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*Mr Christian Toller, Mansfield, from Mansfield 18*  
*E. Williams*

A  
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT THE  
FUNERAL

OF

MRS. SARAH WILLIAMS,

CONSORT OF THE

REV. ELIPHALET WILLIAMS, D. D.  
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN EAST-HARTFORD.

SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE, JANUARY 23d, 1800,  
IN THE 63d YEAR OF HER AGE,

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By NATHAN STRONG,  
PASTOR OF THE NORTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN HARTFORD.

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## FUNERAL SERMON.

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PSALM CXVI. 15.

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his  
saints.*

THE Psalm, from which this passage is taken, appears to have been written, with an experimental sense of God's goodness to his own children. The writer, by his own experience, describes the common lot of Christians in this world. They all see days of affliction—days in which they are brought low, either by the withdrawal of the light of God's countenance, or by earthly trials—days in which the sorrows of death compass them, and the pains of hell get hold upon them, and they find sorrow and trouble; but it is a blessed consideration for the true people of God, that these troubles are not without a remedy.—Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, their God is merciful, for when they are brought low he helpeth and preserveth them.—In the midst of their troubles, they have a help and support, which is unseen by others, and strangely supports their minds, giving them a confidence in the Lord, and enabling them to bear with patience, and sometimes with triumph, whatever infinite wisdom sees to be best.—

This support they find, even in death, that great change before which all the men of the world will tremble, unless they have the peculiar presence of Christ, who hath tasted death for his people and well knows what consolations they need in that trying hour.

Under their trials, they find that the Lord is a God who hears prayer. When they have experienced this, they can say as the Psalmist in the context ; *I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me : I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord ; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.* Such prayer as this the Lord heareth, so that the sustained mind can say, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.—What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits to me ? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.*

To complete the above description of God's grace to his people, the writer adds, in the words of the text, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* As he hath sustained them by a divine support, in all the afflictive scenes of life ; so in their concluding moments of time, he is careful to give them a support, according to their great needs.

There is something remarkable, in the fulfilment of God's promises to his children, under the common afflictions of life, and as they survive these they can bear a testimony for the support they have received. The promise of a Saviour's support in death, is equally explicit ; but as his people do not return to tell us what they meet in passing thro' the dark valley, we are not so well able, from human testimony, to describe what light is let into the souls of God's dying people. If we form our opinion from the divine promises, we must suppose

in some instances, that it is very great, and fully proportioned to the awfulness and great expectations of the moment. To confirm this, we see many instances of dying Christians, around whom friends and the world stand trembling, who appear to have a support that surprizes all.—A support that enables them to say—*O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* This support from God, doth not arise by the removal of animal pains, for these must be felt by all to a greater or lesser degree; but by such an inlet of holy peace and trust in God, and of divine light, as makes the soul not only contented to follow Providence, but desirous to depart, that it may be with Christ, which is far better than to be in this world.

Our Saviour told his disciples, *Ye are the light of the world*, by which he meant, that their life and conversation, in conformity to the doctrines and precepts of his gospel, should be a principal evidence of the nature, reality and comforts of religion. Also, if God be with his people, they are a light to the world, in the hour of their death.—It is a light which can shine but a few moments, but while it continues is a very bright one.

To meet the agonizing pains of a dying body—to feel a present departure from the world and all its surrounding comforts, friends and supports—to feel the awful expectations of coming into the presence of God, and hearing the sentence of his mouth, which will be eternal in its consequences—to expect all this in the full exercise of reason and with a solemn calmness—and to do this with a humble sense of a guilty nature, but depending for acceptance on divine and sovereign grace, is indeed being a light to the world in the season of death—a light which shines but short, but very bright, and is enough to convince all infidels, that the religion

of the humble Christian is a reality. It warns them to acknowledge and fly to the Saviour, who can give such support to his people.—This light and support God often gives, which made the sacred writer say, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

In discoursing further from these words, on the present solemn occasion, we will,

I. Describe who are the saints of the Lord.

II. What is meant by their death being precious in his sight.

III. Conclude with an improvement.

I. The saints of the Lord are those, who believe in his being, providence and perfections.

They consider God as the great efficient, who creates, governs and redeems by his almighty and sovereign agency; and have a heart affecting sense of these truths, while they acknowledge them with their lips. Many, who in words own there is a God, do not feel the solemn truths which they professedly acknowledge; and altho they dare not deny the truth, their hearts say, as the Psalmist describes, *O that there were no God.* His saints rejoice in his being and in all his attributes—they wish no alteration in his character, but delight to be themselves and have their condition, in all respects, in his hand.—None but his saints do really delight in his being, perfections and government.—Some may be afraid to deny these truths, lest they bring an awful vengeance on themselves; and others may think that they can, by their reasonings, accommodate God's character and government to their own safety, and thus consent that he should exist; while his saints rejoice in him and his counsels for what they are, and endeavor to accommo-

date themselves to his almighty and most perfect will.—They rejoice that there is a holy and sovereign God on the throne.

