

Death--Academic Honours--Written Sermons

by John Newton

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking a higher ambition of living for God, and the need for Gospel preachers to use plain language to convey the message of the Gospel.

Scripture: Matthew 13:45, John 6:37, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 1:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Newton emphasizes the importance of submitting to God's sovereignty and being thankful in all circumstances, even in the face of sorrow and distress, as sin and its consequences are ever-present and souls are in need of salvation. He congratulates a minister on their calling, urging them to seek God's glory and anointing of the Holy Spirit for effective ministry. Newton warns against pursuing worldly honors over spiritual growth, highlighting the value of knowing Jesus Christ above all else and the necessity of plain, understandable preaching to reach all listeners.

Transcript

May 18, 1776.

Dear Sir,

Though I wished to hear from you sooner, I put a candid interpretation upon your silence; [I] was some[what] apprehensive for your health, but felt no disposition to anger. Let our correspondence be free from fetters. Write when you please, and when you can: I will do the like. Apologies may be spared on both sides. I am not a very punctual correspondent myself, having so many letters to write, and therefore have no right to stand upon punctilios with you.

I sympathize with you in your sorrow for your friend's death. Such cases are very distressing! But such a case might have been our own. Let us pray for grace to be thankful for ourselves, and submit every thing in humble silence to the sovereign Lord, who has a right to do as he pleases with his own. We feel what happens in our own little connections; but--O the dreadful mischief of sin!--Instances of this kind are as frequent as the hours, the minutes, perhaps the moments of every day: and though we know but one in a million, the souls of others have an equal capacity for endless happiness or misery. In this situation the Lord has honoured us with a call to warn our fellow-sinners of their danger, and to set before them his free and sure salvation; and if he is pleased to make us instrumental of snatching but one as a brand out of the fire, it is a service of more importance than to be the means of preserving a whole nation from temporal

ruin.

I congratulate you upon your admission into the ministry, and pray him to favour you with a single eye to his glory, and a fresh anointing of his Holy Spirit, that you may come forth as a scribe well instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and that his word in your mouth may abundantly prosper.

I truly pity those who rise early and take late rest and eat the bread of carefulness, with no higher prize and prospect in view than the obtaining of academical honours. Such pursuits will ere long appear (as they really are) vain as the sports of children. May the Lord impress them with a noble ambition of living to and for him. If these adventurers, who are labouring for pebbles under the semblance of goodly pearls, had a discovery of the Pearl of great price, how quickly and gladly would they lay down their admired attainments, and become fools that they might be truly wise! What a snare have you escaped! You would have been poorly content with the name of a mathematician or a poet, and looked no farther, had not He visited your heart and enlightened you by his grace. Now I trust you account your former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord. What you have attained in the way of literature will be useful to you, if sanctified, and chiefly so by the knowledge you have of its insufficiency to any valuable purpose in the great concerns of walking with God and winning souls.

I am pleased with your fears lest you should not be understood in your preaching. Indeed, there is a danger of it. It is not easy for persons of quick parts duly to conceive how amazingly ignorant and slow of apprehension the bulk of our congregations generally are. When our own ideas are clear, and our expressions proper, we are ready to think we have sufficiently explained ourselves; and yet, perhaps, nine out of ten (especially of those who are destitute of spiritual light) know little more of what we say than if we were speaking Greek.

A degree of this inconvenience is always inseparable from written discourses. They cast our thoughts into a style, which, though familiar to ourselves, is too remote from common conversation to be comprehended by narrow capacities; which is one chief reason of the preference I give, *caeteris paribus* (for the most part), to extempore preaching. When we read to the people, they think themselves less concerned in what is offered than when we speak to them point-blank. It seems a good rule, which I have met with somewhere, and which perhaps I have mentioned to you, to fix our eyes upon some one of the auditory whom we judge of the least capacity: if we can make him understand, we may hope to be understood by the rest. Let those who seek to be admired for the exactness of their compositions enjoy the poor reward they aim at: it is best for Gospel preachers to speak plain language. If we thus singly aim at the glory of our Master and the good of souls, we may hope for the accompanying power of his Spirit, which will give our discourses a weight and energy that Demsothenes had no conception of.

I can give you no information of a curacy in a better situation. But either the Lord will provide you one, or I trust he will give you usefulness and a competency of health and spirits where you are. He who caused Daniel to thrive upon pulse, can make you strong and cheerful even in the Fens, if he sees that best for you. All things obey him, and you need not fear but he will enable you for whatever service he has appointed you to perform.

This letter has been a week in hand: many interruptions from without, and indispositions within. I seem to while away my life, and shall be glad to be saved upon the footing of the thief upon the cross, without any hope or plea but the power and grace of Jesus, who has said, I will in nowise cast out. Adieu.

Pray for yours, &c.

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