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SERMON XXXVI.

BY OBADIAH JENNINGS, D. D.

LATE OF NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

ON THE NECESSITY AND DUTY OF PROPAGATING THE GOSPEL.

MATTH. 28:19. *Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations.*

THE evangelizing of the world, is an object which has filled with wonder, those higher orders of intelligent creatures, a little below whom, man in his pristine innocence and glory was placed. It is a subject which occupies, and which is worthy the mind of the "only wise God." It is the glorious result of "that eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The grand design originated in the everlasting love of God, and the greatest missionary was his own Son, his "elect," in whom his "soul delighteth."

When this great Missionary, who came forth from God, had finished, by his obedience, even unto death, the work which his Father had given him to do, when he had not only been "delivered for our offences," but "was raised again for our justification"—and just before he visibly ascended from Mount Olivet to that mediatorial throne, where, at the right hand of God, he now sits exalted "a Prince and a Savior for to give repentance, and forgiveness of sins"—he came and spoke to the eleven disciples, saying, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." After such a preface, asserting a claim so extraordinary, and yet so well founded, it might naturally be expected that the triumphant Redeemer would utter something of unspeakable importance. Accordingly, as "Head over all things to the church," and invested with all possible and rightful authority, he gave to his disciples, and through them to his ministers and their successors, in all succeeding ages, the honorable and important, but arduous and oftentimes dangerous commission, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

SERMON XXXVII.*

BY DAVID ELLIOTT,
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THE GROUNDS OF LAMENTING THE DEATH OF A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST.

ACTS 8:2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

THE practice of mourning for departed friends prevailed from the earliest ages. Thus we find Abraham mourning over the tomb of Sarah, and the Israelites lamenting the death of Jacob, of Moses, and Aaron. These expressions of sorrow continued for different periods of time, according to the rank and circumstances of the deceased. The most common term was seven days; though for Jacob, they mourned seventy days; and for Moses and Aaron, thirty. On occasions of this kind, they gave full vent to their feelings, and evinced their deep sorrow by fasting, lying on the ground, weeping, tearing their clothes, beating their breasts, walking barefoot, pulling out their hair, with other like expressions of frantic grief. In this respect, the Jews were particularly distinguished. Accordingly Suetonius informs us, that while at the funeral of Julius Cæsar, a multitude of foreign nations expressed their sorrow, according to their respective customs, the lamentations of the Jews exceeded all the rest; and that they continued about the funeral pile all night together.

Although in the mode of expressing their sorrow for departed friends, the ancient Jews might have been extravagant, the practice itself is founded in nature, and approved by reason. Hence, it has been continued through all ages, and been adopted by all nations. I do not recollect any people so barbarous as to evince no sorrow at the death of friends. Such insensibility, though it is sometimes found in degenerate bosoms, is not the sin of human nature.

This kind of sorrow is also approved by christianity itself. When Lazarus died, "Jesus wept." Can any one, then, condemn those feelings which vent themselves in expressions of sorrow over the tomb of departed worth? 'Tis the honest impulse of nature. And there are often reasons of great importance to show that such expressions of sorrow are not the unmeaning offspring of instinctive feelings or vitiated habits.

The death of Stephen, though attended with some animating circumstances, furnished matter of deep regret to the church of God. Though he died with a noble intrepidity, highly consolatory to his christian friends, they were too sensible of their great loss, and that of the church of God, not to make great lamentation over him, as they carried him to his burial.

* Occasioned by the death of Obadiah Jennings, of Nashville, Tennessee.

Without confining myself to the peculiar circumstances connected with the death of this christian proto-martyr, to which I may have occasion to refer before I am done, what I design from these words is *to show the grounds of that sorrow and lamentation which are occasioned by the death of a minister of Jesus Christ.*

In estimating the grounds of sorrow occasioned by the loss of a minister of Jesus Christ, we must view him in the different relations in which he stands *to his family, to civil society, to the church of God, and to the world at large.* His loss to each of these, is one of great magnitude, sufficient to occasion the deepest lamentation.

I. In the death of a minister of Jesus Christ, *his family* (if he has one) *have sustained a serious loss.* 'Tis not a light affliction to any family, to have a christian head removed from its midst. To the companion of his life, who looked to him for counsel and protection; to his children and domestics, who were accustomed to receive his paternal instructions and admonitions in relation to all that stood connected with their temporal and eternal interests, his removal is a calamity of no ordinary kind.

