

A  
S E R M O N  
O N T H E  
D E A T H  
O F  
*LIEUTENANT GENERAL*  
GEORGE WASHINGTON.

DELIVERED IN THE CAPITOL IN RICHMOND,

BY JOHN D. BLAIR,  
CHAPLAIN *to the* HOUSE OF DELEGATES.

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## TO THE PUBLIC.

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The following Sermon was delivered and is published by appointment of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

That it met with any favorable reception, from the pulpit, was doubtless, owing more to the affecting solemnity of the occasion ; to the high sense which the Legislature entertained of the worth of the deceased **GEORGE WASHINGTON**, and to their unfeigned sorrow for his death, than to the merit of the performance itself.

But since they have been pleased to request the publication of it, it is sent to the Press without hesitation.

**JOHN D. BLAIR,**

Chaplain to the House of Delegates.

**Richmond, January 1800.**

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PREACHED *on the DEATH of* LIEUTENANT GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON, *who departed this life, on Saturday, the 14th of December, 1799.*

PSALMS, 12th Chap. 1st. verse:

“ Help, Lord. for the godly man ceaseth ; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.”

IN the familiar course of human events we are apt to be regardless of the hand of God, in the usual operations of nature, and in all the ordinary instances of mortality which are presented before our eyes.

There is no doubt that, upon due consideration, the one of these would be interpreted into clear indications of an over-ruling Providence, and the other improved into impressive and affecting memento's of human frailty. Through the familiarity of both, however, we are sufficiently attentive to neither.

But when the Supreme Ruler of the Universe makes bare his arm by some signal display of his power, his sovereignty, or his displeasure, when he visits a city with some deadly contagion, or removes from amongst us such of our fellow men as were eminently virtuous and useful, who had engrossed our affections, and on whose preservation our interests mate-

rially depended ; when he makes the Godly man to cease, and the faithful man to fail, he rouses by such high dispensations the attention of all his creatures, and causes them to mourn under the afflictive visitations of his rod.

Impressed by such circumstances with a sense of our weakness and dependence, and affected by the occurrence of such sorrowful events, we are brought to perform the duty, and exercise the privilege of nature, by putting ourselves more immediately under the guardian care of Heaven, and flying for succour to the throne of grace. Hence the importunate application of the Psalmist in the words of the text.

Who was the particular subject of his plaintive strains, it is not material that I should now stay to enquire. They are applicable to the case of all good men ; for their lives are more or less important to the peace and prosperity of this world.

On the present occasion we understand their application, alas ! too well. Never did a people meet with so great a loss as that which we deplore. Never was there before so loud a call for earnest supplication to the Father of Mercies. Never had the people of America such cause of funeral grief as that which has brought us together to-day. The Godly man hath ceased, and the faithful hath failed ;—  
The beloved WASHINGTON is no more.

Often do we behold the sorrows of the afflicted parent, the disconsolate widow, or the helpless orphan; but in this sad instance all America is become a house of mourning, and signals of distress appear on every side. The melancholy tidings of his death have deeply afflicted all descriptions of persons. The aged sire, and tender matron bow down the hoary head in pensive sorrow; and the cheek of the ingenious youth is bedewed with tears. In this numerous assembly I see sadness depicted in every countenance.

On this memorable day the whole representatives of the people of his native State, by whose appointment these funeral honours are paid, appear in the sable badge of mourning in testimony of their grief for the loss of this illustrious, faithful man; and every individual citizen sympathizes in responsive sorrow.

It is no wonder; he was the "Hero of liberty, the father of his country, the first of patriots, and the friend of man."\* Great is the worth of men of piety and virtue to every community; but when these are found to adorn conspicuous & important stations, it is wholly incalculable. The Godly and the faithful man is not only the most respectable in his private character—he is not only an honor to the state that gave him birth, and to the race

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NOTE.

\* Mr. Madisons eulogium in the Assembly.

from which he sprang, but he is the brightest ornament, and the most extensive benefactor to the world at large.

Virtue is not only necessary to the peace and happiness of private life, but it is that alone by which a nation can rise to greatness, or enjoy any lasting prosperity.

This, in a greater or less degree, is true of all nations ; but to those which, like ours, are blessed with free republican forms of government, of which virtue is the leading principle, it is of still the greater usefulness, and the more indispensable necessity. It not only reflects upon them their greatest lustre, but is, in truth, their only sure defence.

