

On the Death of Mr. Whitefield

by John Wesley

This sermon is a eulogy for George Whitefield, a man of unparalleled zeal and devotion, who left a lasting impact on the people he preached to through his ministry and his Orphan-house.

Scripture: Numbers 23:10, Matthew 5:16, John 15:12-13, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13-14, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:1-2, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Legacy of Faith"

Description

John Wesley preaches a heartfelt sermon on the death of George Whitefield, reflecting on Whitefield's life, character, and the impact of his ministry. He emphasizes the importance of desiring a righteous end, as expressed in Numbers 23:10, and encourages the congregation to remember Whitefield's dedication to preaching the gospel and his profound love for others. Wesley highlights Whitefield's unwavering faith, his tireless efforts in ministry, and the need for believers to embody the same spirit of love and unity that Whitefield exemplified. The sermon serves as a call to honor Whitefield's legacy by adhering to the core doctrines of faith and fostering a spirit of charity among Christians.

Transcript

Preached at the Chapel in Tottenham-Court Road and at the Tabernacle, near Moorfields, on Sunday, November 18, 1770.

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Num. 23:10.

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, and to-day, and for ever." And may we not,

I. Observe a few particulars of his life and death?

II. Take some view of his character? and,

III. Inquire how we may improve this awful providence, his sudden removal from us?

1. We may, in the first place, observe a few particulars of his life and death. He was born at Gloucester, in December, 1714, and put to a grammar-school there, when about twelve years old. When he was seventeen, he began to be seriously religious, and served God to the best of his knowledge. About eighteen he removed to the University, and was admitted at Pembroke College in Oxford; and about a year after he became acquainted with the Methodists (so called), whom from that time he loved as his own soul.

2. By them he was convinced that we "must be born again," or outward religion will profit us nothing. He joined with them in fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays; in visiting the sick and the prisoners; and in gathering up the very fragments of time, that no moment might be lost: and he changed the course of his studies; reading chiefly such books as entered into the heart of religion, and led directly to an experimental knowledge of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

3. He was soon tried as with fire. Not only his reputation was lost, and some of his dearest friends forsook him; but he was exercised with inward trials, and those of the severest kind. Many nights he lay sleepless upon his bed; many days, prostrate on the ground. But after he had groaned several months under "the spirit of bondage," God was pleased to remove the heavy load, by giving him "the Spirit of adoption;" enabling him through a living faith, to lay hold on "the Son of His Love."

4. However, it was thought needful, for the recovery of his health, which was much impaired, that he should go into the country. He accordingly went to Gloucester, where God enabled him to awaken several young persons. These soon formed themselves into a little society, and were some of the first-fruits of his labor. Shortly after, he began to read, twice or thrice a week, to some poor people in the town; and every day to read to and pray with the prisoners in the county jail.

5. Being now about twenty-one years of age, he was solicited to enter into holy orders. Of this he was greatly afraid, being deeply sensible of his own insufficiency. But the Bishop himself sending for him, and telling him, "Though I had purposed to ordain none under three-and-twenty, yet I will ordain you whenever you come" -- and several other providential circumstances concurring -- he submitted, and was ordained on Trinity Sunday, 1736. The next Sunday he preached to a crowded auditory, in the church wherein he was baptized. The week following he returned to Oxford, and took his Bachelor's degree: and he was now fully employed; the care of the prisoners and the poor lying chiefly on him.

6. But it was not long before he was invited to London, to serve the cure of a friend going into the country. He continued there two months, lodging in the Tower, reading prayers in the chapel twice a week, catechizing and preaching once, beside visiting the soldiers in the barracks and the infirmary. He also read prayers every evening at Wapping chapel, and preached at Ludgate prison every Tuesday. While he was here, letters came from his friends in Georgia, which made him long to go and help them: but not seeing his call clear, at the appointed time he returned to his little charge at Oxford, where several youths met daily at his room, to build up each other in their most holy faith.

7. But he was quickly called from hence again, to supply the cure of Dummer, in Hampshire. Here he read prayers twice a day; early in the morning, and in the evening after the people came from work. He also daily catechized the children, and visited from house to house. He now divided the day into three parts, allotting eight hours for sleep and meals, eight for study and retirement, and eight for reading prayers, catechizing, and visiting the people. Is there a more excellent way for a servant of Christ and His Church? If not, who will "go and do likewise?"

8. Yet his mind still ran on going abroad; and being now fully convinced he was called of God thereto, he set all things in order, and, in January, 1737, went down to take leave of his friends in Gloucester. It was in this journey that God began to bless his ministry in an uncommon manner. Wherever he preached, amazing multitudes of hearers flocked together, in Gloucester, in Stonehouse, in Bath, in Bristol; so that the heat of the churches was scarce supportable: and the impressions made on the minds of many were no less extraordinary. After his return to London, while he was detained by General Oglethorpe, from week to week, and from month to month, it pleased God to bless his word still more. And he was indefatigable in his labor: generally on Sunday he preached four times, to exceeding large auditories; beside reading prayers twice or thrice, and walking to and fro often ten or twelve miles.

