

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL

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MR. BENJAMIN ASHURST.

TO HIS HONOURED FRIEND

HENRY ASHURST, ESQ.



SIR,

I Have complied with your desire in publishing the following Sermon upon the death of your dear brother. The Sovereign Disposer of all things has been pleased to take away in a few years several persons very near to you in the consanguinity of nature, and younger than yourself: a solemn call to remember you, that the last day of your present life is approaching that will be attended with its night, and to excite you to prepare for your great change from time to eternity. You have indeed peculiar obligations and encouragement to be religious in a degree of eminence; whose father was so bright a light, and guide to all his relations in the everlasting way, by his holy counsels and heavenly conversation. Of him I could speak many excellent things, were not his goodness so universally known, that de-

traction itself could never fasten an unworthy imputation upon him.

It shall suffice to give this short character of him sincerely : he was adorned with all divine graces, and by their conspicuous exercise was singularly eminent among the saints. He made so particular an application of that general precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," as if it had been solely given to himself; the love of God inflamed his heart, and shined in his life. This made him one day in a week (besides that which is sacred by divine appointment) to withdraw himself from the business of the world, that he might more freely enjoy communion with the blessed object of his spiritual desires. His piety was in conjunction with all those virtues that are requisite to accomplish a christian : temperance and purity of manners, justice and equity in his commerce with others, and those virtues that cast a more lively lustre, and have an attractive force upon men. A rare humility, an amiable meekness, condescending affability and sweetness, compassionate charity and beneficence to the souls and bodies of men, were really exhibited in his deportment and actions. He was so lovely in his conversation, so loving to all, that he

was beloved of all. The uniform and regular tenour of his life obtained this testimony, that was given to our blessed Master, "he did all things well." A constant serenity reigned in his countenance, the visible sign of the divine calm in his breast, "the peace of God that passes understanding." And for an entire conformity to our Saviour, that the image of his meek suffering evil, as well as his zealous doing good, might radiantly appear in this chosen saint, the divine providence called him forth to a very sharp trial; for being under the afflicting severities of the stone, and by the advice of his dear friends persuaded to submit to the dangerous remedy of cutting, with what resigned submission did he yield himself to the will of God? With what tranquillity did he expect the issue either of surviving or dying? You remember his words before that terrible operation, 'When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:' when so great a wound was made in his flesh as an open passage for death to enter, and such cruel pains followed as struck the spectators with trembling, he endured them with an inspired patience and constancy. Thus God was pleased to perfect his dear servant by sufferings.

Your descent from such a father should be

a powerful incentive to you to imitate his admirable example: you should consider whose name you bear: to be a faint copy of so bright an original, as it is below your duty, so I am persuaded will not satisfy your affections. Methinks a sacred ambition should inflame you to excel in "all holiness and godliness," that the living image of your father's graces may be clearly visible in your person and conversation. Proceed, dear Sir, in the everlasting way, wherein you are so happily advanced; be always aspiring, and with zeal endeavouring to obtain the celestial prize. I unfeignedly recommend yourself, your excellent lady, and your family to the divine blessing. I am with great respect,

SIR,

Your affectionate and faithful Servant,

WILLIAM BATES.

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S E R M O N, &c.

REV. XXII. 12.

And he said, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

THESE words were spoke by the Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme judge of the world, upon his finishing the revelation to St. John. In them we may observe, 1. An excitation, "behold." 2. The celestial object, "I come quickly." 3. The end of his coming, "my reward is with me, to render to every one according to his works."

It is observable that the prophetic notice of the Lord's coming to judgment is ushered in with great solemnity: thus Enoch the seventh from Adam, foretelling his judiciary appearance, said, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all:" and the circumstance of the suddenness of his coming, is used as a powerful motive to awaken our drowsy spirits, and fix our scattered minds entirely on this so eminent an object. So the apostle James gives an

awful admonition, "Behold the Judge stands before the door" ready to pass a final sentence. And St. John breaks forth in an ecstasy at this admirable spectacle, "Behold, he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him:" and the everlasting Judge himself assures us of his speedy coming with this preface, "Behold, I come quickly." The words contain this proposition:

It is our high wisdom and duty, to represent by actual and solemn thoughts the certain and speedy coming of Christ to the righteous judgment of the world.

I will illustrate and prove this doctrine in the following order. First; Consider what is revealed in the scripture of his *certain* coming to judgment. Secondly; The circumstance of time, his coming *quickly*. Thirdly; The *rewards* he will then immediately distribute. Fourthly; The *respective difference of the rewards*, according to the *actions* of men in this life. And then apply it.

I. In the managing the first point, I shall not insist upon the proofs of a future judgment, but only direct to the fountains of arguments that are demonstrative to attentive and unperverted minds.

It is a doctrine of natural reason and divine faith: if we consider the essential and necessary perfections of God, or the frame of man, we must strongly infer his accountableness for his actions. There is an essential subordination between man and his divine Maker, and being endowed with understanding and free faculties, it is becoming the wisdom of God to govern him by a law, to regulate his choice and actions: this is the rule that distinguishes between virtue and vice, and the holiness, justice, and goodness of God are infallible assurances to us, that there will be recompences according to the diversity of men's actions, either conforming or transgressing his laws. Besides, every man has an internal sentiment, a judicial impression in his breast of this great truth. Conscience, the inseparable faculty of the reasonable soul, has a directing and reflecting light, to show us our duty, to examine our actions, and accordingly to excuse and comfort, or to accuse and terrify; which acts necessarily imply, that it is deputed by the Supreme Judge of the world, to observe our ways in order to its final testimony before his tribunal. This proof is the more convincing and pal-

pable, in that those persons who are exempted from human judgment by their power and dignity, those who are above reproof, and by a fatal privilege damn themselves with less contraction than others, yet are not impenetrable to the stings of conscience, but at times have a conscious feeling of their guilt : and in those who have so far stupified conscience, that it is either silent, or speaks with a low voice, yet when they are in distress, especially in the approaches of death, conscience recovers life and vigour, sets their sins in order before them, and flashes the terrors of future judgment in their faces ; an evident presage that although conscience be not strong enough to control their licentious appetites here, it will be strong enough for their conviction and torment hereafter.

