



SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH, AND DELIVERED
AT THE FUNERAL OF THE

HONORABLE

OLIVER ELLSWORTH Esq. L. L. D.

WHO DIED NOVEMBER 26th, 1807.

IN THE SIXTY-THIRD YEAR OF HIS AGE.

BY HENRY A. ROWLAND,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WINDSOR.


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TO the bereaved Widow and afflicted Children; the following discourse, preached at their desire, and published by their request, is inscribed by their sympathising friend,

THE AUTHOR.



A FUNERAL SERMON.

PSALM XXXIX. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it.

DIVINE mercies and chastisements are so promiscuously distributed to men in the present state, that we cannot, by their outward circumstances in life, determine their real character.

David, though a man after God's own heart, was distressed with outward afflictions and inward terrors—yet he resolved he would not utter a word which would appear as a reflection on God and his Providence. After making some observations on the brevity of human life, he resolved to exercise fortitude under every trial, and to seek for happiness, in the enjoyment of God. In order to this he prayed for pardon, and professed submission to the divine will. “I was dumb ; I opened not my mouth ; because thou didst it.” He was silent as to murmuring or repining against God or his Providence. When he looked to instruments only, he was discomposed and spake unadvisedly. But when he looked upon God, as the sovereign disposer of all things, he was silent.

It is our duty, under all the trials of life to lie in humble submission before God.

This will appear if we consider

I. God is the rightful owner and proprietor of all things.

II. It is our duty to submit when he takes our comforts away.

I. God is the rightful owner and proprietor of all things, and therefore has a sovereign right to dispose of them. By his almighty word he brought the world and all things in it into existence. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. He hath made us and not we ourselves. He supports that life which he has given us—for "in him we live, and move, and have our being; and in him are all our ways."

It is he who sets the solitary in families, and makes a hedge about their dwellings. His blessing it is, which makes their habitations the residences of peace and happiness. Without it, every relation in life would be a snare, and every blessing would be embittered; we should have no capacity for enjoyment in the fulness of earthly good. When he sees fit, he can, with the utmost ease, draw a melancholy veil over all our worldly prospects, and bring on us such a train of disasters, as will fill our souls with anguish, and cause us to go mourning all our days. God is our rightful owner, because he hath created us. The Creator hath surely a right to the work of his own hands. He upholds us in being; and, therefore, has a right to that which could not exist a moment without his supporting power. He has endowed us with rational souls, which are capable of knowing and serving him. He therefore justly claims our love, gratitude and obedience.

He hath redeemed us by the precious blood of his own Son—and therefore we are not our own, but his; for we are bought with a price.

We have abused our rational powers, and have not known, nor served God aright. Our knowledge and services have been confined to the earth. Our health and ease have been improved to selfish purposes. The glorious Sav-

our has been refused the dominion of our hearts, and our lives have not been consecrated to God.

As we have forfeited these blessings, God has a right to take them away.

Further—All our outward comforts are from God. It is he who feeds and clothes us, provides for us comfortable habitations, and raises up for us friends and benefactors. It is he who has constituted the nearest and most intimate of all connections, and made them subservient to each other's happiness. He formed their mutual joy and congratulations in prosperity, the united participation of which increases their delight, and their mutual sympathy, while under the frowns of providence. These tender sensibilities and mutual participations, tend to alleviate the sorrows of life, and to render those adverse scenes tolerable, which would, otherwise, with difficulty be borne. It is he who, in our children, causes us to be born again, makes them a comfort to us, and a blessing to the world. In receiving these bounties of divine Providence, we have considered them as our right, rather than as a free gift, and have murmured that we received no more. We have improved them for our own gratification, rather than to promote our gratitude and piety. We are commanded to remember God in all the common actions of life, and to have an ultimate regard to his glory. "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Our friends and relatives were given to promote our present comfort and spiritual joy; to help each other in the way to heaven. But how have we forgotten God in these creature comforts, and loved the creature more than the Creator! God is just, then, when he withholds the bounties of his providence, and dries up the streams of earthly comforts. The abuse of his mercies is a just cause for their removal. The

great Father of the universe has often merciful designs, when he strips us of creature enjoyments, that we may cease leaning on them, and choose him for our portion.

