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PIERCE (W.)

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT SEEKONK, MASS. MARCH 12TH, 1825, OCCASIONED
BY THE DEATH OF

B. U. 1818
DR. ALVA CARPENTER,

ie

Josiah

SON OF

Snow

April 1st 1825

Deacon Elishu Carpenter,

OF SEEKONK,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE AT MOBILE, ALABAMA, NOVEMBER
30TH, 1824, IN THE 27TH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

B. U. 1818
BY WILLARD PIERCE, A. M.

Pastor of the Congregational Church in Foxborough, Mass.

Thou destroyest the hope of man.—Job.

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FUNERAL SERMON.

JOB, X. 22.—*Without any order.*

Though the Creator and governor of the universe, is a God of perfect order ; yet, in many of his providential dealings with mankind, there appears to be the greatest irregularity and confusion. And in nothing, in which God's special agency is concerned, does this disorder appear more striking, than in the different times and circumstances, in which men are called to leave the world.

Some die in infancy ; some in the bloom of youth ; some at middle age ; and others far out live the common age of man. Some die in their full strength ; and others go down to the grave in the bitterness of their souls. As this irregularity cannot be seen in the inanimate creation ; in which there is the greatest apparent order and harmony ; nor in the origin and preservation of rational creatures ; the question arises, why does it prevail in their death ? Why does God take mankind out of the world without any *apparent* order ? I say, *apparent* order : For, although God's agency is always regulated by the wisest and best principles ; yet, in such afflictive providences, they seem almost totally hid from human view. To this question, no other answer can be given, but such is the will of him, who regulates all things, according to his own good pleasure.

In discoursing from the text then, we shall attend to these two ideas, the consideration of which may lead to some profitable observations and reflections on the present mournful occasion :

I. That it is God who takes mankind out of the world ; and,

II. That he does it without *any order.*

First. It is God who takes mankind out of the world.

As God is the giver of life, so he must be its destroyer. The machine having been put in motion, will run till it is stopped by its omnipotent deviser.

Mankind can no more die without God's agency, than they can live without it. As no finite power can create, so none can destroy. Every incidental cause, and all the means, by which men are brought to death, are under the absolute and sovereign control of divine providence. God always exercises an agency, directly, or indirectly, either to preserve, or to destroy the lives of men. In this respect, it is impossible that Omnipotence should be inefficient, or leave mankind to themselves. The moment God ceased to preserve Paul, that moment, he began to kill him. So long, as God is pleased to keep the soul and body united, all the powers of finite existence, cannot dissolve the union. The *fact*, that men die by the appointment, and agency of God, the scriptures abundantly confirm. Job says to God, "I know that *thou* wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living;" and God says to all men, "I kill, and I make alive, and there is none that can deliver out of my hand."— Again, "behold, *he* taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, what doest thou?" It is true, that in removing mankind from this world, as in all other events, God works by means: but, between the means appointed, and the end brought about, there is an infallible connection.

These means are not always the same: some die by sickness; some by what is commonly called accident; some by violence; and others, by the decays of nature. But, although they are not always the same; yet, they are always sure. No person can calculate by *what means*; *when*, or under *what circumstances*, he shall die; yet all may be assured of the truth of their mortality; and when it comes, that God is its cause: for he doeth according to his pleasure, and "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." But,

Secondly. He takes mankind out of the world, *without any order.*

And here I would observe,

First. That God takes mankind out of the world without any order, as it respects their *age*. They die at *every* period of life. A stranger, wholly unacquainted with the concerns of the world, and of the messages of death, in looking abroad in the earth, would be apt to think, that all mankind were destined to live equal lengths of time : that any child must live, till his head had become hoary, and his cheek furrowed by the generous lapse of four or five score years : that there would be the same regularity in this, as in most other parts of the divine economy. But, it is not so : mankind die in any stage of human life.

