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A

SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE U. STATES,

DELIVERED IN THE

CEDAR ST. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON SABBATH, APRIL 11TH, 1841.

FROM JEREMIAH 9: 21.

BY REV. WILLIAM RAMSEY.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Philadelphia:

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.

1841.





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A SERMON.

“For death—is entered into our Palaces.”—JEREMIAH 9: 21.

THE sudden and unexpected death of the Chief Magistrate of these United States, has cast a mantle of gloom over the whole nation. But God hath done it, and it therefore becomes us to bow in meek submission to His righteous will ; for the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. This afflictive dispensation of Divine Providence has come upon us, when we least expected it. God grant that the peculiarity of the means, by which He has chosen to chastise us as a nation, may lead us to deep repentance for our national sins ; to amendment of life ; and a more explicit acknowledgment of our dependence upon Him for the future.

The great political struggle of this nation had just passed over. And the man of the people's choice, respected for his grey hairs, and for what adorns the gentleman, the husband and the father ; honored for his heroic valor on the field of battle, and his unwavering republicanism in the day of his country's distress ; revered for his stern integrity, and manly adherence to the principles of the constitution of our government, and who had been raised to the highest office in the gift of a free and noble people ; having taken the helm of government into his hands, and in an acknowledged dependence upon the God of heaven for wisdom, had entered upon the arduous duty of guiding the affairs of this increasingly great and prosperous nation.

Thousands of his fellow-citizens had just listened with profound attention, and joyous hearts, while he marked out before them the pathway of constitutional republicanism in which he purposed to tread, and solemnly avowed the manner in which he intended, through divine aid, to fulfil the high and responsible duties of his office.

Expectations were raised high, that under his administration our country would be greatly advanced in her temporal prosperity. Joy was spread throughout the land. And all were constrained to say that

if the principles thus avowed shall be maintained, the nation has naught to fear from this source. His administration will be one of peace to this nation, and of good will to others. The Hero will then be permitted to return, with additional honors, to his peaceful home—end his days in the quietness of domestic life—die in the bosom of his family; and, like the Father of our country, leave a grateful people to testify, that from boyhood to grey hairs, he had been a friend of liberty, and constitutional republicanism, and a devoted servant of his country.

Fame's loud trumpet sounded in all our borders the joyful news, as contained in his first, and last message, that he had actually entered upon the duties of his office, as President of the United States. Men met their fellow men, and exchanged congratulations in prospect of a brighter era in the history of the American nation. The smile of joy had not yet left the cheek, nor had the sound of congratulation died upon the ear, when, lo! a messenger clad in the habiliments of mourning, arrives in haste to announce the afflictive news that

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

The President of the United States of America, is Dead!*

Consternation seizes the minds of all. The nation is dumb. Justice in her halls of legislation drops, in a moment, her poised scales, to shed the tear of sorrow over the condition of an afflicted people, and to weep that the mighty have fallen. Industry, in her shops, and in her fields, lays down her implements of labor, to mourn that a cloud has overcast her sky. Religion, too, in her ecclesiastical councils, in the sanctuary, in the family, and in the closet, bows the knee to the King of kings, to acknowledge the sins of the people, which have brought down upon them his displeasure, and to pray that the judgments of his hand may be stayed.

“A voice of wailing is heard out of Zion.—How are we spoiled! We are greatly confounded.” Like Israel of old, we, as a people, have sinned against the Lord. We have not been valiant for the truth upon the earth. We have proceeded from evil to evil. Through deceit we have refused to acknowledge God. We have forsaken the law of the Lord, and have not obeyed his voice; but have walked after the imagination of our own hearts. “Shall I not visit them for these things?”

* His death occurred on Sunday morning, April 4th, 1841—just a month after his inauguration.

saith the Lord: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Therefore it is that the badges of mourning have come up into our windows, and death is entered into our palaces.

