

This world is not our Rest.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED AT MORRIS-TOWN,

JULY 14, 1816,

BY

JAMES RICHARDS, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEWARK.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.]

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☞ IT is with reluctance that the Author consents to the publication of the following Discourse ; as he is persuaded that the favorable manner in which it was received, was chiefly owing to some observations of a local nature, and to the recollection of former friendships, which the occasion might have awakened.

Such as it is, he INSCRIBES it to the People of his former charge—with a devout wish that it may excite them more earnestly to seek that REST, where he desires to meet them when the labours of this mortal life are closed.

J. R.

A SERMON, &c.

MICAH ii. 10—FIRST CLAUSE.

“ Arise ye, and depart ; for this is not your REST.”

THESE words were addressed to the inoffensive and pious part of the house of Israel and Judah, who were unjustly and cruelly treated by their brethren. Though they dwelt in the land of Canaan, which God had given unto their fathers for a quiet habitation, they found no *rest* : though they had laws and ordinances of divine appointment, well calculated to promote the peace and good order of society, yet they found neither safety nor enjoyment. *Iniquity*, which burneth like a fire, had made awful ravages. Men had risen up in every part of the land, void of justice and charity, as they were of the fear of God ; *men* who devised mischief, and wrought evil upon their beds—who were given to covetousness and robbery, and who, by fraud or by violence, spoiled those who fell into their hands.

In the verses preceding the text, the Prophet describes them as plundering the weak, and forcibly dispossessing the women of their pleasant habitations, while, from their children, they *had taken away* “God’s glory forever;” as they had sold them for *bonds-men* and *bonds-women* in a land of strangers, where the true God was not known. All these atrocious acts were committed by men calling themselves the people of God, and who had actually entered into covenant with him, to walk in his ways.

The anger of the Lord, as might be expected, was kindled against them, and he determined to visit them according to their sins.

As an indication of the judgments which he was about to inflict, he addresses himself to the pious sufferers in the midst of the land, and says—“Arise ye, and depart ; for *this is not your rest.*” *Here* is no quietness, no safety for you ; get you into the land of captivity, the land of strangers ; for your own land is polluted—and because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.

The same monitory voice is heard by the Lord’s people still ;—not, indeed, to warn them to change the place of their earthly abode ; but to change the current of their expectations and desires ; and, instead of looking for any

thing like a true and satisfying rest in the things of this life, to look for it in God, and the things which appertain to his everlasting kingdom.

To every child of God in this assembly—nay, to every soul, of whatever character, does the word of the Lord say to-day, “*Arise ye, and depart ; for this is not your rest.*” There is nought on earth which can satisfy the desires of your minds ;—you will find no place, no condition, in which you can quietly sit down and say, *here will I rest....here will I enjoy.* Through every step of your journey, you will find something to disquiet you ; something to convince you that you have pitched your tent in the wilderness, at a distance from the land which the Lord has promised to make a *quiet habitation, a perfect rest forever.* *Arise ye, and depart ; lift up your eyes to another country ; seek to inherit a portion, which is not liable to be lost by misfortune, or torn from you by violence ; and which can in no degree be affected by any of the afflictions or changes of the present world.*

But to give this exhortation the greater effect, I shall call your attention to three things :

1st. The fact, which this exhortation supposes, that we are prone to seek our rest in this world.

2dly. That here no true and satisfying rest can be found. And

3dly, The duty and the importance of arising and departing from this world, in our affections and desires, and seeking the rest which God has provided for us ; a rest which is *full, perfect and eternal*.

I. Let us for a moment advert to the fact, which is pre-supposed in this exhortation, *that we are prone to seek our rest in this world*.

While this fact lies open to the observation of every one, who will take the pains to notice what is passing in his own heart, or in the world, it is notwithstanding connected with many circumstances, which may justly excite our astonishment.

We all know that we are strangers and sojourners upon earth, as all our fathers were ; that our days *here* are only as a shadow ; and our enjoyments as transient as our days. We are well convinced, that whatever prosperity may attend us, the places, which now know us, will soon know us no more forever. At the same time, we pretend not to doubt the immortality of our beings. We expect to live through the unwasting ages of eternity, in some *unknown* portion of God's kingdom, and to be happy or miserable, according to the part which we have acted in this world ; and yet, strange to tell, our thoughts turn almost continually upon the present life. We are perpetually devising means

of securing the good, or of avoiding the evil, attendant upon our condition here ; with comparatively little solicitude what shall befall us hereafter. The great object seems to be, how we shall better our circumstances—and be able to pass the years and months which are to come, with more ease and satisfaction than those which are past ;—or, which is the same thing, we seem to be looking for something like a *rest*, here on earth.

