

A SERMON,

IN MEMORY OF THE DEATH OF

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

THE LATE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

BY THE

REV. JOSHUA L. WILSON, D. D.

II

DELIVERED, MAY 14, 1841.

BEING THE DAY RECOMMENDED BY THE PRESIDENT TO BE SPENT IN  
FASTING, PRAYER AND OTHER RELIGIOUS EXERCISES.

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Cincinnati :

PRINTED AT THE REPUBLICAN OFFICE,

BY E. GRAHAM.

1841.



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Prepared, delivered and published at the request of the  
Session of the First Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, Ohio;  
and respectfully inscribed to the bereaved Family and  
Friends of General HARRISON.

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## SERMON.

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"There is a time to mourn."—Eecl. iii. 4.

To those who know that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," it may be a matter of some surprise to find it gravely recorded that "there is a time to mourn."—Might they not ask, "when can time be found for mirth, in this world of sin and death?" Yet they are told with equal gravity, "there is a time to rejoice." God hath graciously preserved man as a prisoner of hope and sent his only begotten Son "to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound—to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God." The proclamation of liberty makes a time of joy—but the day of vengeance makes a time of grief.

The truth of our text is applicable to individuals, to families, to nations. Its application to nations, particularly to our own nation, we are this day called to consider. No nation, under heaven, since Israel was led from the house of bondage, has ever been more favored of God than these United States. The delivery of the thirteen confederated Colonies, from the usurpation of Great Britain, was almost as miraculous as the Exodus of the twelve tribes from Egypt. Many seasons, of great rejoicing, have been afforded to us under the star-spangled banner, adorned with this significant motto, "E Pluribus Unum." Among the peculiar favors conferred on us, as a nation, is that of the remarkable preservation of the lives and usefulness of the leading patriots of

American freedom. The members of the old Congress, who signed the Declaration of Independence, who appealed to the whole world for the goodness of their cause, and looked to the God of armies for success, were long spared to the nation as guides, shining as stars of the first magnitude in our political firmament, and uniting together by their golden orbits, the several States of this great Confederacy. Some of this patriotic band were advanced to the highest office in the gift of the people, and after wielding the sceptre of the Republic, under the dominion of law, returning to the tranquility of domestic repose, "slept with their fathers in a good old age."

But it has happened to us as to other nations. The bright day of prosperity is closed in by the night of adversity.—For more than half a century—one distinguished man succeeded another, without a moment's vacation of the Chair of State. But now the funeral knell has called us to the house of mourning. Our beloved President Harrison is dead.—And dead, too, when his steady hand seemed fixed on the sceptre of national reform. This sad sound of death—this voice from Washington—is heard from the centre to the circumference of our vast domain. It speaks to all the language of our text—"THERE IS A TIME TO MOURN." In the history of nations there are many practical examples of the duty to which we are now called. I shall mention a few, in which we shall find that a nation is called to mourn.

I. When bereaved of a good and great man.

II. When conscious of sins, which deserve additional rebuke.—

I. A nation is called to mourn when bereaved of a good and great man.

When Moses the servant of Jehovah was called to die, he had been long engaged in public life. His services had been various and of the highest interest to the Israelites. His body and mind were both firm and vigorous, and as far as human sagacity could penetrate, he might have led Israel to the con-

quest of Canaan. Yet contrary to his wish, contrary to the desire of the nation, he is suddenly arrested, by the command of God, and called to die—and that too, at the very time when Israel was about to pass over Jordan. For, “the Lord spake unto Moses—get thee up into Mount Nebo, and die in the Mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people.” How solemn, how unwelcome the summons! No sigh, no prayer could change the mandate!

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the Mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah,” and the Lord shewed him all parts of the Land, and said—“This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying I will give it unto thy seed; I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.”—“So Moses the servant of the Lord died—his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses, in the plains of Moab, thirty days.” Moses had acted as a scourge to Pharaoh, a leader, law-giver, and judge to Israel—and just when apparently entering upon the most delightful and elevated services of public life, in the Land of Promise, he is subjected to the stroke of death. But Joshua the son of Nun, was left, “full of the spirit of wisdom, and the children of Israel hearkened unto him.” While the Israelites wept for Moses, thirty days, how many recollections would crowd upon their attention! They would think of his public services, of his meekness, his frequent interpositions to avert divine vengeance, to mitigate sufferings, to remove evils. And how would their hearts relent and their eyes swim with tears, when they remembered their own ingratitude to God, their murmurings against Moses—the base charges, the unfounded calumnies they had uttered against him—the stones they had lifted up to cast at him—the good counsel they had slighted, and the wickedness they had practised. All this, and more would be so many bitter ingredients in their cup of sorrow. Yet some good to them resulted from this great calamity. It is recorded to their

credit, that when the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended—that “the children of Israel hearkened to Joshua the son of Nun, and did as the Lord commanded Moses.” Happy that people who have wise and faithful rulers, still left when their Moses is called to Pisgah’s top to view the promised land, and die! Take another illustration from Jewish history.