In the chapter from which the text is taken, the prophet Jeremiah laments, in the most pathetic language, the terrible judgments which were about to come upon his nation. As God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men without a cause; he specifies some of the sins of which they were nationally guilty, and in consequence of which they had incurred the divine displeasure. In this catalogue of crimes he affirms that adultery and treachery abounded; that public confidence was gone; that neighbours were suspicious one of another; that brother would supplant brother; that they had taught their tongues to speak lies, and wearied themselves to commit iniquity. He predicts that Judea shall be utterly wasted; and that the inhabitants shall be carried captives into heathen countries, and the land become a desolation. In allusion to an ancient custom, which is still observed in the East, he calls for a band of mourning women to lament over Jerusalem. The funeral dirge of the nation's happiness and peace, which was sung on the occasion, and of which our text forms a part, is expressed in language peculiarly pathetic. "A voice of wailing is heard out of Zion. How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded. For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces." The Prophet then makes known to them, that, as God is the fountain of all good, and man merely the instrument in his hand, by which a portion of that good is distributed on the earth, it is, therefore, highly improper for men to glory in their wisdom, might, or riches, which can come alone from Him. Thus saith the Lord, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches." For riches cannot deliver a man from the shaft of death; individual or national strength cannot withstand the purposes of God; nor can our wisdom, which is foolishness in his sight, shield us against the inflictions of his judgments, when he visits a people for their transgressions. But, if men will glory, let them glory in this, that they understand and know the Lord; and that it is he who exerciseth loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth.—The chapter then concludes with a declaration, that when the judgments of God shall come upon the land, they will fall not only upon the circumcised, but also upon the uncircumcised; that is, not only

upon the Jewish people, who were in covenant with God, but, upon those also who were connected with them. It has always been so. When the judgments of God fall upon a people, the innocent suffer with the guilty, and the righteous share, in some degree, in the calamities which the iniquities of the people have brought upon themselves,

It is not my intention in this discourse to dwell upon the history of the honoured dead ; nor, is this the place. There are many, I doubt not, who, from their intimate acquaintance with the political affairs of our country for the last fifty years—from their personal knowledge of the worth and excellence of our departed President, in the domestic, social, and public walks of life, as well as his undaunted heroism on the field of battle, in the day of our national struggle against oppression, when men's souls were tried, are thus better qualified than I am, to render to his memory that tribute of praise which he, as an instrument in the hand of God, deserves from us. To them I leave the performance of this duty, and feel confident that it will be well done.

But, while we make this acknowledgment, we are not willing to grant that we are behind any others in our zeal to express our sincere sympathy for the bereaved family of the deceased, or our heart-felt interest in the welfare of this nation, which has been so suddenly, and so mysteriously deprived of its chief ruler. God looks not at the external badges of mourning that we may assume on this occasion. He looks at the heart. If the heart of this congregation and of this nation be not humbled under the chastening hand of God, the sorrowful expressions of our lips will be of no avail. Our halls of Justice may be hung in black ; our churches may be clad in mourning ; the banners of our associations may move in solemn procession ; the American Eagle, perched upon the crape-wreathed staff of our national flag, as it waves in mournful attire, may droop in token of sadness of heart ; the mountains, the hills, and the vales ; the cities, the hamlets, and the habitations of the wilderness may unite in one general note of lamentation ; but, unless the hand of God be acknowledged in this afflictive dispensation of his Providence, our mourning will be vain, and our lamentations will only be a prelude to other sorrows, which God will bring upon those who bow not under his chastisements, and acknowledge not the operations of his hand.

God has a controversy with this nation, and he would teach us this, by what he has done, and is doing. It, therefore, becomes us, like

Ninevah of old, to put on not only the badges of mourning, but, to rend the heart; to acknowledge our transgressions, and to return to the Lord. "For who can tell if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not."

My object is briefly to turn your attention to the moral history of our nation. And while we contrast the present with the past, we shall, no doubt, see some of the reasons why God is chastening us; and what it becomes us, as a nation, and as Christians, to do. May God give us grace to look at this whole subject in the light of divine truth, and to act, as it becomes us, in the fear of God.

In looking back upon the history of this country, we find that there were numerous settlements of European emigrants in different parts of it, before the arrival of the Puritans in New England. And, although religion was established by them in their respective colonies, yet the influence, which wrought for us our civil and religious liberty as a people, emanated from the little colony, consisting of nineteen families, that landed upon Plymouth Rock, Dec. 22d, 1620. They had fled from the influence of kingly and priestly power in the Old World, and had determined, by the grace of God, to seek, in the unexplored regions of the New, an asylum from oppression, where, as they said, "they might enjoy a purer worship, and greater liberty of conscience." It was with such feelings as these, that the seeds of Religion and Liberty were planted in this happy soil. They were watered by the tears and the prayers of God's people. And they have sprung up, under the fostering care of our Heavenly Father, as two majestic trees, whose branches gracefully intertwine; whose shade is a shelter from the blighting rays of the sun of Despotism; and whose fruit has been, and is for the temporal and spiritual prosperity of the nation.

