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SERMON I.

BY THE REV. GEORGE POTTS, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, UNIVERSITY PLACE, NEW-YORK.

In memoriam of James W. Alexander, D.D.

"THEY that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever."—DAN. 12: 3.

GREAT work rewarded by great wages! When the multitude of them "that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," said the celestial messenger to Daniel, the man greatly beloved, "then they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever."

Do these words need an interpreter? Nay, their meaning is transparent. They require meditation, not exposition. If an explanatory remark be at all needed, it is in regard to the terms in which those who are to be rewarded by the exceeding and eternal

weight of glory are here described: "*they that be wise*" and "*they that turn many to righteousness.*" These are not two classes, but one. "They that be wise," should be rendered, *they who instruct*—they who teach others in the true wisdom; which, as you see, is but another description of those who turn men to righteousness.

This text, then, may be justly called the prophet's and preacher's text. It was addressed to a troubled minister of God in need of being lifted up by such a hope. Daniel, troubled even to dismay at the burdens of prophecy committed to him, troubled with his surrounding dangers, with the grievous captivity of himself and his people, and with the weight of his responsibility as their leader, instructor, and guardian against the snares of idolatry—Daniel—what was he but a type of successive ministers in the Church of God, who in different forms encountered substantially the same labors and sorrows, and therefore needed the same cheering assurance that God would not be unrighteous to forget their work of faith and labor of love. Here is such an assurance. We do not wish to exclude any, even the most feeble and obscure believer and worker, from a share in this and kindred promises of God. But may we not be permitted, for once, to restrict it to the special work and wages of him who, not incidentally, but as the grand purpose of his life, devotes himself to the work of *instructing* and *turning men to righteousness*? May I not, for your sake as well as my own, magnify on this occasion that office which was so well filled by my noble friend and brother, *in memoriam* of whom I speak to-night, and from the burdens and cares of which he has gone to enjoy the rewards here specially promised. In doing this, I shall only be enforcing the duty of the Church to a departed ministry, enjoyed by the great apostle in these touching words: "*Remember your guides who have spoken unto you the word of God, and attentively considering their departure, follow their faith: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.*"

I forewarn you, my hearers, not to expect from me an attempt to describe the recompense of the reward here painted by such bright images. Who can approach, even in conception, to that glory in which Paul and they who followed him as he followed Christ, now dwell? My object shall rather be to remind you of some of the characteristic qualities which are implied in the work of which this glory is the reward—that of instructing and turning men to righteousness. These qualities were found in a very eminent degree in him whose departure we lament. A life like his is an instructive chapter in the Book of God worthy of thorough study. His praise is not only in his own, but in all the churches. I shall not resort to labored eulogy. I shall use no "flattering words." He is beyond the reach or the need of our praises. I aim to speak the simplest words of candid and reverent love; and I am willing to leave those who knew him least to decide whether

the exaggerations of affection are at all necessary in commemorating such a man.

I shall not speak of him as one of the playmates of my childhood, for we were too soon separated by the removal of his residence, to maintain even a boyish intimacy. But after a reunion, which took place in Princeton, after association with him under his father's roof, after frequent correspondence and the close intercourse of co-presbyters and co-laborers here in the same field, especially after the frank intercourse of intimate friendship, I feel that I can speak with the especial emphasis of a long fellowship which reached through many years and mutual trials, and which afforded large opportunities of knowing him well.

From this vantage-ground I deliberately express the conviction of my judgment when I say that, so far as I can see, this loss is irreparable. Of course, I speak from the human point of view. Every honest minister of the word, our beloved and respected friend included, has formed his own ideal of what is desirable and possible in his office; and the broader his conceptions, the more painfully humbling will be the consciousness of his own failure to reach that ideal. The more, therefore, will he be inclined to throw himself down in the shadow of the cross, where his deficiencies may be hidden through the grace of our dear Lord. Our judgments of Christian and ministerial character must needs have two sides, Godward and manward. The first formed by comparison with a divine ideal, the latter by a comparison with the actual. It is with the latter, not the former, in my eye that I repeat that this loss is irreparable; that, so far as I know, such another combination of gifts and graces is not to be looked for soon. In single qualities he doubtless had superiors; but the harmonious whole has rarely, if ever, been surpassed. And this, in all of three respects when taken together, his *personal traits*, his *scholarly acquirements*, and his *official character*. Let me speak briefly of each of these, and even a stranger, should such an one be here, will comprehend why we feel that our loss and that of the Church is irreparable.