II. It is our duty to submit to God's will when he takes away our comforts. As a Sovereign he has a right to dispose of all things according to his own pleasure. He is not obliged to give account of his doings. Though as a Sovereign he has a right to do as he pleases; his infinite justice and equity will cause him to do all things, in the best manner. He will do no injury to his creatures: He will do right. His throne is established in righteousness—justice and judgment are the habitation thereof. We are bound to submit to him as a Sovereign God. This is the requirement of the gospel. The want of it occasions disquietude, leaves us a prey to fierce and turbulent passions, and the reproaches of a guilty conscience.

The opposition of the heart to the divine Sovereignty, occasions all our murmuring and discontent. It is this which keeps us away from Christ, and causes him to withhold the blessings and consolations of the gospel. This stubbornness of heart, if continued, will prevent the salvation of the soul.

Under a sense of our sinfulness, we are willing to receive the comforts of religion, but are not disposed to receive them as a sovereign gift. The heart opposes the divine government in all its operations, whether exercised in temporal, or spiritual and eternal blessings. This is our unhappiness and our guilt. We ought to lie in humble submission before God, be willing that he should order all the circumstances of our lives, continue the blessings which we enjoy, or take them away just as he pleases. When he visits us with prosperity, we should rejoice in him with holy joy, and let the gratitude of our

hearts be manifested in the praises of our lips, and obedience of our lives. When he visits us with the rod, and draws a melancholy vail over all our worldly enjoyments, we should be humble before him, repent of our sins, and be anxious to reform what has been amiss in us.

The days of prosperity are but few, and then come the evil days. Our families are for a time flourishing, our children like olive plants around our tables. But soon the scene is reversed—one misfortune treads on the heels of another—sickness and death enter our dwellings—a beloved child, which we fondly hoped would comfort us, or the dear companion of our days is taken away. Our joys are succeeded by sorrows; our pleasing prospects, by melancholy gloom.

In these painful trials, we should be submissive to God. It is *he* who orders them, and has a right so to order. This is the time for the trial of our submission. There is no trial when things go well with us, and our wills are not crossed. True submission will make us resigned in adversity, as well as in prosperity, when our friends are taken away from us, by death, as well as when they are about us. Of this christian virtue, we have many scripture examples.

When the sons of Aaron were consumed by fire from heaven, and in an act of wickedness, far from murmuring or faulting the divine dealing, it is said, "Aaron held his peace." When good old Eli was informed of the ruin which was coming upon his house, he received it with meekness: and in the language of great submission, said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." He was submissive when the trial came: his faith and patience held. When intelligence was brought him that his sons were slain in battle, though we may well suppose his heart was sorely wounded, he was not over-

whelmed. So much greater was his regard for the honor of God, than his own interest, that when he heard that the ark of God was taken, so violent was the shock, he fell backward from his seat and died.

Our regard for the honor of God should outweigh all other concerns. When under the rod, we must feel the stroke : but we may feel deeply wounded and yet submit. Submission does not imply an indifference to earthly concerns, nor a hard, unfeeling heart toward our distressed and dying friends. This is not submission, but a reprehensible apathy. There must be a trial, or there is no room for the exercise of the virtue ; nor will the affliction be followed by a religious improvement. It will serve to harden the heart more and more.

Job was heavily afflicted, and most sensibly felt the rod. He appeared to all about him, a forlorn and distressed object, as he really was. And yet under his accumulated load of trials, the loss of his property, the death of his children, the painfulness of disease, he opened not his mouth against God, but submissively said, “ Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

In a review of this subject we observe, If God has a sovereign right to order and dispose of all things according to his pleasure, how wrong do we to murmur, and find fault with his dispensations ! To this sin we are exceedingly prone. We complain when divine dispensations do not agree with our views and feelings. We cannot bear to be crossed. How guilty are we to oppose the government of God ! How unwise, also, when our opposition will not alter the divine determinations ! God’s government is just, and he will do according to his pleasure. We are

weak, short-sighted creatures, and know not what is best: but God is infinitely wise. He not only knows what is best, but the infinite goodness of his nature will lead him to do all things in the best possible manner. We ought, therefore, cheerfully, to trust him with all our concerns, and in our afflictions, to cast our care on him.

