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SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
THE CHRISTIAN'S DEATH, RESURRECTION AND FINAL
STATE IN HEAVEN

The Superior Happiness of the
Righteous Dead to that of
Living Saints
ECCLESIASTES 4:2

by John Gill

(London: George Keith, 1763)

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*
— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 85

THE SUPERIOR HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD TO THAT OF LIVING SAINTS

*Occasioned By The Death Of The Reverend Mr James Fall,
Of Watford, In The County Of Hertford.
Preached March 25, 1763.*

~~2ND~~ ECCLESIASTES 4:2

*Wherefore I praised the dead, which art already dead,
more than the living; which are yet alive.*

The particle wherefore shows that these words have a connection with, and are an inference or conclusion from, those that go before, so I returned, etc. The meaning according to some,^{f1} is, that the wise man, whose words these are, returned from his former thought and sentiment, expressed in the last verse of the preceding chapter, that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; that is, as he explains it in the following chapter, that he should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labor with moderation and cheerfulness; but this he now revoked and called in, having observed the violence and oppressions that were in the world, so that a man could not enjoy the fruit of his labors with pleasure. But since Solomon afterwards repeats this sentiment again, it does not appear to be his sense; but rather it is, that he had returned to his former subject, the abuse of civil power and authority, observed in chapter 3:16. I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there; and having made a short digression from thence, he here reassumed his former argument, and enlarged and improved upon it, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun all that occurred unto him, all that were within the compass of his knowledge, or that he had got any hint of by any kind of information, by tradition, or by reading the history and annals of former times, of his own or other nations; as of the oppressions of subjects by tyrannical princes; of the widow, fatherless and stranger by unjust judges; of the poor by the rich; and of servants by true masters; and

perhaps he may have respect to the oppressions of the children of Israel in Egypt, and in the times of the judges; or he saw by the Holy Ghost, as a Jewish writer ^{f2} paraphrases it, and being now under divine inspiration, he might foresee by a spirit of prophecy, the oppressions that would be in after-times, of the Jews in the captivity of Babylon, and in the times of the Maccabees; and the persecutions of the churches of Christ in gospel-times, by Rome, pagan and papal; and all the injuries that have been or will be done to them by anti-Christ, by the man of sin and fort of perdition; *the man of the earth*, who ere long *will no more oppress*: (~~19085~~ Psalm 10:18) it is truly observed by the wise man, that all those oppressions *were done under the sun*; for there are none done above it, none in heaven, none beyond the grave; *there the wicked cease from troubling*, (~~18877~~ Job 3:17) *and there the weary be at rest. The wise man goes on with his observations, and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed; which poured forth from their eyes, and ran down their cheeks in great plenty, because of their oppressions; which were all they could do, since they had no helper.* The word is in the singular number, the tear ^{f3} as if one continued stream flowed from their eyes like a torrent, or as if the source of nature was exhausted, and the fountain of tears dried up through excessive weeping, so that scarce another tear could drop, or that it was as much as could be, that another should fall: and they had no comforter; none to speak a comfortable word to them under their oppressions, to do any thing for them to alleviate their sorrow, or to help them out of their trouble; that is, they had no human comforter, that either could or durst relieve or release them; which is a very deplorable case, and was the care of the Messiah, as personated by David, (~~18912~~ Psalm 59:20) and of the Church, as described by Jeremiah: (~~23002~~ Lamentations 1:9) the people of God indeed, under the oppressions of sin, Satan and the world, have God to be their comforter; he *is the God of all comfort* to them, who comforts them in all their tribulation: one of the names of Christ is the consolation of Israel, whom good old Simeon was waiting for; the holy Spirit is another comforter, sent by the Father and Son; and it is the will of God that the ministers of the gospel should speak comfortably to the saints, by assuring them that their sins are pardoned, full satisfaction is made for them, and their warfare accomplished; otherwise they have no human comforters, at least at times; or they are such who are like Job's comforters, miserable ones. ***And it is further observed, that on the side of the oppressors there was power; to crush them and keep them under, and hinder and deter others from helping and relieving them.*** Such wicked men David had observed in great power,

and spreading themselves *like a green bay tree*; (⁴⁹⁷⁵Psalm 37:35) when on a sudden they came to nothing, having abused their power to the hurt of others, and in the issue to their own hurt: and it is here added, but they had no comforter; that is, not the oppressors, but the oppressed; which is repeated, to observe the aggravated affliction of the oppressed, and the cruelty of their oppressors; and not so much for the confirmation of the assertion, as to excite attention and to raise pity and commiseration in the breasts of others.

