

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 90

We have had Daniel brought before us in the reading this morning. He is one of those whom Paul, in Hebrews 12:1, styles “*so great a cloud of witnesses*” surrounding us in a mental sense, and whom he holds up for our consideration with a view to our being induced to lay aside every weight, and run patiently the difficult race for eternal life. He is also the prophet to whom it was said “*thou art greatly beloved*.”—(Dan. 9:23; 10:11,19.) It is impossible, therefore, that we can fail to be benefited by the contemplation of his case, if we realise the facts as they are presented.

The very first aspect in which he appears is that of a sufferer of adversity. He was in the first batch of captives taken by Nebuchadnezzar from Jerusalem to Babylon, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. To him and to others, this would at that time appear an unmitigated evil. Those left behind in Jerusalem would appear favoured of God, and those taken away to the barbaric land of the conqueror, abandoned of Him to their hurt. The case was much otherwise, however. The state of the case was revealed to Jeremiah after their departure. He was shown a basket of very good and a basket of very bad figs (Jer. 24.), and he was told that the very good figs represented those who had been carried away captive, “*whom*,” says God,

“*I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans FOR THEIR GOOD.*”

The bad figs, he was told, represented the evil inhabitants of Jerusalem who were left, and of whom he says,

“*I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth FOR THEIR HURT.*”

Thus the state of the case was exactly contrary to the appearance. The apparently favoured were objects of displeasure: the apparently deserted were beloved and only exercised for their benefit.

From this we may distinctly learn the very valuable lessons concerning our own experience: that the occurrence of apparent evil is not an evidence of divine disregard, but may be an evidence in the opposite direction. It is a lesson taught directly by Paul, when he says,

“*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,*” and “*without chastisement, we are bastards and not sons.*”

Daniel was humbled and chastened by an experience that at the same time removed him from the sphere of future peril, and led him into a path of exaltation and renown. He did not know adversity was leading him into a large place. The glory that awaited him in Babylon was all darkness before him. He merely saw the evil, and took it submissively, though, perhaps, with tears, as other sons of God have done, including even the First-born of Nazareth. The darkest paths are sometimes the way to the sunniest plains. In all cases of divine contrivance, it seems uniformly so. Noah among the scoffers, Joseph in prison, Moses in exile, David an outlaw, are striking among many examples: and these things are “*written for our learning.*” The application is evident: our adversity, even to the point of imminent destruction, is not an evidence that God has deserted us, but may be the way He is leading and preparing us for marvellous deliverance, even now, but certainly in the day of days—the day of Christ, when death and curses and evil shall be no more for those who in faith, commit the keeping of their souls unto Him in well doing as unto a faithful creator.

Arrived in Babylon, the first characteristic that Daniel exhibits, as the man “*greatly beloved*,” is particularly as to food and drink. He “*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank.*”

“*Let them give us,*” said he, “*pulse to eat and water to drink.*”

Some people may imagine there is nothing for us to think of in this. They say “Daniel was under the law, which accounts for his particularity; and as we are not under the law, we need not care.” Daniel was under the law truly, but it is not his obedience to the law that is conspicuous in the matter in question. The law nowhere prescribes pulse and water; the law nowhere forbids the common Jew to drink wine or to eat of a well-spread table, if the food provided were the flesh of animals allowed to be eaten. We must seek a deeper reason in Daniel’s abstinence, and these deeper reasons we may find applicable to ourselves. Paul says—

“*Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*”

He is alluding to the public games of Greece, the competitors in which underwent a preliminary physical training, just as prize-fighters or performers of walking or other feats do in our day.

"They do it," he says, "to obtain a corruptible crown."

If they did not do it, they would not come off winners; they would lack the requisite "condition" if they did not place restraints on their eating and drinking. *"But we (do it to obtain) an incorruptible."* What is this but saying there are certain conditions of the body unfavourable to spiritual victory, and that these conditions of the body are to a large extent questions of eating and drinking, and therefore within our own power. It is undoubtedly true that we are helped or hindered by the conditions to which we subject ourselves in eating and drinking. If we drink beer, smoke tobacco, and are *"riotous eaters of flesh,"* we burden ourselves with a weight which increases the difficulty of the race, and which Paul's exhortation is to *"lay aside."* Temperance in eating and drinking, after the model of Daniel, will be found to help the spiritual man, and lead by pure paths to liberty and life.