The personal characteristics of our friend may be included in the comprehensive title "A Christian gentleman:" the highest style and type of manhood. A good authority—Lord Lyttleton—commenting upon Paul's defence before Agrippa—adverts to the courteous humanity it displays, and calls the Apostle, among other things, a gentleman. Nature, education, and grace gave to him to whose memory we are offering our poor tribute, the vastly important quality (would it were more common) which we know under the name of good breeding; the essence of which lies in the absence of the selfish, and the power of the unselfish affections. Respectful deference to persons in high or low conditions, the modest

humility which does not obtrude its own claims; the self-respect which does not run after reputation, but leaves reputation to follow in its track; tender consideration for weakness; the disposition to see every character in the fairest light; these and kindred traits belong to the perfection of the Christian character. Were we to affirm that they are of its very essence, we should fear that multitudes calling themselves Christian, would scarcely stand the test. Fidelity to truth and righteousness in our dear brother was utterly removed from all coarseness in manner, all wordy invective. Firmness in asserting his own convictions, did not degenerate into a petty and fractious personality. Firm he was in all essentials; but gentle, unobtrusive, and even diffident in all matters merely incidental. He knew how to meet and rebuke intentional disrespect toward his person or office, but he was always accessible to the humble, and weak, and suffering. He dealt tenderly with the erring, and was "patient towards all." Upon some, who did not know him, I have heard it said, that he produced the impression of distance and coldness. It is almost the only defect I have ever heard urged against the perfection of his personal bearing, but it is a defect which loses its character of a fault, when we know that it arose from those physical causes which lie in a great measure beyond the range of the will, being almost as involuntary as the beating of the heart. Those who would magnify such an occasional infirmity, which often occurs in highly nervous and sensitive organizations, betray their ignorance of the mysteries of the human frame, or their want of candor. In this case, the imputation is the more unjust, as the defect originated from the severe shocks of bodily disease which often threatened his very life.

The meannesses of personal rivalry, the petty ebullitions of self-conceit, ever watching for opportunities of magnifying its own mountainous *me*, the dexterous stratagems meant to catch public notice, were the abhorrence of this Christian man, as a gentleman, a scholar, and a minister of truth. His was a noble candor. His charity was indeed not blind. When Truth was concerned, his trumpet gave no uncertain sound. Not his the

‘Candor which loves in see-saw strains to tell
Of acting wickedly, but meaning well :
And finds with keen, discriminating sight
Black's not so black, nor white so very white.’

In every thing that bore upon truth or purity, he was a decided man—a man of articulate speech—no small praise in times of compromise and vacillation tending to the defacement of the old dividing lines between truth and error. But though so firm in dealing with principles, who more courteous in dealing with persons? Who more decorous in the modes of utterance, when called to deliver his cherished views upon points of difference? Who so reticent of the wit and humor of which he possessed a very

large measure, and by which, had he condescended to employ them, he might have overwhelmed an antagonist with sarcasms? This was not his method of engaging in the necessary conflicts of opinion, which, some more and some less important, must be shared in by any one who mingles with men. He was a noble, candid, gentle opponent, whose conciliatory spirit was limited only by reverence for the supremacy of truth and righteousness.

I will not attempt to draw the veil which hides from view the privacy of the family, and speak of the son, the husband, and the father who is now gone from us, except to say, that within those sacred precincts, where lost joys are at this moment awakening, now grief, now sweet remembrance, shone the same genial but clear-sighted love which made its mark upon all who knew him. Whether ministering or being ministered to in the personal and domestic sorrows of which he had no small share, he was ever breathing in an atmosphere of gentle, patient love. This is not the place for details, even if I were the most fitting person to give them. We leave their recital to one who from the closest intimacy is best qualified to present this side of the personal character of our departed brother.

Let me now say a few words—and they shall be but few—upon his scholarly acquirements. Not that much might not be said, but that the limits of modern discourse oblige me to be brief, and I am myself impatient to proceed to the last and most materia point—his official character.

Of his mental power and literary culture it may be safely said, that high as the general estimate of them is, it falls short, very far short of the facts. I do but speak the judgment of those, who, from their own competency to decide what scholarship is, are fit witnesses, that had he devoted his whole powers to any department of science or letters, he would have secured an eminent rank. He might have shone in any professorial chair, in any line of authorship, had he not preferred, as the work of his conscience and heart, to give himself wholly to the ministry of reconciliation. A powerful passion—the *love of souls*—(I mean what I say, and use the words in no canting sense)—conquered the ambition of the scholar, and restricted his labor of acquirement to those subjects which might be possibly subsidized in the cause of religion, and especially of religious instruction. A clear intellectual perception, rapid insight coupled with careful analysis and broad powers of generalizing, fine appreciation of the limits of human reason and within those limits, a severe logic, would have made him, had he bent his powers in that direction, a metaphysician of the highest order. With these—and this can seldom be said—he had a vivid sensibility to nature, a keen discrimination of character, a large acquaintance with ancient and modern belles lettres, a delicate eye and ear and internal taste, (which are the necessaries of the artist,) the

finest sense of the humorous, the readiest memory—and these would have carried him, if he had chosen to follow their bent, far into the regions of poetical creation.

