

SCAFFOLD SPEECH

Colonel Daniel Axtell (1602–1660)

Daniel Axtell, a grocer before the Civil Wars, joined the Parliamentary cause and quickly rose to prominence. He served as commander of the guards at the trial of Charles I, and later earned a reputation for ferocity against the Catholics in Ireland. He sided with the army against Parliament in 1659, and continued armed resistance into late April 1660. After the Restoration, he attempted to hide, but the government soon found him and placed him on trial for his role in the execution of Charles I. Convicted of treason and sentenced to hanging, Axtell gave this speech from the scaffold.

Tyburn, 19 October 1660

I say the very cause for which I have engaged is contained in this Book of God (*having the Bible in his hand*) both in the civil and religious rights of it, which I leave to you (*giving the book to Mr. Knowles*).

You see a dead man living, and yet I hope I shall live to all Eternity through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant of free grace.

I must truly tell you that before these late wars, it pleased the Lord to call me by His grace through the work of the ministry, and afterwards keeping a day of humiliation in fasting and prayer with Mr. Simeon Ash, Mr. Love, Mr. Woodcock, and other ministers in Laurence Lane. They did so clearly state the case of the Parliament that I was fully convinced in my own conscience of the justness of the war, and thereupon engaged in the Parliament service. Which, as I did and do believe, was the cause of the Lord, I ventured my life freely for it and now die for it.

And after the work of the Lord was done in England, my lot cast me in the service of Ireland, and I thank the Lord I was serviceable to the English nation in that country, and have discharged my duty fully, according to the trust committed to me there.

As for the fact for which I now suffer, it is for words, only for words, and but for words. And the sentence is already reversed in my own conscience, and it will be reversed by Jesus Christ by and by. I pray God from the very bottom of my soul to forgive all that have had any hand in my death, both witnesses and jury, and the court that passed sentence; for considering the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, as He has laid it down, “It has been said of old time, love your neighbours and hate your enemies. But I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that hate and despitefully use you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.”¹

I desire, according to this doctrine, from the bottom of my heart, that God would give them true repentance and not lay this sin to their charge, nor my blood, which by God’s law and man’s (I think) could not justly have been brought here to suffer. But, I bless God, I have some comfortable assurance that I shall be embraced in the arms of Christ, and have cause to hope that His Spirit shall carry my soul into His Father’s hands. And if the glory of this sunshine be so great (*the sun then shining bright*), how much more is the glory of the Son of God, Who is the sun of righteousness?

I think it convenient to give you some account of my faith. I believe all things written in the Old and New Testament as the principles and doctrine of a believer’s faith. I believe the blessed ordinances of Christ, that it is our duty to hear the Word preached, to seek unto God in prayer, and to perform family duties and to walk in the communion of saints. And for my own part, I am a member of a congregation which I judge to be the way of Christ (and were it for that only I were to die, I could witness to it), which is a company of men born again by His grace that walk in the ways of Christ blameless and harmless. I believe Jesus Christ died for poor sinners, of whom I am chief. As the Apostle Paul says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that

¹ Matthew 5:43–45

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.”² And if the Apostle might say so, much more may I.

My friends and countrymen, I have reason to bewail my own unprofitable life, having being very unfruitful unto the people of the Lord. The Lord knows I have much fault upon my heart; were it not for the blood of Christ that cleanses and washes me according to His promise, saying “I loved you and washed away your sins in my own blood.”³ For there is no remission of sins without the blood of Christ. I desire you all to loath and cast off sin; it were better to suffer than to sin; it is better to die than to sin. Nothing could grieve our Saviour but sin, and therefore have a care of that. You and I must meet one day at the bar of Christ, and the Son of God shall be our judge, for God has committed all judgment to the Son “that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father.”⁴ This day is a resemblance of that day; therefore be serious. I beg as much good to your immortal souls as I expect to enjoy by and by. I beseech you, beg of God that He would save your soul, and omit no opportunity through the strength of the Lord to believe and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Be sure to labour after assurance of your interest in Him, or else you will be of all men most miserable. For I of all men were most miserable if I had not believed to “see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”⁵

Blessed be the Lord that brings me into this state; let the way or means be what it will. It is God’s sovereignty who made these creatures so to dispose of them how He pleases, and God has ordained this death for me from all eternity. The Lord Christ often prayed “Thy will be done”; this is the Lord’s will. He has numbered my days and my times are in His hand. Many seek the ruler’s favour, but everyone’s judgment is from the Lord. When Pilate said unto Christ “Know you not that I have power to crucify you?” Christ answered him “You could have no power against me except it were given from above.”⁶ Therefore I acknowledge the righteous hand of God; He is righteous, but I am sinful. “Therefore will bear God’s indignation, because I have sinned against Him.”⁷

It is said of Jesus Christ “that for the joy set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God”, where I hope to see Him by and by in glory and majesty, and to see His angels and believers worshipping of Him, and therefore I despise the shame. Our Saviour died upon the cross without sin; I am a sinful creature, a wretched sinner, and shall I expect better than He that was my master? He who was holy and never had a sinful thought in all His life? And died not for Himself, but for us, that we might live through His Death, that through His poverty we might be made rich? And Christ having done this for His people, it should not in their eyes be thought a despicable thing that we should suffer for Him, having been engaged in the work of God. But Christ must prevail in righteousness, and He will prevail.

The Indictment, Arraignment, Tryal, and Judgment at Large of Twenty-Nine Regicides, The Murtherers of His Most Sacred Majesty King Charles the 1st (London: Walthoe, 1724):358–361.

² I Timothy 1:15

³ Revelation 1:5

⁴ John 5:23

⁵ Psalm 27:13

⁶ John 19:11

⁷ Micah 7:9