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# THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

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A SERMON,  
PREACHED IN  
ST. PETER'S, SOUTHBOROUGH,  
ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF THE  
**REV. STEPHEN LANGSTON,**  
*Late Vicar of that Parish,*  
BY THE  
REV. CANON HOARE,  
*Vicar of Trinity, Tunbridge Wells.*

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## A SERMON.

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“Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”—MATTHEW XXV. 23.

THERE is something very solemn in the death of any one, but peculiarly solemn in the death of a minister of God; for when he dies he resigns not his life only, but his ministry. He gives back the ministerial trust committed to him. So our revered, and honoured friend, has not merely fallen asleep in the Lord Jesus; but he has, as it were, handed back to Him who gave it the sacred stewardship of God's ministry committed to him by God.

Thus this text seems very appropriate, for it contains the words of a master who had been faithfully served, to two servants who had faithfully served him. When they met him face to face, and resigned the trusts committed to their care, the master said to each of them, “Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” And it is no unwarranted stretch of the imagination to believe that a similar welcome was given to our honoured friend when he breathed forth his spirit, and yielded up his ministry to Him who had called him by His grace, and commissioned him for his service.

I take the words therefore as addressed to him at the end of his course, and we may consider

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them at expressing the master's verdict, and the master's welcome.

May God be with us in the study, and may He grant that when we are gathered into his presence, the same words may be addressed to ourselves!

#### I. THE MASTER'S VERDICT. "Thou hast been faithful."

It does not say, "Thou hast been rich," or "great," or "powerful," or "brilliant," but "faithful." And it is remarkable that the master said exactly the same words to the servant who had the two talents, as he did to the one that had the five. They were not equally gifted, but both were declared to be faithful. This is a great encouragement for those who are conscious that they have not the same gifts as our venerable father. We may not have his powerful, and melodious, voice; his intimate acquaintance with our great English divines; or his marvellous power of exhibiting truth. We may have only two talents, or perhaps only one, when he had five; but God may give us grace to be faithful, and we may faithfully use that one talent to his glory. God said to Moses, "What is that in thine hand?" And, though there was nothing there but a common, rough, shepherd's rod, God used it for the performance of the greatest miracles in Israel's history. So he says to each of us, "What is that in thine hand?" And whatever it is, however humble, he gives us the sacred privilege of using it faithfully in his service.

But I do not want to consider general principles this morning, so much as to turn your attention to the special case of him whom we have all known as so faithful a servant of his most blessed Lord and Saviour.

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(1) To appreciate that faithfulness, we must note first, that IT BEGAN IN EARLY LIFE. His was an early call.

There is no age in life at which it does not please God to call his people to himself. We see people called sometimes in childhood, sometimes in middle life, and sometimes in old age when tottering to the grave. It is difficult to say at which age conversion brings the greatest joy in heaven. There is a marvellous mercy when the old man who has resisted every influence throughout a long life, is touched at last by the love of Christ, and brought with a broken heart to the throne of grace. But there is also a peculiar joy when the spirited boy is led in his boyhood to receive the message which his mother teaches him, and so to spend his whole life that he may say in his old age, as Obadiah did, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Now this was the case with our friend. His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was not an afterthought late in life. His father and grandfather were both pious men; and it was in his father's parish, (for his father was a clergyman,) and in his father's home, that as a spirited school boy he was first brought to the Lord. Even before he went to College he began to conduct cottage lectures in his father's parish. That ministry therefore to which you used to listen with such intense interest, contained the ripened experience of a long life, from the beginning consecrated to God. Is there not a lesson in this for fathers and mothers? Is there not an encouragement to train up those committed to them in the Lord? Is there not an illustration of the truth of the promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it?" And is there not a word also for young men? Does it not call on them to begin early, and to begin at once, and in the midst of all the play, and all the work of early life, to fall down before God's footstool, and cry, "Lord save me, Lord make me thine, now, at once, and for ever?"

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(2.) HE WAS FAITHFUL IN HIS STABILITY.

