

God Seen Above all National Calamities.

A SERMON

ON THE

DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

APRIL 23, 1865.

By A. D. GILLETTE, D. D.,
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WASHINGTON, D. C., *April* 24, 1865.

REV. A. D. GILLETTE, D. D.,
Pastor First Baptist Church:

The undersigned having listened to your discourse delivered on Sunday evening, April 23, in commemoration of the assassination of the late President of the United States, and deeming the moral and religious lessons it inculcates, as well as its tribute to the memory of one occupying so important a position, to be specially instructive and timely, respectfully request a copy of the same for publication.

R. J. POWELL.
L. C. BALL.
EDWARD YOUNG.
JNO. W. CLARKE.
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G. W. SAMSON.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *May* 1, 1865.

DR. R. J. POWELL, HON. L. C. BALL, and others :

GENTLEMEN: I duly appreciate the honor done me by your request. The sermon was prepared and preached with a view to usefulness. If in your judgment that end will be promoted by the issue of the discourse in printed form, it is with gratitude and hope committed to your care.

Yours, in the Gospel,

A. D. GILLETTE.

S E R M O N .

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.—ISAIAH vi, 1,

WHEN a little babe dies, all fathers and mothers weep with the sorrowing parents, and press their own dear lambs nearer their throbbing, loving hearts; for they know how frail the tie is that binds them to the pledges of their mutual love.

When parents die, the children of their neighbors cling more closely to their parents, and are in deepest sympathy with those who are so sorely bereft; for they realize that ere long it may be their bitter lot to drink of the sorrowful cup of orphanage.

If a faithful pastor falls from his sacred relation into the silent tomb, every church feels admonished that he whom they obey and revere in the gospel may be called from their service to go up higher.

When the Executive head of a great nation falls, all nations become mourners; for they know that the ruler they look to, to carry them on in improvements and give them desirable perpetuity and stability upon the earth, is also a man, and must ere long die, and may be called to his dread account in a moment least expected, and when they seemed most to need his guiding hand in the affairs which so vitally concern their common and individual good.

We, as a people, wept with weeping Britannia, when the good husband of their beloved queen passed from

time and Windsor Castle to the shade and solitude of the silent tomb. I am sorrowingly mistaken in my estimate of Christian Europe, among whose people I spent a few months of my life, if they all, and England especially, do not join in heart-felt grief with us in our funeral solemnities around the bier of him whom our whole nation mourns, and in respect to whom and the high office he filled so well, we devote the last hours of this sacred day in devoutest religious services.

The lesson of this hour is—*God seen above all national calamities.*

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.”

I. Rulers die. They must die, for they are mortal as other men are mortal. With you and I, beloved, they must meet the messenger from the tombs, and there come to a halt in his cold embrace.

“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.”

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” We must each of us, rulers and people, say, “Thou, Lord, wilt bring me to the grave; it is the house appointed for all living.” He in whose hand our breath is hath said, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” This decree was pronounced by lips that cannot dissemble, at the gates of Eden; it has never been altered, nor has it failed of verification in all the ages of our human history, except in the instances of Enoch and Elijah.

The fathers of our Federal Union, where are they? And the signers of our glorious Declaration of Independence, do they live for ever? In various States of our

great Republic they ended their illustrious mission, and died; reverent friends buried them out of their sight.

The brave legions of our glorious Revolution, were they invincible to the conqueror of all human conquerors? Did those of them who escaped the missiles of their enemies or survived the dying decree against them by their brutal enemies in loathsome jails and prison ships, are they not all gone? Except a corporal's guard—all, all, with their illustrious Washington at their head, have obeyed the divine roll-call and gone up on high, and only a few of their sepulchres are known to us of this day. Mount Vernon is yet sacred, and may be regarded as not only the entombing place of our first and greatest national chief, but as an enshrinement in hallowed memories of all who under him fought and bled in vindication of freedom's holy cause.

