


THE LAST AND GREAT

# SERMON,

by the Rev Dr WILLIAM DODD, Preached in the Chapel of *Newgate-prison*, late Minister at *Bloomsberry-Chapel* in *London*, to his Convict Brethren on Friday the 6th of *June*, 1777, a short time before he suffered. On *Psal. li. 3*, *I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me.*

With his Letter of Address to the Rev. Mr VILETTE, Ordinary in *Newgate-prison*, in order for publication.

Also his Solemn Declaration wrote by himself for his last Speech, and given in a Letter at the place of Execution, *June 27 1777.*



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Dr WILLIAM DODD'S ADDRESS

To the Rev. Mr VILETTE, Ordinary of Newgate.

Reverend Sir,

**T**He following Address owes its present public appearance to you. I read it to you after it was composed, and you thought it proper to be delivered, as was intended. You heard it delivered, and are pleased to think that its publication will be useful.—To a poor and abject worm, like myself, this is a sufficient inducement to that publication; and I heartily pray unto God. that, in your hands, it may frequently and effectually administer to the instruction and comfort of the miserable!"

I am, dear Sir,

With my sincerest thanks for your humane

And friendly attention,

Your truly sorrowful,

And much afflicted brother in Christ,

Friday, }  
June 6. 1777. }

WILLIAM DODD.

Dr D O D D's last S E R M O N, &c.  
 Pſalm li. 3. *I acknowledge my faults, and my ſin is eue  
 before me.*

**C**ONSIDERING my peculiar circumſtances and ſituation, I cannot think myſelf juſtified, if I do not deliver to you, in ſincere Chriſtian love, ſome of my ſerious thoughts on our preſent awful ſtate.

In the ſixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apoſtles you read a memorable ſtory reſpecting Paul and Silas, who for preaching the goſpel, were caſt by the Magiſtrates into priſon, verſe 23.—and, after having received many ſtripes, were committed to the jailor, with a ſtrict charge to keep them ſafely. Accordingly he thruſt them into the inner priſon, and made their feet faſt in the ſtocks. At midnight Paul and Silas, ſupported by the teſtimony of a good conſcience, prayed, and ſang praifes to God, and the priſoners heard them; and ſuddenly there was a great earthquake, ſo that the foundations of the priſon were ſhaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's chains were looſed. The keeper of the priſon awaking out of ſleep, and ſeeing the priſon doors were open, in the greateſt diſtreſs (as might well be imagined) drew his ſword, and would have killed himſelf, ſuppoſing that the priſoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do thyſelf no harm, for we are all here. The keeper calling for a light, and finding his priſoners thus freed from their bonds by the imperceptible agency of divine power, was irreſiſtibly convinced that theſe men were not offenders againſt the law, but martyrs to the truth; he ſprang in therefore, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and ſaid, SIRS, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

*What muſt I do to be ſaved?* is the important queſtion, which it becomes every human being to ſtudy from the firſt hour of reaſon to the laſt; but which we,

my fellow prisoners, ought to confider with particular diligence and intenſenets of meditation. Had it not been forgotten, or neglected by us, we had never appeared in this place. A little time for recollection and amendment is yet allowed us by the mercy of the law. Of this little time let no particle be loſt. Let us fill our remaining life with all the duties which our preſent condition allows us to praſiſe. Let us make one earneſt effort for ſalvation!—And oh! heavenly Father, who deſireſt not the death of a ſinner, grant that this effort may not be in vain!

To teach others what *they muſt do to be ſaved*, has long been my employment and profeſſion. You ſee with what confuſion and diſhonour I now ſtand before you—no more in the pulpit of inſtruction, but on this humble ſeat with yourſelves. You are not to conſider me now as a man authorized to form the manners or direct the conſcience, and ſpeaking with the authority of a paſtor to his flock—I am here guilty, like yourſelves, of a capital offence; and ſentence, like yourſelves, to public and ſhameful death. My profeſſion, which has given me ſtronger convictions of my duty than moſt of you can be ſuppoſed to have attained, and has extended my views to the conſequences of wickedneſs farther than your obſervation is likely to have reached, has loaded my ſin with peculiar aggravations; and I entreat you to join your prayers with mine, that my ſorrow may be proportionate to my guilt!

