

A Discourse:

ON THE

DEATH OF ZACHARY TAYLOR,

TWELFTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

DELIVERED IN THE

RUTGERS' STREET CHURCH,

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D I S C O U R S E .

PSALM LXII. 11, 12.

GOD HATH SPOKEN ONCE ; TWICE HAVE I HEARD THIS, THAT
POWER BELONGETH UNTO GOD. ALSO, UNTO THEE, O LORD,
BELONGETH MERCY ; FOR THOU RENDEREST TO EVERY MAN
ACCORDING TO HIS WORK.

THERE is a strong natural propensity in the human heart to attempt independence of God. It is practically exhibited, both by individuals and by nations, in the various forms of ignoring, evading, perverting, and openly transgressing and defying the Divine Will ;—in cherishing a spirit of inordinate self-reliance ;—and in utter forgetfulness of both the obligation and the safety of trusting solely in God, and of serving, glorifying, and enjoying Him.

It is true, indeed, that there is, at some times, a kind of formal acknowledgment of some sort of subordination and dependence on His throne. But if we examine their habits of thinking and speaking, and the actual deportment of

men, we do not find any very general or genuine feeling of confidence in God and subjection to His supremacy. They form their own plans without reference to Him ;—they rely on their own wisdom, courage, strength ;—they talk of chance, of good, or of ill luck ;—they are cast down by unexpected trouble, as if it sprung from the ground ;—they form expedients of recovery from disaster, and boast of their own resources ;—they sacrifice to their own net, they burn incense to their own drag ;—they trust in man, and their hopes and fears depend upon an arm of flesh.

‡ Now, all this is a striking proof of the alienation and apostacy of mankind from their normal state of affectionate and confiding loyalty to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. It is the essence of all genuine religion to exhibit this devout allegiance. And it is the design of His revelation, and of His plan of grace in the Gospel,—and of all the dispensations of His Providence,—to recover men from their apostacy, and restore them to His favor, in the practice of faith and in the love of His authority. For this purpose, He speaks to them from Heaven,—sometimes in the voice of command, sometimes in promises, and sometimes in warnings ; sometimes in goodness and mercies, and

sometimes in displeasure and judgments. But, unhappily, we are too often heedless. "For God speaketh once, yea twice, but man perceiveth it not." (Job xxxiii. 14.) The repeated intimations of His will, of His supremacy, and of the designs of His Providence, are too often disregarded, and the lessons of His Divine Wisdom are wasted upon a proud and rebellious race. But happy is it for us, that He has thoughts of kindness; that He has methods of "opening the ears of men and sealing their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man;" (Job xxxiii. 16, 17,) that by chastening him with His hand, while he "keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword," He rebukes his haughty iniquity and makes him realize his insufficiency; and that He has appointed His ministry and given power to His word, in order that there may be a messenger with man, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man the ways of uprightness. (Job xxxiii. 18-24.)

These methods of instruction God is pleased still to use. He expects us to observe what He is doing among the inhabitants of the earth, to convince us that the Most High ruleth in the affairs of men; and happy are they, who,

taught to recognize His hand, and led to confide in His goodness and power, return to Him humbly and penitently, and place themselves in hope and submission beneath the protection of His grace and majesty. Very instructive to us, and especially at this solemn and eventful crisis of our public affairs, when God has been pleased to remove by death the Chief Magistrate of this nation,—the second instance of the kind in our history,—at a juncture when so much seemed to depend on his patriotism, his sagacity, his integrity, and his firmness; and while we deplore our bereavement of this illustrious man, very instructive to us, I repeat, is the example and testimony of the wise and pious monarch of Israel, when he was menaced by circumstances, which not only threatened affliction to himself, but, in his relation to his people, threatened also to involve them in troubles, and excited the anxious solitudes of his generous and patriotic soul. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work.”

These are the words of a king, of a warrior, of a statesman; they are the words of a man after God’s own heart; they are the words

of one inspired. They are worthy of our reverent attention.

