

**A**

**DISCOURSE**

**Delivered in Wilbraham**

**November 17, 1805**

**Occasioned by the murder of**

**MARCUS LYON**

---

**By Ezra Witter, A.M**  
**Pastor of North Church in said town**  
**Springfield, Mas.**

**(M. Brewer, Printer)**

## Lamentations V, 16

“The crown is fallen from our head....  
Woe unto us that we have sinned.”

Thou Chicopee! Thy much indignant stream, I call to witness against the murdered man! What hast thou seen – what scenes has thou beheld upon thy violated banks! Savage beast hast thou seen, impelled by insatiate hunger, devour their kind, for prey? Worse than this, much worse than this hast thou seen, the boasted man, in death’s array against his unoffending brother and thy pure wave crimsoned with his blood! This thou hast seen!

You are sensible that I allude to the most melancholy event which recently happened in this place – On the ninth day of instant November, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and five, a most daring robbery and murder was committed within the bounds of this parish. It appears that Mr. Marcus Lyon, a young man about twenty-two or three years of age, who was on his way from the state of New York to Woodstock, in Connecticut, the place of his nativity, was met, by two ruffian footpads, and robbed and murdered in open day, on the stage road in this town. It is probable that he was shot, in the first place, with a pistol aimed at his heart. This proving ineffectual, in consequence it is likely, of his full dress and the ball striking one of his ribs, they had recourse to other means of affecting their nefarious purpose. His body was found, on the evening of the following day, in shallow water, in the edge of the Chicopee River, at a small distance from the highway, and confined with a stone, to prevent it from floating. His face and head, particularly the latter, were greatly bruised and the back of his skull very much fractured. A brace of pistols, in a very shattered condition, and one of them very much smeared with blood, was found nigh him. Whether clubs (one of which was found near the spot) or stones were likewise used was uncertain though somewhat probable from his head being so extremely bruised and broken. The verdict of the jury of inquest, summonsed on the occasion, was willful murder.

His body, as soon as was convenient, was conveyed to the place of his nativity, where it has doubtless received the rights of Christian sepulture and has been embalmed with many a tear.

His melancholy fate excited an uncommon interest in this and neighboring towns and pursuers were immediately dispatched, in quest of the perpetrators of this horrid deed. Through their expedition and perseverance, the supposed assassins have been apprehended, brought back to this county, had before magistrates, and committed to prison at

Northampton, where they are to await trial at the next session of the Supreme Court of this Commonwealth. - *Whoso shredded man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*

This must be considered a most bold and daring outrage. Few instances of this kind are to be met with either upon record or in the memory of man. It is perfectly astounding, that men in the exercise of their reason should venture, in open day and on so public a road, to attack a passenger, with an expectation of being able to murder and rob him; to dispose of his body, his horse and equipage, without being detected by such an almost constant succession of travelers. But such is the hardihood and infatuation of sin. It grows bolder and bolder – success gives confidence, and it presumes upon impunity, till it goes the most extravagant and desperate lengths and prepares itself, at last, for the most awful doom.

And has it truly come to this? Have things gotten to such a pass, in this infant country, that it is dangerous for a man of decent appearance and equipage, to travel on the highway in mid day through fear of his being murdered and robbed for his money? This is alarming indeed! What shall we come to next? Must we all arm ourselves and procure guards in order to travel in safety? We may as well retire from society of man and herd with the wild beasts of the forest!

We are taught the awful progress of vice and the consequent danger of entering upon its devious paths. The daring crime, which was lately committed in the neighborhood, was not, it is presumed, the first that was perpetrated by the same hands. They had not arrived all at once, to such an extravagant pitch of enormity and wickedness. They probably had made a regular progress in vice and crime – they had advanced from stage to stage, till they had attained to a state of such nature and full grown depravity that nothing was either too atrocious or too hazardous for them to attempt.

This is the course of vice – it is a downhill path and progress in it is easy, imperceptible and almost irresistible. Those who travel it never escape unhurt and frequently they are never seen to return. Hence the extreme danger of this course and the importance of never commencing it.