I am now, like you, enquiring *what muſt I do to be ſaved?* and ſtand here to communicate to you what that enquiry ſuggeſts. Hear me with attention, my fellow prisoners; and in your melancholy hours of retirement, conſider well what I offer to you from the ſincerity of my good will, and from the deepeſt conviction of a penitent heart.

Salvation is promiſed to us Chriſtians on the terms of *faith, obedience, and repentance*. I ſhall therefore endeavour to ſhew how, in the ſhort interval betwee

this moment and death, we may exert *faith*, perform *obedience*, and exercise *repentence*, in a manner which our heavenly Father may, in his infinite mercy, vouchsafe to accept.

1. *Faith* is the foundation of all Christian virtue. It is that *without which it is impossible to please God*. I shall therefore consider, first, how *Faith* is to be particularly exerted by us in our present state.

*Faith* is a full and undoubting confidence in the declarations made by God in the holy scriptures; a sincere reception of the doctrines taught by our blessed Saviour, with a firm assurance that he died to take away the sins of the world, and that we have, each of us, a part in the boundless benefits of the universal sacrifice. To this *faith* we must have recourse at all times, but particularly if we find ourselves tempted to despair. If thoughts arise in our minds which suggest that we have sinned beyond the hope of pardon, and that therefore it is vain to seek for reconciliation by repentence; we must remember how God willeth that every man should be saved, and that those who obey his call, however late, will not be rejected. If we are tempted to think that the injuries we have done are unrepaired, and therefore repentence is vain, let us remember, that the reparation which is impossible is not required; that sincerely to will is to do, in the sight of Him to whom all hearts are open; and that what is deficient in our endeavours is supplied by the merits of Him who died to redeem us.

Yet let us likewise be careful lest an erroneous opinion of the all-sufficiency of our Saviour's merit, lead us into carelessness and security. His merits are indeed all-sufficient! but he has prescribed the terms on which they are to operate. He died to save sinners; but to save only those sinners that repent. Peter, who denied him was forgiven, but he obtained his pardon *by weeping bitterly*. They who have lived in perpetual regularity of duty, and are free from any gross or visible transgressions, are yet but *unprofitable ser-*

wants: What then are we, whose crimes are hastening us to the grave before our time? Let us *work with fear and trembling*, but still let us endeavour to *work out our salvation*. Let us hope without presumption; let us fear without desperation; and let our faith animate us to that which we were to consider.

Secondly, "Sincere *Obedience to the laws of God.*" Our obedience, for the short time yet remaining, is restrained to a narrow circle. Those duties, which are called social and relative, are for the most part out of our power. We can contribute very little to the general happiness of mankind, while on those whom kindred and friendship have allied to us, we have brought disgrace and sorrow. We can only benefit the public by an example of contrition, and fortify our friends against temptation, by warning and admonition.

The obedience left us now to practise is, "sub-  
mission to the will of God, and calm acquiescence in his wisdom and his justice." We must not allow ourselves to repine at those miseries which have followed our offences, -but suffer, with silent humility and resigned patience, the punishment which we deserve; remembering that according to the Apostle's decision, no praise is due to them who bear with *patience to be buffeted for their faults*.

When we consider the wickedness of our past lives, and the danger of having been summoned to the final judgment without preparation, we shall, I hope, gradually rise so much above the gross conceptions of human nature, as to return thanks to God for what once seemed the most dreadful of all evils—our detection and conviction!—We shrink back, by immediate and instinctive error, from the public eye, turned as it is upon us with indignation and contempt. Imprisonment is afflictive, and ignominious death is fearful! But let us compare our condition with that which our actions might reasonably have incurred. The robber might die in the act of violence, by lawful resistance. The man of fraud might have sunk into the

grave, while he was enjoying the gain of artifice:— and *where then had been our hope?* We have now leisure for thought; we have opportunities of instruction; and whatever we suffer from offended laws, may yet reconcile ourselves to God, who, if we sincerely *seek* him, will assuredly be *found*.

