

## **DIMINISH NOT A WORD**

What an extraordinary thing the Truth is! What other thing on earth is there that would stand such constant handling without wearing out? Here we are after many years, speaking of it Sunday after Sunday, still talking of it one to another, without any loss of interest. Its power to comfort, to purify, to make strong in the battle of life—abates not in the least from year to year. It is perennial—inexhaustible. It suits all weather and all circumstances. The bright sunshine that streams in at the window on this midsummer morning does not eclipse or dim it. The dark and cold of winter, which we have often seen, when it seems difficult to live, only increases its glory. It is the moderating and sweetening element in prosperity, such as David was permitted at last to see; it is the soothing and sustaining power in the dark hours of affliction.

Is there anything like it among all the busy occupations and schemes, and pursuits, and affections of men? We see many activities among them, in the upper walks of life, they are absorbingly busy, either in politics, business, fame, art or pleasure, do any of these endure the constant handling which we find the Truth can stand? There is but one answer, and it is the answer supplied in the words of Peter:

*“The glory of man is as the flower of the field.”*

Flowers don’t last. They bloom in great beauty and fragrance for a season, and then they disappear; politics are a weariness and a vexation after the novelty and glory have worn off. Men want to get out of them in broken health after the first few years. Business becomes a spiritless drudgery; and even when its highest prizes are secured, and the successful competitor retires upon the fruits of his labour, it is only to find that life is a burden when the activities of business life are withdrawn. Fame is a mocking mirage whose pursuit is a consuming fever; art is but a hobby based upon too limited an action of the mind to give permanent satisfaction. As for “pleasure,” no flower withers so soon, no impostor cheats more thoroughly, no enemy wounds more fatally.

In contrast with all these, Peter declared that—

*“While all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the field,” “the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.”*

The statement is true in all senses, and it is one of the utmost benefit to us to see its truth. Its highest truth we instinctively recognise, namely that while human nature is a vanishing form of life, the creative energy of which it is a blossom, is eternal; also that while the highest good attainable in the present life is transient, the life offered in the Word of God is perfect, and will endure for ever. But it is true in the experience of mortal life—that while everything else dies in our hands as the years roll on, the Word of the Lord remains an ever-living treasure whose preciousness only increases with the efflux of our vain life. This is inevitable from the nature of it. It appeals to the highest needs and capacities of man. It gives us God and we need Him, whether in our first ignorance we know it or not. It gives us a mediator, who is essential to us, for without a mediator, we cannot come into relations of friendship with the Upholder of heaven and earth. It gives us hope, and without hope the human mind cannot develop to the full beauty of which it is now capable. We need the infinite and everlasting light of hope on the horizon, and this the gospel alone gives us. It gives us a standard of duty, without which man is as a rudderless ship in the ocean currents of inclination and whim. It imposes on us the constant obligation to be worshipful of God and mindful of man. It requires prayers without ceasing and well-doing without weariness at our hands. It commands us with a daily monition to—

*“Love the Lord with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves.”*

It asks us to forsake folly and to seek understanding with industry. For these reasons, it touches the perennial springs of human mentality, and explains the wonderful fact before us, that we can go on reading and talking about the Truth all the year round, year after year, without the weariness and sense of satiety that belongs to every other form of human activity.

How good it would be to see the whole world in this beneficent line of action. We have been singing the well-known Psalm,

*“All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.”*

This is not only a divine adjuration to mankind, but a divine adumbration of what is coming. If we sang it merely as a piece of advice to the world, it would be a vain exercise. We might as well whistle

to the wind. *"All people that on earth do dwell"* have no mind to sing to the Lord at all. They are in Pharaoh's mood:

*"Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?"*

They are like Belshazzar: they are not aware that their very power to breathe, upon which all else depends, is in the hand of God. They are like those of whom Job speaks:

*"They say unto God, depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."*

But, nevertheless, *"God hath appointed a day,"* in which there will be a great change. God hath decreed:

*"Unto Me every knee shall bend and every tongue confess."*

His appointments and His decrees stand fast. They cannot be set aside. His words shall not return unaccomplished. Whatever men think or do, the purposes of God will be fulfilled in their due season.

*"I, the Lord, will hasten it in His time."*

It is well to plant this fact deeply in our hearts—that the effectuation of the purposes of God in no way depends on us. It is with the spiritual sun as with the natural. The sun will rise without our cooperation. We go to sleep and are wrapped in the unconsciousness of helpless slumber, but the machinery of this mighty universe rests not a moment. At the due moment (to a second by the watch)—the morning's sun will show on the horizon whether we are awake or asleep. If we die, it will make no difference. We cannot help and we cannot hinder the ways of God. God exists without us. Christ lives whether we think he does or not. He will come again, whether we are believing, or unbelieving. The times of the Gentiles will end, whatever schemes they may have in hand for their continuance, or whatever steps they may take to carry them out. *"The God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom,"* however extensively republicans may organise or anarchists plot. They shall all of them—republicans and monarchies—be *"broken to pieces like a potter's vessel,"* however skilfully they may strengthen themselves with formidable rifled artillery, iron-plated battleships, destructive torpedoes, or bullet-proof coats.

