









# FUNERAL SERMON

ON

THE IMPORTANCE

AND

THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

PREACHED

IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

NOVEMBER 13, 1814,

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE DESIRE EXPRESSED BY THE LATE

**ANTHONY FOTHERGILL, M. D. F. R. S. &c.**

IN HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT, AND IN PURSUANCE OF THE  
PROVISIONS THEREIN CONTAINED.

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## SERMON, &c.

I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day:  
The night cometh, when no man can work.

*John ix, 4.*

**THE** responsibility of man, as a rational and moral agent, to his omniscient and omnipotent Creator, is a truth dictated by Reason, and confirmed by Divine Revelation.

The “distinguished link in being’s endless chain”\* which man constitutes—the endowment of his mind with those three high, intellectual, powers, Will, Memory, and Understanding, not only render him justly amenable to the laws of God, but exhibit him, in the order of creation, as holding a rank, and occupying a station, “but a little lower than the angels.”†

This appears to be an innate principle, and conviction of the human mind; as, all orders of men, from the untutored savage that roams the wilderness, “whose soul proud Science never taught to stray,”‡ to the refined and metaphysical philosopher, who soars above the unlettered throng, and vainly thinks to comprehend the

\* Young.

† Ps. viii. 5.

‡ Pope.

views and motives of Omniscience—all are possessed of a sense of moral rectitude and depravity, of right and wrong, of virtue and of vice; and, therefore, are, or ought to be, influenced by the expectation of merited reward or punishment. Hence among heathen nations the various modes of propitiating the favour of the great First Cause, and of deprecating his displeasure, by copious and fragrant offerings of fruits and flowers—by streams of blood from immolated victims—by clouds of incense rolling to the skies—by voluntary acts of devotion and austerity—and, even by death. “These having not the written law,” says an Holy Apostle, “were a law unto themselves, which shows the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.”\* Hence, Jews and Christians, by the same impulses, strengthened and confirmed by explicit Revelations from the otherwise unknown God, have been taught and assured, that “verily there is a reward for the righteous, doubtless there is a God who judgeth the earth.”†

This conviction of responsibility, associated with a similar conviction of the extreme brevity of human life, at its most extended period, and the absolute uncertainty of the attainment of that period by any, even the most robust and athletic individual, has ever stimulated the prudent, encouraged the pious, and animated and impelled the timid, “to make their calling and election sure,”‡ “to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time,”§ “to work out their

\* Rom. ii. 14, 15. † Ps. lviii. 11. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 10. § Ep. v. 15.



salvation with fear and trembling,"\* "to stand in awe and sin not; to commune with their own hearts,"† "to work while it is day, because the night of death cometh," (with certainty and rapidity) "in which no man can work."‡

Our divine Instructor, Jesus Christ, whose example and familiar converse were always as instructive as his positive precepts, in walking through the city of Jerusalem, saw a man who had been blind from his birth, sitting on the ground, soliciting alms from those who passed by. The singular circumstance of his being *born* blind, induced his disciples to ask his opinion with respect to the correctness of a doctrine which prevailed among the Pharisees, and which they had derived from the Egyptians; that men were punished in this world for sins committed in a preexistent state, by the transmigration or return of their souls after death into maimed or diseased bodies; or, that the crimes of parents were thus visited upon their children. "Master," said they, "who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"§ Our blessed Saviour very promptly condemned the doctrine, by answering—"Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him—I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work."|| As if he had said—The calamitous condition of this afflicted man does not arise from previous sins, committed either by himself or his parents; but, from the natural operation of cause and effect; and he is placed here by the providence of God,

\* Phil. ii. 12.      † Ps. iv. 4.      ‡ Jo. ix. 4.      § Jo. ix. 2.

|| Jo. ix. 3, 4, 5.

in order that I may, by the performance of a miracle, give an additional proof of the truth of my doctrine, and of the authenticity of my character. And though it is the Sabbath-day, yet, to teach you that works of mercy are not prohibited on that day, and that natural and external means are to be used for the cure of diseases, I will make a clay and anoint his eyes with it. And he accordingly, says the sacred historian, “spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay; and said unto him, go, wash in the pool of Siloam; and he went, and washed, and received sight.”\* “As long as I am in the world,” said Christ, “I am the light of the world.”†

