

S E R M O N

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

FREDERICK J. BARNARD, JR.

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

APRIL 27, 1856.

ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

FREDERICK J. BARNARD, JR.

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I CORINTHIANS, XV, 57.

THANKS BE TO GOD, WHICH GIVETH US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST.

You will recognise this passage as the conclusion of Paul's memorable argument for the resurrection of the dead; than which there is not perhaps to be found in all his writings a nobler monument of a penetrating, lofty, and sanctified genius. It would seem that some members of the Church to which this Epistle was addressed, had, through the influence of either judaizing teachers or heathen philosophers, been shaken in their belief of that fundamental Christian doctrine,—the resurrection of the dead; and this argument of the Apostle was designed to set them right in that important matter. He begins his discourse by calling to their remembrance the proofs of our Lord's resurrection,—the last of which was, that he himself had *seen* Him, not only after He had risen, but after He had ascended.

And from this particular fact he deduces the more general one,—that all his followers shall rise also; for not only has his resurrection proved the practicability of theirs, but, as they are united to Him by faith, the one actually involves the other. In the course of the argument, he encounters a philosophical objector, who would fain be wise above what is written, and would know precisely the *manner* in which this wonderful change is to be effected. But the Apostle well nigh annihilates him by a single sentence, in which he shows that it will be time enough for him to build an objection against the doctrine of the resurrection upon his own ignorance, when he can explain the mysteries connected with one of the most familiar processes of nature. In bringing his argument to a close, he rises to the highest pitch of triumph; and, with the confidence of entire certainty, declares that death has no power ultimately to harm the Christian; because a complete victory in the Christian's behalf has been gained over it, through the mediation of the Son of God. Hear his exulting language—“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The first topic which this passage suggests to us, is the NATURE of the believer’s victory over death.

Death is here represented as an enemy — it is among the foremost in that fearful tribe of enemies for which sin opened a door into the world. Who that has ever seen it at its work, or traced it in its effects, can doubt for a moment its hostile character? If you doubt, see what work it makes with human beauty — how it blots out all that is bright and lovely from the countenance, and brings in its place that which you shudder even to look upon. See what work it makes with human strength — how it brings down the gigantic frame into the dust, and, in the twinkling of an eye, conquers him whom no other enemy *could* conquer. See what work it makes with human hopes — how it changes the abode of cheerfulness into the house of mourning, and multiplies the badges of orphanage, and fills the world with sorrow. See what work it

makes with the very constitution of human nature — how it detaches the living inhabitant from the tenement it occupies, and sends the one into the region of spirits, and changes the other to a clod. It came into the world in the footsteps of sin, and it has been going up and down the world ever since, performing its bitter and relentless ministration.

Now is it strange that such an enemy as this should be contemplated with fear; especially when it is remembered that its office is to introduce sinful man to his eternal retribution? Is it strange that nature, taking the alarm at the approach of such an enemy, should anxiously inquire if there be a possibility of deliverance from its dominion? Now this *fear* of death is the first thing which the Christian's victory contemplates. In his meditations upon the future, even in seasons of health, it often occurs to him that he must die; and the thought may sometimes be an appalling one; but it is his privilege to reflect that he has committed himself into the hands of One who can as easily provide for his wants in the dark valley as any where else; and who has pledged Himself that he shall walk

safely through it, and pass triumphantly out of it;—and what can he ask more to neutralize the workings of fear? And when death is actually approaching, it would seem as if his courage would be still more likely to falter. Sometimes indeed it does falter,—perhaps as a chastisement for previous neglect of duty; and the deep shadows that naturally overspread the passage into eternity, scarcely begin to move off, until Heaven with its immortal glories bursts upon the eye. But, in all ordinary cases, especially where the Christian has maintained a close walk with God, he is bold in the last conflict: he triumphs over every fear, and gathers joy where others reap a harvest of anguish. Let the fact be accounted for as it may, even the scoffer cannot deny that it is exceedingly common for the Christian to triumph over the fear of death.

But this is only the beginning of his victory; for he triumphs not only over the fear of death, but, ultimately over *death itself*. I know that the infidel affects to laugh at the Christian's hope of a resurrection; and, though he cannot deny that this hope marvellously sustains him

in the dying hour, yet he will have it that he is kept up only by the power of a bright delusion. There is nothing in *his* creed which would ever seem to question Death's claims to an absolute dominion over man; nothing to indicate the possibility that that iron bondage that is represented by the cold, dark grave, should ever be broken. The Christian dies,—and his eyes are closed, as if for an eternal slumber; and his lips are sealed, as if in eternal silence; and his body moulders, as if it could no longer be of any interest except to the death worm; but a voice from Heaven has already announced that those eyes shall ere long open upon the beauty of a new creation; that those lips shall be unsealed to celebrate a deliverance from the grave; that those particles of dust shall be reorganized and reanimated to form a body, the glorious prototype of which is enthroned in the Heavens. When that day of redemption comes, the Christian's victory over death will be complete. It will be a day in which he will leap away from his chains and from his prison-house, into the liberty of a perfectly glorified immortal; a day in which death will formally

abdicate the throne which he has assumed, and go away into ignominious and eternal exile.

