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# A SERMON

DELIVERED IN CHRIST CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

On Tuesday, April 20, 1841,

BY REQUEST OF THE CITY COUNCILS,

AT THE

## FUNERAL SOLEMNITIES

IN HONOUR OF

THE LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY THE RIGHT REV. HENRY U. ONDERDONK, D. D.,

*Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania.*

Published by request of the Joint Committee of the Councils.

**PHILADELPHIA :**

J. CRISSY, PRINTER, NUMBER FOUR, MINOR STREET.

1841.





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J. S. R.







*Philadelphia, April 21, 1841.*

RIGHT REVEREND SIR,

The undersigned, a Joint Committee of Councils, appointed to make arrangements for public funeral honours to the memory of the late venerated President Harrison, respectfully present to you the thanks of the Councils of the City of Philadelphia, for the truly appropriate and impressive Sermon preached by you on the occasion, at Christ Church, and solicit from you a copy of the discourse for publication.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

JOSEPH R. CHANDLER,  
ISAAC ELLIOTT,  
JOHN THOMASON,  
EDWARD PENINGTON,  
GEORGE SHARSWOOD,  
SAMUEL BRECK.

TO THE RIGHT REV. H. U. ONDERDONK,  
Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania.

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*Philadelphia, April 21, 1841.*

To Messrs. Joseph R. Chandler, Isaac Elliott, John Thomason, Edward Penington, George Sharswood, and Samuel Breck, *Committee, &c.*

GENTLEMEN,

I cheerfully comply with the request of the Joint Committee of the City Councils, to have for publication a copy of the Sermon delivered yesterday in Christ Church.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

H. U. ONDERDONK.



# S E R M O N .

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PSALM XLIX., *part of verse 12.*

## MAN BEING IN HONOUR ABIDETH NOT.

Who can require proof of this declaration, with the fact before him that brings this assemblage together! What greater "honour," than to be the chief Magistrate of a large and growing empire! what fleeter evanescence, than to hold the distinction for only a month! A citizen, already eminent, is sought out for this high office,—the nation is in a movement never equalled, to decide whether it will give it him,—the decision is made, and the office actually conferred. The venerable man who is the choice of his fellow-citizens, is found to be yet more favoured by the large vote he received. All this greatness he enjoys for one month. And then is the truth of the divine word most remarkably illustrated: "man being in honour abideth not." We need not stop to enquire whether the highest place in a nation has ever before been held for so short a period. It is enough to mark this event as unique, that never has supreme greatness been so conferred, to be so soon hid in the tomb.

My brethren : your preacher is designated to his present function by our respected city authorities ; and perhaps also by the obvious propriety of his representing, in this part of the Union, and on this occasion, the church in which the illustrious departed was numbered. Your preacher belongs not to the political world ; and takes no part, either here or elsewhere, whether for or against the distinctive political opinions of the venerable chief Magistrate whom God hath removed from us. Nor was your preacher honoured with the personal acquaintance of the late President ; and, as I could but repeat, from his known history and character, what is already before the public, I may well decline offering remarks on those topics. With his career as a soldier, a statesman, a magistrate, you are all familiar. His private and domestic virtues are well attested. And, best of all, good evidence there is, that his heart was governed by religion, by christian principle and holy faith ; and that in his conduct he “ adorned the doctrine of his God and Saviour.” Would to God, that all men in high places would afford such a testimony during their life, and leave such a testimony at their death !

This fragrant remembrance of the piety of our late chief Magistrate, adds to the natural propriety of your preacher’s avoiding secular topics on this occasion, and devoting the brief space allowed him to reflections more becoming this holy place :—such reflections, we may believe, were the more acceptable to him whose memory we honour ; and, with God’s blessing, they will be far more profitable to us. Allow me then, in a few remarks of the most unpretending character, to direct your minds to a *religious* view of the text, “ man being

in honour abideth not." And may the Holy Spirit impress the instruction on our hearts!