“Hence we learn,” says a celebrated commentator upon this passage, “that our Lord’s miracles were designed not only as proofs of his mission, but to be specimens of the power which he possessed as Messiah. For example, by feeding the multitude with meat which perished, he signified that he was come to quicken and nourish mankind with *the bread of life*, that sovereign cordial, and salutary nutriment of the soul. His giving sight to the blind, was a lively emblem of the efficacy of his doctrine to illuminate the blinded understandings of men. His healing their bodies, represented his power to heal their souls, and was a specimen of his authority to forgive sin, as it was a real, though but a partial removal of its punishment. His casting out devils, was an earnest of his final victory over Satan, and all his associates. His raising particular persons from the dead, was the beginning of his triumphs over Death, and a demonstration of his abili-

\* Jo. ix. 6, 7

† Jo. ix. 5

ty to accomplish a general Resurrection. And, to give no more examples, his curing all promiscuously who applied to him, showed that he was come, not to condemn the world, but to save even the chief of sinners. Accordingly, at performing these miracles, or soon after, when the memory of them was fresh in the minds of his hearers, we often find him turning his discourse to the spiritual things that were signified by them, as in the case before us.”\*

But, to return to the subject immediately suggested by our text. “I must work, &c.” that is, I must embrace every opportunity of performing my duty, and executing the object of my mission into this world; viz. the instruction of men and the salvation of their souls—for, my time is but short; the night of death is fast approaching, which puts an end to all human labours, and precludes the possibility of all future exertion; for, there can be “no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave.”†

By this memorable declaration of our Lord we are taught,

1. The necessity of activity and diligence.
2. The certainty of death, the impossibility of repentance, or improvement afterwards, and the consequent high importance of the improvement of time.

Each of these heads I shall now briefly discuss, and conclude with a practical application accommodated to the design of the present discourse.

First then,—Of the necessity of activity and diligence.

\* Macknight, pp. 343. Note.

† Ec. ix. 10.

Can a being, in any degree capable of reflection, require the aid of argument, the influence of persuasion, or the stimulus of remonstrance, to induce him to desire and endeavour to obtain perfect and eternal happiness, which is fully set before him and solicits his acceptance? Can he be justly termed a rational being, who would estimate the imperfect and evanescent objects of sensual enjoyment, of worldly honour, interest, or ambition, above the refined, sublime, rapturous, and permanent delights of Heaven?—who would appreciate the collision of human interests, the depravity of human passions, the glittering empty toys of time, above the harmonious concord of angels, the seraphic aspirations of pure, celestial intelligences,—the infinite, inexhaustible, splendid realities of Eternity—the full fruition of the Paradise of God? Yet, such is the infatuation of blind, deluded, hoodwinked man, that he madly prefers these present transitory trifles, to future, perfect, and permanent blessings—the shadow to the substance.

“ Yet man, fool man! *here* buries all his thoughts,

“ Inters celestial hopes without one sigh!

“ *Here* pinions all his wishes!”—*N. T. b. 1.*

The cause of this infatuated conduct originates in the corruption of human nature. We see and know our duty and our true interest, yet we want resolution to pursue them. We suffer our hearts to be “incrust-ed by the world,”\* conscious of its paralyzing power, and of the vigilance and exertions that are necessary to destroy or counteract its deleterious influence. With the holy and contrite Apostle, we “feel a law in our

\* Young.

members warring against the law of our minds” (or conscience) “and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin”\* and of death. We know that “the carnal mind,” with its depraved affections and lusts, “is enmity against God”†—that its dictates must be opposed, and its desires restrained, before we can be purified from its corruptions—that we must resist the devil before he will flee from us—that we must “*strive* to enter in at the straight gate,”‡ being assured by the Son of God, that “straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life eternal;”§ and that, with all our exertions, and all the spiritual aid which is offered to us by the Gospel, in conjunction with the efficacy of Christ’s atonement, the number of those who will be found worthy of admission, will, in comparison with the mass of mankind since the fall, and to the termination of this world, be but few; for, that “many will seek to enter in and will not be able,”|| because they will *seek*, or desire only, with feebleness and indecision; thereby “rendering the cross of Christ,” with the proffered scriptural assistance of “none effect”¶ to their salvation. The heart, with its most ardent affections and desires, must be given to God. His requisition is “My son, give me thy heart”\*\* We must work out, as well as will, our salvation, our emancipation from the manacles of sin, or we shall most assuredly be “outlawed from the realms of heavenly bliss.”††

Now, brethren, when we consider the possibility of our obtaining eternal salvation—of being admitted

\* Rom. vii. 23.

† Rom. viii. 7.

