

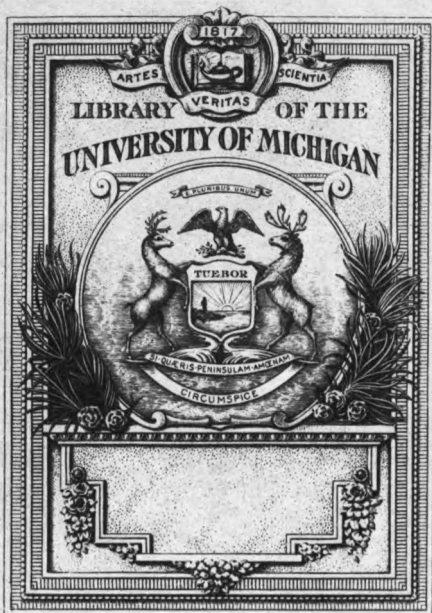
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SERMON

PREACHED BY

REV. CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D. D.,

ON SABBATH MORNING FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF

PRESIDENT JAMES A. GARFIELD,

(SEPTEMBER 25, 1881,)

AT THE MADISON SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
NEW YORK CITY.

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S E R M O N .

HEBREWS, IX. 22 :

“Almost all things are by the law purged with blood.”

EVERYTHING that is great and good has to be paid for. There is hardly anything in life that is pure gratuity. Life is toilsome, and if we are upon a path of ascent, almost every step has to be taken irksomely and with pain. It is so arranged. The cross and then the crown. That is God's thought, and so we find it wrought everywhere into the structure of life, individual and associate. In the market of the finer spiritual, as well as in that of the coarser material, commodities, everything is stamped with its cost-mark. Our prayers are sometimes only an attempt to obtain God's benefits at special rates, or to evade payment altogether. We court the health which the cup can give, but pray to be spared the cup: "Let this cup pass from me." We want to be clothed in robes of white, but pray to be spared that tribulation out from which the white-robed saints of apocalyptic vision

were come: purged (we ask to be), but by something other than blood. But "almost all things are by the law purged with blood."

That is one of those far-reaching thoughts of God, lodged away back in the old altar-ritual of the Hebrews, finer and truer than either priest or layman knew. Nowhere *so* true, of course, as upon Calvary: "Without shedding of blood is no remission." But the world is full of its little Calvaries. Every good thing is obtained by purchase, and every best thing is paid for in blood. Almost all things are purged with blood, and the pathway of life and the highway of history leads continuously over a new Golgotha.

There are qualities of character, individual and national, that are not wrought out by prosperity. Even "the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings." "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Life gets continually broken in upon, therefore invaded, startled. Nothing ought so little to surprise us as a surprise. It keeps men's thoughts at a tension, and makes hearts plastic. Said Jeremiah: "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; *therefore* his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." "*Hath settled on his lees.*" It is a part of the holy discipline of God, then, to trespass upon the quiet of individual life and the

serenity of national life. It makes men think, think deeply, think seriously; and serious thought easily becomes devout, and devout thought is redemption^{it}. It is not often that a joy reaches so deep a place in men's hearts as a sorrow does; defeat touches men in a way that victory does not. More heart, for some reason, gets put into a devout sigh than into a doxology. "Sorrow is better than laughter," said the Preacher, "for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."

That is the meaning of tribulation; that is the deep philosophy underlying the event around which our thoughts cluster tearfully and prayerfully this morning. "Tearfully and prayerfully:" you see how easy and natural the sequence. Of course, we can do but a little in the way of understanding what in particular God means by this or by any other of His afflictive dispensations. God is His own interpreter, not you nor I. Each event has references forward and backward too reticent for us to detect or trace. We do not want to belittle the event or the holy author of it by translating it all out into the terms of our common thinking. We love to think of the sea as sloping down into the globe without trying to picture the deep, mysterious bottom upon which it rests; and of the mountains as spiring up into the everlasting blue without attempting to delineate that utmost finial of rock

where the nether firmament passes into the upper. And so of this great mountainous sorrow, for which our hearts, even more than our streets and churches, are craped: we want to lay no profane hands upon its vastness, nor to make the event small by trying to make it near and intelligible.

