

A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED MAY 16, 1802,

THE SABBATH AFTER THE DEATH

OF

CAPT. Charles Winship,

WHO DIED AT ST. BLAS, DECEMBER 4, 1800,

IN

THE TWENTY-FIFTH YEAR OF HIS AGE,

WAS

CERTIFIED TO HIS CONNEXIONS.

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PSALM XXXIX. 5.

BEHOLD THOU HAST MADE MY DAYS AS AN HAND
BREADTH ; AND MINE AGE IS AS NOTHING BE-
FORE THEE : VERILY EVERY MAN AT HIS BEST
STATE, IS ALTOGETHER VANITY.

IT is a matter of the highest importance, my friends, that we understand, and act in conformity to the circumstances and design of our being. We find ourselves placed in a world, where we are often involved in adversity, and always exposed to the stroke of death. In all the different stages, from the dawn of existence to hoary hairs, we see our brethren, indiscriminately swept from this theatre of action, and consigned to the silent grave.

When we bring these solemn thoughts home to our bosoms, what can be more natural ; what more rational and proper, than for each one to raise his heart and eyes to heaven, in that devout petition, “ Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is ; that I may know how frail I am !” And what, let me add,

add, what can be more pertinent than the exclamation which immediately follows ? “ Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee : verily every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity.”

These words present to the mind, in the most striking and affecting light, I. The extreme shortness of human life : And II. The consequent emptiness, and insufficiency of all temporal attainments and dependencies.

Pursuant to this method, we are, I. To contemplate the extreme shortness of human life. “ Behold thou hast made my days, as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee.” Here let us pause—Turn our attention from the objects and interests of this transitory abode ; and look forward to the approaching period, which ere long, at most, will separate, eternally separate us from every thing below the sun ! Let us take into serious consideration the rapidity, with which we are wafted to the world of unbodied spirits ! We are prone to view death, as at a great distance. Too fondly attached to sublunary possessions and pleasures, we “ put far away the evil day,” and concert plans of earthly emolument and ease, as if this were our only, our abiding place of residence ! Hence it is, that the time to come appears more permanent in its duration, than the time which has already elapsed. For once, however, let us adopt a more consistent and judicious mode of computation.

computation. For once, let us judge of the future by the past. We are not insensible with what amazing swiftness the preceding years of our lives have succeeded each other. Look back, my brethren, to the morning of your existence ; even as far as memory ~~can~~ extend ; and then tell me, in what light the intermediate space appears.—It appears like an unsubstantial, fleeting dream ! It seems but yesterday, that you were engaged in the playful scenes of childhood ; while, to day, many of you have reached the meridian, and some, the decline of your age ! Time, let me remind you, is still on the wing. The revolving sun performs his diurnal, and his annual task, with the same dispatch, as heretofore. How soon then, though we might safely presume on the limited term of “ threescore years and ten,” how soon must that term expire ! Yet to this pittance, small as it is, we have no infallible claim. Constantly liable to the cold embrace of “ the king of terrors,” we have no warrant to depend, even on the morrow ; “ for we know not what a day may bring forth.” “ What is our life ? It is even a vapor, which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away.”

From these remarks, I proceed, II. To deduce the comparative emptiness, and the utter insufficiency of all earthly attainments and dependencies. “ Verily every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity.” This truth is confirmed by our
personal

personal experience. To say nothing, therefore, of the visible symptoms of inquietude and discontent, which are sometimes betrayed by those, whom we are accustomed to deem the most prosperous and happy of mortals, let us turn our thoughts within ; and let conscience ~~speak~~. If the virtuous decide “ wisdom shall be justified of her children :” and if the vicious pass sentence, vice shall not prevail. Without recourse to foreign testimony, do we not feel the incompetency of temporal achievements and gratifications to make us truly blessed ? Have we not oftentimes flattered ourselves with the prospect of durable bliss in some anticipated accession of wealth, of honor, or of pleasure to which we aspired ? Have we not even been persuaded that this would fully satisfy us ; and prove a boundary, beyond which our ambition would never extend ? But when, with eager activity, we have engaged in the chace, and the providence of God, to convince us of our mistake, has succeeded our exertions, and enabled us to win the prize, how has the delusive phantom baffled our sanguine expectations ! Were we permitted to advance from the accomplishment of one wish to that of another, till we became proprietors of all that the world calls great and good, we should look in vain for complete satisfaction ; for these fleeting toys are not our portion. In their fullest extent, they are totally incapable of yielding that substantial and refined felicity for which we are
 formed.