Now divine revelation renews the decayed notions of the future judgment that are natural to the minds of men, and confirms them against the opposition of the carnal faculties, it regulates and enlarges them, with respect to the certainty and circumstances of it, who shall be Judge, and the manner of his coming, and transacting the affairs of the great day.

I will more particularly insist upon the certain coming of Jesus Christ in person to judge the world ; and for the orderly discourse of it, it is observable that a double coming of Christ is foretold in scripture : the first in a low condition ; the second in a glorious state. The ends of his first and second coming regulate their manner : the Messiah came at first, to be the mediator between the righteous God and sinful man, by patiently suffering the most afflictive evils ; to propitiate the incensed justice of heaven against us ; to restore us by humility who fell by pride ; to illustrate his signal love to us, to recommend by the efficacy of his example, the meek suffering all the transient evils of the world : but the second will be to perform the last act of his regal office, to determine the eternal states of angels and men, and suitably in the glory of his Deity. The divine oracles were never less obscure than in describing the first and second coming of the Messiah ; the eclipses of the Sun of Righteousness, and his future glory : and the most clear accomplishment of them in his humiliation, is a convincing visible argument they shall be fulfilled in his exaltation. Now in regard his lowly obedience, and sorrowful sufferings, are the titles to his triumph,

and the height of his glory shall be answerable to his extreme debasement ; I will briefly compare his first and second coming.

His first coming "was in the likeness of sinful flesh:" though he was exempt from the rebellious sin of our first parents, and the poisonous tincture that is derived to their common race, being miraculously conceived by the Holy Ghost, yet he was charged with the frailties, and exposed to those afflictions that are the penalties of sin. His first reception in the world was so mean, that if poverty itself had assumed a visible appearance, it could not be received more poorly. He was born in a stable, and died on the cross, the humble poverty of his beginning was not discordant from his ignominious end: and his life from his first breath to his last in the world, was a course through poverty, disgrace, injuries, indignities, and the most cruel sufferings. He was made not only lower than the angels, but than the lowest of men: in the language of his type, "a worm and no man." Psal. 22. 6. In this poor, weak, and contemptible state, darkened with the clouds of sorrows, O how unlike to him, who appeared in a celestial vision to the prophet Isaiah, sitting "upon a throne high and lifted up," Isa. 6. 1. and the glorious seraphims in a posture of reverence about him, and in an ecstasy of admiration crying, one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." John 12. 41.

Carnal eyes could not discover the Son of God in the son of man so vilified and afflicted. The words of the prophet are justly applicable to him in the state of his humiliation, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour." Isa. 45. 15.

Now to all those steps of our Saviour's depression in his first coming, are correspondent the degrees of his exaltation in his second coming. He shall come the second time from the highest heaven, the true sanctuary of God, and appear "without sin," having perfectly expiated it by his sufferings on earth. His first coming was in dishonour, his "second shall be in glory." He came at first on foot, in "the form of a servant," then he shall come "in the form of God," riding on the bright clouds, "and all the chariots of God, the angels of light attending him." He shall come in the "Glory of his Father," Psal. 68. 17. in

the visible brightness of the Deity. The rods, the thorns, the nails, the cross, all the conspiring instruments of his cruel and disgraceful sufferings shall be exchanged for the ensigns of majesty: his sacred head shall be crowned with glory, of which the sun in its lustre is but a dark shadow; "a sceptre of righteousness shall be in his hand," he shall sit on a "great white throne," the emblem of his unspotted holiness.

His first coming was "in weakness," but his second shall be "in power." Thus he told his enemies, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Mat. 26. 64. His voice shall break the silence of the grave, and all that are in the bowels of the earth, or the bottom of the sea, shall come forth; "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation." John 5. 29. By his omnipotence "he will change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like to his glorious body." Phil. 3. 21. As gold at first taken out of the mine, seems but common earth, but by the refining fire has a brightness superinduced, that it seems rather the product of the fire, than from the vein of the earth from whence it was taken: thus our bodies that in their original are but earth; "from the earthly Adam;" shall by the "Power of the Lord from heaven" be made heavenly, clothed with a living lustre and vigour. He will then judge the "god of this world," with all the invisible legions of rebellious spirits, and force their submission to his high tribunal. He will dissolve the old world, and raise the new: "from his face the earth and the heaven shall flee away, and there shall be no place found for them. According to his promise we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness."

Briefly, in his first coming he was "despised and rejected of men," condemned and crucified, but then he shall be revealed from heaven with "his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance upon all that know not God, and disobey the gospel." How will the wicked be surprised "with the terrors of the Lord?" At the promulgation of the law, the senses of hearing and seeing, that are the inlets of terror, were so strongly affected with the presence of God, when fearful lightnings were darted from his eyes, and clouds of smoke came from the breath of his nostrils, and at the "loud sounding of the trumpet, and the

quaking of the mountain;" that the hearts of the spectators were ready to die within them, and Moses himself was "terribly afraid;" but how will the sights and sounds at the last day overwhelm the guilty with terrors, when the Son of God shall appear "in his terrible majesty! when the archangel shall blow the trumpet of God," when the pillars of heaven shall fall, and the foundations of the earth be overthrown, and a dreadful judgment shall pass upon the impenitent transgressors of the eternal law! how will they appear spiritless, in sad confusion in "the great day of the Lord Almighty?"