An event, so vast that under the shadow of it the whole civilized and Christianized world to-day stands tearful and devout, is one whose truest meaning it lies beyond the scope of our ken either to detect or suspect. It lies deeply locked in the counsels of God. We do not understand it. "God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain." "WILL make it plain." Not now, but then and there. And so we are content to leave it unexplained, inscrutable. We yield ourselves to the mystery of it, to be softened and chastened by it.

And yet the chastening, in order to be chastening, must lie along side of the thought of the divineness of this strange tragedy. A human and bad element there was in it certainly. But to have a holy discipline wrought in us by it, we shall have to recognize with [exactly the same distinctness a divine and righteous element. We have got to feel that in it *God teaches us*, and stand face to face with Him in the transaction. If it is explained as the pure outcome of impersonal historic forces, it fails to touch that spot in us when we cherish the sanctities.

Equally so if we treat it only as the fruitage of Guiteau's crazed brain or depraved heart. This is for us an infamous tragedy because man was in it, but a holy tragedy because God was in it. And our hearts cannot be sufficiently grateful that it is in this latter character, more than in the former, that men are feeling it and contemplating it, now in just these plaintive days through which we are moving; that the sense that God's hand was in the act has sweetened our hearts from all the bitterness incident to the remembrance that Guiteau's hand was in it. And if, when the turf has begun to grow green over the dust of the dear and honored dead, if then with seriousness, but without show of malignity or of spite, and by quiet process of law, wisely applied and soberly executed, the criminal shall suffer what he shall then be adjudged to deserve, it will be the consummating touch put to a picture which in point of grandeur and moral sublimity is unmatched in the history of this or of any people. And so we have brought this matter in our hearts and in our discourse into the House of God this morning, for the reason that God is in the event and we want to find and feel Him there.

Such a visitation as this, as we have seen, is the means by which God works in men tenderness of heart, and so opens the way for the cleansing and strengthen-

ing of character, individual and national. The months that have elapsed since the 2d of July have been long ones and tender. They have been strange months. They have worked strangely. I do not know how to explain the temper of mind that prevails to-day, here, elsewhere. I looked that waiting Monday afternoon upon the cottage at Elberon without understanding why I was unmanned by it. I have read the sad story from day to day, gathering as it has each morning a new burden of pathos, without understanding the unbidden tears. And it is so everywhere. Men are full of heart: their thoughts work quietly and deeply. I do not think there have been any two months in history that quite parallel them. Feelings have greatly fluctuated; and so our spirits have been strangely limbered, mellowed by them. We have become less and less embittered, but more and more burdened and stricken. Each new aspect of the case seems only to have been shaped in a way to let the blade down a little farther into the quick: no feature but what has given a little added tension to the strained cords of our sympathy. For almost three months God has been steadily holding us all against the grinding-stone of a grave and anxious uncertainty. Mr. Garfield and his wife and children have somehow slipped, each of them, into a dear sort of membership in our own families. The sick-bed has been set up in each house-

hold. We have also watched with him. In his affliction we have been afflicted. Our spirits have stood under his, trying to buoy it up. These months have in this way wrought in us a tenderness that only the eloquence of an event could have availed to do.

And now, friends, this singular mellowness of mind into which the tearful persuasiveness of the weeks has been gently leading us is capacity for all kinds of beautiful outgrowth. When, to-morrow afternoon, the world turns back once more from the newly-made grave in Lakeview the critical question will be, What will the world do with its sorrow? What is going to become of its sorrow? Nothing dries sooner than a tear. Of course, the sorrow cannot remain sorrow. It is not in the nature of things. The heart could not bear it. Even nature is wise enough to dress in green its crumbling tenements of vegetable and stone. The decaying trunk converts itself into moss, and so frames life out of death and beauty out of despair. And decayed hopes ought certainly to do as much. The sorrow cannot remain sorrow, but it can pass over into shapes that shall be fixed, and crystallize into jewels of high resolve and firm loyalty that shall be a permanent possession and a perpetual joy. And the vast possibilities of our sorrow are evidenced by certain practical results that the sorrow has already yielded. For our encouragement I want to notice two or three of these.