The saints of the Lord are those, who feel themselves to be sinners, and place their sole dependence for acceptance with God, on his sovereign mercy, thro the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Christians know themselves to be the most unworthy of all men, and while they hope, it is humbly, and with self-abasement.—So far are they from supposing merit in themselves, that they know, if left by the grace of God, they must go to endless sorrow.—They are self-condemned, but hope to be acquitted and gloriously pardoned thro free grace, which God is pleased to extend to the chief of sinners, thro the merits of his Son, in whom he glorifies himself, by the sanctification and merciful acceptance of the undeserving. Christ, who is *all in all* to the Christian as he passes thro the mingled scenes of prosperity and adversity in life, becomes eminently so, in the hour of death. In looking back on a short pilgrimage, where he hath received many mercies, and tasted many sorrows, he can ascribe glory to the wisdom and goodness, which appointed every step and event. He can praise the undeserved grace, which reclaimed a wandering soul from eternal death, and caused the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, to shine in a rich salvation from sin and guilt.—All his hopes of a blessed eternity stand founded on sovereign grace.—The present comforts of religion and foretastes of glory to come, rise highest in the saints of the Lord, when they are most emptied of themselves, and most filled with an apprehension of God's glory in the salvation of free grace, thro a Redeemer's merits.

The faints of the Lord are those, who, in their disposition and practice, are conformed to the divine character and law, and live in the observance of moral and evangelical duties.

There can be no grace in the heart without holiness, and to speak of one without the other is wholly unscriptural. While the people of God depend for forgiveness on his free grace thro a Redeemer's blood, they seek their evidence of salvation in a sanctified temper and practice—in their love of him and his commandments—their delight in his law, and observance of the duties due to him, to the Saviour and to their brethren in the relations and intercourse of life. The two scriptural maxims *by grace ye are saved*, and *without holiness no man can see the Lord* are not only consistent but inseparable ; and it is always by a union of the sovereign grace of God and holiness begun in the creature that guilty men are brought to heaven. The sanctified person will abound in all the duties of a pious, holy and humble life. It is these duties which honor God in this world—become an example to mankind, and make the Christian a blessing in his generation ; indeed love or religion and obedience are not separable, either in rational Christian speculation or in faith.—That life of faith, which derives spiritual comfort and strength from Christ, is always a life of holy obedience, prayer and good works.—Such is the character of the faints of the Lord.

II. What is meant by their death being precious in the sight of the Lord ?

1. Infinite wisdom will order the time, and circumstances of their death, in the best manner for his own glory and their everlasting good.

The Lord will consult his own honor, the good of his kingdom, and the blessedness of his faints, in every circumstance, that attends their departure.

—It often seems to us as tho their death was premature, or attended with some undesirable circumstances, but this is wholly owing to our ignorance; for the same covenant faithfulness, which watched over them in life, doth, if possible, watch over them more carefully in their dying moments. We know that death and all its pains, considered only as natural evils, are undesirable; but they are the direct way to the highest glory—the way in which the Captain of our salvation walked, and his people must follow him in the same path, to come and be partakers in the glory, which the Father hath given him. The bitter bodily pains of dying Christians, are often necessary to perfect that patience, for which a richer crown of glory is appointed.—They may be necessary to give to the spectators an example of the power of religion, and to witness the strengthening presence of Jesus making his servants triumph calmly over awful agonies.—Nothing carries to the unholy world deeper conviction of the power and reality of religion.

2. The death of the Lord's saints is precious in his sight, if we consider it as a time, in which he usually makes special communications of his presence and grace to their souls.

We know that divine dealings, in this respect, are diverse; but it is common for the Redeemer to give to his dying children a support, a clearness of faith, a strength of love, which is much above the common supports of the Christian life. His covenant faithfulness gives what is needed for the hour. In a multitude of instances, we see a most heroic faith and a love, which powerfully draws the soul to bid farewell to this world and be with Jesus immediately.—We see a love which triumphantly says, O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy



victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory thro our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we feel to be present with us in the power of his grace. To quit all present things—to leave these bodies behind—to part with dearest friends—to go into an untried state of existence—to come before the bar of God and hear a sentence for an eternity of glory or of sorrow, are great indeed! All the solemnities of time and eternity seem to center in such a moment, and great indeed! is the grace of God, which enables the dying creature still to crowd forward, and ask for nothing but the continuance of the divine presence, and patience not to dishonor the Lord, under the anguish of a dying body. Who, that beholds such a sight, can deny the reality and the efficacy of experimental Christian piety?