II. We are to consider the circumstance of time; "his coming quickly." It is verified by universal experience, that no carnal principle does more fortify sinners in a false security, "than putting the evil day far from them," and the presumption that they are not in present danger of God's displeasure, when inevitable and great evils are looked upon as remote, they make a slight impression, but the propinquity of such evils inspires terrors. We have an instance of this in Cain, who (after God had denounced his punishment for his bloody crying sin) full of perplexity and despair breaks forth, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me, shall slay me." But when he was secured from present revenge, and expected a long life in this world, he freely indulged his sensual desires, and "built a city," to drown the noise of his accusing conscience. The world follows this way of Cain, and freely pursues the satisfaction of their lusts. When men look upon the divine judgment at an immense distance, and "when the evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delays his coming," Mat. 24. 48. he will satisfy both the angry and voluptuous appetites, he "will smite his fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken." To awaken therefore men's drowsy spirits to prepare for the judgment of the great day, to check their exorbitant lusts, "their lasciviousness, excess of wine, and revelling," it is threatened, "they shall give an account of them, to him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead." 1 Pet. 14. 1, 3. And to induce a patient temper and assuage sorrow, the apostle James encourages afflicted christians, "that the Judge stands before the door."

There is a seeming difficulty how to reconcile the predictions of Christ's sudden coming to judgment, with the interval of so

many entire ages lapsed since, and what may remain of time before the last day is uncertain. This difficulty will be resolved by considering the following particulars.

1. The words of the text are to be understood in the strict literal sense: for our Saviour having represented in a visionary scene the state of the church in the several periods of its duration to the end of the world, its conflicts, victory, and triumph over antichristian enemies, and having described the tranquillity, purity and glory of the church in the very last part of time, which is preparative to the glorious everlasting state in the next world, he declares, "I come quickly, and my reward is with me:" Rev. 22. 5. after the final accomplishment of those prophecies, there is no more use of time, "the unjust, and unrighteous, and filthy," continue unchanged and impenitent; "the righteous and holy" Isa. 22. 1. Mich. 7. 1. Heb. 1. are confirmed in their perseverance, and immediately shall receive recompences according to their works.

2. The whole flux of time, from the first to the second coming of Christ is called the "last days." The prophets foretold of an astonishing change that should arrive in the church and the world, that the ceremonial law should be abolished, when the Messiah, the substance of it, and perfection was come, and a new covenant be immutably established in the church, till the final expiring of time. In this sense the apostle speaks to christians in the first age of the church; "Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Cor. 10. 11. Now in the division of time, this being the last part of it, for the duration of the world, the second coming of Christ is represented as near. The last glass of time was turned up at the revelation of the gospel by the Son of God, and now the last sands are running; when it is out, it shall never be turned more.

3. Sometimes the speedy coming of Christ to judgment immediately respects the destruction of the Jewish state, and their principal city. Thus in his last sermon on Mount Olivet, the temple being in his view, he foretold "that one stone shall not be left upon another:" and after his describing the fearful events that should surprise that nation, tells his disciples, "Verily I say

unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Mat. 24. 24. The time of this judgment, is "called the great and illustrious day of the Lord," Acts 2. 20. when by visible vengeance upon that nation, he declared his divine power and glory before the world. And to this famous destruction of the Jews, may refer several places, where the apostle encourages believers to unfainting perseverance, in their duty, notwithstanding the cruel opposition they met with from infidels of the Jewish nation: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching;" Heb. 10. 25. that is, when Christ will appear for the subduing his enemies, and for the relieving his people.

4. We must distinguish between the judgment of sense and of faith, and this will rectify our estimate of the time of God's particular judgments upon earth, and of his universal judgment when he will distribute eternal recompences. To sense "afflictions seem not only grievous," but often they seem long: for sorrow fastens the thoughts upon the affliction; in sharp pains the soul is as it were confined to the diseased part, and strictly observes all the hours and smaller parts of their duration, which when we are at ease slip away without notice. In distress we would fain hasten away the present time, expecting relief by what shall succeed: and winged time seems slow in its motion. From hence are so many doleful complaints of the saints, "Lord, how long? Lord, make haste:" Psal. 70. 8, 9. as if he had forgot to be gracious to relieve them, and just to repay their cruel enemies. But faith in the divine promises looks to their accomplishment in the time set by the most wise and holy disposer of all things. A steadfast believer never counts God slow in coming to judgment; for he is never too late. "The vision of the church's deliverance is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry." This is applied by the apostle to the particular judgment upon Jerusalem; and is applicable to the universal judgment: "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry:" Heb. 10. 37. "he bears long with the sufferings of his own elect, yet he will avenge them speedily:" at the prefixed time, when the

number of the elect shall be complete, and all the "Vessels of wrath are fitted for destruction," the discerning Judge will come and separate them for ever.

