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Rev. Thomas Robb

TRUE HEROISM, 13.

An Essential trait in the Character

OF

A Minister of the Gospel of Christ.



A FAREWELL SERMON

DELIVERED,

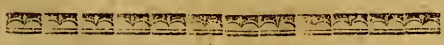
In the Presbyterian Church of Fayetteville,

North-Carolina,

On Sunday the 28th day of February, 1819.

By the Rev. JESSE H. TURNER,

late Pastor of that Church.



FAYETTEVILLE, (N C.)

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TO THE READER,

THE Title of the following Sermon, will sufficiently explain the occasion on which it was delivered ; and account for the peculiar strain, in which the sentiments contained in it are conveyed. It owes its appearance before the public, to the solicitation of its author's friends ; and that solicitation has been called forth, not only by their wish to retain some memorial of a Pastor whom they loved ; but also, by their anxious desire to do justice to his character ; and to silence the rash and captious censures of his enemies ; whose misrepresentations of this parting address to his flock, were likely to operate to the injury of his good name. A friend, who, in the author's absence from the press, superintends the publication of the following Sermon, deems it proper to make this statement, to satisfy the inquiries of any, who may desire to know, why this discourse was sent to the press. May the blessing of him, from whom alone the increase must come, attend this last public effort of a faithful servant of Christ, to do good to the souls of a people, among whom, he had laboured, with indefatigable diligence, for five years ; and may the perusal of the following pages be found, abundantly to promote the spiritual edification of all, in whose hands, God, in his good providence, may place this production of one, whose voice, for aught we know, has been heard, in this place, for the last time.

Fayetteville, May 5th 1819.

A SERMON.

Acts XX. 22, 23, and 24. "And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there :

Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every City, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

THESSE words were addressed by the Apostle Paul, to the Elders of Ephesus. The occasion of them was not only very interesting but somewhat singular : they form a part of his parting or farewell address :—I have chosen these words, Brethren, because I consider my present circumstances somewhat identified with his. I too have gone in and out among you, "serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of mine enemies : " And I can say with him, that "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you ; but have shewed you, & taught you publicly, and from house to house." I can also say, "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." I am, in one word, about to leave you. My ministrations, public and private—my counsels, admonitions, exhortations and warnings, are about to cease—and, as the last service which I shall ever have it in my power to render you, I am about to commit you to the care of the great Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Under these circumstances, the words just read in your hearing, are remarkably descriptive of my feelings. I go away : Duty impels me to the measure—but I must cast "one longing, lingering look behind." My spirit is bound, because I leave a people for whom I have prayed, and for whom I have laboured : I leave a people, with whom "I have taken sweet counsel" & with whom I have "walked to the house of God in company." I leave a people, with whom I have approached the same altar ; and there, broke the consecrated bread, and drank the consecrated wine ! And how do I leave you ? Under the care of some man of God, who will feel for you, as I have felt for you ? Under the guidance of some kind Pastor, who will defend you from all your enemies, and feed you with food convenient for you ? No ! my Brethren : but, I leave you, as "sheep without a Shepherd," or, as a Church without a Pastor. I am, therefore, not only bound, but pained in spirit. In my sympathy for you, I lose sight of myself—"the bonds, the afflic-

"tions" & the trials, which await me elsewhere, disappear from my view ; and I feel disposed to pour forth my whole soul in prayer, that these calamities may be averted, not from me, but from you. There is, my Brethren, such a grandeur in the ministry of the gospel—the design, the object, and the end, are so sublime, that the soul set on fire by the fervour of zeal, ceases to be concerned about self ; and looks only at the great principle of duty. In the midst of bonds, afflictions, imprisonments, and deaths—in the midst of the rage of malice, and the fire of persecution, it boldly steps forth, and, in the language of our Apostle, declares, "none of these things move me ; nor do I count life itself dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

My object at this time, is, to shew, in as few words as possible, that it requires a no small share of true heroism, first to engage in the Ministry of the Lord Jesus, and then to continue in it. Having done this, I shall proceed to some remarks adapted to the present occasion. I am to spend a few moments in shewing, that it requires a no small share of true heroism, first to engage in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and then to continue in it.

