

A Reformed Wesley Preaches The Death Sermon of Whitefield

A
S E R M O N
On the DEATH of the
Rev. Mr GEORGE WHITEFIELD.
P R E A C H E D
At the CHAPEL in Tottenham-Court-Road,
A N D
At the TABERNACLE near Moorfields,
On SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1770.

By JOHN WESLEY, M. A.
Late FELLOW of Lincoln-College, Oxon: and
CHAPLAIN to the Right Honourable the Countess
Dowager of BUCHAN.
1st edition

2 S A M. xii. 23.
*Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him
back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

L O N D O N:
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1770

~ Featured Work ~

NUMBERS XXIII. 10.

*Let me die the death of the Righteous, and let
my last end be like his!*

1. LET my last end be like his! How many of you join in this wish? Perhaps there are few of you who do not, even in this numerous congregation. And O that this wish may rest upon your minds! that it may not die away till your souls also are lodged where the wicked cease from troubling, and *where the weary are at rest!*

2. An elaborate exposition of the text, will not be expected on this occasion. It would detain you too long from the sadly-pleasing thought of your beloved

Brother, Friend, and Pastor; yea, and Father too: for how many are here whom he hath *begotten in the Lord?* Will it not then be more suitable to your inclinations, as well as to this solemnity, directly to speak of this Man of God, whom you have so often heard speaking in this place? *The end of whose conversation ye know, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

...
A particular account of the last scene of his life, is thus given by a gentleman of *Boston*: "After being about a month with us in *Boston* and its vicinity, and preaching every day, he went to *Old-york*, preached on *Thursday*, *September 27*, there; proceeded to *Portsmouth*, and preached there on *Friday*. On *Saturday* morning he set out for *Boston*; but before he came to *Newbury*, where he had engaged to preach the next morning, he was importuned to preach by the way. The house not being large enough to contain the people, he preached in an open field. But having been infirm for several weeks, this so exhausted his strength, that when he came to *Newbury*, he could not get out of the ferry-boat without the help of two men. In the evening, however, he recovered his spirits, and appeared with his usual cheerfulness. He went to his chamber at nine, his fixt time, which no company could divert him from; and slept better than he had done for some weeks before. He rose at four in the morning, *September 30*, and went into his closet; and his companion observed he was unusually long in private. He left his closet, returned to his companion, threw himself on the bed, and lay about ten minutes. Then he fell upon his knees, and prayed most fervently to God, "That if it was consistent with his will, he might that day finish his Master's work." He then desired his man to call Mr. Parsons, the clergyman at whose house he was: But in a minute, before Mr. Parsons could reach him, died without a sigh or groan. On the news of his death, six gentlemen set out for *Newbury*, in order to bring his remains hither, but he could not be moved, so that his precious ashes must remain at *Newbury*. Hundreds would have gone from this town to attend his funeral, had they not expected he would have been interred here. — May this stroke be sanctified to the church of God in general, and to this province in particular!"

II. 1. We are, in the second place, to take some view of his character. A little sketch of this, was soon after published in the *Boston Gazette*: An extract of which is subjoined: "Little can be said of him, but what every friend to vital christianity, who has sat under his ministry, will attest. In his public labours he has for many years astonished the world with his eloquence and devotion. With what divine pathos did he persuade the impenitent sinner to embrace the practice of piety and virtue! Filled with the spirit of grace, he spoke from the heart, and with a fervency of zeal, perhaps unequalled since the days of the apostles, adorned the truths he delivered with the most graceful charms of rhetoric and oratory. From the pulpit he was unrivalled in the command of an ever-crowded auditory. Nor was he less agreeable and instructive in his private conversation: Happy in a remarkable ease of address, willing to communicate, studious to edify. May the rising generation catch a spark of that flame which shone with such distinguished lustre in the spirit and practice of this faithful servant of the most high God!"

2. A more particular, and equally just character of him, has appeared in one of the *English* papers. It may not be disagreeable to you, to add the substance of this likewise: "The character of this truly pious person, must be deeply imprest on the heart of every friend to vital religion. In spite of a tender and delicate constitution, he continued, to the last day of his life, preaching with a frequency and a fervor that seemed to exceed the natural strength of the most robust. Being called to the exercise of his function at an age, when most young men are only beginning to qualify themselves for it, he had not time to make a very considerable progress in the learned languages. But this defect was amply supplied, by a lively and fertile genius, by fervent zeal, and by a forcible and most persuasive delivery. And though in the pulpit he often found it needful, by *the terrors of the Lord to persuade men*, he had nothing gloomy in his nature, being singularly chearful, as well as charitable and tender-hearted. He was as ready to relieve the bodily as the spiritual necessities of those that applied to him. It ought also to be observed, that he constantly enforced upon his audience every moral duty, particularly industry in their several callings, and obedience to their superiors. He endeavoured, by the most extraordinary efforts, of preaching in different places, and even in the open fields, to rouse the lower class of people, from the last degree of inattention and ignorance, to a sense of religion. For this, and his other labours, the name of George Whitfield, will long be remembered with esteem and veneration."