When vice and licentiousness, by an injudicious choice, or any unfortunate accident, are advanced to important and influential stations of honors, of profit, or of power, they do not confine themselves within the immediate circle of the court, but they diffuse their baneful influence all around, and gradually pervade and corrupt all parts of the community. Encouraged by the practice, instead of being suppressed by the influence of those who are in authority, they stalk abroad with hardy front, until finally they triumph over the honor, the dignity, the liberties, nay, the very existence of the people. Hence the saying of the wise man in the Proverbs ; “ when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”

In contrast with this, let us view the Godly

and the faithful man, in a like situation, and learn hence to estimate the infinite superiority of his character, and his worth to society.

Walking in the "paths of truth and grace" he is not only himself a most dignified and venerable character, but becomes to others a pattern worthy of all imitation. He exhibits virtue in its native comeliness and purity, and from the eminence of his station he spreads a glory around it. He recommends religion by his example: He restrains vice by his authority. That prevails and rejoices under the patronage of his smiles—this flies from his presence, or shrinks at his approach with all the pusillanimity of conscious guilt. "When the righteous man is exalted the people rejoice." In him virtue is personified as their representative, and to him their interests, as far as this is necessary, are cheerfully entrusted. The amiable excellence of his character acquires their confidence, and his integrity renders the deposit safe.

Surely the death of such a man is justly to be regretted as a great public loss; and with affecting propriety has it been made the subject of the Psalmist's lamentations in the passage before us. Such a man, my Brethren, was the dear friend whom we have lost.

He was well tried: he was thoroughly proved by his country in a long and variegated life. He always held himself ready to obey it's call on any emergency, and he ever discharged his trust with the utmost fidelity. He

entered into it's service in the prime of his life, and he continued in it, with but little intermission, to the day of his death.

In every station which this great man filled—in every sphere of life in which he was appointed to move, I might call upon our fellow citizens from one end of the continent to the other, and with tears of gratitude they would all bear testimony that he invariably exhibited the evidence, and maintained the character of a “ Godly and a faithful man.”

As long as the people of America shall continue blessed with the enjoyment of peace, of liberty and independence, it will not be forgotten that next to a kind and gracious God, who always made this country his care, they are greatly indebted for them, to the manly firmness, the unremitting exertions, and the inviolable fidelity of **GEORGE WASHINGTON** :

Raised up by Divine Providence to defend the liberties and vindicate the rights of his country, he nobly stepped forward in the day of her distress, when oppressed by foreign domination, and bleeding from the wounds inflicted by an invading army ; and against a formidable host, led on her little band of patriots. Then did his mighty soul, which never brooked oppression, exert its energy. A sincere lover of liberty, and “ early accustomed to appreciate its value,” he exchanged the ease of domestic retirement for the field of battle, and fought valiantly for the people and for “ the cities of his God.” Nor from this

did he withdraw until liberty was effectually secured, and its triumphs were proclaimed throughout our happy country.

Through many a wearisome and long campaign, and in all the vicissitudes of war, sometimes prosperous, and often adverse, he was the uniform, the faithful, and the steadfast friend.

In his highest prosperity he entertained no thoughts of ambition; and in the darkest and most gloomy hour, when the hopes of many were beginning to fail, and they were almost ready to give the struggle for liberty up, the steady soul of WASHINGTON, firm and unmoved, animated with the purest patriotism; and fixing his hopes on Heaven, was stable as a rock. He never for a moment deserted the all-important cause, nor suffered himself to despair of success. At every hazard he resolved to defend the interests of his beloved country, or that he would not survive its downfall, but perish rather in the general ruin.

If the united voice of America did not render it unnecessary, there are, I perceive in this assembly not a few who would be ready to attest the justice of the character which I have thus far drawn. There are those here who were with him in the war, almost from the beginning to the end, who were witnesses of his wisdom in the council and his valor in the field—who were trained to arms in his camp, who have often fought by his side, and whom

I see alive this day to the friendship which was contracted in adversity, and cemented by the precious blood of many a fallen and many a surviving patriot. Ask these men—ask all of this description, to a man, who shall be conveyed throughout America, on this mournful occasion, what the deceased WASHINGTON was—whether he was always at his post in the hour of danger—whether he loved his country—whether he was *faithful* to the important trust which she committed to his hands? and read the answer in their eyes.

O! WASHINGTON! now that thou art gone, delicacy to thy feelings no longer forbids strict justice to thy merits. To thy country thou ever wast a “good and faithful servant.”

