

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN INSCRIPTION FOR THE MAUSOLEUM
OF THE SAINTS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 1ST, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

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"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."—Hebrews xi. 13, 14.

"THESE all died in faith." Believers constitute a class by themselves,—*"These."* They are the people that dwell alone, and shall not be numbered among the nations. We see a great many distinctions in the world which God takes no notice of : there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, in his sight. But there is a distinction which men think little of, which is greatly observed of God ; and that is the distinction between them that believe and those that believe not. Faith puts you across the border most effectually, for it brings you out of darkness into marvellous light, from death to life, and from the dominion of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is the most important thing under heaven that we should know that we believe in God. The Holy Spirit puts believers by themselves, and speaks of them as "*These.*"

Believers are a class by themselves, even when they die. It is idle to think that we can mark out a spot in the cemetery where none but saints shall sleep ; but yet there is a truth at the bottom of that folly. There is a separation even in death between the righteous and the wicked. The Lord seems to erect a mausoleum in which lie asleep the bodies of his people, and he writes this epitaph across the front, "THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH." As for those who died without faith, they died indeed ; but, as for his people, a glorious resurrection awaits them.

"They sleep in Jesus, and are blest,
How kind their slumbers are."

The characteristics of God's people are peculiar to themselves. They are all alike in this, they all lived and all died in faith. They were not all equally believers, for some were strong in faith, and others were

weak ; but yet they all had faith, and it continued in them even to the end ; so that, without exception,—“ these all died in faith.”

We will speak, firstly, of *dying in faith* ; secondly, of *the faith according to which they died* ; thirdly, of *living by faith*, for that is mentioned in the text, “ They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth ” ; and then, fourthly, of *the faith by which they lived*,—“ For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.”

I. First, then, here is DYING IN FAITH. What does it mean ?

Does it not mean that, *when they came to die, they had not faith to seek*, but having had faith in life, they had faith in death ? I will pronounce no opinion upon death-bed repentance. I have heard judgments far too sanguine, I have heard verdicts far too severe. Where we know little, we had better say little ; but this much I may say : I would not like to lie upon a sick-bed, much less upon a dying-bed, and have a Saviour to seek there. The pains and dying strife are usually enough to occupy a man’s thoughts. It frequently happens that the brain is disordered, by disease, and he that was clear of judgment before is then scarcely able to think. You must yourself have often seen men departing out of this life to whom it was useless to speak. If conscious at all, they were barely conscious. Have I not pressed the hand, and received no token of recognition from a familiar friend ? Have I not spoken into the ear, and yet there has been neither hearing nor answering ? Sometimes friends have said, “ He seems to know you, Sir, though he knows nobody else ” ; and certainly there has been a lifting of the eyelid, and a movement of the hand, which made me feel that my voice had penetrated into those dark recesses into which the mind had retired. But what could I say of deep mysteries, or even of simple faith, when the person has been in such a case ? It has been a great joy to feel that we could sing in many instances,

“ ‘Tis done, the great transaction’s done,”

for there was little hope that it could have been done at that hour. Dear friends, if any of you are delaying, permit me to warn you not to do so ! How can it be said of you that you die in faith, if it cannot be said of you that you are living in faith ? Not long ago, a friend of mine, who was apparently in robust health, fell dead in the busy streets of the city ; another came up to our religious meetings, and on his return died in the waiting-room of the railway-station. Suppose that this had happened to any of you. It might have done so ! Where would you now have been ? I bless the name of the Lord that you are spared, for else you would have been where no voice of warning or of invitation could have reached you, but where darkness, death, and despair would have enveloped you for ever.

The saints mentioned in the text had not faith to seek. They had it when they came to die.

They did die, however, although they had faith, for faith is not given to us that we should escape death, but that we may die in faith. I have met with one or two friends who have believed that they would never die, but they have died for all that. One brother has often favoured me with a kind letter of protest when I have spoken about believers dying, for he affirms that he shall never die, and that if a believer does

die it is his own fault, for he must have fallen into sin. It is rather awkward for his theory that all these saints "died in faith." We believe that hundreds, and thousands, and millions of true and strong believers have died; and we expect to follow through the same dark stream of death, unless the Lord shall come.

