

A
F U N E R A L S E R M O N*

ON

DR. JOHN OWEN :

BY

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FUNERAL SERMON,

§c.

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.—Phil. iii. 21.

THE occasion why I pitch upon these words at this time, you are not unacquainted with. The apostle in the beginning of this chapter, warns the Philippians to beware of false teachers, he enforceth this with several arguments, the principal of which are drawn from his own example, in the body of the chapter; and then he concludes it with an elegant antithesis, opposing them to himself, and those that faithfully follow Christ with him: he makes use of this to enforce the dissuasive in a subserviency to his main scope, ver. 19—21. ‘Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things. But our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.’ You may observe an antithesis in all this; they mind earthly things, but our conversation is in heaven; their god is their belly, but we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, their end is destruction, but our end is glory; their glory is shameful, they glory in their shame, but our glory shall be like that of our Lord Jesus Christ; that which they count most glorious, is shameful, but that which is vilest amongst us, shall be glorious: ‘Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.’

The observation from hence is this:

Observ. The bodies of the saints shall be conformed, and made like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ.

The bodies of the saints, how vile soever now, shall at the resurrection be made and fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ. The apostle gives a particular ac-

count of this, 1 Cor. xv. which I may take notice of in some particulars afterward.

For the present, the great inquiry for the explaining of this truth is: how the bodies of deceased saints shall be like to the glorious body of Christ?

1. Negatively,

(1.) Not by any substantial change.

The substance of their bodies shall not be changed, as one of the ancients thought, by a mistake of the word μετασχηματίσει used here, inferring that the bodies of the saints at the resurrection, shall not be of the same substance as they are now, but they shall then have etherial bodies; whereas both the words σχῆμα and μορφή denote quality, a change in quality, not such a substantial change, as they imagined.

(2.) They shall be like, not equal.

The words do import a resemblance, not an equality, they shall not be equally glorious with the body of Christ. The Lord of glory in all things must have the pre-eminence, as he was 'anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows,' so he shall be exalted with greater glory. But then,

2. Positively: How shall they be fashioned like unto his glorious body?

You must not expect an exact account of this, it requires the tongue of an angel, or of some translated saint, that hath seen, and been invested with this glory, or hath had some full view of it. This is of the number of those things, we must believe though we see not, though we know not; it is an object of faith, not of sight, and so is incomprehensible to us, who walk by faith, not by sight. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for those that love him.' If this be true of what is offered us in the gospel, much more of what is reserved in glory. 'Now are we the sons of God,' saith the apostle, and it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; 1 John iii. 2. And who can describe that which doth not appear? Here 'we see but as in a glass, darkly,' we have but a dim sight, such a sight of the kingdom of glory, as the ancient people of God had of the kingdom of the

Messiah: 'Abraham saw his day afar off, and rejoiced.' The wisdom of God hath drawn a veil before that glory, and he hath drawn it in great wisdom. If so be we had the full discovery of that glory that shall be put upon the bodies of the saints (not to speak of that upon the soul) if we had the full discovery of it here upon earth, it would be as hard to persuade the saints to be content to live on earth, as it is to persuade the men of the world to die. As in judgment to them, so in mercy to us, the veil still remaineth upon us; but though the veil be not quite withdrawn, yet the Lord is pleased in the Scripture to lift up, as it were, a corner of the veil, that we may see some glimmerings of that glory which hereafter we shall see face to face, of which I shall give an account in some particulars.

The raised bodies of the saints shall be like the glorious body of Christ in these six or seven respects.

(1.) In respect of perfection, the body of Christ is perfect, so shall theirs be perfect, both in respect of parts, and degrees.

Their bodies shall have integrality of parts in exact proportion, there shall be no defect of members, no not of those that are now wanting; those that could find no remedy for lameness, or blindness, or mutilation on earth, shall find it in heaven; their bodies shall be raised in glory. So the apostle tells us, 1 Cor. xv. 43. 'It shall be a glorious body:' but it would not be so glorious if these imperfections and defects were not removed: and it shall have exact proportion too, there shall be no distinction in heaven between small and great; as there shall be no infant of days, so no decrepit old age, but all shall be reduced to a perfect stature, either to the stature of the first man Adam (for the resurrection shall be as a new creation) or to the stature of the Lord from heaven, as the apostle calls our Lord Jesus. There shall be a conformation to the image of the heavenly, and so shall not want its proportion. The word *μορφῆ* in the text, signifies 'outward form,' and *σχήμα* denotes 'external figure.' Now there could be no resemblance of the body of Christ in external form and figure, without such proportions.