When the storm of war was over, he took an affectionate leave of his brave companions in arms, resigned his commission into the hands of Congress, and returned to the quiet walks of private life. But there he was not long permitted to enjoy repose. In him were concentrated the valor of the soldier, and the wisdom of the sage; and he was called upon by the unanimous voice of his countrymen, to administer the government which they had ordained, to “preserve domestic tranquility,” and perpetuate the liberty he had contributed so much to acquire. The constitution of the United States was quite a new experiment. It was the result not only of their united wisdom; but of their mutual concessions also,

and the administration of it must of necessity have been an arduous task to which the greatest experience, prudence, and intelligence alone were adequate. It was in our now deceased friend that these qualities were in the highest degree combined, and on his shoulders was imposed the mighty burden. In the capacity of Chief Magistrate, for eight years he laboured incessantly to promote the public good, which evidently appeared to be the only object of his ambition.

On the subject of politics, I am but little instructed, and with it, it is still less my inclination to intermeddle. To say nothing then, of the acknowledged superiority of the beloved President's talents as a statesman, suffice it to observe, that notwithstanding the contrariety of opinion that soon appeared amongst our fellow-citizens respecting government as a science, or the administration of it as an art: notwithstanding that upon this subject, brother and brother, father and son, were often found divided against each other; yet, not the smallest suspicion of GEORGE WASHINGTON's integrity ever mingled itself with any disapprobation of public measures.

In March 1797, he resigned this honorable and important office, and retired once more to his peaceful abode at Mount Vernon, which had long been the favorite object of his wishes. His resignation was accompanied by an affecting token of his love, in communicating to his fellow-citizens the result of his experi-

ence, and in tendering to them his last fatherly advice respecting their sentiments and conduct towards each other, and their true policy as a nation. And then, with all the tenderness of parental fondness, he took an affectionate leave.

If on this sorrowful occasion, a place could be found for any criticism on his style and composition, I would just observe that the writings of WASHINGTON, correct without study, elegant without art, resemble a native woodland flower, which displays numberless undescribable beauties to the eye of every beholder, itself alone unconscious of its charms. — While his precious memory shall warm and animate, these will please, instruct and edify the latest posterity.

He now flattered himself that he had bidden a final adieu to all the troubles and perplexities of public life, and that he should be permitted to spend the little remainder of his days in peace. But, alas! the deceitfulness of all earthly prospects! like the Patriarch Abraham, he had to encounter the severest trial in the concluding scene.

His country, alarmed by the apprehension of foreign danger, cast her eyes once more upon her well-tried, faithful general, for her defence, if the calamity which seemed to impend should actually befall: I have called this the severest trial, because he was now far advanced in years, and his arm was enfeebled by age. But old as he was, though he heard with

grief, he obeyed with promptitude his country's call and prepared himself once more to take the field, whenever necessity should require, and buckle the armour on his weary limbs.

In this juncture of affairs it pleased the God of Heaven, whose councils are to us unknown, to take him from us, and release him from all his labours. He called him to put the harness off, and enter into his rest. What fate awaits our beloved country, it belongs to him alone who can pry into futurity, to tell. We hope & trust in God that the olive branch of America will still be regarded, and that our ambassadors abroad and envoys extraordinary, will, by his blessing succeed, in accommodating on honourable terms, all existing differences, and in perpetuating peace with all the nations of the earth.

But if not : if our ears are again to be assailed by the din of arms, and war shall rage, we shall miss this valiant faithful man, and the anxious enquiry in America, will be, where shall we find another WASHINGTON ?

In drawing the character of the great and illustrious, it is not the only object to pay that tribute to merit which justice demands, but especially to exhibit their example for the imitation of others. With this view, permit me to add, that our departed friend was not only a faithful, but a Godly man. Fidelity to his country was an amiable and striking trait in his character ; but to render it complete,

- we add, piety to God. This, like the oil on Aaron's robe, gives it a sweet perfume : or, like the mantle of Elijah, on the shoulders of Joshua, it spreads majestic grace and glory around it. Such was WASHINGTON. Virtue adorned his private life, and his first act of Providential duty was to dedicate himself to God, and commend his country to his divine protection. This act of piety made the hearts of all good men in America glad, and they rejoiced under the auspices of a chief magistrate who thus paid homage to the Ruler of the Universe.

