

Rev. Doct. [unclear]  
from his respectful  
Chas. Stillman

Dr. Stillman's Sermon.

A

# Sermon,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

*GEORGE WASHINGTON,*

LATE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMIES OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

WHO DIED *DECEMBER* 14, 1799,

AGED 68.

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BY

SAMUEL STILLMAN, D.D.

Minister of the First Baptist Church in Boston.

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JANUARY 12, 1800.

**A**T a Meeting of the First Baptist Society in Boston,  
Voted, That Messrs. WILLIAM PORTER, JONATHAN HARRIS,  
and Deacon DANIEL WILD be a Committee, to wait on  
the Rev. Dr. STILLMAN, and request a copy of his Sermon  
on the Death of General WASHINGTON, delivered on  
the 29th of December, 1799, for the press.



*Sermon.*

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2 CHRON. xxxii. 33.

AND HEZEKIAH SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS, AND THEY BURIED HIM IN THE CHIEFEST OF THE SEPULCHRES OF THE SONS OF DAVID; AND ALL JUDAH AND THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM DID HIM HONOUR AT HIS DEATH.

THIS short account of Hezekiah's death and funeral, clearly proves the excellence of his character, and that the people loved him; and will open a way for a variety of reflections suitable to the present solemn, and affecting occasion.

He was the son of Ahaz, who was addicted to idolatry, and, at his death, left the people in a very corrupt and melancholy condition. Hezekiah, on the decease of his father, ascended the throne,



throne, and at once began the work of national reformation. In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple, had them repaired, and ordered the priests and the Levites to cleanse and purify it, and thus to prepare it for religious worship. He attended to its dedication with uncommon solemnity, and kept the passover with great devotion.

He broke down the idols in his dominions, and even destroyed the brazen serpent which Moses set up, because the people were led by it to idolatry.

He was not only a man of religion, but a good prince; and the kingdom flourished during his reign. He subdued the Philistines, and freed the nation from the yoke of the Assyrians. His chief object was to make the people happy.

He also had great trials. Sennacherib invaded his country, and threatened to destroy the city Jerusalem, unless he complied with his extravagant demand. In order to obtain peace, and cause him to leave his dominions, he paid him three hundred talents of silver, and thirty talents of gold. As soon as he had received the money, he violated the agreement, and demanded an immediate surrender of the city.

Hezekiah,





Hezekiah, having made every proper preparation for defence, encouraged the people to trust in the Lord, saying, "There be more with us than with them : with them is an arm of flesh ; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." The result was, that the angel of the Lord destroyed in one night, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army. Thus their deliverance was accomplished, by a miraculous interposition of Heaven. Surrounding nations looked up to Hezekiah with astonishment, and courted the favour of the prince whom God thus delighted to honour.

When he was pressed with difficulties, he fought the Lord ; and having obtained deliverance, he gave him glory.

That Hezekiah should have been so good a man, and so excellent a prince, is matter of surprise when we consider, that he came to the throne about the age of twenty-five ; when the passions are in all their vigour, and temptations to vice numerous and powerful. But he was God's chosen instrument to deliver the people, and to make them happy. He therefore fitted him for the service, and preserved him till it was finished. His talents, his virtue, and his unspeakable importance to the nation, could not



not secure him from the arrest of death. “And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death.”

The text naturally leads us to observe,

I. That men the most accomplished, beloved, and useful to society, must die. And,

II. That a grateful and affectionate people will do them honour at their death.

I. Men the most accomplished, beloved, and useful to society, must die.

There are some men whom we are ready to wish, might live forever, because we cannot see how their place will be supplied. But we forget that God hath all gifts in his possession; that the universe is his kingdom, which he governs with infinite wisdom, and hath made ample provision for a succession of proper characters in all its various departments.

When Moses had completed his scene of service, he fell on sleep, but was succeeded by a cloud of worthies, whom it is not necessary to mention. And thus it will be in all future ages of the world. “Instead of the fathers shall be thy children,” said David, “whom I will make princes



princes in the earth." Such is the divine arrangement, such the all-perfect plan of Providence—"Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." This important truth is the source of our consolation in the day of affliction, but by no means supercedes generous and deep-felt sorrow, when great and good men fall.

