STEPHEN'S DEATH

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."
Acts 7:59-60

IT is of the greatest service to us all to be reminded that our life is but a vapor, which appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away. Through forgetfulness of this, worldlings live at ease and Christians walk carelessly. Unless we watch for the Lord's coming, worldliness soon eats into our spirit as doth a canker. If you have this world's riches, believer, remember that this is not your rest, and set not too great a store by its comforts.

If, on the other hand, you dwell in straitness, and are burdened with poverty, be not too much depressed thereby, for these light afflictions are but for a moment, and are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Look upon the things that are as though they were not. Remember you are a part of a great procession which is always moving by, others come and go before your own eyes, you see them, and they disappear, and you yourself are moving onward to another and more real world.

"'Tis greatly wise to talk with our last hours," to give a rehearsal of our departure and to be prepared to stand before the great tribunal of the judgment. Our duty is to trim our lamps against the time when the Bridegroom comes, we are called upon to stand always ready, waiting for the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or else for the summons which shall tell us that the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, that the body must return to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it.

This death scene of Stephen's may aid our meditations, while, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we cast our minds forward to the time when we also must fall asleep. This is the only martyrdom which is recorded in the New Testament in detail, the Holy Ghost foreseeing that there would be martyrdoms enough before the church's history would end, and that we should never lack memorials such as those with which Foxe's Martyrology and works of the like order supply us.

It is equally remarkable that this is the only death scene in the New Testament which has been described at length, with the exception of our Lord's. Of course we are told of the deaths of other saints, and facts relating thereto are mentioned, but what they said when they died, and how they felt in passing out of the world, are left unrecorded, probably because the Holy Spirit knew that we should never lack for holy deathbeds and triumphant departures. These He well knew would be everyday facts to the people of God.

Perhaps, moreover, the Holy Spirit would have us gather from His silence that He would not have us attach so much importance to the manner of men's deaths as to the character of their lives. To live like Jesus most nearly concerns us, a triumphant death may be the crown, but a holy life is the head that must wear it. To obey our Lord's commands during our life is our most pressing business, we may leave the testimony of death to be given us in the selfsame hour.

We shall have dying grace in dying moments, and at this present time our chief business is to obtain the grace which will enable us to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. However, as we

have this one case of Stephen given us at full length, we should prize it the more highly, and study it the more carefully because it is the only one. Let us do so this morning.

There are three things upon which I shall speak—*The general character of Stephen's death,* secondly, *its most notable peculiarity.* And thirdly, *things desirable in reference to death suggested to us by Stephen's departure*.

I. Let us look at Stephen's death, and notice ITS GENERAL CHARACTER.

It strikes us at once that *it happened in the very midst of his service*. He had been appointed an officer of the church at Jerusalem, to see that the alms were distributed properly amongst the poor, especially among the Grecian widows. He discharged his duty to the satisfaction of the whole church and thereby he did most useful service, for it gave the apostles opportunity to give themselves wholly to their true work, namely, that of preaching and prayer, and it is no small matter to be able to bear a burden for another if he is thereby set free for more eminent service than we could ourselves, perform.

If it be so that I cannot preach myself, yet if I can take away from one who does preach certain cares which burden him, if I thus enable him to preach the more and the better, I am virtually preaching myself.

The care which Stephen exercised over the poor tended also to prevent heartburning and division, and this was a result of no mean order. But not content with being a deacon, Stephen began to minister in holy things as a speaker of the Word, and that with great power, for he was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

He stands forth on the page of church's history, for the time being, as quite a leading spirit, so much so, indeed, that the enemies of the Gospel recognized his prominent usefulness, and made him the object of their fiercest opposition, for they generally rage most against those who are doing most good.

Stephen stood in the front rank of the Lord's host, and yet he was taken away! "A mystery," say some, "A great privilege," say I.

My brethren, who desires to be removed at any other time? Is it not well to die in harness while yet you are useful? Who wants to linger till he becomes a burden rather than a help? If we are called to depart in the middle of service we must submit to it thankfully, and may even wish to have it said of us, he did—

"His body with his charge lay down,
And ceased at once to work and live."

