

## Sermon VI

### "A Funeral Sermon for the Living"

by

Samuel Porter Williams

*"For when he dies he shall carry nothing away;  
his glory shall not descend after him."*

Psalm 49:17

Delicacy and tenderness toward the living forbid us to say what we unavoidably think about a wicked man upon his death. Therefore I am induced to *anticipate* the funeral of the impenitent by saying to him now, in his hearing, what would be unavailing to him at his death.

Child of the world and slave of sin, picture yourself stretched out in the casket, your soul hovering unseen around these walls and listening to the voice of God as it now addresses you: *"For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him."* In other words, conceive that you are hearing your own funeral sermon, and apply it to your present character and state. And may the Spirit of God make it the means of awakening you to righteousness, of saving your soul from remorse, and some surviving friend from anguish.

We hear now the minister speaking, as he looks anxiously around the gathered assembly,

"Friends and brethren, there lies the body of a worldly man! One who loved not God. One who often sat with us in the place of worship to hear the word. He was one of those favored few who heard the message of salvation, who was instructed in the duties of Christianity, was warned of the deceitfulness of sin, and taught the way to life and immortality. But he was a sinner. He loved the world, and in the rubbish of earthly goods he immersed all his thoughts. The love of the Father was not in him, he saw no beauty in the Savior of sinners that he should desire him, and he was a stranger to the duties and pleasures of communion with a reconciled God. Such is the character of the man over whom we mourn. He laid up many treasures on earth, but he failed to secure a mansion and a portion in the kingdom of heaven. In an unexpected hour God has summoned him to judgment, and *we* are left to profit by the reflections his death suggests.

"Let us now, in a calm and collected manner, look over all his possessions--all which could have delighted him--and see how the word of God is verified. Let us see that of all the treasures he had amassed, and all the glory he had gotten, nothing has followed him beyond the grave; and he has carried nothing with him to nourish and comfort him in the country to which he has departed.

"Those worldly accomplishments, to which he devoted every waking hour, are lost to him forever. That grace and elegance of demeanor, which was the envy of all around, profit him no more. His delight in earthly and sensual gratifications, his countless avenues of pleasure, avail him nothing now, for the evil day has come--his sun has set. His native beauty is consumed as a moth-eaten garment, and those sprightly limbs move no more. The spirit has returned to God who gave it, and the mourners go about the streets (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Of all his accomplishments and the glory they yielded him, what has he carried with him to the grave? Senseless as any other heap of earth, there lies his body; and yonder, stripped of all its glory, naked and empty, flits away his soul.

"Despite acquiring great possessions, perhaps he did not live merely to eat and drink and gratify sensual desires, but rose with the sun and ate the bread of carefulness, not throwing away recklessly the success he had earned. Men blessed him for the success of his daily toil, and his industrious life supplied the needs of many workers. But behold him now! His soul is required of him. His body, worn out in the service of money and pride, is lost to the enjoyment of all his prosperity. He labored to be rich. He succeeded; and he died. Which of those many possessions can he now call his own? The eye, the ear, the palate, and all the senses on which his pleasures were suspended, are now locked up within that coffin. Death has taken from him the choicest of his idols. Talk of his acquisitions. The glory of them can go no farther than the monument over his grave; and there his descendants are ashamed to write his real character. Can he now say, 'Soul, take your ease, for you have much goods in store'? (Luke 12:19). No, they have all been burned up. Nothing on which he had set his heart can comfort him now. There is nothing to feed his passions, for everything which was tangible is left below, and his spirit is confined to a state in which no carnal passion can ever be gratified.

"But, you tell me, he had a vigorous mind and was not neglectful of intellectual acquisitions. I grant you the fact. I will admit that he was fitted, like Newton, to explore the worlds which revolve in yonder heavens; that with Locke he could survey that darker world--the human understanding; and that, like every eminent statesman, he could guide the wheels of government. He was among the best of academicians and qualified to train the aspiring youthful mind to future greatness. But take note how empty that skull is now, which before was adorned with all the learning of the sage. His knowledge was only of *this* world. It was a knowledge of the *head*, which only puffs up and is destined to vanish away. What advantage, what comfort has he over the lowest of men, or the fool, so long as his intellectual attainments have not advanced him a single step in the kingdom of God? His glory, indeed, is left behind on monumental marble, on the column of the Capitol, the canvas of the Senate chamber, or the parchment of the Academic register. There it is doomed to perish.

"But, you remind me, he has a reputation and fame which survive him. Shall not these cheering praises, this fame which promised him a posthumous immortality--shall not they break through even the barrier of the grave and open one avenue through which pleasure shall find an entrance to his soul? What a forlorn and wretched expectation! There is no connection between departed spirits and flesh and blood. Between us and them is a great gulf fixed, across which no communications are transmitted. We leave to the credulity of children the apparitions of the dead, and to the misguided delusion of fanatics the notion of conversing with departed spirits. We bind our faith to the word of God and affirm that the dead know not anything of the living, and have no more a portion in anything done under the sun.

"Thus lives the departed spirit, stripped of all that ministered to its pleasure while on this earth. To the land of despair the wicked man cannot carry the ways and means he now enjoys with creatures like himself. He lodges now with the hopeless, and therefore with the most malignant. His soul is beyond the region of the Savior's invitation, of repentance, and of pardon and praise. No messenger from earth descends with the good tidings. He hears it said no more, 'He who believes shall be saved.' No more will the gates of the sanctuary be opened, which point to a refuge from guilt. No ambassador of God, looking across the gulf, is allowed to cry in fervent prayer, 'God be merciful to that sinner!' No, the door is shut and the means of salvation, too long disregarded, are forever lost. His pious friends will no more wet their pillows with tears, the pity of angels no longer desire to look into his condition, and the compassion of a dying and interceding Savior no longer defer the execution of the threatened evil when that great day of His wrath is come."

Dear immortal hearer, if such be the condition of the departed sinner, if he has indeed carried nothing away with him which his heart held dear--nor even the means of becoming better, which he did not hold dear!--then what is there that remains to his soul except remorse and wretchedness inexpressible! He can remember his former pleasures only to regret their loss, its former advantages only to lament their abuse, and listen to the anthems above only to know that he has no portion in those songs of exquisite joy. And if

he suffers only from what he has actually lost, his sufferings must be extreme, for they were his all. But when to that is added the positive punishment threatened to the unholy, his wretchedness becomes such as mortal eye has not seen, nor ear heard, such as has scarcely entered into the heart of man on this side of the grave.

I have labored to place you, in your own view, in the condition to which every impenitent sinner is destined. And though the imagination which has for this little time laid you in the grave can also bring you back again, yet I entreat you to remember that what you have pictured you will before long realize unless you repent. Shrink not from the appeal now made to your understanding, your sympathy, your sensibility. Yield to the conviction that you must repent or perish; that the world and all it can impart cannot be gain to you in exchange for your soul. Choose a part and pursue a portion which you *can* carry away at death, and seek a glory, an honor, a fame which *will* descend after you. Let God be your portion, and heaven your inheritance. At the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, the wicked will be reunited with their bodies only to endure the visible marks of shame and everlasting contempt; but the righteous, at the same moment, to appear in the likeness of Christ's glorious body, and to the perfect holiness and happiness his grace has pledged to all his faithful followers.

Sermon VI from *Sermons on Various Subjects, Chiefly Practical* by Samuel Porter Williams (Salem: Printed at the Essex Register Office, 1827). **Note:** Liberty has been taken for some light paraphrasing and condensing.