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The Veep's last words

Gleaves Whitney
Grand Valley State University

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The Veep's last words

What were Vice President Alben Barkley's last words before he died? I think it was a reference to serving God before doing something wrong.

You almost hit the bull's eye. Alben W. Barkley, most remembered as Harry S. Truman's vice president (1949-1953), died of a heart attack on April 30, 1956, in Lexington, Virginia. He was addressing a mock Democratic Convention at Washington and Lee University, and his last words were: "I would rather be a servant in the house of the Lord than sit in the seats of the mighty."^[1]



The former vice president was a U.S. senator from Kentucky when he died at the age of 78. Indeed, Barkley had spent most of his remarkable career on Capitol Hill, where he served from 1913 to 1949 -- 36 years -- as a representative and senator. As it is the vice president's constitutional duty to preside over the Senate, it was logical for the Democratic party to pick him to be Truman's running mate. After four years as vice president, he wanted to return to Capitol Hill. He sought and won a Senate seat in 1954, and had been in office little more than a year when he was struck down by heart disease.

Three additional facts of note: First, Barkley was the last vice president born in a log cabin (in 1877, in Kentucky). Also, he was first vice president called "the Veep," a moniker given to him by his ten-year-old grandson. Finally, in 1948 Barkley became the first vice president to get hitched while in office; at the age of 71, he married Jane Hadley, who was 38.

(Question from Lenn Kornfeld of Amagansett, NY)

^[1] If you have the chance, try to visit Barkley's gravesite outside of Paducah, Kentucky. An historical marker off Lone Oak Road (at the entrance of Mt. Kenton Cemetery) cites the last words. Also see the Commonwealth of Kentucky website for its historical markers at <http://kentucky.gov/kvhs/hmdb/MarkerSearch.aspx?mode=Subject&subject=13>.