This proves that God will not in every case hear our prayers for restoration to health. It is not true that if we gather together and pray for a sick man he will always be restored. No believer would die if that were the case, for every Christian man would find some friends in Christ to pray for his recovery. If, therefore, God had thus divested himself of his omnipotence, and put it upon us, we should keep our dear friends here as long as Methuselah, and no one would die. It would be a kind of semi-murder to allow our brother or sister to depart: it would be destroying life by omission to pray, and that would be murder in a degree. I thank God that he has not endowed us with any such power, for it would be a very dangerous privilege for any of us to carry about us. Would you have it said that you were the means of the death of your child, or wife, or friend, because you did not pray sufficiently for them? Is a kind of constructive murder to be laid at every man's door when he loses a friend? Is every woman whose child is taken away from her to be charged with want of faith because her child died? This would make her guilty of her child's death. It is atrocious: it is a piece of fanaticism that will not bear thinking of, for, pushed to its legitimate issue, it would be cruel in the extreme, for it would condemn men and women who are perfectly innocent, and who feel that they would have spared the lives of the departed by losing their own, had such a thing been possible.

"These all died in faith." Saints die as well as sinners. David dies as well as Saul. He that leaned on the bosom of Jesus lived long, but died at last—died as surely as Judas did, though in a better style. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Two have entered into glory by another way, but only two. There shall come a day when we that are alive and remain shall not see death; but that day is not yet.

"These all died in faith." I suppose that it means, again, that *these all persevered to the end*. I have often been told that you may be a child of God one day and a child of the devil the next. I do not know upon what Scripture that statement is based. I do not believe a word of it, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But suppose he apostatizes? You have no business to suppose what God has promised shall not be; for he has promised, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." If a man truly believes, he shall be saved. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." It has been said that we assert that if a man is once a believer, he may live as he likes, and yet he will never be lost. We never asserted any such thing. It is a caricature of the doctrine that we preach. We believe that God has given to his people eternal life; and that must be true, for he has said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." This means that they shall be kept from sin, and especially shall be preserved from the sin which is unto death. Though they sin through infirmity, they shall not sin fatally,

nor sin finally, but they shall persevere in holiness, and in the love of God. If they wander they shall be restored. They shall be kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. The seed which God puts into the believing soul is a "living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever." "The water that I shall give him," said Christ to the woman of Samaria, "shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." He gives no transient salvation, but he gives one which will hold the believer's soul from the first even to the last. "These all died in faith": in every one of these instances grace lived to the last, and triumphed at the close.

Does it not mean, also, that *they never got beyond faith*? These good people—Abel, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Sarah,—did they never get beyond faith? We have heard of some who think they have done so. Having begun in the Spirit, they are afterwards made perfect by the flesh. First it is the sinner's simple trust; but they get beyond that, and reach "the second blessing." I wish that they would get beyond that also, and reach the third blessing, and then they would feel more deeply than ever the deep depravity of the old nature, and cling still more closely to Christ. To go on from a second to a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, and an eighth, and a ninth, and a tenth blessing, is the thing for a child of God to do; but to get into a state of pride, and cry that he has got a second blessing, is a poor way of growing. There are ten thousand times ten thousand blessings after which believers are constantly to reach; but, reach what they may, "the just shall live by faith"; he shall never get beyond trusting in the faithful promise of a gracious God, living out of himself upon Christ, who must be our all in all. "These all died in faith," the very best of them. They never got beyond that. How could they? Those who get above faith are like the man who went up so high on the ladder that he came down on the other side. They get to be so good that they trust in themselves instead of resting in him who is the Lord our Righteousness. The Lord save us from self-conceit!

But then, while they did not get beyond faith, *the mercy is that they never got below it*. They still had faith. They were sometimes troubled with suspicions of themselves, and doubts as to whether the Lord had really wrought a work in their souls; but they never quite gave up faith. They had many pains in death, but they did not die in despair. Some of you cry, "What shall I do when I come to die?" I will tell you a more important question, and that is, What will you do now? Take life and death just as they come, bit by bit. You know how the Spartans endeavoured to keep back the Persians. They took possession of the pass of Thermopylæ, and there the brave two hundred stood, and held the way against myriads. The enemy could only advance one by one. Now, do not think of all the armies of your troubles that are coming in the future, but meet them one by one. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Pray—"Give us this day our daily bread." When you come to die, you shall have dying grace in dying moments; and if you have lived in faith do not doubt that you will die in faith. Joyfully, with all the strength I have, my quivering lips shall sing, instead of doubting or groaning. Faith shall grow stronger when it is about to be changed to full fruition. Go on, dear child of God. Though the road

be dark before you, you can see the next step, and that is all you need to see, for you cannot take two steps at a time. When you reach the next step, you will see the next; and so on to the end. He that has helped you up till now will help you even to the end; and when you are laid in the grave, it shall be said of you, as of all believers that went before you, "these all died in faith."

