

S E R M O N CXXXVIII.

QUESTION XXXVII.

WHAT Benefits do Believers receive
from Christ at Death ?

A N S W E R.

THE Souls of Believers are at their Death made perfect in Holiness, and do Immediately pass into Glory, and their Bodies being still United to Christ, do rest in their Graves till the Resurrection.

WE have considered the Inchoate Blessedness, or those beginnings of Glory, which God's Called are made to share in, during their abode in this Life. And if they enjoy so much here, where they are Strangers and Travellers, and hated, what shall we conceive is reserved for them, when they shall come to the Kingdom, and be entertained in those Mansions, which Christ the Forerunner is gone before to make ready ? If Paul could say of the former, as, 1 Cor. 2. 9. *Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* Well might John draw that Vail over the latter. 1 Joh. 3. 2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him : for we shall see him as he is.* We must then expect, but an obscure and clouded Description of the things which follow ; and yet enough to set a Child of God on longing to go and see that better, than Heavenly Country. The Happiness of Believers is Progressive, and as it hath its Augmentations here in this Life, so it hath a remarkable Era at Death, in which it arrives at a more perfect state of Blessedness, tho' not completely consummate till the Resurrection. And this is that which we are to make a sober Inquiry into : In which we must take the Word of God for our direction, and by it set bounds to our Curiosity. And here we shall be led to discover a vast difference between the future State of the Godly and the Wicked, however little it be taken notice of in this World, and that with undue Prejudice.

IN the Answer, there are Two Things to be considered of, 1. *The Death of Believers is taken for granted.* 2. *Their Happiness at Death is asserted and described.* Something may first be spoken to the former of these, to make way to the latter.

I. *THE Death of Believers is here taken for granted.* By which we are only to understand a bodily Death, in which regard, the Condition of Good and Bad is alike : Which that it is so, needs no proof besides our daily Observation. We may rationally suppose, that

there are some Godly in the World, in all Ages, although we cannot certainly tell who they be, but this we see, that all Dye, *One Generation goes off the Stage, and makes way for the Succession of another* ; and if there be any Good Men among them, they go as well as the other. Hence that, *Plal. 49. 10. Wise men die, likewise the fool.* And God's People certainly expect it, *Job 16. 22. When a few years are come, then I shall go the way wherein I shall not return.* And *Job 30. 23. For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living.* Hence they are exposed unto like Casualties with other Men, Sicknesses and Violent Death, befall them as well as the worst : so that immunity from a temporal Death, is none of the Benefits which is secured to them in the Promise. But tho' the thing itself be notorious, yet the reason of it is not so clear, and hath occasioned many thoughts of heart among the Children of God. For, tho' there is no difficulty about the natural reason of it, and every one that hath any knowledge, in the nature of things, can give a satisfactory account of Man's Mortality, whose Body is made up of jarring Principles, and maintained by perishing Supports, breaths in so contagious an Air, and is exposed to, so many Accidents, that it is rather a wonder, how it lives so long, than that it dies so certainly. Yet the Theological Reason is not so easily come at : especially when we consider it as a penalty of Sin, from which Christ came to ransom his Redeemed. It may not then be amiss, to introduce the following Discourse, about the Happiness of Believers at their Death ; by removing all Prejudices at Death, it self out of the Way, which may be, by giving a Resolution to this Inquiry, *viz.*

Quest. *WHY must Believers Dye as well as other Men ?*

Ans. THAT all Doubts about this matter may be Anticipated, and the Case rightly stated, I shall begin with the needful Concessions about it, and so proceed to the Grounds of it ; in which it will appear, that the Death of Believers is so far from being a real misery to them, that it is accommodated in the Wisdom of God, to be an inlet to their more perfect Blessedness. Here then let me offer the following Conclusions,