Taking the words literally, the psalmist employs here an hyperbole, as a strong expression of an important truth: the personage 'honoured,' as if halting but a few hours at an "inn," continueth scarcely a night on this prominent stage of his journey; he is not there on the morrow. Man's whole life is but a pilgrimage, a journey without a home; and of that pilgrimage, his life in eminent station is but as a single night. And so, verily, it often appears; for time has no absolute measurement. Turn to the warrior who fought his way to empire, and who, for some twenty years, filled the world with his expanding fame. He fell from this eminence, and died a captive: and twenty years more withdrew from him and his the effective thoughts of the world. It is only a rhetorical exaggeration then, not untruth, to say that he abode but as the night of a weary traveller amid his thickly strewed glories. So brief does time appear, when past! Contemplate then the much fleeter course of our late President; and it is scarcely exaggeration even, to declare that he tarried but as a night in his honourable sojourn.

But my text was chosen, not for criticism, but for direct and unadorned edification. And how forcible a warning does it present of the vanity of even the best of things earthly!—how deep an admonition 'not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world!' Honours, honourably gained, are perhaps the best of merely temporal good; yet in even these no mortal "abideth." They pass away like things unreal; or man passeth from them as if they were never his. Well, therefore, may we exclaim, with the holy writer, "man

walketh in a vain show ;” we are but bearing parts in an empty exhibition. The world is a great drama, in which the actors give to their feelings and passions, all their strength, all their anxiety, all their hope ; asking no happiness but to succeed in this exhibition. And when their brief part is ended, what has it proved but as the unreal pageant of a theatre ; the illusion indeed longer sustained, and at greater cost, yet as utterly unsubstantial when finished ! When their brief part is ended, what have their exertions gained, but the gratification of some transient hours, without one enduring profit for those dreary hours which are to come after present delusions have ceased ! “Man abideth not” with the “vain show :” the “vain show” abideth not with man. The world is like those false pictures produced by art, in which the eye beholds a beautiful object, while there is nothing to be grasped or felt. Such a deception of the world is perfect. We perceive in it things most desirable, highly coloured and gilded ; we are caught by the glare, and make the strenuous effort to be foremost in reaching the splendid illusion ; we persevere, and are successful : but the prize fades in our hand ; it never had substance. St. Paul uses a similar metaphor, “the fashion of this world passeth away ;” the joys and the grandeur of the world, and ultimately the very form of the world itself, pass quickly by, and are gone. Embellish as we may the earthly scene, it is but a pageant. Yet in this scene only it is, that man finds his temporal “honours.” What wonder then, that they abide not with him ! What wonder, that he “abideth” not with them !

The reason why earthly things are so unsubstantial and vain, so fleeting and unsatisfactory, is, that men

are sinful. Sin hath disordered the world, and made its affairs what they would not have been had innocence remained. Depravity hath opened our hearts to false and deceptive notions. Imagine a community of men *not* fallen: there, none desire wealth, perhaps there is no wealth; and this whole illusion is unknown: none desire power or distinction; so that there is no ambition: yet, if government is bestowed on any, they mingle nothing of mere personal gratification with the faithful discharge of their trust. Here would be a world of things real, though not heavenly. In such a world, man might be “in honour,” yet “abide” long. Such, however, is not our world. Sin hath made it a “vain show;” and as death approaches, it becomes like an emptied theatre. How important then, are religion and heavenly wisdom, to plant the convictions of faith, to unfold the hopes of faith, and urge the reluctant soul from attractions so delusive, and prepare it for the realities of the world that is eternal!

Turn we again to the text;—“man being in honour abideth not.” The personal excellence, and the useful qualities of those who depart hence, are lost to the world. All that we have prized in an eminent fellow-mortal, vanishes at death: “the eye which saw him will see him no more; neither will his place any more behold him.” The eye beheld him with reverence. In the human form, there is beauty and dignity: as much as the body can resemble spirit, our bodies are the ‘image of God,’ expressing the divine qualities lodged within them: and a deep lesson it is, when such forms are doomed to embrace corruption and be food for the worm. Add to this general nobleness of the aspect of man, speaking him lord here below,—add to it the

commanding look of superior intellect, the ardent expression of genius, the features which betoken more of sterling qualities than they distinctly proclaim ; and you have the highest imprints of the human countenance. And when death effaces such an imprint, we feel regret that it could not protect the valued object that bore it.