Now from all this the royal preacher deduces the inference or conclusion in the text, wherefore I praised the dead, etc., not that he composed panegyrics upon them, and raised encomiums upon their persons, characters, actions, virtues and merits; but he pronounced the dead happier than the living; he judged in his own mind, and concluded within himself, and declared it to others, as his real sentiment, that the state of the dead was preferable to the state of the living, and that the one was more eligible than the other; because the one was free from oppression, and the other under it. And this subject I have chosen to treat of, for the relief of your minds under this mournful providence which has brought us together, and which I shall attempt to do in the following method;

- I.** Inquire who are meant by the dead and living, here opposed to each other, and of whom the wise man forms a comparative judgment.
- II.** Observe the preferableness of the one to the other, that is, of the dead to the living.
- III.** Show more particularly in what the preferableness, or superiority of the one to the other lies.

I. I shall inquire who are meant by the dead and living: by the dead are meant not such who are so in a figurative and improper sense, but *literally and properly*; our Lord uses the word dead in both senses in one passage; (⁴¹⁸²Matthew 8:22) to a certain person, who proposed to be a follower of him, but first desired leave to bury his father, he said, follow me, pursue the resolution made, and attend to the service included in it; *let the dead bury their dead*: that is, let the dead, in a figurative sense, the dead in sin, bury those that are corporally dead: and *some are dead in a moral sense* while they live corporally; he or she that liveth in pleasures, in sinful lulls and pleasures, whose whole life is a continued reties of sin, are dead while they

live; (~~5186~~ 1 Timothy 5:6) and this is the case of all unregenerate men, and of the Lord's people before conversion, even until they are quickened by the spirit and grace of God;

you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
(~~4111~~ Ephesians 2:1)

now though those who are dead in sin, many of them, be more happy than living saints as to outward things;

they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men; — their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish: there are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, who increase in riches; (~~1515~~ Psalm 63:5,7,12)

yet the wise man would never commend such persons or pronounce them happy, and prefer them and their state to godly persons with all their troubles. *Some are dead in a religious sense*, while alive, are dead to a profession of religion they have made; they have had a name to live, professed themselves to be spiritually alive, made so fair a show, and gave such proof and evidence of a spiritual life, that they were judged by others, even by churches, to be living Christians, and became famous for the life of godliness, when they had only the form, and denied the power of it; now such as these after a time drop their profession of religion, depart from the faith, and become apostates, and so are twice dead, as the apostle Jude expresses it; (~~1511~~ Psalm 63:12) first dead in sin, as other unregenerate men be, and then dead to the profession they have made of religion: and now though these also, as to their outward circumstances, may be more happy than those who are truly alive in a spiritual sense; since, by their apostasy, they may escape the troubles and persecutions, they that live godly in Christ Jesus are liable to; yet Solomon would never give such apostates the preference to real saints.

There are some that are dead in a civil sense with respect to calamities, distresses and afflictions which attend them in this life; and which may be called, and are called, death, and they represented as dead. The captivity of the Jews in Babylon is called a death, [~~2182~~ Ezekiel 18:32] in which God had no pleasure; rather, it was agreeable to him, that they should turn from their idolatries, and reform from their sins, and live comfortably in their own land again. The fore and severe afflictions and persecutions endured by the apostles and followers of Christ, go by the name of so great a death;

and the apostle Paul, is particularly laid to be in deaths oft; (^{<4700>}2 Corinthians 1:9,10 and ^{<47473>}11:23) that is, he was frequently in danger of his life, and exposed to death, had the sentence of it in him, and despaired of life; but now such as there are the living in our text; the unhappy persons, to whom the dead are opposed and preferred. It remains that by the dead, must be meant such that are so in a literal and corporeal sense, whose souls and bodies are really separated from each other; in which separation of soul and body death lies: *The body without the spirit is dead*; (^{<5006>}James 2:6) and in this sense all men must die and do die; and such are intended here, such that have been dead some time past, are laid in their graves, of whom there is a certainty that they are dead; not merely given up for dead, as Isaac was by Abraham, from the time he was ordered to offer him; and who from the dead *received him in a figure*; nor supposed to be dead as the apostle Paul, when stoned at Lystra, but rose up alive in the midst of the disciples; but who are truly, thoroughly and certainly dead, in a literal and proper sense; which seems to be the meaning of this unusual phrase, already dead.