He refers to the repeated instances in which God had not left himself without witness, as to His own dominion and character as the Supreme Ruler and Judge of men and nations. The law and the prophets had borne their testimony of Him. Manifold instances of His providential agency and interposition were on record, to illustrate the principles of His government, as they were safely and certainly interpreted by the light that His word reflected on His mighty acts. And David himself had received frequent communications of the mind and will of God; while his own experience had taught him how truly dependent both he and Israel were,—not on that splendid prosperity, which was itself the gift of God; not on his extended and populous empire; not on his prowess and conquests; not on the vast resources of a land fertile in productions, and enriched by the streams of wealth that poured into it from abroad; not on the union of the tribes of Israel and their loyalty to him, for he had experience of dissension and revolt, and was at that moment harassed by, or had just escaped from, the dangers and perplexities excited against him by his malignant foes; not

on the defences thrown around him by the mere elements of personal and public happiness, which he well knew might be scattered at a breath; but on God, the blessed and only Potentate, the Saviour of Israel, and the Help thereof, in time of trouble. Here was his confidence. He asserts it, (Ps. lxii. 1.) He charges himself to cherish it, (vs. 5.) He declares his safety under it, and felt that here he was impregnable, (vs. 2, 6, 7): while he expostulates with his foes on their impotent malice and treacherous conduct, and denounces to them confusion and defeat, (vs. 3, 4.) He exhorts and encourages his friends and countrymen and all whose hearts are failing them for fear, to pour out their souls in prayer to God, and to share his confidence in the support of the Almighty Arm, (vs. 8.) He shows how vain are all inferior reliances. The populace are fickle and the princes are false, (vs. 9.) And all are warned of the utter insecurity of those plans of wealth and peace, which depend on the expedients of carnal policy, on violence and injustice, and the insecurity of all those hopes that depend on growing heaps of earthly treasure, (vs. 10.) *His* trust was in the power, the compassion and the faithfulness of God, (vs. 11, 12.)

The Divine strength is supreme and universal. In Heaven and in Earth; over angels and over men; from everlasting to everlasting, He is God. He will not give His glory to another. He will not abdicate His rights. He will not be frustrated in His purposes. Men may imagine devices and designs against Him and against His anointed, but they shall fail. They may break His bands in sunder and cast away His cords from them; they may restrain prayer and despise fear; they may say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should obey His voice?" But shall they prevail by iniquity? "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. He shall speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." Did the old world defy Him and prosper? Did Sodom mock, and did Pharaoh and Egypt rebel, and yet escape by impunity? Did Moab resist and impede the march of Israel and call Balaam to curse them, and succeed? Did the Assyrian and the Babylonian boast of their prowess, and break up God's covenant to give His people the land of Israel for an everlasting possession? And were their triumphs and their boastings the heralds of permanent success in iniquity and pride, for a single moment longer than

either of them fulfilled the ignominious function for which God gave them their power and their victories,—as the mere executioners of His judgments, and the instruments by whom He corrected His chosen people? Yea, did Herod and Pilate, and Jew and Gentile, when they gathered themselves together to destroy the humble and afflicted Nazarene, prevail for the destruction they meditated, or do aught beyond their undesigned fulfilment of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, concerning the death of the holy child Jesus? Tyre and Egypt, Nineveh and Babylon, and all kings of the earth arrayed themselves against the dominion and honor of God; but He made their wrath to praise Him, and the remainder of their wrath, He restrained, and then destroyed them together. And all these things hath He done and said, in raising up nations and in overturning them, that Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, and all rulers and judges of the earth, and all that live may know and acknowledge that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men; that they may cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils and his thoughts perish; that they may learn not to put confidence in princes, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

Who is it that shall lift up the rod of pride and contemn God? Hast thou an arm like God, and canst thou thunder with a voice like Him? *Who* is it that walks in darkness, and *whose* heart trembles within him for the multitude of his enemies, for the dangers that beset him, for the confusion of his affairs and the poverty of his resources, for the power of the adversary of souls, for the troubles that come upon the Church, and for those that threaten the land?—let him remember Him that hath said, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;” and let him make the Eternal God his refuge, and shelter himself within the circling protection of the Everlasting Arm.

And we have reason for indulging this confidence in the Divine power. There is reason, indeed, in all our relations to Him, as the Judge of the quick and the dead, to fear Him who is the King of Nations, and to apprehend His indignation. All our own sins against His commandments, truth, and mercy, and all our public and social sins, might justly become the marks of His mighty vengeance. But, at the same time, He has revealed himself both in His Word and in His Providence, as a God of clemency and kindness: “Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest unto

