

who are like tender flowers that just open to drink the dew of the morning, when, lo! some chilling blast sweeps over them, and nips them in the bud and blossom of their being. You will find many just launched, as they imagined, for a long and prosperous voyage, when they sink and are seen no more. Many, too, who like our beloved brethren, pass from scenes of honour, and usefulness, and affection, to the loathsomeness, loneliness, and corruption of the grave. Then look at the scenes from which death excludes, the relations which it dissolves, the friendships which it breaks—all conspiring to render death awful, and excite strong emotions, even in the strongest minds.

For who to dull forgetfulness a prey,  
Till pleasing, anxious being 'tis resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor can one longing, ling'ring look behind!

Death too, is a change that terminates the probation and ends the enjoyments of the impenitent. In this life, if at all, we have to repent, to seek an interest in Christ, to be sanctified and interested in every possible way for heaven. "The night cometh when no man can work"—when all the probationary work of man shall be ended, and never more resumed. Pass the boundary line that separates this world from the future, and you can never retrace your steps. The enjoyments of the wicked, which are in this earth alone, will then cease; "when he dieth he can carry nothing away with him; his glory shall not descend after him." If, then, our view of the dead be bounded by the narrow confines of the tomb, or fixed on men who live and die without God, we see their condition surrounded by such countless evils that we cannot dare not say,—"Blessed are the dead."

No, it is not of the dead as changed in state, but changed in character, on whom our text pronounces a benediction. "Blessed are the dead who *die in the Lord*." This is an expression descriptive of true Christians, very common in the word of God. Thus Paul makes the avowal:—"I count everything but loss . . . that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having on my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ." And again:—"If any man be *in Christ* he is a new creature." And our blessed Lord emphatically says, "he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." This union with the Lord, of which the text speaks, is not a mere name; it is not a metaphor; it is a grand reality. To be *in Christ* is to be united to Christ as truly as the stone is in the foundation, or the branch in the vine; as truly as Noah was in the ark, or the sheltered man-slayer was in the city of refuge. It is a union most *intimate*; for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." It is in its nature *thoroughly transforming*;—"Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." It is in its results *fruitful*; for believers "become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that they should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that they should bring forth fruit unto God." It is *absolutely necessary*; hence saith the Redeemer, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me even he shall live by me; for except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no

life in you." And the apostle Paul, himself, with all his gifts and usefulness, was deeply conscious that it was as needful for him, as for the humblest of the brethren in any one of the churches which he had planted, "I am crucified with Christ," he says, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." This is a union which connects believers with every office of the Redeemer, and with every blessing of his grace. Being one with their Lord, they are justified by his atonement and righteousness; are made partakers of his Spirit; are received by adoption into the family of heaven; and shall be finally glorified as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." And therefore we may add that this union is an *abiding* one. Once formed it is never dissolved. They of whom the text speak—*died in the Lord*. They were not like some who are aroused, convinced of sin, but not converted to God; who are almost, but not altogether Christians; who approach the strait gate that leadeth to life, gaze upon it, long at times to enter it, but never do so. They were not like some who seem to run well for a while, but are hindered, and halt; who yield, like Demas, to the claims of the world, or fall a ready prey to some besetting sin, or the force of some temptation. They were like Caleb, who held fast their integrity; on the altar of whose hearts the fire never went out; who avowed the same sentiments, professed the same principles, cherished the same hopes even to the end. They were men who not only *died in the Lord*, but *for the Lord*. The iron heel of persecution fell heavily upon them; tortures the most exquisite were arrayed before them; fiery bigots, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter," dogged their steps; but they were superior to all the arts and blandishments, and power of the enemy. "None of these things moved them." "Neither death, nor life, nor (evil) angels, nor principalities, nor powers, could separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." They felt that these might tear the world from their grasp, friends from their embrace, and the soul from the body, but they could look up to their Redeemer, and say,—"Not even death shall part Thee and me." United to him they received superhuman strength, which seemed as if it "stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, and turned the edge of the sword," so that when tortured they would not accept deliverance, nor counting their lives dear unto them, that they might finish their course with joy, and obtain a better resurrection. Brethren, the roll of the noble army of martyrs may be, for the present, closed; but the martyr spirit, the sterling piety, the true inner life, the vital, deathless union with Christ, by which these ancient worthies were distinguished, exist still. Who can doubt that our departed brother, had he lived in the early Christian age, would have proved true as the trust of those who sealed their testimony with their blood. And wherever there is a living man or woman really "in the Lord," there is one also who will assuredly *die in the Lord*, and who would, if need were, also *die for him*. If Christ and his people can be separated, the union bet-

tween Christ and the Father may also be dissolved. "I in them and thou in me," is the Saviour's own solemn and beautiful language, when referring to his union with his disciples.

And now, men and brethren, let me ask if this oneness with Christ is yours? Are you living upon him, with him, for him? While the lightnings and thunders of avenging justice and a broken law flash and roar around, is he the only refuge of your spirits? Do you hide yourselves in him? When the powers of nature quail before all the power of the enemy, and the difficulties and trials of your path, and you feel that compared with the work you have to do your strength is perfect weakness, is it from him you derive your help? In everything connected with your spiritual existence, your communion with the Father, your assurance of victory, your final salvation, is he the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last?" Then, be your place of rest where it may,—whether in the sands of the desert, or under the sculptured stone, or beneath the waters of the sea—yours is the blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord, and yours the promise,—"When Christ who is our life shall appear, ye also shall appear with him in glory."

II. But we must hasten in the second place to notice *why* those who "die in the Lord are blessed." 1. "They rest from their labours," that is, they are freed from all that makes this world a wilderness and a scene of trial, and in possession of everything that can afford real happiness or true joy. This will apply to the *secular pursuits*, in which men are engaged. Doubtless the employment of sinew and muscle, as well as of the intellectual powers, up to a certain point, conduces to the happiness of man. But then, there are multitudes to whom labour is a curse, and not a blessing. From morning to night, from day to day, some cruel taskmaster, or some dire necessity, goads them on beyond their strength, until existence itself becomes a burden. How many there are who may be said to "know no rest!" They are driven on by the wild elements of eager and insatiable competition; and be they active and diligent as they may, a crowd seems ever pressing at their back, and hands are thrust out before them to seize the prize at which they aim. Then, there are others, who, if they live not by the sweat of the brow, have to do that which is harder still—to exist by "the sweat of the brain." Theirs is the hard thought, the much study, which "is a weariness to the flesh," producing oftentimes lassitude, exhaustion, depression of the nervous system, from which other kinds of toil are more or less exempted. But it shall not be thus with those who die in the Lord, and pass on by him, as the "living way" to the radiant heritage which he has purchased and prepared for them. We do not mean that there will be no work in the future life. We believe heaven to be a place of activity, and of endless employment, but not of labour implying *fatigue*. The powers of the glorified body will be ever vigorous; it will be able to move over the wide fields of immensity without one feeling of prostration; "to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint." The employment of its energies shall not waste but renew its strength; the air it breathes shall impart life and vigour. And so shall it be with the faculties of the soul;