No one skilled in such matters could quietly converse long with him, without a strong impression of the soundness and scope of his mental and moral faculties, the great opulence of his learning, and especially his wonderful command of it. For in a very high degree, he possessed that faculty, without which no one ever attained great eminence of any kind—*memory*. This made him a ready man. His learning was not lumber in a store-room, but furniture in a well-ordered dwelling, easily got at when wanted. He knew where and how to get knowledge, and when gotten how to employ it for his own uses. The fruits of his observation and reading were at hand. Memory made him a linguist, and had he felt inclined, and health permitted, he could easily have added indefinitely to his stores of dead and living languages, in respect to which, as it was, he had few if any living superiors.

Do I speak extravagantly? Is it affection, prone as we all know to magnify the qualities of the dead, that here utters exaggerations? No: reverence for the memory of my friend, to say nothing of respect for the truth, would forbid any exaggeration. I do not claim for him what passes under the name of genius, but I claim something far nobler. The multiform but harmonious qualities which made him a well-balanced man—a noble globe, all whose sides are turned successively to the sun. Genius is often but a morbid, mental secretion, and flourishes at the expense of the other faculties. Like a young eagle fallen from its nest before its wing and eye are ready for flight, genius, as it is called, often goes floundering through the tangled forest of thought, helpless and useless, to the wonder and often the pitying contempt of the beholder. Many-sided and robust, a well-proportioned culture can alone do deeds of honor and usefulness which command respect. Such was our departed brother's self-culture. Had he chosen to demean his powers, he could have easily secured the sparkling but superficial honors which now reward that creature of modern times—the lecturer—a character much degenerated from its original type—a character, which, with a few exceptions, might quit the stage without any serious disadvantage to society. He might have written learned works and brilliant fictions and keen satire and poetic sentiment—and if you ask me why he did not? I answer—and I have already adverted to the fact—it was because he had otherwise consecrated his powers, his time, and his enfeebled health. All his contributions to the written wealth of the world—and they are not a few—bear the stamp of mental power and learning; but they are all in the direction of his Master's service. Whatever his pen sent forth, whether he wrote for the young, the illiterate, or scholarly, was the tribute of a soul which was informed by the

Spirit of God, and bent on instructing and turning men to righteousness. This is true of many others besides him. Why do they not disply their gifts upon the rostrum, or at the hustings, in the senate, or in the varied themes of literature? Like Nehemiah, they have selected their work, and have no heart nor time to go down from it. They are sealed and consecrated men, who, amidst the din of worldly ambitions tempting them to descend into the more conspicuous fields of life and display their skill—hear and obey the voice which once said: "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

This brings us to consider more particularly this side of the character of our venerated and beloved brother—that of the minister of Christ, embracing his qualities as a preacher and pastor. He was both: preacher and pastor—offices usually but not always united, and rarely united as they were in him.

And where shall I begin? At what point, in what truth or class of truths, shall we find the central spring of his individual power, the prompter of his labors, the guide of his tongue—the inspiring thought which like sunlight spread through his whole mental and spiritual being, and made him all aglow with that genial force which we have all felt radiating from him? Hear it, ye who are doting about questions and wordy strifes—ye who ask why this great, sick, distorted, miserable humanity of ours rejects your nostrums—ye who think that a broad church and æsthetic forms and dramatic machinery must be evoked from the grave, and who, because yourselves are dying the death of sceptical inanition, falsely infer that the whole Church of God is in the same condition of a suspended faith—hear it, ye thousand reformers who, unlike the Luthers, Calvins, Knoxes, Wesleys, Alexanders, have gone forth to battle with the serpent evil, but have disdained the old and simple armor of God—hear it ye who are for the removal of one social evil by the infliction of a greater—witness the bloody-minded benevolence which sanctions the murder of the white, that it may set free the black race: this man spent all his life, and all his great gifts, in preaching the Love of Christ. Christ, the Prophet—the Priest—the King—was to him the only hope of the individual man—the only cure of social evils—the only true centre of social harmonies. Not one among you all, better than he did, comprehended and felt the magnitude of the problems which lie tangled together in the bosom of the human worldly life waiting a solution. He watched and comprehended thoroughly the nature and force of every one of these boisterous tempests of thought which from time to time have swept over the field of truth, for a while obscuring it and threatening its demolition. From pantheistic impiety, which teaches men to worship, not the Being who harmonized nature's grand music, but the instrument he plays—