Thus much upon dying in faith.

II. Now, what was THE FAITH THAT THEY DIED WITH?

Turn to the text, and you get it. "Not having received the promises." They had received a great deal, but *they had not received the fulness of the promises*. Abraham had not beheld his seed so many as the sands upon the sea-shore. Neither Isaac nor Jacob had ever seen the Shiloh, in whom all the nations of the earth are blest. No, they had not received the promises. And you and I have not received all the promises. We have received a great deal, but there are certain promises which we have not received yet. The coming, the glorious coming, which is the brightest hope of the church, when the Lord "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God"—we have not received that as yet. And heaven itself, with all its splendour, its white robes and palms of victory, we have not yet received. We are looking for these. We do not die in the fruition of these. We die in faith, expecting that we shall enter upon the fulfilment of these promises.

But, while they did not receive the promises, notice what they did. *They saw them*,—saw them afar off. Faith touched their eyes with eye-salve; so that Abraham could see his seed in Egypt,—his seed coming out of the land of Zoan. He could see the people travelling through the wilderness. He could see them entering upon Canaan, and taking possession of the land. Yea, our Lord said, "Abraham saw my day." He saw the babe in Bethlehem. He saw the Son of God, who was the Son of man, the son of Abraham, too. And you and I, if we have faith of the kind we ought to have, see already the coming of the kingdom, the gathering together of the saints, the glory of the better land, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." By faith we see it. Our faith has such a realizing power that it is as if we beheld it all. It is better to see it thus than with the bodily eye, for if we looked upon it carnally we should begin to doubt our eyes; but faith is the opposite of doubt, the evidence of things not seen.

They did more than that. We read that *they "were persuaded of them."* "What is your persuasion?" said one to a Christian man. He answered, "Well, this is my persuasion: I am persuaded that neither things present nor things to come shall ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He was persuaded of the truth of that promise; and so is every believer when he is in a right state. He is of that blessed persuasion: he is quite sure about the promises of God. "Airy nothings," mutters one. "Mere fictions," cries another. "Absolute certainties," says the saint. He has been persuaded by an inward persuasion which others know nothing of. The Spirit of the living God has given him a faith which amounts to full assurance, and he will not permit a question, or tolerate a suspicion.

It is more than that: *the saints "embraced" the promises.* The Greek word signifies "salutes," as when we see a friend at a distance. In the clear atmosphere of Mentone, I have sometimes stood on quite a lofty mountain, and seen a friend down in the valley, and I have spoken his name; and at first it was greatly to my astonishment when he replied, "Where are you?" I held a conversation with him readily. I could not have actually reached him for a long time, but I saluted him from afar. At times, dear friends, we can see God's promises afar off, and we salute them. We are within hail of the glory-land, and we send up rockets in the dark; or, if it be daylight, we signal to the shore. Do you never do that? Do you never salute the mercies that are to come? Do you never talk to the glory that is to be revealed, ay, and commune with the glorified? This is the faith to live with, and to die with, the faith that sees, and is persuaded, and salutes the promised blessings of a faithful God. The Lord grant us more of that faith from this time forth!

III. Now, with extreme brevity, I want to speak upon **THE FAITH TO LIVE WITH**—the life of faith.

How do we live if we live by faith? The answer is, they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." So we are.

We are *strangers by nature.* Born from above, our life differs from those about us. "The world knoweth us not." We do not belong to this world at all. We are in it, but not of it.

We are strangers as to citizenship. Here we are aliens and foreigners, whose privileges are connected with another city, and not with earth.

We are *strangers as to pursuits.* We are wayfaring men hurrying through this Vanity Fair. The men of the fair cry, "Buy! Buy!" but they have no wares that we care to purchase. We buy the truth, and they do not trade in that commodity. We have nothing to do with the business of the fair, but to get through it as quickly as ever we can. Certain things every traveller has to do when he stops in a town: he must seek his inn, and he must take due refreshment; but if he is travelling home from a far country he moves along as fast as he can.

We are *pilgrims in object.* We have not come hither for a pleasure excursion; we are journeying to the temple to behold the face of our Lord. Our faces are set towards Jerusalem, and we are asking the way thither. Our cry is, "Onward! Hinder me not. I must away to the glory-land, where my home is, where my God is!"