The Prophet Zechariah has compared true repentance for sin, to a nation’s sorrow over a fallen chief. “In that day shall there be a great mourning as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon; and the land shall mourn.” The allusion is made to the national grief at the death of King Josiah. This amiable Monarch came into public life while young—was active and faithful in the reform of the abuses of former administrations—and so managed the interests of both Church and State, as to be greatly beloved by the people.

But in the midst of his usefulness, he was slain in battle by Pharaoh—Neco, King of Egypt, in the valley of Megiddo. “His servants, therefore, took him to Jerusalem, and he was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah—And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations—and made them an ordinance in Israel: and behold they are written in the Lamentations.” And this is a part of what was written, “Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains; they laid wait for us in the wilderness; the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits, of whom we said under his shadow shall we live among the heathen.”

In the New Testament we have an example of mourning, not by a nation, but by the Church of God, over a fallen leader. It is recorded, on the sacred page, for our instruction, that “devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.” These devout christians imi-

tated the conduct of Patriarchs and Prophets. They followed the example of the man after God's own heart; who when a great man had fallen in Israel, "said to all the people, rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth and mourn before Abner. And David himself followed the bier. And the King lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner."

Examples are not wanting in civil history to illustrate this subject. But without detaining you, may I not ask, where has there been a people, ancient or modern, civilized or savage, infidel or Christian, but have had their seasons of mourning for their illustrious dead? And now our time of sorrow has come. For more than thirty years we have enjoyed unusual prosperity. The moralist, Time, has emptied his glass in the chambers of five distinguished Presidents.—They served their generations, and came to their graves, without becoming a nation's lamentation. Not so with our late Chief Magistrate. Just seated in the Presidential Chair, just placing his hand upon the helm of state, and adjusting the sheet anchor of our nation's hope, he is snatched from his station, and cast down to fill a niche in the mansions of the dead! But he has not left us in total darkness. The works began are brilliant, and if God bless, must be successful.

His Inaugural Address, his Christian example, his able Cabinet, and "the spirit of wisdom" displayed by his successor, cheer us in our deepest sorrow, and afford a glorious prospect of successful administration. In his inaugural address, WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON shone forth—not like the glimmering light of a remote star penetrating the darkness of our orb—not like the reflected beams of the pale moon, shed down cold and cheerless, upon a benighted world—but like the luminary of day, walking in brightness, and pouring down his genial light and warmth as the glorious centre of our own system. That document forms a monument of glory more lasting than the pillars of Hercules. Simple, classical, clear, and cogent, it has carried conviction into the ranks of political opponents. The deep and intimate ac-

acquaintance with the true import of the Federal Constitution, with the nature of our domestic and foreign relations, and the real wants and interests of the people, together with the public and unequivocal avowal of profound respect for the Christian religion, render the Inaugural of the 4th of March 1841, one of the most important State papers ever filed in the archives of the Union. And it confirms an opinion long since expressed\*—that “General HARRISON, was a citizen and a soldier, a scholar and a gentleman, a farmer and a statesman—a patriot and the poor man’s friend—worthy to receive, and competent to fill the highest office in the gift of this free people.”

That General HARRISON was pious in former years cannot be affirmed; but that his mind had undergone of late a very important change on the subject of personal religion, was believed by many. This belief was founded upon his manifest regard for good men—his respect and love for the Scriptures of truth—his serious attendance upon an Evangelical Ministry—his respect for the sanctity of the Sabbath, and other facts known in his private history. Of the reality of his personal religion, God alone is judge; while at the same time, in this matter we are not called “to sorrow as they who have no hope.”

Before General HARRISON made any pretensions to personal piety, he was amiable and worthy of confidence. His military and political life have been marked with wisdom, patriotism, probity, prowess, kindness and success. As a citizen, he was plain, affable, condescending, benevolent and hospitable. His house was a home and a sanctuary for the Ministers of the Gospel of Christ.†

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\*About eight months before the Presidential election, in reply to a gentleman, residing in East Tennessee, who had asked the opinion of the author of this sermon, respecting General HARRISON’S qualifications to fill the office of President, for which he was then a Candidate.

