

Hope for the Godly in Death

by John Murray

The sermon provides hope and comfort for believers in the face of death, emphasizing the reality of Christ's resurrection and the believer's future glory.

Duration: 25:33

Scripture: Psalm 119:89, Isaiah 61:3, Matthew 18:12, Romans 8:39, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Topics: "Death"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of focusing our thoughts and hearts on the glorious event of Christ's manifestation in his matchless glory. He encourages the audience to measure the depth of their love, hope, and outreach by how much they gravitate towards this future event. The preacher assures the congregation that their departed loved ones, including husbands, fathers, and pastors, will be glorified with Christ at his glorious appearance. He addresses the concern of the Thessalonians about whether those who have died will experience the rapture and assures them that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. The final truth the preacher highlights is that the godly will always be with the Lord, being snatched up into the air to meet him.

Transcript

May we stand while we call upon God's name and pray. O thou eternal and ever-blessed God, who paintest not, neither art weary, and of whose understanding there is no searching. Thou who art the creator of heaven and earth, who doest all things according to the counsel of thine own will, and who hast gathered us together on this occasion, confronted again with the reality of thy word, that it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after this the judgment.

We beseech thee, O Lord, that we may be solemnized than you, remembering that thus we are, and to thus we must return. That thou, O Lord, dost fulfill thine own will and thine own purpose, that none can stay thy hand, nor say unto thee, What doest thou? O Lord, grant us of thy assurance that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant that our attention, our thought, may be focused upon thy revealed will unto us.

We praise and bless thy great name, that thy word is sufficient for every situation into which thou dost place us, and that there is no circumstance for which thy grace is not sufficient. May we know, O Lord, in

truth, that Jesus died and rose again, and that those who sleep through Jesus thou wilt bring with him. Do thou bless to us, O Lord, thy word.

May it be written upon our hearts as with the point of a diamond, and may we know that thy word is forever settled in heaven. And as thou hast given us such abundant manifestation of thy faithfulness in the way thou hast preserved thy servant through the years, in which thou hast maintained him in faithfulness, and hast been his guide even unto death, that thou art the God of the covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Grant us, O Lord, thy grace, and bless us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly sin Christ Jesus, for his name's sake.

Amen. Death is always an abnormality, and death is an evil. Death brings sadness, and it is always compassed about with mystery.

It is an abnormality because it was not the loss of man that he was created. It is an evil because it is the wages of sin. It brings sadness because it separates us from our loved ones.

And it is mysterious because we know so little about the unseen beyond. In the scripture, the shadow falls to a very large extent upon the world of spirits, gives us little information respecting the situation and the activity of those who have gone to the world of spirits. But the scripture provides us with enough information to warn the ungodly and to comfort believers.

Not enough, indeed, to satisfy vain curiosity, but enough to satisfy faith. There is nothing that illumines the thick pall of darkness that falls over the death of the wicked. How significant, then, is the word of the apostle in that passage I read.

Even of others who do not have hope, there is not one ray of light or hope to illumine the darkness that enshrouds the death of unbelievers. And there is not one ray of light because neither heaven nor earth or hell knows of any comfort that can be imparted to the ungodly in their death. The broad expanse of eternity opens out before them without one ray of light or hope.

And we might ask the question very urgently, is there no light that can be cast upon the death of the ungodly? And the answer is absolutely none because heaven has not provided it. By way of contrast, how eloquent and significant, therefore, are the words of the apostle in that same text. Ye follow not, even of others who do not have hope.

Now, he does not say that they do not follow at all. Some people think that it is more Christian and exhibitivive of more fortitude not to mourn at the death of the godly. It is an unscriptural attitude.

The scripture represents death as the occasion for mourning. The silver cord has been loosed and the golden bowl has been broken and the mourners go about the street. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus even though he knew that presently he would raise him to life again, raise him from the dead.

And yet he wept. And we read of Stephen that devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. Yes, the house of death is quite properly and necessarily the house of mourning because there is an abnormality there.

There is an evil there. There is sadness there. And after all, there is the shroud of mystery.

But nevertheless, the apostle does say, ye follow not, even of others who do not have hope. And the thought is that there is light to illumine the darkness that enshrouds even the death of the godly. And why, for what reason? There are five I shall mention.

First, the sting has been taken out of death for them. The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But the sting has been taken out of death for the godly because they have been relieved from the burden of sin's guilt and from the bondage of sin's power.

And you must remember how significant the words of the apostle are here. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, them also who sleep through Jesus will God bring with him. And the reason why the sting is taken out of death is just precisely that they are united to Christ in the virtue of his death and in the power of his resurrection.

As he was delivered up for their offenses, he was raised again for their justification. The second truth that throws light upon the death of the godly is that the righteous sleep through Jesus. That's the exact word of the apostle here in this passage.

They sleep through Jesus. And whether he meant to say it or not, it is still true that they are put to sleep through Jesus. It's a biblical truth.

You know the tenderness, the love, and the care with which a mother puts her infant to sleep. The infant may not want to go to sleep, but that does not detract in the least degree from the tenderness and the gentleness and the love and the care with which the mother puts the infant to sleep. And it is just that that is true in a supereminent degree, on a transcendent plane with respect to Christ and his people.

It is he who puts them to sleep. He attends their departure and when their time has come in accordance with his own appointment and with his own mediatorial lordship, he puts them to sleep. And that's exactly the figure that the scripture uses with reference to the death of the godless.

And not only does he put them to sleep, but they are dead in Christ. They are asleep in him. They are not separated from him.

And the body is laid in the tomb. How beautiful is the word of the Westminster Catechism. The souls of believers are after death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory.

