



## SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by Abraham Lincoln

March 4, 1865

The Capitol Building – Washington, D.C.

Fellow Countrymen:

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first.<sup>1</sup> Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years,<sup>2</sup> during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all.<sup>3</sup> With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.<sup>4</sup>

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war — seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation.<sup>5</sup> Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish.<sup>6 7</sup> And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it.<sup>8</sup> These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the

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<sup>1</sup> Have students explain WHY – A: Civil War, Lincoln did not want a war and wanted to keep unity.

<sup>2</sup> Term limits

<sup>3</sup> War progress was not a secret, public was well informed – newspapers and other prints, letters from family, witnesses to battles.

<sup>4</sup> Hopeful to win the Civil War – HOWEVER, does not feel confident of a for sure win. He understands the division the war has created.

<sup>5</sup> First inauguration focus was on the prevention of war

<sup>6</sup> Who is Lincoln talking about? (A: North ACCEPTS war, South MAKES war) Why would this comment cause division? (A: insinuates the war was entirely the Southern states fault. Southern dwellers would not take kindly to such accusations)

<sup>7</sup> This evokes the Garden of Gethsemanes. Matthew 36:39: O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

<sup>8</sup> Points to the war's cause, slavery. Issue with slavery was the uneven distribution and political discourse regarding the institution of slavery in newly acquired states.

government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it.<sup>9</sup> Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease.<sup>10</sup> Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.<sup>11</sup> Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other.<sup>12</sup> It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces;<sup>13</sup> but let us judge not that we be not judged.<sup>14</sup> The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully.<sup>15</sup> The Almighty has His own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!<sup>16</sup> If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him?<sup>17</sup> Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago,<sup>18</sup> so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."<sup>19</sup>

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds;<sup>20</sup> to care for him

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<sup>9</sup> What is Lincoln saying about slavery here? (A: Was not trying to disband the entire institution, rather prevent the spread of it.)

<sup>10</sup> Referencing the Emancipation Proclamation (Preliminary EP was written in September of 1862, one month before elections.)

<sup>11</sup> Problems with the war, why its been as trying as it has.

<sup>12</sup> A reference to religion. Cane and Abel – brother against brother

<sup>13</sup> A reference to God's rebuke to Adam and Eve requiring them to toil for their survival. Genesis 3:19-- In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:1-- Judge not, that ye be not judged

<sup>15</sup> Which side is prospering at war, if any? (A: Neither is winning, both are taking huge economic and civilian tolls)

Implies Isaiah 59:2- But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 18:7- Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

<sup>17</sup> Will God favor one side of the Civil War? Does Lincoln believe either side is innocent? Why? (A: Lincoln believes that no side of such a ruthless war would be viewed favorably by God.)

<sup>18</sup> What does Lincoln think will happen to the country if the war continues? (A: Lincoln sees this as an unwinnable war, one that would destroy the prosperity of the U.S.)

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 19:19- The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

<sup>20</sup> A reworking of Psalm 147:3- He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup>— to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Orphan – expresses the damage of war on civilians.

<sup>22</sup> Entire line: A reworking of James 1:27- Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

<sup>23</sup> Let us be an example for other nations and the future of our own.

Additional Notes:

- No other president prior to Lincoln quotes the Bible in their inaugural other than John Quincy Adams. However, Adam's is a passing reference to Psalm 127:1 in the last sentence of his speech.
- Lincoln invokes prayer 3X and refers to prayer three other times.
- In a span of 469 words:  
God=5X, Living God=1X, Almighty=1X, Lord=1X, His=3X, He=2X, Him=1X