But here we must distinguish between persons, and persons that are dead; the wicked dead cannot be meant; they die as other men, nor can *wickedness deliver those that are given unto it*: (^{<2008>}Ecclesiastes 8:8) Notwithstanding their daring insolence and impiety, they are obliged to submit to death, to which they are appointed; such that say, *we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are at agreement*; and so promise themselves they shall escape the one and the other; *their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with hell shall not stand*; (^{<2305>}Isaiah 28:15,18) though they live ever so long, they die at last, and die unhappy creatures; the sinner being an hundred years old, that is, at his death, shall be accursed (^{<2360>}Isaiah 65:20) and therefore there cannot be the men commended for happiness in our text: the wicked when they die are cast into hell; the rich man in the parable, as soon as dead, *in hell lift up his eyes being in torments*, in everlasting burnings, the smoke of which torments ascend for ever and ever; *their worm dies not, their fire is not quenched*, their state is fixed and unalterable; there is an unpassable gulf between them and the righteous, among whom they never will have a place, and therefore cannot be the happy men here designed; but the righteous dead, whole death Balaam desired to die, well knowing that such are happy in death: These die as well as the wicked; there is, says Solomon, (^{<2500>}Isaiah 57:1) *a just man that perishes in his righteousness*, not

eternally, but corporally; *the righteous perishes*, that is, dies, *and no man layeth it to heart*; (^{<6443>}Revelation 14:13) or is concerned at it. Good men, even the bell of men, die; those whole lives are most desirable, and are the most useful. *Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?* They do not, they die as other men; out are happier at death; blessed are the dead, not the dead in common; but that die in the Lord. (^{<4075>}Ephesians 7:15)

By *the living that are yet alive*, we are to understand, such that are alive when others are dead, and who are attended with various afflictions, distresses and troubles; and particularly under the oppression of wicked men in power; of whom it is as much as can be fold that they are alive, they are just alive, and that is all; which seems to be the meaning of this uncommon expression. And this is more especially true of living saints, who live spiritually, live godly in Christ Jesus, and suffer persecution in some shape or another for his name-sake: there may be said to die daily, and be in continual jeopardy of their lives; and were it not for the good hope, through grace, they have of happiness in another world, *would be of all men most miserable*. (^{<4559>}1 Corinthians 15:19) See at large the description of them, in ^{<4048>}2 Corinthians 4:8-12 and to there the righteous dead are preferred: which is the next thing to be considered; namely,

II. Observe, the preference of the dead to the living: *I praised the dead, etc.* The righteous dead, who, after death, are much more happy than living saints. There words indeed are generally understood, as spoken according to human sense and judgment, without any regard to the glory and happiness of the future state; as that the dead must be preferred to the living, when the rest and quiet of the one, and the miseries and troubles of the other, are observed; and which seems to be confirmed by the following verse; but I choose to improve the words in the former sense. Death itself, and simply considered, is no happiness; and if it was, it could not be special and peculiar happiness to some, because it is common to all; high and low, rich and poor, wife and foolish, good and bad, all die; *the grave is the house appointed for all living*; (^{<3823>}Job 30:23) besides, it is the fruit and effect of sin, *sin entered into the world, and death by sin*: (^{<4512>}Romans 5:12) Sin opened the door at which death came in; it was threatened in case of sin, and as a punishment for it, and is the wages and just demerit of it; and therefore can never be an happiness in itself; add to this, that it is a dissolution of a man, a dissolving the earthly house of his tabernacle, an

unpinning and taking of it down, a breaking of the whole frame of nature, a disuniting the constituent parts of it, soul and body; and though it is not an annihilation of man, a bringing him to nothing, yet it is a reduction of him to his original dust man was made of the dust of the earth, and at death he returns to it again, which is an humbling and a mortifying consideration to him; he cannot well brook it. Self-preservation is a principle implanted in all living Creatures, and so in man; human nature is reluctant to death, and is not agreeable to it. Satan most truly said,

Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will be give for his life:
(^{<4111>}Job 2:4)

it is the last thing he chooses to part with; he is willing rather to part with any thing than that;

what man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? (^{<4942>}Psalm 34:12)

Every man desires life, and a long life, especially to live in health, prosperity, and success; even the human nature of Christ was reluctant to death; the thought of it was disagreeable, and he prayed for deliverance from it; *Father, save me from this hour:* (^{<4327>}John 12:27) indeed his death was an, uncommon one, it was in the room and stead of others, of sinful men, and was attended with the wrath of God, and curses of the law for their sins he bore; so, that it is no wonder, that his human nature should shudder at it, when left, to itself, and he should say,

Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;
(^{<4159>}Matthew 26:39)

nevertheless it shows, that even sinless human nature is reluctant to death; and therefore death, simply considered, must be much more disagreeable to sinful, human nature. There must be something more than is in nature to make death agreeable, or desireable, or to cause a man to look at it with pleasure, and to carry him through it without fear; even that of being with Christ for evermore, which is better, and is judged to be better by a believer, than to be in this sinful world: death therefore, relatively considered, or as it refers to good men, is only an happiness; death to them is no penal evil, death, as a punishment, being endured by Christ for them; the curse is taken away from death, Christ being made a curse for them; the thing of it, which is sin, is taken away by him, and death is become a blessing to the saints; it is reckoned in the inventory of their good things,

death is yours; (^{<1275>}2 Samuel 23:5) and they are pronounced blessed persons: *blessed are the dead that die in the Lord*, that die in union with him; there is a secret union to him that took place in eternity, when the elect were chosen in Christ, even before the foundation of the world; and there is an open union to Christ in conversion, which is the manifestation of the former; the bond of which is the everlasting love of Christ, which can never be dissolved; death cannot separate from his love, it dissolves the union between soul and body, but not the union between Christ and his people; and hence they shall live with him soul and body to all eternity, and therefore, must be happy; as all are that die in the exercise of grace on him: the death of such is in a remarkable and distinguished manner a blessing; *these all died in faith*, (^{<412>}1 Corinthians 3:22) it is said of some; so died David; his last words, his dying words were,

he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and this is all my salvation. (^{<3412>}2 Timothy 4:7,8)

And so died the apostle Paul; *The time of my departure, says he, is at hand;* (^{<3113>}Hebrews 11:13) *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown, of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.* This is dying comfortably and happily, to die in the faith of covenant-interest and of eternal glory: and so it is to die in hope of it; the hope of the profane, of the hypocrite, and self-righteous man, is as the giving up of the ghost; it is cut off like a spider's web; and if it lives so long as they do, it dies with them, and is of no use at death unto them; but the righteous hath hope in his death; (^{<2143>}Proverbs 14:32) whose hope is fixed on Christ and his righteousness, by which he is justified and denominated a righteous man: this is exercised by him in his dying moments, and is of use to him then; and he rejoices in hope of the glory of God. They that die saints and righteous persons are the only happy at death, or to whom death is an happiness;

precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;
(^{<4365>}Psalms 116:15)

whom God has sanctified or set apart for himself in election, whom Christ has sanctified or made atonement for by his blood and sacrifice, and whom the holy Spirit has sanctified by his grace: and though there is something in death which is disagreeable, and makes the nearest relatives of the deceased, and who have the greatest affection for them, willing to bury them out of their fight, as Abraham did his beloved Sarah; yet there is that

in the death of saints which is precious to the Lord, which he takes pleasure in; as a man that takes a walk in his garden, and spying a beautiful full-blown flower, he crops it, and puts it into his bosom; so the Lord takes his walks in his gardens, the churches, and gathers his lilies, fowls, fully ripe for glory, and with delight takes them to himself. It is the death of the righteous man that is an happiness; *Let me die the death of the righteous*, (^{<4010>}1 Peter 1:9) says Balaam: it is always well with them in time, and to all eternity; it is well with them at death; they are taken away, not only from present evil, but from evil to come, and are immediately possessed of everlasting good; *for the righteous go into life eternal*. (^{<0230>}Numbers 23:10) The end of such is different from that of others; and therefore the above wicked person said, *let my last end be like his*, the righteous man's; the end of such a man is peace; (^{<4256>}Matthew 25:46) he goes out of the world with peace, serenity and tranquility of mind, and enters into eternal peace; he receives the end of his faith, what his faith has been looking and waiting for, *the salvation of his soul*; (^{<4102>}Romans 6:22) he has his fruit unto holiness now, and his *end, everlasting life* (^{<4107>}Romans 6:7) hereafter. But,

III. I proceed to show more particularly, wherein lies the preferableness and superior happiness of the righteous dead to living saints.