He was removed in the very prime of his usefulness, just when many were being converted by his ministry, when, through his faith, miracles were being wrought on all sides, when he seemed, indeed, to be necessary to the church. And is not this well? Well, first, that God should teach His people how much He can do by a man whom He chooses. Well, next, that He should show them that He is not dependent upon any man, but can do His work even without the choicest laborer in His vineyard.

If our life can teach one lesson, and when that is taught, if our death can teach another, it is well to live and well to die, and far more desirable than to tarry long and take one's flight in the dreary winter of declining influence.

Let me be reaped, if I may venture on a choice, when my ministry shall be like the wheat in Pharaoh's dream, with seven ears rank and good, and not in a time when the east wind has shriveled me into barrenness. If God be glorified by our removal, is it not well? And may He not be more than ordinarily glorified when He lays us aside in order to show His church that He can do without His servants, or can raise up others in their stead? Happy is that messenger whose absence as well as his presence fulfils his Master's will.

But *Stephen's death was painful*, *and attended with much that flesh and blood would dread*. He died not surrounded by weeping friends, but by enemies who gnashed their teeth. No holy hymn made glad his death chamber, but the shouts and outcries of a maddened throng rang in his ears. For him no downy

pillow, but the hard and cruel rocks, battered and bruised by a whirlwind of stones he laid down to sleep, and woke up in the bosom of his Lord.

Now, brethren, this is all the more for our comfort, because if he died in perfect peace, nay, in joy and triumph, how much more may we hope to depart in peace! Since we shall not have these grim attendants upon our departing hours, may we not hope that we shall be sustained and buoyed up by the presence of our Lord and Master even as he was, and grace will be made perfect in our weakness?

Every circumstance tells on our side by way of comfort. If he slept amidst a storm of stones, how may we hope to fall asleep right peacefully, in the same faith in Jesus, when the saints are gathered around our bed to bid us farewell!

More particularly, however, I want to call your attention to the fact that *Stephen's departing moments were calm, peaceful, confident, joyous*. He never flinched while he was addressing that infuriated audience. He told them the plain truth, with as much quiet deliberation as if he had been gratifying them with a pleasing discourse. When they grew angry he was not afraid, his lip did not quiver, he did not retract or soften down a single expression, but cut them to the heart with even more fidelity.

With the courage of a man of God, his face was set as a flint. Knowing that he was now preaching his last sermon, he used the sharp two-edged sword of the Word, piercing into their very souls. Little cared he how they frowned, nothing was he abashed when they gnashed their teeth. He was as calm as the opened heaven above him, and continued so though they hurried him out of the city.

When they had dragged him outside the gate, and stripped off their clothes to carry out his execution, he did not let fall a single timorous word or trembling cry. He stood up and committed his soul to God with calmness, and when the first murderous stones felled him to the earth he rose to his knees, still not to ask for pity, nor to utter a craven cry, but to plead with his Lord for mercy upon his assailants. Then, closing his eyes like a child tired out with the sport of a long summer's day, and drops asleep as on its mother's lap, "he fell asleep."

Believe, then, O Christian, that if you abide in Christ, the like will be the case with you. You shall be undisturbed at the premonitions of decay, when the physician shakes his head your heart shall not fail, when friends look sad you will not share their sorrow.

We wept when we were born though all around us smiled, so shall we smile when we die while all around us weep. The dying Christian is often the only calm and composed person in all the group which fills the chamber from which he ascends to heaven. Talking of what he enjoys and expects, he glides gently into glory. Why should we expect it to be otherwise?

Stephen's God is our God, Stephen's faith we already possess in its germ, and we may have it in the same degree. The Holy Spirit dwells in us even as He did in Stephen, and if He puts not forth the same energy, what doth hinder Him but our unbelief?

Getting more faith we shall enjoy the same tranquil repose of spirit when our appointed hour shall come. Brethren, let us not fear death, but descend Jordan's shelving bank without the slightest dismay.

Some other points about Stephen's departure I beg you to notice—points relating to the state of his mind. *His mind was in a very elevated condition*. Here let us remark *his intense sympathy with God*. All through that long speech of his you see that his soul is taken up with his God, and the treatment which He had received from Israel.