every man according to his work." The union, in this ascription, of God's mercy and equity toward His creatures, and the assignation of one of these attributes as the ground for the exercise of the other, furnishes us with a clue to their interpretation as in mutual harmony. The Judge of all the earth does not bid mercy triumph over justice, as He does not give to justice its solitary exercise, untempered, or, rather, unaccompanied by mercy. As sinners before Him, He might destroy us, without impeachment of His throne. But His Gospel teaches us that He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. By this act, He becomes both a Just God and a Saviour. Even in pardoning the ungodly, He vindicates His holiness, and magnifies his law, and makes it honorable. And He is faithful also to them, who, trusting to His adorable compassion, turn to Him with repentance, study His will, aim at obedience, and look to His strength as their help and defence. As He is faithful and just to forgive them their sins, when they confess and forsake their sins, so is He faithful and just in the exercise of His clemency, in the expression of His good will and compassion, and in honoring, vindicating, and re-

warding their affectionate confidence in Him, and their actions which are in conformity with His Word, on which He has caused them to hope. Thus will He render unto them according to their works. He will treat them according to their real character. No man, indeed, can plead that he has not sinned; that he has kept all the commandments; and, therefore, that he has not incurred the just penalty of the Divine law. For deliverance from this penalty, and for a restoration to the favor of God, and to the hope of eternal life, we must be entirely and forever indebted to His *mere mercy*, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. But God is not unjust nor unfaithful to forget the works of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope, manifested by them who truly trust in Him through the cross of His dear Son. He will guide them with His counsel, and receive them to glory. He will comfort them in trouble. He will aid them in duty. He will defend them in danger. He will bring His power forward for their protection, and make them dwell securely under the shadow of His throne. His deportment to them corresponds with their whole

character. Hence, if sinners would be saved they "*must* be born again." Hence, they must be reconciled to God, through faith in His dear Son. Hence it is, while He pours out his displeasure against the ungodly and the disobedient, He shows mercy to them that trust in Him and serve Him; and He renders unto every man according to his works. The royal Psalmist, conscious of his integrity; of his deep penitence for his sins; of his reliance on the covenant which God had made with him by sacrifice; of his love of the law of God; of his intention to do right; of his endeavor to rule in the fear of God, and to be a terror only to evil-doers, but a praise to them that do well; might well plead before the Supreme Judge, when he was assailed by oppositions and reproached with calumnies, "O keep my soul and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in thee; let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee." (Ps. xxv. 20, 21.) And all this appeal for defence against those who unjustly accused and persecuted him where he was innocent, is in the same breath in which he utters his affecting petition for mercy: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy, remem-

ber thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord." "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." (Ps. xxv. 7. 11.) "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He teach sinners in the way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." (Ps. xxv. 8. 10.) This was the consistent judgment and hope of David. Thus he lived, thus he ruled, thus he died. And while we strenuously deny all claim to God's salvation on the part of any human being, high or low, on the ground of his own righteousness, we equally contend that the Divine clemency and equity are united for the safety and defence of them who trust in His mercy and follow His commands. Such defence have all His people. They are the apple of His eye. Whoso toucheth them, him will God punish. Even as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. Even as a father protects his children, so will the Lord throw His shield of protection before them that trust Him in the day of their danger. Such defence have communities—the Church—the nation. Let them trust truly in God. All things may seem to be against them; their strength may be weakened, their peace may be menaced, their prosperity assailed; but

He sees them when they humble themselves before Him, when they honor His power, His love, and His truth; and He will be a glory in the midst of them, and a wall of fire round about them.

It is in this light I would contemplate the last words which are reported to have been uttered by the late President. According to the first account, these were, "I have always done my duty; I am ready to die." Or, according to another account, "I am prepared; I have always endeavored to do my duty;" as if this were the ground of his preparation to meet God. These have been subsequently modified by the report that, when he was informed by his physicians that he had not probably many hours to live, he replied, "I know it;" then, after an interview with his family, being asked if he felt comfortable, he answered, "Very; but the storm, in passing, has swept away the trunk." And finally, adverting to the subject of his previous musings, especially the Slavery question, he observed: "I am about to die; I expect the summons soon; I have endeavored to discharge all my official duties faithfully; I may have erred, but it has been unintentionally; I regret nothing; but am sorry that I am about to leave my friends." Previous to all

this, he had enjoyed the counsels of a Christian minister, and prayer was offered at his bedside, in which he devoutly engaged.