Our late excellent Governor SUMNER lives in the affections of his fellow-citizens. To his tomb we lately followed his remains with every mark of high esteem, and deep affliction; and daily lament his early exit. He sleeps with his fathers, and lies covered with the clods of the valley. And before the days of our mourning for him are ended, a new source of *universal* sorrow opens upon us. What mean these ensigns of mortality?—Why is every countenance sad?—Why weep *all* the people?—Because our beloved WASHINGTON is dead! He now lies confined in a small and dreary apartment, on the banks of the Potomack. Thither will many of his fellow-citizens in future time resort, to see the place that contains his precious dust, and bedew it with their tears; saying, "Here lies WASHINGTON—My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof—How is the mighty fallen." Death *suddenly* seized him as

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his richest prey, and hath thereby taught us this awful lesson, that "there is no discharge in this war."

Though dead, my brethren, he speaketh to us by his *private*, and his *public* life.

But what shall I say when so *much* is to be said? Or what leave unsaid without being *unjust* to WASHINGTON? The uncommon excellencies of his character, check my feeble effort; much rather would I "in expressive silence muse his praise." But duty calls me to attempt the unequal task, persuaded that your candour and warm affection for our departed friend, will cover every fault.

General WASHINGTON was born the 11th of February, 1732. "His education was such as favoured the production of a solid mind and a vigorous body. Mountain air, abundant exercise in the open country, the wholesome toils of the chase, and the delightful scenes of rural life, expanded his limbs to an unusual, but graceful and well-proportioned size. His youth was spent in the acquisition of useful knowledge, and in pursuits tending to the improvement of his fortune, or the benefit of his country."

The uniform account we have had of his *private* life, is, that he was fond of rural retirement,



ment, affectionate to his connexions, kind to his servants, condescending to his neighbours, and liberal to the poor. The most unequivocal proof that he was amiable and beloved in his private character, we have in the *early* public honours that were conferred on him by his country ; which commenced when he was about twenty years of age, and continued till his death. There is one evidence of his private character, which I am unwilling to pass by ; and which I am persuaded will please you in the recital.

When he was about to leave Mount Vernon, and again engage in public life, being chosen to the presidency of the United States, the Mayor of Alexandria, in the name of the people, addressed him in the following affectionate manner—"Again your country commands your care. Obedient to its wishes, unmindful of your ease, we see you again relinquishing the bliss of retirement ; and this too at a period of life when nature itself seems to authorise a preference of repose.

"Not to extol you as a soldier ; not to pour forth our gratitude for past services ; not to acknowledge the justice of the unexampled honour which has been conferred upon you, by the spontaneous



spontaneous and unanimous suffrages of three millions of freemen, in your election to the Chief Magistracy ; nor to admire the patriotism which directs your conduct, do your *neighbours* and *friends* now address you ; themes less splendid but more endearing impress our minds. The first and best of citizens must leave us ; our aged must lose their ornament ; our youth their model ; our agriculture its improver ; our commerce its friend ; our infant academy its protector ; our poor their benefactor ; and the interior navigation of the Potowmack (an event replete with the most extensive utility, already, by your unremitted exertions, brought into partial use) its institutor and promoter.

“ Farewel ! go ! and make a grateful people happy ; a people who will be doubly grateful when they contemplate this recent sacrifice for their interest.

“ To that Being who maketh and unmaketh at his will we commend you ; and after the accomplishment of the arduous business to which you are called, may he restore to us again, the best of men, and the most beloved fellow-citizen.”

His *religious* character will be established in the view of every candid mind by the tenor of  
his



his life ; provided the tree is to be known by the fruit.

He was a member of the Episcopal Church, consequently a believer in Christianity.

In his public acts we have repeated evidence of his reverence for Deity, and dependence on his Providence. After the conclusion of the war, and the establishment of peace, he resigned his commission to Congress ; and says, among other excellent things, “ The successful termination of the war has verified the most sanguine expectations, and my gratitude for the interposition of Providence, and the assistance I have received from my countrymen, increases with every review of the momentous subject. I consider it as an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life, by commending the interests of my dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and those who have the superintendence of them to his holy keeping.” Thus prays our great military Chief ; may soldiers of every description go and do likewise !

We have another pleasing instance of his reverence for Almighty God, in his address to the Senate and House of Representatives, on his acceptance of his election to the presidency of the United





United States. Having expressed his feelings on this renewed evidence of the approbation of his countrymen, he says, "Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station; it would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being, who rules over the universe—who presides in the councils of nations—and whose providential aids can supply every human defect—that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the United States, a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes; and may enable every instrument employed in its administration, to execute with success, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself, that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow-citizens at large less than either."

As every thing that was said by WASHINGTON is delightful to an American audience, I will not hesitate to make one more copious extract, that will both enrich the discourse, and prove him to be the warm friend of religion. This you will find in his last address to the people





ple of the United States ; which deserves to be written in letters of gold ; and will undoubtedly be handed down from generation to generation, till time shall be no more.

“ Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, *religion* and *morality* are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who would labour to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duty of men and citizens. The mere *politician*, equally with the *pious* man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with public and private felicity. Let us simply ask, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice ? Let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded of the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure ; reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

I add, that we have been often informed, that he was a devout observer of the Lord's Day and the institutions of religion.

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It would require a volume to do justice to his character as a *soldier*. He early discovered that he possessed great military talents. In 1755, being then but twenty-three years of age, he bore a Colonel's commission, and was with the unfortunate Gen. Braddock when he was defeated; which sad event might in all probability have been prevented, had the wish of our young hero been complied with, of preceding the main army, and scouring the woods with his rangers. After their defeat, he was of unspeakable service to them, in securing their retreat.

He was not influenced by a spirit of ambition or revenge—He fought not for fame, but freedom. When he saw the liberties of his country in danger, at the call of his fellow-citizens, he stepped forth to defend them. He was the friend and the protector of mankind. Cool, brave and persevering; and when surrounded with difficulties, always found a resource in his own great mind. Witness his forlorn condition in 1776, when he fled before the British army through the Jerseys, with only a handful of men, in want of almost every thing, discouraged and worn down. In this critical situation, when all that is dear to America depended, under



der God, on the exertion of the moment, behold our beloved WASHINGTON—He plans with judgment, and, supported by his few brave troops, executes with boldness and promptitude a most dangerous but successful enterprize ; by which he raised the spirits of his dejected countrymen, and rescued a great part of New Jersey from their enemies. The circumstances of this brilliant part of his history you will at once recollect.

“ As night to stars, no lustre gives to man.”

I shall take leave of his military character for the present, by reminding you, that when the great objects of the American war were obtained, he resigned his commission to Congress, and retired to the private walks of life. It is really surprising, because uncommon, that a man who had been for several years in the habit of commanding armies, could with such ease exchange the *soldier* for the *citizen*. In this, as in every other part of his conduct, he discovered the greatness of his mind, and the benevolence of his heart.

But this part of his history will come with more propriety from the historian than the preacher.

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After a short period of retirement from the anxiety and fatigues of military life, his country call on him to assist in the formation of a Constitution of Government for the United States. Sensible of the importance of an energetic government, he accepted their choice; not consulting his own inclination, but the voice of his fellow citizens and the public good. When the delegates from the several States had met, they chose him President of the Convention; on which occasion he presided with his usual dignity and spirit of conciliation. And when that excellent instrument was finished, which bears his name in front of the names of his worthy compatriots; which hath been the means of raising our country to its present condition of respectability and opulence, he again retired to Mount Vernon. But now all eyes are fixed on him as the most proper person to preside over the Union. The united voice of three millions of citizens he could not withstand. His sentiments and feelings on this occasion, are excellently expressed in the following answer to the address of the mayor and people of Alexandria, when he was about to repair to the seat of government.

“GENTLEMEN,





“GENTLEMEN,

“ALTHOUGH I ought not to conceal, yet I cannot describe the painful emotions which I felt in being called upon to determine whether I would accept or refuse the presidency of the United States. The unanimity in the choice, the opinion of my friends, communicated from different parts of Europe, as well as from America, the apparent wish of those who were not entirely satisfied with the constitution in its present form ; and an ardent desire on my part to be instrumental in connecting the good will of my countrymen towards each other ; have induced an acceptance. Those who know me best (and you, my fellow-citizens, are from your situation, in that number) know better than any others, my love of retirement is so great, that no earthly consideration, short of a conviction of duty, could have prevailed upon me to depart from my resolution, “never more to take any share in transactions of a public nature.” For at my age and in my circumstances, what prospects or advantages could I propose to myself, for embarking again on the tempestuous and uncertain ocean of public life ?”

This repeated sacrifice of his domestic ease and happiness to the voice of the people, drew  
from





from them new and ardent expressions of gratitude and love to him. Various parts of the country through which he passed to the seat of government, were crowded with citizens of every description, who discovered such a desire to see the Man, to whom they owed so much, as greatly affected him, and caused him to weep.

His first interview with Congress on his arrival at New-York, was solemn and interesting. To the history of that day I refer you, because no abridgment of its transactions can be admitted without injury.

Eight years he filled that exalted and arduous station, with honour to himself and great advantage to his country; constantly pursuing her best interests.

When the time drew near that a choice was to be made of President of the United States, he declined being considered as a candidate. This determination deeply affected his countrymen. But considering his time of life, and that he had devoted forty-five years of it already to their service, they could not urge him to relinquish it.