down to the delusions of besotted dealers with the dead, he saw that all were alike in this—a malignant and often frenzied desire to dethrone the Christ of History—the Christ who died and lay in the grave, the victim of a similar malignant passion—the Christ who has not ceased, and will not cease, to pity and forbear and plead with his bitterest enemies—until pity, forbearance and remonstrance are forced to give way to the reluctant but stern interference of Justice. Through all the forms of error which aim to release conscience from the restraints of a Divine Law, and a Divine Gospel whose grace they scorn with an especial scorn—he had gone with a critic's eye and a philosopher's candor—weighing their claims, measuring their half-truths, acknowledging the dialectic skill of some of their advocates, and wondering at the impudent frivolity of others—and with a full heart, he returned to bathe his wearied soul at the fountains of the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord—thankfully saying as he looked around upon this multitude of false Christs and false prophets: "To whom shall I go but to Thee; thou hast the words of eternal life."

You, who knew him from his preaching, all who knew his inner thoughts, will be able to discern the secret of his earnest, incessant, and skillful preaching of the cross. It lay in his own experience; in an experimental consciousness, a personal trial of the plans of redeeming grace. I need not say that he had thoroughly examined the historical evidence of the Bible, both in the writings of its friends and those of its foes; but he went deeper than this evidence can carry any one, into the vital nature and necessity of the things to be believed. Not from hearsay, but from actual personal trial, his heart acknowledged the power and fitnesses of the truths revealed. The Spirit of God made his eye to see them shining in their own inherent evidence. He knew himself a sinner, he knew himself a sufferer, and nothing in all philosophy, nothing within or without, could he find to correspond to this double personal necessity, but the expiation and consolation found in the work of Christ. To him, hell was no figment. He scorned, so far as his humility would allow him to scorn any thing, that shallow sentimentalism which, ignoring the claims of God's justice, is employing itself in pampering sin with eulogies upon God's mercy, as if the commonest of common-sense did not require of every man that he should find, if he can, some method of harmonizing these grand attributes; as if the groaning nature of which we form parts, and which writhes in the travail pains of sin before our very eyes every hour, does not assert the majestic jurisdiction which a just God holds over the transgressor man. He attempted, indeed, no solution of the reasons of God in relation to the origin of evil. He made no pretensions to be wise above what is written, but then—to use Paley's terse sentence—he did not suffer what he did not know to interfere with what he did know. He

knew sin—he knew Christ. He knew sorrow—he knew Christ. He believed in hell—he believed in Christ. He believed in heaven—he believed in Christ; and for his own sake, and for the sake of his fellow-sinners and fellow-sufferers, he allowed nothing to divorce these vast realities which God has joined together by the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Like chain-shot, when one of the grand truths of the Gospel grace enters an intelligent soul, it carries all the others with it. Revealed truth is a system of well-compacted parts. He knew this, and was eminently happy in building the arches of the bridge which conducted his hearers from one to another point in the system. From the fall from original righteousness, involving every man's helpless depravation of soul and body—onward through all the provisions which redeeming mercy has made for his restoration—where was there ever found a guide who had studied more profoundly every step of the process, or one more competent to expound the ways of God in words of truth and soberness. He was not one-sided, but complete in all that requires to be taught concerning the covenants of works and grace—concerning God the imperial Trinity and his sovereignty of wisdom, justice, power and love—concerning his gift, his unspeakable gift, the eternal Son incarnated to expiate sin by an awful sin-offering—concerning his free grace to the believing and repentant sinner through the in-working of the Holy Spirit, in renewing, in justifying and pardoning, in purifying, consoling and strengthening, and thus bringing him from the bondage of sin and death into the embraces of his Father in his Father's home. Through whatever region in the wide domain of thought he carried his hearers, he kept open an avenue by which he might easily bring them back to the central spot—the cross of Calvary. With what a master's hand did he draw sweet music to the glory of Christ from the many-stringed instrument—the works, the ways, the word of God! Who ever heard him preach or pray without perceiving the odor of the rose of Sharon? Simplicity and godly sincerity were the fruits of his personal faith, and truly did he bring them into his Master's service, with the finest appreciation of the dignity of his themes, and disdaining all the degrading arts of the fine orator. All his arts, as a great man once said of himself, were honest arts. The arts of the true artist, who, out of the treasure-house of words, brought things new and old, but never low and belittling, to win first the attention and then the faith, love, and obedience of his hearers. It was a Pauline manliness—a Pauline vigor of faith, which made him throw himself upon the themes, not the mere forms of Christian preaching—for no one whom it has been my lot to know, seemed more entirely penetrated with the thought, that this treasure “has been committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of men.”

