

## The Index Pulpit

### A Sermon

Delivered in the Baptist Church, St. Helena, S.C., on the death of Mr. William Norton, who departed this life March 7, 1817, in the 71st year of his age, by William T. Brantley, A.M., pastor of the Baptist Church in the town of Beaufort.

Whether we die, we die unto the Lord. - Rom. 14:8

#### An excerpt.

Few have lived so devoted to God, and so exemplary before men, as to justify the application of the text to them with more strict fidelity than did our aged brother, Mr. William Norton. To you who hear me, I can speak of his worth with the greater confidence, for you have long known the integrity of his Christian character, and have long seen his zeal and discretion in the service of God. In this house he prayed to God and adored the Savior. Here he interceded for men, and wept for their miseries. Here has shone the lustre, emanating from the consistent tenor of a godly life. In your just sense of his merits, I shall find a warm testimony of the correctness of this imperfect tribute.

He was the fourth son of Jonathan Norton and Mary Ann, his wife, whose maiden name was Chaplin. His grandfather was a native of England, whence he emigrated to South Carolina, and became one of the first settlers of this island, where his descendants were numerous and respectable. Mr. William Norton, the subject of these remarks, was born October 22nd, 1746; was married November 19th, 1771 to Mary Godfrey, of John's Island, and by this connection had seven sons and three daughters. In 1794, the wife of his youth was taken from him by death, and he was left, with his bereaved children, to deplore an irreparable loss. The year following he married Mrs. Dixon, relict of Mr. Thomas Dixon, and had a further accession of four children to his family.

In August, 1816, he was again left, by the death of his wife, to the solitude of bereavement, which he was not long to suffer; for the 7th of March, 1817, full of faith and good fruits, he left this expectant state for one of holy reality and sublime fruition. He was educated an Episcopalian, and passed the early part of his life as an active, useful member of that denomination on this island. His conversion was of that gradual kind, which displays itself more in the progressive holiness of the heart, and the established rectitude of the actions, than in the warmth and power of instantaneous impressions. Notwithstanding this, he entered deeply into experimental sentiments of religion, and felt the force of those profound and searching affections which are essential to all attainments in grace. As he was not remarkable for any one pre-eminent quality in his pious character, it will be necessary to observe the well proportioned union of many excellencies conspicuous in him. To his honorable solicitude for the preservation of divine worship in the place of his nativity, is to be measurably ascribed the erection of an Episcopal chapel here, in the order and support of which he took an active part. At that time, the determination of his mind to the forms of his own church, was so strong, that, in the year 1789, when the late Rev. Joseph Cook, pastor of the Baptist Church at Euhaw, first visited this place, Mr. Norton would not consent to hear his preaching. After a favorite brother-in-law, Dr. George Mosse, had become convinced of the justness of those grounds upon which the Baptists maintain a profession of faith and immersion to be constituent requisites in baptism, and had avowed his convictions by an open adherence to their sentiments, Mr. Norton began to listen more favorably to the arguments by which those sentiments were supported.

Being at length fully persuaded that he had not previously submitted to one of the great institutions of Christ, in its clear and scriptural acceptation, he without hesitation applied to Mr. Cook for the administration of the ordinance, and was baptized by him, at Euhaw, in 1790. Thus was he emboldened to unite himself to a church, at that time much traduced; being convinced that its principles were conformable to the Scriptures.

His enlightened zeal was now exerted in the cause of vital religion. And as, from conscientious motives, he had embraced a persuasion that had not been honored with the suffrages of his neighborhood, his situation necessarily became such as to draw largely upon his Christian prudence and resolution.

Yet such was his determination in the course he had begun, that the fervor of his spirit was in no respect abated by the coldness of those who could not accord in feeling or in sentiment with the tone of his piety. And his prudent conciliatory deportment was such, as either to defeat or silence opposition. Through many difficulties he persevered, and with the aid of a few others, erected a place of worship on this island, where he had the satisfaction to see many resort, to hear the word of salvation. When there was no regular supply for the pulpit, it was his custom to collect as many as seemed disposed to assemble, and to engage in giving them, especially the negroes, such religious instruction as their cases appeared most to demand. In this we may believe him to have been instrumental in the conversion of many, who ever loved him with sincere affection, and saluted him with evident emotions of gratitude.

He long served as one of the deacons of the Beaufort Baptist Church; and in that capacity was distinguished for his godly sincerity and Christian simplicity. His language and conversation had so much of a gracious savor, that all with whom he had habits of intercourse, were compelled to recognize the heavenly influence under which he lived. It was his great pleasure to promote agreement among brethren. Discordant spirits and conflicting sentiments he would assiduously endeavor to recall to harmony. In him was conspicuous the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, in the mildness of which his presence imparted a delight to every one who witnessed his life. Though surrounded with the cares of this world, and sharing in the trials of a probationary state, it was evident that "his conversation was in heaven," and he sought "a country" in the immortality of which he would be superior to every sorrow.

The interests of Zion engrossed a large portion of his care, and of his conversation. Such was his solicitude for the extension of religion and the prosperity of the church, that he withdrew his membership from a community that was greatly endeared to him by near connections and valuable friendships, that he might aid in the formation of a new church. And, in the circle of his friends, he rarely failed to manifest the prevailing inclination of his soul. The language of another world was delightful to him, and with them that feared the Lord he would often speak.