And their bodies being still united to Christ to rest in their grave to the resurrection. The fifth, the third, truth that shows light upon the darkness that surrounds the death evil of the godly and injects hope into it is that they go to be with Christ at death. There's no interval.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and present with the Lord in his exalted glory. You remember, of course, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. We are told that Lazarus was carried as the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Well, of course, Abraham's bosom is just a figure. But the truth is that they are carried as it were into our Lord's own bosom. They are carried into the immediate presence of the Lord that they love.

And oh, what an immediate transformation there is from the sorrow that surrounds their actual departure and sometimes between the struggle that attends their actual departure and their presence, their immediate presence. The fourth truth is that they will be glorified with Christ at his glorious appearance.

Now apparently it was that doubt that occasioned this particular revelatory word of the apostle in the fourth chapter of the first epistle to the Thessalonians.

The Thessalonians were concerned that those believers who had departed this life would not enjoy the rapture, would not enjoy the glory of Christ's appearing. And he writes unto them that they are not to have any concern in that matter. The first thing that will happen when Christ will come in his final consummate glory is that the dead will be raised and Christ will descend with a shout with the voice of the archangel and the comfort of God.

The dead in Christ will rise first. The corruptible then will have put on incorruption and the mortal will have put on immortality and then they will enter in in the integrity of their reconstituted personality into the fellowship of Christ's consummated glory. Have we pondered, my friends, the glory of this stupendous event? Then will be brought to pass the saying that is written death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting? O death, where is thy victory? The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. And the fifth and final truth from which I wish to say a word as that which injects life and hope into the death of the godly is that they will always be with the Lord. They will be snatched up into the air to a meeting of the Lord and they will always be with Him.

That is to say they will never be separated from the confirmation of Christ's glory. However much we must emphasize the glory that belongs to Christ in His exalted face, exalted far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named in this world and in the world to come, nevertheless we must never forget that the confirmation of Christ's glory is yet in the future when He will come in the clouds of heaven and He will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. It is then that He will sit upon the throne of His glory and then and only then will be the final fruitage of Christ's prayer.

Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me. Think of it, meeting the Lord. When He will come bodily, physically and gloriously to meet Him, do our minds, our hearts gravitate by the irresistible attraction of interest, of love and of hope towards that glorious event when Christ will be manifested in His matchless glory? I say we can measure the outreach of our faith, the depth of our love and the outreach of our hope by the extent to which we gravitate in our thoughts to that event when the Lord Himself will be finally glorified and when the people of God shall enter into the complete fellowship of Him in that exalted and final glory.

That is the confident assurance that we have with respect to our departed friends. Some of you have lost a husband. Some of you have lost a father.

Perhaps some children not here present have lost a grandfather. Some of you have lost a pastor. And then all of you, if you only knew it, have lost a friend.

I have lost the one whom I probably deemed my dearest friend on earth outside of my own family. There was no one on whom I relied for moral, spiritual and prayerful support as our dear departed friend. But oh, however much sadness is connected with his departure, what a glorious prospect is presented to us.

What an assurance we have that he is now in the full enjoyment in his disembodied spirit of the Lord he loved and that when Christ will come again a second time without sin unto salvation, he, with all the people of God, is awesome, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing holy and without blemish. Let us now

stand while we call upon God's name in prayer and receive the benediction. O Thou our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort, who comforts us with the consolation of the everlasting gospel, may we know, O Lord, I knew, the power of Jesus' resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable unto his death.

And may we indeed be closed as we are confronted with the sovereignty of Thine apartment, closed with humility, imbued with true conviction, realizing that we are confronted anew with the wages of sin, which is death. And may we, O Lord, confess our sins. Blessed forever be Thy great and holy name, that if we confess our sins, Thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Enable us, O Lord, to follow in the footsteps of Him whom we expect shortly to commit to His last resting place in this earth. O grant us that the example of godliness, the example of faithfulness, the example of love, of joy, of peace, of longsuffering, of gentleness, of goodness, of faith, of meekness and of temperance, which have been so signally manifested in His faith and in His life, we might emulate so that we shall follow in the footsteps of the cross. That we shall not be discouraged, that we may remember that Thou art the Lord God Almighty, that Christ is exalted at the right hand of power, and that we may lay hold upon Him who, though He was dead, is alive again and has the keys of hell and of death.

Blessed forever be Thy great and holy name, for the light and the joy, the assurance that Thou hast given us, that all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. We pray, O Lord, that the good measure of comfort, in accordance with Thy holy sovereign purpose, may be administered unto each one in this particular situation and on this occasion. Do Thou strengthen with all might, by Thy Spirit in the inner man, her who has been bereaved of a faithful and loving husband.

Do Thou sustain her now and in the days to come. And may she more and more know this presence, that is divine from its salted state, and who has given all authority in heaven and in earth. Out of His wholeness may she receive grace or grace.

Bless abundantly also all the other members of His family, and may they know, even though they have lost a father or a grandfather or a brother or a friend, that Thou wouldest, O Lord, give unto each one that measure of grace that is necessary for sustenance, for continuance in the faith, for obedience to Thy word, so that we all may come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Do Thou, O Lord, bless the people who have been bereaved of their past. Do Thou grant unto them beauty for eyes, the oil of joy for morning, the garment of praise, and give them ever to remember that the Chief Shepherd is still watching over His flock and that He will minister according to His goodness, according to His wisdom unto them.

O grant, we pray, that the testimony of truth that hath been borne for these years in these parts through the faithful ministrations of Thy servants might be continued and that even now abundant truth may be shown, that Thou wouldest graciously grant that the word sown throughout these years may take root down and spring forth upward, bringing forth fruit some seven, some sixty, and some a hundredfold. And do Thou grant that those who are careless might be aroused from their indifference. And now, O Lord, do Thou dismiss us with Thy blessing.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with us all.

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