

UNBELIEF, THWARTING GOD'S PURPOSE.

A Sermon Delivered at Union Ch. B. M. Church, on Sunday Evening, Oct. 31, 1894, by the Rev. Alexander MacLaren, D. D.

The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of Him.—Luke 7: 30.

Our Lord has just been praising and praising on the head of John the Baptist. The evangelist was tenderly timid, for it followed, and was occasioned by the ex. reason, through messengers, of John's doubts of Christ's Messiahship. Let these doubts shake the people's confidence in the Forerunner, and make them think of him as weak and shifting, Christ speaks of him in the glowing words which precede my text, and declares that he is no "reed shaken with the wind."

But what John was, was of less moment to Christ's listeners than was what they had done with John's message. So our Lord swiftly passes from the eulogium upon John to the sharp thrust of the personal application to His hearers. In the context He describes the twofold treatment which that message had received; and so describes it as, in the description, to lay bare the faintest characteristics of reception or rejection of the message. As to the former, He says that the mass of the common people, and the ostentatious, "justified God," by which remarkable expression seems to be meant that their reception of John's message and baptism acknowledged God's righteousness in accusing them of sin and d-manding from them penitence.

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Now, by the gospel, which, as I say, thus has one single design in the Divine mind, I mean, what I think the New Testament means, the whole body of truths which underlie and flow from, the fact of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, which are these in brief: Man's sin, man's helplessness, the incarnation of the Son of God, the death of Christ as the sacrifice for the world's sin, Faith, as one hand by which we grasp the blessing, and the gift of a Divine Spirit which follows upon our Faith, and bestows upon us Sostship, and likeness to God, purity of life and character, and heaven at last. That, as I take it, is the barest outline of what is meant by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And now I want to press upon you, dear friends, that that great and sublime body of truths made known to us, as I believe, from God Himself, has one sole object in view and none beside—viz., that every man that hears it may partake of the salvation and the hope which it brings. It is not a mere effect, but the twofold effect does not imply a twofold purpose. There have been schemes of so-called Christian theology which have darkened the Divine character in this respect, and have obscured the great thought that God has one end in view, and one only, when He speaks to us in all good faith, desiring nothing else but only that we shall be gathered into His heart, and made partakers of His love and life, "not willing that any should perish," but that all should come to the knowledge of His truth.

If so, the question comes very sharp and direct to each of us, is that Gospel fulfilling its purpose in me? There are many subordinate good things flowing from the Christian revelation, such as blessings for social out-ward life, which are as flowers that spring up in its path; but unless it has effected its one purpose in regard to you and me, it has failed altogether. God meant His Word to save your soul. Has it done so? It is a question that any man can answer if he will be honest with himself.

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to accomplish this purpose even now, by my lips, in so far as I am true to my Master and my message. The outward appearance of what we are about now is that I am trying, lamely enough, to talk to you. You may judge this service by rules of rhetoric, or anything else you like. But you have not got to the bottom of things unless you feel, as I am praying that every one of you may feel, that even with all my imperfections on my head—and I know them better than you can tell me them—I like all true men that are repeating God's message as they have caught it, neither more nor less, and have sunk themselves in it, may venture to say, as the Apostle said: "Now, then, we are ambassadors for God, as though God had beseech by us, we pray in Christ's stead." John's voice was a revelation of God's purpose, and the voice of every true preacher of Jesus Christ is no less so.

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THE SUNNY SIDE OF SEVENTY.

The sunny side of seventy I've reached it long ago, And now am nearing eighty With hair as white as snow; Eyes dim, joints stiff, back feeble I seem in evil case, To sing of sunny, sunny seventy, Seems rather out of place.

But is it? Pause and ponder What the Good Book hath said Of righteousness and glory, Crowning the hoary head. Think of the rosy and quicksands Which I have safely passed, By the Good Shepherd's guidance, Through many a roaring blast.

Now I am near the borders Of the bright shining land, Where blessed saints are waiting For me to join their band— For me and all believers, Cleansed in that same flowing flood Which frees from all delusion, 'E'en Christ's most precious blood.

Does not that counterbalance The weakening of my frame? Oh, how the thought of glory Doth set my heart on flame, What though this mortal body, E'er temerent of clay, Now seems to fall, falling Should perish and decay.

What matter—all is brightness, For the promise of the Word Abundant from this poor body. Then present with the Lord, How glorious are my prospects, Lo, to faith's piercing vision, Lie realms of brightest glory, Scener ever fair and new.