But how are we to *seek the Lord?* By the way which he him-self hath appointed; by humble, fervent, and frequent prayer. Some hours of worship are appointed us; let us duly observe them. Some assistance to our devotion is supplied; let us thankfully accept it. But let us not rest in formality and prescription: let us call upon God night and day. When, in the review of the times which we have past, any offence arises to our thoughts, let us humbly implore forgiveness; and for those faults (and many they are and must be) which we cannot recollect, let us solicit mercy in general petitions. But it must be a constant care, that we pray, not merely with our lips; but that when we lament our *sins*, we are really humbled in self-abborance; and that, when we call for mercy, we raise our thoughts to hope and trust in the goodness of God, and the merits of our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The reception of the *holy sacrament*, to which we shall be called, in the most solemn manner, perhaps a few hours before we die, is the highest act of christian worship. At that awful moment it will become us to drop for ever all worldly thoughts; to fix our hopes solely upon Christ whose death is represented; and to consider our selves as no longer connected with mortality. And, possibly, it may please God to afford *us* some consolation, some secret intimations of acceptance and forgiveness. But these radiations of favour are not always felt by the sincerest penitents. To the greater part of those whom angels stand ready to receive, nothing is granted in this world beyond rational *hope*;—and with *hope*, founded on *promise* we may well be satisfied.

But such promises of salvation are made only to the *penitent*. It is requisite then that we consider,



Thirdly, "How Repentance is to be exercised."

Repentance, in the general state of Christian life, is such a sorrow for sin as produces a change of manners; and an amendment of life. It is that disposition of mind, which he *who stole, steals no more*; by which the *wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doth that which is lawful and right*. And to the man thus formed, it is expressly promised, that *he shall save his soul alive*: Of this repentance the proofs are visible, and the reality certain, always to the penitent, and commonly to the church with which he communicates; because the state of the mind is discovered by the outward actions. But of the repentance which our condition requires and admits, no such evidence can appear; for to us many crimes and many virtues are made, impossible by confinement; and the shortness of the time which is before us, gives little power, even to ourselves, of distinguishing the effects of terror from those of conviction; of deciding, whether our present sorrow for sins proceeds from abhorrence of guilt, or dread of punishment; whether the violence of our inordinate passions be totally subdued by the fear of God, or only crushed and restrained by the temporary force of present calamity.

Our repentance is like that of other sinners on their death-bed; but with this advantage, that our danger is not greater, and our strength is more. Our faculties are not impaired by weakness of body. We are able to the great work not withered by pains, nor hindered by the fumes of disease. But with minds capable of continued attention, and with bodies, of which we need have no care! We may therefore better discharge this tremendous duty, and better judge of our own performances.

Of the efficacy of a death-bed repentance many have doubted; but we have no leisure for controversy. Let us in your minds this decision, 'Repentance is a change of the heart, of an evil to a good disposition, when that change is made, repentance is complete.'

God will consider that life is amended if he had spared it. Repentance in the sight of men, even of the penitent, is not known but by its *fruits*: but our creator sees the fruit blossom, or the seed. He knows those resolutions which are fixed; those conversions which would be permanent; and will receive them who are qualified by holy desires for works of righteousness, without exacting from them those outward duties which the shortness of their lives hindered them from performing.

Nothing therefore remains, but that we apply with all our speed, and with all our strength, to rectify our desires, and purify our thoughts; that we set God before us, in all his goodness and terrors; that we consider him as the Father and the Judge of all the earth; as a Father, desirous to save; as a Judge, who cannot pardon unrepented iniquity: that we fall down before him self-condemned, and excite our hearts an intense detestation of those crimes, which have provoked him; with vehement and steady resolutions, that if life were granted us, it should be spent hereafter in the practice of our duty; that we pray the Giver of *grace* to strengthen and improve these holy thoughts, and to accept our repentance though late, and, in its beginnings, violent; that we improve every good motion by diligent prayer; and having *declared* and *confirmed* our *faith* by the holy communion, we deliver ourselves into his hands, with firm hope, that he who created and redeemed us will not suffer us to perish.

The condition, without which forgiveness is to be obtained, is that we forgive others. There is always a danger lest men, fresh from a trial in which life has been lost, should remember with resentment and malignity the prosecutor, the witnesses or judges. It is indeed scarcely possible, that with the prejudices of an interest so weighty, and so alarming, the convict should think otherwise, than he has been treated, in some part of the pro-

with unnecessary severity. In this opinion he is perhaps singular, and, therefore, probably mistaken. But there is no time for disquisition: we must try to find the shortest way to peace. It is easier to forgive than to reason right. He that has been injuriously or unnecessarily harassed, has one opportunity more of proving his sincerity, by forgiving the wrong and praying for his enemy.