‡ Luke xiii, 24.

§ Mat. vii. 14.

|| Luke xiii. 24.

• 1 Cor. i. 17

\*\* Prov. xxiii. 26.

†† Milton.

to a never ending association with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, and “all the innumerable sanctities of Heaven,”\* nay—to the beatific presence of the omnipotent Jehovah—the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—to a recognition of, and reunion with those of our departed relatives and friends, who have gone before us to the realms of glory—or, to an anticipation of that glory which they will enjoy, in full fruition, after the general judgment.—When the magnitude and wide extent of these sublime, transporting objects are considered, surely the most unsleeping vigilance against the wiles and temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh—the most strenuous exertions to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord—the most anxious care to fulfil all our religious, social, and personal duties—the most ardent desires to obtain all that celestial aid which is offered to us through the instituted channels of divine grace, to strengthen us in our spiritual warfare, and enable us to go on “conquering and to conquer”†—should characterise our conduct, and influence our hearts—because,

2. “The night of death cometh, in which no man *can* work.”‡

The certainty of this awfully interesting event, and the uncertainty of the time of its occurrence, should be habitually present to our minds; knowing, that in that night of death, no repentance of past negligence can be exercised—no improvement of the talents committed to us can be effected—no consolation and aid from the established means of salvation can be embraced—for, the day of grace, the period of probation, being termi-

\* Young.

† Rev. vi. 2.

‡ Jo. ix. 4.

nated, the decision of Omniscience and Omnipotence upon our past stewardship will be immediate in its effect—unavoidable—irrevocable. Merciful God! how tremendously interesting a moment for a rational, an immortal soul!—an instantaneous transition from the prison-house of clay, to the bar of infinite purity, infinite justice, to be rewarded or punished, according to the deeds done in the body, the thoughts, words, and actions of this our probationary state!—What Sinner's heart is not appalled at the prospect of that dread scrutiny?—What true Christian's heart is not exhilarated by that expected emancipation from the toils, the troubles, the anxieties, the vanities of human life—from the delusions of its promises, the frivolity of its pleasures, the poignancy of its pains! And consequently, through how very different a medium is the *grave*, that inevitable receptacle of mortality, viewed by the Worldling, and the Christian! The former, through the dense and fuliginous atmosphere of human passions and earthly affections, contemplates it as a distant, dark, and fathomless cave, where awful, sad, and solemn silence shall forever reign—in which his hopes will be forever extinguished—his plans and expectations irremediably frustrated—his affections obliterated—his enjoyments terminated—and, (if the idea of reanimation ever darts across his mind) as an incarcerating dungeon, in which he must remain, till summoned to the bar of Omnipotence, to receive the sentence of condemnation for his inattention to the calls of the Gospel, his rejection of its offered means of grace and salvation, his neglect or abuse of that invaluable talent *time*. While the Christian, soothed and animated by the assurances of the

Gospel, and confiding in the promises of his Saviour and his God, looks forward to the grave, through the luminous channel of Divine Revelation, as a friendly and blessed asylum from the storms of his probationary state—as the vestibule of eternity—the gate of admission into the Paradise of God.

Like the cloudy pillar which was constantly before the Israelites of old, to guide them on their way through the wilderness to the promised Land, it is “cloud and thick darkness”\* to the Worldling, as *that* was to the Egyptians—but it illuminates, with the mild radiance of celestial light, the path of the Christian Pilgrim, as that also did, under the appearance of fire, the pathway of the chosen people of God.

The suspension of the vital functions of the body, and the dissolution of its particles—the darkness and silence of the tomb—have induced writers of every description, poets, theologians, sentimentalists, and historians, nay, the sacred writers themselves, to characterize the intermediate state, between the extinction of human life and the resurrection or resuscitation of the body, as “the night of death”—“the iron slumber of the grave.” And that, from the similarity of death to natural sleep: which indeed, some metaphysical speculatists have carried so far, as to involve in that state of unconsciousness the soul also, that vital, inextinguishable spirit, by which the body was animated. Thus advocating the monstrous doctrine of Materialism, in direct opposition to the positive declarations of Holy Writ, the dictates of sound reason, and the belief of the wisest and best men in every age of the world. We

\* Ex. xiv. 20.



have ample authority for asserting, that the soul never loses its activity and consciousness of identity: of which, among many other passages, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus,\* and Christ's assurance to the thief upon the cross—"To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise"† are conspicuously corroborative. The doctrine of our Church is, that the soul, immediately after its separation from the body, the state of trial being then over, enters upon a degree of that reward or punishment which its conduct while in the body hath merited, the fulness of which will not be experienced, till after the judgment of the last great day.