Of the sixteen men who have hitherto filled the Executive chair of our nation, three only survive. May Jehovah have ever in his safe keeping the life, the intellect, the heart and soul of him who now sits there, burdened with a nation's responsibilities, and almost overwhelmed in sympathy with the people in this their great peculiar grief, as in a recent personal interview I have reason to know.

The sixteenth and late Chief Magistrate of our Union has but just left us; his call hence was so sudden, so unlooked for, so deeply to be deprecated, especially "in the deep damnation of his taking off," that we are scarcely as yet awake to the consciousness that we shall see his manly form towering among us no more, nor greet his kindly countenance, or feel the warm clasp of his ready hand ever again. Abraham Lincoln is dead—as we speak of death; his ever-laboring brain was pierced by a bullet, shot from a pistol by the hand of a drunken, debased assassin, April 14, 1865. Though the wound was mortal, he did not die, thank Heaven! amid the unhallowed surroundings where he received it. Kind arms bore him to a Chris-

tian home, there to terminate his memorable and useful life. His breath and spirit went out of its clay tabernacle into the presence of his God and Judge from the house of a worthy family, belonging to the Lutheran Church, of which the Rev. Dr. Finckel is Pastor, in a room sacred to them, as from it, a few months since, went two cherub children to the bosom of the good Shepherd above. I thank God that he, whom we all revered, did not die in a place of questionable utility—a place I never was in, and where I entreat my hearers never to go. He died in a religious home, his friends and Pastor around him—the most sacred place this side of heaven. May it be ours to die amid such holy surroundings as ever cluster where Christian families reside. I know I speak for you all when I say—

When I die, as die I must,
And my worn body seeks repose,
At home with those in Christ who trust,
I'd yield to death, my last of foes.

For there 'tis given the good to die,
And there will guardian Angels come,
Heralds of grand eternity,
The ransomed sinner's joyful home.

The knell of death has sounded ; it sounded first from the steeple of this Church ; the authorities of the nation have paid funeral honors to him they officially surrounded, prudently counselled, loved, and respected. The electric throb has sent the thrilling sensation to the extremes of our country, and swift winged ships are bearing it to all peoples who live beyond the seas. The lofty form that so recently bowed to welcome the humblest citizen to the nation's mansion has been shrouded and confined, and committed to careful hands, to be borne to their home on the prairies, where in less exalted position he was not less loved than here.

Men of God, in presence of our newly inaugurated Chief Magistrate, have given Christian counsel to the living—

comforting words to the widow and fatherless children ; all has been done that a grateful community could do, to respectfully consign the casket, from whence the jewel had departed, to the keeping of the earth from whence it came, and from whence it will rise again at the last day. What remains to us now is to so improve this solemn Providence as that we may be benefitted by its having occurred. Each of us will be held accountable to the bar of the Lord Jesus, our only Saviour and final Judge, for the use we make of the lesson so solemnly and impressively taught us in this terrible and unlooked-for catastrophe.

Can we better do at this period in our life, and in the life of a lacerated nation, than to say, "Lord, so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom?" Does not divine wisdom teach us in our text, that "*God is seen amidst and above all national calamities?*"

Secondly. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple."

So let us, my brethren, now that our honored President has died, "see also the Lord on high," His train in gracefulness and glory filling the temples of our land, and the hallowed place where we now worship.

I. We have need to see the Lord now on high, because we have been too grovelling and sensual in our thoughts and ways heretofore. When victory perched on our national banners, when armed rebels fled before our vindicators and defenders, we did not as we should give God the glory that was due unto His holy name. We rejoiced, as well we might ; but instead of devout gratitude to him who enabled us to triumph, there was the sound of licentious revelry and noisy coarseness in our joy. Loosed for a season from the toils of routine life, many rushed madly

to the intoxicating cup for stimulus to artificial excitement, and drowned all seasonable delight in mire, and a poison that not the dumb animals will swallow. We heard men say, when Richmond had fallen, they would get drunk then, if never again.