1. THAT *Man was at first made in a state of Immortality.* The Pelagians of old held, that Death belonged to Man at first by his natural Constitution : And if that be true, the case is soon resolved : for if Adam must have dyed tho' he had kept his Integrity, no wonder if sinful Men, such as are the best in this Life, do die. The Papists say with the Pelagians, that man was by nature Mortal ; but that he had Immortality granted him by a supernatural Privilege, which having forfeited,

scited, it is God's Prerogative whither he will restore it again: But Protestants look upon Immortality to be a con-natural Priviledge of man in Innocency, considered as he was made for such an end, which he could not have attained without it. We acknowledge, that *absolute Immortality, is a Divine Prerogative, and Angels themselves are not Priviledged with it, nor can be.* 1 Tim. 6. 16. *Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen.* God who gave every Creature its being, is able to take it away either by Annihilation, or Dissolution, if he sees meet. Nay their beings are continued by his Sustainment, Heb. 1. 3. And should that Manutenency of his be withdrawn, they would return to their Abyss of Nothing. But then there was a *Conditional Immortality*, which God bestowed on Man in the first Covenant, i.e. *that if he did never sin, he should never die.* He had it therefore by Promise from that God who was able to preserve him, and will to preserve the Saints in Glory forever. But this will farther appear in the next. Hence,

2. *A bodily Death befell Mankind according to the threatening of the first Covenant upon Adam's Transgression.* That this was the Moral Cause of it, the Scriptures abundantly testify. If we consider the commination of the first Covenant, Gen. 2. 17. as we must acknowledge a bodily Death to be one part, tho' not the whole of the Death there threatened, so there is a good Argument from thence, that if Man had not transgressed the Law, he had not dyed, for how should that be threatened as a Penalty, which was a Condition of Nature? So we are assured that the Threatning did not only concern Adam *personally*, but it involved his whole Progeny. Hence we are told, 1 Cor. 15. 22. *In Adam all die.*— And if we would know how they dyed in him, we are acquainted that it was, as they were sharers in his Sin, which was it that opened the door to let Death into the World, Rom. 6. 12. We are further acquainted, Rom. 6. 23. *The wages of sin is death.* And if it be the Wages of Sin, how is it the Condition of Nature? Or how can we conceive that God inflicted a Penalty on Man for Sin, before he had incurred it by his Default?

3. THAT hence *Bodily Death was a part of the Curse, which Sin brought upon Man.* That this Death is an evil in it self, is a truth beyond Question. Nature resents it as such, and for that reason reluc'ts against it. It is a privation of a natural Good, which is Life, and therefore must be Evil. The Godly themselves would willingly avoid it if they could any other way come at perfect blessedness, 2 Cor. 5. 4. *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.* The Curse is nothing else but that which is involved in Guilt, or that which by it the Sinner is bound to suffer,

for Guilt is an Obligation lying upon a Creature to suffer Punishment. Now as Good is contained in the Promise, and nothing but Good, so nothing but Evil is in the Threatning: As therefore Life was promised to Man in case of Obedience, and was therefore part of the Blessing, so Death was threatened in case of Disobedience, and so was part of the Curse; and therefore Christ by Suffering of Death in our room, is said to be *made a Curse for us*, in Gal. 3. 13.

4. THAT *Jesus Christ hath born the Curse of the first Covenant for Believers.* He became a Surety for them to the Justice of God, and put himself under the Law for that end. The Penalties that he underwent, were not for himself, but those whom he represented, and they were all such, as were in time made Believers. Hence that, Gal. 2. 20. *Who loved me, and gave himself for me.* The Apostle therefore gives this account of all the Sorrows which he bare, *Isai. 53. 4, 5, 6.* He interposed himself between the Wrath of God and his Elect, and took it all upon himself for their sakes: And for this reason is he said to be *made sin for us*, 2 Cor. 5. 21.