3. The death of the Lord's saints is precious in his sight, as it is the consummation of their communion with him in his own immediate presence.

*Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.* He also loveth all who belong to it, and it is doubtless to him a precious time, when he seeth the purchase of his blood in the removal of his earthly members to his own presence, in the prepared mansions of his Father's house. Their holiness is then perfected—their joys are full—they will no more be sinning and backsliding members of his body. Precious in the sight of the glorified above, is the death of the Lord's saints by whose access to the spirits of just men made perfect, the communion and love of heaven are increased.

Our subject admits a solemn improvement.

1. It teaches the sufficiency of the gospel of salvation by Christ.

This gospel gives us a Redeemer who is equal to all our needs. He hath given himself to die that

salvation may be preached to men.—He pities his chosen people, while in their state of alienation from him, and gives his spirit to renew and enlighten them in the knowledge of the glory of God.—He gives them strength from himself, proportioned to their day, under the trials and difficulties of life.—Even his corrections are their best blessings, by weaning them from the world and preparing them for the glory of a holy state.—He gives them seasons of correction to purify them for heaven, and seasons of the clear shining of his face to draw them forward thro the wilderness of the world to the Jerusalem above.—He guides them by his counsel thro all earthly events, and their death is precious in his sight

My brethren, the way to have this light in the hour of death, is to live like Christians ; for suppose we be indeed believers, if we go thro this life crucifying Christ afresh, there is little reason to expect that he will seal our departure with triumph.—If Christ, should commonly give much of his sensible presence, in such cases, it would be too great an encouragement to low Christian attainments ; but if we are faithful to show ourselves on the side of Christ and his gospel, and live in a humble obedience, we need not anxiously fear that he will leave us in death.

2. Our subject administers solemn admonition to all who are not savingly united to Jesus Christ.

Infidels may laugh and scoff thro life, but they will groan from a sense of danger at death. Impenitent persons may go on for a season, and try to think they do not need a change ; but they will tremble to die and come before the bar of God. The lovers of the world and its pleasures may choose it as their portion, and think themselves wise in their choice ; but they will feel the need of another portion and another support, when death irresistibly

removes them from the world they have loved and fought and served. Every triumphant Christian death is a warning to those who have not an interest in Christ, and speaks to them in this most solemn address, **PREPARE TO DIE!** remember that the time is near when you will feel the need of a Redeemer!

My brethren, Providence calls us all this day by the death before us, as an instance both of mortality and of the Christian light shining and triumphing in death. Funeral eulogiums are not commonly to be indulged, still God designs those instances to be noticed, where he gives uncommon evidence of his supporting presence with his dying people, who have lived a meek and humble life. He designs such instances to be noticed for the consolation of humble Christians, who are often brought into bondage thro fear of death, and for the admonition of those, who think that no preparation is needed for that hour.

The deceased, for whose remains we are now performing the last duties of respect, thro a disease which was wonderfully painful to the body, was as wonderfully supported by the grace of a present Saviour. An acquaintance with her sick and dying bed, became to those who had an opportunity of observing it, a new and high evidence of the efficacy of experimental piety, of faith in Jesus Christ, and of love to God extraordinarily drawn forth by the aids of the Holy Spirit.

She was the daughter of an eminent, humble and faithful minister in the church of Christ, the Rev. **WARHAM WILLIAMS** of Waltham, and appeared to become pious in her youth.\*

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\* Mrs. Sarah Williams now deceased, was born Sept. 20, 1737, and died Jan. 23, 1800. She was daughter of the Rev. Warham Williams of Waltham, and of his wife Abigail who was daughter of Col. George Leonard of Norton.—The Rev.

Her first marriage connection was with the Rev. JOSEPH PARSONS of Brookfield, who was early called from his faithful ministry, leaving one daughter now in this place. With that respectable connection, which is now dissolved, you are all acquainted. In the earlier part of life she was much in the school of Christian patience by family affliction.