First, *It lies in what the righteous dead are delivered from*; and this is what the wise man has chiefly respect unto; he had considered the oppressions, tears and uncomfortable condition of many in the present state of life, and observed the dead were free from all this, and therefore pronounced them the more happy persons. And,

1st, The righteous dead are entirely free from sin, the source of all trouble and distress in life; and when that is no more, there will be no more sorrow. What the apostle says of those, who in a spiritual sense are said to be dead to sin, is true of the righteous dead in a natural sense; he that is dead is freed from sin, (^{<4877>}Psalm 37:37) even from the very being of it; they are not only delivered from the guilt, and any return of it, but from that itself: living saints are delivered from the guilt of sin through Christ bearing sin for them; and from sensible guilt in their consciences, through the application of the blood of Christ, which purges their consciences from dead works, the load and guilt of them, and their hearts from an evil conscience sprinkled with his blood, which speaks peace and pardon, and so better things than the blood of Abel; but then as fresh sins are

committed, new guilt is contracted, which requires a repeated application of the blood of sprinkling; but this is not the case of the righteous dead, they sin no more, and have no more renewed guilt, and need no more renewed discoveries of pardoning grace and mercy. They are also not only free from the dominion of sin, but from any attempt made upon them to regain it; it is promised, and it is true of living saints, men regenerated by the spirit and grace of God, that sin shall not have dominion over them, and it has not; because they are not under the law, the law of sin and death, exercising its authority over them, but they are under grace, as a governing principle in them, which *reigns through righteousness unto eternal life*; (~~6164~~Romans 6:14 and ~~6172~~5:21) yet notwithstanding, such at times is the power and prevalence of indwelling sin, that it brings them *into captivity to the law of sin*: (~~6180~~Psalm 38:2,3) but it has no such power over the righteous dead, for it has not so much as a place in them; they are the spirits of just men made perfect, not only perfectly righteous through Christ's righteousness, but perfectly holy in themselves; they are without the spot or wrinkle of sin, or any thing like it; there is not a Canaanite in the land, not a single lust and corruption in their hearts: but not so is it with living saints; they are not free from sin in such sense; they are far from a sinless perfection in themselves; this has always been disclaimed by saints on earth in all ages, as by Job, David, Solomon, the apostle Paul, and others; and, says the beloved disciple,

if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: (~~6173~~Romans 7:23)

their complaints, confessions and prayers, abundantly confirm the fame; they groan being burdened with the weight of indwelling sin, and will, as long as they are in this tabernacle; (~~6177~~2 Corinthians 12:7) the breakings forth of indwelling sin in them, their actual transgressions and iniquities, are *as an heavy burden, too heavy for them* (~~6108~~1 John 1:8) but saints in heaven are rid of such incumbrances; those burdens are fallen off from them, and they will feel them no more; now sins of heart and life; are like the Canaanites to the Israelites, pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, which give great pain and distress. Perhaps it was something of this kind the apostle Paul felt when he complains of *a thorn in the flesh*: (~~6184~~2 Corinthians 5:4) but in the heavenly state there will be no *pricking briar*, nor *grieving thorn to all the house of Israel*, (~~6324~~Ezekiel 28:24) or family of God therein breaks the peace of the people of God now, so that they have no rest in their bones because of it; yea, their bones are broken lay it,

and the joys of salvation taken away through it; and though it cannot dissolve the union between God and them, it interrupts their sensible communion with him, and causes him to withdraw his gracious presence from them,

your iniquities, have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

(~~281D~~ Isaiah 59:2)

Sin makes this world a weary land to saints, and all their solace and comfort is, that *Christ is as the shadow of a great rock* to them in it; and speaks a word in season to their weary souls, inviting and encouraging them to come to him for spiritual rest, where they find it: their inbred corruptions are to them like the daughters of Heth to Isaac and Rebekah, make them weary of their lives; but the righteous dead are no more harassed with them, but are entered where the weary are at rest, even into that rest, or sabbatism, which remains for the people or God. Sin now causes a war within them, where there are, as it were, a company of two armies, *the law in the members, and the law in the mind*, warring against each other; the flesh and spirit, sin and grace, lusting the one against the other, so that they cannot do the things they would; but with the righteous dead this warfare is accomplished, and they serve the Lord without any interruption, and do his will as it is done by the angels in heaven.