formed. The further we ascend the lofty summit of prosperity, the more extensive will be the prospect before us ; and the more numerous the objects which we shall endeavor to grasp. Our attainments will never keep pace with our desires ; and though we should rise to a degree of eminence, sufficient to awaken the envy of observers, still we shall unexpectedly find ourselves a prey to more numerous cares, and vexatious wants than we have left behind. This, beyond all controversy, has frequently happened : inasmuch that I scruple not to appeal to any one, who has made, either the least, or the greatest advances toward the flattering height, whether his unaccomplished wishes, be not rather increased, than diminished !

To this account we are to add, that an incalculable variety of difficulties and afflictions are inseparably connected with a state of trial and discipline ; that the most fortunate, frequently fail in their enterprizes ; that “ riches often take to themselves wings and fly away ” ; that none, however vigilant and industrious, was ever yet favored with uninterrupted success ; and that all are in perpetual danger of disease and death ! From the cradle to the grave, there is no fixed point of rest or security, in which we can call a single moment our own, beyond the present. That period of life which, of all others, exhibits the most flattering prospects of continued health, and increasing enjoyment ; that period of life, in which the bloom of youth, and

the vigor of manhood united, at once excite exertion, and inspire the hope of reward, is frequently overcast with clouds and darkness ; and made the concluding scene of this probationary state. A melancholy instance of this sort, recently announced to us, enforces the point in debate, with an emphasis and coloring, beyond the power of language. Go then, in imagination, to that remote region, in which an amiable and promising youth, born and educated among us, was destined to end his days ; and while you recollect the circumstances of his life and death, read the inscription of vanity upon every earth-born care and pursuit, which they visibly hold up to your view ! Having concerted measures for the advancement of his outward welfare, he engaged with ardent zeal, industry, and perseverance in their execution. In the midst of this career of enterprize, behold him suddenly taken off from his labors ; confined in a strange land, far from his paternal roof, to a bed of mortal sickness ; and rapidly brought down to the grave !*

While we sympathize with his afflicted parents,
brethren,

* Capt. Winship was now on a second voyage to Canton, by the way of South-America, and the North-West coast, since September, 1797. He made the *first*, on board the ship Alexander, in capacity of supercargo ; and returned in July, 1799. In October following, being previously commissioned by Mr. ADAMS, then President of the United States, to command a *lettre of marque*, he sailed from Boston in the brigantine Betsey. On the 1st of November, 1800, he went ashore at St. Blas, on the coast of the North Pacific ocean, for the purpose of transacting business relative to some necessary repairs of the vessel. He had been here but a few days, when he was seized with the malignant fever of the climate, which on the 4th of December put a period to his life.

brethren, and sisters ; and mingle our tears with theirs, at the distressing thought that oceans intervened, and precluded the possibility of their flying to his relief, and paying those tender and soothing attentions which nature and affection so powerfully dictate ; while we join in lamenting that they were denied the mournful satisfaction of closing his eyes, and of following his remains to “ the house appointed for all the living ” ; we cannot but rejoice in their behalf, that the tidings of his exit are accompanied with the consolatory assurance, that he received the kindest treatment from those, among whom his lot was cast ; and that a gracious providence induced even strangers, as far as possible, to supply the place of his absent connexions and friends.

“ By foreign hands his dying eyes were clos’d,
 “ By foreign hands his decent limbs compos’d,
 “ By foreign hands his humble grave adorn’d,
 “ By strangers honour’d, and by strangers mourn’d ! ”

May every alleviating circumstance serve to moderate the grief, and compose the troubled minds of the bereaved ; and may God, in mercy, grant them every needful support, cause all things to “ work together for their good,” and enable them so to improve his dispensations, that affliction may “ yield to them the peaceable fruits of righteousness ” in this life, and “ work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ” in a future state.