3. That both these accounts are just and impartial, will readily be allowed; that is, as far as they go. But they go little farther than the *outside* of his character.

They shew you the *Preacher*, but not the *Man*, the *Christian*, the *Saint* of God. May I be permitted to add a little on this head, from a personal knowledge of near forty years? Indeed, I am thoroughly sensible how difficult it is to speak on so delicate a subject; what prudence is required to avoid both extremes, to say neither too little, nor too much? Nay, I know it is impossible to speak at all, to say either less or more, without incurring from some the former, from others the latter censure. Some will seriously think, that too little is said; and others, that it is too much. But without attending to this, I will speak just what I know, before Him to whom we are all to give an account.

4. Mention has already been made of his unparalleled *Zeal*, his indefatigable *Activity*, his *Tender-heartedness* to the afflicted, and *Charitableness* toward the poor. But should we not likewise mention his deep *Gratitude*, to all whom God had used as instruments of good to him? Of whom he did nor cease to speak in the most respectful manner, even to his dying day. Should we not mention, that he had an heart susceptible of the most generous and the most tender *Friendship*? I have frequently thought, that this, of all others, was the distinguishing part of his character. How few have we known of so kind a temper, of such large and flowing affections? Was it not principally by this, that the hearts of others were so strangely drawn and knit to him? Can any thing but love beget love? This shone in his very countenance, and continually breathed in all his words, whether in public or private. Was it not this, which, quick and penetrating as lightning, flew from heart to heart? Which gave that life to his Sermons, his Conversations, his Letters? Ye are witnesses.

5. But away with the vile misconstruction of men of corrupt minds, who know of no love but what is *earthly* and *sensual*. Be it remembered, at the same time, that he was endued with the most nice and unblemished *modesty*. His office called him to converse very frequently and largely, with women as well as men; and those of every age and condition. But his whole behaviour toward them, was a practical comment on that advice of *St. Paul to Timothy*, *Intreat the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity*.

6. Mean time, how suitable to the friendliness of his spirit, was the *frankness* and *openness* of his conversation? Although it was as far removed from rudeness on the one hand, as from guile and disguise on the other. Was not this frankness at once a fruit and a proof of his *courage* and *intrepidity*? Armed with these, he feared not the faces of men, but *used great plainness of speech* to persons of every rank and condition, high and low, rich and poor: endeavouring only be *manifestation of the truth*, to *commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.

7. Neither was he afraid of labour or pain, any more than of *what man could do unto him*, being equally

"Patient in bearing ill and doing well."

And this appeared in the *steadiness* wherewith he pursued whatever he undertook for his Master's sake. Witness one instance for all, the Orphan-house in *Georgia*, which he began and perfected, in spite of all discouragements. Indeed, in whatever concerned himself, he was pliant and flexible. In this case he was *easy to be intreated*, easy to be either convinced or persuaded. But he was immoveable in the things of God, or wherever his conscience was concerned. None could persuade, any more than affright him, to vary in the least point from that *Integrity*, which was inseparable from his whole character, and regulated all his words and actions. Herein he did

*"Stand as an iron pillar strong,
And stedfast as a wall of brass."*

8. If it be inquired. What was the foundation of this integrity, or of his sincerity, courage, patience, and every other valuable and amiable quality, it is easy to give the answer. It was not the excellence of his natural temper: Not the strength of his understanding: It was not the force of education; no, nor the advice of his friends. It was no other than faith in a bleeding Lord; *Faith of the operation of God*. It was *a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. It was *the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which was given unto him*, filling his soul with tender, disinterested love to every child of man. From this source arose that torrent of *Eloquence* which frequently bore down all before it: From his, that astonishing force of *Persuasion*, which the most hardened sinners could not resist. This it was, which often made his *head as waters*, and his *eyes a fountain of tears*. This it was which enabled him to pour out his soul in *Prayer*, in a manner peculiar to himself, with such fulness and ease united together, with such strength and variety both of sentiment and expression.