Such is the nature of the Christian's victory over death: let us next contemplate the MEANS by which it is obtained. The Apostle says that it comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is through the mediation of Christ that the Christian gains the victory over the *fear* of death. "The sting of death," says the Apostle, "is sin." It is not the mere physical pang of dying, nor even the sundering of the ties which bind men to the world, that throws the deepest shade over the valley of death; but it is the reflection which conscience forces upon the sinner, that, after death is the judgment; and that, if he be unpardoned, the future must open upon him in a scene of interminable misery. But this fearful exigency of his condition, the mediation of Christ fully meets; for it not only brings pardon, but brings the evidence of pardon, which is the signal of peace to the guilty conscience. By the shedding of his own blood, He hath rendered it consistent with Jehovah's character and government to admit the vilest offender

to a free forgiveness; and thus the sentence of the law actually is reversed; and he who was liable to suffer an endless punishment for his sins, is graciously absolved from all obligation to punishment, and has a glorious immortality secured to him. And while there is pardon through the blood of Christ, there is sanctification through the Spirit of Christ; and herein is provision for the believer's evidence of his own acceptance. The Spirit produces and cherishes within him the graces of faith, and love, and humility, and zeal, and devotion; and these have their operation in a life of Christian obedience. And when he finds, by an inspection of his heart and life, that he is the subject of these evangelical graces, he can no longer doubt that he is the subject of God's forgiving mercy. Why then should he be any more in bondage to the fear of dying? Why shudder at that which is to put him in possession of an eternal weight of glory? Just in proportion to the evidence he gains of being a subject of God's grace, and an heir of salvation, will his fear of the last enemy be overcome; and whether this victory be considered in connection with his justifi-

cation or his sanctification, it is to be referred alike to the mediation of Christ.

And it is through Christ's mediation also, that the believer will ultimately gain the victory over *death itself*.

Notwithstanding sin has its seat more immediately in the soul, yet the body also, being part of the man, shares the common calamity;—and hence becomes a proper subject of redemption; and when we are assured that Jesus has purchased his people with his own blood, we must suppose that he regards the whole man as his own, and that, in due time, he will come and claim even the mouldering dust. Because He lives, his people shall live also; for He has risen as their Representative; and to suppose that they should always slumber in the grave, would be to impugn his wisdom, and faithfulness, and power, and to pronounce the whole mediatorial economy as an ignoble failure.

You see then how emphatically it may be said that, in dying, Jesus conquered death. He indeed left this enemy with some power; for he has reigned over all the generations that have inhabited this earth; and he will con-

tinue to reign till the final shock shall announce the grand catastrophe of nature. But it is the mere show of a triumph after all. He is, in the most important sense, a vanquished foe; and this conquest, Christian, was achieved by your Redeemer when he fell. His groans on Mount Calvary were the price of your songs on Mount Zion. When he bowed his head and cried, "It is finished," the King of terrors felt the arm of his power wither, and the believer was privileged to look up to Heaven, and thank God that the redemption, not only of his spirit, but of his body, was virtually accomplished.

But it was not till his resurrection from the grave that this victory was made manifest. Jesus expired in all the feebleness of a mortal man; and when his body was taken down from the cross and carried to the tomb, there was nothing in its appearance to indicate the glory of its future destination,—nothing to indicate that the death which it had experienced was the price of the life of the world. But when that body, pierced and mangled as it was before it was laid in the tomb, after three days, began again to heave with life,

and cast off its death robes, and was greeted by an angelic ministration, and thus showed itself an overmatch for the power that had seemed to conquer it, *that* was a public demonstration that he had purchased the complete redemption of all who should believe in Him. It was an assurance that the price which had been paid had been accepted of his Father; and that, as death should henceforth no more have dominion over *Him*, so they who were united to Him by faith should share in the benefits of his victory.