5. Compare time with eternity. Time is numbered and distinguished by the motions of the sun and moon, and is accounted long or short by us with respect to our transient and limited duration in the present world: but eternity is an endless duration. The whole space of time, from the first motions of the heavens to the last, has not that proportion to eternity, as a short span has to the vast compass of the heaven. Now God, who is absolutely eternal, and truly infinite, measures the continuance of things by his own standard: accordingly the psalmist tells us, "A thousand years in his sight, are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night:" Psal. 90. 4. as the space of a few hours that passes without the least perception in sleep. God comforts his suffering church: "for a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee: in a little wrath I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." Isa. 54. 7, 8: St. Peter replies to the infidels of the last days, who scornfully say, "Where is the promise of his coming? One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day:" 2 Pet. 3. 4, 8. all the measures of time are determined in eternity. This estimate will reconcile the two seeming opposite durations, the long delaying, and speedy coming of the Judge.

If a malefactor be taken, sentenced and executed in a day, it is quick justice: now the longest time considered in God's duration is no more than the shortest among men. And the application of this is more sensible and evident, with respect to the particular judgment that immediately attends the death of men, whether graciously rewarding, or justly punishing them: "The afflictions of the saints are but for a moment," 2 Cor. 4. 17. compared with the eternal state of glory they enter into: and though an impenitent sinner live to extreme age, yet "his judgment did not slumber," but was hastening, for his death, that is the end of an hundred years on earth, will be to him the beginning of an hundred thousand years in hell, attended with an endless duration after.

III. We are to consider the *rewards* he will then immediately distribute. What the rewards shall be in their general nature

we may understand, but the degrees of happiness or misery in the future state are beyond the utmost comprehension of our thoughts, or expressions of our words. A child may as soon be instructed to understand and relate the deepest counsels of a senate; as a mortal man can fully conceive or explicate what heaven or hell is. The Judge styles it "my reward, who is the great God and our Saviour:" and it is correspondent to his infinite goodness and bounty, or to his terrible majesty and offended justice. Who can unfold the treasures of his love, or the treasures of his wrath? "Who knows the power of his anger?" Though no resemblance be capable to express fully the sovereign felicity, and the extreme misery in the future state, yet for our instruction they are set forth in the most intelligible and affecting manner with respect to our narrow capacities. The reward of the saints is a state of glory and joy in the presence of the blessed God; the fountain of true felicity. The apostle assures us, that those who continue in well-doing shall be "rewarded with glory, and honour, and immortality." Rom. 2. 7. The reward is shadowed forth by chosen comparisons, a "Crown of glory, a crown of life:" by the joys of a marriage festival that shall be celebrated in the city of God. In short, the reward contains the highest perfection and exceeding satisfaction of the reasonable nature. Our most beautiful expressions darken the eternal brightness of that state: heaven is infinitely better known by one minute's enjoyment, than by the description of the dis-inest orator.

The recompence from revenging justice is set forth by words of the heaviest signification: by "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish:" Rom. 2. 8, 9. and by most fearful representations, to typify the torments of the damned: "by the worm that never dies, and the fire that shall never be quenched:" by the blackness of darkness for ever, and the bottomless gulf of horror and misery. Briefly, as the blessed reward eminently contains all those joys, of which we have but dark shadows here, so the punishment is more extreme and fearful than the literal meaning of the most violent figures express. This reward he saith "is with him." This I shall consider in three things.

1. It is a *present reward*. Here the saints have a sure title to "the immortal and undefiled inheritance; a right to the tree

of life. He that hath the Son, hath everlasting life :” an unfeigned faith that “unites us to Christ, that purifies the heart and conversation, and works by love to our Redeemer,” secures to us an entire interest in the kingdom of glory, both upon the account of the purchase of it by the sacred treasure of Christ’s blood, and the unchangeable tenour of the gospel, wherein God promises heaven to all obedient believers : but the actual bestowing of this upon their entire persons, is not till the last day. Then the King “will say to them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” He will crown them with his own hands, and immediately introduce them “into his own joys.”

Now sentence is passed upon those who disobey the gospel ; “He that believes not, is condemned already,” but the execution of it is suspended for a while. Though sinful men are guilty of such violent provocations as would conquer all created patience, yet their Judge endures with much long-suffering “the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. He is the God of patience,” it is one of the divine attributes, and cannot be violated by the indignities of rebellious sinners, but has its perfect work in this lower world. He ever enjoys the serenity and blessedness that are inseparable from the perfections of his own nature, and spares the wicked for a time in order to their salvation : but when he comes to judgment, the execution will immediately follow : for the sentence will be peremptory and final ; there can be no appeal from it : the Son shall then appear with equal majesty and authority with the Father : “All judgment is committed to him :” and his power to execute the definitive sentence is irresistible, we may read the tenour of it, “Take him, bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness :” there is no possible escape by flight from his righteous fury, no possible resistance of his almighty power, but the wicked shall presently suffer the decreed vengeance.

2. It is a *complete reward* : for it shall be the issue of final judgment, with respect to “all things done in the body, whether good or evil.” Separate souls act in their opposite states : the saints above continually glorify God, and do his commands : the wicked in hell continually blaspheme God : but the obedience of the saints in heaven is not in order to a reward, for they are

actually possessed of it, and complete holiness is a principal part of their felicity: and the sins of the damned do not incur a new guilt, and expose them to more severities of punishment, for they are in the hands of revenging justice, and their sin is a principal part of their punishment. The rewardableness of human actions is limited to the present life; and when men shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, a full reward will be distributed to them.

Here the faithful servants of God have some vails to encourage them in their work, and to delight in their duty: and in their various sorrows and sufferings they are cheered with some forerunning beams of heavenly light, revived with the air of paradise, refreshed with waters of life from the sacred springs of comfort, the promises of God, "and rejoice in the hope of glory:" but then they are received into God's glorious presence, "where there is fulness of joy, and rivers of pleasure for ever." What defect can there be in their happiness when they are entered into "the joy of their Lord, and joy enters into them" replenishing all their faculties?