We are *pilgrims as to continuance.* We do not expect to be here long. Do any of you? Ah, then you are under a great mistake. We shall soon be gone. Each time we bid each other "good night" we may do it with the suspicion that we shall not all meet again. There never was the same congregation here twice, and there never will be. Almost every week two members of this church depart for the upland country, and leave us in these lowlands. Of late our death-rate has largely increased, and the conscription for the armies of heaven has fallen heavily upon us. How quickly are we gone! Say to yourself, then, next time you are fretting about worldly trouble, "I will not fret about it. It will not last long." Next time you are tempted to rejoice in earthly treasure, say to yourself, "No, I shall not rejoice in this. It is only a shadow. I will rejoice in something more enduring."

Do not wonder if you are found to be *strangers as to usage*, for the world uses foreigners roughly; and they that are really of Christ must expect to be misunderstood and misrepresented. They burned many pilgrims in former days; they cannot do it now; but there are trials of cruel mockings still, and the seed of the serpent still hates the seed of the woman.

This, then, is the way of believers, they live in this world as strangers and foreigners, who are hasting as fast as they can towards their own country, where they shall hear their own language spoken, and shall abide with their own Father for ever. This is the life of faith.

IV. And what is THE FAITH BY WHICH WE ARE ABLE TO ENDURE SUCH A LIFE AS THIS? Why, it is this faith: "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

Our faith is one which we dare to avow. We declare plainly that we seek a country. We are not ashamed to say that this is not our rest, that we do not expect to find pleasure here. We are speeding over this stormy sea to the Fair Havens, where we shall cast anchor for ever. We are not ashamed to say this, however others may ridicule our hope.

And we say it because we believe it. In that day in which Christ washed away our sins he gave us the token that we should be with him where he is, for this is the mark of the blessed—"They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." That day in which we gave ourselves up to Christ, to be his for ever, he gave us a certificate that we should be with him in the glory, for this is his prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." I trust, beloved, no doubt ever crosses your mind as to the fact that every believer in Christ will certainly be in the glory with Christ for ever and ever. But if you so believe, I pray you to believe it strongly, so that you realize it; and if you do, you will sometimes sit yourself down and laugh; and if a neighbour asks you, "Wherefore do you laugh?" you will say, "I laugh with very delirium of delight to think that this poor aching brow shall one day wear a crown—that I shall exchange these dusty garments for the snow-white robes of perfection—that I, whose voice on earth is so poor and cracked, shall one day sing with seraphim and cherubim." Oh, what joy to the invalid to know that he shall leave his bed on which he has suffered so much, and go where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." There the poor man shall no longer fight with poverty, and earn his daily bread with toil, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and none shall know a want.

How glad I am that this shall be in so short a time! Some here present may be in heaven before this year is out; ah, perhaps he who speaks to you now may have gone very soon away to his own country! Shall it cost us any regret? It does for others; for we would fain remain to do them good; but for ourselves the contemplation is one of unmingled delight. The change has no loss about it: it is unspeakable gain. We lose nothing by departing to be with Christ, for it is not only better, but, as Paul puts it, it is "far better."

So now let us refresh ourselves with the thoughts of what we have, and forget what we have lost. Let us just think of what is laid up for us, and forget the penury of our estate below. Come; let us revel in the

prospect of our ultimate perfection, and thus gather strength wherewith to struggle with our present corruption. Come, let us now rejoice, and ring the joy-bells at the prospect of beholding the Well-Beloved's face without a mist or a veil between; and so let us be content awhile to pass through the darkness, even though we see no light. We will meet; we will meet; we will meet in the glory-land. A dear sister the other day wanted to have a long talk with me, and I did not want she should, for I had twenty more waiting, and she said, "Well, dear pastor, I will have a long talk with you when we both get to heaven." And I said, "Ah, that I will, and I will find you out if I can, or you will find me out; and we will converse without hurry." When we begin to speak up there, she will say to me, "How sweet is your voice!" And I shall look at her, and answer, "How beautiful you have become!" We shall be amazed at one another in the perfect country. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when *he* shall appear, we shall be like *him*, for we shall see him as he is." My dear aged friend will forget all her rheumatism; and so shall I. You may be bent half double while you are here below, but you will be straight enough up there. Those dim eyes need glasses, but you will want no spectacles before the throne. Limping, and lame, and halt, you are at this hour; but up there you will be able to join with all the happy ones in that music and dancing which shall celebrate the triumph of Christ. Arise, then, and be glad! Lift up your eyes from the dust and the darkness, and gaze upon the light eternal! The gate of heaven is open! If we may not enter yet, we shall enter before it shuts: let us rest assured of that. The day dawns, and until its full light has come let us rejoice in the anticipation of it. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, let us cry, "Turn, O our Beloved, and abide with us." He will not deny us our fond request.

The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xi.

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