(2.) The bodies of the saints shall be like the glorious body of Christ, in respect of impassibleness.

The body of Christ is now impassible; that is, it is not

liable to any sufferings, and so shall the bodies of the saints be ; they shall be secured from all hurtful impressions from without, and all distempers from within ; there shall be no hunger, nor thirst, no pain, no sickness, nor suffering whatsoever ; the body shall suffer no disturbance, no inconvenience from earthly melancholy, or from dull phlegm, or fiery choler, or from the levity of a sanguine humour, but all shall be brought to such an exact temperament, as shall place them above any sufferings imaginable. The body will not be passible, nor liable to corruption, or suffering ; for that which is liable to suffering, is more or less liable to corruption, in whole, or in part ; but the bodies of the saints will be incorruptible : “ It is sown in corruption, but is raised in incorruption ; ” 1 Cor. xv. 42. ; their bodies shall be secured from whatever may blemish their glory, or impair their perfection, or any way disorder the constitution of it.

(3.) The bodies of the saints shall be like the glorious body of Christ, in respect of immortality.

The body of Christ is immortal, as the apostle expresses it, Rom. vi. 9. ‘ Christ dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him ; ’ so it shall be with the bodies of the saints, ‘ mortality shall then put on immortality, ’ as the apostle expresses it, 1 Cor. xv. 53. when the bodies of the saints shall be raised, they shall commence, take the degree of souls, that is, they shall be immortal ; they shall be more secured from death in heaven, than our first parents, while innocent, were secure from death in paradise ; there shall not only be a ‘ posse non mori, ’ ‘ a possibility not to die ; ’ but a ‘ non posse mori, ’ ‘ an impossibility of dying, ’ and that not arising from the nature of the body, but from the decree and purpose of God, from the victory of Christ, and from an immunity from sin ; ‘ Death shall then be swallowed up of victory ; ’ death shall then lie under the feet of glorified ones, while they sing that song, 1 Cor. xv. 54—57. ‘ Death is swallowed up in victory : Oh, death where is thy sting ! Oh, grave where is thy victory ! The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law ; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. ’

(4.) The bodies of the saints shall be like that glorious body of Christ, in respect of agility ; that quickness, nimbleness, and wonderful celerity of glorified bodies, an in-

stance whereof we have in the ascent of Christ's body from earth to heaven. The distance between the highest heaven, and the earth, is computed by astronomers to be some hundred millions of miles, so that if he finished that distance in a day, and we have no reason to think it so long, his body must move some millions of miles in an hour. But not to insist upon that, the bodies of the saints shall move when, where, how, and as fast as the soul pleases, without any reluctance, without any toil or trouble to the body. The body shall be then immediately subject to the soul, as the soul shall be subject to God: nor will this motion be any disturbance to them. For what one of the ancients saith of the angels, shall be true of the bodies of the saints: "Wherever they move, they move not out of the blessed presence, out of the inhappying presence of Christ."

(5.) The bodies of the saints shall be like the glorious body of Christ, in respect of spirituality.

The body of Christ is now a spiritual body, not that it is changed into the nature of a spirit: Christ prevents that mistake, Luke xxiv. 39. 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see me have.' The body is not changed into the nature of a spirit, but it is said to be spiritual, because it is elevated to the highest degree of perfection and excellency that the body is capable of, brought as near to the angelical nature, as is consistent with the essence of a body. So the bodies of the saints shall be spiritual bodies, not changed into the nature of spirits, but they shall be purged, defecated, and cleansed from all the dross, and mud, and feculency of an earthly temper, and their senses shall be refined to heavenly, all their acts and motions shall be advanced to a spiritual perfection: there shall be none of those parts, none of those actions from which the body is denominated a natural, or an animal body: 'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body:' there will be no need of meat, drink, or sleep. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls the raised bodies, *ισάγγελοι*, like to the angels in this respect, for in the resurrection, 'They shall neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven;' Matt. xxii. 30.

