

CHRIST'S DEPARTURE TO HEAVEN.

A SERMON

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Preached by Mr. HAZELTON,

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AT MOUNT ZION CHAPEL, CHADWELL STREET,
CLERKENWELL,
On LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 26th, 1885.

"But now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me,
Whither goest Thou — {John. 16: 5}.

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." It is said that the Lord delivereth him. The number of righteous persons on the earth is very considerable, and all of them are at times in trouble and affliction, but it is a fact that they shall be delivered out of them all. But our God has been pleased to express Himself in a peculiar manner, saying, "The Lord delivereth him not them, out of them all," indicating that every individual saint lives beneath the ever-wakeful and watchful eye of God. Every true believer shall be guarded and protected by Jehovah, and sooner or later the weakest and feeblest one shall emerge from trouble and sorrow, and take his seat in eternal rest. But why are the righteous tried, and why are their trials and afflictions many? God giveth no account of any of His matters; but "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." We are in the hands of infinite wisdom, as well as of everlasting love; and God is dealing with His people in a manner which will surely do them

good, and promote His own honor and glory. Whilst we see the hand of God at work in connection with mysteries dark and deep, it well becomes us as purblind creatures to be silent in His presence. Many of the people of God,—and I think I may number myself among them,—have resolved to have a smooth path through life; for it is not in human nature to choose trouble nor to love it, on the contrary, the flesh kicks and rebels against it; and, therefore the saints are sometimes looking on the right hand and on the left for a level road. They resolve again and again to make their circumstances, if possible, agreeable ; although our great reigning Lord has said, " In Me ye shall have peace,"—not in the world, not in your plans, or the manner in which you execute them. "In Me ye shall have peace "in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." It is said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation and I think I have rejoiced in the position in which the Saviour was pleased to place that fact. Observe, it stands between two bright and blessed stars: "First, in Me ye shall have peace and then, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;" and between those two lights we have the cloud of trouble,—"in the world ye shall have tribulation." The world, however, is a conquered enemy; and therefore, the believer, is not, strictly, speaking, correct when he says he is going to heaven through an enemy's country. This world does not belong to the devil. Hell was made for him, and for his slaves and followers; but he is not Lord of all, for our Jesus is upon the throne. Satan is permitted to go up and down in the earth, to tempt and try the people of God; but if our faith is strong, we shall see that the monster is chained, and that the hand of his great Conqueror holds the chain; hence—

*"All shall come, and last, and end,
As shall please our heavenly Friend."*

Nevertheless, in the world the righteous shall have tribulation. Not a few of them are tried and afflicted in relation to their families. I have known during the three-and-thirty years I have been with you, many mothers and fathers with aching heads and broken hearts, in consequence of family disappointments and trials. Not a few of God's servants are in tribulation with regard to their business: but it is not for me in the pulpit to go into these matters; therefore, I will only say, we are in the world, and must have to do with it. Some of you have more to do with it than I have, and I know that some believers are sorely tried and troubled in relation to business matters. Again, some of God's people have been tried with regard to church affairs; and I speak experimentally when I say that church trials are among the bitterest troubles the child of God passes through. Some of us have known what it is to have sleepless nights, and days of restlessness and sorrow, in consequence of the state of things in the church or churches with which we have been connected. We are, however, greatly favored in this respect in this place ; for there has never been any very serious misunderstanding here. The Lord be thanked for His goodness towards us. Let us unitedly put the crown of praise upon the great Head of Zion. But if there are no business trials, and no family trials, and no church trials, there is always enough in the heart of every child of God to try him night and day. "In me," said Paul, a greater man than any of us now present, "that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Indwelling sin is an enemy that is

very near to us,—nearer in fact than our business, and to use a strong expression, nearer to us than our families are. Families dwell within in a certain sense, but our children, our wives and our husbands do not dwell within as sin dwells there; and so long as we are the subjects of indwelling sin, we shall experience affliction and trouble.

But many of the afflictions of the saints have arisen out of persecution. The Saviour in the chapter out of which I have taken my text, gives us several important predictions, and several precious promises, and much rich comfort and consolation. He gave the disciples certain important predictions: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. " They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." This was part of the prospect the Saviour opened before His apostles, which was not very attractive or cheering. Nevertheless, He would not deceive them. "I have spoken these things unto you, that you should not be offended. First, they will draw the ecclesiastical sword, and turn you out of the synagogue, or excommunicate you; and secondly, they will draw the civil sword and kill you. And this took place in the experience of most of the apostles of Christ, and this has been the experience also of thousands of God's people since their days. Oh the sham religion of persecuting Antichrist! And I could go a little closer too if I had time. Ecclesiastical judges sat upon certain cases, and condemned professors of religion for holding certain doctrines; and then handed them over to the civil power. They tried cases religiously, and found thousands guilty of heresy, and then handed them over to the magistrate to be executed. And this was a literal fulfillment of the words, "

