

THE JUST MADE PERFECT.

THE
FUNERAL SERMON

OF

Mrs. Emilie E. Fowler Brown,

(WIFE OF MR. THOMAS H. BROWN.)

PREACHED


AT THE SPRING ST. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

MILWAUKEE, AUGUST 23, 1863.

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THE JUST MADE PERFECT.

Hebrews, 12: 22, 23, 25: “ But ye are come unto * * the spirits of just men made perfect. * * See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh * * from Heaven.

The whole magnificent passage from which the text is taken is this: “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake: But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped

not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”

Since the present year opened, we, as a congregation, have been afflicted by the calling away of seven of our number by death—five of them adults, and one of the two children of some years. I am reminded by it that we are come to the spirits of the just made perfect. The text was written by the sacred penman as an exhortation to faith, patience, reverence, and godly fear. He conceived of the Hebrew Christians, whom he addressed, as being brought by the divine dealings and mercies into the presence of an august assemblage—Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, innumerable angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born, the blood of sprinkling, Jesus the Mediator, God the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect. In such company, and surrounded by so holy and grand objects, so great a cloud of witnesses, how ought they to hear the voice from heaven, and follow holiness, and “have grace,” “with reverence and godly fear.” So many are passing from us of late to the world of spirits, that we seem to stand near the entrance, and liable soon to pass through ourselves. God the Judge, Jesus the Mediator, speaketh to us from heaven, and friends who have gone seem almost to be looking down upon us from the heavenly abode. We are come indeed unto the spirits of just men made perfect. We are ourselves nearer the eternal world than we have generally been wont to suppose; from our very company and presence our friends are caught away from us with astonishing ease and rapidity. The question may well be put, Who shall go next? for the inference is very natural and inevitable that we shall not all remain here very long. With solicitude and watchfulness we may well inquire into what presence of unseen powers and spirits we are come, and to what a height of privilege and sacredness our upward march hitherto has conducted us.

And our inquiries may well be sent forward, higher and further on than we ourselves have yet gone, Who and what are they who have reached the goal in the skies? Let us consider them.

I. The ascent to the spirits of just men made perfect.

1. Taking our first step, we find they are MEN. "The spirits of just MEN." Alas! that the world forgets what man is. Not, indeed, is he holy and true in his state by nature, and yet has he a nature once in the image of the Eternal. Associated with God is the innumerable company of the angels. They dwell and glory in his presence, they are his messengers and ministering spirits, they are counted worthy of trust and power in God's great universe and plans. But man was made only a little lower than the angels, and if he had not sinned and fallen, he would not now be on this earth, or this earth would not be stricken, and rent, and travelling with pain as it is. Man has cast himself down from the angels into the presence of demons, as a pearl is cast before swine; and one of the worst evidences in the case is, that he is so unwilling by nature to acknowledge it. He hath made God a liar by himself denying the truth--the truth that he is universally sinful and fallen until he is rescued by the Son of God. The Son of God, Son of Man, came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, and the almost angel-forms, that are now worms, deny, in the very face of Jesus, that they are lost. They not only necessitate his humiliation and death for their salvation, but they refuse and deny the very errand of mercy to them on which he came. They oblige Him first to convince them, if He can and will, that they need that for which He came from heaven expressly to do. The whole great work for their salvation has long been done; the thing to be accomplished is to show the sick that they need a physician, to get the consent of the intoxicated to be reformed.

But such a condescension of the Son of God would not

have been endured for irrational creatures ; not for those who were irredeemable, not for those who could not be carried back again to the skies. Jesus came down to earth to take back a people, and He will. The Father covenanted with Him that He should have a people to serve Him, and they who are redeemed from earth will finally appear in heaven as the Savior's great company of loved and purified ones ; He will forever delight to call them His own, and they will delight to call themselves redeemed by His blood, and will eternally sing the song of deliverance by the Lamb that was slain. In the first step of the ascent to the spirits made perfect, we find MAN.