(6.) The bodies of the saints shall be like the glorious body of Christ, in respect of splendour and beauty.

He gave a glimpse of that glory to his disciples in his transfiguration; Matt. xvii. 1, 2. 'He took some of his disciples into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light;' it was glistering, saith the other evangelist; so shall the bodies of the saints be, they shall shine as the firmament and stars; Dan. xii. 3. 'They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever;' not only as the firmament and stars, but as the sun; Matt. xiii. 43. 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.' The purest and most lovely complexion, the most exquisite beauty on earth, is but darkness and deformity to that which shall shine forth in the glorified bodies of the saints: they shall shine as the sun, with a brighter lustre than that of the sun, with such a splendour as shall never be clouded, never be eclipsed, never obscured. If the glory of Solomon did transport the queen of Sheba, when she saw him, so that it is said, 'there was no more spirit left within her,' 1 Kings x. 5. how ravishing will the sight of those glorious bodies be, whose splendour, whose glory shall as far exceed that of Solomon's, as the glory of the sun exceeds that of a lily? If a little converse with God put such a glory upon Moses's face, that the people were not able to behold it, their eyes were too weak; what glory will shine forth in the bodies of the saints, of those that converse with God for ever, who will see him face to face unto all eternity? 'And we all with open face,' saith the apostle, 'beholding the glory of the Lord, as in a glass, are thereby changed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' By this we may guess, indeed we can do little more than guess as to these things, farther than the Scripture leads us, but by this we may conjecture, how these bodies that are now so vile, should have such a glory derived upon them. The moon is of itself a dark, gross, opacous body, much like the earth, as it is now generally concluded, and capable of demonstration; but the sun darting its beams upon it, makes it a lightsome and glorious

planet; so the bodies of the saints, though vile in themselves, yet by the glory of Christ darting on them, shall be made glorious bodies.

(7.) They shall be like him in respect of glorious dignities and privileges.

It is the glorious privilege of Christ, that he sits on the right hand of God, as Mediator, in respect of his human nature: 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand. Him hath God exalted to be a prince, King of kings, and Lord of lords;' and he hath glorious regalities, ensigns of royalty, he hath a throne, and a crown, and a sceptre: 'Thy throne, O God' (it is spoken of Christ, as Mediator) 'endures for ever, the sceptre of thy kingdom, it is a right sceptre, a sceptre of righteousness.' And he shall exercise his royal power in a glorious manner, in a judiciary way, when he shall descend corporally to judge both the quick and the dead. Now the saints shall partake of these glorious privileges, or of something like them; they shall stand at the right hand of Christ: 'Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir;' Psal. xlv. 9. The bodies of the saints shall have possession of a glorious kingdom, a kingdom of glory: 'Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' And they have glorious ensigns of royalty ascribed to them. They have a crown: when the chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive 'a crown of glory;' yea, the Lord himself will be their crown, as the expression is, Isa. xxviii. 5. 'In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people.' How glorious will it be for them, not only to be crowned by the Lord, but to have the Lord himself to be their crown? And they shall partake with him in the glory of judging quick and dead; they shall sit with him in his throne: 'To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne.' They shall join with Christ as assessors in that glorious act of judgment; they shall not only judge the world, but the angels: 'Know ye not,' saith the apostle, 'that we shall judge angels?'

And so much for the explication of this truth.

I might improve it several ways.

Use 1. By way of inference : If the bodies of the saints shall be so glorious, what glory then will be put upon their souls ? If the body, the vile body shall be advanced to such a glory, what glory will be put upon the soul, which is the prime receptacle of the image of God ? If glory be the portion of the body, the soul will much more exceed in glory.