On this occasion, I can only say, that it was **WASHINGTON**: a name, which in all future  
ages



ages ought to be considered as a *general term*, including every thing great and excellent in the human character. Behold this man, admired by a world ; of his own accord descending from his high station of **THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**, to become the farmer of Mount Vernon—the private citizen : which introduces the last solemn scene.

On Friday the 13th inst. he appeared to have taken a cold, which principally affected his throat ; of which he made but little complaint. About three o'clock on Saturday morning his disease became alarming : physicians were sent for, but they came too late. Heaven's great decree had passed, that **WASHINGTON** should die. "This last scene corresponded with the whole tenor of his life. Not a groan nor a complaint escaped him, though in extreme distress. With perfect resignation, and a full possession of his reason, he closed his well spent life."\* Death to him was an enemy disarmed.

We sincerely sympathize with the disconsolate widow, and wish her every divine consolation under her irreparable loss. But she sorrows not as they who have no hope. The immortal spirit of that excellent man, the partner  
of

\* Mr. Lear's Letter.



of her life, who hath left a nation in tears, hath, we trust, ascended to an infinitely better world, to receive the rewards of a good and faithful servant ;

II. While an affectionate and grateful people do him honour at his death.

The moment the melancholy news arrived, that our beloved Chief was dead, every countenance was sad—business was suspended—and tears flowed from eyes not used to weep.—All the people felt alike. These artless effusions of the heart are far more honourable than the sculptured monument, or most elegant panegyric. But as succeeding generations will not feel as we do, who know the man, let us perpetuate his memory by every proper method. Let us impress on the minds of our children and youth a sense of the virtues and talents of WASHINGTON, and urge them to go and do likewise. Let the faithful historian transmit to generations yet unborn, his private and his public character. Let men who occupy the highest offices of government not only *applaud*, but *imitate* his virtues. For even kings may learn from him what mode of conduct to pursue



sue to make the people happy, and live in their affections.

But I leave this matter to my afflicted fellow-citizens, who will, with one soul, devise the best method of doing lasting honour to his memory.

The subject suggests a variety of useful reflections.

1. If the man whose death we now deplore, possessed so many excellencies, as the united voice of his countrymen and of foreigners ascribe to him, I ask, Whence were they derived? Certainly from the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift. If then such are the streams, what must the fountain be? If the personal excellencies of a man can attract the admiration of a nation, how ought we to be swallowed up in love and adoration of that God, in whom dwells essentially every possible perfection!

Permit me also to inquire, how it happens, that a people feelingly alive to excellence of character, should so generally forget our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and express image of his person: in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Who hath left us in his life a most perfect





perfect example of every thing amiable and praise-worthy; and by his one offering hath perfected for ever all them who are sanctified. He is infinite in excellence, and abundant in grace and goodness: yet to crowds he appears without form or comeliness. This awful evidence of human depravity we bewail.

2. That solemn instance of death which now arrests our attention, is a loud call to all, especially to the rulers of the people, to be always ready, because they know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come. They hence learn that they are to die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Death will soon level all distinctions, and after death the judgment; when Jehovah will render to every man according to his works. It becomes us all to entertain a lively sense of that awful period, when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ; and to be prepared for it, that we may give up our account with joy, and not with grief.

In fine—We are under every obligation to mingle thanksgivings to God, with the sorrows of the occasion, because a life so important to our country hath been spared so long. A kind  
 Providence





Providence lent us a WASHINGTON—fitted him for the various and arduous services in which he was employed—covered his head in the day of battle—preserved him amidst innumerable dangers, till the great affairs of our country, civil and military, were happily arranged. Till this period, he was immortal. However much we feel our loss, we bless the Lord that he did not fall before. His work was done; and he hath come to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season. He hath passed through life and descended to his grave with *unsought, unfulled* honours.

There are some men who are always in eager pursuit of fame, from whom she keeps a cautious distance: not so WASHINGTON. With full spread pinions she pursued him all his life, solicitous to bestow on him those distinguished rewards which were due to his uncommon merit, which he received with that modesty and diffidence in himself, that were peculiar to a mind like his. And at this moment, while silent in the tomb, a nation is engaged to do him honour. —Surprising man!—

But we leave for a moment the tomb of our much loved friend, to offer praise to  
 D Almighty



Almighty God, for the many promising and useful characters that rise before us: especially that ADAMS yet lives to serve his country. May the Lord long preserve and bless him, and think on him for good, according to all that he hath done for this people.