2. We find JUST men, "The spirits of just men made perfect." That word "just" is not down on the low plain of this world's morality. One of the evidences against men is their prostitution of holy words and things to a sordid and untrue use. For men to move about this world calling themselves just, when they are only fair in business, kind to the suffering, and treat their friends well, taking the liberty to hate their enemies, and refusing to give the heart to God, and declining to hold themselves and their all as ever the Lord's, is one great act of *injustice*, an act lengthened out into depravity. God, the great Judge, says: "Ye have robbed Me this whole nation," and none of us ought ever to think to deny the charge.

God is the first great Owner ; to God we are vastly most indebted, so much so that in one sense we may say to Him, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned ;" and our first business is to seek God and His righteousness, that we may repay Him a debt that can never be paid. There is hardly, therefore, the first sign of *justice*, unless we are just with God. To be just, then, is to be Godly, like God, righteous, pious.

This meaning is emphatically scriptural. In the passage, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the king-

dom of their Father," the word "righteous" is the same in the original with the word "just," in the text. Doubtless the translators used the word "just" as being more euphonious and quicker uttered, where so many things were to be said in one sentence. In the 25th of Matthew, where the righteous are so forcibly and solemnly contrasted with the wicked, the original word is the same as that translated "just" in the text. "But the righteous into life eternal;" every one feels that the word "righteous" is the one to be used, and that the word "just," as meaning honesty in mere human business transactions would come infinitely short of the divine conception. When the Centurion said at the Cross of Christ, "Certainly this was a righteous man," he meant more than mere legal justice, more than that combined with strict honesty in deal, more than both those, with humanity added; he meant that Christ, who just then cried out with a loud voice and gave up the ghost, was a holy, a righteous man; pure, and true, and just in God's sight.

They are then *righteous* men to whom we have come, whom we are to emulate, whom we are to gaze upon, whom we are to rank as fit associates with the angels, that stand ever in God's presence, whom we are to call blessed of the Father, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ to an inheritance that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens.

3. By the next step, we come to the "SPIRITS" of just men. Hitherto we have considered man as he may be here in the flesh. But now, when you come to speak of the soul separated from the flesh, you have man sublimated from the dross. Not that the body need be, or always is, impure, lustful after earth, and contaminated by indulgence. But such is its state or tendency of nature.

The question is a fair one, and often asked, whether we will or no, Does the spirit of man *live* separate from the body, conscious and active? Far more might be said upon this than were allowable now. But first, in general, we

instinctively, or intuitively, suppose that the soul may be separate, conscious and active. However much we may question the doctrine, before they know it, men generally come back without premeditation to assume its truth. I believe it to be unperverted nature, and truth, that thus speak. It is like the doctrine of free-agency in opposition to fatalism. Men may deny their free agency as much as they please, but when you come to character and good deeds, they are the first and last to accept of human praise, or to praise themselves, which assumes that they are voluntary, and not fated in their doings. Let another do wrong to the most downright fatalist, and see whether he will not be pretty quick to know and condemn the injurer. He thoroughly believes in the free-agency and wickedness of his enemy. I noticed that when Mrs. Brown breathed her last, her husband, who was kneeling by her side, and holding her hand in his, sighed in a low voice, "She is gone." When the telegraph message was sent in various directions, to distant friends, it said in each case, "Emma is gone." But why gone, and where, unless her spirit now lives absent from the body?

But, secondly, on this point, the scriptures variously assume this doctrine of the existence of the spirit separate from the body, conscious and active. When a man dies, they represent and declare that the dust or body shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it. They declare that no man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit in the day of death, which plainly is an assumption that the spirit goes away from the body at death. Jesus told the penitent beside Him on the cross, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," which did not mean that his body should be with Him there, but his spirit; the bodies of both went to the grave. Jesus commended His spirit to His Father when He hung on the cross, and was about to yield up the ghost, which was yielding up His spirit, as though of course He expected His spirit would leave the body, which it did when