Use 2. Let us here take notice of the love of Christ, the wonderful love of Christ, that he will take notice of the bodies of his people, of that which is so vile, bodies that are vile in themselves, and much more vile as they are instruments of sin ; bodies that are vile while they live, but much viler when they are dead ; noisome by putrefaction, or devoured by vermin, or dissolved into dust. Will the King of glory take notice of such vile things ? Can he think thoughts of love concerning objects that are so unlovely ? Yes, thoughts of love indeed, to make things so vile to be glorious, glorious like himself. Was it not enough that he redeemed men from wrath, delivered them from going into the pit of destruction ? Was it not enough to make their souls glorious, but will he make their bodies glorious too ? Was it not enough to make their bodies like the stars, or the sun, but to make them glorious like himself ? Must his own glory be the pattern of theirs ? Will nothing less satisfy the love of Christ, but imparting to these vile bodies his own glory ? O what manner of love is this ! So dear are the saints to him, such love he hath for them, as the very vilest thing belonging to them shall partake of his own glory, shall be made glorious like himself. As Mephibosheth said to David : ‘What is thy servant that thou shouldst look on such a dead dog as I am ?’ With much more reason may we say, and that with astonishment : What are we, O Lord, that thou shouldst look upon such vile dust, which is even trampled under the feet of the beasts, that thou shouldst advance us to such a height of honour, that thou shouldst crown us with glory, with such a glory, a glory like thine own ?

Use 3. For inquiry : How shall we know whether we are of the number of those whose vile bodies shall be fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ ? There are several characters in this chapter by which it may be known : I shall only name them.

(1.) Those that worship God in the spirit.

(2.) Those that rejoice in Christ Jesus.

(3.) Those whose conversation is in heaven. And,

(4.) Those that look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; you have these two last in the verse before my text, but I must not insist on them.

Use 4. This should teach us to mix our grief for the loss of deceased relatives (those that die in the Lord) with joy. Some sorrow is allowed. They are reckoned among the worst of sinners, that are ἀσποργοί, without natural affection. Stoical senselessness is inhuman, it is far from being Christian, or evangelical. We may mourn for ourselves in reference to the great advantages that we lose by those we are bereaved of, especially if they are spiritual advantages: we may mourn in reference to the places where they lived, it portends evil to those places: 'For the righteous are taken away from the evil to come.' When those that should stand in the gap are removed, there is wrath breaking in upon that people without any remedy: we may mourn in reference to ourselves, but in reference to them we have cause to rejoice. If we mourn, it should not be as those without hope. Immoderate sorrow hath its rise from self-love. Will you count him a friend who grieves at your preferment? The death of the saints is the highway to glory. The apostle calls death, a seed time, that is, a time of hope, not of mourning; and a time in reference to an expected harvest, is a time of rejoicing.

But we may mourn, we of this congregation have a particular cause to do it. I shall speak something of that excellent person that we have lost: but what I shall say, as the time will permit me, is but little concerning that great worthy. It was my unhappiness that I had so little and late acquaintance with him, which makes me not competent for such an undertaking; the account that is due to the world, requires a volume, and a better hand than mine, which I hope it will meet with in time: only let me touch some generals, which may help us to a sense of our loss, without which we are not like to make such an improvement of it, as the Lord expects from those upon whom his hand is fallen so heavy.

A great light is fallen; one of eminency for holiness, learning, parts, and abilities; a pastor, a scholar, a divine of the first magnitude; holiness gave a divine lustre to his other accomplishments, it shined in his whole course, and

was diffused through his whole conversation. I need not tell you of this that knew him, and observed that it was his great design to promote holiness in the power, life, and exercise of it among you. It was his great complaint that the power of it declined among professors. It was his care and endeavour to prevent or cure spiritual decays in his own flock. He was a burning and a shining light, and you for a while rejoiced in his light: alas! that it was but for a while, and that we cannot rejoice in it still!

Those practical discourses which he published to the world, did give a taste that his spirit and temper was under the influence and power of holiness. There are some creatures that love to bark at the light, instead of making a better use of it: he met with such, I mean some that wrote against him, who thought themselves concerned to represent him odious to the world, but with great advantage to him, because they could not do it but by groundless surmises, and false suggestions, such as shewed the authors of them malicious, and rendered them ridiculous.