2dly, The righteous dead are delivered from the temptations of Satan: living saints, as well as they, are redeemed out of his hands by Christ, who has taken the prey from the mighty, and delivered the lawful captive, and has led captivity captive, Satan and his principalities and powers, who led his people captive at their will: and they are taken out of his hands at conversion; when the strong man armed is dispossessed of his palace by him that is stronger than he, his armor taken away, and his spoils divided; and they are turned from the power of Satan unto God, and translated into the kingdom of Christ; but then they are not freed from his temptations, even the greatest saint and strongest believer; the apostle Peter, was sifted by him as wheat is sifted, and the apostle Paul had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him; yea, Christ, the Son of God, in our nature here on earth, *was tempted in all things, like unto his people, excepting sin*. Satan solicits good men to sin; he provoked David to number Israel, contrary to the mind and will of God; he finds something in them to work upon, the corruption of their nature, which he could not find in Christ; he knows what sin is

most prevalent in them, and they are inclined unto, and he baits his hook, or frames his temptations agreeable thereunto; these are some of his crafty wiles, and cunning devices and stratagems, saints are not altogether ignorant of: he has great power and influence on the spirits of men; he not only works in the children of disobedience, and puts it into the heart of Judas to betray his Lord, and into the hearts of Ananias and Saphira to lie against the holy Ghost, but he can suggest things blasphemous and atheistical into the minds of good men; as to call in question the being of a God, and the authority of the scriptures, the truth of Christianity, and the like; which are some of those fiery darts he casts at them, and into them, which give them great pain and uneasiness, and sorely grieve them: he disturbs them in religious exercises, not only in private, but in public; he comes among the sons of God when they present themselves before the Lord to wait upon him, and worship him; and he not only catches away the word preached from a careless and ignorant hearer, but diverts the minds of good men to other objects, from a close application to the word, and hinders their profit and edification; and therefore they have need to pray that they enter not into temptation, as not to be able to watch in divine service with Christ one hour: he goes about to and fro in the earth, and observes the sins and failings of God's people, picks up all he can against them, and then accuses them before God; as he did Joshua the high-priest, who had fallen into sin, though Satan met with a revere reprimand for it from Christ, the advocate and intercessor, and Joshua was acquitted and discharged: he often possesses the minds of saints with fears; he sifts them, being suffered, as wheat is sifted, and throws the chaff of corruption uppermost, that they cannot discern the true seed of grace in them; and so fear the work of God was never begun upon them, and that they are hypocrites, and have only the form of godliness, and not the power of it; and that they shall one day perish through their own sins and Satan's temptations.; and many of them, by his suggestions, *are through fear of death all their life-time subject to bondage*. But this is not the case of the righteous dead; they are free from all the temptations, solicitations and suggestions of this enemy of souls; they are out of his reach, he is under their feet, and bruised there; he is call out of heaven, and will never be admitted there any more. There was a tempter and a subtle one in the garden of Eden; but there is none in the garden of God, in the paradise above. Satan indeed, as soon as he fell, was cast out of heaven, and laid in chains, though suffered to walk about in them on our earth to tempt the children of men; but ere long he will not only be bound by the mighty

angel, and call into the bottomless pit, and there be shut up for a thousand years, and then for a time let loose once more to deceive the nations; but he will be laid bold upon again, and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are, to be tormented forever and ever; he will never regain, his place in heaven more: so that the saints will be clear of him, and every annoyance from him to all eternity.