It is sixty-three years since he was ordained to the ministry, but throughout the whole of that long period he was never known to waver. And how full of disturbing causes has that whole period been! The minds of men have been unsettled, and there has been a general shaking of thought. The stagnation which prevailed when he commenced his ministry has given place to a general fermentation, and during those sixty-three years we have had wave after wave passing over the Church. In his early days there was great excitement about the gift of tongues and prophecy under the leadership of that wonderful christian orator EDWARD IRVING. Then followed what we used to call "tractarianism," taught by that master mind NEWMAN, and since developed in the open Romanism of the Ritualist. Then arose those who call themselves "The Brethren," as if they alone were children in the Lord's family, and who have done so much to disturb and unsettle those who have been walking most conscientiously with God. And lastly, there was wafted from America what many welcome as a new rule for holiness. In addition to all which there have been from without the steady efforts of Popery to pervert the purity, and of Infidelity to sap the foundations of the faith. So wave has followed wave, but in the midst of it all our venerable friend was kept firm as a rock with his principles unchanged, and his faith unshaken. As a consistent and honest Churchman he rejoiced in the thirty-nine Articles, and never for one moment wavered in his fidelity to their clear testimony to the truth of God. And as a student of sacred Scripture, he clung to the great, grand distinctive truths of the Gospel, such as atonement through the substitution of the Lord Jesus, justification by faith, new birth by the Holy Ghost, sanctification by the Spirit, preservation through God's unchanging faithfulness, and a full salvation in all its parts through the free grace that is in Christ Jesus. These were the great principles of his faith and ministry all through his life, and through God's mercy nothing shook him. You may compare the old man of eighty-six with the boy of sixteen, and you will find no change in principle. You may compare the last Sermon preached last year with the first Sermon which was preached in his father's pulpit in the year 1815, and you will find the great message substantially the same. As he himself said, the last time he occupied this pulpit, "In the Church

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where I was baptized, in the village in which I was born, I began my ministry on December 24th, 1815. I remember the text was "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." 1 Timothy i. 15. There I began, there I continued, there I am still, and there, God helping me, I hope to end glorying in the Gospel which I know to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

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### (3.) HE WAS FAITHFUL IN THE FULNESS OF HIS TEACHING.

If we are to stand steadfast for seventy years, we must have something solid on which to rest, and one great reason why people shift about as much as they do, is, that they have no stability in their principles. The reason of this again very frequently is that they take partial views of truth. They are one-sided christians, and so lose their balance; whereas we want our foundation to be well built, and to rest all round with an even pressure on the rock. Surely this was most remarkably the case with the ministry of this faithful man. He did not clip, or twist, the sacred Scripture to fit his system, but he was ready to sacrifice the symmetry of his system in order to bring out the whole teaching of God himself in his inspired Word. He rested absolutely on Scripture as the only and sufficient rule of faith, and wherever Scripture led him there he was prepared to follow. It was this that gave such a richness, such a fulness, and such a comprehensiveness to his ministry.

Nothing, for example, could exceed his exhibition of the love of the Lord Jesus. It was his joy to exalt him as a Saviour, and to hold converse with him as a friend. But with all that the love of the Father was always prominent. The Father's holy law, and the Father's purpose, the Father's gift, the Father's covenant, and the Father's home, were always in view.

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And so with reference to the what are termed the doctrines of Grace. It was the joy of his heart to exalt the grace of God in all its forms of application: redeeming grace, predestinating grace, grace in the call, grace in the pardon, grace in the gift of faith, grace in the new birth, grace in holiness, grace in preservation, grace never failing till it ends in glory! And this grace he would preach in its peculiar, limited, and special application to the Church of God's elect. But that did not prevent his proclaiming with unlimited freedom the great offer of eternal life to the sinner, and throwing on the sinner the whole responsibility of the acceptance or rejection of the offer. As an illustration, I never can forget a magnificent Sermon of his, the grandest Sermon I ever heard from the lips of man, on Eph. v. 25, and never can I forget the way in which he quoted the text, "Christ also loved the *Church*," the church of God's elect, "and gave himself for *it*," or how he pointed out to us the special and most tender love of the Lord to his chosen people; but neither on the other hand can I ever forget the thrilling power with which he gave forth the grand words of our blessed Saviour, "God so loved the *world* that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," and on the strength of these words threw broadcast over the congregation the free offer of life to the sinner. It was this grand harmony of gospel truth that gave such a wonderful power to his ministry. He was not afraid of letting Scripture tell its own tale, and proclaim its own message. What he found there, that he taught, and taught fearlessly, even though he knew in some instances that it was beyond man's power to fit all the parts together. He believed the Gospel to be God's message, revealed in God's word, perfected in God's purpose, and taught in God's own way; so by God's help he gave the whole just as he found it, and left it to the infinity of God himself to bring to light the perfect harmony of the various parts.