But, of course, there is a medium in all things. This idea may be carried to an extreme, and become a hurtful hobby. Some people place dietetics in the place of the gospel, and give all their attention to theories of physical improvement, which land them after all in the corruption and silence of the grave. We must keep things in their place. The only admissible hobby is *"the glorious gospel of the blessed God:"* dietetic considerations are in place if they come humbly and reverently at the service of the gospel. When they become a hobby, it is like a monkey getting on to the throne—unfortunately a very common occurrence. Their place is at the footstool of the truth; but there they have a place, and the danger is that in a licentious age like ours, believers of the truth may think they have attained perfection in attaining to that belief, and may defile themselves freely to their hurt, *"with the portion of the sin-king's meat and with the wine which he drinks,"* instead of being found among the beloved Daniels, who are temperate in all things that they may obtain the incorruptible crown.

Looking at Daniel at a later period of his stay in Babylon, we find him surrounded with envious fellow-servants, who desire to find occasion to bring about his fall. In this position something transpires concerning him, well deserving our notice and consideration. His enemies try to find out something against him, but cannot. At last they say one to another,

"We shall not find occasion against him except in the matter of his God."

They could find nothing incorrect, nothing unfaithful, nothing dishonourable in his common dealings. They could only find fault with him about his religion. Now let us remember that Daniel is one of our brethren, an approved brother, one declared in advance to be the beloved of God, one, therefore, to whom we may safely look as a standard by which to judge ourselves. Is it with us as with him, that no one can truthfully point the finger of scorn at us on the score of integrity? It ought to be so. It must be so if we are to enter the kingdom of God. No man ought to be able to say of us that our word cannot be depended on, or that our dealings are tainted with dishonour. I do not speak of slander, of course, which every man is liable to. I speak of accusation which investigation would substantiate. We ought to be without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. —(Phil. 2:15.) We ought to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. —(Matt. 5:48.) This is a high standard, but it is the standard of God:

"Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord, who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul nor sworn deceitfully. —(Psalm 24:3-4.)

"He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart."—(Psalm 15:2.)

On the part of such there may be failures, which need forgiveness, and for which forgiveness is promised through Christ; but in the main, righteousness is the standard of attainments. An unrighteous man shall not inherit the kingdom of God. —(1 Cor. 6:9.) It matters not that such a man knows the truth and has been baptised, if he lack the moral image of Christ, which the truth has been given to form within us; in fact, his standing in the truth will be worse than useless. It will be to his condemnation. It will be said he knew better and did not do it.

In the affairs of his God, the enemies of Daniel thought they could contrive to get the better of him. The trap they laid for him brings out another characteristic of Daniel's, from which we may draw profit. They obtained the king's consent to a law that no man should make any petition to any god or man save the king only. Now what does this prove? It proves that Daniel was a man of prayer, and

that his enemies knew it. Let us measure ourselves again here by the standard supplied in Daniel. We must not only maintain integrity towards men, we must also be well-pleasing to God. Integrity is truly pleasing to Him, but there is something else to go along with it. It is revealed that prayer is the acceptable offering of righteous lips. This is beautifully represented in the symbolism of the Apocalypse. An angel stands before the throne with a censer in his hand, from which ascends a cloud of incense. This incense, it is declared, represents the prayers of the saints. Now incense is a fire-caused cloud of sweet smelling vapour, which diffuses itself through the air with a grateful effect to those who may be within reach of it.

The use of such a figure to represent the prayers of the saints shows distinctly the estimation in which they are held by the Almighty Father, to whom they are addressed. The question is, do we contribute our portion of this incense-cloud, causing Him pleasure? Daniel was in the habit of doing it three times a day. —(Dan. 6:10.) David says,

“Seven times in a day do I praise Thee.”—(Psalm 119:164.)