The pearly gates, the heavens, Where the bright angels dwell, Whence shining saints in myriads God's praises ever tell; Where all is joy and blessing, True happiness and peace; Where death, pain, care and sorrow For evermore shall cease.

Where Christ in heavenly glory, The Lamb of God divine, God's Son, His well-beloved, Both reign and Christ is mine. Speak of earthly glory, Of worldly wealth or fame; The brightness of His presence Will put them all to shame.

'E'en now, although my vision How fade that transient glories Where'er I gaze on Him, His wondrous self-surrender, His cross, His thorn-crowned brow, His loving heart, His patience, His agony and woe.

And now His throne of glory, And of the Father's love, How little seem things earthly Compared with things above. All we can see is transient, And soon will pass away, Things unseem are eternal, And so will last for aye.

O Lord, my God, I praise Thee, That thus I live in hope, For the sunny side of seventy Hath brought me well-nigh home. B. E. M. M. H.

ADDITION. Because of old time uniting, Hath borne me swift along; The sunny side of eighty, Is now my joyous song. Help me to sing it loudly, My fellow pilgrims all, O praise the Lord of Glory, Praise Him both great and small.

Aid me to chant His goodness, Who sent His Son to die, That hell-deserving sinners, Might dwell with Him on high. Oh Jesus, precious Saviour, We soon will see Thy face, And praise Thee in the glory, As sinners saved by grace.

SABBATH PREPARATION. There is no preparation for the Sabbath day usually more valuable than that which we make in its early hours. Then we may devote ourselves to special thought concerning the sacred duties before us. And even though on the Sabbath works of necessity should intrude upon our minds to material things, it is possible to make a supreme effort in the secret depths of the soul to have our thoughts harmonize with the day. Everyone should desire on the Sabbath to arrest worldly tendencies. There are many ways in which this can be done. As far as possible, conversation foreign to the spiritual claims of the Sabbath should be avoided; especially secularizing literature should be discarded. When Christians consent to promote the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, "not seeking worldly pleasure or gain, even from the very beginning of the day; not secularizing its only hours by anything of a questionable character, then a new era will dawn upon the church. Then the spiritual significance of the Sabbath, as a sign between God and man, will be appreciated.

The truth is, the responsibility of a proper Sabbath observance, with all its attendant blessings, rests upon the Church of Christ. All agree that progress in the Christian life is largely dependent upon the faithful recognition of the Lord's day. It is manifestly our duty to seek release as far as possible from worldly engagements on the Sabbath. The day is given, among other things, for hearing God's Word in the congregation, for uniting in His praise and with His people. It is possible so to transfer the cares of life to this day as to wholly unite the soul for these sacred duties. And not only so; the reading, social visiting, and unnecessary work may be of such a kind as to render religious exercises wholly unprofitable.

We may be fully absorbed in the work of the Sunday-school, the church and the community. Home may bring its urgent demands. Oftentimes duties may require to be left to the day as to wholly unite the soul for these sacred duties. And not only so; the reading, social visiting, and unnecessary work may be of such a kind as to render religious exercises wholly unprofitable.

Mr. T. V. Rowley, who was not the Grand Master Worked during the recent strike, when asked his opinion as to how far the nearest saloon should be from the schoolhouse, replied: "About five hundred miles would be a reasonable distance, according to my way of thinking."

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KEEP RIGHT WITH GOD.

A child of God should not leave his bedroom in the morning without being on good terms with his God. We should not dare to go into the world and feel: "I am out of harmony with my Lord. All is not right between God and my soul." In domestic life we are wise if we square matters before we separate for the day; let us part with a kiss. This method of unbroken fellowship should be carefully maintained toward God. Be at perfect rest with Him. Acquaint thyself with Him, and beat peace, for thereby good shall come unto thee. If you cannot get rest with God, perhaps some fault of character may prevent you enjoying that perfect rest. See where that flaw is. Are you living in any sin? If so, the sun may have risen, but there is a bandage over your eyes; you will still be in the dark. Get rid of that which blinds you. Or are you trusting yourself as well as trusting in Christ? Are you relying on your experience? Then I do not wonder if you miss the rest of faith. Get rid of all that spoils the simplicity of your faith. Come to the Lord and rest in Him; tell out your grief to Jesus, and He will breathe on you, and say, "Peace be unto you."—Our Young Folks.

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