

THE OARSMAN DEFEATED

"THE MEN ROWED HARD TO BRING IT TO THE LAND."

Dr. Talmage Points Out the Helplessness of Man, and Contrasts with the Power and Willingness of Christ.

BROOKLYN, October 14.—Rev. Dr. Talmage, who is still absent on his round-the-world tour, has selected as the subject of to-day's sermon through the press, "The Oarsman Defeated," the text chosen being Jonah 1: 13, 14: "The men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not; wherefore they cried unto the Lord."

Navigation in the Mediterranean Sea always was perilous, especially so in early times. Vessels were propelled partly by sail and partly by oar. When by reason of great stress of weather, it was necessary to reef the canvas or haul it in, then the vessel was entirely dependent upon the oarsmen. He was running away from the Lord, and when a man is running away from the Lord, he has to run very fast.

God had told Job to go to Nineveh to preach about the destruction of that city, Jonah disobeyed. That always makes rough water, whether in the Mediterranean, or the Atlantic, or the Pacific, or the Cape of Good Hope. It is a very hard thing to scare sailors. I have seen them, when the prow of the vessel was almost under water, and they were walking the deck knee-deep in the surf, and the small boats by the side of the vessel had been crushed almost as small as kindling wood, whistling as though nothing had happened but the Bible says that these mariners of whom I speak were frightened. That which sailors call "a jump of sea" had become a blinding, deafening, swamping fury. How mad the wind can get at that time, and the water can get at the wind, you do not know unless you have been spectators. I have in my house a piece of the sail of a ship, no larger than the palm of my hand, that piece of canvas was all that was left of the largest sail of the ship Greece, that went into the storm two hundred miles off Newfoundland. Oh, what a night that was! I see it was in some such storm as this that Jonah was caught.

He knew that the tempest was on his account, and he asked the sailors to throw him overboard. Sailors are a generous-hearted race, and they are solved to make their escape, if possible, without resorting to such extreme measures. The sailors are of no use, and so they lay hold on their oars, I see the long bank of shining blades on either side of the vessel. Oh! how they did pull, the bronzed seamen, as they laid back onto the oars. But nothing on the sea is very different from rowing upon a river; and as the vessel heeled, the oars skip the wave and miss the stroke, and the tempest begins to scorn the flying paddles. It is of no use, no use. There comes a wave that crashes the last mast, and sweeps the oarsmen from their places, and tumbles everything in the confusion of impending shipwreck, or, as my text has it, "The men rowed hard to bring it to land; but they could not; wherefore they cried unto the Lord."

The scene is very suggestive to me, and I pray God I may have grace and strength enough to represent it intelligently to you. Years ago I preached a sermon on another phase of this very subject, and I got a letter from Houston, Texas, the writer saying that the reading of that sermon in London had led him to God. And I received another letter from South Australia, saying that the reading of that sermon in Australia had brought several souls to Christ. And then I thought why I take another phase of the same subject, for perhaps that God who can raise in power that which is so weak in weakness may now, through another phase of the same subject, bring salvation to the people who shall hear. Men and women who know how to pray, lay hold of the Lord God Almighty, and wrestle for the blessing.

Bishop Latimer would stop sometimes in his sermon, in the midst of his argument, and say, "Now, I will tell you a tale of a man who was a Jew, and the scene of the text as an illustration of a most important religious truth. As those Mediterranean oarsmen trying to bring Jonah ashore were discomfited, I have to tell you that the Jew was the only man who had broken down on their paddles, and have been obliged to call on the Lord for help. I want to say that the unavailing effort of those Mediterranean oarsmen have a counterpart in the efforts we are making to bring souls to the shore of safety and set their feet on the Rock of Ages. You do have a father, or mother, or husband, or wife, or child, or near friend, who is not a Christian. There have been times when you have been in agony about their salvation. A minister of Christ, whose wife was dying without any hope in Jesus, walked the floor, wrung his hands, cried bitterly, and said, "I believe I shall go insane, for I know she is not prepared to meet God." And there have been days of sickness in your household, when you feared it would be a fatal sickness; and how closely you examined the face of the doctor as he came in and scrutinized the patient, and felt the pulse, and you followed him into the next room, and said, "There isn't any danger, is there, doctor?" And the hesitation and the uncertainty of the reply made two eternities flash before your vision. And then you went and talked to the sick one about the great future. Oh, there are those here who have tried to bring their friends to God! They have been unable to bring them to the shore of safety. They are no nearer that point than they were twenty years ago. You think you have got them almost to the shore, when you are swept back again. What shall you do? Put down the oar? Oh, no! I do not advise that; but I do advise that you appeal to that God to whom the Mediterranean oarsmen appealed—the God could subvert the elements and bring the ship in safety to the port. I tell you, my friends, that there has got to be a good deal of praying before our families are brought to Christ. Ah! it is an awful thing to have had a house hold on the other side of the line! Two vessels part on the ocean of eternity, one going to the right and the other to the left—father apart, and father apart—until the signals cease to be recognized, and there are only two specks