It is the duty of a penitent to repair, so far as he has the power, the injury which he has done. What we can do, is commonly nothing more than to leave the world an example of contrition. On the dreadful day, when the sentence of the law has full force, some will be found to have affected a shameless bravery, or negligent intrepidity. Such is not the proper behaviour of a convicted criminal. To rejoice in tortures is the privilege of a martyr; to meet death with intrepidity is the right only of innocence, if in any human being innocence could be found. Othello, whose life is shortened by his crimes, the last duties are humility and self abasement. We owe to God sincere repentance; we owe to man the appearance of repentance.—We ought not to propagate an opinion, that he who lived in wickedness can die with courage. If the sincerity or gaiety with which some men have ended a life of guilt, were unfeigned, they can be imputed only to ignorance or stupidity, or, what is more horrid, to voluntary intoxication: if they were artificial and hypocritical, they were acts of deception, the useless and unprofitable crimes of pride unmortified and obstinacy unsubdued.

There is yet another crime possible, and, as there is reason to believe, sometimes committed in the last moment, on the margin of eternity.—Men have died with a steadfast denial of crimes, of which it is very difficult to suppose them innocent. By what equivocation or reserve they may have reconciled their consciences to falsehood, if their consciences were at all consulted, it is impossible to know. But if they

thought, that when they were to die, they paid the legal forfeit, and that the world had no farther demand upon them; that therefore they might, by keeping their own secrets, try to leave behind them, a disputable reputation; and that the falsehood was harmless because none were injured; they had very little considered the nature of society. One of the principal parts of national felicity arises from a wise and impartial administration of justice. Every man reposes upon the tribunals of his country, the stability of possession, and the serenity of life. He therefore who unjustly exposes the courts of judicature to suspicion either of partiality or error, not only does an injury to those who dispence the laws, but diminishes the public confidence in the laws themselves, and shakes the foundation of public tranquility.

For my own part, I confess, with deepest contrition, the crime which has brought me to this place; and I admit the justice of my sentence, which I am sinking under its severity. And I earnestly exhort you, my fellow prisoners, to acknowledge the offences which have been already proved; and to bequeath to our country that confidence in public justice without which there can be neither peace nor safety.

As few men suffer for their first offences, and no convicts are conscious of more crimes than have been brought within judicial cognizance, it is necessary to enquire how far confession ought to be extended. Peace of mind, or desire of instruction, may sometimes demand that to the minister, whose counsel is requested, a long course of evil life should be discovered; but of this every man must determine for himself. To the public, every man, before he departs from life, is obliged to confess those acts which have brought him to this place. It may bring unjust suspicion upon others; and to convey such information as may enable those who have suffered losses to obtain restitution.

Whatever good remains in our power we must diligently perform. We must prevent, to the utmost

our power, all the evil consequences of our crimes. We must forgive all who have injured us. We must, by fervency of prayer and constancy in meditation, endeavour to repress all wordly passions, and generate in our minds that love of goodness, and hatred of sin, which may fit us for the society of heavenly minds. And, finally, we must commend and entrust our souls to HIM, who died for the sins of men; with earnest wishes and humble hopes, that he will admit us with the labourers who entered the vineyard at the *last hour*, and associate us with the *thief* whom he pardoned on the cross!

To this great end, you will not refuse to unite with me, on bended knees, and with humbled hearts, in fervent prayer to the throne of grace! May the Father of Mercy hear our supplications, and have compassion upon us!

“ O Almighty Lord God, the righteous JUDGE of all the earth, who in thy providential justice dost frequently inflict severe vengeance upon sinners in this life, that thou mayest, by their sad examples, effectually deter others from committing the like heinous offences; and that they themselves, truly repenting of their faults, may escape the condemnation of hell:—look down in mercy upon us, *thy sorrowful servants*, whom thou hast suffered to become the unhappy objects of offended justice in this world!