If this were true only of men of the world, who are confessedly ignorant of the spirituality and power of religion, the wonder would not be so great : for what can be expected of those, who have never been enlightened from above, but that their affections and desires should be pointed to earth ? But the same thing, with few exceptions, is lamentably true of God's children. Who that witnesses their cares and anxieties about this mortal life, their eagerness and bustle while pursuing its transitory objects, would readily believe that they expected another *life*, perfectly happy and eternal ?

Look at them in the hour of prosperity : what cheerfulness does a little sunshine seem to infuse into their spirits, while every object around them smiles, and flatters them with the augmentation or continuation of earthly bliss ? And how soon does their countenance fall, the mo-

ment their wordly prospects change ? Let foul calumny assault their reputation—the wheels of business be obstructed, or some unforeseen event suddenly involve them in poverty ;—let *sickness* blight their worldly enjoyments, or death, by falling on some dear friend, sweep away their fondest earthly hopes—and you will see at once, by the gloom or agitation which attends them, how much they were building their expectations on this world.

Sanctified but in part, and seeing through a glass darkly, their views of another life are not sufficiently clear and strong, to raise them above an unreasonable dependence on the present. This is evident from the constant *struggles* which they make, to become dead to the world, and alive unto God—and which constitutes no small part of the warfare to which they are subjected on earth. This is manifest from the repeated exhortations addressed to them in the scriptures, to be less careful for the life that now is, and more solicitous for that which is to come.

Why did Jesus bid his disciples take no thought for the morrow, saying “what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed,” but because they were in danger of having their thoughts and affections too much engrossed with these earthly objects ? Why did

he exhort them, on another occasion, “ *to watch and pray always, lest their hearts should be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life,*” but because he saw that, with all their attainments, their affections leaned by far too much to this world ?

Were it not for this state of mind, we should never have heard the Apostle say, “ set your affections on things *above*, not on things *on the earth.*” “ Be not conformed to this world, but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

All these exhortations pre-suppose the fact, that the minds of Christians are too much weighed to earth, and that *here*, to a criminal and dangerous degree, they are prone to seek their *rest*. It is not, however, the existence of the fact only, which I wish you to contemplate, but its amazing extent.

Could you make the whole of your lives pass before you, and instantly separate those thoughts that have been employed about your *present*, from those that have been occupied with your *future state*, would you not be surprised at the disproportion ? How much of this span of life, would you be compelled to say, has been devoted to the concerns of an hour, while the bound-

less scenes of an unwasting duration have shared comparatively but little of your attention ?

You cannot justify this direction of your thoughts, by alledging that you have already made such provision for your immortal existence, as no longer to have any fear or anxiety on that subject ; for, with regard to many of you, it is even now a very doubtful matter, in your own minds, if the one thing needful be yet secured. But if it were otherwise—if you had the assurance of St. Paul, of your justified state, and an assurance equally well grounded, it would not acquit you from the charge of having given so many of your thoughts to the world, and so small a portion of them to God, and the things of his everlasting kingdom.

The true secret of all this is, *an earth-born mind*—an unreasonable attachment to the world—a disposition to find a *rest* in something short of God.

But, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, and forever blessed be his name—no such *rest* can be found. It is not on earth ;—it is no where in the universe of *creatures*.

I doubt not but that every *true believer* cordially assents to the propriety of this remark. It is your experience, Christian, as well as the language of your bible, that nothing but Jeho-

vah himself can fill the expansive desires of the mind, and bring the soul to rest. This makes it the more wonderful that those, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, should ever think of forsaking him, and finding a resting place among the perishing objects of time.—But this folly, I ought to remark, is not an habitual and prevailing characteristic of the people of God : It is an evil, of which they complain, and of which, God, in the course of his providence, as well as by the operations of his spirit, intends ultimately to cure them.

They have a conviction already, though not so deep as it ought to be, that there is no true rest on earth. And others, if they would give themselves time to reflect, or would faithfully consult their own experience, could not fail to receive a like conviction.

II. But let us, in the second place, consider more particularly, wherein it appears that no true and substantial rest can be found in this world.

If it were possible to find rest on earth, how comes it to pass that we never sit down contented with the present, and say *here* will I enjoy ? Why do we perpetually look forward, and think of something yet to be accomplished—some evil to be removed, or some good acquired, before we can be *happy* ?

It is a truth, to which the experience of all ages bears witness, that the more men know of the world, the less confidence they have in it, as a place of rest or of enjoyment.

We may take the testimony of Solomon as conclusive on this subject ; and that not only, nor chiefly, because he was placed in circumstances to form a correct judgment, but because he was divinely inspired, and spake by the authority of God : and what is his testimony ?—Why, that as in the *natural*, so in the *moral* world, all things are full of labour, and that there is no true and satisfying rest under the sun ; that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

But not to content ourselves with general views, let us look a moment at some of the objects in which we are prone to seek our *rest*.

