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THE PRINCE OF PEACE

AN ADDRESS
By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN.

I offer no apology for speaking upon a religious theme for it is the most universal of all themes. If I addressed you upon the subject of law I might interest the lawyers; if I discussed the science of medicine I might interest the physicians; in like manner merchants might be interested in a talk on commerce, and farmers in a discussion of agriculture; but none of these subjects appeal to all. Even the science of government, though broader than any profession or occupation does not embrace the whole sum of life, and those who think upon it differ so among themselves that I could not speak upon the subject so as to please a part without offending the others. While to me the science of government is intensely absorbing, I recognize that the most important things in life lie outside of the realm of government and that more depends upon what the individual does for himself than upon what the government does or can do for him. Men can be miserable under the best government and they can be happy under the worst government.

Government touches but a part of the life which we live here and does not touch at all the life beyond, while religion affects the infinite circle of existence as well as the small arc of that circle which we spend on earth. No greater theme, therefore, can engage our attention.

Man is a religious being; the heart instinctively seeks for a God. Whether he worships on the banks of the Ganges, prays with his face towards the sun, kneels toward Mecca or, regarding all space as a temple, communes with the Heavenly Father according to the Christian creed, man is essentially devout.

Some regard religion as a superstition, pardonable in the ignorant but unworthy of the educated—a mental state which one can and should outgrow. Those who hold this view look down with mild contempt upon such as give religion a definite place in their thoughts and lives. They assume an intellectual superiority and often take little pains to conceal the assumption. Tolstoy administers to the "cultured crowd" (the words quoted are his) a severe rebuke when he declares that the religious sentiment rests not upon superstitious fear of the invisible forces of nature, but upon man's consciousness of his finiteness amid an infinite universe and of his sinfulness; and this consciousness, the great philosopher adds, man can never outgrow. Tolstoy is right; man recognizes how limited are his own powers and how vast the universe, and he leans upon the arm that is stronger than his. Man feels the weight of his sins and looks for One who is sinless.

Religion has been defined as the relation which man fixes between himself and God, morality being the outward manifestation of this relation. Every one, by the time he reaches maturity, has fixed some relation between himself and God and no material change in this relation can take place without a revolution in the man, for this relation is the supreme thing in his life.

Religion is the basis of morality in the individual and in the group of individuals. Materialists have attempted to build up a system of morality upon the basis of enlightened self-interest. They would have a man figure out by mathematics that it pays him to abstain from wrong doing; they even inject an element of selfishness into altruism, but the moral system elaborated by the materialists has several defects. First, its virtues are borrowed from moral systems based upon religion; second, as it rests upon argument rather than upon authority, it does not appeal to the young and by the time the young are able to follow their reason, they have already become set in their ways; and third, one whose morality is based upon a nice

calculation of benefits to be secured spends time on mathematics that he should spend in action. Those who keep a book account of their good deeds seldom do enough good to justify keeping books.

Morality is the power of endurance in a man; and a religion which teaches personal responsibility to God gives an unyielding strength to morality. There is a powerful restraining influence in the belief that an all-seeing eye scrutinizes every act of the individual.

I passed through a period of skepticism when I was in college; the theories of the scientists concerning the creation confused me. But I examined these theories and found that they all began with an assumption. The materialist assumes matter and force as pre-existing and he assumes force working on matter and upon these assumptions he builds a solar system. I have a right to assume as well as he, and I prefer to assume a Designer back of the design—a Creator back of the creation. No matter how long-drawn-out the period of creation, so long as God stands behind it my faith in Jehovah cannot be shaken. In Genesis it is said that God created the heaven and the earth, and I shall stand on that proposition until some one presents a theory that gives a more reasonable beginning.

The miracles also disturbed me and I am inclined to think that the miracle is the test question with the Christian. Christ cannot be separated from the miraculous; His birth, His ministrations, and His resurrection, all involve the miraculous, and the change which His religion works in the human heart is a continuing miracle. Eliminate the miracles and Christ becomes merely a human being and His gospel is stripped of divine authority.