I say, *united to Him by faith*—and this leads me to remark that, while this victory of the believer over death, is to be considered as in the highest sense a Divine gift, there is a condition to be fulfilled on his part in order that the blessing may be bestowed; and that condition is faith. It is faith by which the Christian appropriates to himself *all* the benefits of redemption; and this as truly as any other. It is by faith that he overcomes the fear of death,—trusting in the Lord Jesus, not only as the Redeemer from sin, but also as the Resurrection and the Life. And it is by faith that he brings himself within the scope of the

promise of a final redemption from the grave. Faith is at once the instrument of his justification, and the principle of his sanctification. It is not only the victory which overcometh the world, but the victory which overcometh the grave.

I say then, my friends, that while this victory over death is the fruit of the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of that alone, it is secured to the believer only by living faith. I do not say that there is nothing else which may operate as an antidote to the fear of dying; for I well know that vice itself often hardens the heart to such a degree that even the approach of death creates no alarm. And so the dreams of the infidel and of the disbeliever in a future retribution may so far deaden the sensibility of conscience, that the sinner shall remain undisturbed till the light of eternity glares upon him. But nothing else than faith in Christ as a Redeemer can impart any *consistency* to a peaceful dying scene. So too, I know that the impenitent sinner is destined to a final resurrection; but it is faith in Christ alone that can secure to any a *glorious* resurrection and a Heavenly inheritance.

He who has living faith in Christ may consistently look upon death and smile; but he who lacks this faith, and still contemplates death with indifference, shows that he is ripe for a fearful retribution, and acts a part worthy only of a madman.

Let me call your attention in the last place, to the GRATITUDE with which the believer's victory over death should be acknowledged. The Apostle expresses it in the words—"Thanks be to God." And whether our obligation be estimated by the greatness of the blessing, or the means by which it comes to us, I am sure you will be unable to fix upon a point at which you would be willing that your gratitude should be limited.

Consider, for a moment, the value of this victory, when viewed in contrast with that bondage to the fear of death, and death itself, to which it is opposed. On the one hand, think what it is to be obliged either to exclude death from your thoughts, or to reflect upon it only with forebodings of horror; to feel that the sting of death, so far as it respects yourself, remains with all its rank poison; to recollect that the pains, and groans, and dying

strife, which precede the fall of the earthly tabernacle, are only harbingers of a mysterious and awful future! What especially must it be to have these reflections forced upon you in the very gate-way of the eternal world,—when your spirit is within a few moments of taking its final flight! And last of all, what must it be,—not to remain a tenant of the tomb for ever,—for even that dismal privilege will be denied to the sinner,—but to awake to a resurrection of condemnation; and thenceforward to advance through endless ages of unmitigated and ever increasing woe.

Now I ask whether a deliverance from these amazing calamities would not of itself be a rich blessing. But this is only a part of the victory which we have been contemplating; for while it involves a deliverance from the greatest evil, it involves also a mighty amount of positive good. Say then what would it not be worth not only to be free from tormenting anticipations of death in this world, but when the thought of dying comes, to be able to hold it to your mind as a pleasant thought, and to connect with it the anticipations of a glorious Heaven. What would it not be

worth, when you should see your friends gathered around your bed with suffused eyes and bleeding hearts, to bid you a last adieu, and you should feel that death's cold hand was passing over your frame, and chilling your life blood! Oh, what would it not be worth to reflect calmly, even joyfully, upon your condition and prospects; to be able to view death as a gracious, though dark, attendant on your spirit to introduce it into the region of an endless life! And more than all, what will it not be worth, when the voice of the archangel shall indicate the opening preparations for the judgment, to have this body raised—a glorified body, and united to a glorified spirit, to live and reign forever in the regions of glorified existence! Brethren, this is the victory over death. Estimate then, by the greatness of the blessing, the amount of gratitude which is due for it.

And then again, say how much you are indebted to God's grace for this victory, in view of the sacrifices which have been requisite to secure it to you. Your bondage to death awakened the compassion of the most merciful God; and, to rescue you from it, He formed

a plan that has filled Heaven and Earth with astonishment. That plan involved the sacrifice of His own Son; and all the stupendous events in the history of redemption that were consequent upon it. And it is his grace that works in you that principle of faith that overcomes the fear of death; and it will be by his power that you will come forth from the grave, clothed with immortality.. When you remember that your redemption from death was purchased by a Saviour's blood, and that it is to be the effect of Almighty grace and power, I ask again, how will you estimate the value of this victory?