Can we find it in *wealth* ?—To say nothing of its impotence to ward off a thousand evils to which we are exposed in this world, it has no power at all to satisfy the desires of the mind, and thus to give us ease and tranquillity. “He
“that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with sil-
“ver ; nor he that loveth abundance, with in-
“crease. If goods increase, they increase that
“eat them ; and what good is there to the owners
“thereof, saving the beholding of them with their
“eyes ?”

They usually bring a heavy weight of care—expose to many temptations, and too often, alas ! shut the door of eternal life upon their *guilty* and *unhappy* possessors.

Can we find it in *honour* ?—Of all the passions perhaps, none is more uneasy, than that which leads us to desire distinction among our fellow-men, and none, I will venture to say, which sets the soul farther from the way of peace. When acquired in the path of duty, and in the struggles of a magnanimous and virtuous course, honor is nothing more than a precarious *life* in another's breath ; not unfrequently exchanged for lasting oblivion, or unmerited disgrace. It is no food for the soul ; “one *self-approving hour*,” said a poet, who was no incompetent judge of the passions and interests of men,

“ One self-approving hour whole years outweighs

“ Of stupid starers, and of loud huzzas.”

Will *pleasure* or voluptuous enjoyment afford us *rest* ? It may pall our appetites—it may brutalize our faculties, and harden our hearts—but it can never satisfy the nobler desires of our souls. They who live in pleasure are dead while they live, and, paradoxical as the remark may seem, they are as dead to all true felicity, as they are to the voice of reason and duty.

The same insufficiency may be seen, with respect to every other *earthly object*.

Go to *human friendships*, however carefully formed, however studiously cultivated ; and can you find rest *here* ? I will not suppose that your friends prove fickle or faithless—an occurrence by no means unfrequent in this changing world ; but let them be all to you that you can wish, so far as fidelity and moral worth are concerned, yet how often will they find you in a condition where your wants are beyond their reach ; where an unavailing sympathy is all the relief they can extend ?—Or perhaps you may be made to feel your own weakness, and your own misery too, by finding them in a state where you can suffer with them, but where you cannot help them.

Go to the *walks of science and of taste*, where genius has poured its ardent rays for ages, and try, by the expansion of your intellectual powers, or by the gratification of the finer feelings of the mind, to satisfy your desires, and obtain a rest to your soul—and you will find only, what Solomon long since found before you, “ that
“ in much wisdom is much grief ; and he that
“ increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.”
If you run through the history of past generations—if you visit every country on the globe—if you explore, with microscopic eye, every animal, and every insect—if you traverse the wide

field of plants, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, still you will find that the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, nor the heart with any kind or degree of knowledge, while God himself, in his true moral excellence, is either *unseen* or *unknown*. Nay, go to your *farms* and *merchandize* ; try business in its diversified forms ; it may occupy you, and keep you from pausing to think of yourselves ;—it may afford you, at times, the satisfaction of reflecting that you are rationally employed, while you are providing for your own wants, and the wants of your households—but it cannot bring you peace ; it cannot soften the pang of guilt ; it cannot draw the sting of death : it leaves an aching void in your souls, which, immortal in themselves, thirst for immortality ; and cannot, and will not, be satisfied with any provision, which is not commensurate to their own unceasing duration.

But you have religious society, and religious ordinances—perhaps you expect *rest* in these. No, my dear friends, not even here will you find *rest*, unless, at the same time, you can find *God*. No outward privileges, without the presence of God to attend them, can afford us any heart-felt joy : nor ought we to calculate that any mani-

festations which He will make of himself, through the medium of ordinances on earth, will bring our souls to a satisfying and unchanging rest. The disciples of Jesus did not find it in the *presence* of their Saviour, with all the advantages and comforts attendant on that privilege. Peter, James, and John did not find it on the mount of transfiguration, glorious and transporting as the scene was ; for the messengers from heaven, and the excellent glory with all its circumstances, soon *passed*, and left them alone. Again they were compelled to descend from this eminence, and to mingle as before in the labours and conflicts assigned to their earthly state.

So it will be with us, whatever glimpses we gain of the divine glory this side of the grave.—Our *rest* lies not below the skies. Comfort we may have—joy we may have, and at times a joy unspeakable, and full of glory—but no *rest* which is adequate to our wants....none which is full and permanent as that which is in reserve for the people of God. What then remains but that we listen to the exhortation before us,

III. To arise, and depart from this world, in our affections and desires, and seek the rest which God has provided for us—a rest which is *full, perfect and eternal*.

Such a rest, my dear brethren, is to be found in Heaven—a rest free from care and anxiety—a rest from all our labors, from all our sufferings, from all our sins ; but not an *inactive* rest, where the powers of the soul will be locked up in a state of inglorious ease, destitute of sensibility, as they are of exertion ; but where every faculty will be employed, and every capacity for enjoyment filled. It will be a rest in God, in his adorable attributes, his *wisdom, power* and *love* : a rest in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the grand medium of divine communications—a rest in the society of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. *Here*, kindred souls will meet, without the least particle of jealousy or fear ; they will embrace each other with unlimited confidence—and rejoice in each other's felicity, as making a part of their own.—This will be a rest without alloy, and without end.