They shall excommunicate you ; and the time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Thus we are reminded of the fact that there was a measure of conscientiousness connected with all this. Be very careful when you hear people talk about acting up to their consciences, and that their actions should follow its dictates. Conscience may be wrong, and if there is no grace therein, it is not good. If there has been no blood applied, and one is not directed by the Holy Spirit, he will err in following the requirements and demands of his conscience. The persecutors that killed the apostles thought that by doing so they were doing God service. Was their conduct, however, approved by the God of heaven? "I speak these things unto you now, that when the time comes ye may not be offended." Sin and grace can never coalesce, and the church and the world cannot be united together. The two companies, the two societies, the two seeds are wondrously distinct from each other. The world will hate the people of God, and the saints will not be able to associate with the world. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him; and "whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Let us, therefore, shine as believers, and make up our minds to be persecuted if we do so. Thank God they can not draw the civil sword against us now, nor cast us into prison for the sake of Christ and His truth. Nevertheless, the spirit of persecution is still in existence; and if the restraints were removed from it, it would break forth in forms as cruel, and as bitter, as in days past and gone. Well, the Saviour predicted persecution, and then He gave them great and precious promises to comfort their souls. And now He says, "I go my way to Him that sent me." He had been with them three years, and during that period they had walked up and down the land with Him, and the

hand of persecution had scarcely ever fallen upon them, but upon their Leader and Captain. "Now, I am no more with you, I am going my way to Him that sent Me," and it is expedient for you that I should do so.

The subject before us is the departure of our Lord from this world to His Father. I shall make no remarks upon the latter clause of this verse. a Now, I go my way to Him that sent me." The first thought that occurs to my mind, as requiring a like notice is, when did the Saviour depart to Him that sent Him '? "But now I go my way." Let me here observe in somewhat general forms that our Lord is perfectly punctual, and that Divine punctuality constitutes a branch of our eternal salvation and life. Time is of the utmost importance to God and also to His people. In my spirit I wish that God's saints felt more than they appear to feel in regard to this. A year or a month is a very important period, and so is a week or a day. How many minutes are lost! And yet a minute is important in the government of God. And I go further, for I am warranted to do so, and say that moments which are the smallest points of time are important in the providence and grace of God. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." "A vineyard of red wine: I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment" This vineyard must be an important one, and a very extraordinary place to require watering every moment. What is the meaning of the phraseology, "I will water it every moment Why, it means this, my friends, that the blessing of God never ceases to fall, that the enriching grace of God never ceases to distil upon the heads and hearts of His people on the earth. Our thoughts are very quick, for they spring up and travel in a moment, like a flash of lightning to the ends of the earth, and in a

moment they are in heaven or hell. And how much has arisen from a thought! One may have given rise to an empire; for "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindled!" And if thoughts may be the seeds of such great results, they are matters of importance in the government of God, and He might well say, "I will water it every moment." But what has this to do with our text? My subject just now is Divine punctuality, and the Saviour was Divinely punctual in every branch of His work, and in every step He took as the Saviour of lost and ruined sinners. When the time was come, and He was due in this world, He appeared upon the scene; for He came in due time. Our gracious God never comes too early, or before He is needed, and, bless His name, He never comes to the help of His people too late. When Jesus Christ was due on earth, He appeared at the very hour, and an angel of God announced His advent, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." And then, further, our Lord died at the appointed time. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come." Our Lord referred to a particular hour that was agreed upon between Himself and His Father in the council of peace, before the foundation of the world. How much depended on that hour! It was the grand central point of time, out of which flowed, and still continues to flow streams of eternal life and salvation. When Jesus was due in Gethsemane, He appeared in the garden; and when He was due on Calvary, He appeared on the accursed tree. When He was due in heaven as the returning High Priest of our profession, He ascended to His God and our God, and to His Father and our Father. He went His way to Him that sent Him. Was it by chance that our Lord died during the time the Jews celebrated their Passover? No, it was a matter of