Yet further : “ man being in honour abideth not ” in the “ place ” he occupied here. By the death of eminent men, we are deprived of the continuance of the good which they were the means of conferring. They have lived for the benefit of society ; they have been nearly connected with the national welfare. Perhaps such an one had borne honourably the burden of high official station. Or, he had served his fellow-citizens usefully without being in office. He may also, in either case, have been the creator of his own eminence, and have seen that eminence willingly accorded by the social body around him. They had looked to him as their example, their guide, their benefactor. Even his private virtues had thus been brought into notice ; and had become objects of imitation for the ‘ cloud of witnesses with which he was encompassed. ’ We often know not the value of such individuals, till death removes them from us : for the benefits they conferred were so many and so perpetual, yet so unostentatious, that we received them almost imperceptibly ; their influence was so gentle and unobtrusive, that we yielded without feeling it. There often is something in pure love to a worthy public character, that makes it kindred with personal affection ; it is gratifying to bestow it on an object in whom we have a deliberately formed confidence ; its very bondage is pleasing ; and the “ honours ” we offer with it, we feel to be reflected on



ourselves. Such an attachment is the dictate of religion; for, as in any way benefactors, the class of persons we refer to are entitled to this gratitude, whether in deeds or in the heart; and, if they are in authority, their right is yet stronger, for they are to us “the ministers of God,” acting towards us and for us in the place of God; and the love we thus yield them is a branch of the love we owe to the Divine Sovereign. All this affection is due to the higher magistrates, and proportionally to the lower, on the principles even of natural religion; and christianity ratifies the practical duties flowing from it by her commandments, and its spirit by her spirit. And when an object of such reverence and kind feeling is called from this world, we mourn his departure with emotions, not so excited indeed, yet not unlike those which overcome us under more tender bereavements. We exclaim, with the inspired man, “the beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places.” And if such a public friend is cut off in the height of his usefulness, or in our highest expectation of his usefulness, how utter appears the desolation of the ‘places which behold him no more!’ and how does much of our exulting hope seem buried in his grave! We share the withering force of the truth, “man being in honour abideth not.” Even the best “honour” in this world, and some of its best affection, are but as vanity. What then can be better than vanity, but the qualities and the affections that will endure for ever, and for ever increase, in the world above!

To extend our view of the ‘unabiding honours’ of man, we turn to those whose talents are lost to us at death. Ample is the sphere for which God designs the benefit of His choicer intellectual gifts; exalted the

distinction awaiting an individual thus endowed. He feels the energy of an expansive mind; and its powers are evolved by the labours of youth, and extended by the cultivation of riper years. Or perhaps, native genius impels him at once to enter upon an admired course, in some department in which ardour may suffice for a noble beginning, while greater applause will mark its mature progress. From such classes of men, are furnished the 'burning and shining lights' of the world; and the world often acknowledges its obligation to them. Science is explored, or the heart instructed, or human misery alleviated, or public justice and the fabric of society improved, by their persevering meditation and patient study; or the country is defended by their instinctive valour, or governed by their counsel almost instinctively wise. In such benefits multitudes rejoice; for such benefits multitudes are grateful, and magnify willingly their benefactor; while yet they look for more, deeming the talents that conferred them a mine inexhaustible, or the services rendered too valuable ever to cease. But such fancies are illusion. A day, a moment, may annihilate the hope of those who indulge them. Disease hath fixed his iron grasp on their favourite; his intellectual majesty is palsied; his manly arm is nerveless; his vigour of judgment is prostrate; he is borne away to the tomb. Talent, skill, knowledge, wisdom, valour, all are gone; and the mind that was almost more than human, will never again irradiate this world. How mysterious the providence, which thus kindles a luminary, to extinguish it when its ray shall diffuse the widest promise! How mysterious the providence, which excites thus human expectation, and centres human attachment, in some revered personage; and

then casts over him the veil of death, and hides him from us! Our eyes and our hopes attempt in vain to follow him into his concealment; and we are left with the poor consolation, "man being in honour abideth not."

No, brethren, we will not deem such a providence mysterious; for it points to a future state. It teaches that this world is not excellent enough for our noble faculties, but they must find larger expansion and higher employment in a better state of things. If here so exercised, as to have the "glory of God" through the Redeemer for their primary or their ultimate object, they are called hence to minister to his glory in functions more exalted. Much as the good and the wise knew here, they knew but in part; whether it were in the study of God, in the study of affairs, or in the study of nature: nor could their knowledge of any thing be perfect, without ascending to that world where there is no imperfection; much less could they know the things that belong to that world only. To that world therefore, the good and the wise depart. And though mortal 'eyes' behold them no more, eyes immortal will see them, in the resurrection, beaming with the 'glory of the incorruptible body!' Though earthly 'places' are deprived of them, they will enter the better heavenly places, and stand in "honour" in the presence of the Eternal. The faculties that can avail in that holy world will there remain; and the mind, entering the new 'tabernacle,' the new body, prepared for it, will again expand, with nobler powers, purified from all that weakened or debased it while on this fallen earth.