The miracle raises two questions, Can God perform a miracle? and, Would He want to? The first is easy to answer. A God who can make a world can do anything He wants to do with it. The power to perform miracles is necessarily implied in the power to create. But would God want to perform a miracle?—this is the question which has given most of the trouble. The more I have considered it the less inclined I am to answer it in the negative. To say that God would not perform a miracle is to assume a more intimate knowledge with God's plans and purposes that I can claim to have. I will not deny that God does perform a miracle and may perform one merely because I do not know how or why he does it. The fact that we are constantly learning of the existence of new forces suggests the possibility that God may operate through forces yet unknown to us, and the mysteries with which we deal every day warn me that faith is as necessary as sight. Who would have credited a century ago the stories that are now told of the wonder working electricity? For ages man had known the lightning, but only to fear it; now, this invisible current is generated by a man-made machine, imprisoned in a man-made wire and made to do the bidding of man. We are even able to dispense with the wire and hurl words through space, and the X-ray has enabled us to look through substances which were supposed, until recently, to exclude all light. The miracle is not more mysterious than many of the things with which man now deals—it is simply different. The immaculate conception is not more mysterious than any other conception—it is simply unlike; nor is the resurrection of Christ more mysterious than the myriad resurrections which mark each annual seed-time.

It is sometimes said that God could not suspend one of His laws without stopping the Universe, but do we not suspend or overcome the law of gravitation every day? Every time we move a foot or lift a weight,

we temporarily interfere with the most universal of natural laws and yet the world is not disturbed.

Science has taught us so many things that we are tempted to conclude that we know everything, but there is really a great unknown which is still unexplored and that which we have learned ought to increase our reverence rather than our egotism. Science has disclosed some of the machinery of the universe, but science has not yet revealed to us the great secret—the secret of life. It is to be found in every blade of grass, in every insect, in every bird and in every animal, as well as in man. Six thousand years of recorded history and yet we know no more about the secret of life than they knew in the beginning. We live, we plant, we have our hopes, our fears; and yet in a moment a change may come over any one of us and then this body will become a mass of lifeless clay. What is it that, having, we live and, having not, we are as the clod? We know not, and yet the progress of the race and civilization which we now behold are the work of men and women who have not solved the mystery of their own lives.

And our food, must we understand it before we eat it? If we refused to eat anything until we could understand the mystery of its growth, we would die of starvation. But mystery does not bother us in the dining room; it is only in the church that it is an obstacle.

I was eating a piece of watermelon some months ago and was struck with its beauty. I took some of the seeds and weighed them, and found that it would require some five thousand seed to weigh a pound. And then I applied mathematics to a forty pound melon. One of these seeds, put into the ground, when warmed by the sun and moistened by the rain, goes to work; it gathers from somewhere two hundred thousand times its own weight and, forcing this raw material through a tiny stem, constructs a watermelon. It covers the outside with a coating of green; inside of the green it puts a layer of white, and within the white, a core of red, and all through the red it scatters seeds, each one capable of continuing the work of reproduction. I cannot explain the watermelon but I eat it and enjoy it. Everything that grows tells a like story of infinite power. Why should I deny that a divine hand fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes when I see hundreds of millions fed every year by a hand which converts the seeds scattered over the field into an abundant harvest? We know that food can be multiplied in a few months' time, shall we deny the power of the Creator to eliminate the element of time, when we have gone so far in eliminating the element of space?

Those who question the miracle also question the theory of atonement; they assert that it does not accord with their idea of justice for one to die for others. Let each one bear his own sins and punishments due for them, they say. The doctrine of vicarious suffering is not a new one; it is as old as the race. That one should suffer for others is one of the most familiar of principles and we see the principle illustrated every day of our lives. Take the family, for instance; from the day the first child is born for twenty-five or thirty years the mother's time is devoted to her offspring, she sacrifices for them, she surrenders herself to them. Is it because she expects them to pay her back? Fortunate for the parent and fortunate for the child if the latter has an opportunity to repay in part the debt it owes. But no child can compensate a parent for a parent's care. In the course of nature the debt is paid, not to the parent, but to the next generation, each genera-