Now, as a man, and as a ruler, why might he not properly say, in the "integrity of his heart," (Gen. xx. 5,) "I have endeavored to do my duty; or, "my *official* duty?" Who doubts the honesty of his intentions? Even the voice of faction will not dispute it now. And as for me, I am not the judge of men's souls. It is God alone that tries the reins and searches the hearts. My good opinion will take no man to heaven; my ill opinion will thrust no man into hell. Who can say what were the secret communings of his heart,—what his views of the plan of salvation, and what their influence upon his hope, in that last hour of his expectation of the judgment-seat? Why may we not hope when we consider all that took place in that sick chamber, that they were Christian views and feelings?

While I would encourage no man to say, in view of the law of God and the judgment-seat of Christ, "I am prepared—I am not afraid—*because* I have always endeavored to do all my duty,"—for there is another, and a better, and an exclusive foundation of our acceptance with God—nevertheless, I would even contend, that

with an entire reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, as the *only* foundation of a sinner's hope, a man might still justly say, in the consciousness of his humble trust in the mercy of God, manifested in a sincere endeavor to do His will—as every Christian man may say—to the praise of God's grace, and in repelling the accusations of adversaries and the fears of conscience, "I have endeavored to fulfil my obligations." The apostle did not disparage the plan of salvation, when, on his arraignment before the Council, he protested, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this day," (Acts xxiii. 1); or when, at the end of his career, he exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.) Why, in our anxiety for the faith, should we disparage the *works* which are its inseparable fruits? And besides all this, may it not rather have been the meaning of these fragmentary words—uttered, as we are informed, at the close of his musings, on the bereavement of his family, on the great and trying questions of public policy which had

cost him such anxiety, on the factious oppositions of party-spirit, and on the unjust censures which some were ready to record against him on the journals of Congress,—why may it not have been that, in the honest and assuring consciousness of his official and personal integrity, he thus bequeathed his reputation to the judgment of his country, and that country itself, after he had done for it all he could, to the protection of Him to whom power belongeth, and mercy, and who will render unto all according to their works ?

Such are some of the great truths, which God has spoken, once and again. These testimonies of His word, have been reiterated and enforced upon our attention, by the voice of His Providence. That which we have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, has been confirmed to us, when He stretched forth His hand, and He made us to see and feel that verily there is a God who judgeth in the Earth.

Once and again, He hath spoken to us, in tones of rebuke and warning, by those afflictions and disasters, that have come upon us to teach us that we are dependent on God. Pestilence has gone before Him, and burning coals

have been cast from His footsteps. War, if it has not brought upon us intestine ravages, has at least, been at once our crime and punishment; for it has brought discord and confusion into the midst of our public councils, and, at this moment we are quarrelling over our spoils and conquests, and our own ambition and avarice have returned to plague us. The flood has desolated; and the conflagration has swept away our wealth with its fiery wing. On the same day, last week, while one was yet speaking, to tell us of the appalling destruction of property and life, in a neighboring city,* another messenger of evil tidings rushes in upon us to announce that the Nation itself has been stricken by the hand of Death falling upon the head of its Chief Magistrate. Others that have filled this high office have died, but they had fulfilled their official course. And all that have filled it will die, for they are but men. But within the last ten years, God has begun to take another season for the removal of our Rulers—even while they were yet in office. It is only within this period that the provision made by our Constitution for such a contingency has been tried. And although God has not re-

* Philadelphia—between 300 and 400 houses destroyed.

moved from us our country's life, in removing from us those on whom we had been too much disposed to rely as the breath of our nostrils, yet these acts of His Providence are calculated to throw the people and their statesmen into perplexity, and to involve us in the fears that are engendered by the unexpected change of rulers and administrations.

God hath spoken once, yea twice. The death of President Harrison, within one month after his inauguration, was a rebuke and a disaster, that ought to have been felt in the then crisis of our affairs, and should have taught us that power belongeth unto God. The death of President Taylor, in the second year of his administration, and at this far more alarming crisis of our public affairs,—when civil dissensions are raging, and civil war itself is menacing us,—is indeed a rebuke and a disaster. And shall we not perceive it? Shall it be recorded against us, that seeing many things we observe not? We are rebuked, because we have forgotten God, and leaned upon an arm of flesh. At this moment, we are tossed upon the billow, between hope and fear. Does it not become us to look upward to Him who hath founded His throne above the Heavens and established His dominion to rule the

floods. Power and strength belong unto God; to Him also belongeth mercy; for He will render our portion in equity.