9. On December 28 he left London. It was on the 29th that he first preached without notes. December 30, he went on board; but it was above a month before they cleared the land. One happy effect of their very slow passage he mentions in April following: "Blessed be God, we now live very comfortably in the great cabin. We talk of little else but God and Christ; and scarce a word is heard among us when together, but what has reference to our fall in the first, and our new birth in the Second, Adam." It seems, likewise, to have been a peculiar providence, that he should spend a little time at Gibraltar; where both citizens and soldiers, high and low, young and old, acknowledged the day of their visitation.

10. From Sunday, May 7, 1738, till the latter end of August following, he "made full proof of his ministry" in Georgia, particularly at Savannah: he read prayers and expounded twice a day, and visited the sick daily. On Sunday he expounded at five in the morning; at ten read prayers and preached, and at three in the afternoon; and at seven in the evening expounded the Church Catechism. How much easier is it for our brethren in the ministry, either in England, Scotland, or Ireland, to find fault: with such a laborer in our Lord's vineyard, than to tread in his steps!

11. It was now that he observed the deplorable condition of many children here; and that God put into his heart the first thought of founding an Orphan-house, for which he determined to raise contributions in England, if God should give him a safe return thither. In December following, he did return to London; and on Sunday, January 14, 1739, he was ordained priest at Christ Church, Oxford. The next day he came to London again; and on Sunday, the 21st, preached twice. But though the churches were large, and crowded exceedingly, yet many hundreds stood in the churchyard, and hundreds more returned home. This put him upon the first thought of preaching in the open air. But when he mentioned it to some of his friends, they judged it to be mere madness: so he did not carry it into execution till after he, had left London. It was on Wednesday, February 21, that, finding all the church doors to be shut in Bristol (beside, that no church was able to contain one half of the congregation), at three in the afternoon he went to Kingswood, and preached abroad to near two thousand people. On Friday he preached there to four or five thousand; and on Sunday to, it was supposed, ten thousand! The number continually increased all the time he stayed at Bristol; and a flame of holy love was kindled, which will not easily be put out. The same was afterwards kindled in various parts of Wales, of Gloucestershire, and Worcestershire. Indeed, wherever he went, God abundantly confirmed the word of his messenger.

12. On Sunday, April 29, he preached the first time in Moorfields, and on Kennington Common; and the thousands of hearers were as quiet as they could have been in a church. Being again detained in England from month to month, he made little excursions into several counties, and received the contributions of willing multitudes for an Orphan-house in Georgia. The embargo which was now laid on the shipping gave him leisure for more journeys through various parts of England, for which many will have reason to bless God to all eternity. At length, on August 14, he embarked: but he did not land in Pennsylvania till October 30. Afterwards he went through Pennsylvania, the Jerseys, New York, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina; preaching all along to immense congregations, with full as great effect as in England. On January 10, 1740, he arrived at Savannah.

13. January 29, he added three desolate orphans to near twenty which he had in his house before. The next day he laid out the ground for the house, about ten miles from Savannah. February 11, he took in four orphans more; and set out for Frederica, in order to fetch the orphans that were in the southern parts of the colony. In his return he fixed a school, both for children and grown persons, at Darien, and took four orphans thence. March 25, he laid the first stone of the Orphan-house; to which, with great propriety, he gave the name of Bethesda; a work for which the children yet unborn shall praise the Lord. He had now about forty orphans, so that there was near a hundred mouths to be fed daily. But he was "careful for nothing," casting his care on Him who feed the young ravens that call upon Him.

14. In April he made another tour through Pennsylvania, the Jerseys, and New York. Incredible multitudes flocked to hear, among whom were abundance of Negroes. In all places the greater part of the hearers were affected to an amazing degree. Many were deeply convinced of their lost state, many truly converted to God. In some places, thousands cried out aloud; many as in the agonies of death; most were drowned in tears; some turned pale as death; others were wringing their hands; others lying on the ground; others sinking into the arms of their friends; almost all lifting up their eyes, and calling for mercy.

15. He returned to Savannah, June 5. The next evening, during the public service, the whole congregation, young and old, were dissolved in tears: after service, several of the parishioners, and all his family, particularly the little children, returned home crying along the street, and some could not help praying aloud. The groans and cries of the children continued all night, and great part of the next day.