The body indeed becomes inanimate, and appears, when deposited in the earth, to mingle with its kindred dust, reposing in the solemn silence of the sepulchre, and enjoying "the sad immunities of the grave,"‡ that "last sure refuge from the storms of fate"§—"where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."|| But it is not the everlasting rest of annihilation—it is not an eternal sleep—it is not the extinction of existence—it is only the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle—it is the bed of earth in which "man lieth down and riseth not till the heavens are no more."¶ For, an hour is rapidly approaching, when an archangel, setting his right foot on the earth, and his left foot on the sea, and stretching forth his mighty arm, commissioned by him who liveth forever and ever, shall proclaim that "time shall be no longer"\*\*\*—then shall the dead be "ransomed from the power of the grave, they shall be redeemed from death."†† Then shall "the dead,

\* Luke xvi. 19. † Luke xxiii. 43. ‡ Burke. § Gray. || Job. iii. 17

¶ Job. xiv. 12. \*\*\* Rev. x. 6. †† Hos. xiii. 14.

small and great stand before God, and shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books," (the awful register of Heaven!) "according to their works, and the sea shall give up the dead who are in it, and death and the grave shall deliver up the dead who are in them."\*

"Great day of dread, decision, and despair,

"Where, *then*, for shelter shall the *guilty* fly,

"When consternation turns the *good* man pale?"—N. T. b. 9.

Yet, though we are taught, that the soul continues to exist after its separation from the body, we have not the smallest ground to suppose, either from reason or revelation, that in this intermediate state there can be any such repentance for former error, either in sentiment or in conduct—or any work or device practicable, by which the just punishment of that error may be mitigated or remitted. We are expressly told that no such operation can take place; that "the night of death cometh in which no man can work"† that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither we are going"‡ that "the dust (or body) shall return to the earth, as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it"§—that "the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they who have done good unto the resurrection of eternal life, and they who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."|| In short, the general tenor of Scripture teaches us, that as death leaves us judgment will find us.

\* Rev. xx. 12.

† John ix. 4.

‡ Eccl. ix. 10.

§ Eccl. xii. 7.

|| John v. 29.

I conclude, therefore, brethren, in the words of an holy Apostle, “Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.”\*

Seeing that each of us is possessed of an immortal soul, that must be infinitely happy or miserable hereafter, according to our conduct in the present state—seeing also that we are blessed with the marvellous light of the Gospel, and the means which it offers to enable us to secure perfect and eternal felicity—surely the salvation of our souls is the grandest and most important object that can possibly engage our attention—surely it is “the one thing needful.”† But, the soul cannot obtain this salvation, if it depart from the body polluted by sin—if, defiled by the indulgence of depraved passions, and enfeebled by the paralyzing influence of worldly objects and affections, it be rendered incapable of enjoying the happiness of Heaven. For, the preparation for that enjoyment must be effected on *earth*, its probationary state. If not purified by penitence and sanctified by prayer—if not refined by an habitual obedience to the precepts of true Religion, and sublimed by the holy fervour of devotional exercises—it can, in no degree, be qualified to associate with, and assimilate itself to, those pure and perfect intelligencies which surround the throne of God, and fill the celestial mansions with unceasing strains of seraphic adoration, with fervent effusions of gratitude and love, and with responsive Hallelujahs of exultation and of praise.

O! then, brethren, awake to righteousness; for,

\* Pet. iii. 14.

† Luke x. 42.

“Time flies—Death urges—knells call—Heav’n invites,  
Hell threatens!”—N. T. b. 2.

And if, awful supposition! we live “without God in the world,”† when Death, the resistless Conqueror of the human race, arresting each of us as his victim, shall with one hand dash in pieces the glittering bubbles, and dissipate the airy visions, which fascinated and enchained our attention—and with the other, draw up the impenetrable veil which separates us from the world of spirits, exhibiting to our astonished view the stupendous realities of eternity—when we shall behold that omnipotent Jehovah whose commandments we had violated, or whose worship we had neglected—that Jesus whose mediation we had rejected, whose invitations we had disregarded, whose intercession we had never solicited—that Holy Ghost, whose impulses we had resisted, whose dictates we had silenced, and whose sanctification we had not desired—those myriads of Angels and Archangels—those holy Apostles, Prophets, Patriarchs, and Martyrs—those spirits of the Just made perfect—with all the happy company of heaven—how bitter, how agonizing will the reflection then be upon our mispent, murdered time, which will not only then occasion our exclusion from those blest abodes, but our banishment to those doleful regions of misery and despair, where the worm of reproaching conscience dieth not, and the fire of divine vengeance, upon wilful disobedience, and obstinate ingratitude, is not quenched!

