

A Happy New Year.

New mercies, new blessings, new light on thy way
 New courage, new hope and new strength for each day;
 New notes of thanksgiving, new chords of delight,
 New praise in the morning, new songs in the night;
 New wine in thy chalice, new altars to raise;
 New fruits for thy Master, new garments of praise;
 New gifts from His treasures, new smiles from His face;
 New streams from the Fountain of Infinite Grace;
 New stars for thy crown, new tokens of love;
 New gleams of the glory that waits thee above;
 New light of His countenance, full and unpriced—
 All this be the glory of thy new life in Christ.

A New Year's Greeting.

BY THE REV. JAMES DOUGLAS.

"The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit."—2 Tim. iv. 22.

Usually, when people wish each other a happy New Year, they mean a year of happy circumstance, a year of gladsome event. But that is not the first thing to be thought of. The great thing is to come out of a New Year better in soul and character than when we entered it.

We can never tell what a new year may bring; how it may open out; what consequences it may entail. We can glance backwards, but to see into the future is beyond us. We have no means of determining the course of events, or the turn circumstances may take. We have not gone this way heretofore. But our true life is not a life of circumstances; nor is our true good at the mercy of events. These may serve as a scaffolding which, though essential to the rearing of the building, forms no part of the fabric itself.

The vital point concerns the spirit we are of—all else is drapery and detail. It is not a question of escaping this or gaining that. Rather it resolves itself into a question of inward demeanor. How am I to comport myself in this new year of vicissitude, which greets me with face as expressionless as that of the sphinx? Have I so learned Christ that, let what will befall, the light of the Christly spirit shall gleam through all? If losses are appointed me, shall I bear them in the Christian spirit? Or, if bereavements, if new trials and infirmities, shall I so meet them, in the temper and mind of my Saviour, that, however rough the outward aspect of the year may be, it shall indeed prove a blessed and successful New Year?

Paul's salutation to Timothy, as given above, accentuates this point. Paul had been brought before Nero the second time. The Second Epistle to Timothy, therefore, ranks as a farewell letter. Its whole style, tone, and contents mark the man whose house is set in order. How calm he is, how soul-sustained, how assured of an amaranthine crown, how ready to be offered!

And how tender! How his heart goes forth to his dearly beloved Timothy! He would like to see him before winter set in; but, whether or no, he has a salutation to send, the last that is recorded, and it is this: "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit."

No one knew better than Paul what it was to have been weather-beaten and storm-tossed. More than the far-famed Ulysses himself, had he been tossed on life's billowy sea. Even then he knew that he was appointed as a sheep for the slaughter. But none of these things moved him. The Lord Jesus is with his spirit, and hence he dwells on the sunny heights of jubilation. And as enriched himself, he would have Timothy enriched in like manner.

To the eye of Paul loomed increasing trials for the infant Church. Errors were creeping in; evil men were multiplying. Timothy would have rough weather and stormy seas to encounter. But Paul's greeting discounts all. The spirit companionized by Jesus is more than conqueror.

I. There is a peculiar depth and richness of meaning in the form of this salutation.

It occurs nowhere else. It calls attention to the most mysterious and distinctive feature in the human constitution. It presents the Lord Jesus in the closest possible relation to His redeemed. For whatever may be the precise distinction between the soul and the spirit, there can be no doubt

that the spirit, is the innermost part of man's nature, and that in which he specially holds fellowship with God. Hence, if we may speak of health of body as good and health of soul as better, health of spirit is best of all. The concerns of the spirit are supreme in the case of each one of us; and how much this involves probably none but God can appreciate. It is in virtue of the spirit in us that we take rank above the animal, that we are capable of religious thought and feeling, of conscience and responsibility, and that we hear, even in an unconverted state, at times the footfall of the Almighty.

Paul's salutation, therefore, concerns the marrow of need and the acme of blessing. "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit." Then though thy body be much mauled about, and thy soul pierced with many sorrows, thou shalt have abounding compensation in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.

II. The precise character of this salutation will appear from a consideration of the temple Solomon.

The temple was, like man's constitution, *threefold*. There was the outer court, for the general congregation, answering to the body; the inner court, for the officiating priests, answering to the soul; and the innermost court, the Holy of Holies, answering to the spirit.

The parallel here is much closer than one might suppose. Take, for example, this innermost court. Who dwelt there? The Lord only. Unless He were there the chamber was vacant. Is it not so with respect to the spirit of man? Yes, the proof is complete. At the centre of unrenewed Being is a vacuum, a void, a sense of lack, a feeling of desolation that nothing can relieve. Man's nature is such that whatever the body and soul may have, the inner sense of emptiness remains. The Lord has deserted the temple, and the glory of the Shekinah is gone.

Pre-eminent, then, among greetings is this one: "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit." The spirit is His peculiar abode. No person or thing can take His place. The spirit is vacant which He does not inhabit, and, if vacant, then desolate.

Another instructive feature in the parallel is this, that the holiest of all had no natural light. There was no window in the Holy of Holies. Unless the Lord Himself was the light of it, and unless the glory of God did illumine it, this innermost court was outer darkness.

How true is this of the spirit of man! No natural light can penetrate the dark spirit. All the wisdom of the schools will not furnish you with so much as a spark of spiritual illumination. "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit"; for no one has an illuminated spirit whose experience this is not.

III. The bearings of this greeting are very precious. If the Lord Jesus be with thy spirit, thou shalt never be solitary. However lonely thy path in life may become (and it has grown lonely indeed with some of us), there will be the heart-cheer of living fellowship with the Lord—a portion more sufficing by far than any amount of earth's convivialities and friendships.

Another result will be that in His light thou shalt see light. How many lose heart in the battle of life! They bear up bravely for a time, and then despondence ending in despair begins. As one after another of the footlights of this world expires, they ask themselves, "Why struggle on? Why battle more? Is life worth living? It is not. We have no heart left for further action. Let us drift with the stream and give ourselves over to remorseless fate."

Not thus shalt thou ever hold soliloquy with thyself "if the Lord be with thy spirit." His light is "the life of men"; His outshining is everlasting brightness. No beam emanating from the uncreated light can ever expire. Let the worst come to the worst, yet cannot life be shorn to thee of its meaning, or existence of its sweetness.

What can better bring out the value of our New Year's greeting than the demeanor of Paul, the aged, in the circumstances under which he sent it? Nero's brutal sentence has no terrors for him. He greets Timothy from his own felt experience of good. The greeting is a legacy of priceless worth. "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit." That is all, and that is everything. The Lord fulfil the greeting to every reader, that whatever the New Year may bring of circumstance and event, of joy and sorrow, all may be sanctified and transfigured by temple service and divine communion.