These,

These, however, are not the only emotions which this afflicting event is calculated to excite in our breasts. While we “weep with them that weep,” it is incumbent on us to remember that “we also are in the body,” and exposed in common with others, as well to be deprived of our dearest relatives and friends, as to be summoned ourselves into the invisible world. We are solemnly admonished that the chief good, the most desirable portion and inheritance of man are not to be found within the compass of this lower creation ; that nothing which earth affords is either durable in its nature, or adequate to the cravings of an immortal mind ; and, therefore, that we are bound both in duty and interest, to “look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at those things which are unseen and eternal.”

In improving this subject, we are led, 1. To remark the inexcusable folly and guilt of those who are unduly engrossed by the honors, emoluments, or pleasures of time. Had we nothing, either to hope or fear in futurity ; did all sense and perception terminate with our expiring breath ; yet so transient is our continuance here, that wisdom and prudence would require us moderately to estimate sensitive delights, and worldly possessions, merely to avoid the insupportable anguish with which an inordinate fondness must inspire the heart, when called to bid them a last adieu. A

more

more deplorable, a more hopeless spectacle cannot be conceived than the man who, “ in his life-time, has received all his good things,” when brought to the verge of dissolution ! How keen the sensations of regret and despondency which distract his bosom, on the recollection of enjoyments and pursuits which he is about to leave to others ; and in which he will, henceforth, have no more participation, or concern, forever ! “ This,” nevertheless, “ is but the beginning of sorrows.” The apprehension of a retribution to come, will unspeakably heighten his distress, and fill him with remorse and dismay, wherever he turns his thoughts. For this apprehension, though it may be evaded while in prosperity and at ease, will inevitably intrude itself upon the mind, at the awful approach of the universal conqueror. Then, at least, conscience will be heard, while it proclaims in accents, at once intelligible and alarming, that “ after death is the judgment” ; that when we have quitted this tenement of clay, we must appear before the dread tribunal of heaven, and “ receive the things done in the body, according to that we have done, whether they be good or evil.”

Here then, 2. The proper use and end of life are clearly defined and powerfully enforced. “ Strangers and pilgrims on the earth” ; and candidates for a future and eternal state of existence, it certainly behoves us to “ abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” ; to “ walk by faith, not by sight” ;

fight” ; to “ seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” ; and to “ lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come.” This the dictates of reason, and the precepts of revelation jointly require. At the same time, a holy Providence which “ turneth man to destruction, and saith return ye children of men,” loudly calls us to activity and zeal in the arduous and all-important undertaking. We hear the admonition ; we comprehend its design ; we acknowledge its propriety :—Yet we too seldom make application to ourselves. We speak in general terms of the shortness of life, together with the comparative vanity of its attainments and pleasures, and the consequent obligation to “ choose that good part which can never be taken away from us” ; to devote ourselves with persevering diligence to the service of our Maker ; and “ account all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, that we may be found in Him.” But notwithstanding all this, we often conduct in practice, as if the passing hours hung heavy on our hands ; as if we believed a longer space allotted us than we could profitably employ in “ finishing the work which is given us to do” ; as if, in direct contradiction to all our professions, we were convinced that the precarious and unsubstantial indulgences of time are preferable to the sublime and unfading joys of immortality ! Strange, and unaccountable it is, that creatures “ to whom the inspiration of the Almighty hath

hath given understanding"; that creatures who feel themselves amenable to the Judge of quick and dead, for every thought, word and action ; that creatures who know, and are frequently reminded of their perpetual exposedness to be called into eternity, and arraigned at the bar of Jehovah, should betray such heedless indifference and insensibility to " the things of their everlasting peace" ! Is not the awful solemnity of an appearance before the eternal God, who has declared his unalterable purpose of " rendering to every one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings," sufficient to rouse our attention ? Are not the rewards of the faithful, on the one hand ; and the fate of hypocrites and unbelievers, on the other, enough to excite us to " flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the hope set before us" ?

