

OUR FALLEN LEADER.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 1865, IN THE BRIDGE STREET
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GEORGETOWN, D. C.

BY

REV. A. A. E. TAYLOR,

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PASTOR-ELECT.

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REV. A. A. E. TAYLOR.

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SERMON.

“But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.”—
LUKE XXIV. 21.

THE followers of Christ, above all others, should be most cautious in applying to merely human greatness those words of Scripture by which especially our divine Master has been described. No being who ever trod the earth or rode the clouds of heaven is worthy of comparison with Him. Neither is any earthly work of deliverance of such priceless worth, as for one moment to be likened to His spiritual redemption of His people.

A single reflection will show you that we do not transgress this principle of Scripture use, by the present application made of the passage selected as a text. It appears plainly, from the study of the gospel history, that the disciples of Jesus never attained to the true apprehension of the *spiritual* nature of the Messiah's work, as a deliverance of their nation from the bondage of sin, until his interviews with them subsequent to the resurrection. Up to the time of His death, they expected to see him set up an earthly kingdom, and achieve political redemption for Israel from the yoke of Roman bondage.

Such was evidently the sense in which the two disciples, on the road to Emmaus, used the word “redeem,”

as they held converse with the stranger who "drew near and went with them." They spoke these words sorrowfully, in their grievous disappointment at the failure of Him in whom they had trusted, to re-establish the temporal throne of David, and restore unto their loved Israel its national rights and place of glory and power. They mourned a civil leader, from whose wise head and potent arm they had expected salvation from that national ruin which seemed so near. And with such a burden oppressing their hearts, they sadly exclaimed, "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

It will, therefore, appear to be not inappropriate for us, under similar circumstances, to employ these same words in the expression of our great national disappointment and grief at the loss of a leader to whom we looked with so much confidence for the deliverance of our people.

By the voice of the Chief Magistrate of our bereaved nation are we summoned to the solemn service of this day, as a day of humiliation and mourning in view of the sudden and untimely death of our late honored and beloved President. The religious end contemplated in the appointment of this day, is clearly stated in the proclamation under which we are convened. We are to "humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order that the bereavement may be sanctified to the nation; and in order to mitigate that grief on earth which can only be assuaged by communion with the Father in heaven." The whole loyal population of this nation are expected to "assemble in their respective places of worship, there to unite in solemn service to Almighty God, in memory of the good man who has been re-

moved, so that all shall be occupied at the same time, in contemplation of his virtue, and sorrow for his sudden and untimely end."

When the chief officer of the State, and representative head of the whole people, recognizes the hand of God in our public afflictions, and calls the nation to humiliation and prayer, it is the least that could be expected of Christian citizens, joyfully to respond, and give proof that we are a commonwealth which, not only from its high places, but from its universal heart, recognizes Jehovah as the Supreme Ruler and Dispenser of all events, before whom it is incumbent upon both individuals and States to bow and confess their sins. And it is all the more appropriate that we should now respond to this sad summons, since we have been so frequently before convened, in like manner, at the call of him whose end affords the occasion for our present convocation.

When President Lincoln fell by the blow of an assassin—the enormity, and cowardice, and shame of whose infamous crime against civilization, and humanity, and national life, no words can properly characterize—our entire nation was stunned, and, for a moment, reeled in horror and dismay. So deeply was the hope of the whole people grounded upon him; such confidence had they gained in his executive ability, by their experience of his justice, and wisdom, and integrity; so fully convinced were especially the religious portion of the community, that he was the chosen instrument of God for the deliverance of the nation, that, in the bitterness of their grief, and in their bewilderment at the future, they could only utter the touching wail, "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

The history of the inception and growth of this almost universal faith in his leadership, as appointed of God, is as remarkable as it is interesting.

The American people, above almost all others who have ever of themselves maintained an extensive government, have shown themselves most ready to accord their thorough confidence to the leader of their choice; but most stringent in the exaction of fidelity, zeal, and wisdom on his part. When any leader gives indication of incapacity or unfaithfulness they are ready to depose him in an instant, though they may have previously yielded to him their entire affections, and invested him with the character of a hero. So jealous and sensitive are they as to the proper administration and the rightful execution of the public trust.

The election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidential seat was the signal for the outbreak in act, of that treachery to the nation which was already ripe in heart. As this attempt to dismember the Republic has signally failed, so we are confident that history will show the causes which led to its origin to have been with its leaders ambitious, and with the masses who wildly followed, imaginary or delusive.