In visiting the sacred deposits of the dead, we shall find that the angel of death has arrested all ages : that there are no human calculations to be made upon the length of man's existence in this world. Nor is this irregularity confined to modern times ; it has always been the case since the apostacy of Adam.— Perhaps, there has been no moment, from the shortest period, to the protracted lapse of nine hundred and sixty nine years, that some have not departed from this, to the world of spirits. Observation abundantly proves, that there are no data, by which men can calculate to what age they shall arrive, before he who gave them breath, will take it away, and consign them to the grave.

No age is exempt ; no constitution, however firm ; nor no character however pleasing to God, can bribe the angel of death to stay, for a moment, his icy hand. As there is no discharge, so there is no order in that war.

Secondly. God takes mankind out of the world without any *order*, as it respects their *circumstances*.

Some he takes out of the world, step by step. They waste away in a very gradual manner, they are borne down, not only from day to day, and from month to month, but even from year to year, with pain, sickness, distress and anguish, exhibiting hourly increased signs of their approaching dissolution. To such, God gives much time to contemplate upon their departure ; to reflect upon those solemn scenes which await them in their next state ; and to make suitable preparations for

them. Others he hurries away in a very sudden manner. Without any notice, in a moment unexpected, their souls are required of them ; and they are called away to appear in the presence of that God who gave them ; and who hath fixed the bounds of their habitation, that they cannot pass. He causes some on a dying bed, to endure the most excruciating pain, and that for a great length of time. They often seem to die, and then to revive again but to renew the unwelcome task ; others he takes away without a band.---- They are quietly dismissed from their earthly tabernacle without a struggle. He ends the probationary state of some, at home, under a father's roof, and amidst a numerous circle of friends, who are constantly endeavoring to administer comfort, and soften the agonies of a dying bed. Others receive their final summons, in a land of strangers ; where, far from their native cot, they have not a friend to soothe their troubled breasts ; to bid them an affectionate farewell ; or to close their eyes, already sunk in awful silence.— Some he takes away in the midst of their days, and of their useful labors ; when necessity seems to demand their further stay. An aged parent is sometimes robbed of its only support ; and a widowed mother of her last comfort. At other times, a numerous family of helpless children are left fatherless, with no other earthly dependance, than an unsympathising world. Others are kept till they burden themselves, and all around them.

The death of some is the cause of great lamentation and weeping to numerous friends, while others die in obscurity, and without a relative to follow them to the chamber of death.

God takes away the rich man in his riches ; and the poor man in his poverty. In a word, the honorable and the despised are alike exposed to the shafts of death.

So little order is there in the circumstances attending the death of human creatures.

Thirdly. God takes mankind out of the world without any *order*, as it respects their *moral characters*.

He removes some, while they are dead in trespasses and sins : others, after they have exercised that godly sorrow, which worketh an effectual reformation in heart and life. Some, in their departing moments, are wholly insensible to danger, or just desert of evil ; others see themselves to be sinners ; and feel that they are without God, and a reasonable hope in the world. They often anxiously inquire, what they shall do to be saved. Some, while dying, are in darkness and doubt respecting their preparedness for a future state : others, in the full assurance of hope, are enabled to exclaim, “ O death, where is thy sting , O grave, where is thy victory !” In the triumph of faith, they “ know that if their earthly house were dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.”

Some have the hope of the hypocrite, which is no better than the spiders web, when God takes away the soul. Others have a good hope through grace, which proves as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. Some are very timorous and fearful, constantly dreading the thoughts of dissolution : others with great boldness, long to depart, and be with Christ.

Many are cut down in the midst of an abandoned life ; while some few live, till they seem well nigh the goal of christian perfection.

Thus God takes away mankind without any order. There is no established rule, either with respect to the time, circumstances or characters of those whom he calls out of time, into eternity. There are no principles, by which the most enlightened of the human race can tell, *how long* they shall live ; *when* or *where* they shall die ; or even *what* will be on the morrow.