He does not speak against his countrymen from any ill will, but he seems to take them into very little consideration. His God absorbs all his thoughts, and he tells how his God had sent Joseph, but his brethren persecuted him. His God had sent Moses, but they rebelled against him, his God had now sent Jesus, and they had been His betrayers and murderers. He had pity upon them in his heart, that is clearly seen in his dying prayer for them, but still his main feeling is sympathy with God in the rebellions which He had endured from the ungodly. Surely this is the mind which possesses the saints in heaven.

I see, as I read Stephen's speech, that he regarded impenitent sinners from the standpoint of the saints above, who will be so taken up in sympathy with God and the righteousness of His government,

that the doom of the finally rebellious will cause them no pain. The triumph of right over willful wrong, of holiness over the foulest and most wanton sin, of justice over the ingratitude which made light of redeeming love, will clear the soul of all emotion but that which rejoices in every act of the Most High, because it is and must be right. I know how easily this remark may be misrepresented, still it is true, and let it stand.

Notice too, how *Stephen's mind clung only to that which is purely spiritual*. All ritualism was clean gone from him. I dare say at one time Stephen felt a great reverence for the temple, the first Jewish Christians still continued to feel a measure of that awe of the temple which, as Jews, they had formerly indulged. But Stephen says, "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the LORD; or what is the place of my rest?"

It is noteworthy how the saints, when they are near to die, make very little of what others make a great deal of. What is ritual to a dying man?—a man with his eyes opened, looking into the future, and about to meet his God? Sacraments are poor supports in the dying hour. Priestcraft, where is it? The reed has snapped beneath the weight of a burdened conscience, and the tremendous realities of death and judgment.

The peculiar form of worship which a man contended for in health, and the little specialties of doctrines which he made much of aforetime, will seem little in comparison with the great spiritual essentials, when the soul is approaching the presence chamber of the Eternal. The saint in death is growingly spiritual, for he is nearing the land of spirits, and that city of which John said, "I saw no temple therein."

Brethren, it is a grand thing to grow in spiritual religion till you break the eggshell of form, and shake it off. For the outward fashion of ceremonies, and even of simplicities is too often to men what the eggshell is to the living bird. And when the soul awakens into the highest forms of life we chip and break that shell, and leave our former bondage. Stephen came right away from those superstitious reverences which still cast their blight over many Christians, and worshipped God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth.

It is most clear *that he rose beyond all fear of men*. They grin at him, they howl at him, but what matters that to him? He will be put to a blasphemer's death outside the city by the hands of cruel men, but that daunts him not. His face glows with joy unspeakable joy, he looks not like a man hurried to his execution, but as one on the way to a wedding. He looks like an immortal angel rather than a man condemned to die.

Ah, brethren, and so will it be with all the faithful! Today we fear man, who is but a worm, today we are so weak as to be swayed by the estimation of our fellows, and we listen to kindly voices, which counsel us to speak with bated breath upon certain points, lest we grieve this one or that. But the fitter we are for heaven the more we scorn all compromise, and feel that for truth, for God, for Christ, we must speak out, even if we die, for who are we that we should be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that is but a worm? It is a blessed thing if this shall be growingly our condition.

At the same time *Stephen was free from all cares*. He was a deacon, but he does not say, "What will those poor people do? How will the widows fare? Who will care for the orphans?" He does not even say, "What will the apostles do now that I can no longer take the labor from off their shoulders?" Not a word of it. He sees heaven opened, and thinks little of the church below, love it though he does with all his heart. He trusts the church militant with her Captain, he is called to the church triumphant. He hears the trumpet sound, "Up and away," and lo, he answers to the summons.

Happy men who can thus cast off their cares and enter into rest. Why should it not be thus with us? Why, like Martha, do we allow our much serving to cumber us? Our Lord managed His church well enough before we were born. He will not be at a loss because He has called us home and therefore we need not trouble ourselves as though we were all-important, and the church would pine for lack of us.

At the same time, *Stephen had no resentments*. That was a sweet prayer of his, "Lay not this sin to their charge." Just as Daniel before Belshazzar saw the scale and saw Belshazzar weighed in it and found wanting, so Stephen saw the balances of justice, and this murder of his, like a great weight, about to be placed in the scale against the raging Jews and he cried, "Lord, cast not this sin into the balance." He could not say, as the Savior did, "They know not what they do," for they did know it, and had been troubled by his speech, so that they stopped their ears to hear no more. But he pleads for them as far as truth would permit him, while breathing out his soul.

