

The Dealings of God with our Nation.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN WASHINGTON, D. C.

ON THE

DAY OF HUMILIATION AND PRAYER,

June 1, 1865,

BY

REV. T. R. HOWLETT,

PASTOR OF THE

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH.

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WASHINGTON, D. C., June 5, 1865.

Rev. T. R. HOWLETT :

Dear Sir,—The undersigned having listened with pleasure and much satisfaction to the discourse delivered by you in the E Street Baptist Church, before the united congregations of the E Street and Calvary Baptist Churches, on the observance of the day appointed for Humiliation and Prayer on account of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, late President of the United States, respectfully request the same in full for publication.

AMOS KENDALL,
GEORGE W. McLELLAN,
C. S. BUTTS,
GEORGE WOOD,
E. A. PARKER,
S. V. BOYD,
DAVID HAYES,
WM. STICKNEY.

—00—

HON. AMOS KENDALL, HON. G. W. McLELLAN, and others :

Gentlemen,—In compliance with your request, I cheerfully place at your disposal a copy of the discourse preached in the E Street Baptist Church on the 1st inst. I feel honored by this expression of your accord and approbation of the sentiments set forth, and trust the day is not distant when they shall be cherished by all, both in this city and throughout our common country.

Yours, respectfully,

T. R. HOWLETT,
Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church.

WASHINGTON, D. C., June 5, 1865.

A DISCOURSE.

PSALM CXLVII, 20.—“He hath not dealt so with any nation.”

The nation here spoken of was Israel. It was a faithful testimony which David gave in the text, whether we regard his language as referring to the mercies or judgments of God. The Lord had dealt with this nation, as with no other, in its origin. It sprang from Abraham, the “friend of God.” Unto him Jehovah said: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred. and from thy father’s house unto a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great *nation*.” Their history shows us the fulfillment of this promise. God’s distinguishing goodness appears in the choice of their inheritance. “When the Most High separated the sons of Adam, when He divided the nations their inheritance, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” The same truth appeared in their religious advantages. Other nations walked in the darkness of heathenism, but unto them were committed the lively oracles. “God was in their midst—their very present help in trouble.” To sum up all in the fewest words, we may say He dealt with them “by temptations, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand, by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors.” The Psalm, with which the text stands connected, is a review of their history through successive centuries. The text itself is the conclusion to which the inspired author comes.

I hope I do not abuse this beautiful passage in applying it to our own country. Is it not as true of us as of ancient Israel? May not Americans also say “He hath not dealt so with any nation?”

The hand of God’s Providence appears as distinctly in *our origin* as in that of the Hebrew commonwealth.

How unlike other nations are we in this respect. Take those of Europe for example. They were once rude, and barbarous, and savage. They have attained to their present state of enlightenment, prosperity, and strength by the growth of ages. What were the ancient Britons

when Caesar marshalled his legions and displayed the Roman eagles on their shores? They were a barbarian race—as wild and fierce as the savage tribes whom our fathers found in the unbroken forests of the New World.

How different our origin. The founders of this nation were the choicest spirits of the most cultivated communities of the Old World. They were men of intelligence, courage, high moral character, true Christian principle. Nobler blood than theirs never warmed the human heart. They were exiles of righteousness, pilgrims and sojourners in a strange land for conscience sake. The scowl of power could not intimidate them; the favor of crowned heads could not seduce them. They were higher than the kings whose edicts banished them, for they were “great in the sight of the Lord.” Such were the men whose character, principles and influence, like the solid granite of the everlasting hills of their own New England, laid the foundation and built the structure of American civilization and nationality. All honor to these heroic, God-like men, who braved the dangers of wintry seas and the more frightful dangers of the wilderness, that they might in Western wilds found a “Church without a Bishop,” and establish “a State without a King.” Of them this nation was born, and well may we exult over our origin.

“Our boast is not that we deduce our birth
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth:
But higher far our proud pretensions rise,
The sons of parents passed into the skies.”

Again, if we consider the goodly heritage which the Lord has given us, we have cause to say, “He hath not dealt so with any nation.”

The land of Canaan was an exceedingly good land. It abounded in fountains and streams, and orchards, and vineyards. It yielded fruits of the choicest kinds. Its pastures were clothed with flocks; its valleys were covered with corn. It flowed with milk and honey. In it the people ate bread without scarceness.

But what was it either in its extent, or the variety and abundance of its productions, compared with our land? From east to west, from north to south, it might be measured by the journey of a few days. But ours stretches from the bristling regions of the north to the sunny fields of the south, where summer forever reigns; and from the troubled waters of the Atlantic to the peaceful waves of the Pacific. The Eastern and the Western Oceans lift up their billows for its defence, and the voice of their many waters cry to the crowned heads of other lands, “thus far shalt thou come, *but no farther.*”

Time would fail me to tell of the variety and beauty of American scenery, of the diversity and bounty of our productions, of our exhaustless resources which have scarcely begun to be developed. The Valley of the Mississippi is more fruitful than Palestine and ancient Egypt combined, and could furnish the world with bread. We have single mountains in whose bosom is stored wealth sufficient to pay our national debt. But of these things I need not speak. It is enough to know that it excels all other lands, and that in so rich a gift God has "not dealt so with any nation."