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### (4.) THERE WAS A BLESSING ON HIS FAITHFULNESS.

The faithful servants in the parable were able to present to their master the talents which they had gained during the period of their trust. In their case therefore, faithfulness led to fruitfulness. Their work was successful, and there were talents gained. Can we doubt for one moment that God blessed in the same manner the faithfulness of our revered friend? Whatever others may do, I cannot. I have heard of the deep interest excited by his ministry wherever he has laboured, in Sheffield, in Jersey, and amongst yourselves. I am told by a clergyman at Sheffield that his ministry there was followed by most blessed results in the awakening and salvation of souls. I am told also that "when upwards of thirty years afterwards he visited that town, not only were there crowds to hear him, but many came forward to relate the blessings which either themselves, or their parents and friends had received through his instrumentality." The Lord alone knows how many talents were gathered in all those places, and presented as a thankoffering to God. But I know a little of what took place at Richmond. MR. LANGSTON went there very soon after the commencement of his ministry. Before he went there every thing in that place was dark, cold, and dead. The glorious Gospel was almost an unknown message. His ministry there lasted, I believe, about three years, and after an interval of nearly twenty years, I followed him as curate of the parish. I have always regarded it as one of the greatest blessings of my life that I did so, for there I found a large body of persons from all classes of society, living consistent, holy lives, and full of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who owed their conversion to Mr. Langston's ministry. Like Barnabas, I "saw the grace of God," and I am not ashamed of acknowledging that what I there witnessed as the fruit of his labours has helped to give a tone to the whole of my subsequent ministry. Most truly then may I say of that faithful man, "He rests from his labours, and his works do follow him."

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(5) He was faithful in HIS CHILDLIKE TRUST AT THE END; when his work was done, and as a little child he was simply resting in the arms of his most blessed Saviour. I do not attach much importance to the last words of such a man. When a person has been walking with God for seventy years and more, we do not want last words to assure us of his faith. But it is pleasant to see how the old

foundations bear, and to watch the last earthly intercourse of the faithful servant with the faithful Saviour. It was delightful in this instance to do so. He was sure, perfectly sure, of his Lord's fidelity; and when it was said to him, "He will never leave us," his reply was "No, never, never." On another occasion as he lay in the deepest weakness, he said, "I am thinking of that good Scotchman who said, "There is nothing so sweet in all this universe as Christ to die with, and nothing dearer than his love." Nor was this merely a matter of feeling, or experience; for he was calmly and intelligently resting on the great principles of the Gospel. These solid foundation principles he had preached from the beginning. On these principles he had lived, and on these principles he died. It was the thought of redeeming mercy that filled his heart with gratitude. So that he was heard saying, "He became a curse for me—left alone—deserted by his own." That was his one resting place, and resting there he used to delight in the hymn—

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OH! Saviour, I have nought to plead,  
In earth, beneath, or heaven above,  
But just my own exceeding need,  
And Thy exceeding love.

The need will soon be past and gone,  
Exceeding great—but quickly o'er,  
The love unbought is all Thine own,  
And lasts for evermore!

Till at length nothing could be heard but a few detached words, but those words were quite sufficient to shew where his heart was resting. "Dear Saviour"—"Looking"—"Covenant"—"Ordered and sure"—"Thy blood and righteousness"—"Hope"—"End"—"Coming soon"—and then came the message from heaven itself, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," and the ransomed spirit was free from the burden of the flesh.

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II. For our second subject, THE MASTER'S WELCOME, I have no time left, and perhaps it is well, for who can attempt either to describe or imagine it? The words of this passage seem to indicate that the joys are beyond all proportion greater than any thing seen here. There are but few things here, but many joys there, and the many cannot be measured by our notions of the few.