He went to Paradise, returning again at the raising of His body, as the spirits of all men will return to their bodies when they are raised. The first christian martyr, Stephen, when about to die, followed the example of his Master in commending his spirit, and prayed, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit," as though expecting that it would be received to the bosom of his Lord, while his enemies would triumph over his slain body. Paul, in speaking of the man he knew, (doubtless himself,) whom God caught up to the third heaven, says of him while in the state or transition, "Whether in the body I can not tell; or whether out of the body I can not tell; God knoweth." Now Paul implies that man has a thinking, knowing part that may be *out of the body*, and that thinks, and knows, and hears, while out of the body. He says of that one, that he was caught up into paradise; and that was where Jesus and the penitent thief went on the very day of their execution. And the man heard there "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter," words and thoughts that have never been revealed to us.

And still again, when that Apostle was about to die, and expected that his body would be committed to the grave, he said, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better;" and that "departing to be with Christ," he speaks of as just the very opposite of abiding in the flesh. How could that be, unless he believed that the soul at death was separated from the body, active and conscious, because being with Christ, and better off than to stay here, in the case of the spirits of the just? And how could Paul believe such a doctrine, unless it were truth?

We may then safely and confidently believe, and rest and rejoice in the belief, that our christian friends, when they die, go to paradise, and remain there, where Abraham and Lazarus were, whence Moses and Elias came, when they stood with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. We may joyfully think of their spirits as in paradise, and as not in the silent

grave. Though our cemetery is beautiful, and the spot seems pleasant and cheerful as a resting place for the lifeless bodies of our friends, and delightful for their and our resurrection place in the morning of the judgment, yet paradise is a far more pleasant, and beautiful, and cheerful, and delightful dwelling-place for the “*spirits*” of the departed.

There is one more step in this ascent to the spirits of just men made perfect.

4. They *are* made perfect. The *body* is *not* yet made perfect, but the spirit is. The body will not be until the resurrection. Paul, while in this world, and still pressing on to the mark, declared himself as not already perfect ; his course was not finished, the goal was not attained, all growth in grace was not completed. But the saints made perfect have secured all this. Their race is fully run, they have reached the goal, they are victors crowned. They have gone to the third heaven, the paradise, where things are heard which it were not lawful for a man to utter on the earth, things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. They are in the mansions which Christ has prepared for all them that love him. All things will not be made complete until the body is perfected also ; raised from the grave, made immortal and glorious, and the living saints are also changed, and meet Christ and the angels in the air.

In this same epistle to the Hebrews it is said that Christ was made perfect when He finished His work, and “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” Therefore it is clear that when the spirits of just men are spoken of as made perfect, it is meant that they too have reached the goal, and entered on their reward. Christ made perfect and being in glory, the saints made perfect are in glory also.

But an inquirer may ask, “Is it certain that the text teaches that the saints dead are already perfected and in glory ; or does it not teach simply that they will be made perfect when all things are completed ?” Let us see. In this whole

elegant, inspired and inspiring passage, there are two grand clauses, both opening in like manner, only one has the negative, the other the affirmative.

First, "For ye are NOT come;" secondly, "But ye ARE come." In the first clause, all the great columns of truth are in the past tense; they are historic; as, the mount that was touched by God and shaken, but might not be touched by man or beast; the mount that burned with fire, the sound of a trumpet, the voice of words on Sinai, the sight terrible, so that even Moses feared and quaked; all this was in the historic past. Now, in the second clause, we have wonders and glories *present, not future*; the Mount Zion, which is the kingdom of Christ symbolized by the Mount in Jerusalem, the city of the living God, the *heavenly* Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, the *spirits* of just men made perfect, now in heaven—Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. All these entrancing objects are *now*, and are not simply to be in the future; at least, all are unless the spirits of just men made perfect are an exception. And *can* they be an exception in time in the midst of such a glorious array? In the first clause, all past; in the second clause, all present, with *no* exception.