on the horizon, and then they are lost to sight forever!

I have to tell you that the unavailing efforts of these Mediterranean oarsmen have a counterpart in the efforts some of us are making to bring our children to the shore of safety. There never were so many temptations for young people as there are now. The literary and the social influences seem to be against their spiritual interests. Christ seems to be driven almost entirely from the school and the pleasurable concourse, yet God knows how anxious we are for our children. We cannot think of going into heaven without them. We do not want to leave this life while they are tossing on the waves of temptation and away from God. From which of them could we consent to be eternally separated? Would it be the son? Would it be the daughter? Would it be the eldest? Would it be the youngest? Would it be the one that is sick? Oh, I hear some parent saying to-night, "I have tried my best to bring my children to Christ. I have labored with them, and I have braced myself against the ribs of the boat, and I have pulled for their eternal rescue; but I can't get them to Christ."

If you ask me to imitate the words of the text and cry mightily unto God. We want more importunate praying for children, such as the father indulged in when he tried to bring his six sons to Christ, and then he drifted off into dissipation. Then he got down in his prayers and said, "O, God! take away my life, if through that means my sons may repent and be saved to Christ," and the Lord startlingly answered the prayer, and in a few weeks the father was taken away, and through the solemnity of the six sons led unto God. Oh, that father could afford to die for the eternal welfare of his children! He rowed hard to bring them to the land, but could not, and then he cried unto the Lord.

There are parents who are almost discouraged about their children. Where is your son to-night? He has wandered off, perhaps, to the ends of the earth. It seems as if he cannot get far enough away from your Christian counsel. What does he care about the furrows that come to your brow, about the quick whitening of the hair, about the fact that your back begins to stoop with the burdens? Why he would not care much if he heard you were dead! The black-edged letter that brought the tidings he would put in the same package with other letters telling the story of his shame. What are you going to do? Both paddles and oars are laid down. He says, "You can pull him ashore," and threw you one oar now with which I believe you can bring him into the harbor. It is the glorious promise, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." Oh, broken-browed father and mother, you have tried everything else now make an appeal for the help and omnipotence of the ever-living God! And perhaps at your next family gathering—perhaps next Christmas day—the prodigal may be home; and if you crowd his plate more luxuriously than on any other plate at the table, I am sure the brothers will not be jealous, but they will wake up all the music in the house, because "the dead is alive again, and because the lost is found."

Perhaps your prayers have been answered already. The vessel may be coming homeward, and by the light of this night's stars may be seen peering the deck of the ship, anxious for the time to come when he can throw his arms around your neck and ask for forgiveness for the many years of leaving your old heart so long. Glorious reunion that will be too sacred for outsiders to look upon; but I would just like to look through the window when you have all got together again, and are seated at the banquet.

Though parents may in covenant be, and have their hearts in view; They are not happy till they see Their children happy too.

Again, I remark that the unavailing effort of those Mediterranean oarsmen have a counterpart in the effort which we are making to bring this world back to God. His pardon and safety. If this world were not rescued by the power of the Holy Spirit, it would have been dead long ago. John Howard took hold of one oar, and Carey took hold of another oar, and Adoniram Judson took hold of another oar, and Luther took hold of another oar, and John Knox took hold of another oar, and they pulled until they fell back dead from the exhaustion. Some dropped in the sea, and some were cast away, and some were rescued, and some were saved. What then? Put down the oars and make no effort? I do not advise that. But I want you, Christian brethren, to take the efforts of the oarsmen and the school and the college and the missionary society are only the instrumentalities; and if this world is ever done at all, God must do it, and He will do it, in answer to our prayer. "They rowed hard to bring it to the land, but they could not; wherefore they cried unto the Lord."