5. THAT *Christ, in bearing the Curse upon himself, hath born it away from his People.* We are therefore told for what reason he was *made a curse*, Gal. 3. 13. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.* And why he was *made sin*, 2 Cor. 5. 21. *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* So that now Justice cannot execute the Curse upon Believers, because it hath taken its Satisfaction upon Christ as their Surety; and a double Satisfaction for the same Offence is inconsistent with Equity. Nor indeed would Christ's End in taking our Penalty upon him be otherwise answered, which was to *redeem us from the Law, and the Curse of it*, Gal. 4. 5. We are therefore told in *Isai. 53. 5.* *He died that we might live.*

6. HENCE it follows, that *Death is no longer a Curse to Believers, but turned into a Blessing.* All that was of Curse in it is gone; for Christ hath born that, that we might be delivered from it; and if he could not have made a separation between Death it self, and the Curse annexed to it, he would have taken that away too; but he both can and hath done it. *We must distinguish between Death, and the Sting of it;* and we are told what that is, and assured it is so taken from it, with respect to Believers, that they can challenge it, and triumph over it, 1 Cor. 15. 55, 56. And now that is taken out of it, it becomes harmless to them. Nay it is put into the Inventory of the People of God, in, 1 Cor. 3. 22. —*Death is yours.*

7. THAT *God hath seen meet to make Death an introduction of the Believer to a more compleat Happiness.* Here two Things are observable; (1.) THAT *the necessity of the Believers Dying is from Divine Ordination.* It is the Sovereign Pleasure of God that it should be so,

and we must ultimately refer it to that, as is evident on a double Consideration,

[1.] THAT *God could as easily have taken away Death it self as the Sting of it.* It is certain that Death is no more a Curse to a Child of God. Now it is a greater thing to remove that, than to restore Man to Immortality, altho' both are Divine Works, and require the Power of God to do them, and are equally easy to him, yet the thing it self is less, because when the Curse is taken out, the Man is an heir of *Immortality*: This *they seek for, and this at length they shall enjoy*, Rom. 2. 7.

[2.] THAT *if it had pleased him, he could have brought them to Heaven's Glory in another Way.* It is true, our perfect Blessedness is not to be enjoyed upon Earth, but is reserved for Heaven, and we must go thither for it; but God is not necessitated to bring us thither through the *Red Sea of Death*; there is a nearer way if God had judged it the best. *Enoch and Elias* were Translated, that they should not see Death. And so might we, but God saw it meet that it should be in this way. And hence he hath made a *Statute* for it, Heb. 9. 27. *It is appointed unto men once to die.*

(2.) THAT *yet God hath holy Designs, which he will advance in this way.* When we ascribe Sovereignty unto God, we do not separate it from the consideration of his infinite *Wisdom*, which we are assured *displays it self in all his Works*, Psal. 104. 28. God is an Intelligent Agent, and hath holy Ends in all his Works of Efficiency. He aims at his *Glory* in all, and he also consults the best Good of his Chosen. And hence, in our Conception, all his Dispensations to them are contrived for the best, for the advancing of these Designs. And tho' it be our Duty to acquiesce in the Divine Wisdom, and not over curiously to inquire into the Reasons of God's Doings, but to resolve, that it must be right and good, because he doth it, who is *holy in all his ways, and just in all his doings*; yet there is a sober and satisfying Account that may be given of this matter according to Scripture Light. For which let these things be observed,

1. THAT *God hath seen it meet for holy Ends, that Sin should abide in Believers in this Life.* They are here renewed but in part. They must carry a Body of Death about with them as long as they live. This he doth not for want of Power, but in Wisdom. He could as easily take away all Sin, and make them perfect in Holiness at once, as do it by degrees, but it hath not pleased him so to do; and this is not for nothing. He will make use of that remaining Sin in them for his own Glory, and their Good. He will have his saved ones to know the evil and bitterness of Sin, that so they may see what rich Grace it is that saveth them. This they cannot know before Conversion, for it is only Grace that can discern the vileness of Sin; but by the Presence and Molestation of it, they are made to cry out, as Rom. 7. 24. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.* He will have them to know that this Grace of

