

**A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN CENTRAL
CHURCH, BOSTON, 13 AUGUST, 1851,
AT THE FUNERAL OF THE REV. WILLIAM
M. ROGERS, SENIOR PASTOR, BY HIS
COLLEAGUE, GEORGE RICHARDS**

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A Discourse Delivered in Central Church, Boston, 13 August, 1851, at the Funeral of the Rev. William M. Rogers, Senior Pastor, by his colleague, George Richards by George Richards

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GEORGE RICHARDS

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"WE TOOK SWEET COUNSEL TOGETHER AND WALKED UNTO THE HOUSE OF
GOD IN COMPANY."

BOSTON:

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1851.

DISCOURSE.

MATT. 23 : 42.

THY WILL BE DONE.

“How dreadful is this place. This is none other but the house of God.” Often hath He addressed us here, by his word;—to-day, by his providence. What is Death, but God, blighting our cherished hopes, burying our idols in the dust, pointing, through the shadows and phantoms of the present, to the calm, grand, unchanging, unending realities beyond ?

Met in this accustomed sanctuary, on this unaccustomed errand, drawn all by a single grief, gathered about one centre of engrossing and melancholy interest, let our first thoughts be of God, of his claims, of our duties, of the one duty that comprehends all others—entire, unquestioning submission to his will. How better, how else, can we gird us for these solemnities, than with Christ to say,—bowing, as He bowed,

under overwhelming sorrows, shrinking, as He shrunk, from impending calamities, to say, as He said,—his eye, and thoughts, and heart on Heaven,—“Thy will be done.”

SUBMISSION, then, is the doctrine of the text and of the hour.

It is not plainer that there *is* a God, than that His will ought to be, and is the paramount law. As the Creator of all, He is the Proprietor of all, and has a right to prescribe to all their duty and their destiny. As their continual Preserver, the unwearied Benefactor, He has added claims to their allegiance. More than this. As the infinitely Intelligent, He must *know*, as the infinitely Good, He must *desire*, what is, in every instance, *best*. Hence his preference and our duty are identical; to know either is to know both.

The Will of God is sometimes to be *done*, sometimes to be *borne*.

I. It is to be *done*. An action, or course of action, is prescribed by divine authority. It may be prescribed directly by revelation to the individual,—as to the Prophets and Apostles; or indirectly, by

revelation to another, — as through them to us. Whatever the medium, the divine will satisfactorily ascertained, duty is ascertained. Ordinarily the process is reversed. The moral fitness or unfitness of the act in question, or a foresight of its consequences, having determined our duty, we reason backward to the preference of God. The act contemplated is obligatory; God must approve and require what is obligatory; hence, He approves and requires the act contemplated. Thus Conscience in us serves in a twofold capacity. As an independent tribunal, supreme within its allotted jurisdiction, it utters its own judgments, approves the right, condemns the wrong. As the viceroy of God, it affixes his seal to the already recorded verdict, and enforces it by his tremendous sanctions. To sin, now, is not merely to run counter to our own convictions; to turn self-accusers; to wake within us that worm, whose venomous tooth gnaws into the spirit. It is to run counter to God's moral sentiments; to lift the standard against his authority; to dare the misery which measures, not our, but his disapprobation. They who explain away sin into the mere accident of circumstance and education, man's misfortune rather than his fault, consistently fritter away its retribution into a remorse from which they first steal the sting. They, on the

contrary, who see in the former a contempt for the Ruler of the world, an assault on his authority, a defiance of his displeasure, behold impending over the conscience-stricken culprit the vials of God's righteous indignation. The Will of God is to be *done*.

II. It is, also, to be *borne*.

While the *moral* purposes of God are the rule of *duty*, the *providential* purposes of God are the rule of *destiny*. The former are to be yielded to with the alacrity of obedience, the latter with the meekness of resignation. God's providential purposes include all actual occurrences, sin even not excepted. "For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." If the murder of the Son of God was foreordained in heaven, what sin is not? To the Will of God, then, in the existence of *moral* evil, we are to bow with reverence. Not that the sin itself is to be commended; nor our will in the perpetration of it. *God's* will is to be cheerfully deferred to;—not *his*, in *approving* sin,—

He never approves it, always condemns and threatens it,—his, in *permitting* it; allowing its introduction and continuance; tolerating it, the one blot on his else spotless universe.

We may be unable to assign the reasons that actuated the divine wisdom and benevolence; why so foul and unnatural an intruder was admitted to such a paradise; why warders more numerous or more vigilant were not stationed at the gate. We can defer to the over-ruling Providence which foreknew and prearranged things as they are, and say—“Thy Will be done.”

If so with *moral* evil, certainly so with natural. In fact, in this world at least, there is but one evil—Sin. To extirpate this, to implant and foster in its stead its opposite, is the end and aim of our probation. *Natural* evils,—pain, sickness, disappointment, bereavement, death, the whole catalogue of like ills that flesh is heir to,—are but separate links in the chain, separate wheels in the machine, contrived all to further man's spiritual emancipation. Sin excepted, no one thing befalls us here, whether by our own act, or the act of others, which was not designed and is not adapted, to make us better, to make us happier,

to help us on our way to Heaven. In all cases, if we will have it so, — “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” What duty so plain, then — I had almost said, so easy — amid our sternest trials, as Resignation! If designed, each and all, for our personal advantage, — as steps in a process that is fitting us for immortality, selected and arranged by an infinite Intelligence moved by an infinite Benevolence, — who so reckless, so presumptuous, as to complain of his hard lot; to wish one Heaven-appointed sorrow exchanged for one earth-prompted joy; to crave the allotment of his own prosperity and adversity, his own success and disappointment; to wrench the helm from the One Pilot, competent to steer the crazed and shattered bark, with its inestimable ventures, across the dark, perilous, tempest-swept, wreck-peopled sea? “Thy Will be done!”

It should be appended to every prayer, should follow in the wake of each petition, should qualify the most impassioned and importunate entreaty. From Sin we may pray to be delivered. That supplication may be absolute, unqualified, unconditional. To answer it can thwart no wish of God's. Beyond that, we should weigh our words. All other evils may be