

A DISCOURSE  
DELIVERED ...  
APRIL 13, 1823

---

WESLEY

BV  
4269  
.B76  
1823

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
820 WITHERSPOON BUILDING  
PHILADELPHIA 7, PA.

17.  
BY  
4269  
.376  
1823

A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

AT THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

Washington, Pa.

---

BY

THE REV. MATHEW BROWN,

---

APRIL 18TH, 1823:

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RECEIVING HIS CHARGE OF THAT  
CONGREGATION.

---

John G. Johnson, Jr.

ADVERTISEMENT.

---

THE following Discourse is published at the request of the Elders and other members of the congregation to whom it was addressed. As it was not originally designed for the press, but delivered from short notes, hastily prepared, this must apologize for its imperfections, and also for some slight variations from what was delivered.

## A DISCOURSE,

Delivered in the Presbyterian Church, Washington, Pa.  
—by the Rev. MATHEW BROWN, April 13, 1823—on  
the occasion of his resigning his charge of that Con-  
gregation.

---

FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL.—2 Cor. XIII. 14.

---

I HAVE selected these words, not as a "text" for discussion, but merely as a "motto" to the observations which I am about to make on the present occasion. This form of salutation used by the Apostle is, we all know, the usual form of address when friends are about to separate. It is an expression of affection, and a desire for the welfare of the persons addressed, and is usually accompanied with such reflections as the occasion is calculated to excite.

As I am now to address you for the last time as your pastor, I desire to improve the occasion by some reflections on the past and some advice suitable to your present circumstances. And may I not hope, that what shall now be said, tho' possessing nothing entirely new, will be heard with more than ordinary interest, and make some lasting impressions.

I. The first reflection which occurs in review of the past, is the *changing and transient nature of every thing around us*. Eighteen years have passed away since my settlement among you, as your pastor. How short and transient does this period appear in retrospect. Our days are, indeed, as a shadow—they have passed away as a tale that is told. They are gone with all their opportunities—never to be recalled. How solemn the call to redeem the time, to improve every moment of the short period allowed us to prepare for eternity!



What changes too have occurred during this short period! What changes in this congregation! How small a proportion of those pews are now occupied by their first occupants! Some have removed into distant parts. "Some in whom we once delighted, we shall meet no more below." Some have exchanged their place in the sanctuary here for a place in the sanctuary above. What changes in families—in connections—in circumstances! How mutable is human condition! How uncertain the most flattering earthly prospects! How delusive is earthly bliss! How unstable earthly friendship! How vain for any man to say "I will die in my nest." The objects on which we rest for happiness often prove broken reeds to "pierce us through with many sorrows." Great expectation from any created object is usually succeeded by great disappointment. That from which we expect the most enjoyment often proves the occasion of the most bitter sorrows. It is dangerous to set our affections on creatures—dangerous to idolize them; and when we do so, it is merciful, as well as righteous in God, to enter them to our souls, that our affections may be set on things above. Let us turn away our eyes from vanity, from creatures, earth and dust—and when we see "the fashion of the world passing away," and that there is nothing here abiding, let us go for happiness and rest to him who changes not, "who is the same, yesterday, to-day and forever."

II. A review of the past calls for *gratitude to God*. Whether we consider ourselves as individuals, or as families, or as a congregation, great has been the goodness of God to us. "The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have had a goodly heritage." Think of the various means of instruction and grace. Think of the many Sabbaths, sermons, sacraments, and solemn meetings, when we took "sweet counsel together and went to the house of God in company." I trust I am addressing a number who have found these precious seasons to their souls—some who have been "brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light"—some strangers, some children—some enemies, some friends. What eternal gratitude is due to him "who sought you when strangers, wandering from the fold of God," brought you into his house, and feasted your souls on the banquet of his love. It becomes you to think, with humble gratitude, on that sovereign

grace, which has made you to differ, which has cast your lot not among strangers—not in a region covered with darkness and “full of the habitations of cruelty,” but in Zion, the city of the living God, and there imported a free and unmerited salvation, whilst others are left to perish forever.

Considered as a congregation, I think we have special cause to notice the peculiar care and most marked interposition of a kind Providence. Reflect on the state of society & of religion in this place formerly—the numbers who have been hopefully brought into the kingdom of Christ—and the general change in the aspect of morals and religion—and amidst all the causes of lamentation, you will find cause of gratitude to God, that he has been in the midst of us for good.