But still more was the piety of their general the ground of their confidence through the more perilous scenes of war. While his valor and fortitude qualified him, above his fellows, for the command of a patriotic army, this not only endeared him to all the wise and virtuous, but made him, as they rightly supposed, the peculiar care of Heaven. They were not mistaken. This fortified his integrity, and this secured his camp. The valiant chief, altho' he was himself an host, and superior in courage and conduct to the opposite commanders, yet knowing that "the battle was not always to the strong," with his eyes directed to Heaven, commended himself and his army to the guidance of infinite wisdom, and to the protection of our omnipotent shield. Thus qualified he went forth under the banners of the Lord of hosts : he fought in his fear, and conquered in his name.

“ The first in peace, and the first in war,” he was a singular example of virtue, and piety in both. In the humble sphere of private life, in the more splendid chair of state, and amidst the confusion and licentiousness of war, this great man “ walked with God.” His heart was impressed with the highest reverence for his holy name, and in his presence the mouth of the profane was shut.

Who of the heroes of antiquity shall compete for fame with the illustrious chief?—Alexander was vain-glorious, and sometimes cruel—Cæsar was ambitious—and the life of Cato terminated in an act of suicide.

But WASHINGTON was not ambitious. Such was his modesty that but for the trump of fame, the rising generation had not known that he was the “ hero of liberty” who rescued them from bondage. Guided by the wisdom, and protected by the power, he was also resigned to the will of Heaven. Piety adorned his youth ; it rendered his “ hoary head a crown of glory,” and softened his dying bed. His setting sun went down unclouded and serene, the happy presage of a bright succeeding day.

Alas ! “ The Godly man hath ceased, and the faithful hath failed.”

Heavy and afflictive is the loss which the people of America have sustained by the death of this great man. It is only in some measure retrievable by the improvement we shall make of it. Let us then, under this sore visitation,

learn in the first place, humbly to acknowledge and adore the hand of God. He is the sovereign disposer of all events, and he has a right to do whatsoever he will with his own. In his adorable, but to us mysterious providence he has taken away our WASHINGTON, and though we cannot but mourn his loss, yet, since it is the will of Heaven, we will endeavour not to repine.

2. To submission to the divine will, let us add a grateful acknowledgement of divine goodness. God who hath taken our dear friend away, first gave him to us, qualified for the most important purposes. The whole of his useful life was devoted to the good of his country, and he lived to a good old age. He lived to perform the important work of procuring and establishing the independence of America, and proclaiming liberty to all her sons. Thro' all the perils and the fatigues of war: amidst the dangers of the field of battle, and under the pitched tent on the cold ground by night, the life and health of the illustrious chief, and of his valiant army, were most graciously preserved. Many a brave patriot fell; but the Gen. on whom so much depended was carefully protected from the "pestilence that walked in darkness, and from the arrow which flew by day." Nor was he taken hence until he saw his country smiling in peace, and settled under the most excellent constitution that any nation on earth ever enjoyed. For all

- these mercies “let the people praise thee, O God ; let all the people praise thee.”

3 The character of the deceased, while it endears his memory, should also be improved into a source of consolation to all who mourn his death. People of America—affectionate fellow-citizens of his native state, ye may weep for yourselves ; but weep not for WASHINGTON. He rests at length from all his labours : and if a mansion be prepared in glory, for piety and virtue, thither I trust he is gone, and there will he thine ; as a star in the firmament, for ever and ever. “ Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”

4. Suffer me to recommend the example of our departed friend, to the imitation of his countrymen. It is dignified and lovely, and shews to what perfection human nature may arrive. In this, although he is dead, he still speaks to us. Ye youth of America, the hope of your country—ye rising patriots of Virginia. learn that to be truly great, you must be sincerely good.

Who will now fill the place of the American chief ? The expecting eyes of your country are turned upon you. She will have need for you, in the cabinet, at least, if not in the field. If you would be prepared to do her service, study the character, cultivate the virtues, and follow the example of your WASHINGTON.

5. Finally, let us improve this solemn occasion, by serious reflections on our own tendency to the dust. We have here no abiding city.

“ It is appointed to all men once to die,” and the temple of this body will soon be dissolved. Let us apply to the redeemer of the world for pardon, and salvation. Let us implore the assistance of divine grace that we may “ so number our days as to apply our hearts to wisdom.” Let us cordially imbibe the principles of piety, and steadily pursue the practice of virtue ; so that when this “ earthly house of our tabernacle shall be dissolved, we may have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.”—AMEN.