16. In August he set out again, and through various provinces came to Boston. While he was here, and in the neighboring places, he was extremely weak in body: yet the multitudes of hearers were so great, and the effects wrought on them so astonishing, as the oldest men then alive in the town had never seen before. The same power attended his preaching at New York, particularly on Sunday, November 2: almost as soon as he began, crying, weeping, and wailing were to be heard on every side. Many sunk down to the ground, cut to the heart; and many were filled with divine consolation. Toward the close of his journey he made this reflection: "It is the seventy-fifth day since I arrived at Rhode Island, exceeding weak in body; yet God has enabled me to preach an hundred and seventy-five times in public, besides exhorting frequently in private! Never did God vouchsafe me greater comforts: never did I perform my journeys with less fatigue, or see such a continuance of the divine presence in the congregations to whom I preached." In December he returned to Savannah, and in the March following arrived in England.

17. You may easily observe, that the preceding account is chiefly extracted from his own journals, which, for their artless and unaffected simplicity, may vie with any writings of the kind. And how exact a specimen is this of his labors both in Europe and America, for the honor of his beloved Master, during the thirty years that followed, as well as of the uninterrupted shower of blessings wherewith God was pleased to succeed

his labors! Is it not much to be lamented, that anything should have prevented his continuing this account, till at least near the time when he was called by his Lord to enjoy the fruit of his labor? If he has left any papers of this kind, and his friends account me worthy of the honor, it would be my glory and joy to methodize, transcribe, and prepare them for the public view.

18. 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 fixed 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 labors 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 day 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 luster, 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] impressed 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 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 cheerful, 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 endeavored, 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 labors, the name of GEORGE WHITEFIELD 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 show 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 not cease to speak in the most respectful manner, even to his dying day. Should we not mention, that he had a 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 anything 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 behavior towards them was a practical comment on that advice of St. Paul to Timothy: "Entreat the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity."

6. Meantime, 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; endeavoring only "by manifestation of the truth to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

7. Neither was he afraid of labor 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 entreated;" easy to be either convinced or persuaded. But he was immovable 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 steadfast 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 this, 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 fullness and ease united together, with such strength and variety both of sentiment and expression.

9. I may close this head with observing what an honor 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 the 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 everywhere 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 aright, 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 anything 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 was raised 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 everywhere 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 upbraids not," cry to Him that works 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 true 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 the 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, 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 cause before men; who speaks comfortably to them, and labors, 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 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 may 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 color 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 "thinks no evil;" which "believes and hopes 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 a by-word 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 Thou 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 what ever others do, let all of us, my brethren, hear the voice of him that, being dead, yet speaks! 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 mild, 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 does whatsoever please Thee! O that Thou would 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! Show Thou art the God that answers 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 clamor 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

1 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 possess'd,

Lodged by the ministerial choir

In thy Redeemer's breast.

2 In condescending love,

Thy ceaseless prayer He heard;

And bade thee suddenly remove

To thy complete reward:

Ready to bring the peace,

Thy beauteous feet were shod,

When mercy sign'd thy soul's release,

And caught thee up to God.

3 With saints enthroned on high,

Thou dost thy Lord proclaim,

And still To God salvation cry,
Salvation to the Lamb!
O happy, happy soul!
In ecstasies of praise,
Long as eternal ages roll,
Thou seest thy Saviour's face!
4Redeem'd from earth and pain,
Ah! when shall we ascend,
And all in Jesu's presence reign
With our translated friend?
Come, Lord, and quickly come!
And, when in Thee complete,
Receive Thy longing servants home,
To triumph at Thy feet!

[Sugden's edition includes the additions in square brackets within the text.] [Sugden's introduction:

GEORGE WHITEFIELD died at Newburyport, Massachusetts, thirty miles north of Boston, on September 30, 1770, in the Presbyterian manse, which is still preserved. He was buried in a vault under the pulpit of the Presbyterian meeting-house on October 2, according to his own wish; and in 1828 a cenotaph was erected in the church with a suitable inscription. Under date November 10, 1770, Wesley says, "I returned to London, and had the melancholy news of Mr. Whitefield's death confirmed by his executors, who desired me to preach his funeral sermon on Sunday the 18th." [This was his own wish. "If you should die abroad," said Mr. Keen, "whom shall we get to preach your funeral sermon? Must it be your old friend, the Rev. Mr. John Wesley?" This question was often put, and as often Whitefield answered, "He is the man."] "In order to write this, I retired to Lewisham on Monday; and on Sunday following went to the chapel in Tottenham Court Road. An immense multitude was gathered together from all corners of the town. I was at first afraid that a great part of the congregation would not be able to hear; but it pleased God to strengthen my voice that even those at the door heard distinctly. It was an awful season. All were still as night; most appeared to be deeply affected; and an impression was made on many which one would hope will not speedily be effaced. The time appointed for my beginning at the Tabernacle was half-hour after five, but it was quite filled at three; so I began at four. At first the noise was exceeding great; but it ceased when I began to speak; and my voice was again so strengthened that all who were within could hear, unless an accidental noise hindered here or there for a few moments. Oh that all may hear the voice of Him with whom are the issues of life and death; and who so loudly, by this unexpected stroke, calls all His children to love one another." On the following Friday he repeated the sermon at the Tabernacle at Greenwich to an overflowing congregation. Again, on January 2, 1771, he preached at Deptford "a kind of

funeral sermon for Mr. Whitefield. In every place I wish to show all possible respect to the memory of that great and good man."