Every child of God ought to lay aside all resentments at once, or rather he should never have any. We are to carry in our hearts no remembrance of ills, but to live every day freely forgiving, as we are every day freely forgiven. But as we get nearer to heaven there must be growing love to those who hate us, for so shall we prove that we have been made ready for the skies.

To close up this description of his death, *Stephen died like a conqueror*. His name was *Stephanos,* or *crown*, and truly that day he not only received a crown, but he became the crown of the church as her first martyr. *He* was the conqueror, not his enemies. They stoned his body, but his soul had vanquished them. It was not in their power to move him. His quiet look defied their fury. He went home to his God to hear it said, "Servant of God, well done," and in nothing had his foes despoiled him on the way thither. He was more than a conqueror through Him that loved him.

These are some of the characteristics of Stephen's departure, and I trust that in our measure they may be ours. God grant them to us, and we will give Him all the glory.

II. Now I call your attention to a very interesting point—THE MOST NOTABLE PECULIARITY OF STEPHEN'S DEATH.

It was notable for this one point, that it was full of Jesus—and full of Jesus in four ways. Jesus was *seen*, *invoked*, *trusted*, and *imitated*.

First, *the Lord Jesus was seen*. The martyr looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. At first he was probably in the council hall of the Sanhedrim, but the vision seemed to divide the roof, to roll away the firmament, and set open the gates of heaven, so that into its innermost chambers the anointed eye was able to gaze.

It is said he saw *the Son of Man*. Now this is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is called the Son of Man by any one but Himself. He frequently called Himself the Son of Man, that was indeed His common name for Himself, but His disciples did not call Him so. Perhaps the glory of the rejected Messiah as man was the peculiar thought which was to be conveyed to Stephen's mind, to assure him that as the despised Lord had at length triumphed, so also should His persecuted servant.

At all times it is a gladsome sight to see the representative man exalted to the throne of God, but it was peculiarly suitable for this occasion, for the Lord Himself had warned His enemies, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power." He had spoken those words to the very men who now heard Stephen bear witness that it was even so. Stephen saw his Lord *standing*, now our Lord is generally described as sitting, but it was as if the sympathizing Lord had risen up to draw near to His suffering servant, eager both to sustain him and to receive him when the conflict was over.

Jesus rose from the throne to gaze upon Himself suffering again in the person of one of His beloved members. The place occupied by the Lord was at the "right hand of God." Stephen distinctly saw the ineffable brightness of eternal glory which no human eye can see until strengthened by superior grace, and amid that glory he saw the Son of Man in the place of love, power, and honor, worshipped and adored.

Now, when we come to die, dear friends, we may not, perhaps, expect with these eyes to see what Stephen saw, but faith has a grand realizing power. The fact that Jesus is enthroned is always the same, and so long as we are sure that He is at the right hand of God, it little matters whether we see Him with our natural eyes, for faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

Brethren, if your faith shall be strong when you come to die, as doubtless it will be, you will have a sight and sense of Jesus in His manhood at the right hand of God, and this will effectually take away

from you all fear of death, for you will feel, "If the man Christ is there, I, being already represented by Him, shall also be there. I shall rise from the dead, I shall sit at the right hand of the Father, His eternal power and Godhead will raise me up to be where He is, for has He not said—"I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."

I will, however, venture further. I am convinced, from my own observation, that not to a few, but to many dying saints, something more is given than the realizations of faith. Much more frequently than we suppose, supernatural glimpses of the divine splendor are vouchsafed to the saints in the hour of their departure.

I have heard persons comparatively uninstructed, and certainly unimaginative, speak of what they have seen in their last hour, in such a way, that I am certain they never borrowed the expressions from books, but must have seen what they described. There has been a freshness about their descriptions which has convinced me they did see what they assured me they beheld, and moreover, the joy which has resulted from it, the acquiescence in the divine will, the patience with which they have borne suffering, have gone far to prove that they were not under the influence of an idle imagination, but were really enabled to look within the veil.