Again, as an evidence and illustration of the truth of the text in its application to ourselves, I might mention the prosperity and growth of our country. In this respect we also are without a parallel in history.

There are men now living who saw the day on which the foundations of our Government were laid. During their lifetime it has passed from infancy to manhood—it has grown from a child to a *giant*, beneath whose strong right arm the oppressed of all nations find protection. Contrast our present condition with what it was at the close of the Revolution. We were then few in number, small in influence, and weak in resources. The life of the country was well nigh exhausted in the struggle for independence. What a change has taken place since that day! The wilderness and the solitary place have blossomed as the rose. Our valleys have echoed to the songs of the reapers. Our hills have smiled with culture carried to their tops. Villages, towns, cities, have sprung up all over the land. In the contemplation of their number and magnitude we are bewildered and become like them that dream. The prows of our ships plough every river, lake and sea. The iron horse neighs to his neighbor on the far distant prairie, where but yesterday the wolf and the buffalo and the wild Indian roamed, and speeds with his ponderous train towards the setting sun, as on the wings of the wind. Thought, on nerves of iron, outstrips the flight of time, and at a single pulsation overwhelms with sorrow or thrills with joy the inhabitants of the whole land.

Our population has kept pace with the march of our other prosperity, until we have increased from three millions to thirty millions of souls. All this in the lifetime of a man! Surely He hath "not dealt so with any nation."

Again, the truth of our text appears in the measure of civil and religious liberty enjoyed by us as compared with other nations of the earth.

"With a great sum," have we and our fathers "obtained this freedom." It cost them the struggle of the Revolution to establish the first great principle of the Declaration, that "all men are *created free and equal*." It has cost us the severer struggle of a mightier war to maintain it.

Long before the Revolution the conflict for *religious* liberty began. The battle though moral and spiritual was real and earnest. We, as a denomination, have especial cause to be grateful that it was not fought in vain. The Baptists were the first to advocate and espouse the principle of unrestricted freedom in the worship of God. They did it in the face of opposition from Church and State, and against the prejudice of the whole human race. For its sake they were imprisoned and fined and banished. But the principle itself was not banished. It grew stronger and increased in favor with the people until it was incorporated into the Constitution of our country, and therein declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Thus, cotemporary with the establishment of the Union was the Tree of Liberty planted. She was placed by our fathers in a soil enriched by their tears, their treasure and their blood, and commended to the gracious favor of God. Throughout the North she "grew like the olive tree" and "cast forth her roots like Lebanon." But for the blighting airs of *slavery* she would long since have overshadowed the whole land. They retarded her growth and withered some of her branches for a season, but could not destroy her life. In spite of every hindrance she *grew*. Entwining her roots about the granite hills of the East, and extending them westward beyond the Alleghenies, over the valley of the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains, and lifting her broad arms high she has, in our day, grappled with the storm cloud of rebellion and oppression, and tossing it to the skies in triumph, waves over us in beauty, her every leaf marked with the red sweat-drops of her foe in the struggle. Henceforth she shall grow up to the heavens. She shall stretch her boughs southward as well as northward and her leaves shall be as green by the Savannah and the Santee as on the banks of the Merrimac, or by the Falls of Niagara, where many waters thunder their ceaseless and majestic anthem to the God of the free. She shall yield her fruit in its season at the mouth of the Mississippi, as well as at its source. She shall flourish beside all waters, and under her shadow a free press, free speech, free thought, and a free people shall "revive as the corn," and "grow as the vine," according to the prophetic word. Truly this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. "He hath not dealt so with any nation."

The declaration of the text is as true with respect to our afflictions as our mercies. Israel was dealt with "by temptations, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand, by a stretched out arm, by great terrors." We, as a nation, have been dealt with in like manner.

We are this day tossed with conflicting emotions, and know not whether most to rejoice or mourn. Our condition is like that of the Hebrews when the foundation of the second temple was laid. "All the people shouted with a great shout because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the ancient men that had seen the first house when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

So is it this day in our highly favored, and yet deeply afflicted land. It is difficult to say whether this should be observed as an occasion of thanksgiving and praise over the success that has crowned our arms and the brightening prospects of peace, throughout our borders, or of humiliation and prayer, under the calamity that has overwhelmed with sorrow our own nation, and stunned with horror the whole world. Since the last of March, we have been standing where two seas meet—the one of sorrow, the other of joy—and they have both been at their highest flood. The peans of victory have been mingled with the funeral dirge. The sons of the Republic are returning in triumph from the war, but the Father of the country is gone. His spirit has passed into another world, wearing the gory crown of martyrdom. The foundation of our "second temple"—a regenerated nation—has been laid in our firstborn, and we can but lift up our voice and weep. The hour seems sacred to grief; and the ministers of religion might not this day complain if from every pulpit the people bade them retire and leave them to weep in silence. All hearts are overwhelmed with emotions too powerful for utterance. Our lips are dumb "because of thy judgments, O Lord!"