Why God has been pleased to remove mankind from this world in a manner so seemingly irregular, we cannot tell ; it must be left for the light of eternity to unfold. All that we can say at present is, that such is the pleasure of him, “ who worketh *all things* according to the counsel of his own will ; and giveth not an account of any of his matters.” And even so, because it seemeth good in his sight.

It is the duty of all men, under the darkest, most mysterious, and afflictive dispensations of God's providence, to be still, and know that he is God : that he has a perfect right to take what he gave, and in such a manner, as is most pleasing in his sight.

IMPROVEMENT.

First. If it is God who takes mankind out of the world : then men greatly err, when they charge it upon secondary causes. When the christian looks only at the means, regardless of the agency of God, it is impossible that he should receive much consolation, under the bereaving strokes of divine providence. As long as the patriarch Jacob extended his views no further than the voracious beast, which he imagined had destroyed his much beloved child, so long he was comfortless. His relatives and friends endeavored to soothe and cheer him ; but he would receive no consolation. The language of his disconsolate heart was, " Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces ; and an *evil beast* hath done it." Hence, I will go down into the grave to my son mourning. Had I kept my son, whom I loved most tenderly, at home, in the vale of Hebron, and under my immediate inspection ; instead of letting him wander, companionless, amid the forests of Shechem and Dothan, in search of his brethren, who were abundantly able to protect themselves ; or had he died at an earlier period, when less an object of parental fondness, I should have been saved from such cheerless, heart-rending sorrow. But, O that *beast* ; that *evil beast* ; Joseph is gone ; " he is without doubt rent in pieces !"

The views of Martha were equally limited, when she made the following complaint : " Hadst thou been here, my brother had not died.

But these saints, for a time at least, looked only at the *means* ; they saw the *rod* but not *him* who appointed it.

Christians, more especially in the commencement of their afflictions, are exceedingly apt to indulge very sordid and narrow views of the divine government.--- They believe in the being and providence of God ; yet

amidst the cares and perplexities of the world, they too often lose a practical sense of his presence and agency.

But this is not always the case : often, as soon as they are brought into trouble, they look far beyond secondary causes, up to that cause, whose providence is so particular, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice.

To *this*, they ascribe the beginning and end of all the evils they suffer : on *this*, they stay themselves : and from *this*, they derive lasting comfort.

Job, when he had lost all his property, and was bereaved, not of one, but of all his children, and that too, in a most sudden and awful manner, says nothing of the means of these evils.

He makes no bitter complaint against the Sabeans, or Chaldeans ; nor does he rail against the elements of heaven ; but with the most pious resignation, he replies, “ the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Secondly. Since, as we have seen, God takes mankind out of the world without any order ; christians ought to live in a constant preparation for death.

It is one thing to be in a regenerate state, and in distinction from sinners, to possess the one thing needful ; and another, to have one’s loins girt about with truth, ready to depart. Very few christians feel themselves ready to die.

King Hezekiah was a good man ; but still, he seemed not to be ready for the summons of death. His house was not only disordered, but to his mind, the prophet’s message was sudden and dreadful. “ I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years. I shall behold man no more, with the inhabitants of the world.”

His heart had been too much lifted up in himself ; and too much attached to the objects of time and sense. His thoughts of God and heaven had been but seldom : and he reflected, far too little, upon the solemn scenes of death, judgment, and eternity. Hence, his call was as a thief in the night ; though his departure

seemed near, even at the door ; yet he was not ready to be offered. Nor would death be less surprising to multitudes, who, at times, possess a comfortable hope through grace.

But still, by the light and power of divine truth, every christian ought to have his doubts respecting his future state, dispelled ; his lamp trimmed and burning ; and to live every day and hour, as if it were his last. God takes without any order : and he takes saints as well as sinners : hence, every christian is momentarily liable to enter upon another and an eternal state. Therefore, a single doubt where the welfare of the immortal soul is concerned, is enough to call the mind to the closest self-examination.