9. I may close this head with observing, What an honour it pleased God to put upon his faithful servant, by allowing him to declare his everlasting gospel in so many various countries, to such numbers of people, and with so great an effect, on so many of their precious souls! Have we read or heard of any person since the apostles, who testified the gospel of grace of God, through so widely extended a space, through so large a part of the habitable world? Have we read or heard of any person, who called so many thousands, so many myriads of sinners to repentance? Above all, have we read or heard of any, who has been a blessed instrument in his hand of bringing so many sinners from *darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*? It is true, were we to talk thus to the gay world, we should

be judged to *speak as barbarians*. But *you* understand the language of the country to which you are going, and whither our dear friend is gone a little before us.

III. But how shall we improve this awful providence? This is the *Third* thing which we have to consider. And the answer to this important question is easy; (may God write it in all our hearts!) By keeping close to the *grand doctrines* which he delivered: And by drinking into his *spirit*.

1. And first, let us keep close to the grand scriptural doctrines, which he every where delivered. There are many doctrines of a less essential nature, with regard to which, even the sincere children of God (such is the present weakness of human understanding!) are and have been divided for many ages. In these we may think and let think; we may "agree to disagree." But meantime let us hold fast the essentials of *the faith, which was once delivered to the saints*; and which this champion of God so strongly insisted on, at all times, and in all places.

2. His fundamental point was, give God all the glory of whatever is good in man. And in the business of salvation, set Christ as high, and man as low as possible. With this point, he and his friends at *Oxford*, the original *Methodists* (so called) set out. Their grand principle was, there is *no power* (by nature) and *no merit* in man. They insisted, All power to think, speak, or act right, is in and from the Spirit of Christ: And all merit is (not in man, how high soever in grace, but merely) in the blood of Christ. So he and they taught: There is no power in man, till it is given him from above, to do one good work, to speak one good word, or to form one good desire. For it is not enough to say, all men are *sick of sin*: No, we are all *DEAD in trespasses and sins*. It follows, that all the children of men are *by nature children of wrath*. We are all *guilty before God*, liable to death temporal and eternal.

3. And we are all helpless, both with regard to the power and to the guilt of sin. *For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* None less than the Almighty. Who can raise those that are *dead*, spiritually dead in sin? None but He who raised us from the dust of the earth. But on what consideration will he do this? *Not for works of righteousness that we have done. The dead cannot praise thee, O Lord!* Nor do any thing for the sake of which they should be raised to life. Whatever therefore God does, he does it merely for the sake of his well-beloved Son: *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. He himself bore all our sins in his own body upon the tree. He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification.* Here then is the sole *meritorious cause* of every blessing we do or can enjoy: In particular of our pardon and acceptance with God, of our full and free justification. But by what means do we become interested in what Christ has done and suffered?

Not by works, lest any man should boast, but by faith alone. We conclude, says the apostle, that a man is justified by faith, without the works of the law. And to as many as thus receive Him, giveth he power to become the sons of God: Even to those that believe in his name, who are born, not of the will of man, but of God.

4. And except a man be thus born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But all who are thus born of the Spirit, have the kingdom of God within them. Christ sets up his kingdom in their hearts; Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. That mind is in them, which was in Christ Jesus, enabling them to walk as Christ also walked. His indwelling-Spirit makes them both holy in heart, and holy in all manner of conversation. But still, seeing all this is a free gift, through the righteousness and blood of Christ, there is eternally the same reason to remember, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

5. You are not ignorant, that these are the fundamental doctrines which he every where insisted on. And may they not be summed up, as it were, in two words, *The new birth*, and *justification by faith*? These let us insist upon with all boldness, at all times, and in all places: In public (those of us who are called thereto) and at all opportunities, in private. Keep close to these good, old, unfashionable doctrines, how many soever contradict and blaspheme. Go on, my brethren, *in the name of the Lord, and in the power of his might*. With all care and diligence, keep that safe which is committed to your trust: Knowing that *heaven and earth shall pass away; but this truth shall not pass away*.

6. But will it be sufficient, to keep close to his Doctrines, how pure soever they are? Is there not a point of still greater importance than this, namely, to drink into his Spirit? Herein to be a *follower of him, even as he was of Christ*? Without this, the purity of our doctrines, would only increase our condemnation. This therefore is the principal thing, to copy after his spirit. And allowing that in some points, we must be content, to *admire* what we cannot *imitate*; yet in many others we may, through the same free grace, be partakers of the same blessing. Conscious then of your own wants, and of his bounteous love, who *giveth liberally and upbraideth not*, cry to Him that worketh all in all, for a measure of the same precious faith: of the same zeal and activity, the same tender-heartedness, charitableness, bowels of mercies. Wrestle with God for some degree of the same grateful, friendly, affectionate temper; of the same openness, simplicity, and godly sincerity, *Love without dissimulation*. Wrestle on, till the Power from on high works in you the same steady courage and patience: And above all, because it is the crown of all, the same invariable integrity.