†In the last twenty-five years, he has complained to me of three men who professed to be ministers of the gospel—a Methodist, a Presbyterian,

It is for the death of this man—pre-eminent in private and public worth—we mourn. Let us in deep humility bow to the will of God. Nature in the bitterness of unbelief would say, “curse God and die”—but Grace in the exercise of submission and hope exclaims, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

II. A nation is called to mourn when conscious of national sins, which deserve national punishment.

The existence of nations is only recognised in this present world. After death there is a judgment at which every man must give an account of himself to God. And at the great day, when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God—they shall not stand as nations, but in two divisions, the righteous and wicked.

It is in this world that nations sin and are punished.—God’s wrath is revealed from heaven here against a sinful people. True, he suffers long and is kind—but vengeance will not sleep forever. Look at the waters of Noah, the fires of Sodom, the captivity of the ten tribes, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews for eighteen centuries. Behold the overthrow of the greatest monarchies and

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and a New School Abolitionist. Of one, for imprudence in going through all the forms of public worship, and preaching a long and loud sermon when none were in attendance but the General and his servant. Of another, for avarice, in loaning money at ten per cent., when six was the lawful interest! And of the third, for folly, in preaching a whole sermon on the sin of slave-holding, when not a single slave-holder was present—and when the state of the neighborhood, owing to recent calamities, called for a very different discourse. But no man, perhaps, ever manifested a greater respect, than he did, for clergymen who used their sacred office for the good of souls and the glory of the Redeemer—who made the pulpit the place to exhibit the good sense of good men. He said to me once, after hearing two sermons on the Sabbath, “you preach too much to your people. They cannot retain and digest all they hear. Had I heard but one of your sermons today, I should have retained it and been profited, but after hearing both, by attempting to retain all, I have lost all.” Yet when the General became more serious and spiritually minded, he could hear two sermons on the Sabbath with pleasure and advantage.

the ruins of splendid and mighty cities. Where is Nineveh and Babylon, and Old Tyre? Where is the throne of Alexander, the seat of the Cæsars, and the vast dominions of Napoleon? Where are the dynasties of Ancient Egypt, the dukedoms of Edom and the mighty republics of Greece?—And where will be our Republic if we continue to sin against God?—If we *continue* to sin—for it cannot be disguised that we have already sinned—that we have already suffered. But if this be the rebuke, what will be the vengeance? If God spared not the gold, the silver, the brass and the iron of mighty kingdoms—if he spared not Israel and Judah—“take heed lest he also spare not thee.” God’s dealings with a favored but sinful nation are set forth in a Jewish melody.

“My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very pleasant hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine; and built a tower in the midst of it, and made a wine-press therein, and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What next shall I do? Go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste, it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it—For I looked for judgment, and behold oppression for righteousness, and behold a cry.”

If I may be allowed to mention some of the national sins of these United States—I must name the offences of Sabbath breaking, oppression, pride, self-confidence and political contest, for the power of party. Alas! we are a nation of Sabbath breakers. The Sabbath was made for man: made to be kept holy as a day of sacred rest. By the example of him who is Lord of the Sabbath, it is lawful, on that day, to do works of necessity and mercy. Further than this no man, no family, no nation has a right to go, in worldly employ-

ments. But have we stopped here? Is not the day desecrated by the sanction and order of the General Government, so that even the sovereignty of the States cannot interfere, to preserve their own citizens from its profanation. The business part of community, both in and out of the Church, follow the example of the General Government, and invest their funds in Sabbath breaking corporations, and transport their goods continually in lines of conveyance that perpetually trample upon holy time. "Six days thou shalt labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt do no servile labor."

This law was given to man before the fall. It was devoutly obeyed by Patriarchs and Prophets—sanctioned by Christ and the Apostles, and kept by holy men in all ages. This law was written in the Decalogue by the finger of God, and promulgated at Sinai in the midst of fire. None can disregard this law with impunity. The violation of no precept has been ever followed with more certain and signal marks of divine displeasure. God plucked up his own covenant people for profaning his Sabbaths, and none have ever yet practised in this sin and prospered.

France once decreed the destruction of the Lord's day, but France was drenched in blood, and trodden down by despots. God now commands all men every where to repent, and except we repent, we shall perish.