Be wise, therefore, in time—consider your latter end—consider how much is to be done, and how little of life, how small a remnant of your stewardship, may be remaining to accomplish it in—and instantly and

† Eph. ii. 12.

earnestly endeavour to give your heart to God, and henceforth, “so to pass through things temporal, that you finally lose not the things eternal.”†

These sentiments on the value and consequent necessary improvement of time, are now suggested to you, in compliance with the request of a departed brother, who is gone to his great account, and who was frequently a fellow worshipper with you in this Holy Temple. The person I allude to is Dr. Anthony Fothergill, a native of Westmoreland in England, who, for several years, resided in the United States, and for the most part in this city; and who, by his attachment to the interests of science and of literature, as well as by the urbanity of his manners, and the correctness of his deportment here, acquired the respect and esteem of those with whom he familiarly associated, many of whom were our most distinguished citizens. He was a regular attendant upon the service of our Church, and a partaker of her most solemn ordinance, the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. His high sense of the responsibility of man, and of the consequent importance of religion to prepare him for the participation of eternal happiness, cannot, I think, be more forcibly expressed than it has been by himself, in part of the inscription which he directed to be engraved on his own monument.

“Reader, here make a solemn pause! Remember, thou art ever in the awful presence of thy Creator! who knows all thy actions and inmost thoughts, which are all recorded; and for which thou must one day give an account. “He that formed the eye, shall he not see? and he that formed the ear, shall he not hear?”‡

“Remember, that on the present day hangs eternity, to which thou art hastening!

“Resolve, therefore, instantly, to devote thyself to Virtue, Religion, and Piety, which alone can give thee peace here, and everlasting happiness hereafter.

“In short—resolve to preserve a clear conscience; and be not *almost* but *altogether* a Christian.”

Such are the strong indications of the correctness of his religious character. As a citizen and a man, his uniform exertions to contribute to the instruction and consequent benefit of society are evinced by several useful and scientific publications in his own country, and by some valuable communications to literary societies and individuals in this—in both of which he was acknowledged to possess considerable professional skill. His philanthropy, and the ardour and sincerity of his individual attachments, are amply expressed by his liberal bequests to public institutions, and to his friends and acquaintance, as well as to his relatives—his scientific investigations and communications almost universally tending to the relief of human misery—the alleviation of many of those various ills that flesh is heir to: and, the same spirit of benevolence and disinterested charity dictating his munificent donations, by will to the numerous institutions and associations established for the comfort, the relief, and the support of the wretched—the poor, the helpless, the accidentally unfortunate, and the diseased.\*

\* Dr. Fothergill's medical and philosophical communications to the several literary and benevolent societies of which he was a member, are mentioned in the highest terms of approbation and recorded in their transactions. He obtained a gold prize medal

When such men are removed by death, it is a duty to society, as well as to the deceased, to record their merits: the mildness, however, and modesty of our departed brother's disposition was such, as to induce your preacher to believe, that it was by no means his desire that an elaborate eulogium should be pronounced on him, but only that the occasion of his death should be rendered instrumental to the suggestion of some moral and religious reflections, "on the importance and improvement of time," resulting from the elucidation of the words of our text. I shall, therefore, not enlarge the present brief sketch, but conclude, by earnestly recommending his virtues to your imitation.

Now to God, &c.

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from the Royal Humane Society of London, for "A Plan for the preservation of persons exposed to those accidents which suddenly suspend or extinguish vital action." He also received prizes for other essays communicated to the Bath and West of England Society, and the London Board of Agriculture—and he left, in manuscript, twelve volumes, folio, entitled *Adversaria, Medica et Philosophica*—the result of much reading and research.

He was one of the governors for life, and a director of the Royal Humane Society; a member of the Royal College of Physicians; and of the Medical Societies of London, Edinburgh, and Paris; and also of the Philosophical Societies of Manchester, Bath, Philadelphia, &c.

He returned to England in September, 1812; and died in St George's Place, Black Friar's Road, in the county of Surry, on 11th May, 1813, aged eighty-six years.



