When the newly chosen President left his quiet home in the West, to assume control of the State, he had mingled but little in the public counsels; and to the vast majority of the people had been previously unknown, except in the canvass immediately preceding the election. Besides, it was the first entrance of the party that elected him, upon a lease of national power. The chief principles by which his administration was to be controlled had not yet endured the test of political experience in this land, although they were deeply

seated in the moral convictions of a large proportion of the loyal nation; more deeply seated, perhaps, than all were then ready to confess. Against these principles, and under such circumstances, the revolting States appealed in armed contest.

You well know with what trepidation, and even dread, in a sorrowful conviction of duty to God and the nation, the States that stood by the constitutional compact accepted the gage of battle, and entered upon the unwelcome conflict. You also well understand the vast difficulties and embarrassments, from causes both of inexperience and previous infidelity of public servants, and both at home and abroad, which surrounded the loyal States in this fearful crisis. All eyes were turned for help towards the untried man whose hands were now calmly laid upon the reins of government.

It were needless for us to follow his course through the tedious and arduous administration which followed; through days of trial, doubt, and darkness; through periods of ill-success at home and unfriendliness from abroad; through the testing of military leadership and the guardianship of constitutional principles; through the search for true financial and political policy, and for wise diplomacy, and the proper means and material of warfare by land and by sea; through the conflict for the control of popular emotion and the preservation of it from prejudice and misdirection, by those who opposed his policy; for the maintenance of the public spirit, and other interests of no less importance to the national security.

Is it any wonder, my friends, that amidst such perplexities we should find the one whom the nation held responsible for success in all, retiring from his public

offices to seek wisdom from "Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not." As he had been more than human not to have *needed* divine counsel, so he had been less than human not to have sought it, in such a position when vital interests were at stake.

Nor need we follow him through subsequent periods, when the day began to break, when the national anchor began to hold, when the storm began to abate; through increasing difficulties, until the hollow shell of conspiracy was at length broken, and the last remnant of hopeful resistance was about to be crushed between the two great approaching millstones of military power. In the many new and varied questions of policy and duty which were gradually evolved in the progress of our victorious arms—all of them involving, to a greater or less degree, moral principle, all surrounded with difficulties which to many seemed inextricable—his wisdom shone forth brighter and brighter, until the nation came e'er long to lean upon his judgment as supremely wise, although having sorely feared and doubted it betimes, when his adversaries were not unfrequently they of his own household of political faith. Until, as event after event proved how sagaciously he had unravelled their tangled perplexities, how sagely he had discerned the true thread of principle, the nation came at length to accept of his decisions as unchallenged wisdom, and to endorse his acts with instant acclamation, calmly confiding in the result, and awaiting in assurance the day of its favorable manifestation. So that never has a political leader stood more deeply rooted in the confidence and affection of any people under the sun, than did Abraham Lincoln in the hearts of the American people at the

hour when victory had crowned his endeavors, and the final battles for the preservation of the nation had been fought and won. This is not mere eulogy, my hearers, prompted by the favoritism of party, called forth by the glory of success, or forced to the lips by the partial judgment of personal grief. It is the solemn and simple testimony of truth, to which the world stands a witness to-day.

We are permitted in this connexion, also, to state that soon after the end of the great battles which closed up the conflict, a letter bearing upon this subject was received in this vicinity, from one of the most prominent ministers of our denomination in the late capital of the rebellion, who has been in warm sympathy with the secession movement from the very beginning. In this letter the writer states, as the result of his observation, for which he possessed unusual facilities, that towards the close of the conflict, as the people of that neighboring State gradually lost confidence in their own political leaders, so they steadily acquired confidence in Mr. Lincoln, and were ready at the time of his death to submit to his terms, and trust to his truth and wisdom with implicit faith.* It is also understood

*The following quotations from that letter will show that we have not exaggerated its expressions:—"No words can depict the grief and consternation that this foul murder has produced here. We were beginning to hope for speedy tranquillity, and knew that in Mr. Lincoln we had a man whose policy would certainly secure it; and all classes seemed ready to bow, and many to welcome his authority with joy. We felt that in him we had a wise, true, and humane ruler whom we could trust. And now, in the mysterious providence of God, he is struck down by the hand of the assassin. Oh, it is unspeakably sad and fearful, and we can only gaze in silence on this new act of sorrow and mystery that opens up. I believe that at no time, for two years past, would the assassination of Davis have caused a hundredth part of the grief here that this has done, for he has long been losing the love and confidence of the people, while Mr. Lincoln was, with

that this same clergyman, on the Sabbath after the news of the assassination reached him, pronounced a warm and discriminating eulogy upon the life and character of the deceased. After the furious conflict of the past four years, this is remarkable testimony in deed. Let the ages to come hear it and render judgment. And when the President fell, the world beheld a scene such, for greatness of its kind, as it never gazed upon before. The millions of a mighty nation arising as one man from business, society, and pleasure, and bowing down to grieve for a President as for a father; thronging out from palace and hamlet, to stand in line and guard the avenue of his funeral procession with parallel walls of living mourners for more than a thousand miles; to express in one appalling outburst a national lamentation, which found its responsive echoes from every nation and people unto the ends of the earth, even from thrones and chairs of state; and to clothe throughout a whole land, from ocean to ocean, in city and in country, every loyal house with the sombre drapery of a mourning that was both sincere and deep.