If he has permitted evils to arise, he has over-ruled them for good. “If the enemy was permitted to come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord has filled up a standard against him.” If a righteous and offended God has chastised, mercy has been mixed with judgment. If Zion has been brought low, it was, that God might, by his own arm, bring deliverance. “If the bush has been at times consumed, it has not been consumed;” and it becomes us in review of the past and in view of present circumstances, to set up our Ebenezer, and say, “hitherto the Lord hath helped us.”

III. We are especially called to improve this occasion, by considering the account we must render to God, of the manner we have discharged our duty and improved our privileges. Salomo, very solemn is the relation subsisting between a pastor and his people. Their duties are reciprocal, and of high responsibility. As an ambassador for Christ, he is to propose and urge the messages of heaven with all fidelity, sincerity, plainness and zeal. As a watchman on the walls of Zion, he is to give faithful warning of approaching danger, and “warn the souls as one that must give account.” As a pastor, he is to gather and guard and feed the sheep and lambs of Christ. He is obliged to declare the whole counsel of God, and in the face of obstructions, difficulties, reproaches and censures, to preach the word—to reprove, rebuke, exhort—to declare to Israel their transgressions—

to administer the discipline in Christ's house with a steady and impartial hand, and to improve every opportunity of leading souls to Christ. "Who is sufficient for these things?"

In the review of my ministry, I have much cause to be *humbled* before God, and to acknowledge, with sorrow of heart, that in "many things I have offended, and in all have come short."

It has been, however, I believe, my sincere desire and habitual endeavor to discharge my duty, and I cannot accuse myself of deliberate and intentional unfaithfulness. I think I have not refused "to declare the whole counsel of God," nor intentionally "kept back" any part of divine truth. Your duty and danger—the law and the gospel—the threatenings and promises—the doctrines and precepts of the word, I have endeavored, in due proportions, plainly to exhibit.

Now, as the duties of a minister require reciprocal duties on the part of the people, it becomes you, brethren, seriously to enquire how you have improved your privileges, and discharged the solemn duties involved in this relation. Have you realized the solemn import attending the ministerial office? Have you "received the grace of God in vain?" Have you received the word "not as the word of man, but as the word of God?" Has it been a savor of life and not of death to your souls? I wish you to reflect how many sermons you have heard; how many Sabbaths and sanctuary opportunities you have enjoyed; how often the Lord's Supper has been dispensed, and Jesus Christ set forth as crucified before you; how many prayer-meetings; how many exhortations! Think of all the various instructions and arguments from the word of God, calculated to shew you your state by *raising*—your guilt, your depravity, your danger, your need of pardoning mercy through the blood of Christ, and the renewing and sanctifying power of the Spirit on your hearts. How often have you been urged to come to Christ, by the consideration of his loveliness, sufficiency, sublimeness, and willingness to save, by arguments drawn from the vanity of the world, the folly and the danger of sin, the dreadful curse of an incensed God; the peace, the joy, the honor and excellence of true religion here, and also by the dread solemnities of eternity, the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell. The motives, calls, and



warnings which you have heard, may no doubt have often referred upon your consciences by the spirit of God. And may not such the effect have you bear, as truth persuaded to be reconciled to God?

Have you endeavored to co-operate with your minister, and to support and encourage and strengthen him in his work? Would I could impart his influence, have you endeavored to build up his hands by your example, your counsel and prayers? Let me remember that we must stand together and re-engage each other at the bar of God. Blessed are the people who shall be thus blessed by their pastor as the fruits of his ministry; and blessed beyond expression may he be who shall receive them as "his joy and crown of rejoicing," and be permitted to present them before the Lord, saying, "were not I and the children whom thou hast given me." Their well done and grateful memorial, all their works and labors of love, every kind office, every benevolent effort or desire, their mutual sympathies, their prayers and tears—would the recollection of former trials, conflicts and sufferings, will tend to accustom their songs and imbue their enjoyments throughout eternity. But not how involuntarily and extending, beyond description, must be the reverse of this picture!

Having suggested these subjects of reflection, in relation to the past, let me now offer you some advice as to your duty in present circumstances, and for the time to come.