The principles of civil and religious liberty, which characterized so strongly the colonies of the Pilgrim Fathers, and which they had drawn directly from the word of God, spread themselves far and wide among the inhabitants of the land. They grew stronger by their use, and became endeared to the hearts of all by their purity and their truth. The time, however, drew near, when the soundness and stability of these principles were to be tested. The men who had escaped from the mandate of kings, and had braved the dangers of the deep, and the terrors of the howling waste, were to be called upon to prove, by their acts, that their souls were sincere in the declarations which their lips

had made. The contest came. The struggle was severe. Truth and righteousness triumphed. America was FREE.

In the bond of union which united these free States together, the principles of civil and religious liberty, first promulged by our Pilgrim Fathers, and which had triumphed over all opposition from selfishness and oppression, held the most conspicuous place. Delaware first, and Pennsylvania next; and, subsequently, all the States ratified the Constitution, as prepared by the Convention and recommended by Congress. And although our territory has extended her borders, and new States have been added to the original thirteen, yet there is not one of them, save the State of Louisiana, which in her constitution does not guarantee to every man the right of worshipping his God without molestation, according to the dictates of his own conscience. Louisiana had no part in that conflict for truth; but was purchased in 1803 from the French, for the stipulated sum of sixty millions of francs. The majority of the citizens were then of the Roman Catholic faith; and they, either unwittingly or designedly, left out of her constitution this fundamental article of the political faith of this Protestant nation.

Notwithstanding this exception, this nation stands forth before the world, in the glorious attitude of having her constitution, not only based upon, but, in these respects, in accordance with the word of God. We are then, in our national capacity, a Religious nation. Our laws are based upon the Bible; and the Old and New Testaments are acknowledged, in every Court of Justice, as of Divine authority, and of binding obligation upon the conscience of every man. This is the view of the subject as entertained by the framers of our National Constitution, and also by the framers of all our State Constitutions, with only the exception of the one already named.

It would be needless here to enumerate the private opinions of those who have borne the highest offices in the land from that day to this, in reference to the importance of vital godliness in a nation. Their united testimony is, that it is essential to the well being of any people. But, I cannot forbear to repeat to you a portion of the Farewell Address of Washington to this nation, touching this point. He thus remarks:

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, *Religion* and *Morality* are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labour to subvert

these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with public and private felicity. Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for *life*, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education, or morals of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles.*

“It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who, that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundations of the fabric.—Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human nature. Alas! it is rendered impossible by its vices.”

Such was the published opinion of him, whom we are proud to call the “Father of our Country.” Nor was his private conduct at variance with these declarations. He was a man who feared God, and endeavored to walk humbly before Him. He was a man of prayer.**

These were not the sentiments of Washington alone, but of the Congress also in that day, as is very manifest from the resolution they passed Sept. 10th, 1782, in which they approve of an edition of

* The anecdote related concerning Washington and the Friend is, no doubt, true. While Washington and the American army were encamped at Valley Forge, an aged Friend had often expressed his doubts as to the possibility of a soldier being a Christian. As he was walking one day through a wood, a short distance from the encampment, he discovered Washington, on his knees, engaged in prayer to God for his blessing to rest upon the nation, and to bring them safely through all their trials. His doubts were all gone. He could then believe that a man may fear God, and yet defend his country against the invasion of others. He had, perhaps, never heard of Colonel Gardner, who died in Europe about the year 1725.

the Bible published by Mr. Robert Aitken, and recommend it to the inhabitants of the United States.* It is also stated that each member of Congress was furnished with a copy of the sacred Scriptures, which lay upon the desk before him. There were then two chaplains to Congress, and daily prayer was offered up to God in their legislative Halls, for wisdom to guide them in their deliberations, and for the blessing of God to rest upon the country. The Sabbaths of the Lord were then observed. "Respect for the authority of government, compliance with its laws, and acquiescence in its measures, those fundamental maxims of true liberty," were enjoined as duties upon the people, and they were observed in a great degree. In the memorable Convention which formed the Constitution of the United States, when its members, arrayed against each other on a question deemed vitally important, and were involved in difficulties apparently inextricable, Franklin perceived their error, and at the same time the remedy. He proposed that the business of the house should be suspended, for the purpose of looking up to God by prayer, for that wisdom which they needed to bring them out of their present perplexities. Prayer was offered, and answered too: and the business of the house then went on without confusion.