The flesh in its weakness becomes, if I may so say, a rarefied medium, the mists are blown away, the obscuring veil grows thinner, disease makes rents in it, and through the thin places and the rents the heavenly glory shines. Oh, how little will a man fear death, or care about pain, if he expects to breathe out his soul on a better Pisgah than Moses ever climbed!

Well did we sing just now—I am sure I sang it with all my heart—

"Oh, if my Lord would come and meet,
My soul would stretch her wings in haste,
Fly fearless through death's iron gate,
Nor fear the terror as she passed."

Now this model departure, which is given in Scripture as a type of Christian deaths, has this for its ensign, that Christ was visible, and such shall be the character of our departure, if through faith we are one with Jesus, therefore, let us not fear.

Next, notice that *Jesus was invoked*, for that is the meaning of the text. "They stoned Stephen, calling upon," or invoking, "and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Dying Christians are not troubled with questions as to the deity of Christ. Dear friends, Unitarianism may do to live with, but it will not do to die with, at least not for us. At such a time we need an almighty and divine Savior, we want "God over all, blessed for ever" to come to our rescue in the solemn article.

So Stephen called upon Jesus and worshipped Him. He makes no mention of any other intercessor. O martyr of Christ, why didst thou not cry, "Ave Maria! Blessed Virgin, succor me!"? Why didst thou not pray to St. Michael and all angels? Ah, no! The abomination of saint and angel worship had not been invented in his day, and if it had been he would have scorned it as one of the foul devices of hell. There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He invoked Christ, and no one else.

Neither do we find him saying a word as to his good works, and alms deeds, and sermons, and miracles. No, he invoked the Lord Jesus and leaned on Him wholly. Ah, brethren, it is well to live and to die resting wholly upon Jesus. If you lie down tonight and quietly think of your departure, and inquire whether you are ready to die, you will not feel at your ease till your heart stands at the foot of the cross, looking up and viewing the flowing of the Savior's precious blood, believing humbly that He made your peace with God. There is no right living, or joyful dying, except in invoking Christ.

What next did Stephen do? *He trusted Jesus*, and confided in Him only, for we find him saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He felt that his spirit was about to leave the body to fly into the unknown world. Perhaps a shiver came over him of natural awe at the great mystery, even as it comes over us when we think of being disrobed of the familiar garment of our body, but he placed his

unclothed spirit in the hands of Jesus, and his fear and care were over. See, he has quite done with it now! He prays no more for himself, but intercedes for his enemies, and then closes his eyes and falls asleep. This is the simple and sublime art of dying.

Once more we take our guilty soul and place it in the dear pierced hand of Him who is able to keep it, and then we feel assured that all is safe. The day's work is done, the doors are fastened, the watchman guards the streets, come, let us fall asleep. With Jesus seen, invoked, and trusted, it is sweet to die.

Notice, once again, that in Stephen we see *Jesus imitated*, for the death of Stephen is a reproduction of the death of Jesus. Let us hope that ours will be the same. It was so, even in little circumstances. Jesus died without the gate, so did Stephen. Jesus died praying, so did Stephen. Jesus died saying, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," Stephen cannot approach God absolutely, but he approaches Him through the Mediator and he says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Christ dies pleading for His murderers, so does Stephen—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Now, if our death shall be a reproduction of the death of Jesus, why need we fear? It has hitherto been sweet to be made like Him, and it will still be sweet: even to suffer with Him has been delightful, surely it will be joyful to die with Him. We are willing to sleep in Jesus' bed, and lie as He did in the bosom of the earth, to arise in His likeness at the resurrection.

Thus you see, dear brethren, that Stephen's death was radiant with the glow of his Lord's brightness. Christ was glorified and reflected in him. None could question whose image and superscription he bore. If our lives shall be of that order, our deaths also shall be of the like character.

Let your life be looking unto Jesus, pleading with Jesus, trusting in Jesus, copying Jesus, and then your departing moments will be attended by visions of Jesus, and reproductions of His dying behavior. As you have been with Him in the trials of life, He will be with you in the closing scenes of death. Happy they whose deathbed Jesus makes, and who sleep in Jesus, to be brought with Him when He returns to take the kingdom.