Then it follows that the spirits of the righteous dead are made perfect. They are made perfect because they are in paradise, where the penitent thief went with Jesus; because they are in the third heaven, where things unutterable by earthly man are heard; because those spirits have been received by the Lord Jesus, as the martyr Stephen prayed to be when dying; because they are in the world to which it is better to depart and be with Christ, to which the saintly and inspired Paul, and millions more, desired to go long before they died, because in that world Christ, the HOPE of glory in

this world, is made present unto them, and *hope* is exchanged for the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Ah! thanks be to God that we are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect. Well may we strive to be of their number when God shall call us away.

“ Let saints below in concert sing

With those to glory gone.

* * * * *

Part of the just have crossed the flood,

And part are crossing now.

E'en now, by faith, we join our hands

With those that went before,

And greet the ransomed, blessed bands

Upon the eternal shore.”

My hearers, are we not prepared just to notice the concluding part of the text :

II. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven. Ah! how can we afford to refuse such a God? Would you *not* refuse him? Then how shall it be done?

1. See to it that ye sell not your birth-right. In this same chapter we read of Esau, who for one morsel of meat, sold his birth-right, and afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. *Your* birth-right is this mediatorial probation. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. Sell not your birth-right for the pleasures, and vanities, and wealth of the world. Fail not to repent with the Godly sorrow; fail not to believe with the heart unto salvation; let not the gospel be a source of death unto death to your soul.

2. Endure chastening without complaint. It is in this same chapter also that we are told, “ Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Especially do thou bear well the *little* chastening of having a spirit of the just taken from your side to be made perfect in the third heaven.

3. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This is an exhortation also in the same chapter. Look unto Jesus. Despise not the cross. *Detract* nothing from the cross, the blood of the Lamb, the blood that cleanseth. Philosophize not the cross down to a mere martyr's death, though a divine martyr. You take away from God's glory if you do it. You underestimate the evil of sin if you do it. You bring darkness on your own soul if you do it, and shut yourself out from the peace of God that passeth all understanding. You darken your own light that should shine, you hinder or destroy your usefulness to save men, you blast other souls, if you detract from the nature and power of the cross.

Look to Jesus ; look to the word that testifies of Him ; search the scriptures ; see what they say about death, judgment and eternity, and believe it all ; be not so foolish and thoughtless as to suppose that all deaths are christian deaths ; think not that Jesus has dispelled the darkness of the tomb for all men. Know that Christ is "the author of eternal salvation" only, as said in the same epistle, "unto all them that obey Him."

Yes, give the hearing ear, the attentive mind, the obedient heart. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." And once more :

4. If you would not refuse Him that speaketh from heaven, let it not be in vain that ye are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect. You may have a father in heaven, a mother there, a brother, a sister, brothers, sisters, a husband, a wife, a child, children, even a little babe born lifeless. Be drawn thitherward yourselves. Kindred and friends in heaven should be a powerful motive to love and serve Christ,

the author of their salvation. I recall seven that have passed away from us this year, and the year carries to take away still more. First was summoned Mr. Abbott, lost on the Sea Bird ; then Hattie Millerd, then George Millerd, Jr., then Mrs. Mary Eccles, then Mrs. Melissa Rogers, and soon after her infant child ; and now the last week, Mrs. Emilie Fowler Brown. All these were at least *professing* christians, save the little babe, given to God before its birth—the little girl Hattie earnestly confessing Christ in the family church.

The past week, we know, has added one to the spirits of the just made perfect, in a very sudden manner and unexpected time. We have now more to call us to heaven, less to bind us to earth. She has left a memory behind that should especially be a guide to our youth. Just older than they, just entered upon life's most choice companionship, and just knowing what would doubtless be her position and mission in life's mature years, she was a mark set before the young, particularly of her own sex, which they might well strive for, which they may well remember. Note ye who will, her unaffected and simple manners, her freedom from haughtiness and pretensions, her willingness to be counted at what she was worth, her winning without display. Note her real elegance without pride, her beauty nowhere immodestly thrust upon others, her discriminating taste, her acquaintance with books and the world, without the noise of reporting it. Note, also, that with these qualities, up to the age of thirty years, she succeeded well in woman's mission. When I see such persons die young, I often wish, if God would, that they might live longer, to show more fully to others, though unconscious of it themselves, what such characteristics are worth, and to manifest to all around the crown of true success in old age.