Oh! my beloved, such things ought not so to be among us—a people educated to rational freedom, nurtured on the warm bosoms of Christian mothers, and having access to the word of God as a ritual with which to chant our ecstasies, and surrounded with open churches wherein to pay our vows and declare our thanksgivings.

II. We should see the Lord above all national calamities, that so we might place our confidence for future success in a certain help in time of trouble.

I have seen men high in civil and military positions resorting to exhibitions of frivolous if not immoral tendencies in this and other cities, when their sons, brethren, and fellow-citizens in arms were bareing their bosoms to the storms of death, and weltering in dying gore upon battlefields, so near that we could hear the roar of cannon that was tearing them to pieces. I have trembled for my sons, and the sons of others, exposed on the ball-ploughed fields, and have, wondering, asked if my God, who is just, as well as merciful, would give success to a people so forgetful of the solemnities and even proprieties of a time so momentous as this was. Ambulances loaded with brave mangled men have rumbled through our streets past scenes of revelry and crime which we would suppose fiends only could delight in, amid associations so solemn and anxious as were transpiring near us.

That we may be chastened and have proper sympathy with those who peril all for our common good, we must see the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and to Him we all must look when death is at his carnival, and union and freedom are the prey he is voraciously seeking to devour.

III. We have depended too entirely on man when we have been in dread of our enemies. In triumph we gave too much glory to man, and not enough to God. He assures us He will not give His glory to another. He is a jealous God. While I yield to no man in intelligent admiration of the unsullied integrity, uncorrupted honesty, lofty aims of philanthropy, and pure patriotism of our lamented President, I do most fearfully believe he was sometimes put between us and HIM who alone could help us. Not by his desire to be so exalted ; he was too humble and reliant on divine aid himself ever to admit of such an emotion ; but we were prone to forget the hole of the pit from whence we were digged, and the rock from whence we were hewn, and said man had done what Omnipotence alone could do.

I fear, my brethren, that when our heavenly Father saw that his goodness did not deter us from putting our trust in princes, nor from resting too entirely on an arm of flesh, he permitted a reckless wretch to assassinate our good President, and cowardly steal into the home of our chief of cabinet, and with bloody hands complement and companion that act, at least in extent, and even beyond in diabolical intentions of butchery, and so commit the deed that has disgraced the name of civilization.

Cain is exceeded in this wickedness, and a worse than Cain's mark is set upon the villain's murderous brow. Go where these murderers may, these human fiends will find, even in savage wilds or African deserts, Satan also going with them, tormenting them before the time. No civilized people will give them asylum. They must go, driven by the fiery furies which their well-served but cruel master of the pit will send to hound them on their track, with no rest for the soles of their feet in all the realms of existence, and as they cannot escape the just judgments of God we dare not speak of their terrible hereafter. In life they cannot escape that worse than hell into which tiger

passions have engulfed them ; and ever as consciousness lights up its glare in their gloom, each must exclaim, "Myself am hell, and hell itself were tolerable if it could but hide me from myself." Every night-wind they breathe will howlingly echo from their blistered throat and lips the terrific exclamation, true as it is wild and despairing, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Except repentance ensue and marvellous mercy interpose, each must be as a tree set on fire by lightning, kindled and blasted, "his life one long war with self-sought foes."

IV. Finally, God must be seen above all national calamities, in order that we may have Him to go to in time of trouble. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," was an apostolical exclamation in an hour of need and trial.

Our late President Lincoln is dead. Andrew Johnson is now our President. "The powers that be are ordained of God," and we are to respect, obey, and pray for all who bear rule over us. Christians are to be loyal to both God and man.

"A foe to God was ne'er true friend to man."

It is our first duty to look up to Him who is on the throne of the universe, for direction and help in discharging our duties growing out of the death that has bereaved us, and the mercy that gives us one so able to succeed him.