But to a minister's family, his loss is incomparably great. There is a peculiarity in their case, which renders them objects of the deepest sympathy. Even during a minister's life, it is well known that his family have, in many cases, very hard measure dealt out to them. His wife is considered a suitable object of remark and censure for every one.

His children—how great their deprivation! The children of ministers are more exposed than those of other men. Every one around them, who hates religion and loves the pleasures of sin, labors to find an apology for his conduct, in that of the children of his minister. Hence, plans are devised, and efforts made to seduce them into sin, and to make them the companions of those who delight in mischief. The fact is notorious. The history of ministers' griefs too well attests its truth. What a heavy loss, then, is it to such a man's family, to be deprived of its pious head? If his living counsels and example could scarcely withstand the strong current of temptation, which threatened destruction to his children, what will come of them when he is gone? Oh, it is enough to rend the heart, to think of the desolations which death makes in the house of a minister of Christ. Well may his friends, while they carry him to his burial, make great lamentation over him, when they look at his despoiled household. When, moreover, we add to this, that ministers, generally, leave their families poor, few congregations being willing to allow them more than a bare and scanty support; it is calculated to deepen their sorrows, and increase their wailings at his death.

II. In the death of a minister of Jesus Christ, *civil society has sustained a great loss.* It is not as civil officers of the state, that the removal of ministers is felt to be a public calamity. To such stations, they are rarely called, in this land of enlightened freedom. They ought not, indeed, to be disfranchised by the constitution of a country where all are entitled to equal privileges. But while their rights in this respect ought not to be taken away, it is not desirable in practice that the ministers of Christ should be elevated to civil stations in the government. And it is believed that few, if any, in our favored na-

tion, who understand and love their master's work, desire such an elevation. It is not in official stations in the government, then, that we consider ministers as useful to their country, or their removal as a loss.

But there are other respects in which they do civil society an extended service. It is well known, that as a class, ministers are the open and decided friends and advocates of rational liberty. So far as my information extends, this is true of the ministers of all Protestant denominations in the land. Respecting those of our own denomination, I speak with more confidence; for with them and their history, I am better acquainted. Presbyterian ministers will yield to no class of men in the country, in their attachment to the civil institutions of our government. Much as they have been abused, and are still abused by designing men, as aspirants after political alliances, they may safely appeal to their history, as a practical commentary on their principles and professions, in refutation of the calumny. They may go back, and with honest confidence refer to the annals of the American revolution in proof of their attachment and that of their fathers to those sacred principles which gave birth to our independence and happiness to our country. And at the present day, it is believed that none are more undisguised, nor more ardent in their support of the laws and institutions by which American rights and privileges are so fully guaranteed.

And is it no advantage to our country to have such a class of men as the ministers of Jesus Christ, consisting of not less than from eight to ten thousand of the various Protestant denominations, a large proportion of them learned, many of them talented and eloquent, trained to public speaking, and all the friends and advocates of liberty, who, when necessity calls, are prepared to stand forth in its defence and infuse its spirit into every breast? One such man, is a treasure to a community, and the loss of him is cause of deep lamentation.

But add to this, that ministers are, by office, the teachers of public virtue, the patrons and advocates of order, of morality, of obedience to the laws, of reverence to magistrates, of an elevated and enlightened regard to every institution bearing on the happiness of men in their associated condition. They are in short, the sworn heralds of a religion, which, while it proclaims first, and loudest, "Glory to God in the highest;" pours forth, with accents equally divine, "peace on earth and good will towards men." It is, moreover, the office and duty of ministers to rebuke vice, to check disorder, to frown upon the infraction of the laws, and to bring the principles of the gospel to operate in all their heavenly force, for the prevention of vice, and the reformation of those who disturb society by their crimes.

And is civil society under no obligations to such men as these? Are they not a public blessing to the community? I know that infidels would have it believed that they are a curse to the nation, and that they ought to be put down; and some weak people are silly enough to believe them. But what would come of the public morals, if there were no public teachers of religion and morality? What would bind society together, if the principles of the bible were withdrawn, as they would in a great measure be, by the removal of the heralds who proclaim them? The experiment was once tried. France, in the madness of her folly, closed the doors of her sanctuaries and her pulpits

against the publication of the gospel, by its authorized ministers—and what were the consequences? Degenerate as was the character of her priesthood, the consequences were of the most fearful kind. Society was torn from its base. It suffered disruption in all its parts. The throne and the altar were crimsoned with blood, and the sword and the guillotine were the arbiters of human fate. And let the ministers of Christ be driven from the exercise of their appropriate functions in our own country, and the time would not be far distant, when the tragedy of the French revolution would be acted over again here.

