

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 25

The words we have been singing (hymn 80,) depict a glorious picture which shall yet be seen on earth. How different is the scene presented at the present time in all the world. “Age with snowy hair,” instead of meeting together in the fear of the Lord to do those things which are well-pleasing to Him, and so fruitful of joy to all who take a part in them, throng with the rest of the world in the train of vanity and vice; “strength and beauty,” instead of bowing themselves at the shrine of holiness, —spending themselves wantonly in that service, the wages whereof are corruption and death. Innocent childhood, instead of lisping the words of wisdom, is trained up in the principles and practice of folly. Instead of God’s holy design—which shall be accomplished in His own good time—which is that the world should be a habitation of righteousness and of great joy, of glory to God in the highest, and peace among all men; instead of that, we see wickedness and desolation abounding, smiling fields turned into desert, the abodes of peaceful industry converted into scenes of havoc and bloodshed; and the friendly soil, yielding food for man and beast, drenched with the blood of the slain.

But there is a good time coming. If it were not for this conviction, we might well be filled with despair at the spectacle of generation after generation following in the same dismal track of folly, iniquity, strife and ruin, making use of their increased knowledge only to increase the effectiveness of their evil ways. What a blessed thing it is to know, and to be related to that good time, which God has, from the beginning, purposed to bring through Abraham and his seed. How thankful we ought to be when we consider that, humanly speaking, it is by a sort of accident that we have come into this privileged position. There are millions upon millions of human beings in the world who know nothing of it; and there are in our own country thousands of God-fearing people, who think they are doing God service, but who are ignorant of the truth, and are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. What gratitude we ought to show, that we are not in their position.

There are many ways of showing it. We ought to show it in the first place, by doing all we can to make other people “*know the joyful sound*,” and to bring them into the same glorious position as we are permitted, in the divine goodness, to occupy. We ought to show it especially by bowing to the wishes and the will of him who is the centre of the good time coming. That centre is Jesus. He is to us a master. He tells us we are right in calling him master, and it exactly suits us to have a head, —one to whom we can look up with reverence, and upon whom we can let out all our affection, without fear of check or disappointment. It is a crowning beauty in the scheme of the truth, that one is set up for our adoration and obedience, who is “*altogether lovely*,” who is at once the embodiment of God’s authority, wisdom, excellence, and love.

But let us never lose sight of the purpose he is carrying out, as concerning those who put themselves into the relation of brethren by the gospel; that is, to purify unto himself a “*peculiar people*,”—a people distinguished from common people (rich and poor who serve the flesh); a people for himself—his own property, his friends, his servants, his agents, —who shall be prepared to hold themselves as his stewards, —realising in their lives as well as in their sentiments, that they are not their own, but are bought with a price, and that their strength, and intellect, and money, and everything they have, are his, for the use of which, he will hold them responsible. There are very plain directions as to what manner of people he wants his servants to be. We are not to be like ordinary people; we are **peculiar** people if we are his; if we are not his, we had better give it up at once, and waste no more time in an unfruitful and damaging connection with his unpopular truth. Better not lose the world’s sweets, if we are going to lose Christ.

“If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.”

Therefore, we ought to be the sort of people he wants. We are not to be with the world in this. The world says, “Look out every one for himself: attend to No. 1.” This is the world’s motto, universally acted upon. Christ forbids it in his friends. He says by his apostles, and by his own

mouth, that we are not to live for ourselves; we are to love our neighbours as ourselves; and we are not to do good to brethren only, for then, Jesus says, we are no better than the hypocrites. It is an easy thing to do good to them that do good to you; the world is equal to this sort of goodness. It gives and obliges where a prospective benefit is implied. See two prosperous merchants. They are very complimentary to each other. They would lend each other 500 pounds without a moment's hesitation. But a poor man wants a favour, and he is scowled out of the place. The goodness that Jesus expects, and will only approve, is a goodness done to those who cannot give a recompense (Luke 14:14.), a goodness that can be extended towards even those who are undeserving—“*the unthankful and the evil*”—(Luke 6:35). This is what Jesus commands, and we are his servants only if we obey—(John 15:14).