In view of death, even a reluctant feeling demands a serious attention. It is but fit and proper then, that every christian should rejoice, as though he rejoiced not ; and weep, as though he wept not ; and live in a constant preparation for death, through which he may immediately be called to pass.

Thirdly. Since, as we have seen, God takes mankind out of the world without any order, sinners are in a state the most dangerous and alarming. Like saints, they are breakers of that law which saith, “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.”

But like them, they have no reasonable hope in the grace of the gospel. They are enemies to God, and as such, they are unreconciled to him, and to every possible display of his character. Hence, they are wholly unprepared to die ; unqualified to receive the favour, or to enjoy the presence of God. They are altogether destitute of a heavenly temper ; a temper of heart, that “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits ; without partiality, and without hypocrisy ;” so that, if they were admitted to heaven, they could not be happy. Holiness and happiness, in a great measure, go hand in hand in this life ; and they are inseparable in the next. And sinners are not only in a dangerous state, as being in the broad road that will ultimately lead them to ruin ; but they are in a very alarm-

ing condition ; not knowing but that they are upon the very threshold of perdition. As God takes mankind out of the world without any order, as it respects their characters, as well as circumstances, they know not but another hour may put them far beyond the reach of mercy. Yea, God may already have sworn in his wrath, “ that they shall never enter into his rest.”

Fourthly. Since, as we have seen, God takes mankind out of the world without any order, they ought not to be greatly surprised when death approaches ; or when their relatives and friends are called out of time into eternity. Instead of being thoughtless and inconsiderate, they ought to believe and feel that their lives, and the lives of every living creature, are in the hands of God. That he has a right to take them away when, where, and under what circumstances he pleases. They ought always to bear it in mind, that their connections, as well as themselves, are probationers for eternity ; that they are liable, every day and hour, to be called before the judge of all the earth, to give an account for all the deeds done in the body.

Hence, those who appear as mourners on the present occasion, ought not to be greatly shocked, that a beloved son, and an affectionate brother has recently been taken from them. And since God takes mankind out of the world without any order, they ought not to be surprised, that he died young, in the midst of his days and usefulness. Nor should they much marvel, that he died far from home, in a land of strangers, without a parent’s parting blessing.

Dr. Carpenter, whose premature death has been the occasion of this discourse, was a man of no ordinary talents and acquirements. But few, comparatively, had his thirst for knowledge, or his opportunities for gratifying it. He was a graduate of Brown University ; was a classmate, and an intimate friend of the preacher.

As a scholar, though his mind was far from being disturbed by that unjustifiable ambition, which so often tortured the bosoms of others ; yet, he was always studious, punctual in his recitations, and ever merited well of his teachers. His knowledge was rather of the general, than of the classical kind. He read

much ; and retained and digested what he read. His taste was refined, and his judgment discriminating. These intellectual qualities were adorned with an amiable disposition, a discreet deportment, and impeachable morals. He understood, and had a consistent belief of the doctrines of the gospel.

During his collegiate course, so far as I can recollect, his mind was often awakened to the concerns of his soul, and a future state. He was frequently asking, what he should do to be saved.

Soon after he graduated, the acquisition of a chosen profession, the improvement of his mind and health, all seemed to invite a residence, for a time at least, at the south. Hence, he left his father's house, his earthly connections, the land of his nativity, and journeyed to a land of strangers. Once he returned to the bosom of his friends ; but a disease, portentous of death, bid him go back to more propitious climes. There he lived ; there he died ; but we have reason to believe, not without those sore trials, which a debilitated body, and the want of a parent's care, are calculated to produce. During his last moments, we are told, that " his sufferings were great ; but his patience and resignation* were still greater." As his day was, so was his strength.