The men of that day felt that there is a God, who rules in the affairs of the nation, and they were not ashamed to acknowledge it,

* The facts in this case are these:—Mr. Robert Aitken, an enterprising Printer in this city, undertook, at his own expense, to publish an edition of the Bible during the Revolutionary War. Fearing that he might become bankrupt in consequence of the great expence of the work, he applied to Congress for assistance. Mr. Aitken's memorial to Congress was presented, and a committee, of which Mr. Duane was chairman, was appointed to report on the same. The committee consulted the chaplains of Congress, viz. the Rev. Dr. (subsequently Bishop) White, and the Rev. George Duffield, D. D., as to the correctness of the edition. Their opinion being commendatory, the committee accordingly reported in favor of Mr. Aitken's memorial. Whereupon it was "Resolved, That the United States, in Congress assembled, highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interests of religion, as well as an instance of the *progress of the arts in this country*, and being satisfied from the above report, of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorize him to publish this Recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.

CHARLES THOMPSON, Secretary."

or their dependence upon him. But those giant minds and grace-touched spirits rest from their labors on earth. Their mantle has fallen as they ascended to God; but, alas! who of their children have found it? May God raise up in our land, other Elijahs who shall possess the spirit of those who have gone up from us, and who shall, by their holy example, as well as righteous precepts, lead this nation forward in the paths of righteousness and peace.

It would seem that a portion, at least, of that spirit had fallen upon our late chief magistrate. In his inaugural address, he thus speaks:—“I deem the present occasion sufficiently important and solemn to justify me in expressing to my fellow-citizens, a profound reverence for the Christian religion, and a thorough conviction that sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility, are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness. And to that good Being who has blessed us by the gifts of civil and religious freedom, who watched over and prospered the labors of our fathers, and has hitherto preserved to us institutions far exceeding in excellence those of any other people, let us fervently unite in commending every interest of our beloved country in all future time.”

That these sentiments were the honest expressions of a heart that felt them, we are left without any doubt. More than one minister testifies that he fully intended to unite himself with the Episcopal Church in Washington City, at their next communion season. A member of his own family testifies that for many months previous to his death, he never omitted reading the Scriptures every night before retiring to rest. And while lying upon his dying bed, he deeply regretted that he had not connected himself with the church of Christ as a communicant.—We can only add, we regret it also. It would seem that he had postponed this duty till after his election, lest many should take occasion from it to say that his public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, was designed for political purposes. Some might have said so. But our rulers should learn to regard the commands of God more than the opinions of men. May others be admonished by this.

Now, while a sense of religious obligation may have been acknowledged by all our chief magistrates, and in the councils of the nation, what, alas! has been the practice of the great mass of the rulers of this nation? What comment do we write upon the test of our faith? It is written as with a sunbeam. All may read it. Yea, all who do

read it, must be compelled to acknowledge that our *national faith* in the matters of religion, and our *national practice*, are perfect antipodes, the one to the other.

Oaths of allegiance, in our halls of legislation, and in our Senate chambers, are taken to support the constitution of our country, whose pillars, says Washington, are *Religion and Morality*. And yet how few are to be found of those who have been, and are now set for the defence of our liberties, who do not violate their allegiance to God, by profaning his most holy name? We can truly say with Jeremiah, "because of *swearing* the land mourneth; wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness; they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil on them, saith the Lord."

"In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism," adds Washington, "who would labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness." If this be so, what then must we think of the high sounding pretensions of many in our day, to this noble virtue? Their patriotism is but a name; their Christianity but a lie. Who can doubt for a moment, that our national regard for religion and morality, has not degenerated in an awful degree? Like Israel, as we have increased, so have we sinned against God, and our glory he will turn into shame. If it be not so, then tell me, what means the effort that was made in Congress a year ago, to dispense with the wholesome, though old fashioned practice, of appointing a chaplain to Congress, to pray that God might make our rulers and counsellors a blessing to the nation, and to impart to them wisdom in their deliberations? Was there no need of *one*, when in the days of Washington there were *two*? What means the effort made in New York State, to discard the use of the Bible from all the public schools in the State? What means the Infidel petition to the Legislature of this State, to abolish the Sabbath of the Lord? What means this open violation of the Sabbath, by the angry debates of maddened wine heated politicians in the councils of the nation? What means this daring wickedness of men, in legislating away the law of God, by giving the sanction of law, by chartering companies to break the Sabbath, seeing that the Lord uttered amidst the thunders of Sinai his command, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy?" What means the national violation of our covenants made with the red man of the forest, and our forcing them from the graves of their fathers, because we were mightier than they?