III. From Stephen's departure we gather something as to THE KIND OF DEATH WHICH WE MAY WISELY DESIRE.

First, it is very desirable that *our death should be of the same sort of our life*. Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost in life, and so was he full of the Holy Ghost in death. Stephen was bold, brave, calm, and composed in life, he is the same amid the falling stones. It is very sad when the reported account of a man's death does not fit in with his life.

I am afraid that many funeral sermons have done great mischief by their flattery, for persons have very naturally said, "This is very strange, I never knew that the departed person was a saint until I heard this account of his end. Really, when I hear these wonderful things about him—well, I should not have thought it."

No, it will not do to have no character for piety but that which is hurriedly run up in a few days of sickness and death. It is ill to die with a jerk, getting as it were upon another line of rails all on a sudden. It is better to glide from one degree of grace to another, and so to glory.

We ought to die daily, die every morning before we go down to breakfast, that is to say, we should rehearse it all, so that when we come to die it will be no new thing to us. Death may be the fringe or border of life, but it should be made out of the same piece. A life of clay is not to be joined to a death of gold. We cannot hope to dine with the world and sup with God. We ought to dwell in the house of the Lord every day.

Again, it is most desirable that *death should be the perfecting of our whole career*, the putting of the cornerstone upon the edifice, so that when nothing else is wanted to complete the man's labors he falls asleep.

Dear brethren, is it so with you? Suppose you were to die this morning in the pew, would your life be a complete life, or would it be like a broken column snapped off in the center? Why, there are some who even in their business lives have left many needful things undone. For instance, they have not made their wills yet, and will cause much sorrow to wife and children through their neglect. Some Christian

people do not keep their worldly affairs in proper order, but are lax, disorderly, and slovenly, so that if they were to die, there would be many things of which they would feel loathe to die.

Mr. Whitfield used to say when he went to bed at night, "I have not left even a pair of gloves out of their place: if I die tonight, all my affairs, for time and eternity, are in order." That is the best way to live, so that, let death come when it may, at midnight, cockcrowing, or midday, it will be a desirable *finis* to a book of which we have written the last line. We will have finished our course, and served our generation and our falling asleep is the fit conclusion of the matter.

May our death not be one of a kind which needs flurry and hot haste to make the man ready. There are people in the world who, if they were going off by train and knew of it a month beforehand, would be all in a fever an hour before they started, though they know the time the train starts, they cannot arrive a few minutes before by any means, but rush in just as the bell rings, and leap into a carriage only in time to save the train. Some die in that fashion, as if they had so much to do and were in such a hurry, and besides, had so little grace that they could be only saved so as by fire.

When worldly Christians die, there is a deal to be done to pack up, and get ready for departing, but a true Christian stands with his loins girded, he knows he has to travel, he does not know exactly when, but he stands with his staff in his hand. He knows the Bridegroom is soon coming, and he therefore keeps his lamp well trimmed. That is the way to live and the way to die.

May the Holy Spirit put us in such a condition, that the angel of death may not summon us unawares, or catch us by surprise. Then will going home be nothing out of the common way, but a simple matter.

Bengel, the famous commentator, did not wish to die in spiritual parade, with a sensational scene, but to pass away like a person called out to the street door from the midst of business. His prayer was granted. He was revising the proof sheets of his works almost to the moment when he felt the death stroke. Is not this well?

Equally desirable was the end of the Venerable Bede, who died as he completed his translation of the Gospel of John. "Write quickly," said he, "for it is time for me to return to Him who made me." "Dear master," said the pupil, "one sentence is still wanting." "Write quickly," said the venerable man. The young man soon added, "It is finished," and Bede replied, "Thou hast well said, all is now finished," and he fell asleep. So would I desire to depart, so might every Christian desire, we would make no stir from our daily holiness, we would change our place but not our service, having waited on our Lord at this end of the room, we are called up higher, and we go.