his carrieth on the whole business of their Salvation, from the beginning to the end: that it not only puts them into a *state of Salvation*, but that it *preserves them in it*, 1 Pet. 1. 5. And this is witnessed in them by their Experience of the Sin that accompanies the best they do. He will have their Graces exercised in a Spiritual Warfare, for the proving and strengthening of them, and for that reason they shall have *another Law in their Members*, &c. Rom. 7. 23. And all this that they may have a Triumph after a Victory; when they have by his help proved their Fidelity to him. For these and such like Reasons God hath pleased to leave the Canaanites in the Land, Sin and Corruption, in the best of his Children.

2. THAT *imperfect Holiness is inconsistent with perfect Blessedness.* It is the mixture of Sin that makes the Holiness of God's Children imperfect. As long therefore as any of that abides, they are so far short. Now Sin is the Creatures misery; it must be utterly abolished, before he can be perfectly happy. It is the felicity of the reasonable Creature, intirely to serve to the end it was made for, which it cannot do, so long as there is any Sin to alloy its Service. The Blessedness of Man is in Communion with God in Christ, the nearer to God the Fountain of all Good, the more happy, and every distance from him, is so far a misery; but so much as there is of Sin in him, so much there is of distance between God and him. Mai. 59. 2. *Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.*

3. THAT *God will have his Children conformable to their Head Christ.* As therefore he pass through Death to his Glory, so shall they. True, there is another reason of the Death of Christ, and that of Believers. He died to satisfy for Sin, and therefore bare the Curse and Penalty of it, which they do not, because he hath already done it for them: Yet he sees meet, that in the way to Glory, they should follow him through Death. We must follow Christ if we would *be with him*, and for that we *must be dissolved*, Phil. 1. 23.

4. THAT *God hath reserved the manifestation of his Sons to another day, and will therefore that they have the common Lot with others here.* There is a time to come which is so called, and the Creation is said to *grope under vanity* till then, Rom. 8. 19, &c. As God's Children are Strangers here, so he will have them to go in a disguise, as to that which Men value things upon; and for that end, there shall be a promiscuous dispensation of outward Providence to Good and Evil, both in Life & Death, Eccl. 9. 2. God's Children are on this account called his *hidden ones*, Psal. 83. 3. And we are told, 1 Joh. 3. 2. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be.* The World count Believers miserable, and they are prejudiced at Godliness, because there is so much of Death in the Condition of them that do most profess it, and God suffers it to be so, because he hath Ordained a Day wherein he will gloriously discover the Mysteries of Providence to the whole World; and for this also it is convenient that Believers should dye.

5. THAT

5. THAT God will bring his Redeemed to perfect Happiness by Steps & Degrees. Glorification is one of those Benefits of which we observed, that they are not begun and perfected at once, but gradually. Now as Death gives them a wonderful lift towards this, so he will have another Change before it be every way compleat. How far the Happiness of Believers is perfect at Death, will be considered in the opening of this Answer: But as Believers consist of two essential parts, Soul and Body, so God gives the Soul first to pass to the Glory provided, and reserves a farther Transaction, in which he will confer this on the Body with the Soul, till when the Body is to dye, and be resolved into it's dust. Hence we have that in, Eccl. 12. 7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.*

6. THAT God, to shew his Wisdom & Power, hath made Death many ways serviceable to his People. Tho' Death hath it's first proper Relation to the Covenant of Works, from which Relation Christ hath delivered Believers, yet he hath seen meet to bring it under the Service of the Covenant of Grace. The New-Covenant did not make Death, but found it fallen upon the sinful Creature, and Christ hath made it to be, of an Enemy, a Servant: And herein both his Wisdom & Power are displayed, and there is a manifold Service that he puts it to; and that more especially in these respects,

(1.) TO keep them humble and mortify'd to this World. The Consideration of our Mortality, is an abasing thought, and therefore Men are often put in mind of it to keep them low. Hence that, Psal. 146. 2, 3. Gen. 18. 27. and elsewhere. And David prays that God would savingly apply this thought to him, Psal. 39. 4. *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.* And it is very useful to the Children of God for the killing of their over eager Affections to the things here below. And this may safely be looked upon as a part of the meaning of that, Col. 3. 2, 3. *Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth, For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* This improvement good Old Barzillai made of the apprehension he had of his natural decays, and halting dissolution, 2 Sam. 19. 24, &c.