Here the wicked feel some beginnings of sorrows, the twinges of an accusing conscience that settles into the undying worm: the first breath of God's indignation sometimes sings them here: but then the flames of it will break forth with vehemence: in this world his dispensation is a compound of justice and mercy, he is unwilling to use extremity: when he is exceedingly provoked, mercy mollifies the rigour of justice, calms the fierceness of his wrath, lightens the weight of his power: he "does not reward them according to their iniquities:" but then nothing will break the blow of his revenging hands: strict justice will then inflict a punishment commensurate to the guilt of their sins. All the leading faculties of the soul, the mind, the fancy, the memory, the will, the affections, that have been polluted with sin, all the sensitive faculties of the body that have been instrumental in the commission of sin, shall be tormented. The voluptuous wretch, whose soul was drowned in flesh and blood, and riotously feasted every day, his tongue was tormented in the fire.

Briefly, pain is more intense and violent according to the capacity of the patient, and the activity and impression of the agent: thus in the body those parts that are of the quickest

and most tender sense, are most receptive of pain; and when sharp and piercing humours fall upon them, are vehemently affected: how great shall be the punishment, when the entire man the soul and body are prepared to be most capable of torment, and infinite power inflicts it? "Weeping and gnashing of teeth," extreme sorrow, and extreme rage, are the characters of damnation. O doleful state beyond all possible expression!

3. It is a *perpetual reward*: it is the issue of "Eternal judgment:" the sentence is fixed and unalterable for ever. The "Saints shall ever be with the Lord," whose presence is the living fountain of felicity. Their bodies shall be endowed with a celestial unfading beauty and vigour becoming the glorious quality of the sons of God: their souls shall for ever be satisfied with the sight of his glory, and ravished with the fruition of his love. There is no defect in that blessed state, and no danger of losing it. The love of God towards his elect vessels of mercy is as unchangeable as his nature; and the divine beauty fixes the flame of their pure affections upon the Deity: they enjoy an everlasting communion with him. Eternity crowns and consummates their happiness.

The wicked are excommunicated from the beatifical presence of God, and the joyful society of the saints for ever. They are imprisoned in hell during the displeasure of the immortal King, who is inflexibly angry, and irreconcilable for ever. In the present state violent pains or passions extinguish life, as a fierce fire devours the matter that feeds it: the natural body could not endure the torments of hell a moment, the frail tabernacle of flesh would presently be dissolved: but the divine power will uphold the damned in vivacity to feel the infernal torments. Here there are intermissions and pauses between the strokes of God's hand; even Pharaoh that proud rebel was indulged at times, to lead him to repentance: but there is an incessant perpetuity of torments: the obstinate sons of darkness are without ease or end of their misery.

IV. We are to consider the respective difference of the rewards, according to the actions of men in this life: and that with respect to the kinds whether good or evil, and the degrees of good and evil in them. He will then lay "Judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and bring every work to judgment, whether good or evil." Eccles. 12. 14. He will try

our good works inclusively, with our principles, and aims, and affections, wherein their spiritual value consists. He alone has exact scales to "weigh the spirits of men," a divine faculty to see the deepest seeds of their actions. When religious duties, when acts of charity and of any virtue are performed in obedience to God, to please and glorify him, they shall be rewarded accordingly: but when done from carnal motives, for our own reputation, our own interest or pleasure, the Judge will then declare, "I have not found your works full before me:" Rev. 3. 2. though never so specious and glittering in the eyes and esteem of men, though appearing with a great show of goodness, yet without the internal exercise of gracious affections that are the life of obedience, they are of no account in that day. According to the sincerity, zeal, and measure of our good works, the reward shall be: "He that sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that sows bountifully, shall reap bountifully." 2 Cor. 9. 6. This rule of judgment does not in the least imply that there is any desert of the reward in the best works of men: the scripture is most express, "That eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord:" the kingdom of glory is infinitely more a gift than a reward.

As the predestination of saints to life is an act of sovereign mercy; so the glorification of them is an act of equally free mercy, without respect to any merit of ours: but the wise and holy Lawgiver dispenses the blessed reward according to the tenour of our good works: and as by the excellence of the reward he declares what value he sets upon our obedience; so by the exactness of our obedience we declare what value we set upon the reward.

The recompences of distributive justice shall be according to the evil works of men. All sins with the enhancing circumstances of guilt shall be brought to judgment; sins of omission; "I was an hungry, and you gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink," shall be charged upon the reprobates by the Judge himself. "To him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is a sin." Jam. 4. 17. All sins of commission, "whether secret or open: God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ:" the sins concealed from the eye of the day, the light of the sun, and from the eye of the night, the light of a candle, shall then be made manifest: and all the no-

torious and infamous sins, "Lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatry, men shall give an account of to him, who is ready to judge the quick and the dead." 1 Pet. 4. 4, 5. Sins of thoughts and words, as well as of actions, shall then be remembered; the "vain thoughts that have lodged in the heart, and every idle word that hath been spoken by men, they shall give an account of in the day of judgment."

The degrees of punishment shall be correspondent to men's sins: how much "they have lived deliciously and presumptuously, so much sorrow and torment shall be given them." The more rebellious, outrageous, and obstinate sinners now are, the more fearful severities shall be their portion. "Those who know their master's will, and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

The proceedings of that day shall be transacted by the Son of God in his glorified human nature, and suitable to the capacities of men that the justice of his sentence may be evident: therefore St. John, describing the process of the last judgment, relates, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works." Rev. 20. 12.