To do this, it appears to me, that I need only direct you to the text. Look at the words which have just been read in your hearing ; and mark their import. "And now behold I go bound in spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there : save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." Is it possible, that the Apostle, with the full knowledge of these afflictions, can persevere ? They have not the least influence upon him—they no more divert him from his purpose, than the loose atom, floating in the atmosphere, can change the course of the sun, or defeat his purpose. But you will say, that he contemplated these perils at a distance ; and therefore assumed a boasted heroism, which forsook him, when pressed with present danger. But let us hear the account which he gives of himself. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the Heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false Brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Yet "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"

These were the afflictions which attended the ministry in the

early ages of Christianity—but besides these, there are others which attach to the sacred office, in all ages of the world. Permit me to mention, 1st. That the ministry never has been, nor ever will be, the road to wealth or preferment. What, I will ask, are the great governing principles of the world? They are, a strong sense of interest, and a scrupulous regard to policy. Whilst, therefore, the Merchant grows rich, and even the Mechanic talks of his gains—and whilst men of other professions are steadily walking in the road of honor; it is no uncommon thing, for Ministers, to live poor, and to die neglected. And besides, the *means* by which they obtain bread for themselves and their families, are often humiliating to the very extreme. It is a fact, which cannot be denied, that the ministry is not generally supported, from the influence of principle: The people do not give their money, feeling that their Minister has a right to it; but they consider him as an object of public charity: They wish him to continue among them, because he is often convenient to them; and because his office tends to their respectability; just as it increases the pride of some rich Lord, to have a servant of superior order in his retinue: but it never occurs to them, that they are doing nothing more than their duty, in contributing their full proportion to his temporal support: they rather put this down, as a work of charity.

And, as to preferment, what may a Minister expect? If he receives common decency, and common civility, and common honesty, at the hands of the people, he may even congratulate himself. I do not speak of all: I rejoice to say, there are many noble exceptions to this remark:—there are many, who esteem their Ministers *very highly* for their work's sake: But the *common sentiment* among mankind is, that, setting aside his books, his Bible, and his religion, a Minister knows nothing.—“He is a good man,” say they “but what does he know of the world, of politics, of the relations of nations, or of the great interests of Mankind?” Advice, or even an opinion, on these subjects, from a Minister, is regarded as preposterous; and treated with ridicule.

Now, what effect must these things have upon a generous spirit? Is a Minister so different from all the world, that he can embrace poverty, for its own native loveliness? Must he confine himself to the vale of humility, and to the limits of his own Parish, because there is nothing in the charms of fame to allure him? Must he clip the wings of ambition, because he does not love to soar aloft? what heroism, then, does it require, to rise superior to these things! Yes; Brethren;—the Minister, *must* consider those things small, which all the world consider great—he *must* regard them as base and contemptible, in comparison of the Gospel of Christ. But Again—the Minis-

ven has a conscience : yes !, strange as it may appear to many, *he has a conscience* ; and, unfortunately for the people, his conscience is not always made of as pliant materials as they suppose it ought to be. He is, in one word, so superstitious, as to believe, that he "ought to obey God rather than Man." Now as the Jews did not understand Peter and John when they asserted that their conscience was in their duty, no more can the people, at this day, understand the Minister, when he speaks of his conscience : And what is the consequence ? why, if he fail, in one instance, to gratify their wishes, though he does it in terms the most mild and conciliating, yet they are offended ; and embrace every opportunity to express their hatred to him : The king of Israel, and Jehosaphat king of Judah, consulted together, that they might take Ramoth Gilead in battle :—In those days it was customary to enquire of Prophets, as to the success of such enterprises. Accordingly, these kings assembled together a large number of Prophets, about four hundred, and enquired of them. They all, to a man, encouraged them ; saying " *Go up*, for the Lord hath delivered it into your "hand"—But, it appears, that the king of Judah did not give full credit to their testimony :—for he asked " *Is there not here "a Prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him"?* "And the king of Israel said, there is one man, Micaiah, the "son of Imlah, but I hate him ; for he doth not prophecy good "of me, but evil." Nevertheless, when Micaiah is called for, how does he act ? Does he imitate the conduct of the 400 ? Does he conciliate the favour of the king at the expense of his conscience ? No ! but he has heroism enough to please God rather than Man—" *As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, "that will I speak*"—But

