

“The Graveyard”

A Sermon Preached by Christmas Evans (1766 – 1838), the Welsh Baptist Preacher

Methinks I find myself standing upon the summit of one of the highest of the everlasting hills, permitted from thence to take a survey of the whole earth; and all before me I see a wide and far-spread burial-ground, a graveyard, over which he scattered the countless multitudes of the wretched and perishing children of Adam! The ground is full of hollows, the yawning caverns of death; and over the whole scene broods a thick cloud of darkness: no light from above shines upon it, there is no ray of sun or moon, there is no beam, even of a little candle, seen through all its borders. It is walled all around, but it has gates, large and massive, ten thousand times stronger than all the gates of brass forged among men; they are one and all safely locked, – the hand of Divine Law has locked them; and so firmly secured are the strong bolts, that all the created powers even of the heavenly world, were they to labour to all eternity, could not drive so much as one of them back. How hopeless is the wretchedness to which the race is doomed! Into what irrecoverable depths of ruin has sin plunged the people who sit there in darkness, and in the shadow of death, while there, by the brazen gates, stands the inflexible guard, brandishing the flaming sword of undeviating Law!

But see! In the cool of the day, there is one descending from the eternal hills in the distance: It is Mercy! The radiant form of Mercy, seated in the chariot of Divine Promise. She comes through the worlds of the universe; she pauses here to mark the imprisoned and grave-like aspect of our once fair world; her eye affected her heart as she beheld the misery, and heard the cry of despair, borne upon the four winds of heaven; she could not pass by, nor pass on; she wept over the melancholy scene, and she said, ‘Oh that I might enter! I would bind up their wounds, I would relieve their sorrows, I would save their souls!’ An embassy of angels, commissioned from Heaven to some other world, paused at the sight; and Heaven forgave that pause. They saw Mercy standing by the gate, and they cried, ‘Mercy, canst thou not enter? Canst

thou look upon that world and not pity? Canst thou pity and not relieve?' And Mercy, in tears, replied, 'I can see, and I can pity, but I cannot relieve.' 'Why dost thou not enter?' inquired the heavenly host. 'Oh,' said Mercy, 'Law has barred the gate against me, and I must not, and I cannot unbar it.' And Law stood there watching the gate, and the angels asked of him, 'Why wilt thou not suffer Mercy to enter?' And he said, 'No one can enter here and live;' and the thunder of his voice outspoke the wailings within. Then again I heard Mercy cry, 'Is there no entrance for me into this field of death? May I not visit these caverns of the grave; and seek, if it may be, to raise some at least of these children of destruction, and bring them to the light of day? Open, Justice, Open! Drive back these iron bolts, and let me in, that I may proclaim the jubilee of redemption to the children of the dust!' And then I heard Justice reply, 'Mercy! Surely thou lovest Justice too well to wish to burst these gates by force of arm, and thus to obtain entrance by lawless violence. I cannot open the door: I am not angry with these unhappy, I have no delight in their death, or in hearing their cries, as they lie upon the burning hearth of the great fire, kindled by the wrath of God, in the land that is lower than the grave. But without shedding of blood there is no remission.'

So Mercy expanded her wings, splendid beyond the brightness of the morning when its rays are seen shooting over mountains of pearl, — and Mercy renewed her flight amongst the unfallen worlds; she re-ascended into the mid-air, but could not proceed far, because she could not forget the sad sight of the Graveyard-World, the melancholy prison. She returned to her native throne in the Heaven of heavens; it was a glorious high throne, unshaken and untarnished by the fallen fate of man and angels. Even there she could not forget what she had witnessed, and wept over, and she weighed the woes of the sad world against the doom of eternal Law; she could not forget the prison and the graveyard, and she re-descended with a more rapid and radiant light, and she stood again by the gate, but again was denied admission. And the two stood there together, Justice and Mercy; and Justice dropped his brandishing sword while they held converse together; and while they talked, there was silence in heaven.

'Is there then no admission on any terms whatever?' she said. 'Ah, yes,' said Justice; 'but then they are terms which no created being can fulfil. I demand atoning death for the Eternal life of those who lie in this Graveyard; I demand Divine life for their ransom.' And while they were talking, behold there stood by them a third Form, fairer than the children of men, radiant with

the glory of heaven. He cast a look upon the graveyard. And He said to Mercy, 'Accept the terms.' 'Where is the security?' said Justice. 'Here,' said Mercy, pointing to the radiant Stranger, 'is my bond. Four thousand years from hence, demand its payment on Calvary. To redeem men,' said Mercy, 'I will be incarnate in the Son of God, I will be the Lamb slain for the life of this Graveyard World.'

The bond was accepted, and Mercy entered the graveyard leaning on the arm of Justice. She spoke to the prisoners. Centuries rolled by. So went on the gathering of the first-fruits in the field of redemption. Still ages passed away, and at last the clock of prophecy struck the fullness of time. The bond, which had been committed to patriarchs and prophets, had to be redeemed; a long series of rites and ceremonies, sacrifices and oblations, had been instituted to perpetuate the memory of that solemn deed.

At the close of the four thousandth year, when Daniel's seventy weeks were accomplished, Justice and Mercy appeared on the hill of Calvary; angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, principalities and powers, left their thrones and mansions of glory, and bent over the battlements of heaven, gazing in mute amazement and breathless suspense upon the solemn scene. At the foot of Calvary's hill was beheld the Son of God. 'Lo, I come,' He said; 'in the bond it is written of me.' He appeared without the gates of Jerusalem, crowned with thorns, and followed by the weeping Church.

It was with Him the hour and the power of darkness; above Him were all the vials of Divine wrath, and the thunders of the eternal Law; round Him were all the powers of darkness, — the monsters of the pit, huge, fierce and relentless, were there; the lions as a great army, gnashing their teeth ready to tear him in pieces; the unicorns, a countless host, were rushing onwards to thrust him through; and there were the bulls of Bashan roaring terribly; the dragons of the pit unfolding themselves, and shooting out their stings; and dogs, many, all round the mountain.

And He passed through this dense array, an unresisting victim led as a lamb to the slaughter. He took the bond from the hand of Justice, and, as He was nailed to the cross, He nailed it to the cross; and all the hosts of hell, though invisible to man, had formed a ring around it. The

rocks rent, the sun shrank from the scene, as Justice lifted his right hand to the throne, exclaiming, 'Fires of heaven, descend and consume this sacrifice!' The fires of heaven, animated with living spirit, answered the call, 'We come we come! and, when we have consumed that victim, we will burn the world.' They burst, blazed, devoured; the blood of the victim was fast dropping; the hosts of hell were shouting, until the humanity of Emmanuel gave up the ghost.

The fire went on burning until the ninth hour of the day, but when it touched the Deity of the Son of God it expired; Justice dropped the fiery sword at the foot of the cross; and the Law joined with the prophets in witnessing to the righteousness which is by faith in the Son of God, for all had heard the dying Redeemer exclaim, 'It is finished!' The weeping Church heard it, and lifting up her head cried too, 'It is finished!' Attending angels hovering near heard it, and, winging their flight, they sang, 'It is finished!'

The powers of darkness heard the acclamations of the universe, and hurried away from the scene in death-like feebleness. He triumphed over them openly. The graves of the old Burial-ground have been thrown open, and gales of life have blown over the valley of dry bones, and an exceeding great army has already been sealed to our God as among the living in Zion; for so the Bond was paid and eternal redemption secured.