But we have occasion to sing of *mercy* as well as of judgment to-day, and it is hard to "discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

We have occasion for praise in the integrity and uprightness of our departed chief; I shall not attempt to eulogise him. Eulogy mistakes her province when she chooses for her theme ABRAHAM LINCOLN. He needs no Homer to celebrate his praise. His deeds have clothed him with an earthly immortality. He has a monument "more lasting than brass," and "higher than the pyramids," in the love of his country saved and the gratitude of millions whose broken fetters he carried in his hands when he ascended to the bosom of his God. Like Moses, who lead Israel from Egypt, he went up to Pisgah's top and viewed the promised land, and then "was not, for God took him."

"The children of Israel wept for Moses thirty days in the land of

Moab." In our own and other lands millions weep for *many days* over Abraham Lincoln's death. Strong men whose cheeks blanched not before the storm of iron hail, of screaming shot and bursting shell, become children at the mention of his name, and exclaim "O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."

From the assassination of the President we learn a new lesson of the diabolical nature of treason. We had had portraits of its character before—in the barbarity shown to the wounded and slain, in the massacre of hundreds after surrender, in the starvation of thousands upon thousands of helpless prisoners—but this last was its master-stroke. It was the limner's touch that finished the picture, and presented it to mankind in all its horrid and hideous proportions.

Upon whom rests the awful guilt and responsibility of this crime? Not alone upon him who fired the fatal weapon, and whom the vengeance of God suffered not to live. Not alone upon the miserable wretches now on trial for their complicity; but upon every aider and abettor of the Rebellion. Ministers who have preached peace and conciliation when they meant aid and comfort to the foe—Women who have spoken insultingly of the "boys in blue"—Men who have disparaged our successes and magnified our disasters.—Upon all these as well as upon Confederate soldiers in arms and the greater conspirators, rests the blood of our ruler, and all the innocent blood that has been shed during the war. In vain they wash their hands, like Pilot, and protest their innocency. They can never remove the stains. Through life they shall cry:

"Here's the smell of the blood still;
All the perfumes of Arabia never
Can sweeten these hands."

They are verily guilty, for without their countenance Rebellion had never made such headway. Less than this, we may not say, lest we suffer sin to remain upon them. For such as have done it ignorantly there is mercy if they now repent. But the chief conspirators, who have sinned wilfully, must find no place for repentance, though they seek it carefully and with tears. Justice, public necessity, and the well being of millions through coming generations, demand the expiation of their great crime by the rendering up of their lives.

Dark has been the cloud that for years past has hung over our land; abundant and terrible has been its red rain. Thank God its force is at length spent; its last bolt has been drawn. The bow of peace is painted on its brow. It spans the heavens in beauty, and touches the

extremes of the northern and southern horizon. Beneath its triumphal arch we have seen returning to the Capitol the war-worn and glory-crowned armies of the Republic, amid the bursting plaudits of the nation saved by their valor on a hundred fields. Never was the Government so strong—never was our country so secure.

The good ship of State, against many difficulties, and amid many dangers, has descended the river from its source to its mouth. She has passed the narrows, and now feels the swell of the ocean, and spreads her sails to catch the freshening breeze. The pilot, who had served so well on the river, has landed on an immortal shore, and another, and perhaps stronger hand is on the helm. Henceforth, with a crew of thirty millions, who are proud of the deck that bears them, she shall plough the briny billows. Already her hull is seen by distant nations, and the struggling peoples of all lands hail her with mingled emotions of fear and hope. Their voice comes to us over the waters. "Ship ahoy! what cheer? From whence do you sail? with what are you freighted and whither bound?" We sail from the port of the Immortal Declaration. We are freighted with the blessings of Democracy and Constitutional Liberty. We visit every land, but chiefly the shores of the *New World*, to insure to its nationalities exemption from the interference of the kings and despots of the old.

Hark! there comes responsive over the waters the melody of song. It is the voice of a great multitude singing for our cheer:

"Sail on, O ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity, with all her fears,
With all her hopes for coming years,
Is hanging, breathless on thy fate."

Let us, O friends, regard this as a day of good tidings, as well as of sorrow. We have greater cause for joy than grief. All armed resistance to the Government has been overcome. The rebellion is ended. The arch traitor himself—like the devil, who sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light—has been taken in the guise of a woman. "*For the greatness of his iniquity have his skirts been discovered and his heels made bare.*" This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. "He hath not dealt so with any nation," let us therefore come into his presence with praise. Let the "noise of the shout of joy exceed the noise of the weeping of the people." Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. AMEN.