*"Many are the counsels of a man's heart; but the purpose of the Lord, that shall stand."*

We cannot alter or retard the purpose of God. One thing we can do, and this is all we can do; we can fasten on to it. This we are invited to do—commanded to do. Those who comply with this command will see the glory of God in the land of the living. The Kingdom of God will be established: and they will be there, with Christ as the glorious head over all upon earth. Of others, it is said,

*"They shall not enter in,"*

*"They shall not inherit,"*

*"They shall be cast out."*

Do we want to be among these? Where is the man who does not desire to be rather among those whom God shall select, and spare as *"His jewels"*? as saith the Lord by the prophet,

*"They shall be Mine in that day when I make up my jewels."*

The question is, How are we to be included? One thing is certain: the privilege is open to all if the conditions are complied with. There will be no favouritism in the matter. There is no respect of persons with God. *"Whosoever"* is their constant description, that is, whosoever pleases God. He has made known how we can please Him. There is no obscurity about this part of the subject. We must know Him; we must love Him; we must obey Him; we must be interested in those things in which He delights. The house of the wicked, at present established upon the earth, has the reverse of all these characteristics. He purposes to build a house to take their place when the house of the wicked is with violence overthrown. He has laid the foundation in Zion, as He said, and He has got ready in advance many of the stones that are to be built on the foundation. Indeed, the materials of the house are nearly all provided. We live in an age when the work is nearly done. It is not an interesting work to mere natural sense, because mere natural sense unenlightened does not know the purpose of God, and is only interested in what it can see and hear—which is all very well so far as it goes, but a very limited and transient affair for mortals. No house in the first stage is interesting to those who do not know what is going on. There is a mere display of heaps of sand and mortar and stone and brick, and piles of timber, with perhaps a bit of the framework beginning to show in the middle. To the architect or the destined proprietor these heaps are interesting. In the present case the house is not only in its rudimentary stage but it is invisible. The stones are not literal stones, but men who are passed away and long forgotten, so far as man is concerned. Most of the men who will surround Christ in the day

of his glory are in the dust. They reach back in a long line—even to the gates of Eden. The work of their preparation has been, and continues to be, a rough work, which is one reason why it is a work not attractive to natural men. We see it illustrated in the case of Jeremiah who was one of them. We have him before us in the chapter read in a position profitable for us to contemplate in our evil day. What is that position? A position of single-handed antagonism to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was commanded to deliver a most unpalatable message to them—viz., that if they would not reform their ways, and live in harmony with the Law which He had given them, He would destroy them and make the temple a ruin, and Jerusalem a curse to the whole earth (Jer. 26:1-6). Jeremiah was earnestly enjoined to be thorough in his communication. He was not to soften or trim the message in any way.

*“Speak all the words that I command thee to speak unto them, diminish not a word.”*

Let us note this. It implies that Jeremiah was under some kind of temptation to keep back the message. So he was. He tells us so, earlier in the book, viz., that because the Word of the Lord was made a derision to him daily, he was inclined to hold his peace (ch. 20:8-9). The command now was—

*“Hold not thy peace.”*

*“Cry aloud and spare not.”*

The point has an importance for all who would do the will of the Lord in our day and generation. We have not received a message such as Jeremiah received, nor a command such as he was laid under. But we have received a message and a command, nevertheless. The message and the command laid upon believers in the first century retain their force for all believers till the Lord come.

*“Let him that heareth say, come.”*

*“Shine as lights in the world:”*

*“Hold forth the Word of life.”*

Now this obligation may be discharged in a pinched and niggardly way, or it may be done with openhanded and energetic thoroughness. We may hold back the profession of faith through fear of unpopularity, or we may do the work as Paul did, who said,

*“I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.”*

As to which is the right method, reason cannot falter. The Word of God to Jeremiah gives us the right cue.

*“Diminish not a word.”*

*“He that hath My Word, let him speak it faithfully.”*

Professors who are only half enlightened, or who are in bondage to their worldly interests which they fear to put in peril, are very liable to “diminish” the Truth exceedingly, so that in their hands, it shrinks to a mere variation of the popular superstition. The influence of such faint-hearted professors is not good. They are liable to demoralise fellow-soldiers. They would be better as out-and-out enemies. No good comes from a half-and-half profession of the Faith. Even present interests are not protected by it. There is a very fair illustration of this in the same chapter.

Jeremiah obeyed the command to be thorough. He went and took up his position openly in the court of the temple, and delivered the message fully and without running away. The result was his arrest and threatened death. It seemed likely he would die, for “all the people were gathered against him in the house of the Lord” (Ch. 26:9). But a turn in circumstances delivered him and placed him under the protection of a powerful prince. But in the case of another man, “*Urijah, the son of Shemaiah, of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against the city: according to all the words of Jeremiah,*” matters worked out differently. Whether he received a message direct from the lord, or merely re-echoed the words of Jeremiah, does not appear; but at all events, when the king heard of his words, he ordered his arrest and execution, which Urijah hearing of Urijah “*was afraid and went and fled into Egypt*” (v. 21). He thought he had made himself safe by running away. It was not so. The king despatched messengers in pursuit, “*and they fetched Urijah out of Egypt and brought him unto Jehoiakim, the king, who slew him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people,*” whereas, “*the hand of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.*” Jeremiah, who did his duty and braved death was preserved, while Urijah, who did his part in a timid hearted way, and fled from danger, was overwhelmed in the peril he feared. The way of faithfulness is the way of safety—sometimes even now, for God can preserve His servants in the midst of danger without appearing to

interfere. Certainly, at last, there is no other way of safety, for the words of Christ will be absolutely true, in this as in all other matters, that—

*“He that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”*

Let us, therefore—

*“Endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ Jesus”—“contending earnestly for the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.”*

The enterprise is the most bootless and unwise and dangerous to which we can put our hands from the present point of view, for there is nothing so detestable to all classes of the people as the Truth of God as testified in the Scriptures. But in the end, it will prove the most honourable and advantageous work in which the sons of men can engage: and in such a work we are on God’s side, and He has promised that He will not forget those who are faithful to Him in the day of evil. He will give them an everlasting place in His house, in which are pleasures for ever more flowing from the deep fountains of eternal wisdom, and life that never ends.

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By Bro. Robert Roberts