The prayers of godly ministers, also, for the civil and political prosperity of their country, is no mean benefit. How often, in ancient times, did the prayers of God's ministers, while standing "between the porch and the altar," avert the threatened judgments from those for whom they supplicated? And who can tell how much evil is averted, and how much good is secured to rulers and people, by the daily supplications of the ministers of Christ on their behalf? Although some of our State legislatures have refused to have daily prayers offered in their legislative halls for the blessing of God upon their deliberations, it is doubtless owing to the forbearance of God, in answer to the prayers of ministers and christians, that they are permitted to assemble and deliberate for the public good.

Viewing the ministers of Christ in their connection with civil society, under the different aspects, as the patrons and advocates of liberty; as the public teachers of religion and good morals; as the friends of God and of man, daily engaged in making supplication for their country, we cannot fail to be deeply impressed with the great loss which society sustains when any one of their number is removed by death. And every friend to society and his country, while he carries him to his burial, will make great lamentation over him.

III. In the death of a minister of Jesus Christ, *the church of God has sustained a heavy loss*. The prosperity of the church lies near the heart of every minister of Jesus Christ. "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof." To the service of the church he has been dedicated. For her appropriate employments he has been trained. On her ultimate triumphs, he has staked all his interests for time and for eternity. In him, therefore, she may calculate on a steadfast friend, and a zealous advocate and defender of all that pertains to her prosperity and glory.

I need not enter into any argument to prove the value and importance of the ministry to the church. The fact is palpable from their institution by the Head of the Church; from the nature of their functions; and from the benefits which, in different ages have resulted from their labors. Under every dispensation of God's covenants there have been ministers of religion, who have been recognized as vital parts of the system. Under the present dispensation, it was among the most important acts of the Savior's public life in relation to the order of the church, to commission ministers to labor for her good, by proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation, and urging sinners to accept of mercy through the atoning blood of the Son of God.

It is true that ministerial agency is dependent on the blessing of God, for the beneficial results arising from it to the church. "I have planted, (says Paul,) Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So

then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." But with God's blessing, what have the ministers of Christ not achieved, in relation to the glory of the church? Let the history of the labors of the apostles in the primitive age of the church answer. Almost the whole of the then known world felt the influence of apostolic enterprise; and Judaism and Paganism alike dreaded the force of their eloquence, and the controlling power of the doctrines which they preached. Let the history of the Reformation also, in the 16th century, answer to this question. Who is ignorant of what Luther, and Calvin, and Melancthon, and an host of others did, to dethrone error, to banish ignorance and superstition, to disrobe truth of the filthy vestments which had been cast around her by her false friends, and to release the captive church from the slavery to which she had been subjected by a wicked and tyrannical priesthood? It is true, that they had helpers among the laity, who nobly sustained them. But the ministers of Jesus Christ led the van, in this holy contest for truth and the souls of men.

I might point you also to the later results of missionary labor, in proof of the efficiency of ministerial effort. Who shed the light of salvation on the dark minds of the savages of our forests, and introduced them to the blessings of civilization? Who taught the Greenlanders to sing of Jesus, and trust in his atoning blood? Who carried the gospel to India? Who ventured to set his foot on the ground stained by the blood of his brethren, and preach the gospel successfully to the ferocious inhabitants of Otaheite? Or who raised the sluggish mind of the Hottentot to the throne of God, and poured into it the vivifying streams of the water of life? There is but one answer. *They were the ministers of Jesus Christ.* Courageous men! What does not the church of God owe them for their self-denial, and zeal, and laborious efforts in her holy cause? To others, we would not deny the glory to which they are entitled in this work. But historical truth will require that the most prominent place be assigned to the ministers of Christ.