But there are yet dearer things to be spoken of the deceased. Whatever good others might think of her, she

thought of herself as a sinner, lost without Christ, and I come not to deny her words at her funeral. If you ever spoke with her in regard to her religious state, she perfectly relieved you from all painful attempt to take down too much self-consciousness, too high self-opinions. She was her own greatest accuser, and relief from condemnation she sought not in good works, or legalism, but in the blood of the cross.

She lived through many of the most thoughtful years of a human life, and yet her most deliberate testimony to her husband, as I learned from him by her open coffin, was that she had no doubt in regard to the reality of the christian religion. And though she so suddenly died, and died so unconscious that no voice, no calling her by name, no pressure of her chilled and chilling hand could gain the least response or attention, yet, thanks be to God, she had beforehand left her best, a priceless legacy, in declaring to her companion, when in health and with the promise of long life, without agitation, and without fear, that she believed she had a good and reliable hope in Christ; and that if sometime she should be taken suddenly away, he might rest assured that it would be well with her soul.

Note, also, ye young persons, that this confidence which sustained her, and which is now so invaluable to her kindred, had its seed-sowing in her early years. At about the age of sixteen, under the ministry in her native town, with praying parents watching for her, with sisters desiring her salvation, with a brother then also coming to Christ, she gave herself up to Jesus, and confessed there His name before men. I can tell you she never regretted that step. She was twice born, and that was her second birth. If any of my young hearers think it too much to bear the responsibilities of a consistent professing christian, let them see that here was one who in youth firmly took those responsibilities and never desired to turn back, or disown her Lord. And now, having proved faithful unto death, though *she* would say in an imper-

fect degree, her dear Savior gives her a crown of life ; she is one of the spirits of the just made perfect.

Dear mourning ones, unto her, with all the heavenly perfected, you come to-day. This is her first Sabbath in heaven ; it is your first one without her on earth, since you possessed her. She is among those who have crossed the flood. She will not return to you ; may you in God's good time go to her. I doubt not she has already met her two sisters among the blessed, grand-parents also, and other kindred and friends, and is beginning her personal acquaintance with patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles ; and more than all, with her adored and precious Saviour.

“Another hand is beckoning us,
 Another call is given ;
 And glows once more with angel steps
 The path that leads to heaven.

Unto our Father's will alone
 One thought hath reconciled ;
 That He whose love exceedeth ours,
 Hath taken home His child.

Fold her, O, Father, in Thine arms,
 And let her henceforth be
 A messenger of love between
 Our human hearts and Thee.

Still let her mild rebuking stand
 Between us and the wrong,
 And her dear memory serve to make
 Our faith in goodness strong.”

NOTE.—Mrs. Brown was born in Fowlerville, N. Y., Oct. 2d, 1837, and died in Milwaukee, at sunset, August 18th, 1868. She was married to Mr. Thomas H. Brown, December 26th, 1866. The elder of her two deceased sisters, referred to in the foregoing, was Mrs. Mary Eliza Fowler Wadsworth, wife of Rev. Thomas A. Wadsworth. She was born at Fowlerville, Oct. 27th, 1829, and died at Sheboygan Falls, Wis., March 28th, 1866. The younger was Miss Frances Cornelia Fowler, born at Fowlerville, Dec. 15th, 1831, and died at the same place Sept. 15th, 1857. These three sisters, with Mr. Wm. Henry Fowler, and Miss Grace Churchill Fowler, both still living, are the children of Mr. Alonzo Fowler and Mrs. Eliza Ann Fowler, now residents of Milwaukee—the former a native of Pittsfield, Mass., and the latter of Paris, N. Y.