3dly, The righteous dead are delivered from all darkness and desertion, the living saints are liable to, and therefore are preferable to them. Now good men are not only, like Heman the Ezrahite, laid in darkness, and in the deeps of afflictive providences, but are often in darkness of soul; walk in darkness, and see no light; have no clear evidence of their interest in the love of God, and in the covenant of his grace, nor of their interest in Christ, his blood, righteousness and sacrifice; nor fight of the spirit of grace in their hearts; are without the light of spiritual peace and joy, without sensible communion with God and the light of his countenance: he hides himself from them, and they cannot see him; their beloved withdraws himself from them, and is gone, and they seek him in the word and ordinances, and cannot find him. But now the saints that are dead and gone to heaven, they see the face of God, and have unclouded views of him; they see him *face to face* in the clearest manner they possibly can; they see him as he is, so far as finite creatures are capable of; their *sun no more goes down*, neither does their *moon withdraw itself*; for the Lord is their *everlasting light, and the days of their mourning are ended*.

(~~622~~ Revelation 22:4; ~~632~~ 1 Corinthians 13:12; ~~612~~ 1 John 3:2; ~~680~~ Psalm 60:20)

4thly, The righteous dead are delivered from all doubts and fears, misgivings of heart and unbelief, to which living saints are subject in the present state; they have their fears left God should not be their God, or that he has forsaken them, and will return no more, or that they have not the true work of grace upon them, and shall come short of eternal glory and happiness at last the language of their unbelieving hearts sometimes is,

Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?
Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (~~670~~ Psalm 77:7-9)

Unbelief reads all this in the affirmative, which causes great distress and trouble; but in heaven there is not the least doubt of the love of God, no

fear of being cast off by him, nor any disbelief of interest in him, or the least jealousy of change of state and condition for evermore.

5thly, The righteous dead are free from all toil and labor, trials and afflictions of whatsoever kind, which are endured in this life, in which their superior happiness lies;

blessed are the dead which die in the Lord — they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them: (~~66413~~ Revelation 14:13)

they left from toil and labor of body, are not obliged to get their bread with the sweat of their brow, as living saints do; and from toil and labor of the mind, by frequent reading, deep meditation and constant study, the employment of such who labor in the word and doctrine, which at death is at an end; and from all diseases and disorders living saints labor under. In the other state there are no more pain, no more sickness, no more sorrow, and also no more penury and want, to which good men are here sometimes subject; no more tribulations of any kind which saints have in the world, and through which they pass till they enter the kingdom, and then they leave them; no more reproaches and persecutions, which they that live godly in Christ Jesus here must expect, and do share in. In the heavenly state, where the righteous dead are, neither the sun nor heat of persecution light upon them, for

the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall seed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (~~66716~~ Revelation 7:16,17)

Secondly, *The superior happiness of the righteous dead to that of living saints lies in what they enjoy there*; the best things are referred unto the last; saints have, as Lazarus had, their evil things here, but their good things hereafter, such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive of; they are beyond conception and expression: it cannot be said, how great is that goodness which God has laid up, and is in reserve for them that fear him and trust in him, and which they enjoy in another world.

1st, The saints in heaven have better company than the saints on earth; the righteous are immediately with Christ, which is far better than to be in this world; their spirits, as soon as separated from their bodies, are with him in paradise; and where they are for ever with him, beholding his glory, and enjoying uninterrupted communion with him, and with his Father and the

blessed Spirit. Indeed the living saints on earth have sometimes the presence of Christ with them; and it is known by themselves, and perceived by others, that they have been with Jesus: but then they complain that he is as a *wayfaring man, that tarrys but for a night*; he soon withdraws himself, and is gone, and their souls faint within them. They have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, but then it is of a short duration. Whereas the saints in heaven are always in the presence of God, and behold his face for evermore. They also there enjoy the company and conversation of angels; here indeed the saints come to an innumerable company of them, who wait upon them, are guards about them, and convoy their spirits at death to Abraham's bosom. But in the blissful state they are always with them, and join in the same divine service of praising God and glorifying him. The righteous dead are immediately with perfect saints, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; with patriarchs, prophets and apostles, and with all good men who have departed this life from the beginning of the world. Here living saints, like righteous Lot, are vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; as were David when he sojourned in Meshec, and the prophet Isaiah when he dwelt among a people of unclean lips; and good men, even in the churches, have such in fellowship with them as are often a grief unto them, by reason of their unhappy tempers and disagreeable conversation; of whom the apostle says,

I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. (~~3088~~Philippians 3:18)

But in heaven there is none to disturb by their words or actions;

The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (~~3005~~Psalms 1:5)

2dly, The employment of the righteous after death is superior to that which living saints are engaged in, even to that which is most sacred and spiritual. Prayer is the work of saints on earth, and is both pleasant and profitable; but it supposes want, implies imperfection, and is attended sometimes with groanings which cannot be uttered: but prayer ceases in heaven; there is no need of it there: the preaching and hearing the word, administration of, and attendance on ordinances, are a principal part of the business of the people of God here; but in the future state there is no need of the sun and moon of gospel-ordinances, *for the glory of the Lord lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*. The work of the saints in heaven is praise; their constant

employment is singing the songs of electing, redeeming, sanctifying and persevering grace.