It does not require to be proved that such success in administration, and such a hold upon the popular heart, could not have been attained without mental capacities of a high order and deeply-seated moral principles, especially during such a period of popular agitation and conflict. Had not the nation had just cause to trust him before all others, we should not have seen him returned to his seat in the second term, with such an

unexampled rapidity, gaining it. * * * * *
 Most of the people of V——, I think, regarded the war as ended with Lee's surrender, and wanted peace, and were willing to come back on Mr. Lincoln's own terms."

overwhelming voice, amidst the most determined opposition of those whose sympathies were so foreign to his own.

It is too soon for history to weigh the acts and motives of Mr. Lincoln, in private and in his administration, and to assign him without prejudice to his true place among men. Such men as he rise in greatness with succeeding years, and the posterity of those who have thought lightly of his worth will delight to exalt him to the skies. We know enough, however, of his character and life to be assured that the future can never write his name in any humble place. He must ever live among the mighty, good men of earth.

Raised from the most humble and obscure position by the steadfast exercise of that natural force of mind and will which everywhere won him respect and favor, he preserved the simplicity of his early years until the latest moment of his life. He carried his natural gentleness and unassuming manners with him from his prairie home to the presidential chair. Elevation did not unduly elate, as adversity did not overwhelm him. He displayed in all the same tranquil, undisturbed, unimpassioned, hopeful, and serene character, that first arose before the nation's eye to pass to the mansion of the nation's chief. Governing, his simplicity ripened into wisdom, his meekness became patience, his hope endurance, and his serenity tenacious faith in God. So that he sat upon the chair of state "at once a giant and a child."

His judgment was singularly clear, cool, quick, and penetrating. His will was naturally firm and unbending, save to the pleas of pity or mercy. To the mild determination of that unshaken will, as it stood steadfast alike against the shock of extreme opinions from

different sides, more perhaps than to anything else, under God, do we owe our present prosperity.

His sense of justice was most keen. He would not willingly wrong even a child or an enemy; and amidst hours when his overtasked nature sought and demanded repose, he was found balancing the petitions and prayers of the suffering and distressed against the stern demands upon which the nation's life depended, seeking some possible way of escape. The widow or the mother in distress gained as ready access to his ear, and were as patiently and attentively heard in their pleas, as the statesman in his counsels.

He confided in the people as thoroughly as the people in him, and sympathized in all their sorrows. Indeed, his humane spirit was full of mercy and pity towards all. The fearful necessities and expedients of warfare wrung his tender heart, and his reluctant consent was yielded to them only when every other plan had failed. He was eager for the close of the conflict, though there were apparently years of power before him, that he might relieve from their sufferings those who had been deluded into the commission and support of resistance to the national authority. So conscious was he of nothing but kindness and compassion in his own breast for them, that he fearlessly ventured alone into the midst of their conquered capital, whilst the smoke of battle still overhung its dismantled defences. Neither the grievous sorrow of defeat, nor the atrocities of barbarism practiced upon imprisoned, helpless, and dying men, appeared to elicit from him expressions of unholy anger, malice, wrath, or vengeance. That self-possession and maintenance of an undisturbed spirit, which it has been so great a task for the Christian

people of this nation to preserve during the progress of the war, found their loftiest exhibition, as they endured their severest trial, because of his position, in him. Whilst his fidelity to the popular trust, and to the vital principles of natural and civil freedom, has been as evident as his desire and determination to wrong not even his bitterest foe.

If there ever was danger to the State from his hands, it arose from his choice to suffer rather than to commit a wrong, and to hedge about the necessities of justice with the sweet clemencies of mercy.

His integrity was unimpeachable, his honesty of purpose as evident as the frankness of his nature. His moral heroism was as sublime as it was fearless. And in him the nation finds all it desires to hand down as a model and living illustration of national character, and a specimen type and product of free representative government to succeeding generations.

His was a character worthy to complete the experiment of liberty which was begun under the hand of Washington; so let their names be inseparably linked together.