And suffer me to inquire into the policy of permitting so many idle vagrants to traverse the country. Such strollers must have a subsistence in some way or another as well as other people. They do not dig; to beg many of them are ashamed; and how then are they to be supported? Are we at a loss in this case? Reflect upon the numerous thefts and robberies committed in the country and the difficulty is solved at once.

How was money lately obtained in this neighborhood by men of this description? And is it advisable to have the evil repeated? Judge ye.

We see the evil attending a continued influx of vicious and polluted foreigners in this country. Many of the outrages we suffer proceed from this source. Who break open our homes in the unsuspecting hours of sleep? Who set fire to our large cities and towns for the sake of plunder? And who rob and commit murder on our highways? We are far from exculpating all of our own native citizens; we regret, indeed, that so many of them disgrace themselves and injure society by evil deeds. But these things notwithstanding, we are doubtless justified in saying, that a great proportion of the crimes above mentioned, together with many others which might be named, are committed by foreigners. And that atrocious deed which has so recently congealed all our blood with horror, in this palace, is supposed to have been perpetrated by foreigners. Look at the annual reports of the overseers of the prisons and you will find them be principally occupied by foreigners.

The first planters of this country were, generally speaking, men of pure lives and good morals and they were induced to come here for the sake of religion. And. For a long time, they maintained a wholesome and orderly state of society. But since the rapid increase of our commerce with other nations, and the great ingress of foreigners, many of whom are said to come here for the sake of escaping the retribution of justice in their own country; we have ripened apace in all the arts of vice and depravity. Some, who come among us from abroad, we readily acknowledge to be worthy and good men, and we cordially welcome their approach. But the number of these is comparatively small. The best and most useful citizens are cautiously retained, while the worst are readily parted with. Hence the rapid influx upon us, of late, of the most violent and abandoned of the human race. The late and present disturbances in foreign countries have greatly increased the calamity. The prisons of Europe and the West Indies are now disgorging themselves upon our shores; and this country is thus becoming the general asylum of convicts. This is a sore evil, and will furnish an increasing number of inhabitants for our prisons and victims for the halter.

How uncertain is human life? We know not truly what a day may bring forth. How little did the unfortunate stranger, who we have lately seen mangled in such a shocking manner, think, that, when he entered the fatal dug-way between the river and the mountain in this town, he should never go out from it alive; that it was to be, truly, the Valley of the Shadow of Death. *Man knoweth not his time*, as the fishes that are taken in the evil net; and as the birds who are caught in the snare; so are the sons of man taken in an evil time when it falleth suddenly upon them –

Let us work then while the day lasts for we know not what shall be on the morrow.

It is a matter of thankfulness that this atrocious deed, though perpetrated within the limits, was not done by the inhabitants of this town. It is unfortunate, truly, that such a bloody scene should have been acted in our territory, but how much more so would it have been had the actors been of our neighborhood brethren? But as we are so clearly exonerated from the crime, the stigma is wiped away. And as we have escaped reproach and disgrace in this instance, let it be our fixed purpose to do so in every other. To this end, let us assiduously avoid even the appearance of evil. Let us lay the ax at the root of the tree and carefully extirpate the first shoots of inequity. In this our safety consists. If we begin to transgress, we know not where the evil will stop. It may terminate in the most violent outbreakings of human passion and wickedness. The greatest conflagration may proceed from a single spark. When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth death.

We are not our own keepers. If we have been preserved from gross and scandalous crimes, let us bless God for the restraints of his grace and pray for a continuance of it in the future. But let us not, too hastily, presume upon our innocence even though we may have not been guilty of overt acts of wickedness. For sin consist in the exercise of the heart as well as the operation of the hands. He who looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart. And *whoever hateth his brother is a murderer.*

But blessed be God we are not left a prey to sin and death. Provision is made for a recovery from the ruins of apostasy, for the sanctification of our nature and the preparation for the society of the blessed.

Let it be our case then, and our prayer to God, that we may be received when we shall have done with this polluted and contentious world into that blessed region where the wicked shall cease from troubling and where the weary shall be at rest, even a land of peace and quietness forever.

(This is an edited version of the Discourse, copied from microfesh copy in UConn Library)