These last years have been a season in which irreligion and unfaith have been displaying themselves with rather more than usual resoluteness and bravado. Christian scholarship has taxed itself to the utmost to dislodge this unfaith. You have seen, perhaps, what is sometimes called a cloud-banner: a little penon of mist that in certain conditions of the atmosphere will gather above a mountain summit, and cling there in the face of the boldest attempts of the sun to dissolve it or of the winds to dislodge it. It will not be brushed away. Shadowy and almost impalpable it maintains itself on its bleak watch-tower with a pertinacity at once grim and defiant. But bye and bye, subtle and invisible influences begin to pervade the sky: the wind shifts perhaps, or the temper of the air is in some silent and stealthy way modified; and now the shapes of floating vapor soften their edges, their borders are combed out into a fleecy fringe, the cloud-banner is noiselessly furled, and the bare mountain peak stands out under the sunshine and the blue. That is the very sublimity of gentleness. And it is in that way that God works, and has been working all about among us during these disciplinary months. He has not met skepticism with theism, as we do in our arguing; but the climate that was in men, and that by its very nature condensed into unfaith and unreligion, He gently displaced by another climate, in which unfaith

just as easily dissolved. And so by the breath of His spirit and the baptism of an event, He has accomplished by a persuasion aimed at the heart what Christian scholars have not availed to do with their noisier logic addressed to the head. "Man's necessity has been God's opportunity."

And so in the hour of their sad exigency, at the bidding of the Government, at the instigation of the press, secular as well as religious, but most of all at the impulse of a holy and devout longing for God's deliverance, men slipped into the churches—even those to whom the church was an unwonted place—or in a still and unostentatious way cried "O God!" in the solitary sanctuary of their own spirits. And that is what the boasted atheism of the Nineteenth century does! Cries up to God that He would save the sick man by the sea! There is gladness enough in that fact, of a nation bowed in prayer before our Christian God, almost to turn our Requiem into a Te Deum, and to make of our churches temples of thanksgiving, even though sable with the trappings of our woe.

Nor (most significant of all) has God's refusal to answer the nation according to the specific form of its request chilled by one degree the religious fervor with which the request was presented. If we can accord any confidence to the countenances that men are wearing, to the words they are speaking, to the thoughts to

which they are giving expression through the medium of the press, home and foreign, the bitter cup has only chastened men into profounder devoutness, and, so far from embittering them toward God and belief in God, has only strengthened the texture of their faith and drawn them yet further beneath the shadow of the divine wing. As it seems to me, it was one of the most thrilling passages in the whole dramatic story, that holy hush in the thronged streets of Washington, as the funeral cortege was moving toward the Capitol, when the marine band began slowly to play, "Nearer, my God, to Thee!" And we shall turn away from the grave to-morrow, reflecting how blessed and profound is even the unconscious Christianity of the American people.

And then there are other results that have been already wrought that only show how the sweetest of flowers may unfold from the bitterest of buds. It has been an immensely *nationalizing* event. Around Mr. Garfield's bedside, and now around his grave, is no North, no South, no East, no West. Not since the war, and not since a long time before the war, have all the sections of our country come so distinctly under the pressure of one heart-beat. All the life-currents of our people, *just now*, are driven by a single pulse. We have prayed for him *as a nation*, we have watched with him *as a nation*, we are weeping over him *as a*

nation, and now that he has passed yonder he shines with purest light among the stars of our *national* firmament. In this way cords of national sympathy and fellowship have been struck that had almost forgotten to vibrate. We have learned that the music is *not* all out of the strings, and have discovered, it must seem, that if we are all to become thoroughly, permanently and nationally one again it must be not along the avenue of our *lower* but along the avenue of our *best* impulses, tuned as now to a key-note high and grand enough to stir the best music that slumbers in every several heart of the nation.