Again, the unavailing effort of those Mediterranean oarsmen have a counterpart in every man that is trying to row his own soul into safety. When the Eternal Spirit flashes upon our condition, we try to save ourselves. We say, "Give me a stout oar for my right hand, give me a stout oar for my left hand, and I will pull myself into safety." No. A wave of sin comes and dashes you one way, and a wave of temptation comes and dashes you in another way, and there are plenty of rocks on which to founder, but seemingly no harbor into which to sail. Sin must be thrown overboard, or we must perish. There are men who have tried for years to become Christians. They believe all I say in regard to a future world. They believe that religion is the first, the last, the infinite necessity. They do everything but trust in Christ. They make sixty strokes in a minute, and they lie back until the muscles are distended, and yet they have not made one inch in ten years toward heaven. What is the reason? That is not the way to go to work. You might as well take a frail ship, and put it down at the foot of the Niagara, and then head it up toward the churning waters of the cataract, and expect to work your way up through the lightning of the foam into calm Lake Erie, as for you to try to pull yourself through the surf of your sin into the hope, into the life, into the glory of the Gospel. You can not do it in that way. Sin is a rough sea, and the long boat, yawl, pinnace, and gondola go down unless the Lord is with you, and far from Christ and lay hold of divine mercy you are as safe from eternal condemnation

as though you had been twenty years in heaven.

I could put before my unparaded readers their own helplessness. No human arm was ever strong enough to unlock the door of heaven. No foot was ever mighty enough to break the shackles of sin. No oarsman swarthy enough to row himself into God's harbor. The wind is against you, the tide is against you, the law is against you, the devil is against you, the world is against you, the flesh is against you, the devil is against you. Prove it, you say, I will prove it. John 6: 44—"No man can come to Me, except the Father who sent Me draw him." But while I have shown your helplessness, I want to put by the side of it the power and willingness of Christ to save you. This is the story of a vessel of war bound for Portugal, but it was driven to pieces on an unfriendly coast. The captain had his son with him, and with the crew they wandered up the beach, and started the long journey to find relief. After a while the son fainted by reason of hunger and the length of the way. The captain said to the crew, "Carry my boy for me on your shoulders. They carried him on; but the journey was so long, that after awhile the crew fainted from hunger and from weariness, and could carry no more. The captain then called his almost wasted energy, and took up his own boy and put him on his shoulder and carried him on mile after mile, until he came himself by hunger and weariness, he, too, fainted by the way. The boy lay down, and died, and the father just at the time rescued him, and he carried him, living only long enough to tell the story—also story, indeed! But glory be to God that Jesus Christ is able to take us up out of our shipwreck and carry us to the land of promise, the shoulder of His strength, and by the omnipotence of His Gospel bear us up through all the journey of the life, and at last through the opening gates of heaven! He is mighty to save. Though your sin be long and black and inexcusable, and outrageous, the very moment you believe I will prove the quick whitening of the hair, the conditional, uncompromising, illimitable, oh, the grace of God! I am overwhelmed when I come to think of the quick whitening of the hair, the conditional, uncompromising, illimitable, oh, the grace of God! I am overwhelmed when I come to think of the quick whitening of the hair, the conditional, uncompromising, illimitable, oh, the grace of God!

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TO THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST. ANDREW.

Arise in your strength, young men of today. The Master hath need of you, haste and obey. Go, carry the message St. Andrew first brought: "The Master hath come—I with Him have talked."

Go, there is work for you to do, For Him who on Calvary died for you; For there are precious souls to save, And snatch from sin's dark rolling wave. Sit ye not down with folded hands, While your brother in error's darkness stands. And say not the flesh is so weak, Christ is your strength, He will give what is meet.

O, do not let the toll retard The efforts put forth by your brother, to guard, And count not the struggle, toll and pain, For the soul for whom Christ will come again.

But thank God for the wonderful gift of strength That will enable your life in his fields to be, And from out the hot breath of the battle's To carry to Him a soul saved from sin.

And as thus you work in the fields below, And in the sacred footsteps of the Master Go, Carry forth the fragrance like the breath of a prayer, While your labors everywhere, —Mrs. Mary E. Foxwell, in the Rubric.

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