The records of conscience shall then be opened, and all the sins of men, even those that are now obliterated and forgotten, shall then appear in so clear an impression, with all their aggravations, that the wicked will be inexcusable to themselves, and conscience will subscribe their condemnation. The Judge himself who knows all things will then unfold the registers of his omniscience, and publish their sins before the world. "Then shall the King say, I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:" and by just analogy we may infer he will charge sins of all kinds upon the wicked, of which they have been guilty, that the righteousness and reasonableness of his proceedings may appear: he will overcome when he judges, the condemned shall have nothing to reply, struck into silence and confusion: the saints and angels shall with admiration magnify his true and righteous judgments.

THE APPLICATION.

The doctrine of Christ's speedy coming to judgment, should be a powerful incentive to our most solemn and ready preparing for it. The affair is infinitely serious, it is our incomparable interest to secure the favour of the Supreme Judge: if we are cast in judgment, our misery is irrecoverable. There may be errors in human judgment, and other days of trial to review and alter the sentence; but the judgment of the last day is irrevocable. And is it a slight matter to be saved or damned for ever? "Then the children of this world are absolutely wiser than the children of light." But it is not possible for the mind of man, unless monstrously perverted, to conceive such a thought. From whence then is it, that the eternal judgment is so unconsidered, so unexpected, and unprepared for, by most of the world? "Should not the excellence of their Judge make sinners afraid?" His universal knowledge, "for all things are naked and open to him, with whom we have to do;" his immaculate holiness, "for he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without aversation;" his incorruptible justice "that will not spare the guilty;" his "eternal power" that can so easily and terribly revenge all wilful disobedience to his law, and has been so insolently contemned, all the perfections of his divine nature, and the bleeding sufferings of his human nature to purchase salvation so wretchedly neglected, will render their judgment fearful and intolerable. "What will they do in the day of visitation?" Isa. 10. 3. "Can their hearts endure, or their hands be strong in the day that he will deal with them?" Ezek. 22. 14. Can they think to mitigate his hot displeasure, when his clemency so often despised, will inflame his justice? All the mercies which they have so ungraciously abused, shall be produced in testimony of their rebellion, heightened with the most unworthy ingratitude: what consternation will seize the guilty, when ten thousand accusers shall rise up in judgment against them, and not one advocate appear for their defence? Methinks the hearing such terrible truths should make their ears tingle, and their hearts die within them, yet (O astonishing security!) though God speaks so loud by the voice of his ministers, and sometimes by his powerful providence, they are as deaf as ad-

ders ; but let a carnal lust whisper within from their earthly part, they presently hear and are charmed. From whence is it that the eternal judgment, so sure as death, does not cause an extreme apprehension in unpardoned sinners? The next cause of this stupidity is, that they put the evil day at a remote distance, as the scorers said, "the vision is for many days:" Ezek. 12. 12. they study to be secure, and delay their preparations, presuming to have time enough before them. Vain men! how willingly do they deceive themselves? Can they be assured of the present life one hour? Some in their impure embraces, others at voluptuous feasts have been seized by divine justice: the day of death is equivalent to the day of judgment; for immediately after there is a final decision and actual disposing of men for ever.

That we may therefore be duly prepared, these directions are to be followed.

1. Let it be our special care to plant the belief of this great truth in our minds, and preserve it in its vigour, that we may feel its efficacy and influence in our hearts and lives. Customary believers, whose assent to divine truths is only from the prejudice of education, and the current opinions of others with whom they live, are as careless and secure as direct atheists: the substantial fruits of godliness and holiness spring from internal notions deeply established, and experimentally felt in the soul. The usual coldness in the duties of religion, and presumptuous boldness in sin, is because men have but a slight belief of their great account. But we have infallible assurance from the Judge himself: "Behold I come quickly: his throne is like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire," an emblem of his swift coming to judgment. The steadfast belief of this will arrest our vain thoughts, and control our vicious affections, and regulate our conversations. Faith is the principle of fear; and fear is a preventive passion, it engages the mind to consider with becoming seriousness, how "to escape the damnation of hell." Then we thoroughly believe this fundamental principle of religion, when the design and work of our lives is to be approved by our Judge.

2. Moderation both in the pleasures and business of the world is requisite, that we may with entire application of mind prepare to appear before our Judge. It is the awful caution of our

Saviour to his disciples, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time, your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them, that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21. 34, 35. The universal snares that fasten men in security are sensual pleasures and worldly cares: they are natural and insinuating into our hearts. A dissolute voluptuous course is attended with a stupid neglect of God and the soul: and the indulging of the carnal appetites, though not in such vicious excesses, as the notoriously profane are guilty of, lessens the fear of caution, which is instrumental to make us serious and diligent, lest we be surprised in an unprepared state by the Judge of the world. The subtilty of satan is to be observed, he does not tempt men to take so deep a surfeit of pleasures as might cause a loathing of them, but gently feeds the voluptuous diseased appetites, knowing that a sensual life alienates the mind from a severe reflecting upon the state of their souls, and induces a deep forgetfulness of their accounts with God. From hence it is, that the danger wherein so many are of losing their souls for ever, is not perceived till their case be desperate.