Had I time, I might advert to his extraordinary skill in the art of exposition as distinguished from that of preaching. Alas! I have had but few opportunities of hearing him in this department; but it is the universal testimony of competent judges, that they never heard his equal in the gift of extracting and in the most natural and simple manner bringing his stores of learning and piety to elucidate the bond of connection between verse and verse in the word of God. His ready memory, his fluent elocution, his devout reverence for truth, his rejection of all pedantic conceits, made this, I am told, one of the most profitable of his talents. Happy the writer or preacher who possesses the gift—one of the most welcome that he can possess—the power of exhibiting and establishing an orderly connection among the otherwise vague and confused thoughts of inexpert thinkers, without fatigue on their part.

I have time for a few words only upon another and a most important part of his ministerial character—his executive power. The least observed, the least known, the least appreciated, but most anxious and laborious task of the pastor is that of watching, following, caring for the manifold interests which are involved in the well-being of the congregation. Many of them small; many which ought to be cared for by others, but disturbing and carking in a high degree. Were it the pulpit alone that taxed his efforts, it would be little compared with being made the confidential repository of the griefs and errors of a multitude. He must painfully follow the wanderers from the fold with expostulation and rebuke, must try to calm the agitation of domestic sorrow, must go into many a door darkened by the shadows of evil, must witness many heart-breaking experiences of various sorts, some beyond relief; he must minister to the dying saint or sinner, and try to soothe the griefs of the bereaved. Shall I tell you, that often, when he who is now gone beyond the reach of this necessity, and I who am left behind to bear it awhile longer, have compared experiences we agreed in regarding these things as the heaviest part of the burden of our ministry? I will not dilate—but add only this one word; that these cares and labors, far more than any others, helped to wear out that delicate frame and terminate his life. It was work that must be done, and faithfully he did it.

Not without its reward was it; for it has, far more than his ability, won him a warm place in many a heart, into which he poured the balsam of God's promise with a gentle, a very gentle hand. But this is not the best of his recompense. Now he comprehends better than he did while here, that it was Christ to whom he ministered when he cheered the sorrow-stricken and smoothed the rugged road to death for so many. He has ere now heard the voice of him whom he loved saying: "Thou didst it unto me."

I fear, I know, my hearers, that I have fallen far below my

theme. It matters little, however. The will has been mine, if not the skill, to add a few leaves to the chaplet which adorns the memory of my friend. I will not obtrude upon you the further expression of my sense of personal loss. The wise, faithful, tender-hearted friend, the good and holy Christian man, displaces from my view at this moment, to a great extent, the great man. For after all, was not his goodness the greatest of his greatness? Not for his talents and attainments did Christ love him; but for his holy consecration. The servants of God, whose memories are embalmed in the sacred writings are rarely mentioned there because of their intellectual ability. Not that they were not highly endowed, but because they were known to God far more by the holiness which brought them like little children to the feet of Christ. And surely can I say of my dear friend, that far rather than stand in the highest place on the roll of earthly fame, he would have gloried in such a record as that of Barnabas: "He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, and much people were added to the Lord."

Nothing now is left to us but these memories of him. His record is written upon our hearts; but a far more complete one is on high. The soldier, who, in the early dawn of youth enlisted for Christ and threw away the scabbard, has now laid down the sword. The scholar who had made so many attainments, knows now how small they were compared with what one glance into the spiritual glory has taught him. The son has embraced his venerated parents; the father has been welcomed by his little children, now grown to perfection in the heavenly glory. He who often resorted to the fountains of comfort which spring through the clefts of the rock made by earthly suffering; he who carried upon him while here the scars of many wounds given in the wars of life, now lives "where night, death, age, care, crime, and sorrow cease." I would we had all loved and prized him more while we had him. Had every one looked upon him while living as they look upon him now that he is dead and gone forever, many a word of truth lost in the silence, would not have fallen upon callous hearts.

O my brother! thou shalt always be to me one of the noble men who stand like promontories upon the sea of life; a help and guide to me in the work of our common Lord. We wait till we can come to thee, for thou wilt no more come to us. We are saved by this hope.

For sweet, while waning fast away
 The stars of this dim world decay,
 To hail, prophetic of the day,
 The golden morning dawn, my soul!
 To feel we only sleep to rise
 In sunnier lands and fairer skies;
 To bind again our broken ties
 In ever-living love, my soul!