Many are the trials to which we are called—many and great the disappointments which we must meet. They are the common lot of humanity, and cannot be avoided. But all will end well, if the temper and disposition of our hearts are right. For, all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to his purpose.

Dreadful indeed will it be for those who despise God's chastenings, and do not tremble under the rod. They are in great danger of being given up of God to a hard heart and a blind mind.

God makes use of mercies to bring men to repentance. When these do not answer the designed effect, he visits with affliction—and after much long-suffering he sometimes withholds his chastening and says, “Why should ye be stricken any more, ye will revolt more and more.”

Let all who are afflicted be earnestly engaged at the throne of grace, that they may answer the design of the affliction. O ye who are “tossed with tempests and not comforted,” see where your help lies! Are any afflicted, let them pray. Look to God for instruction and comfort. Fly to him as the only rest for your souls. In this way you may derive good, from the evil which you endure.

Have you been called to the painful trial of parting with dear friends? And does the world look gloomy about you on this account? Be silent before God, and open not your mouths, in complaint, because he has done it.

If earthly friends forsake you, make it your great concern to obtain an heavenly friend. His friendship will be sincere and permanent, he will never leave nor forsake you. In him you may securely trust amidst all the storms and tempests of life. Though they beat upon, they shall not move you from your anchor of hope. Through these tribulations, thus improved, you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Before I quit this subject, it will, naturally, be expected that I take a special notice of the holy and afflicting providence which hath called us together this day.

A particular delineation of the character of the deceased I shall leave to some abler hand. The short notice and unusual parochial duties, have rendered it impossible for me to do justice to his character, and to answer your expectations.

All that I shall attempt, will be but a brief sketch of his character.

The Honorable OLIVER ELLSWORTH, whose breathless remains are now before us, was born in this town on the 29th day of April, in the year of our Lord 1745. He graduated at Princeton College in New-Jersey, in the year 1766.* Soon after this, he became a Counsellor at Law, and in his profession was highly distinguished. He discovered uncommon genius and deep erudition. He was an able advocate; and when convinced of the rectitude of his cause, he pursued it with unwearied diligence. His arguments were strong and convincing; his language persuasive.

Abilities so distinguished could not be concealed from the public eye. In the arduous and doubtful conflict with England, and when our

* He was married to Miss *Abigail Wolcott*, daughter of the Hon. William Wolcott, Esq. of East-Windsor, in the year 1772, by whom he had six sons and three daughters.

country was enwrapped in the deepest gloom, the united voice of the citizens called him to act in a more distinguished station—and at an early age he was chosen a member of Congress. At the conclusion of our revolutionary war, when our public affairs wore an aspect of gloom and perplexity, for want of an efficient government, he was again summoned, by the voice of the people, to a Convention for the purpose of forming a constitution of civil government. In this he bore a distinguished part.

In the State Convention, for the adoption of this constitution, he was equally distinguished, and by the force and energy of his arguments, became invincible.

The public mind, too deeply sensible of his worth, to suffer him to enjoy domestic ease, renewed its call to take a distinguished part in the administration of that government, of which he had been so able an advocate, and appointed him a member in the Senate of the United States. Here was a field for the display of his great abilities, and he was generally acknowledged to be one of its most influential members.

Called from this, into the judiciary, and to the chief seat in the Supreme Court of the general government, he displayed a firmness and integrity, which did honor to himself and to his country.

When the public concerns were again perplexed, on account of subsisting difficulties with the French nation, he received the appointment of Ambassador to that country. Though contrary to the feelings of his heart, he accepted the appointment and high responsibility, quitted his family and country, to encounter the hardships and dangers of the seas. The success with which his embassy was attended, all can witness. The treaty which was formed received the public approbation. In this undertaking he laid the

foundation for all those distressing infirmities which have with such violence preyed upon him, and enfeebled his constitution. Unable to return to his native land when his negotiation was completed, he was obliged to seek an amelioration of his complaints, in a neighboring kingdom.