We must bring forth fruit, or be removed as worthless branches—(John 15:2.) Let your light shine before men not in the sense of ostentation, for Jesus abominates ostentation. He has told us, we are not to let our right hand know what our left doeth. Our light is to shine in the sense of good deeds characterising our lives. We are not to parade what we do, but we are to do things that shall constitute “*light*” to those around. This light will be seen in our carriage and deportment—in what we do and what we say. Not that we go and say to our neighbour, “we have done thus, and so.” It is a bad sign when people blow their own trumpets; and there are such people—people who bore you with their personal achievements, who always give conversation or discourse a turn to imply their own credit, and yet, who would indignantly plead “not guilty” to such a thing if it were hinted. They blow their own trumpet because nobody else will, and the reason nobody else does it, is because they haven't a trumpet worth blowing. It is a mere gimcrack, with unmelodious sound. When a man has a really musical instrument, it will be called for. He is not given to perform on it himself. One of the first features of an excellent man's excellence, is, that he cares little whether anybody knows it or not. He does not parade his good works in any sense but that of doing them, and in this sense, his light will shine, and must shine.

We must obey the commandments, or we have no right to the promises. We cannot legitimately nurse in our bosoms the comfort of our privileges, without giving a chief place in our lives to their responsibilities. Therefore, we must not make “Number one” our standard. Trust in God for daily bread, and do His commandments; and that shuts out everything. This is a plain rule, easy to follow, where God is realised by faith. If we but fully realise His will, we shall be capable—if we are reasonably constituted at all—of doing it. There is every motive to do it; not that it is a hard service. There is a little hardness about it, there is a bondage: we are Christ's servants, or bondsmen, for the word translated “*servant*,” means a slave; but nevertheless, as Jesus says,

“*My yoke is easy, and my burden light.*”

It is so with those who take hold of it. It is a bondage associated with inducement in the highest form. There is everything to keep a person in the way of obedience, for the way of obedience is the only way to eternal life.

We are fast hastening to the end of life, and that end we cannot put off. We may postpone it for a short time, but it is only a question of time, and we must at last find ourselves dead and rotten; altogether worthless and nothing. That is what we must all come to, away from what is revealed in the truth. Therefore, the fear of death fairly faced will help a man to embrace Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. The hope of good to come, of which, by nature, we are not heirs, will help in the same direction. The power of hope is proverbially great. We see it in all the relations of life. Give a man a reliable ground of expectancy of good, and see how it wakes his sluggishness, and stimulates to effort. It makes all the difference between a heartless way of working and the opposite.

Solomon says, that good news doeth good like medicine; and we must all acknowledge the truth of the remark. We have all felt it. When we have been down and dreary through the monotony or anxiety of life, and some very good news has come to hand, how it has filled the heart with lightness and buoyancy. Well, there is that element in our calling. There is a good time coming, the assured belief in which will work wonders in a man's life. We have been reminded in one way of

that good time by what has been transpiring during the week in this town. We have had the Birmingham Triennial Music Festival—an institution now of European fame. We have had distinguished visitors in crowds, splendid performances, fine singers, noble words; but what has it amounted to? Simply so much sound and colour—an empty show—a piece of beautiful vanity. Take it to pieces, and you will find it so, though it sounds misanthropic to say so. The singers themselves, what do they sing for? Two things: money and fame; and those two things by themselves are evil: they afflict with misery; they gnaw and destroy. And the people: what do they assemble for? To have their ears gratified; to see and to be seen; to exhibit and behold fine dresses. The fact that the money goes to a charitable institution is an accident in the situation, which only makes them feel all the more complacent in their indulgence in *“the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.”* Do they understand the words that are sung? Why, they are our words: they belong to Christ, and we are Christ’s.

We stand related to the real beauties which they merely shadow forth in words and sound, only being now, in our turn, as Christ was when he was on earth, we are banished from them now. Christ had no fine music, no fine company. Christ, of whom they sing, without thinking about him, was a plain man, in plain circumstances, pursuing a course as hard and uninteresting as any we may be called upon to fulfil. We are, therefore, in his company in that respect, and our turn will come, if we are faithful, to be in his company in another respect. If we are but chosen, we shall listen to music, the like of which has never been heard at any musical festival under the sun.