7. Is there any other fruit of the grace of God, with which he was eminently endowed, and the want of

which among the children of God he frequently and passionately lamented? There is One, that is, *Catholic love*: That sincere and tender affection, which is due to all those, who, we have reason to believe, are children of God by faith: In other words, all those in every persuasion, who *fear God and work righteousness*. He longed to see all who had tasted of the good word, of a truly *catholic spirit*, (a word little understood and still less experienced by many, who have it frequently in their mouth.) Who is he that answers this character? Who is a man of a *catholic spirit*? One who loves as friends, as brethren in the Lord, as joint partakers of the present kingdom of heaven, and fellow-heirs of his eternal kingdom, all of whatever opinion, mode of worship, all of whatever opinion, mode of worship, or congregation, who believe in the Lord Jesus; who love God and man; who rejoicing to please, and fearing to offend God, are careful to abstain from evil, and zealous of good works. He is a man of a truly catholic spirit. who bears all these continually upon his heart: Who having an unspeakable tenderness for their persons, and an earnest desire of their welfare, does not cease to commend them to God in prayer, as well as to plead their case before men: Who speaks comfortably to them, and labours by all his words, to strengthen their hands in God. He assists them to the uttermost of his power, in all things, spiritual and temporal. He is ready to *spend and to be spent* for them; yea to *lay down his life for his brethren*.

8. How amiable a character is this? How desirable to every child of God! But why is it then so rarely found? How is it, that there are so few instances of it? Indeed, supposing we have tasted of the love of God, how can any of us rest, till it is our own? Why, there is a delicate device, whereby Satan persuades thousands, that they may stop short of it, and yet be guiltless. It is well, if many here present are not in this *snare of the devil, taken captive at his will*. "O yes, says one, I have all this love for those I believe to be children of God. But I will never believe, he is a child of God, who belongs to that *vile congregation*! Can he, do you think, be a child of God, who holds such *detestable opinions*? Or he that joins in such senseless and superstitious, if not idolatrous *worship*?" So we justify ourselves in one sin, by adding a second to it! We excuse the want of love in ourselves, by laying the blame on others. To colour our own devilish temper, we pronounce our brethren children of the devil. O beware of this! And if you are already taken in the snare, escape out of it as soon as possible. Go and learn that truly catholic love, which is *not rash or hasty in judging*: That love which *thinketh no evil*, which *believeth and hopeth all things*: Which makes all the allowances for others, that we desire others should make for us. Then we shall take knowledge of the grace of God, which is in every man, whatever be his opinion or

mode of worship. Then will all that fear God be near and dear unto us, *in the bowels of Jesus Christ.*

9. Was not this the spirit of our dear friend? And why should it not be ours? O thou God of love, how long shall thy people be byword among the heathen? How long shall they laugh us to scorn, and say, "See how these Christians love one another?" When wilt thou roll away our reproach? *Shall the sword devour for ever? How long will it be, ere thee bid thy people return from following each other? Now at least, let all the people stand still, and pursue after their brethren no more! But whatever others do, let all of us, my brethren, hear the voice of him that being dead, yet speaketh! Suppose ye hear him say, "Now at least, be ye followers of me as I was of Christ! Let brother no more lift up sword against brother, neither know ye war any more! Rather put ye on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, brotherly kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. Let*

the time past suffice for strife, envy, contention; for *biting and devouring one another.* Blessed be God, that ye have not long ago been *consumed one of another!* From henceforth hold ye *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

10. O God, with thee no word is impossible: Thou dost whatsoever pleaseth thee! O that thou wouldst cause the mantle of thy prophet, whom thou hast taken up, now to fall upon us that remain! *Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Let his spirit rest upon these thy servants! Shew thou art the God that answereth by fire!* Let the fire of thy love fall on every heart! And because we love thee, let us love one another with a *love stronger than death. Take away from us all anger, and wrath, and bitterness; all clamour, and evil-speaking.* Let thy Spirit so rest upon us, that from this hour, we may be *kind to each other, tender-hearted: Forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us!*

AN HYMN.

I.

Servant of God, well done!
Thy glorious warfare's past
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crown'd at last;
Of all thy heart's desire
Triumphantly possessest,
Lodg'd by the ministerial quire
In thy Redeemer's breast.

II.

In condescending love
Thy ceaseless prayer He heard,
And bad thee suddenly remove,
To thy complete reward:
Ready to bring the peace,
Thy beauteous feet were shod,
When mercy sign'd soul's release
And caught thee up to God.

**Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you;
considering the result of their conduct imitate their faith. Heb. 13:7**

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