It must be considered a very peculiar felicity that you are not to be left without a pastor, for a single day. You are not to be left exposed to the dangers incident to a vacant state. Your choice of a successor is already made. To me it is a source of great satisfaction, in separating from you, that I leave you in prosperous circumstances, and see you intrusted to the care of one who will serve you with more ability, and I pray with more success than I have ever done.\*

\* The above reference will be explained in these circumstances, by stating, that when I accepted the appointment to the presidency of Jefferson College, in October last, I was requested to continue the pasturage of the congregation until the ensuing spring. With this request I complied. In the near time there was

I trust you will duly appreciate this token of God's goodness; that you will esteem and honor his servant; that you will co-operate with him in his labors of love; hold up his hands and encourage his heart in the arduous duties of his station, and that you will endeavor to profit by his ministry, as you most tender your account to God. Whilst he is endeavoring to discharge his duty, in declaring the counsel of God, in dealing plainly with your consciences—in pointing out your duty, your sin and your danger—in searching out the hidden iniquities of the heart, and in establishing the holy doctrines of the cross; or in the strict and impartial exercise of discipline, let no one be so unreasonable as to take offence at his fidelity. Never imagine that your minister is your "enemy because he tells you the truth." Remember that the success of the ablest ministry is from God. Therefore, pray much for your minister. If you regard your own profit or his comfort and usefulness among you, pray much in the family and in the closet; come to the house of God in prayerful dependence, and while there, sitting under the sound of the gospel, let your earnest desires be continually ascending to God: for the influence of the Divine Spirit to accompany the word, so as to make it the power of God to salvation. Study the unity and peace of the church. While it is an acknowledged duty to exercise benevolence to all men, we owe special duties of love and preference to the "household of faith," and to the particular congregation to which we belong. Beware of taking offence without cause; and if differences do arise, let them be speedily healed by candid explanation, or by mutual confessions and forgiveness; "each his own fault own to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed." Never neglect the positive command of Christ, Mat. v. 23—25.

Remember it is a very serious thing to separate from the church, and doubtfully dangerous to be rejected by opposition to its lawful discipline or administration. Every church aimed against the officers of

---

*efforts were made to obtain a secession. In January the congregation met, and unanimously chose the Rev. Obadiah Jennings, who had arrived in Haverhill, and assisted in administering the Lord's Supper on the day this address was delivered.*

his heart in the discharge of *his* duty, God will consider as aimed against himself. They carry the flag of heaven. He will not suffer it to be leaked with impurity. There are momentous litaries in evidence the truth of this declaration.

At the same time it is the privilege and the duty of every individual to examine every principle and proceeding by the law and testimony, and in due temper, and according to the directions of the gospel, to maintain his rights and to seek redress of wrongs.

As members of a congregation, it is your duty severally to use every honest effort to build up the house of the Lord. The churches must not be left to labor alone. In your several stations, and every one "over against" his own house—you must be at work to build the wall—Nehem. iii, 26. Take the word of God for your rule, and not the maxims and policy of the world. The church of God needs not such aid. When employed, it has always proved an injury. Let not carnal policy ever enter into your economy; nor let the men of the world, with polluted hands, presume to touch the ark of the Lord.

Before I conclude, I beg leave to address myself more particularly to two classes: 1. Christians and Christian professors. 2. Those of a contrary description.

**I. TO PROFESSORS.** Let me entreat you to transcribe well the sincerity of your profession.

Although the greater number of you have been admitted to sealing ordinances under my ministry, and on personal examination all I deem it not unnecessary to caution you against resting on this profession. There may be the form without the *fruit* of godliness. There may be an *exterior* decency of character, when the heart is still in its natural state of enmity to holiness. The outward conduct and conversation may be such as to command the approbation of man, while the Searcher of Hearts sees and shows a man totally estranged from the knowledge and love of Christ.

Once more, then, brethren, you are exhorted to "examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, prove your own selves, know ye not

your ownless, that Christ is in you except ye be reprobates." Do you know what it is, to be brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light!—to be born again!—to have passed from death to life!—to be created anew in Christ Jesus? Have you known any thing in the exercise of your souls which would be properly represented by these strong expressions?

Have you ever seen and felt your dreadful state as sinners—wholly depraved—rebels—guilty and exposed to the displeasure of a holy God? Have you seen your absolute need of salvation through Christ? Have you embraced him as offered in the gospel, cordially and exclusively, for "righteousness, wisdom, sanctification and complete redemption?" Have you experienced the influences of the Holy Spirit, renewing you in the temper of your hearts—producing hatred of sin, desires after perfect holiness, delight in God, his attributes, laws, worship, ordinances and people? Have you been growing in grace, particularly in knowledge of yourselves—in humility—in faith? Is Christ more and more precious to your souls, and his word more and more sweet to your taste? Examine yourselves by these marks and by the light of God's word, and let conscience make faithful report. Admit the truth though it should condemn you; and instead of deceiving yourselves to your eternal disappointment, pray God that he would search and try you, and show your state, and however wretched it may be, that he would lead your souls to Christ, and make you truly to experience the pardoning and sanctifying power of his gospel in your hearts.