Lastly—Ministers have often to groan, and to shed tears of bitterness, in secret, over the hardness and stupidity of their people. You have heard of the lamentation of Isaiah—" *Behold "I have laboured for nought : all day long have I stretched forth "my hand, to a disobedient and gainsaying people.*" You have also read the plaintive accents of the sorrowing Jeremiah—" *Oh ! "that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters "of my people ! Oh ! that I had in the wilderness a lodging place "of way-faring men, that I might leave my people, and go from "them : for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous "men.*" And you may suppose that these lamentations were confined to those days ; but you are greatly mistaken : Ministers *now* "wet their couch with tears" yea, "*rivers of waters,*" "run down their eyes, because men make void the law of God." They go into their pulpit, and they preach plainly and affectionately : they shun not to declare all the counsel of God. They admonish and they expostulate : they say, with tears,

“ Oh ! that thou hadst known, even now, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace ! ” but they go from their pulpits with a heavy heart ; and, at night, complain “ we have stretch- ed forth our hand all the day long to a disobedient and gain- saying people.” I will also add, that Ministers groan under a sense of those corruptions, which prevail in their Churches ; corruptions, which they see, but cannot reform.

These, Brethren, are some of the afflictions, which embitter the life of a Minister : I say, some of them ; because, were I to detail the whole, I should more than tire your patience. A Minister, then, is not satisfied, when his people come regular- ly to hear him preach, and as regularly pay him his salary : he watches for their souls ; and nothing short of this, will sa- tisfy him : Considering, then, all the afflictions, the poverty, the self denial, and the mortification, which a Minister has to en- dure ; does it not require a more than ordinary share of true heroism to say “ none of these things move me ” ? Surely it does !

We shall now proceed to some remarks applicable to the present occasion.

Brethern, my time is very short among you, so short, that it has dwindled to the merest span—I am now rendering my last service ; and that is almost over. Our times of meeting for social converse, our opportunities of walking to the house of God in company, are all past. I address you for the last time— I see you for the last time, till we shall meet at the bar of our common Judge. I therefore feel at a great loss, how I can best improve the few remaining moments—I have scarcely ever, dur- ing the whole time of my Ministry among you, descended from the pulpit, and felt altogether satisfied with the performance : something was faulty, either in the matter, or the manner, and often in both, which was cause of humiliation when I retired by myself ; but then, I comforted myself with the hope, that the next performance would be of a better quality : that hope can no longer support me: I am therefore exceedingly anxious for the result—I must, however, proceed to say something : And

1st. I must say, that it grieves me exceedingly to leave one enemy to the Lord Jesus Christ behind. The great object of the Gospel Ministry is to persuade sinners, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God : this, I have endeavoured, in various ways, and in many instances. I have painted in your view, the comforts, the exquisite enjoyments of religion. I have described the Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on the Cross ; and I have used his language— “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” I have represented your danger, and your condemnation, as sinners, before God. I have referred you to a death-bed ; and depicted the horrors which await you there. I have also placed you at the bar of your God, and in- sisted upon the terror of your sentence. I have, then, besought

and intreated you, to fly to the hopes set before you in the Gospel of Christ. On some occasions, I have seen you moved. Like Agrippa, you were ready to exclaim, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." My hopes have been raised, and my expectations were increased, almost to a certainty. But, what has been the result of the whole? Oh! it pains me to say, that many of you are still aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise—still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. And now, my friends, what shall I say to such of you as yet remain in this unhappy condition: I must not withhold the dreadful truth! You are a hundred fold worse now, than you were five years ago—Your hearts are harder; and, if possible, even more impenitent. The Gospel you have heard—the invitations you have rejected—the privileges you have abused—the mercies you have contemned—and the warnings, the reproofs, and the exhortations, you have slighted, will all have a dreadful bearing upon your condemnation: Your sins have made you an important creature in the hands of God. He will not overlook you in the day of his wrath; but he will produce you as vessels fitted to destruction. Let all those who forget God, think on these things lest he tear them in pieces.

To the Church I would say, "Finally, Brethren, farewell: be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you" I have preached to you "the unsearchable riches that are in Christ: To you, I have also dispensed the sealing ordinances of God's house—This I did, that I might build you up in the most holy faith; and that I might present you holy and unblamable, at the coming of the Lord Jesus, without spot, or blemish, or any such thing: Nevertheless, I must say, in the language of revelation, "I have somewhat against you; for I have not found your works perfect before God." There has always been in this Church, too strong a disposition to unite those things which God hath declared separate: the world, its policy, its maxims, its fashions, and its amusements, have entered too much into your religion; and corrupted its holy simplicity. You have not come out from the world and been separate; and this, I am persuaded, has done you more injury, as a Church, than the combined efforts of all your enemies. And now, Brethren, suffer the word of exhortation, for a few moments. I shall soon cease to speak to you: and you will see my face no more. I would exhort you, then, for the last time, "be zealous and repent:" cease to corrupt the pure doctrines of *Christianity*. Let the religion of our blessed Jesus, which you have professed, be exhibited, in your life and conversation, in all its native purity. Depend upon it, the Ball Room, the Theatre, and the Card-Table, are but illy calculated to promote an increase of holiness.