When the day of the Lord shall come, and the redeemed of the Lord shall come to Zion, with singing, and everlasting joy upon their heads, (Isaiah 51:11), these lordly creatures of the flesh, who have filled the streets with equipages and the Town Hall with colour and perfume, and those fine performers who have starred it proudly on the platform, and brought down the thunders of coveted admiration, are all decaying inside, and, in a few years, will be gone for ever; but Christ’s people will be both beautiful and immortal—they will endure for ever. The rich people that have turned out in their grandeur, are only walking clods of corruption. They have made money in their own industrious ways. Industry, with the world, passes for the very sum of all virtue.

“Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself; but they shall go to the generation of their fathers; they shall never see light.”—(Psalm 49:18-19.)

When Christ comes, all the riches in the world will be his, and his own people will be rich people then, and his own people will be the aristocrats of the earth—kings and priests unto God; and the great difference between their good estate and that now existing, will be that it will be genuine to the backbone. The beauty, and riches, and life, and joy, will be but the outer dressings of the love of God within, and intelligence and goodness spread abroad in all hearts in perfection. The unsearchable riches of Christ! These are ours, if we like to make them ours, and only so. No man will get them that does not work for them. That is so in this world. No man gets on except by patient labour, and Christ has adopted that rule. He has laid it down beforehand:

“He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully; he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly;”—

And he that soweth nothing at all, shall reap nothing at all. There are some people professing truth who sow nothing at all to the spirit. If you take their schemes to pieces, you find they are all for their own personal benefit. Christ is not in them. It never seems to enter their head that Christ’s claim upon them is real. They shall reap as they sow.

Let it be borne in mind that although there is a good time coming, it may not be for us. It depends upon whether we work ourselves into a good relation to it. Let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. It is too serious a business to allow of trifling. Light, frivolous, stupid talk should be discarded. It has a ruinous effect on those who indulge in it, and is inconvenient to those which have to listen. It leads to folly when, perhaps, otherwise folly would not come. It draws the mind into a whirl of vanity. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt;

refrain from jesting and foolish talking. It is only those who have not realised their position as saints who will go astray in this matter.

The chapter that has been read this morning (Rev. 6.) reminds us of one or two things that are interesting. The first is, that we are in the scheme of providence, of which the chapter is a part. This revelation Jesus did not receive until he was in heaven. He said when he was upon earth,

“That day and that hour, knoweth no man, no, not the angels, neither the Son, but the Father only.”

He said to his disciples, when they asked him, *“Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

“The times and the seasons the Father hath put in His own power.”

But afterwards, God did make known to him what he did not know before, and He sent and revealed it to his servants through John, that his servants might know the things which were shortly to come to pass; and the book of Revelations is a series of pictures which represent these things which were shortly to come to pass, which have now nearly all happened, only the best has yet to happen. (Here the 6th chapter was run through, and its historical parallels sketched as elaborated in Eureka, to which the hearers were referred.)

We are contemporary with the disturbing influence of the frog power of the 16th chapter. The French empire has been the political embodiment of that power. Its mission was to operate on other powers in such a way, as to entangle the nations in war, that things might be brought into such a form, as would ultimately bring on “the war of the great day of God Almighty.” The Emperor has accomplished his mission most effectually. Generating war through Constantinople, Vienna, and Rome, he has at last, in a direct manner, put the whole world into a warlike state. He began, 15 years ago, by first arming himself, and thus terrorising the world into the same precaution; and after bringing about several wars through his diplomacy, he has wound up by bringing about one of the most dreadful wars Europe has seen since the days of the first Napoleon, and causing even peaceful nations to fall into dire distress, and to arm. Actually, in our own newspapers, they are now discussing the propriety of assimilating our military system to that of Russia and Prussia—making every citizen do military duty for a certain period of his life; and, as you are aware, the government has decided upon adding to the regular army 20,000 men, and increasing the military expenditure by 2,000,000 Pounds. That is the result of the operations of the frog power. Its further operations will extend the war, and bring Russia to the foreground. However, we need not look for this necessarily before Christ comes to us. Christ must have sent for his people before Gog marches upon the Holy Land; how long before is not revealed. Sufficient for us that we see the frog sign active as a war-producing element in the world. This is the juncture of affairs at which we may expect the Lord; and then as he himself says:

“Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”

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