Without any order, he has gone to that world, from whence no traveller returns. But his departure, to the deeply afflicted parent, is attended with many aggravations. His son was one whom he tenderly loved : and the *time*, the *place*, and the *manner* of his removal are all of a character to excite painful reflections. Taken away young, he was deprived of the residue of his years ; and before any of his schemes of life had been matured, or fairly developed.

He had just entered on the stage of public life, with prospects of usefulness the most flattering. Having

* Dr. Carpenter, as appears from a letter which he wrote his sister, dated only four days before his death, retained a very grateful sense of the favors shown him, by those around him.— He noticed with thankfulness the smallest acts of kindness.— And he requested, with his dying breath, that his friends would ever cherish a faithful regard for his benefactors ; who tenderly, and gratuitously administered to his necessities, those comforts, which were out of the power of relatives to bestow.

been educated with the utmost care and tenderness, both as it respects religion and literature, there was much, for which an indulgent parent might reasonably hope and expect. In addition to this, he was far from home, in a very distant part of the country; where, though much might probably be done to relieve his pains, and soothe his sorrows, and to make him comfortable and happy; yet, the wholesome counsel, the sympathising look, and the parting blessing of a fond parent, was wanting. These reflections cannot but awaken the tenderest emotions: these circumstances are so aggravating, that they cannot but cause a father's heart to ache.

But, my aged sire, you very well know, that they are such as an all-wise, and benevolent providence saw fit and proper, should attend the death of your son. Before God took him away, he perfectly knew how tenderly the news and manner of his death, would affect you: yet, he saw it was needful for you, and necessary to work further in you, the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

In all these things, God has exercised his sovereignty; and he gives you a fair opportunity to exercise holy submission. True, it is lawful for you to mourn and weep, but not to repine and murmur. Your son will no more return to you; but you must go to him. If you discharged your duty to him while living, and under your paternal care, you have no painful reflections to cast upon yourself. Do you say, did I but know that he is happy, my spirit would be at rest? In the language of Christ, I answer, "what is that to thee? follow thou me." He is in the hands of that God, who never did, nor never will injure any of his creatures. Stand with your own loins girt about with truth, and your lamp trimmed and burning, ready to be offered, and to enter on that rest prepared for the people of God.

Brothers and sister of the deceased; lover and friend has God taken from you. One, whom you tenderly loved; in whom your souls delighted; and with whom you have spent days and hours of sweet converse and pleasure, has been put far from you into darkness.

Although, from his prevailing habits, you might have anticipated the intelligence of his death ; yet, when it came to you, it was rather sudden than otherwise. But remember *who* has taken him away ; charge nothing upon secondary causes. Say not, had we been *there*, our brother had not died : or had he been *here*, we could have protracted a life, to us most valuable and dear. His bounds were set which he could not pass ; and his days were numbered and finished.— Having gone to the world of spirits, he bids you, with a piercing, though silent call, to prepare to follow him.

He admonishes you of the shortness of life, of the certainty of death, of the vanity and emptiness of all earthly things, and the infinite importance of being prepared, by timely repentance, for another and better world. Never promise yourselves long lives ; or a better and more convenient season to prepare to meet your God.

Your brother's life was short : his days were few indeed, and very evil : and the days of some of you, may be equally so. Run then into the name of the Lord Jesus ; and hide yourselves in the pavillion of the mercy-seat.

To all who had the happiness to be acquainted with Dr. Carpenter, his early death is an affecting event ; and his memory will long remain dear. No one could be long in his society, without the most intimate friendship ; or even visit him, without pleasure and profit ; for he was certainly a man made to be loved. By the death of such a person, in such a situation, and at so early a period, is really a solemn lecture to all the living. They are reminded, not only of the uncertainty of life, but of the importance of being always ready to leave the world. No age, condition, or character is exempt from death. God takes mankind out of the world without any order, and none can let, or hinder him ; hence, no one should live a moment, without a reasonable hope of a better world ; and without good evidence, that his name is enroled on the Lamb's book of life ; for no man knoweth the day of his death, or what an hour may bring forth. Amen.