If we duly realized these things, we should be astonished at our own negligence and sloth ; and constrained to " work out our salvation with fear and trembling," and " give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." " O that we were wise, that we understood this, and considered our latter end" ! Let us " bring it again to mind," and deeply engrave these things upon our hearts. Under their salutary and commanding influence, let us " live as dying daily" ; comply with the various obligations, under which we are laid ; and act our respective parts with that uniform deference to the divine authority and law, which alone can give us confidence

confidence towards God, enable us to “rejoice in tribulation,” and inspire us with “hope in death.”

I shall now conclude, as both the subject and occasion authorise, by addressing a few words to the younger part of the assembly—To those who have been the companions and associates of the deceased.

At your age, my dear friends, numberless are the enticements which tend to seduce and destroy ; numberless the alluring objects which court your attention, and tempt, and encourage you to the chace of vanity. Every thing around you assumes the aspect of enchantment, and promises lasting peace and pleasure. Beware, nevertheless, of the delusive phantoms which sport before your imagination. Beware of saying within yourselves, “our mountain standeth strong, and we shall never be moved.” Beware of reposing an unlimited trust in the world and its enjoyments, and of pursuing them as your chief good : but learn to “use this world as not abusing it,” knowing that “the fashion thereof passeth away.” For this purpose, the most watchful circumspection, and resolute exertion are indispensably requisite. Be persuaded, therefore, to act with cautious deliberation. Instead of listening to the siren voice of temptation ; instead of yielding to the impulse of unruly passions, and depraved appetites ; instead of following the impious and disgraceful example of those, who are no sooner exempt from the control of parents and guardians,

guardians, and at liberty to act for themselves, than they throw off all the restraints of religion and virtue, habitually neglect the worship of God, and treat the ordinances of the gospel with derision and contempt—Instead of falling into these snares of the deceiver, and his emissaries, look well to your ways. “Sit down, and count the cost.” Commune with your own hearts in retirement. Recollect the great errand, upon which you were sent into the world ; that “here you have no continuing city” ; that “this is not your rest” ; that “when a few days are come, you must go the way, whence you shall not return” ; that you are liable, every moment, notwithstanding all the vigor of health and youth, to be assaulted by disease and pain, remanded to your native dust, and summoned into the awful presence of your God and Judge ! Often converse with death, and familiarize to yourselves the solemn hour, which shall call you hence to be here no more ; and according to your improvement, or abuse of the time and talents now committed to your trust, raise you to the regions of ineffable delight ; or plunge you into the dreary abodes of despair and woe ! Actuated by such views, and by the motives which they naturally suggest, “be sober and vigilant. Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” This disposition and deportment are most solemnly inculcated upon you, by the departure of a coeval and friend, who,

not long since, had as fair a prospect of life, as any of you can boast ; and, perhaps too, as sanguinely anticipated future years of increasing prosperity and happiness. But alas ! how soon, how suddenly was the scene reversed ! Though “ dead, he yet speaketh ” ; and could he give utterance to the impressive eloquence of his early exit ; could he raise his head from the grave in which it is shrouded ; could his tongue be loosed from the profound and perpetual silence in which it is bound ; could his voice be heard from the distant clime, where his remains are interred, what think ye, would be the strains in which he would accost you ? Would he exhort you to “ rejoice in your youth, and to let your hearts cheer you in the days of your youth ; and to walk in the way of your hearts, and in the sight of your eyes ” ? No :—He would declare to you the sacred reality of religion. He would urge and adjure you to shun every sinful pleasure ; to guard against an immoderate attachment to the world ; to “ remember now your Creator ” ; and to live, “ as those who expect to give an account.”

How soon, or how suddenly *your* trembling breath may be seized, God only knows ! The decree may already have gone forth against you ! Some fatal disease may, this instant, imperceptibly lurk in your bosoms, which, in a short space, will bring you to your end ! At most, a few revolving suns must waft you to your “ long home ” ! And can you, while this lesson is so forcibly pressed upon you,

you, both by the word and providence of God, can you remain heedless and secure? Can you, while a companion in years and in friendship, is cut short in his days, and consigned to the dreary mansions of the dead, can you refuse seriously to "lay it to heart"? What, let me ask you, what are the emotions of your minds, relative to this momentous concern? Have you formed no resolutions of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ"? Have you conceived no desires to be found in a posture of readiness at "the coming of the Son of Man"? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation! Watch ye, therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