As professors of the religion of Christ, consider your obligation to honor the religion you profess. Christians are a peculiar people. They ought to show, by their conduct and conversation, that they are governed by higher motives and a better spirit than others.

Be not conformed to the world. Come out from the vain of the world and be separate. "Let your light shine," so as to force conviction on the consciences of the ungodly, that there is a reality, a power and excellence in the gospel of Christ. Be not satisfied with past attainments, but study to grow in grace, adding to your faith "charity, knowledge, temperance, brotherly kindness and charity."



Hold fast the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Beware of that scepticism, falsely called charity, which trifles with the sacredness of truth, and considers all religious opinions equally admissible. The scriptures speak a very different language. They attach a fundamental importance to the reception of the truth as it is in Jesus.—They teach us that opposition to the truth is a sin of the heart. They tell us of damnable heresies—and warn us to beware of such, especially as deny the Lord of life and glory. Warn, therefore, you endeavor as far as possible to pass on peace with all men, and exhibit a kind and benevolent disposition to those who may differ from you in sentiment, still it is your duty “to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.” Finally, “whosoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

II. I would now address those who are still living in their sins, strangers to the power and comforts of the gospel—“in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.”—It is a cheering thought, that there are a number here of this description, and woe to whom I have been preaching during the whole of my ministry among you.—I feel no small solicitude to say something to such, at parting, which might make some lasting impression.—I am desirous on my own account, that I may be “pure from your blood,” and on your account, I feel not a little anxious, that in the day of the Lord, I may not see you cringed on the left hand of the Judge.—The eternal ruin of my soul is dreadful, beyond conception; but how peculiarly dreadful the condemnation of those who have long sat under the sound of the gospel.

Think what will be your feelings, if you recede, when you shall remember the opposition, once enjoyed—the calls, the invitations, the warnings, so often addressed to you by the word, and enforced by the spirit of God. What will be your feelings when the dot of your whole life shall rise before you in rapid succession, and in all their unobscured deformity and guilt? What when you remember that salvation was once in your offer—when you shall see the man who had then preached to you the gospel—when you shall behold the Saviour himself, once despised and rejected, now surrounded with all the splendor and majesty of Godhead, about to pronounce your sentence

—when you shall behold those who sat with you in the same congregation, perhaps in the same pew, now gloriously seated on the right hand, and yourselves separated forever! Think not lightly of these social amenities.—How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? How distressing the thought, that this gospel, which is a saviour of life to others, should be a saviour of death to you; and that the only effect of my ministry to you should be your more aggravated condemnation! This thought is the more affecting when I reflect that in this happy number may be some whom I love—some who have endeared themselves by amiable manners, by personal friendship, and by acts of kindness—some may of the precious youth—the children of pious parents, early devoted to God in baptism. What shall I say to you? O that the Lord Jesus who is the “resurrection and the life,” would himself speak to your hearts. O that you would yet be persuaded to break off your sins by repentance and speedily fly to the Saviour to break the door of mercy be forever closed. Once more we preach to you Christ Jesus as the only Saviour of sinners—in a willing Saviour—and as able to save to the uttermost.—Once more in his name we offer you salvation through his blood. Flow to the sceptre of his grace, renouncing every sin. Now is the accepted time—daily no longer.—Let this hour be memorable in the history of your lives and in the annals of eternity as the hour of your conversion to God.

In relation to that dispensation which takes me from you, to occupy another station, I need say but little, as the circumstances are already made known to you. I shall only say, that this call as Providence was wrought, as it was unexpected by me. In accepting of it I yielded more to the advice of my letters and brethren, and what appeared to be duty, than to my own feelings. I had expected and desired to have lived and died with you. The mysterious providence of God has determined otherwise. I need not tell you that it is with painful feelings I leave you. I thank you for all the many proofs you have given of your attachment, and all the kind attentions I have received from you. May the Lord reward you. I have only to request that you will still remember me in your prayers. “Finally farewell, farewell. Be perfect, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