Let me also exhort you, to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace : Your present situation calls loudly for the most perfect unanimity : You are just about to become a vacant people : You will not, I trust, remain long in this situation : A most delicate and important duty, therefore, awaits you : You will be assembled, and your suffrages will be taken, in the choice of a Pastor . If, then, there be divisions among you ; if one declares himself for Paul—another for Apollos, a third for Cephas, and a fourth for some other man, the consequence will be, that you will remain long, as sheep without a Shepherd. Ministers have feelings ; and I am persuaded, that no man of real worth, will take the charge of you, under these circumstances . And, in the choice of a Minister, I would advise you, not to be too tenacious, as to his natural or acquired qualifications. I have known many Ministers who could sing a pleasant song : and they sung it throughout the course of a long life ; and yet, perhaps, could not mention one individual, of whose conversion they had been the instruments. I have also known Ministers of good sense, but of moderate acquirements, who, by their diligence, their zeal, and their perseverance, were made the happy instruments of turning many to God. It pleases God, by weak things, often to confound the strong. If, therefore, it pleases God, to send you a man of plain sense, and of fervent piety—who, although he cannot flourish in all the arts of polished eloquence, can, nevertheless, convince the sinner, and direct the humble enquirer to the Lord Jesus Christ—“ receive such an one, I say, and esteem him very highly for his work's sake” I lay the greater stress upon this, because there is manifestly a disposition at the present day, to refine upon the simplicity of the gospel. Our Saviour spoke in plain language—the Apostles used the same strain ; and, whenever we attempt to prune their discourses, or to polish their doctrines, we destroy their sublimity ; and reduce them to a level with our feeble productions.

I must also say a word to the youth of our congregation :—My dear friends, I have always considered you as the Lambs of my flock. I have, therefore, taken you into my arms ; and cherished you in my bosom. I have considered you as needing instruction ; and have therefore, endeavoured to instruct you. Besides my public ministrations, I have put into your hands, the best compends, of all the doctrines comprised in our holy religion. You know, that, although exhausted through the labors of the day, I have not failed to give you this separate instruction. Some of you, by your diligence, your obedience, and perseverance, have endeared yourselves to me. I shall never forget the tender plants which I have nurtured with my own hand. Hear, then, the voice of your friend and instructor. “ Fear God”
“and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man:

“—remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth—honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Shun the paths of pleasureable sin; for, they lead to hell—Begin every day with prayer; and set apart a certain portion of it, for reading the Holy Scriptures. Thus will you be a crown of glory to your parents; and God will bless you.

To the congregation, who have waited upon my ministry, I would also say a few things. I know that my services among you, have been very feeble, and very few. I have abundant reason to humble myself before God, that I have been so cold, and so negligent. I, however, have a consciousness, that I have not “handled the word of God deceitfully:” I have always endeavoured to order my ministry so that I might say with the Apostle. “I have not shunned to declare all the counsel of God.” And now “before God I protest—behold, I am pure from the blood of every man.” There is not one among you, whom I have not warned, and admonished, to flee from the wrath which is to come. If, therefore, you perish, your blood be upon your own heads. I beseech you, Dear Brethren, to lay it to heart, that we shall meet again. Yes; Minister and people, shall stand, face to face, at the bar of our God. I, to render an account of my ministry; and you, to render an account of the manner in which you have improved it. May God, of his infinite mercy, grant, that we may meet, with exceeding joy and gladness!

I thank you for all the kindness which you, have rendered me and mine. May God reward you, even for the cup of cold water, which you have given me, in the name of a Disciple! My enemies, I forgive; and I pray that God may forgive them also. Nothing remains, but that I now give you my blessing. May God bless and prosper this Church! May God defend you during your vacancy! May He send you a Shepherd after his own heart! May times of refreshing come from his glorious presence! May all the congregation, and all now present, be blessed in time, and blessed in eternity.