Can we need arguments, brethren, to persuade us to seek such a rest ; and to seek it in the manner which God has prescribed ? Its transcendant glory and excellence, one would think, were enough, not only to awaken all our powers, but to keep them in a constant stretch, to our latest breath. It is our supreme good—the only thing, which can make our existence

a blessing, or save it from being an inconceivable and endless curse.

But, important as this rest is, remember that you cannot have it without seeking. It is purchased by the blood of Christ; it is freely tendered in the Gospel; it is taken possession of by the great Redeemer of his people; but it will never become yours, unless you desire it; unless you labor to enter into it.

Yet do not imagine, that your labor for this object, will diminish your present enjoyment: it will make you more happy. Its anticipations will be your sweetest consolation in affliction—your firmest support under trials. It will lighten all your burdens, soften all your cares, and bring down the very dawn of heaven to your souls.

I exhort you, then, my dear brethren, to look away from this land of your pilgrimage, to the promised rest. Lose sight of these mountains and hills—these rivers and vallies; and fix your eyes on Canaan's unbecclouded shores. *There* your divine Redeemer is gone—*there* the glorious armies of martyrs have ascended—*there* the millions of pious souls, who have waded through the cares and sufferings of the present life, have found a safe and joyful *retreat*. Raise your thoughts and desires to this blessed abode, and seek, by every mean in your power, to put yourselves in possession of it.

But how shall you seek? By repentance of your sins; a repentance deep and unfeigned: by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; a faith which works by love, and purifies the heart: by a course of self-denial and mortification to the world; by a diligent attendance upon every Christian duty, and especially, upon the duties of holy watchfulness and prayer:—In a word, by seeking God, the author and giver of this rest. Endeavor to become acquainted with him—to live near to him, and, as far as possible, to embosom yourselves in his love. This will give you a blessed earnest of the rest of which we speak, while you remain on earth, and a sure title to it, when your pilgrimage is closed.

Let me only say that the voice of divine providence unites with the voice of God's word, in pressing us to this duty.

We are admonished by every thing around us, that this world is not our *rest*.

The progress of the seasons—the changes which time is constantly working in ourselves, and in others;—and, above all, the mortality which we witness among those, who have pursued the journey of life with us, loudly proclaim that we are *pilgrims*, having here no continuing city. How many have departed life, in this con-

gregation, since I closed my ministry among you. I look round with surprize, on the change of seven short years. Where are the hoary-headed pilgrims who used to fill these seats, and bend their knees with us, before the *King Eternal* ? Where are multitudes in the morning and midst of life, who were the partakers of our weekly devotion ? They come no more to your assemblies : they have done with every thing below the skies : they have gone to a world of retribution, and such as were prepared, to a world of *rest*. This is a new congregation, in which I feel myself a stranger. How soon, and we too shall have passed to our eternal abode ! But, blessed be God, that, with all the changes time and death are making, his church still lives, and is rapidly advancing to greater maturity and glory. I rejoice to hear that the Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon you ; and that many of the youth have hopefully listed under the banner of King Jesus, and are directing their footsteps towards the promised rest. Go on, ye dear pilgrims, and be not discouraged with the length or troubles of the way. You follow the standard of one who will not deceive you. You are journeying to the land, of which the Lord your God has spoken. It is the heritage of Israel given by covenant and by oath.—

You will find it a glorious rest, a quiet and eternal habitation. When you come to count your numbers on the other side of Jordan, may none of you be wanting *there*.

But, is there no ground to fear, that many, in this assembly, will come short of that inheritance ? Is there no danger that some who have been recently awakened, will lose their impressions, and return again to the beggarly elements of the world ? and that others who have continued *unmoved* during this season of divine grace, will be given up to hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, while God shall swear in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest ? Are there not *some* who begin to tread the evening vale of life, that have not made their peace with God ?....Some who have resisted the calls of half a century, and are now trembling on the threshold of eternity, without any provision for that boundless state of existence, on which they must so shortly enter ? Will you not hear the voice of a friend, who again addresses you in God's name ? of *one* who never thinks of going to the bar of judgment himself, without remembering that he must meet you there ?

Oh ! let not this special season of mercy *close*, without securing a title to the inheritance above. What will it avail you, that success has atten-

ded your enterprizes in this world, if you are finally shut out of the Kingdom of God : that the beam of mercy has long shone upon your path, if your sun must set in everlasting darkness ? Behold the day goeth away, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out.—“ **ARISE YE, AND DEPART, FOR THIS IS NOT YOUR REST.**”

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