From this event, we may learn a lesson of human frailty. The victorious commander, the illustrious citizen, the chief ruler of a mighty nation, at brief notice, vacates all his earthly dignities; and from that tomb which was opened yesterday, in the national metropolis, there comes a voice of solemn warning that speaks to all the votaries of grandeur and all the sons of ambition. Ah! what is its import?—

“ Hark, from the tombs, a doleful sound!

Mine ears attend the cry:—

‘ Ye living men, come, view the ground,

‘ Where you must shortly lie!

‘ Princes, this clay must be your bed,

‘ In spite of all your towers;

‘ The tall, the wise, the reverend head,

Must lie as low as ours.’ ”

We may learn from it, how completely we are dependent on God. The modest and humane, but skilful and valorous and successful leader of our armies; the honest and sagacious and incorruptible patriot, whom we called to preside over the destinies of the nation; whose brief trial evinced his worthiness of all that con-

fidence we felt in him; to whom we looked for wise and moderate counsels, and for the conservation of our peace and concord, is suddenly snatched away from the hopes of his loving countrymen; and they are downcast because they have lost the right arm of their strength.

“God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the rulers, . . . I have said, ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High: but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” (Psalm lxxxii., 1, 6, 7.) “Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south: but God is the Judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” (Psalm lxxv., 5--7.)

We may learn from it a lesson of the wickedness of partisan warfare and of the relentless malignity of faction. This man labored, and lived, and died for his country alone. But he was pressed to death. What a shame to this land, and especially what an infamy to those who gave occasion for it, was the pathetic complaint of this brave, strong man, to his physician, but a few hours before his decease: “I should not be surprised, if this were to terminate in my death. I did not expect to encounter what

has beset me since my elevation to the Presidency. God knows that I have endeavored to fulfil what I conceived to be an honest duty. But I have been mistaken. My motives have been misconstrued, and my feelings most grossly outraged." Oh! well, were it for our country, if, listening to the voice of rebuke, from the lips of this dying man, and especially from that Supreme Arbiter of nations and of men, in chastening us by this great loss, we should learn to lay aside that bitter animosity, that relentless malignity, that maliciousness of calumny, and vile detraction, which has not spared our purest patriots, pursues them to death, and involves the land in all the disgrace and danger that spring from the virulent feuds and selfish conflicts of faction. Unmeasured vituperation of the living is ill atoned by posthumous retraction, and sentimental eulogy of the dead!

We may learn, again, a lesson of humility, penitence, and trust in God. We have many public and personal sins, for which God engages in controversy against us. But His Providence calls us to repentance and hope in Him, as our Supreme Deliverer and Ruler. He has not visited us according to our iniquities. There have been dangers before now, and

times that tried men's souls. But he has overruled our fears, and brought us out of trouble into a wealthy place. We may look to Him,—but only to Him,—to do it again. He removes our princes and perplexes the nation. But He Himself is on the throne. Our reliance is on His mercy and equity. The nation and kingdom that will not serve Him, shall utterly perish. But if we are led by His Providence and grace to lay aside our base and selfish and sectional aims, and to allay our wretched controversies; if our public men and our people cherish a lofty patriotism, trust in God, look to Him for counsel, and follow His word, in our national policy and in our personal conduct, then may we hope for our best prosperity. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

In the view of all these circumstances, it becomes us to offer prayer unto God for those that are in authority over us, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. It is He by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. He only is able to make our rulers faithful. It is He alone, who can watch over the heart and counsels of the eminent citizen who has already succeeded to the func-

tions, the temptations, the labors, and the responsibilities of the Presidency. And with what force of pathos, comes to us, as well as to our Senators and Legislators, the modest but manly appeal, with which the new President closes his announcement to Congress, of the death of his illustrious predecessor :

“To you, Senators and Representatives of a nation in tears, I can say nothing which can alleviate the sorrow with which you are oppressed. I appeal to you to aid me under the trying circumstances which surround me in the discharge of the duties, from which, however much I may be oppressed by them, I have not shrunk. I rely on Him who holds in His hands the destinies of nations, to endow me with the requisite strength for the task, and to avert from our country, the evils apprehended from the heavy calamity which has befallen us.”

May this prayer be lifted up by all our countrymen, with holy hands, without wrath and doubting. And may it be answered from Heaven, by that God of Sabaoth, whose ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, nor His arm shortened that it cannot save.

Now, unto the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, our Saviour ; Who is

able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us ; Unto Him, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

AMEN. (1 Timothy, i. 17 ; Ephesians, iii. 20 ; Jude 25.)