pre-ordination, and Divine appointment. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;" and it was right and proper that the antitype should answer to the type, and the substance to the shadow, and therefore, our Passover was sacrificed for us at a particular time. It was not a matter of chance that our Lord died at three o'clock in the afternoon. You are aware that in the former dispensation there were two daily sacrifices for sin, one called the morning sacrifice at nine o'clock, and the other the evening sacrifice, at three o'clock in the afternoon. Christ is our morning and our evening Lamb; and at the ninth hour, which was three o'clock in the afternoon, "He cried with a loud voice, and said, It is finished and gave up the ghost." And how striking was the fact that at that hour the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, even at the very moment the priest was standing before it offering the evening incense to the God of Israel. How it must have startled him! Well, all that was divinely arranged, and I put these historical facts before you, for the purpose of encouraging you to hope in the infinite and boundless mercy of that God who times all the operations of His hand and keeps all His appointments with His beloved people. "Jesus said, And now I go my way to Him that sent Me." It appears then that He went to heaven, or returned to His Father, after He had finished His work on the earth; and that He would not, and did not die until He had finished it; for His life was in His own hands: "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." He came to do a certain work in a certain time, and He went about it and through it like the great God- man and Mediator. He worked every day for three-and-thirty years, and when they were expired He was at the end of His sufferings and His labor, when He lifted up His eyes towards His Father in heaven, and

said, " It is finished, and bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." Our Lord's work was completed before He died and went to heaven. How unlike you and me in our performances, even those which give us most pleasure and satisfaction. A finishing stroke or two is wanted here and there, and something extra is required to render it satisfactory. But here we have, or had, the great God man, the grand embodiment of Divine wisdom, love, and omnipotence, saving sinners, who proceeded with His work, sweating blood, and weeping and dying the curse away; and when it was' all gone, and the storm was all over, and millions were redeemed and saved, then He said, " Now. I go my way to Him that sent Me." Here, then in, the first place, we have the time when our dear Lord went to heaven.

In the second place, let us look at the point or the place from which He departed. "I go my way to Him that sent Me." He was in this world. I do not know whether He has ever been in other worlds as He was in this. He is in other worlds with regard to His omnipresence, for as God He is everywhere; but whether He has visited other worlds as He visited this, I am not required to know. He has been here, and tabernacle on earth; and having saved sinners, and fulfilled His Father's purpose, He said, Now I shall leave the place; and He went from the scene of His labor. Now, I want to remind you of two or three things; first, that the bodily presence of Christ on the earth is not now needed; secondly, that it is not expedient; and thirdly, that it is not possible. In the first place, the bodily presence of Christ in this world is not now needed. The saints do not need it. When I say His bodily presence, my hearers understand me. I mean the real visible presence of Jesus Christ, as God-man. He is really and truly God, but He is

man as well as God, and therefore, God and man in one great Person. As man He cannot be in two places at the same time, although as God He is everywhere. As man, however, He must be located somewhere, and the Scriptures represent Him as sitting at the Father's right hand. We need Him there, but we do not need Him here. His bodily presence, since He has saved His people from condemnation is in heaven. If we need it here, it must be to fulfill some purpose. Is it for revelation? Do we need Him here to reveal the things of God unto us? He has done that, and the revelation is written here, and it is sufficiently full and copious. Is it for the application of salvation to the heart? Does that require His presence here? The Holy Ghost does that: "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you:" And if we have the Holy Ghost to apply salvation in this world, we do not require the presence of Jesus to do it. If Immanuel had not been here and bled, the Spirit would not now be here to apply anything. The Lord Jesus, however, came and bled and died, and then went to Him that sent Him, and now the Holy Ghost takes the blood that was shed, and applies it to the consciences of those whom He saved. We do not require, you see, the bodily presence of Jesus for revelation, nor for application. Neither is it required for consolation. Some of God's people have fancied that it would be very agreeable and pleasant to have Jesus personally here, that they might see Him and talk with Him, and have to do with Him every day. Well, we should want Him in our congregation, and other congregations of saints would like to have Him also. It is best that His bodily presence should be in heaven, and His spiritual presence here. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "Now, I go My way to Him that sent Me." My bodily presence with you on earth is no longer needful, and I am going to

My God and your God, to My Father and your Father.

Again, the bodily presence of Jesus Christ is not expedient. "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." His bodily presence is not expedient; for first, we are to live by faith, and not by sight; and if He were on the earth, we should, like His immediate followers and disciples, live by sight and not by faith; and this state of things was gently reproofed by Christ in Thomas. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." It is blessed to see Christ and to believe at sight; but it is more blessed to believe without seeing: so said our great and glorious Saviour. We walk by faith, we live by faith, and we stand by faith. The world derides us, because we pray to a God that they and we cannot see, and sing psalms and hymns, and make a joyful noise unto a Being Whom we believe and declare to be in heaven. We do believe He is there; and more than that we believe He is our God, our portion and our all. Therefore,

*"Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne*

For we live by faith of joys to come, and are as confident of the existence of our God as if we had seen Him face to face. Not expedient that Christ should be here, for I do not think we could bear His glory. He would have to veil the splendor of His majesty, if He lived among us.