(2.) TO put them upon the more Diligence to prepare for another Life. God makes the Lectures of Mortality, and Consideration of the Death that awaits them, to be a continual Monitor to his People, to be laying up their Treasures in another World, and redeeming their few hours of abode on Earth, for this end. This made those ancient Patriarchs to be seeking a better Country, Heb. 11. 16. because they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, ver. 13. And a Child of God is never more diligent at his Work, than when he is most deeply engaged in the Contemplation of his short abode here, and hastning Dissolution, 2 Pet. 1. 13, 14.

(3.) TO give some of his Servants a peculiar Advantage to glorify him in their Death. The Glorifying of Christ, is the Happiness of his Children. Now he is glorified by their passive as well as by their active Obedience; and the highest pitch of this is, when they Die for his Testimony: which they would not be capable of, if they were exempted from Dying. We therefore have such an expression, Joh. 21. 19. *This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.* Hence we have Paul's exultation, Phil. 2. 17. *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice & service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.* And it is the commendation of the Martyrs, Rev. 12. 11. *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

(4.) TO put an end to Sin in them. And if it be their wickedness to be pestered with the reliques of Sin in them, then it must needs be their gain to be delivered from them; which is one reason of that Assertion, Phil. 1. 21. *For me—to dye is gain.* Now it is certain, that when the Body dies, all Sin in a Believer is put to an end. So some apply that, Rom. 6. 7. *For he that is dead, is freed from sin.* And we are told, Rom. 8. 10. *And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin: but the Spirit is life, because of righteousness.* i.e. because Sin remains in it, and so it ceaseth when they dye.

(5.) TO give them rest from the Evils of this Life. As long as they live they must encounter them. Job 14. 1. *Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.* But now they are no more. And tho' the Bodies of the Wicked share in this as well as the Godly, as it is merely bodily, (Job 3. 17, 18.) yet with this difference, viz. it passeth over the Wicked to future Miseries, and ends all Comforts of Soul and Body with them: whereas it puts an end to all Trouble both of Soul and Body with the Godly, and while their Bodies are at rest, their Souls are in bliss. Rev. 14. 13. *And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*

(6.) TO reserve their Bodies for a glorious Change in the last Day. The Bodies of Believers in this Life are the Subjects of all the Infirmities that Sin brought upon them, and hence they Dye and see Corruption, and are the Subjects of that dishonour that attends such a State; but this is but a Seeds-Time, for a new Springing of them up again, that when they are restored they may appear in glorious lustre; according to that, 1 Cor. 15. 42, 43, 44. So that there is no harm but good every way accruing to God's Children by Dying. But of the Happiness it self, we are nextly to treat.

U s r. LET this then serve to reconcile the Hearts of Believers to Death. It is indeed terrible to Nature, and that cannot but startle at the Apprehension of it: But do you labour

to make sure of your Vocation ; and then remember, that as God hath determined, that you must pass through this *dark Entry*, and hence there is no avoiding it, so Christ hath turned it from being a Mischief into a Benefit, and hath taken it out the Curse, and put it into your Inventory. And because you must Dye, make it your great Business to Dye well, and then you need not be afraid of it, but be able to look on it with this reflection, This also shall turn to my Account.

[OCTOBER 24. 1699.]

SERMON CXXXIX.

WE are pressed to consider the Happiness of