He was master of all parts of learning requisite to an accomplished divine; those that understood him, and will be just, cannot deny him the reputation and honour of a great scholar; and those that detract from him in this, seem to be led by a spirit of envy, that would not suffer them willingly to see so great an ornament among those that are of another persuasion. Indeed he had parts able to master any thing he applied himself unto, though he restrained himself to those studies which might render him most serviceable to Christ, and the souls of men. He had extraordinary intellectuals, a vast memory, a quick apprehension, a clear and piercing judgment; he was a passionate lover of light and truth, of divine truth especially, he pursued it unweariedly, through painful and wasting studies, such as impaired his health and strength, such as exposed him to those distempers with which he conflicted many years: and some may blame him for this as a sort of intemperance, but it is the most excusable of any, and looks like a voluntary martyrdom. However it shewed he was ready to spend, and be spent, for Christ: he did not bury his talent, with which he was richly furnished, but still laid it out for the Lord who had intrusted him. He preached while his strength and liberty would serve, then by discourse and writing.

That he was an excellent preacher none will deny who knew him, and knew what preaching was, and think it not the worse because it is spiritual and evangelical. He had an admirable facility in discoursing on any subject, pertinently and decently, and could better express himself extempore, than others with premeditation. He was never at a loss for want of expression; a happiness few can pretend to; and this he could shew upon all occasions, in the presence of the highest persons in the nation, and from the greatest to the meanest. He hereby shewed he had the command of his learning. His vast reading and experience was hereby made useful, in resolving doubts, clearing what was obscure, advising in perplexed and intricate cases, and breaches, or healing them which sometimes seemed incurable. Not only we, but all his brethren will have reason to bewail the loss of him. His conversation was not only advantageous in respect to his pleasantness and obligingness; but there was that in it which made it desirable to great persons, natives and foreigners, and that by so many, that few could have what they desired.

I need speak nothing of his writings, though that is another head that I intimated, they commend themselves to the world. If holiness, learning, and a masculine unaffected style can commend any thing, his practical discourses cannot but find much acceptance with those who are sensible of their soul concerns, and can relish that which is divine, and value that which is not common or trivial. His excellent Comment upon the Hebrews gained him a name and esteem, not only at home, but in foreign countries. When he had finished it (and it was a merciful providence that he lived to finish it), he said, Now his work was done, it was time for him to die. There were several other discourses that seem controversial and are so: our loss of him in this respect seems to be irreparable, for any thing that is in our present prospect. The due management of controversies require so great abilities, that there is not one among a hundred of our divines, are competently qualified for that; and the truths of the gospel, which should be dearer to us than our outward concerns, are like to be suppressed or adulterated, unless the Spirit of truth stir up and empower some to assert and vindicate them. He had a singular dexterity this way, for the managing of controversies; and those truths

that he vindicated, were such as were most in danger by the apostatizing spirit of this age: some may think his genius led him much to study debates, but so far as I have observed, he did not affect to be an aggressor, but still was on the defensive, and proceeded with such temper, that he would rather oblige his adversary (if a lover of truth) than exasperate him. He made it appear he did not write so much against any man's person, as for the truth: I heard one of them declare, it would not trouble a man to be opposed in such a way as this great doctor did treat his greatest antagonist. It is usual with persons of extraordinary parts, to straggle from the common road, and affect novelty, though thereby they lose the best company; as though they could not appear eminent, unless they march alone. But this great person did not affect singularity; they were old truths that he endeavoured to defend, those that were transmitted to us by our first reformers, and owned by the best divines of the church of England. What the truth has lost by this, I cannot easily say.

But it falleth heaviest, and most directly upon this congregation; we had a light in this candlestick; which did not only enlighten the room, but gave light to others far and near; but it is put out; we did not sufficiently value it; I wish I might not say, that our sins have put it out. We had a special honour and ornament, such as other churches would much prize; but the crown is fallen from our heads: yea, may I not add, woe unto us, for we have sinned, we have lost an excellent pilot, and lost him when a fierce storm is coming upon us, when we have most need of him. I dread the consequences, considering the weakness of those that are left at the helm. If we are not sensible of it, it is because our blindness is great. Let us beg of God, that he would prevent what this threatens us with, and that he would make up this loss, or that it may be repaired, or at least that the sad consequences of it may be prevented. And let us pray in the last words of this dying person to me: 'That the Lord would double his Spirit upon us, that he would not remember against us former iniquities; but that his tender mercies may speedily prevent us, for we are brought very low.'