3dly, The joys of the righteous dead vastly exceed the joys of the living; saints now have joy in the holy Ghost, and peace in believing: they can at times rejoice in Christ, and in hope of the glory of God; but there joys are often interrupted by indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, divine desertions, and the troubles of the world. But at death a saint enters into the joy of his Lord, and his joy is full, and always continues; *everlasting joy is on his head: and sorrow and sighing flee away*; he is immediately in the presence of God, *in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore*: so that upon the whole, the state of the dead in Christ is better than the state of living believers in this world; death is a gain to them, and better is the day of their death to them, than the day of their birth, since the one is the outlet of those troubles, which the other is an inlet into; and however desirable the lives of saints, and particularly of ministers of the gospel, may be to their fellow-Christians, it is more to their advantage to be removed hence. *You may think, that it was more needful for you, that your late pastor should abide in the flesh, for your furtherance and joy of faith; but it is better for him to be where he is; he has done all that work which it was the pleasure of God he should do among you, and it is your duty to submit to the will of God concerning him; of whom something may be expected to be said.*

The Reverend *MR. JAMES FALL* was one of the fruits of my ministry, under which it pleased God to call him by his grace, and reveal his Son in him; he was baptized upon a profession of his faith, and received a member of the church under my care, in January 1730, upwards of thirty-three years ago. After some time it was thought he had a gift fitting him for the public ministry of the word; and it was accordingly tried, judged and approved of by the church, and he was regularly, sent forth as a minister of the gospel; and in a little time after, this church being without a pastor, sent for him to minister to them, and approving of his ministration, gave him a call to take the pastoral care of them; in which office he was ordained, July 11th, 1735. So that he hath been almost twenty-eight years pastor of this church; what work God has done by him among you, in the conversion of sinners, and in the edification of your souls, you are the best judges; this however must be said of him, that he abode by the truths of the gospel he first received and preached; and that his conversation, has been becoming his character, as a Christian and a minister, being holy, harmless and inoffensive; he had a

good report both of them that are without, and of them that are within. The disorder ^{f4} which issued in his death, was of such a nature as rendered speaking difficult to him, and in a good measure unintelligible; but he was often heard to say, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*; and declared he had no fear of death, and of what follows, but of the pangs of death; and some of his last words were, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*; and at the same time, expressed his full satisfaction as to his eternal state. Thus died your pastor, and now sleeps in the arms of Jesus. And let me exhort you, this church of Christ, to keep together, and keep up the worship and service of God among you; consult together and unite in your counsels; for mutual good be frequent and fervent in prayer, that God would give you a pastor in due time, to seed you with knowledge and understanding; let brotherly love be cultivated and continued with you; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. And as for you his dear offspring, for whom your parent had the most tender concern, for your temporal, spiritual and eternal welfare; remember the counsel, and advice he frequently gave you for your good, walk as you had him for an example; tread in his steps, and serve your father's God, and it will be well with you. And what has been said upon the subject treated of, on this occasion, may serve to make death familiar to every believer here, and take off the dread and terror of it, which often ponders the minds of real Christians; for if the dead are more happy than the living, why should we be afraid to die, since it will be greatly to our advantage, and give us a preference to those that survive us? this may serve to cause us to breathe after that heavenly state, and choose rather to be *absent from the body, that we might be present with the Lord, and even to rejoice in hope of the glory of God*; and it should be our great concern, that whether we live any longer space of time in this world, we live unto the Lord, to his honor and glory; or whether we die in a short time, having done our work, *we die unto the Lord*, to live with him to all eternity.

FOOTNOTES

^{ft1} Aben Ezra in loc.

^{ft2} Jarchi in loc.

^{ft3} t[j r Lachryma, Montanus, Cocceius, Rambachius.

^{ft4} A Quinsey.