I thank God that when I speak of the Christian's victory over death,—of the calm and even heroic spirit which he often displays in the last hour, I speak of nothing that is sustained by equivocal evidence,—nothing of which we may not, at any time, find examples, without going out of our immediate circle. God in his providence permits me to report to you such a case to-day;—a case that has occurred in the midst of us during the past week, and that really furnishes less occasion for mourn-

ing, than for gratitude and praise. A youth of much more than ordinary intellectual promise, belonging to a family connected with this church, was designed by his parents for a liberal education, in the hope, no doubt, that he might, in some way,—perhaps in the ministry of reconciliation, consecrate the energies of a cultivated mind to the best interests of his fellow-men. But scarcely had the first step been taken towards the accomplishment of their wishes, when a disease, the seeds of which seem to have been in his constitution, arrested him, and it became apparent that the hope of prosecuting a collegiate course must be abandoned. That disease ere long gave place to another, or rather assumed another form, the features of which were too strongly marked, not to betray even to the eyes to which they were most unwelcome, decisive symptoms of a fatal issue. And now it seemed necessary that a milder climate should be resorted to; and this was done, for several successive years, under the watchful and loving ministrations of sisters, who counted it no sacrifice to become exiles from home, and to sojourn among strangers, for the sake of bright-

ening the path and softening the pillow of one so tenderly beloved. In the earlier stages of his illness, I am not aware that there is any evidence that his mind was specially directed to his immortal interests; but, about two years since, if I mistake not, he became deeply concerned in respect to his salvation, and gradually emerged from that state into the joy and peace in believing. You will remember that, at our communion in October last, he was admitted a member of the church; and though his strength was too much reduced to allow of his being personally present at the time, yet the ordinance was subsequently administered to him in his own chamber, and he found in it, as he assured me, a source of spiritual strength and comfort. As I have had the opportunity of seeing him at short intervals, I have been struck with the fact that, as the outer man decayed, the inner man waxed strong; that the objects of sense gradually lost their hold on his affections, while the objects of faith grew brighter and more precious as he came nearer to the dark boundary. In all his expressions in regard to himself he was modest and humble, while yet he evinced a

joyful confidence in his Saviour, and evidently felt strong and safe, only because the Rock of Ages was beneath him, and the Everlasting Arm round about him. I saw him when the unmistakeable and yet indescribable signs of death were gathering in his countenance,—when his voice had sunk into a feeble and almost inarticulate whisper; and I could detect nothing then that indicated the faltering of his faith, or the intervening of a cloud between him and the Sun of Righteousness. I feel assured that his passage through the dark valley was made without fear as well as without danger. It seemed to me rather a serene than an ecstatic departure; but I doubt not that there were in it all the elements of a substantial triumph; and that, in view of it, we may justly exclaim,—“Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If there is such an exercise as joy in tribulation, they surely have a right to it, who, in their thoughts of a beloved departed friend, can connect the slumbers of the grave with the victory over death, and the glories of an immortal life. I cannot doubt that our mer-

ciful Father bids the mourners who are here this afternoon welcome to this consolation; and I trust that his gracious Spirit will whisper the welcome also in the ear of the bereaved sister, whose heart had scarcely ceased to bleed under another and yet deeper wound, but whom sickness obliges to indulge her sorrow for the dead in her own chamber.* What though the child, the brother, who has so long engaged your vigilant attentions, and kept in exercise your tender sensibilities, has been removed to the gathering place of the dead; yet, as you believe the nobler part of him,—the intellect, the affections,—all that in which you delighted most, is still preserved in the energy and purity of a higher existence, why should you indulge any feelings of grief that are inconsistent with feelings of gratitude and joy? Why should you not, even on the very spot where he endured his death struggle, gather up your soul into a fervent expression of gratitude that that struggle was but the harbinger of an immortal victory? May God enable you to honour him as mourners. Let your light shine

* The sister referred to is MRS. STAMPS, who was bereaved of her husband a little more than a year before the death of her brother.

brightly in the dark vale of affliction. Remember that Earth and Heaven are but one moment's distance from each other, and let your present experience help you to keep your loins girt about for the glorious transition.

There is one class upon whom I am specially desirous of impressing the lessons of this hour,—I mean those who are in the morning of life,—young men, who are dreaming intensely of temporal good, and scarcely sending a thought beyond the world. Let me tell you that the only effectual way of becoming happy, even in this world, is to secure the higher happiness of the next. Disguise it to yourself as much as you will,—you are in a world where calamities will inevitably overtake you; and without religion, you will have nothing to sustain you under them. You are in a world where you can remain but a little season, and then comes death, and then comes eternity; and nothing but religion can render it safe for you to enter the dark valley, much more to pass out of it. I would fain bring an argument from that death-bed, beside which I stood the other day, to persuade you to enter upon the religious life at once; and I would

bring another from the spot where we stood this morning, surveying another death-scene, in virtue of which, death becomes the gate of glory. God grant that this day, thus rendered specially sacred by our recollections of the death of Jesus and of one of his youthful disciples, may be rendered memorable to you as the beginning of a new and spiritual life, which shall involve in its progress a victory over death, and in its final issue, the life everlasting.