Then again the expression "the joy of the Lord," seems to raise us far above all earthly thoughts, and introduce us as it were into the very mind of the Lord himself.

It may be understood as the joy which the Lord feels. We are taught that he has special joy even in heaven. There was a joy set before him to attain which he endured the cross. And what is the joy? Is it not in the ingathering of souls? Is it not when souls are saved, and many justified, that he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied? Now surely there must be the same blessed happiness in those who share his joy. If we rejoice in the joy of the Lord Jesus, we shall rejoice with those whom he has gathered around him. As MR. LANGSTON said in his Sermon on Rev. vii. 15. "The meeting with those Saints will add no little accumulation of blessedness. I shall see Abel, the first martyr for Christ; the first witness to the atonement by his precious blood. I shall see Enoch the first great prophet who walked with God, and was not, for God took him. I shall see Noah, the Preacher of righteousness; Melchizedec, king of righteousness and peace; Moses, Samuel, and all the Prophets, Evangelists, and Saints." Does he not see them now? Is he not with them now? But does he not also see multitudes of precious souls, from Hastings, from Richmond, from Sheffield, from Jersey, and from Southborough, to whom he was permitted to convey God's message, and who are now rejoicing with him before the throne? How many were there to welcome him at heaven's gate? And may not the joy of such a meeting be well termed the joy of the Lord?

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But besides this, the joy of the Lord must be the joy that is realized in the presence of the Lord himself. It is all very well to be with Abel, and Enoch, but what must it be to be with Christ? This it is that will fill heaven with praise, and make even eternity too short for our thanksgiving. Do you remember what he said of the prospect, in the last Sermon he ever preached to you, "Oh!" he said, "What joy to see him face to face! What joy to see him even now through the lattice! But what to enjoy that love without interruption, and without a cloud ever rising between the soul and the sunshine of his love! Then the seven-fold promises of revelation, all his own gracious words, will be fulfilled—"The crown of life." "The tree of life." "The new name." "The morning star." "The white raiment." "The abiding pillar." "And the share in the throne of the Son of God." Is not that the joy of the Lord? And is not that the joy in which the faithful servant has now entered? is he not there now? Is he not face to face with his Saviour? Does he not even now see him as he is? Has he not already experienced the truth of the words, "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore?"

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And now what would he say if he could speak to us from that presence chamber of God? Do you think he would change his note, or withdraw his testimony?

What would he say to you believers? Do you think he would tell you to give up for that your faith is in vain? Would he not rather say, that the half was not told you, no not the thousandth part, and that there is such a fulness in Christ Jesus as when on earth he never had had the least idea of? Would he not entreat you to cleave to him, to follow him, to love him, to serve him, to labour for him, and to clasp him to your heart as the strength of your life, and the joy of your soul?

And what would he say to the unconverted? Would he say to them that it does not matter whether they are converted or not, and that he finds that he was mistaken? You may remember what he said in his farewell Sermon, "I think with grief of those who have not submitted to the Gospel of Christ. To such, the minister stands in a very awful position as a witness. Oh, those words, "Son remember!" You See how the Father of the faithful addressed him, owned him as a son, and one of the family, so that he might have shared its blessing; but he had cast them away. My unconverted brethren, if you die without Christ, oh the bitterness of the anguish, and remorse! What must be the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched? O consider this ye that forget God. He that being often rebuked, and invited, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. My hearers, what I want is that your hearts may be given to the Lord. I want Christ to be enthroned in your hearts. I want you to become His, to enter in while the door of mercy invites your approach, and to share all the blessings of everlasting salvation so freely offered through Christ Jesus the Saviour!" Do you think he would say less now, now that he has seen the great realities? Oh! how would he plead with you, and how would he persuade you, and how would he point you to the Lord Jesus Christ for life! But we shall hear that voice no more on earth, and we can never again listen to him pleading with souls. Nevertheless, the message remains, the Redeemer remains, the salvation remains, the open door still remains, and may God grant that there may be such a work in each one of us, that when we pass beyond the veil, we may be welcomed, as we are sure that he has been, with the words—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

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