Since his return to the land of his nativity, though he has been called to an elevated station in the State Legislature, he declined accepting the chief seat in the Judiciary. His bodily infirmities and distressing pains, together with the death of his eldest son,* greatly embittered his comforts. His constitution became gradually weakened, and after a short and painful confinement, death closed the scene.

Mr. ELLSWORTH received the highest collegiate honors, being admitted to a degree of Doctor of Laws. He was one of the Trustees of the Missionary Society; was honored with elevated stations and important trusts, both in the State, and general governments; in all which he acquitted himself with dignity and reputation.

He was a lover of the peace and order of society; one that respected the public institutions of christianity; a professor of the religion of Jesus from his youth; a constant attendant on the worship of God in his sanctuary, and on the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

In private life he was regular and strictly temperate. In his intercourse with men, he was social, easy of access, and from the improvement of his mind, and that fund of useful knowledge which he possessed, his conversation was improving and highly entertaining.

* OLIVER ELLSWORTH, JUN. an amiable and promising youth, who after finishing his Collegiate education, accompanied his father in his Embassy to France. Soon after his return his health became impaired, and after a gradual decline, he died in the 25th year of his age.

In his last confinement, the severity of disease produced a derangement of mind, and prevented those counsels which his family and friends desired to receive. In this state of mind he concluded his days on earth, and gently fell asleep, we trust, in Jesus, in the 63d year of his age.

If in the death of this great man, the public has sustained a heavy loss, his family and connections have sustained a much heavier. They have reason to mourn. But they mourn not as those who are without hope.

With the solitary widow and fatherless children, we drop the tear of condolence. We feel for you under this heavy bereavement. May you be disposed to adopt the language of Job, under the most accumulated afflictions, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." And of the text, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it."

Once you could pray, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But that season is gone, and will return no more. All that remains now is to say, "Father, thy will be done," and make him your refuge in the day of trouble. If you trust in him, and obey his commandments, he will cause light to arise out of darkness, and sweeten your afflictions, with the consolations of his holy spirit. May God kindly mitigate your grief, and wipe away your falling tears. To the great Comforter of the afflicted, we commend you. May he cause this affliction, how severe soever it may seem, to work for your good. Let the children remember the counsels of love which they have received from the lips of their father. Remember his prayers. And by these, may he, though now dead, yet speak effectually to you. Follow him in all that he followed Christ.

The church of Christ, and the Society usually assembling in this house, are called to mourn the loss of an important member. Seek the Lord that he would raise up others to stand in the place of the fathers, and espouse his cause.

The Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Council of this State will feel their hands weakened, by the loss of one, who was able in counsel. Let them remember, the most distinguished offices and highest honors from men, will not secure from death. Let them be excited to look to God for all needed counsel and direction.

Let all who are afflicted, rely on a gracious God for support. He is the great healer of breaches, and comforter of the afflicted. In him the wretched may find a friend, who will never leave nor forsake them.

Earthly friends are dying comforts, but the Lord liveth forever. Those who trust in him, though plunged in a sea of trouble, and tossed on tumultuous billows, shall find a deliverer. He will carry them safely through, and bring them to the haven of rest and peace. Oh! how comforting the thought to the children of God in their distresses! But those who are not his by a spiritual regeneration, may derive benefit from their afflictions. Come, return to the Lord, he hath "torn, and he will heal, he hath smitten, and he will bind" up your wounds. Loud and piercing are his calls. They have reached your hearts—O, let them melt under the rod and submit. Give yourselves no peace until you can say, "thy will be done." This is the only peace which you can obtain. It will calm your tumultuous thoughts, and give sweet serenity to your souls. But if you fly from God and seek to drown your troubles in the cares and vanities of the world, you may harden your hearts, but cannot enjoy true peace.

Let this numerous assembly consider themselves addressed in a loud and solemn manner. My brethren, we are all, in this providence, admonished of our frailty. The time of our dissolution is at hand. We shall soon be consigned to the grave. But short will be our slumber there. We shall hear the sound of the last trump and arise! We must stand at the judgment-seat of Christ! Our state will be decided for eternity! How solemn the thought! Awful, if found unprepared! But happy and glorious, if found clothed with the righteousness of Christ! We shall enter the New Jerusalem, and no more go out—and God will wipe all tears from our eyes. AMEN.

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