John saw a measure of His glory in the Isle of Patmos, and what was the effect thereof upon him? "I fell at His feet as dead." Why, surely it is not pleasure, nor joyful communion with Jesus to fall as dead and powerless as in a swoon at His feet. We shall not so fall before Him in heaven. We could not bear the glory here. I am, said the Master, about to be glorified, and "now I go My way to Him that sent Me." Again, ordinances would be superfluous if Jesus were bodily present with us now. Should I require the bread and wine if Jesus were before my eyes? He that shed His blood and saved my soul. What should I want the ordinance of believers' baptism for, if I had before me that dear Saviour, in whom was opened the fountain for sin and for uncleanness?

We said also that His bodily presence here was not possible. First, we do not need it, then it is not expedient, and thirdly, it is not possible. That is a great word to use. It is impossible on this ground. Were Jesus bodily present with us in this world, He could not complete our salvation and deliverance. Having made the atonement He was bound to take it into the holiest of all, and present it to His Father there. "If He were on earth, He should not be a priest; seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law. Having magnified the law, and made it for ever honorable, He was bound as our law-fulfiller, to appear in the presence of the great Lawgiver there. We need Him there, and could not do without His presence where He is now, but we now need the Holy Ghost to reveal to us the things of Christ, and this we are favored with. The Spirit abides with us for

ever, but Jesus dwells in heaven, and we are going to Him. He will not now come to us, only in a way of spiritual power; but by and bye when His mediatorial kingdom is completed, "He will come again the second time, without sin unto salvation. He is gone from this world to His Father.

Thirdly, how did He depart? "Now, I go My way to Him that sent Me." Did He go alone? No, angels attended Him:—

*"They brought His chariot from above,
To bear Him to His throne;
Clapped their triumphant wings, and cried,
The glorious work is done!"*

Was that all ? I think not, for many bodies of the saints that slept arose, and came out of their graves after His resurrection, and appeared unto many in Jerusalem. Did they die again, and were they again buried? As angels accompanied the great Conqueror to His throne, I apprehend our great Redeemer took those saints to heaven with Him; so that there was a kind of representative gathering composed of angels and risen saints, whom He presented, if I may so express myself, as a pledge and example of what the whole should be at the last great day. Nor did He go empty-handed to His Father. What did He carry with Him? A stainless character, and a great and new name. He took with Him a magnified law, and put it into the ark of the covenant which is the mercy-seat, and covered the whole with

His own propitiation. Thus He magnified the law and made it honorable. He carried with Him the price of our redemption, and presented it to His Father, and Justice said, Loose them all and let them go: I am well pleased for His righteousness' sake. He carried with Him on His breast-plate, as our great High Priest all the names of His beloved people. He went to heaven bodily and officially. Our Surety was released and returned to Him that sent Him. He went as a Conqueror. He left behind Him all the powers of darkness conquered, the world overcome, death unstrung, and the grave consecrated and subjected to Himself; while before Him was the glory in which He now dwells. He is crowned with many crowns, His seat is at the Father's right hand, and He has an everlasting right to present the persons and the offerings of all His ransomed people. My dear friends, our Lord is now just where we require Him to be as a priest a prince, and a Saviour. He is on the other side of death. What should we do, if having passed through death, we met not there our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, He has passed through death, and waits on the other side to receive our souls when we arrive in that world. He is in heaven, and we on entering shall see Him face to face. People talk about entering heaven, and looking about for brothers and sisters, and deacons and pastors and so on; but I apprehend that the saint of God on entering his home will look for the Saviour. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others are there, and we are glad to know it; but "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee!" We require the presence of Christ before God, between Him and our poor souls. When Jesus went to Him that

sent Him, there was nothing between Him and His Father; and we, having reached heaven, my brethren, shall find nothing between us and our Saviour. Sin is put away, guilt has been removed, and the devil is conquered and chained. No, we want no priest between Christ and our souls, and no creature to introduce us to Him. There is an open way for the sinner to the Saviour, as there was an open way for the Saviour to His Father. What is Jesus to you? The pearl of great price, the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. You say I could afford to lose this, and that, and the other friend, and this comfort and the other; but I could not afford to lose my Lord. Jesus is my all in all, and He is in heaven. Therefore, my heart and my affections are there; "for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also."

*"Jesus, my all, to heaven is gone,
He whom I fix my hopes upon;
His track I see, and I'll pursue
The narrow way till Him I view."*

The Lord command His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.