And what would the church *at home* do without ministers? Would religion prosper? Has it ever prospered for any length of time, without the labors of ministers? Or, has not the reverse been true? Are there not examples enough of particular churches suffering dissolution and death for want of ministerial labor? The fact is notorious, and goes to show the value of ministers to the church of God, as an integral part of her prosperity, and the great loss which she sustains when any of them are called away by death.

There are particular emergencies in the church, in which the loss of an able minister of the New-Testament is a peculiar affliction. There are times, when above all others, his presence seems almost indispensable to the prosperity and safety of the church with which he stands connected. Such was the time in which holy Stephen was cut off by the unrelenting hand of persecution. The church was in her infancy. She was in the midst of powerful and malignant enemies. The storms of persecution were gathering in thick and fearful gloom around her. Her integrity was threatened; the foundations of her faith were impugned; learning, and talents, and eloquence, Jewish prejudice and heathen superstition, all united in giving an impulse to

the power which threatened her extirpation from the earth. For the ground that she occupied, and the conquests she had won, she was indebted, under God, to the labors of her ministers. In Stephen, she had found an able defender of her doctrines, a bold and fearless champion of her rights; a man, the lightning of whose eloquence flashed conviction upon the hearts of his hearers, and the heavenly benignity of whose spirit sought pardon for his murderers in the very arms of death. In this crisis of her affairs, how could the church do without Stephen? What need had she for his counsels, his constancy, his theological attainments, his persuasive eloquence, and his heaven-born spirit! His death seemed like tearing out her very vitals, and laying her loftiest energies in the dust. No wonder that devout men, while they carried him to his burial, made great lamentation over him.

And are not such men always a loss to the church, in times of peril and rebuke? To the Presbyterian church at this time, it is an affliction of no small magnitude, to have an able, prudent, zealous, godly minister removed from her midst. Such men are needed to guide her councils, to defend her doctrines, to sustain her piety, to rebuke her slanderers, and to give an impulse to her zeal for the promotion of the Redeemer's glory. It is not every man who is furnished to meet such a crisis as the present; who is thoroughly acquainted with the standard doctrines of the church, and able and willing to defend them, when assailed by the enemies of the truth. When, therefore, ministers who are gifted for times like these are taken away, the loss to the church is peculiarly great, and she is called to lamentation and mourning whilst they are carried to the tomb.

IV. In the death of a minister of Jesus Christ, *the world at large has sustained a loss*. Let not the infidel smile at this remark. It is by the doctrines of the gospel, which the ministers of Christ are commissioned to preach, and the accompanying energies of the spirit of grace, that the heathen are to be enlightened and the world brought back to God. To preach these holy doctrines is the appropriate business of every minister of Christ. To give them extension and power over the hearts of men, is his most delightful employment. In this respect, he is emphatically the friend of man, and the benefactor of the world. His plans and his labors have for their object, the moral and spiritual renovation of every inhabitant of our globe. His is not the infidel charity, which would erect palaces and endow seminaries of learning, whose dying inmates should never be blessed with the sound of salvation by the blood of God's eternal Son, proclaimed by the commissioned heralds of the Redeemer of the world. But with a benevolence as expansive as the globe, he would send the gospel throughout the whole earth, and have it proclaimed by the messengers of God, in every hamlet and in every palace, in the midst of the haunts of ignorance and the halls of science, that all might be brought to the knowledge of the truth, and obtain salvation and eternal glory in the heavens.

For these blessed objects the minister of Christ labors: for these he prays: for these he enlists the sympathies of his fellow christians, and opens the hearts and the hands of the benevolent to contribute of the substance which the Lord has bestowed on them. And it is impossible to tell how far the efforts of a single minister of Christ may extend

in promoting the general interests of the world. If he does not go himself, he may by his preaching and his prayers, and his contributions be the means of training some pious youth, who may go to the heathen and be instrumental in converting thousands to God. The plans which he devises, and the energies which he elicits, may reach in their effects to the ends of the earth, and tell upon unborn millions of our race.

What a loss, then, is it to the world, when a minister of Jesus Christ is removed from the earth? When one who thus feels and labors for the cardinal sorrows of our race is consigned to the tomb? It is no ordinary calamity, no insulated bereavement. The world has lost a friend. The human family has been bereaved of a benefactor.

Having thus pointed out the grounds of sorrow occasioned by the death of a minister of Jesus Christ, the way is prepared for noticing the grounds of that sorrow in which we are called to indulge at the news of the death of my worthy predecessor, and your late Pastor, the Rev. Obadiah Jennings, who died at Nashville, Tennessee.