It must not be forgotten that at this very time Wesley was in the thick of the controversy with the Rev. Walter Shirley and the Countess of Huntingdon's preachers about the famous Minutes of 1770, in which Wesley had laid down clearly the differences between his views and those of the Calvinists. It is much to the credit both of Mr. Whitefield's friends and of Wesley that this was not allowed to interfere with their invitation to him to preach the sermon, nor with his own affectionate and ungrudging recognition of the greatness and goodness of his departed fellow worker. Indeed, their difference of opinion had never, since the dispute in 1741, been permitted to interrupt their mutual love and esteem; they agreed to differ, and still to love one another.

The sermon was at once published in London; and a reprint was issued in Dublin, also dated 1770, with an additional hymn "Glory and thanks and love;" and it was placed last in the sermons in vol. iv (1771). A warm attack was made on it in the Gospel Magazine of February 1771, probably by Mr. Romaine. He first objected to the text. "How improper," he says, "to apply the words of a mad prophet to so holy a man as Mr. Whitefield!" Of course Wesley's answer was obvious: he did not apply the words to Mr. Whitefield, but to himself; and he humorously says, "Nothing would be more suitable than for Balaam junior to use the words of his forefather; surely a poor reprobate may, without offence, wish to die like one of the elect!" The more serious part of the attack was on the statement in iii. (5) that "the fundamental doctrines which Mr. Whitefield everywhere insisted on" were "the new birth, and justification by faith." Romaine, on the contrary, affirms "the grand fundamental doctrines, which he everywhere preached, were the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, and absolute predestination flowing therefrom." Wesley answers "(1) that Mr. Whitefield did not everywhere preach these. In all the times I myself heard him preach, I never heard him utter a sentence either on one or the other. Yea, all the times he preached in West Street Chapel, and in our other chapels throughout England, he did not preach these doctrines at all, no, not in a single paragraph. (2) That he did everywhere preach the new birth, and justification by faith. Both in West Street Chapel and in all our other chapels throughout England, he did preach the necessity of the new birth, and justification by faith, as clearly as he has done in his two volumes of printed sermons." Wesley was not ignorant of the differences between himself and Whitefield in regard to predestination; but most properly in this sermon, whilst he recognizes (iii. 1) that there are differences of opinion between the children of God, he emphasizes the points of agreement; and whatever Whitefield may have believed about the eternal decrees, no man ever preached a full and free salvation more constantly and effectively than he did. The only solution of this difficulty is to be found in the recognition that the two opposing views represent the two sides of one truth, which our finite understanding is not able to synthesize; but which we may nevertheless accept, just as we accept the Unity in Trinity in the Godhead, or the divine-human person of our Lord.

Incidentally we learn from Wesley reply to Romaine that one of the hymns sung at the service was Charles Wesley's "Shrinking from the cold hand of death," from the Short Hymns on Select Passages (1762), now No. 823 in the Methodist Hymn-Book; the other was no doubt the one appended to the sermon, "Servant of God, well done!" written by Charles Wesley for this occasion, and published as "An Hymn on the Death of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield" in the third (post-humous) series of Funeral Hymns. The hymn appended to the Dublin edition of the sermon is No. 42 in the second series of Funeral Hymns, published in 1759 (Osborn's edition of Poetical Works, vi. 285).

The Tottenham Court Road Chapel, or Whitefield's Tabernacle, as it was often called, stood on the west side of the road, between Tottenham Street and Howland Street. The site was then surrounded by fields and gardens, and there were only two houses to the north of it. The foundation stone was laid by Whitefield in June 1756, and he opened it on November 7 of the same year. It soon was found to be too small, and was enlarged in 1759. A vault was prepared beneath the chapel, in which Whitefield meant that both he himself and the two Wesleys should be interred; but his wish was not fulfilled. In 1890 the building was taken down and re-erected. It is now known as Whitefield's Central Mission.

The Tabernacle was originally a wooden shed to the north of Upper Moorfields, close to Wesley's Foundry, opened in 1741; in 1753 it was superseded by a brick building, the one in which this sermon was preached in the afternoon. This was used for over a century, and was then replaced by a Tabernacle at the corner of Tabernacle Street and Leonard Street, Finsbury, which occupied the old site. The old pulpit was retained from which Wesley preached on this occasion. The building is now used for business purposes.]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-wesley/on-the-death-of-mr-whitefield/>

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