Others are so involved in secular-business, their minds are so overshadowed with the cares of the world, that they are not at leisure to attend "to the one thing necessary," and can take no right aspect of the world to come. Their affections are stiff and settled in the earth, their thoughts are immersed in the affairs of this present life; they think it their discretion and duty to engage in the incessant prosecution of their worldly designs, and the devil takes this advantage to prevent in them the pity and care of their immortal souls: or if at any time serious desires are kindled in them of salvation, an inundation of worldly thoughts presently quenches them. Thus men perish by the abuse of lawful things. The flood broke in upon the old world whilst they "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, and destroyed them all:" the last fire will devour the present world in the same dull incogitancy, and stupid neglect to prepare themselves for judgment. "As it was in the

days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man." Luke 17. 26. The sensual and worldly-minded are usually secure, and when they "shall say peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child," as surprisingly as irresistibly, "and they shall not escape." It is a divine and solemn warning, "Behold, I come as a thief in the night, blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments unspotted from the world, lest he be found naked without the robe" Rev. 16. 15. of holiness, and be exposed to confounding shame in the great day.

3. The frequent and serious trial of conscience with respect to our spiritual state, and the actions of our lives is requisite to our preparing ourselves for our last account: for there will be a manifestation of them in that day. The most never spend a serious hour in considering whether they "are translated from death to life." The rule of judgment is declared by St. John; "He that hath the Son, hath life: and he that hath not the Son, hath not life." The justification of our persons from the guilt of our sins, is wholly to be ascribed to the divine mercy upon the account of his most precious merits and mediation: and all the saving benefits purchased by his death are actually applied only to those who are united to him by an unfeigned lively faith. All the vital influences of his merits are derived from him to his members: "he is the head of the church and Saviour of the body." His most precious blood that was shed on the cross, must be "sprinkled on the conscience to purge it from dead works: the blood of sprinkling speaks better things than the blood of Abel." And the faith that is saving is not a mere assent in speculation to the doctrine of the gospel, but such a belief in the blessed Mediator of his reconciling us to God, as produces a superlative love to him, and by that love sincere and uniform obedience to his most holy laws. By faith we are justified from the guilt of sin, by works from the charge of hypocrisy, in that we have sincerely complied with the terms of the gospel, by receiving an entire Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

We can never with comfort appear before the righteous Lord, if we have not an interest in him as the "Lord our righteousness."

There are some of a moral temper and civil conversation that

finally miscarry, by their neglect of coming to Christ with earnest hunger and thirst after his righteousness, which alone can endure the trial of God's judgment-seat for our absolution: they have not such a conscious feeling of their undone condition by sin, as to make them earnestly seek for a remedy: the deceiver of souls insinuates into their secret thoughts, that they are safe enough, and shall stand in judgment, because they are not guilty of enormous crimes; they rarely feel the lashes of conscience, which those who rebel against the clear light do. But how fair soever the lives of men appear, such is the exact purity of the divine law, so many known and secret sins even the most circumspect are guilty of, that without an interest in the blessed Mediator, they will be cast in judgment for ever. It is therefore of infinite consequence to examine ourselves whether we are in a state of favour and acceptance with God: the jealousy of many holy and tender spirits suspends the comfortable judgment of conscience, and the vicious self-love of carnal persons suspends the condemning judgment of it.

Besides, the daily review of our actions is of excellent use to prepare us for our last account. Conscience is placed in our bosoms as a vigilant inspector and domestic Judge, to observe our actions, and compare them with the rule, and accordingly to censure or approve us: when we fail in our duty, and violate God's precepts, it should work upon the affections of grief and shame, and cause us earnestly to address to the throne of grace for pardon: and renew the application of the blood of Christ to our souls. According to the quality of our sins, our repentance should be more solemn and special, we should more severely judge ourselves that we may "not be judged by the Lord." This is very unpleasant work to carnal men: but it is the indispensable condition of obtaining pardoning mercy: it is the most congruous way of recovering sinners both for the honour of God, and our good, for the broken and contrite person will most prize the favour of God, and be most fearful of returning to sin. Indeed then our "Repentance is unto life," when the dominion of sin is subdued, and the way is forsaken. Now, the speedy coming of our Judge should recommend this severe repentance to us: it should excite conscience to the daily observation of our errors, then when sins are committed, we may be restless till we get them pardoned: though men may suppress and smother the

convictions of conscience at the present, yet it will shortly, like a fierce and terrible officer, take the guilty by the throat and command him to pay what he owes to divine justice. It is our wisdom to compare the bitterness of repentance with the torments of hell: repenting sorrow is for the cure of sin, the sorrow of hell is for the punishment of sinners for ever. "Repent, that your sins may be blotted out in the times of refreshment from the presence of the Lord."

4. The persuasion of this doctrine is an excellent means to obtain a calm and contented frame of spirit in every state: for if we consider within a little while all civil distinctions of high and low, rich and poor, shall be at an end, and only the moral distinctions of holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous, shall remain, that all must stand in an equal line before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive eternal recompences, how will it vilify this world in our esteem, and consequently make a mean and low condition tolerable to us? It is related of Julius Cesar, that being in a storm at sea, he was fain to strip himself naked and swim for his life, carrying in one hand his commentaries written by himself of his military actions: within a short time we must be divested of all the external circumstances of the present life, riches, honours, dignities, and of the garment of our flesh, and our naked souls shall only carry with them the book of conscience, wherein all our actions are recorded with our own hands, into that vast eternity before us: this should make us more indifferent what our present state is, that we must shortly leave, and very solicitous to order our conversation so as to be accepted of our Judge.

Particularly it should render the praise or dispraise of men a very small matter to us. Within a little while we shall only have to do with God, depend entirely upon him, and according as his sentence shall be favourable or fatal, must be determined for ever; how reasonable then is it in comparison of his judgment to disvalue the contingent opinions of men, who raise or depress our names according to their fancies and passions, and to be satisfied in God's approbation.