Are we afflicted? then let us pray. Our Saviour, "being in an agony, prayed more earnestly." Prayer is the result, the pledge, the solace, the right use of affliction. The deeper the anguish that rives our hearts, the greater the necessity for the rest and support we may find at the throne of the heavenly grace, "on which the Lord sits high and lifted up." In the greatness of our personal and national grief, let us not, like our shamed ancestors in Eden, flee away and hide ourselves from God, but pray. Let us not,

like Cain, try to dissipate our consciousness of need by building and being absorbed in worldly objects, but let us come before the Lord in penitent, beseeching prayer. Let us not, like Jonah, be fretful and angry because of the withering of our earthly gourds, but let us give ourselves unto the seeking prosperity of Him who is ever on the throne, and whose train of mercies fills the temples.

“When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wounds, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian and sent to King Joreb ; yet would not he heal them nor cure them of their wounds.” Not so will we ; but in the sickness of our souls, and the wounds of our people, we will to Him, who alone can cure. Not like Saul shall we repair to carousing and dissipation, to drown our sorrows or wash away the remembrance of our guiltiness, but pray, “Lord, help ! for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men.” We must not, like Ahitophel and Judas, suicidally plunge ourselves into hell for relief from the ills that whelm us here, but say to one another, “Come and let us return unto the Lord, for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; he hath smitten, and He will bind us up.” Though the heavens are brass over our heads, and the earth iron under our feet, and we hear the roaring of His vindictive thunder and are terrified at the shaking of his avenging spear, whom we have most justly offended, and are afraid at His tokens,—yet with the patient patriarch we will say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

Let each of us set a Christian example before the world, the best that we can do in our lot and station, resolving to contribute the life and heart of one patriot and Christian to the good of our wounded country, and a needy world.

Doing this, we may confidently hope to finish our course with triumphant joy, and go into the possession of a glorious eternal hereafter. With the consecration of the noblest purposes in our hearts, and full trust in the merits of Jesus Christ underlying all our prospects, if we must

needs be occasionally cast down, we shall not be destroyed. In our personal and national trials we shall see the Lord on the throne, high and lifted up, and His train filling the temple, and we singing responsive to the heavenly host.

“ I seem forsaken and alone,
I hear the lions roar,
And every door is shut but one,
And that is mercy’s door.

“ There till the dear Deliverer come
I’ll wait with humble prayer,
And when he calls his exiles home
The Lord shall find me there.”

Let us Pray.

Our Father and God, we now pray unto Thee in words Thou didst hear from the lips of our beloved Washington, saying :

“ May thy Providence, which has so long appeared to be on our behalf so manifestly, interpose and help us through all this struggle, and direct us to the measures to be used and pursued to bring about the happy event all lovers of Thee and of mankind so ardently desire ! ” “ Mayest Thou who art powerful to save, in whose hands is the fate of nations, look down with an eye of tender pity and compassion upon the whole of these United States, continue to smile upon our councils and arms, and crown them with success, whilst employed in the cause of virtue and mankind.”

We humbly beseech Thee, O most merciful Lord God ! that this distressed country, and its capital, and every part of this wide-extended continent, through Thy divine favor, may be restored to more than their former lustre and once happy state. May we have peace, liberty, and safety, secured upon a solid, impartial, and permanent foundation.

May freedom be given to all the oppressed, health be

restored to all sick and wounded, comfort ministered to all who mourn! The fatherless and the widow do Thou take into the covenant-keeping of Thy everlasting arms. May we all, with hearty repentance and sincere faith, turn away from our sins unto Thee, O Lord!

We do most humbly and heartily beseech Thee to bless Thy servant the President of these United States, his cabinet and counsellors, members of our Senate and Congress, with all others in authority; endow them plenteously with Thy grace and wisdom, that so being replenished, they may do good while they live, and come at last to the enjoyment of eternal felicity in presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; to whom be glory and dominion world without end. Amen.