And we have gotten a little closer to one another in a religious way, also, in these days of tender supplication and cross-bearing. There has been no sect in our prayers. We all came before the throne of mercy with only the thought of him we were praying for and Him we were praying to. For the time that was all there was in our religion. In these two facts we all touched one another. We all became in an unusual way members of one another. "To pray together" (so some one has said) "is the most touching ^{of} ~~pat~~ternity of hope and sympathy which man can contract on earth." We have felt, kneeling together around our national altar, that there are lines along which even Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile draw into coalition with one another. We have been reminded that cathedral, syna-

gogue and church all build down into the same soil, and all spin up into the same heaven.

The continents, too, have been made nearer. The bells on both sides of the Atlantic are tolling one requiem to-day, and the American and the English heart are drawing near to God in one prayer and one psalm. We lament sometimes the slow extension of the Kingdom of Christ, but when we contemplate the relations subsisting between nations, *as a matter of course*, in the old savage centuries, we are made to realize something of the achievements of the Gospel of Peace, that the subjects of one realm can with cordial tears supplicate the Throne of Grace in behalf of another realm, foreign to it, and rival with it.

And then this stress of mind, too, has been working within us deep and holy contempt for all kinds of political impurity. These months have been to us, in our political relations and ambitions, months of schooling. The country had been staggering under the burden of an army of office-seekers, scrambling for preferment. The shot fired in the depot at Washington was God's voice calling the nation to order. It was recognized as such, recognized abroad and recognized at home. Business has gone on as usual since the 2d of July, but there has been very little politics. The people are not in a mood to bear it. The people have had a revelation: they have heard a voice. We

have learned to recognize that the 2d of July was the legitimate outcome of what was just as actually existent before the 2d of July, only without having come yet to its final and loathsome demonstration. We have only been eating the fruit. It is bitter, and in that fruit we have learned to understand the essential quality of the tree. There are some things that do not advertise their essential badness till they have come to their growth. Guiteau is simply the naked, filthy incarnation of political place-seeking. His case simply publishes the possibilities of evil that lurk in every man that has a mind to make country servant to his private interest. The air has been cleared. Eyes have been opened. We see in Guiteau the untinselled deformity of this whole breed of political cormorants. In him the fact has been shown to us without its disguises, and the fact has been burned into the heart of the American people by eighty days of waiting and weeping. "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood." The precious blood has been shed, may it be applied by us to the end that we may be cleansed.

And may this tenderness of the general heart go on issuing—as it has already begun to do—go on issuing in completer consecration to country and to God, prompting us to regard our civil obligations in the light of Christian duties, to controvert every kind of political evil with Christian bravery and resoluteness,

to range ourselves with Christian alacrity on the side of every force that makes for national righteousness, to carry the interests of our country in tender and devout hearts; especially to accord our hearty fellowship and to yield our warmest sympathies to our new Executive in the position of delicacy and difficulty in which he now finds himself placed—these months have disciplined him just as they have disciplined us all—and to prayerfully expect from him great and good things, and to stand by him cordially in every effort of his to administer this country justly and in the fear of God. Above all, to hold ourselves in the mighty hand of God; to recognize that above the catastrophies of life and empire God abides in the quietness and strength of His unfaltering purpose of wisdom and of grace, that clouds may darken the earth but throw no shadow against the sky, and that enthroned above earthly vicissitudes and human administrations, “**THE LORD REIGNETH.**” Standing in imagination at the grave of the nation’s dead, may we come more deeply than ever into the intimacies of God, and even while drinking the bitter cup have power and grace given unto us to say: “The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.”

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