5. The consideration of this point should encourage us joyfully to endure reproach or violence for the testimony of divine truth, to suffer for righteousness-sake: for, as the apostle comforts the suffering christians, "Within a little while, he that

shall come will come, and will not tarry;" and will bestow an excellent reward in heaven upon his faithful servants. This, duly considered, will inspire not only patience, but divine joy in the saints in their most afflicted state for the name of Christ.

6. The consideration of this great truth should regulate our deportment towards all men, with sincerity, equity, benignity, and clemency. It is the apostle's chosen argument, "Let no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter; because the Lord is the avenger of all such." 1 Thes. 4. 6. "Let your moderation be known to all men, the Lord is at hand." Phil. 4. 5.

To sum up all: let us with entire application of soul, and zealous endeavours strive to be approved by our Judge. "We labour," saith the apostle, "whether present or absent, to be accepted by him." 2 Cor. 5. 9. The certain rules of pleasing him, are to imitate his example, and obey his precepts. He will be a lamb to all who are like him in innocence, patience, and purity. He "went about doing good: let us do good to all, especially to the household of faith." To use an estate only for mean ends, our temporal conveniences, much more to abuse and pervert it, to foment pride and luxury, will make our accounts to be uncomfortable, and grievous: but to be "liberal and rich in good works," is the infallible way to obtain a rich reward. He forgave his cruel and unrighteous enemies; his dying prayer mixed with his precious blood was to reconcile God to those who shed it; and our absolution in his judgment is suspended upon this indispensable condition, that from the heart we forgive even the most injurious offences, and violent provocations from others. An unforgiving temper, like a millstone fastened about the neck, will sink us into unfathomed misery. He that is stiff and irreconcilable, either never seriously considers his own numerous sins, or never received God's pardoning mercy.

Let us uniformly obey the commands of Christ. We must stoop to his power as our Judge; "As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God;" it is our wisdom therefore to yield obedience to his authority as our Lawgiver. "He is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

Let us faithfully improve all our talents, all the means and advantages to serve and glorify him, for the account will be strict, and the reward infinite. Briefly, let us learn this point of wisdom of our spiritual enemy, who, because his "time is short," is more active and vigilant to do mischief; so considering our opportunity of doing good is short, and the omission irreparable, "Let us with zealous diligence always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. 15. 58. O that men were wise to consider their mortality and immortality: to do these things now, which in the last and great day they shall wish they had done.

I shall now, as the present occasion directs, speak of the deceased Mr. Benjamin Ashurst, of whose goodness there are very valuable testimonies. He had the felicity to be instructed and ordered in his early and obsequious age by a wise and holy Father: and as, usually the gracious and vicious habits of the first age are transfused into the next, so his succeeding life was correspondent to his education. There is a fit resemblance between the natural culture of the earth and the moral of our minds: three things are requisite to make the earth fruitful, a good soil, good culture, and good seed; so by analogy, that education may be successful, a well-disposed nature, an understanding and good instructor, and the precepts of religion and virtue are necessary. All these concurred in the present subject. Some by a rare privilege are exempted from those tyrannous passions that so frequently disorder the lives of men; and in their childhood are of such mild and guileless spirits, so receptive of virtuous impressions, that at the sight of their dispositions and carriage we may have a conjecture of the felicity of the innocent state; of which one ray, or rather shadow, is so amiable. With such a happy temper God was pleased to endow our deceased friend: his spirit was humble, modest, gentle and complying with the counsels of his gracious Father, who with tender care led him in the way to heaven. When he was grown up to the age of vanity, he was preserved from youthful lusts: his conversation was unstained; he was not swelled with pride, nor ruffled with passion, nor disordered with excess. And as to a judicious eye, no spectacle is more deformed than an old man in whom the vices of youth are notorious, levity of mind, vehemence of passions, and vanity in

conversation: so on the contrary, there is not a more amiable sight, than a young man in whom the virtues of age are conspicuous; a staid mind, temperate desires, a composed deportment: and it were happy for the world if foolish old men were as rare to be found, as wise young men.

This praiseworthy person, when fit to enter a particular calling, was placed in the family of a Turkey merchant: there his behaviour was so religious and serious, that it was said of him by some that observed his actions, that he would be a merchant for heaven. He after some time went to Smyrna, and preserved his integrity and purity in the midst of temptations: where many by vicious excesses disparage the sanctity of the christian religion professed by them, he adorned it by the sobriety of his conversation. He returned to England after some years spent beyond sea, and persevered in his christian course, serious and solemn in his carriage, and ready to do good to those that wanted supplies from relieving charity. A few years after his return, he fell into a dying consumption that quickly put a period to his days. In his languishing disease he expressed an humble quiet submission to the divine disposal: he was silent from murmuring, but not from prayer, which he performed with solemn reverence to the Lord of life and death even in his weakness. When the hour of his departure was come, he calmly rendered his soul to his faithful Creator. There is just cause of sorrow that one in the flower of his age, of such hopes, should so suddenly wither and return to dust: if one old in years and vices, a corrupter of others by his contagious example die, the world is well rid of him: if a good man 'comes to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in his season,' there is cause of thanksgiving, that he was so long a blessing to the world: but when a young saint dies, that might according to expectation have long glorified God upon the earth, and been a happy instrument of doing good, we should pay our tributary tears, and have a due and tender sense of the general loss. Yet those who are most nearly concerned, and mournfully affected, should quiet their troubled thoughts by considering the unaccountable will of God, nay, comfort their sad dejected spirits, by considering, that he has lived long enough in the present world, who by dying arrives to perfection and felicity.