“ Give us a thorough sense of all those evil *thoughts, words, and works*, which have so provoked thy patience, that thou hast been pleased to permit this public and shameful judgement to fall upon us; and grant us such a portion of grace and godly sincerity, that we may heartily confess, and unfeignedly repent of every breach of those most *holy laws and ordinances*, which, if a man do, he shall live in them.

“ Let no root of bitterness and malice, no habitual and deadly sin, either of *omission* or *commission*, remain undisturbed in our hearts! But enable us to make our penitance universal, without the least flattering or

deceitful reserve, that so we may clear our consciences before we close our eyes.

“ And now that thou hast brought us within the view of our long home, and made us sensible, that the time of our dissolution draweth near, endue us, we humbly pray thee, O gracious Father, with such Christian fortitude that neither the terrors of thy present dispensations, nor the remembrance of our former sins, may have power to sink our spirits into a despondency of thy everlasting mercies in the adorable Son of thy lone.

“ Wean our thoughts and affections, good Lord, from all the vain and delusive enjoyments of this transitory world; that we may not only with patient resignation submit to the appointed stroke of death, but that our faith and hope may be so elevated, that we may conceive a longing desire to be dissolved from these our earthly tabernacles, and to be with Christ, which is far better than all the happiness we can wish for besides!

“ And in a due sense of our extraordinary want of forgiveness at thy hands, and of our utter unworthiness of the very least of all thy favours—of the meanest crumbs which fall from thy table. Oh! blessed Lord Jesus! make us so truly and universally charitable, that in an undissembling compliance with thy own awful command, and most endearing example, we may both freely forgive and cordially pray for our most inveterate *enemies, persecutors, and slanderers!* Forgive them, O Lord, we beseech thee; turn their hearts, and fill them with thy love.

“ Thus, may we humbly trust, our sorrowful prayers and tears will be acceptable in thy sight. Thus shall we be qualified, through Christ, to exchange this dismal bodily confinement, (and these uneasy fetters) for the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And thus shall our legal doom upon earth be changed into a comfortable declaration of mercy in the highest heavens; and all through thy most precious

ous and all-sufficient merits, O blessed Saviour of mankind,—who with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, livest and reignest ever, *One God*, world without end.  
*Amen.*

*Dr. DODD'S last solemn DECLARATION,*

**T**O the words of dying men regard has always been paid. I am brought hither to suffer death for an act of fraud, which I confess myself guilty with shame, such as my former state of life naturally produces, and I hope with such sorrow as he, to whom the heart is known, will not disregard. I repent that I have violated the laws, by which peace and confidence are established among men; I repent that I have attempted to injure my fellow creatures; and I repent that I have brought disgrace upon my order, and discredit upon religion; but my offences against God are without name or number, and can admit only general confession and a general repentance.—Grant, Almighty God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that my repentance, however late, however imperfect, may not be in vain.

The little good that now remains in my power, is to warn others against those temptations by which I have always sinned against conviction; my principles have never been shaken; I have always considered the Christian religion as a revelation from God; and its divine Author as the Saviour of the world but the laws of God, though never disowned by me, have often been forgotten. I was led astray from religious strictness by the delusion of shew, and the delights of voluptuousness. I never knew or attended to the calls of frugality or the needful minuteness of a painful economy. Vanity and pleasure, into which I

plunged, required expence disproportionate to my income, expence brought distress upon me, and distress, importunate distress, urged me to temporary fraud.

For this fraud I am to die; and I die, declaring in the most solemn manner, that however I have deviated from my own precepts, I have taught others, to the best of my knowledge, and with all sincerity, the true way to eternal happiness. My life, for some few unhappy years past, has been dreadfully erroneous, but my ministry has been always sincere. I have constantly believed, and now leave the world, solemnly avowing my conviction, that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved, but only the name of the Lord Jesus; and I entreat all who are here to join with me in my last petition, that for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ my sins may be forgiven, and my soul received into his everlasting kingdom.

WILLIAM DODD.

F I N I S.

*N. B. It is hoped and expected, that all ranks of men, in whose hands this Awful Sermon may come into, will take care, and steer by the fatal Rock, on which this great man has split upon; for through all England, there was not a more popular Clergyman in his day, and one who has left many valuable books of his own writings, for the good of succeeding generations. Witness DODD upon Death.*