As we look upon yon unfinished monument of a nation's gratitude to its founder, whose half-risen mass is even now not beyond the range of our vision, we can but reflect how fitting it was that it should remain thus sadly incomplete, whilst the problem of the capability of a free people in governing itself was still unsolved. But now the time has come for block after block of marble to rise into its place, until the perfected shaft shall become the admiration, as the republican principle it represents is the bulwark, of this whole liberty-loving race.

The nation's capital itself is reaching perfection in an appropriate hour. So let the monument now begin anew its growth. And when the work is done, on its surmounting block let the grateful builders carve the name of him who brought to a successful issue that political enterprise which he whose honored name shall adorn its base first inaugurated. So shall the *cap-stone* respond with the notes of liberty to the *foundation-stone*, and the whole lofty pile stand to bear perpetual witness to the work that has been done, and so well done, between the dawn of liberty under *the first*, and its attainment to the perfection of power under *the second* Washington.

President Lincoln could scarcely have been what he was, except he had been first a Christian. Not that these beautiful characteristics *make* him a Christian, but they could scarcely have existed save as *the fruits* of a devout spirit. We rejoice, therefore, that we have satisfactory reason for believing that he was a sincere and earnest servant of the Lord, whose devout character steadily ripened towards the close of life. It is right that a Christian people should be governed by Christian magistrates. So shall we everywhere recognize the Lord as our nation's God and King.

Those who were privileged to hold spiritual intercourse with Mr. Lincoln repeatedly received from his lips assurance of his faith and personal confidence in the Son of God. Whilst the tone of all his proclamations, and especially of his last inaugural address, was such as to impress upon all men the sincerity and courage of his religious belief, which feared or shunned no public avowal.

We rejoice that we were permitted to have such a

President. And as we say with the disciples, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel," so our condition is not unlike theirs in this other respect, that he it was indeed, who, though he seemed lost to us, had yet redeemed his people.

The life of Abraham Lincoln, when justly portrayed, will exhibit the late rebellion in the height of its moral and political turpitude, since he was the representative of the laws and the moral principles against which it revolted. And it would have been more favorable to the rebellion to have had a less pure, true, and just character with which to be compared.

The mysterious fall of the President, at the precise moment when the part of physical force seemed finished, and the influence of reason and heart was about to resume that authority which peace ever confers, was terrible in its shock, not only to the Government, but also to the whole people. So far as concerned *the Government*, it was doubtless intended to be shown that there is scarcely any violent concussion that can even disturb the steady and fixed movements of a free Constitution, founded on the principles of divine justice and right, in its power to control the thinking millions of its subjects. If at such a crisis it could stand such a test, what could it not endure? Such a blow would have forced monarchies to reel from their foundations, and exploded an empire of tyranny into scattered and hopeless fragments.

So far as *the people* were concerned, the lessons which Providence intended thereby to impress are evidently various. God desired us to learn that no mere man who ever lived was essential to the accomplishment of his divine purposes; that he can work by one as well

as by another. So we are taught to rely not upon any single instrument or human agency, but primarily and substantially upon the Omnipotent Ruler who holdeth the heart of kings and governors in His hand, and turneth them as the rivers of water, whithersoever he will.

But doubtless the chief lesson indicated by this great national affliction, was the duty which this day teaches, of *national humility*. The whole approach to success in this war has lain through the path of disaster and sorrow. The inherent tendency of a free government is to the self-exaltation of the people who constitute it. To abase this pride may have been in part the object of this blighting conflict itself. And now, when final and conclusive victory had wreathed our banners, and the whole people were rejoicing, perhaps too much, with a carnal and self-reliant joy—especially when joy was letting down its moral barriers, and displaying itself in intemperate, sensual excesses and physical indulgence in too many quarters—this blow fell suddenly and violently upon us. “And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people.” This healthful sorrow tempered our joy, bowed our pride, steadied the national pulse and purpose, and brought us low before the throne of grace whence all our blessings flow; to which, if gratitude in joy will not serve to bring us, we may ever expect to be led by the hand of chastisement. God is the Lord who ruleth, and he is jealous of his prerogative, and will have it respected. We heard a voice saying unto us, “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted in the earth.”

When we attempt to condense into one distinct

lesson those inferences which are to be derived both from the character of the late President, and from the teachings of this startling providence by which he was sundered from us, we are deeply impressed with this one thought—that it is the duty of every faithful citizen to bear himself meekly, patiently, quietly, with forbearance and brotherly love, and due submission to rightful and established authority. The administration of justice to offenders of right belongs, and may safely be trusted to, the organization of law and its officers. It belongs not to society at large. The attempt by society to assume it would fill the land with ceaseless heart-burnings and discord. We are henceforth, as a people, to seek for unity in heart and life throughout all our bounds. The work of establishing this real and vital union will only be embarrassed and delayed by continued hostility in thought, word, or act.