It must be a dreadful thing for a professing Christian to die full of regrets for work neglected and opportunities wasted. It is sad to have to say, "I must leave my Sunday school class before I have earnestly warned those dear children to flee from the wrath to come." It would be wretched for me to go home today and say, "I have preached my last sermon, but it was not earnest, nor calculated either to glorify God or benefit my fellow men." Can the end of a wasted life be other than unhappy? Will it not be sorrowful to be called away with work undone and purposes unfulfilled? O my brethren, do not live so as to make it hard to die.

It must also be a sad thing to be taken away unwillingly, plucked like an unripe fruit from the tree. The unripe apple holds fast to its place, and so do many hold hard to their riches, and cleave so fondly to worldly things that it needs a sharp pull to separate them from the world. The ripe fruit adheres but lightly, and when a gentle hand comes to take it, it yields itself freely, as if willing to be gathered, like an apple of gold into a basket of silver. God make you unworldly, and forbid that you should cleave so resolutely to things below as to make death a violence and departure a terror.

Brethren, we would not wish to die so that it should be a matter of question, especially to ourselves, to which place we are going, and yet you will die in that way if you live in that way. If you have no assurance of salvation, do you expect it to come to you on your dying bed? Why, my dear friend, when the pain increases and the brain becomes weary, you are very likely to suffer depression, and therefore you need strong faith to begin with for your own comfort then.

Would you like friends to go out of your death chamber saying, "We hope he is saved, but we stand in doubt concerning him"? Your life should prevent that.

Holy Mr. Whitfield, when some one observed, "I should like to hear your dying testimony," said, "No, I shall, in all probability bear no dying testimony." "Why not?" said the other. "Because I am bearing testimony every day while I live and there will be the less need of it when I die." That seraphic apostle preached up to the last afternoon, and then went upstairs to bed, and died.

There was no need for anyone to ask, "What did he say when he was dying?" Ah, no, they knew what he said when he was living, and that was a great deal better. Let your testimony in life be such that, whether you speak or not in your last moments, there shall be no question about whose you were nor whom you served.

In conclusion, one would desire to die so that *even our death should be useful*. I feel persuaded that Stephen's death had a great deal to do with Saul's conversion. Have you ever observed the evident influence of Stephen upon Paul? Augustine says, "If Stephen had never prayed, Saul had never preached." I do not say that the death of Stephen converted Saul, far from it, that change was wrought by a divine interposition when Saul was on the road to Damascus, but what he saw in Stephen's martyrdom had made the soil ready to receive the good seed.

Saul, in later life, seems to me to be always taking his text from Stephen's sermon. Read that sermon through at home, and see if it is not so. Stephen spoke about the covenant of circumcision, and that was a very favorite topic with Paul. When Paul stood at Athens on Mars' Hill and addressed the Areopagites, he said to them, "God that made heaven and earth dwelleth not in temples made with hands"—almost the identical words which Stephen had quoted, and surely the remembrance of Stephen before the Sanhedrim must have rushed over the apostle's mind at the time.

There is yet another passage—and indeed I might carry on the parallel a very long way—where Stephen used the expression, "They received the law by the disposition of angels," an idea peculiar to Paul. Paul is the child of Stephen, Stephen dying is the seed out of which Paul springs up. What a privilege so to die that a phoenix may rise out of our ashes.

If we have been useful ourselves up to the measure of a moderate ability, we may, as we die, call forth greater workers than ourselves. Our expiring spark may kindle the divine light in some flaming beacon, which far across the seas shall scatter the beams of Gospel light. And why not? God grant that we may, both in life and in death, serve Him well. I would that even in our ashes might live our former fires, that being dead we yet may speak.

It was a happy thought of an earnest divine, who asked that when he was dead he might be placed in his coffin where all his congregation might come and see him, and that on his bosom should be placed a paper bearing this exhortation, "Remember the words which I have spoken to you, being yet present with you." Yes, we will go on telling of Jesus and winning souls in life and death, if God so helps us. Beloved believers, love the souls of men, and pray God to save them.

As for you who are not saved yourselves, I implore you think of what your condition will be when you come to die, or if a seared conscience should cause you to die in peace, think what you will do at the judgment, when that conscience will become tender. What will you do when the lips of the dear Redeemer shall say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell"?

"Ye sinners, seek His grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Look to the dying Savior's face,
And find salvation there."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 5:9-15 AND 7

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—855, 829, 853

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