

August 2

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou least young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." — John 21:18-19

This was another part of his discourse, "when they had dined." He had enjoined Peter his doing work, and now he appoints him his suffering work. In such a world as this, doing well and bearing ill are commonly connected. In the first days of Christianity they were inseparable.

The representation may be applied to the difference there is between youth and age. The glory of young men is their strength. They can gird themselves, and go, with ease and speed, whither they would. And let them use well their powers and opportunities. Let them be active and useful, and prepared for the future. Other days will come; and when they shall be old, they shall stretch forth their hands, and another shall gird them, and carry them whither they would not. Then they will be helpless and dependent. People long for age, but what is it but longing for days in which we have no pleasure; when we shall be dim-sighted, and hard of hearing, and tremblings will come upon us, and the grasshopper will be a burden, and desire fail. These are the effects of the state, and if by reason of strength our years are threescore and ten, yet is their strength labour and sorrow. Let us secure succour against such a period. It is said, an old man has no friend but his money. But if we are kind, and live not to ourselves, we shall not want those who will rock the cradle of our age. And, above all, God will be our comfort and strength, and bear and carry us, and gently take us to himself, where our youth shall be renewed like the eagle's, and mortality swallowed up of life.

But our Lord, we are assured, designed to intimate that after Peter had served him as an apostle, he was to honour him as a martyr: "signifying by what death he should glorify God." Thus,

First, our Lord foresaw Peter's sufferings, and the manner in which he was to finish his course. And he foresees all that shall befall each of us. We know not what a day may bring forth. But nothing is left to chance. No event will turn up that is new to him, and for which he has not provided.

Secondly, Peter was not to die till he should be old. Very good and useful men have been removed in the midst of life, and this is one of the most mysterious dispensations of Providence. But this is not always the case. Religion conduces to health and longevity. Many of God's most eminent servants have "filled their days," and come to the grave in a good old age, like a shock of corn fully ripe in its season. And the hoary head is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness. Such a man is not only a kind of physical wonder, that he should have been preserved so long with such a feeble frame, and exposed to so many outward dangers, but a moral wonder, that with such a heart, and in such a world, he should have held on his way, and kept his garments clean, and have been without offence. He is a monument to the glory of divine grace.

Thirdly, he was to die by crucifixion. This is the meaning of his "stretching forth his hands, and being girded, and carried whither he would not." That is, his arms would be extended on a cross, and he would be bound, to be led to a death of violence, not agreeable to his feelings, and at which nature would revolt. For religion does not divest us of humanity; an aversion to pain is not inconsistent with submission to the will of God: we may love the result of death, and shudder at the passage. Paul wished not to be unclothed, but clothed upon; and Jesus himself, with strong cryings and tears, said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Peter would, and would not; there would be nature in him, as well as grace. And while the spirit would be willing, the flesh would be weak. We see this related of some of the martyrs. Latimer, in one of his letters in prison, says to his friend, "Oh, pray for me. I sometimes shudder, and could creep into a mouse-hole; and then the Lord visits me again with his comforts; and thus, by his coming and going, shows me my infirmity." Ridley, at the stake, said to the smith that was driving in the staple, "Knock it in hard, my good fellow; for the flesh may have its freaks." And when they were leading Rawlins along to the flames, chancing to see his wife and children among the crowd, he burst into a flood of tears, and striking his breast, he exclaimed, "Ah, flesh, you would have your way; but I tell thee, by the grace of God, thou shalt not gain the victory."

Lastly, his death was to issue in the divine glory. Persecution has always been overruled to advance the cause it aimed to destroy. The wrath of man has praised God. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the churches. The death of such men has been honourable to the truth and grace of the Gospel. It has awakened attention, and induced inquiry; and by displaying the temper and supports of the sufferers, such impressions have been made upon the spectators, that, before the ashes were extinguished, others were ready to be baptized for the dead.

We are not martyrs, but we are often called to suffer; and we may glorify God in the fires. There is only one way into the world, but there are many ways out. By which of these we are to pass we know not. But we may glorify God by the death we shall die, if we are enabled to exercise faith, patience, and repentance; if the joy of the Lord

is our strength, and we can, from experience, recommend his service.

For this we should be concerned. But for this, we presume many would desire to die "softly, suddenly, and alone." Yet what they should choose, they wot not. They therefore leave all with their heavenly Father, only praying that Christ may be magnified in their body, whether it be by life or by death.

Morning Exercises For Everyday In The Year
By Rev. William Jay