Alas! We are too a nation of oppressors. The wrongs of Africa testify against us. I admit, that as a Republic we did not plant American slavery in our soil. Unhappily this work of sin and shame was done by foreign power, when we were dependent colonies. But we have given sanction to its duration, and augmented its growth. By our federal compact the slave-trade from Africa was continued on till 1808. And the domestic slave-trade is continued on to the present hour.—We call the slave-trade between the continents piracy, but the slave-trade between the States is denominated lawful traffic! We talk of abolishing the African slave-trade by colonies and

ships of war—but the slave-trade goes on with all its horrors and can never be abolished as long as there is a slave market kept open. Let us pull out the beam before we try to extract the mote. Abolish the slave-markets, and the trade is at an end. We proclaim liberty, by wholesale, with the trumpet of our national jubilee, but the oppressed goes not free. And while our Federal Compact remains what it is, there is no remedy. When a nation is called, in the Providence of God, to mourn and repent, she is called upon to reform. Will this nation now be humble under the mighty hand of God and reform, or will she brave his vengeance? The same power that made our Federal Constitution what it is, can make it better. It is not, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unchangeable. The majority in our government must rule, or we plunge into anarchy or despotism. The majority said the evil should continue, and it continued. The minority bowed to their will. Now, let the majority say, it shall end. Let them say so in a constitutional way, and end it must. The minority must submit. As long as the majority says, slavery shall be, a lawful and binding relation must exist between master and servant, with which no man has a right to meddle, only to propose in a peaceable manner constitutional remedies. But let the majority say slavery shall not be, and this relation is instantly dissolved—the slave is free—the master's authority comes to an end.

That Patriot who shall place himself as a shield between this nation and the righteous judgments of God, by the procuring of an amendment to the Constitution to abolish slavery, will deserve and receive the thanks of good men in this nation, and among every wise and virtuous community, under heaven. How would my heart rejoice to see such a man as the Hon. HENRY CLAY, or Hon. DANIEL WEBSTER, or some other able Statesman, take the lead in this good work, and with his mighty hand push on such a reformation to its full accomplishment!

Did time permit, I might add the wrongs done to the Abo-

rigines of our country—I might dwell upon our national pride, and self-confidence and abuse of credit—but I must call your attention to another sin, which I fear will prove our ruin. I mean our political contests for the power of party. The good of the whole should be the aim of all. It is so professedly; but with profession of patriotism in our mouths, we have actually become a nation of political gladiators. We must expect difference of opinion about men and measures, and we must admit the freedom of discussion—but the rancor of party has become so violent, that our once happy land—our once peaceful halls of legislation,—are stained with blood! But the streams of blood which have gushed from the veins of dying combatants, are nothing to be compared with the destruction of character by false tongues. “A good name is better than precious ointment,” and many a noble spirit has adopted the maxim, “death before dishonor.” But who can stand before envy? Who can politically live under the scourge of the false tongue? For party purposes, the most base and unfounded calumnies have been fabricated, spoken and published against the best of men. And when these have been disproved the hundredth time, the vile slanderer has come afresh to the assault, as though he had never been refuted nor confounded. I speak not of one political party, it is a crying sin of our land, it is a wicked abuse of liberty, and it must lead to utter ruin, except we repent. O, brethren, let us this day humble ourselves before God, and mourn over this sin and forsake it forever. Let us esteem character dearer than life, and as we would that men should do to us, do the same to them.

Before I conclude, I must mention another sin. We have trusted too much in an arm of flesh. We are this day suffering sharp rebuke for placing too much confidence in man. I speak of the majority, for whether right or wrong, they form the nation. They depended too much upon the man of their choice. They expected too much from him. He felt and expressed his need of wisdom and strength from on high—

but we were looking to the creature more than to the Creator. And God has taken him away as a just judgment on us. It is written, "cursed be man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his aim." Let us mourn before God over his sin also, lest a worse evil come upon us—lest God should remove all good men from among us, and leave us an easy prey to our enemies.

Blessed be God, we are not yet left to despair. Our worthy Chief Magistrate was permitted to ascend Nebo, and to stand on the top of Pisgah. Hence he surveyed with expectation the regions and measures of moral and political reform. Having seen them spread before him, like a vast landscape, he took his flight from that lofty summit, to the unseen world. His noble successor is left to carry out his plans, or adopt more salutary measures. And now let us go with our leader in every movement of reform—let none of our host, like Achan, defile himself with the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment. Let us remember, that a nation may mourn and repent for national sins, so as to arrest the judgments of God; and yet citizens may remain impenitent in regard to their own transgressions. Let us humble ourselves personally, as well as nationally, before God. And while we adopt external signs of national sorrow, let it be seen in our lives, that our sorrow is not that of the world that worketh death, but "a godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto salvation, and needeth not to be repented of." May the Lord pour upon us, this day, "the spirit of grace and of supplications," that we may look upon Jesus—whom we have pierced, "and mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son, and be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for a first born."—And when every family shall mourn apart, and every citizen bring forth fruits meet for repentance, then shall the desolating judgments of God be averted, and that righteousness which exalteth a nation, shine forth with unfading lustre.