Your preacher has thus far willingly combined greatness and goodness, in the thoughts laid before you; for

they are believed to have been combined in the venerated personage whose death has called forth these general remarks. But there may be earthly greatness without goodness; greatness in office or rank, greatness in learning and science, greatness in the cabinet, in the senate, in the field, greatness in the halls of justice, and even in the church of God; all, without the only real goodness, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." When persons of such character depart from this world, *their* future world is not that we have described, but a condition of endless ignominy and pain. They have been great in those things only which begin and end on the earth; they have not cultivated the "glory" that belongs to heaven. Nothing have they to take thither; and their earthly greatness is their only reward. They have shared, also, with the whole human race, the depravity common to all; but they have not, like the godly, obtained pardon through the atonement of Christ, and been purified by the Spirit of grace. Their depravity they take with them to the other world; and it makes them unfit for heaven, and consigns them to perdition. Earthly greatness was the only reward they sought, the only reward they obtained; and it follows them not when they die. How deeply woful, in the case of those to whom so much hath been given, and who have so little improved it, to have to exclaim, "man being in honour abideth not."

But man "in honour" here, and prepared likewise for heavenly "honour," *will* "abide;" he will "abide" for ever in the everlasting world. He goes where ALL is "glory, honour, and immortality." He goes where God can make him "ruler over many things." He goes where the Saviour 'will grant to him to sit with him in

his throne, even as He is on the throne of the Father.' There is figure indeed in such descriptions; but it is not empty figure. And the least they can signify is, that the righteous "abide" in "honour" in the heavenly world.

In heaven, we shall be no more perplexed with the "vain show" that here deludes us; all will be reality; holy joys, perfect knowledge, everlasting existence, and the unfading brightness of the Father's countenance. Such, christian, is thy sure prospect. And know, that it may, in part, be enjoyed even here. Abandon the desires and pursuits that are vain; devote your heart to the realities of virtue and godliness, of faith and repentance, of the things that are of account in the celestial world; and a stream from the celestial fountain will reach your heart, for refreshment through the earthly pilgrimage. The Spirit of God is a fountain inexhaustible; his 'renewing is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' Surrender the baseless hopes of the world, for the "sure Foundation" and the "tried Corner Stone;" and you will partake of the joy, the peace, the hope, of those who are 'redeemed unto God by the Saviour's blood.' Thus "lay up treasure in heaven," and you may begin to enjoy it while on the earth.

Or, do any object, that such thoughts and motives are too highly spiritual, to produce effect on minds not religiously enlightened? Let me return then to the gloomy *facts* which require no spirituality to comprehend them. Does he who has reached middle age, find it difficult to acknowledge, that worldly pursuits and worldly fortunes are generally but "vanity and vexation of spirit?" Is there an individual who sees not, in the mournful

event we commemorate, the glaring stamp of the emptiness of earthly "honours?" The departed first Magistrate of our land had gained every thing he could hope for; much more, probably, than he had ever expected, till past middle age. And of this he had one month's enjoyment; if, indeed, the enjoyment was not drowned in the toil and the care. And, but for his religious character, bitter would be the vanity, that, reaching the "honour" in which he "abode not," he had gained what to him was "the whole world," yet had 'lost his soul.'

Here then, brethren, are some of the facts: whither look we for the cause? We need not seek it "afar off." My sins and yours contribute to the disorder, the sorrow, the delusion, that prevail on the earth; and to the sins of mankind at large, the whole is due. My sins and yours are rebuked in the visitations of severity which God inflicts on the earth, or on our country. Be such the reflections we carry with us, from the contemplation of death, to the scenes of life. Let our hearts cherish every solemn thought we have this day gathered; and while thus "musing" faithfully, "the fire" of the Spirit shall be "kindled." Thus glowing, our souls will become more pure and more precious, under the hand of Him who "sits as a refiner's fire," and so be prepared for 'the day when He shall make up his heavenly jewels.' How unspeakable the "honour,"—and it "fadeth not away," but "abideth" for ever,—how unspeakable the "honour," of being "jewels" in the Redeemer's eternal "crown of glory!"

THE END.













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