Warham Williams her father, who died June 1752, aged 52, was the son of the Rev. John Williams of Deerfield, with whom he was carried into Indian captivity in Canada, in 1703-4, and grandson of Deacon Samuel Williams of Roxbury and of the Rev. Eleazer Mather of Northampton.—On his father's side Mr. Williams was the great grandson of Mr. Robert Williams and of Deacon William Park of Roxbury, both of whom came out of England. On his mother's side, the great grandson of the Rev. Richard Mather of Dorchester, (the great family ancestor of the Mathers,) and of the Rev. John Warham of Windfor, who both came out of England.

Mrs. Williams, now deceased, was married Nov. 23, 1763 to the Rev. Joseph Parsons of Brookfield, who died Jan. 17, 1771, by whom she had one daughter.† Her second marriage was with the Rev. Eliphalet Williams, D. D. of East-Hartford, June 12, 1777, by whom she had two daughters, the eldest of them named Fanny Leonard Williams; died June 30, 1792, aged 11 years—the second named Abigail is now living.

The Rev. Joseph Parsons of Brookfield, the first connection of the deceased, was born Oct. 1733.—He was ordained at Brookfield Nov. 23, 1757. He continued in the ministry upwards of 13 years, though bodily infirmities increased upon him to a degree that disabled him from carrying on the work for about three years before his death.—He was released from his pains and received to his reward Jan. 17, 1771 in the 14th year of his ministry and 38th of his age. "He was a gentleman of sprightly powers, an accurate reasoner and a sensible preacher.—In his life he was a promoter of peace and order, and an example of the Christian virtues; in his sickness a pattern of patience and resignation; and in his death, strong in faith and full of hope.—He lived beloved and died lamented." He was son to the Rev. Joseph Parsons of Bradford, and Frances his wife, and was grandson to the Rev. Joseph Parsons of Salisbury (New Hampshire) and great grandson to Joseph Parsons, Esq. of Northampton.

† Mrs. Pitkin, the wife of Mr. Samuel Pitkin, now of East-Hartford and son of Elisha Pitkin, Esq. of the same place.

tions and personal weakness, and her Christian graces were such as a school of affliction commonly forms, when accompanied by the Spirit of God, meekness, patience, resignation, and a humble submission to a sovereign God. Humility was a principal trait in her character, and she taught others by showing that she thought herself unable to teach.—She became a bright example for imitation, by showing that she thought herself unworthy to be imitated.—Thro her last sickness, which was uncommonly painful, the Lord was with her.—She often said that her God and Redeemer was her all; and her greatest anxiety was lest anguish of body should make her impatient to be gone before God's time.

It was thus that she slept in Jesus, at the appointed moment, an example to her friends and to Christians, and a bright Christian light shining in death, and saying, *O death where is thy sting.*

We all mourn with her reverend and aged Partner in life, now made lonely again by this stroke of God's providence. His afflictions are great—long afflicted by most pressing disease, he is now afflicted anew by this deep bereavement, and hath been called to close the eyes of one, who he expected would close his own. We who are ministers of the gospel, and have found him a father to us under our respective griefs, wish that he may now have those consolations that he hath ministered unto us, and that when he goes to the throne of grace, a heavenly father may meet him.—This people with whom he hath been, so long, in their scenes both of joy and sorrow, cannot now fail to have their hearts melted with his, and to pray that God would be with him to the last.—And let them faithfully follow his example in the faith and patience of the kingdom of Jesus, that they may be found among

those, whom he shall have as seals of his ministry, and a crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

With the children of the deceased whether they be such by nature or connection we would affectionately mourn. They have all the consolation that they can have in the death of a parent, and when they weep they must weep for themselves and not for her.—May they feel that a sovereign God hath done right in removing their mother, and that he calls them to prepare to follow her.—May they always recollect her example for it will teach them, and her precepts for they were wise. We hope that God will answer all her prayers, that are laid up in store for them, and that they will all of them take her place at the throne of grace, in supplicating God's blessings on themselves and on the world, and thus thro much prayer, die with that peace, in which she died.

May all, who this day mourn the death of a relation and friend, so mourn that the affliction which now is grievous may work out for them the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Let all this people know that they must die.—Such solemnities as these are either the favored season of God for doing us good, or will be the means of hardening us in that security which must end in remediless death.—We must soon die, and surely it cannot be an uninteresting point, whether it be with comfort or with terror. The only safe manner of coming to a peaceful death, is to love God and keep his commandments, and trust in divine mercy thro the merits of a Mediator. Let none think they can safely meet God without these qualifications, for if they do the disappointment will be exceeding great. May the Lord be with us thro these solemnities, and bring us all to rejoice and praise him in his kingdom, AMEN.