As a member of civil society, the loss of Dr. Jennings will be felt. From his early education and habits, he was, doubtless, well skilled in the economy of civil society. At the bar and in the council chamber, he had learned the character and the strength of the evils, with which our political and social system had to contend; and could pronounce from experience upon the excellence of our laws, and their effective power for all the purposes of salutary government. In common with his clerical brethren, he was the ardent friend of civil liberty. He wanted no alliance of church and state. He would have tolerated none. He understood the interests of the church and the principles of civil liberty too well, to desire or advocate that which would prove ruinous to both.

A man so meek, and peaceful, and unpretending, as the deceased was, must also have been peculiarly valuable to the social circle in which he moved. In times of public excitement, when society was tossed and distracted by the unhallowed influence of party strife, we can readily conceive of the beneficial results arising from the gentle breathings of a spirit so affectionate and heavenly as his. His very example, one would think, would be an host in allaying the excitements of party, and infusing a spirit of peace and love into the breasts of contending combatants. In this respect, his death is doubtless a loss to society.

As the friend and patron of literature, civil society has also reason to deplore his loss. In this, he evinced his regard for his country, and his attachment to her institutions. No man is a greater enemy to his country and its prosperity, than he who is the advocate and patron of ignorance. For if ever our liberties perish, it will be when *ignorance*, with all her brood of kindred vices, shall have snatched the reins of government from the hands of intelligence and virtue. Every friend of learning, then, who is called away, is a loss to the country; especially one whose influence was so great as that of him whose death we this day deplore.

But it is especially to the church of God, that the removal of Dr. Jennings is a loss. His entire devotion to her interests none can

doubt, when it is recollected that he abandoned a lucrative practice at the bar, for the sake of becoming her humble minister, on a salary which was insufficient to defray the ordinary expenses of his family. That he was thus willing to make a sacrifice of his worldly interests, that he might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to perishing sinners, is strong proof of the ardent desire which he felt to be instrumental in promoting the highest interests of the Redeemer's church on earth. And how faithfully he sustained her interests and her honor, you all know. From what we know ourselves, and have heard from others, his exhibitions of scriptural truth were always lucid and solemn, and often convincing and powerful in a high degree.

Of his elevated character as a debater, he had often given evidence on the floors of our ecclesiastical assemblies. His speeches (and we have had the happiness to hear some of them ourselves) were always marked by perspicuity, intelligence, sound argument, and well balanced discretion. His eloquence, so far as we understand its character, was not the lightning which flashed, nor the thunder which roared, filling the heart with awe; but it was the clear, strong, vigorous current, which carried his audience willingly and with self-complacency to the place of destination. In theological debate, when called to defend the doctrines of his own church and of the Bible, against the encroachments of heresy, the annals of the church, will give him a deservedly high rank.

In the estimation of his ministerial brethren, Dr. Jennings was regarded as a wise, sagacious, dispassionate counsellor, whose judgment might be relied upon in times of difficulty and distraction in the church. His sound, discriminating mind, his great experience, his devotion to the standards of the church, and his mild and heavenly spirit, marked him out as an efficient agent in allaying the agitations, and conducting to a sound and healthful issue the existing distractions of the Presbyterian church. But Dr. Jennings is gone. In him the church has lost an able champion and ardent friend. He is gone from the conflicts and trials of the church militant on earth, to enjoy more peaceful scenes in the church triumphant in heaven. The church to which he belonged, and of which he was a minister, mourns his death.

Nor let it be thought extravagant to say, that the death of this philanthropist is a loss to the world. He was the friend of our race. He sought to have the gospel preached to every creature, to send messengers into every land, and to have the light of salvation shed down upon every dark place on the earth. Of his labors and his prayers on this behalf, you have all been witnesses. The loss of such a man, therefore, as this, whose benevolence was as diffusive as the dimensions of the globe, is one which every friend of man is called to mourn.

But while we mourn his death, we are animated with the assurance that our loss has been his unspeakable gain. His life was that of the righteous, and his last end was like his. With holy composure, he gathered his family around his bed, and having given to each his dying counsels, commended them all to his covenant-keeping God. Having done this, he departed in the full hope of a happy resurrection, and a glorious immortality in the presence of his God and Redeemer.