and give an account of the improvement you have made. O think of these things! and if the sermons, counsels, prayers, and example of your minister had no saving effect upon you while he lived, let the recollection of them have an influence upon you now he is gone, and lead you to be reconciled to God.

And may the Lord of his infinite mercy sanctify this providence to all of us. AMEN.