More especially is it demanded of Christian people that they should conduct themselves with gentleness, and charity, and self-control. Let no untimely and needless word, bitter expression, or scornful look, aid in the perpetuation of social dissension. To bear and forbear, to endure and suffer, rather than to resent or challenge diversity of views, to stand fast and firm in principle, yet not to aggravate or provoke—this is Christian duty, this is the imitation of the life of our divine Master.

We will fail to acquire the lesson which the life of our fallen chief, amidst all its trials, constantly impressed, as well as refuse to accept the teaching of this terrible affliction, if we do not learn thus to conduct ourselves. This is the task to which the past and the present, as well as the future, unite to bind us. Let

us apply ourselves with diligence and watchfulness to the complete mastery of it.

Certain vital principles of national policy, for the ultimate decision of which an appeal was made to arms, have been definitely and permanently established in this highest court of war, by the result of the late conflict; and, being decided, the conflict has ceased. Of these, *two*, standing out almost solely prominent, are to be particularly observed.

First, it is now decided beyond further appeal, that the inhabitants of all our States are henceforth to live as one people, under one Constitution and one flag. In other words, the rights of States are to be subordinate to the rights and demands of the Union of States.

Secondly, human bondage throughout all our national territory is henceforth and forever at an end.

Now, whether any like the result or not, it is no less decisive and final, and it were forfeiting the character of law-abiding people to still oppose it. It becomes the evident duty of every faithful and upright citizen to accept the decrees of Providence, whether favorable or adverse to our personal preferences, and to submit peaceably to those decisions which cannot be reversed. Let all then conform themselves, submissively at least, if they do not so joyfully, to that state of affairs which is inevitable. Our duty as consistent Christians especially demands this much of us.

Without ever seeming to exult over the humbled foes of constitutional government and human freedom, we may say that, for ourselves personally, no other result could be grateful to our hearts, or in conformity with those pure civil and moral principles which we deem to be essential to the permanency of any govern-

ment, and its acceptability before a just and righteous God. During the course of this war for principle, it has appeared to the ministers of the gospel a bounden duty, from which they dared not draw back, to instruct the people that fidelity to their rightful Government, even to the extent of the defence of it by the sword, was fidelity to God and to his commandments. So have we invariably held and taught. So would we expect to do again, with similar light, under a solemn consciousness of duty.

But as to the future, now that civil power has resumed its sway, and so long as the life and morality of the nation appears to be no longer in danger from armed hostility, it will become the ministers of religion to remand the instruction of this duty, in great part, to the law and the civil powers, as upon them rests its enforcement.

So far as our own course in this respect, as the chosen spiritual leader of this church, may be now foreshadowed, it will be enough to say, that, whilst true in every instinct of our heart to the Government of our fathers, and maintaining steadfastly the duty of every Christian to lend it his cordial and sincere support, we yet trust that the occasion may never again arise which shall compel us, by the evident faithlessness of any in its performance, to enforce this duty from this desk. We shall seek, by a candid, patient, honest bearing in word and deed, by refraining from the indulgence of severity, or reproach, or impatient condemnation, to commend ourselves to you as the servant of Christ, in all forbearance, meekness, gentleness, and brotherly love, setting the things immediately pertaining to the kingdom of God before all lesser

interests. This course we also earnestly commend to you all, as brethren in Christ Jesus, having a common inheritance in the church of our Redeemer below, and one hope of glory above. Dear brethren: Let us live not in the past, but in the future. Let the dead past bury its dead, "but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." Let us strive to imitate the earnest apostle, and "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

These great humiliations of this war, if they serve no other purpose, should at least bind all the people of God, who recognize his hand, together before the throne of grace, in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

And may the forgiving Lord pour out his Spirit of grace upon us, and link us all closely in the chain of true and hearty Christian love; teaching us to receive, observe, and exhibit in our lives, that disposition manifested by our beloved Saviour for an example to us. May He again unite in one body every portion of our favored land, binding up all its wounds, healing its broken bones, and restore it speedily to that perfect health in every member, which shall prepare it, as a strong and undivided nation, for that blessed work which we trust he has appointed unto it, of becoming the messenger of grace and peace to the utmost bounds of the earth. So shall we be rewarded with His perpetual favor, and remain as a people, through His preserving grace, "one and indivisible," until the end of days.