What means this crushing down of three millions of immortal beings from the dignity of man, made in the image of God, to the level of a beast—to a mere chattel—a thing of merchandize and of speculation? What means this system of *outlawry* that stalks abroad in our land, that by violence and threats, sets at open defiance the laws of God and of man? What means the wailing, and the cries that ascend from yonder dwelling, to the God of the widow and of the fatherless, from the wife and children of the *murdered Cilley*? What means the voice of blood which cries to God for vengeance, from the Senate chamber of this nation? Well may we ask, what do these things mean? Ah! they mean that we as a nation, have departed from God. We have not been valiant for the truth.—And how far the words of the prophet against the people of Judea are applicable to us, I leave you to judge. “They proceed from evil to evil, and acknowledge not me, saith the Lord; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. Therefore, saith the Lord, shall I not visit them for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?”

It is a fixed principle in the government of God, that nations which sin shall be punished, as such, in this world. As this is the case, we can easily understand now that “the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.—By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish.”

God’s judgments are abroad in the land, and it therefore becomes the people to learn righteousness. You may see the chastening hand of God, in the long and broad line of blood that girds the southern borders of our country. See it in the devouring fires that have gone through the land; in the desolating floods; in the insurrectionary spirit that exists in some parts of our land; and in the perfect contempt for righteousness, law, and order, throughout the whole of it: in the complete prostration of national credit; in the want of confidence between man and man; in the distress that exists in the nation with perplexity; in men’s hearts’ failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. See it also in the shaking of the powers that be in this nation,

for God has brought to naught the wisdom of the wise, and the counsel of the prudent.

Every man, in this assembly, is fully aware of the great political conflict that has agitated this nation for years past. That contest was over for a season. But how has God disposed of it? He has disappointed the whole nation. He has removed the chief ruler of the people, and has raised up over them a man, who, however good he may be, and however well qualified for the office he now fills, was not raised by the people to the station he now occupies. God has put him there, at the head of this nation, and he designs it for weal or for woe. What a change in the affairs of this nation, in the space of one short month! Has the present Chief Magistrate a lease of his life from God? Should he, too, be removed from us, with our volcanic feeling within, and the muttering sounds of threatened or dreaded war without, what may not another year bring forth? The hand of God is upon us. Oh! that he may bestow upon us grace, to repent of our individual and national sins, so that we may not fall under his avenging hand.

We have sinned grievously as a nation, and God has laid upon us his afflictive rod, so that in church and in state, we feel that he is chastening us. Still I trust that our case is not beyond the reach of hope, or of mercy from God. The universal acknowledgment of the nation, that the hand of God has afflicted them; the merging of all party feeling in the general spirit of sorrow that prevails; the breaking down of every political barrier that may have separated man from his fellow man; and their uniting their hearts, in the sanctuary, and in the convocation to acknowledge their affliction; to supplicate the favor of God, and to deprecate his wrath; give signs of hope, that the conscience of this nation has yet a voice to speak, and that the people have a heart to respond to its solemn warnings.

Oh! that this death, so sudden, so mysterious, and so anomalous in the dealings of God with this nation, may not pass by unimproved.— We are taught by it, how vain is popular applause; how sinful is political strife, and how unbecoming are local jealousies, in this united people. God would teach us “to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,” and lead us to place our dependence alone on him. “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled; and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.” In

our covetousness, and pride, and adoration of men, and dependence upon measures, we have forgotten God. It is well, if this affliction bring us to our sober reason, so that we may understand that "cursed is the man (or people,) that trusteth in man, or maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord."

May our rulers be brought to fear God, who casteth down and raiseth up whom he will, and to make their peace with Him, before it be too late. "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

And may the Church remember that when the judgments of God fall upon a land, the righteous and the wicked share them together.— Let us, then, pray earnestly to God, that our officers may be Peace, and our exactors Righteousness, so that God may stay the judgments of his hand, and bless us with his grace. Then shall "righteousness go before us, and the glory of the Lord shall be our reward."

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