The Lord himself frequently appears, in the course of the gospel narratives, in the same attitude. He withdraws and spends even whole nights in prayer. Left to our own thoughts on the subject, we should have concluded that in his case, at all events, prayer was unnecessary. Yet there he stands before us in the act of thanksgiving, supplication, and prayer to the Father of all. His example is itself sufficient, and shows what manner of men we ought to be, as those who are striving to be acknowledged as his brethren in the day of his glory. Prayer is needful for us and well-pleasing to God. It is a source of comfort and strength and purification; but to be effectual, it must be real. It must not be a mere repetition of words, like the prayer-saying abomination of modern superstition. It must be an act of conscious address to the Deity. To be such, certain conditions are necessary. There must first be a true confidence in God’s existence, and that though He is *“in heaven,”* He is present everywhere by the spirit. If a man lack this confidence, his petitions will be as words spoken to the heedless air. He will feel as a child feels, that he is speaking into space with nobody to hear. Prayer in that case will neither be profitable to himself nor acceptable to God, who requires the prayer of faith. How are we to attain this conviction? It is the result of evidence. The evidence consists of many things, including the Bible as the principal evidence. If the mind dwell habitually on the evidence, the conviction will come and at last fervently fill the inner man with almost the power of a living consciousness which will enable us to feel, *“though no answering voice is heard,”* that our words are spoken in the Eternal ear, and that they will bring forth for us the blessedness of the man who trusteth not in man nor maketh flesh his arm, but who putteth his trust in the Eternal Creator, and whose hope the Lord is. It will enable us to pray the prayer of faith and to feel that the act of prayer is an act of real communion with God.

The engendering of this conviction is indeed the ultimate object of the truth in all to whom it comes. Its attainment will be the great solicitude with every earnest man. It will come to those who seek it as God wills it to be sought for, *“with all your heart.”*—(Jer. 29:13.) It will not come without care and diligent attention to the things of the spirit. It is easily interfered with. Merely sensuous exercises of the mind are unfavourable to it. It is here where *“pleasure,”* in the conventional sense of that term, is so deadly. It dims the facts out of which the conviction of faith arises. It weakens the picture of God made on the mind by the truth, by impressing upon it other pictures for which the mind has a more powerful affinity. It comes like a cloud between us and the eternal throne, so that divine things lose their power with us, and we are dragged down to the original level of the natural mind, which is a level of brutish obliviousness to the fact that in God and for Him all things exist and have their being.

It is here where true wisdom will impel a man to avoid many things that may not be in the category of things definitely and palpably *“wrong.”* Things even *“lawful”* are declared by Paul to be in some cases *“not expedient.”* How much more is it so with the many questionable things by which we are surrounded in this pleasure-loving and God-neglecting age—things in which it is customary to say *“there is no harm.”* No harm? Is spiritual hurt no harm? Is carnal strengthening no harm? Is it no harm to have the power of Christ weakened within you? Is it no harm to have your affections revived for an evil world, shortly to be destroyed? Is it no harm to have your moral perceptions blunted, your enthusiasm for Christ allayed, your original contentment with the present wicked state of things increased, your spiritual man enervated and weakened, your eternal life endangered? It is doubtful if people who say there is no harm in the pleasure-following of the present age, have ever truly realised what spiritual well-being is. We can only do this by daily intercourse with the holy oracles; these

enable us to see “harm” in many things, where the children of the flesh are necessarily blind. They do this by imparting to us a habit of thought and a system of sentiment which are incompatible with the whole atmosphere of worldly thought and pleasure. They, besides, tell us plainly that those who live in pleasure are dead while they live. —(1 Tim. 5:6.)

How does Daniel act in the presence of the trap set for him? Here we shall find another distinct and useful lesson. The decree came out that nobody was to pray to any god or man but to the king only, on pain of death by wild beasts. Now, if Daniel had been like some people, he would have got round the corner of this danger by some subterfuge. He would have said: “Prayer is a thing between God and me. I need not let these men know that I pray during the next 30 days. I will pray, but I need not get down on my knees or do anything else by which they will know it. Why should I run into danger? Why should I needlessly expose myself to destruction? I can pray walking on the street or lying in my bed. I will not rob God of His due; but I will take care to run clear of the trap which these men have laid.” Did Daniel act in this worldly-wise manner? On the contrary.

“When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his window being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”—

(Dan. 6:10-11.)

The lesson is plain. Never conceal our obedience to God from a fear of consequences. Confess Christ before men—not with Pharisaic ostentation—not with the obtrusiveness of a man who wants to be taken notice of, but with the frankness and courage of a man determined to do the will of God, at the risk of whatever consequences it is in the power of man to inflict.

Caught in the act, Daniel was cast among the lions. He did not know he would be saved from them. He had no revelation on this point. He probably thought he would be torn to pieces in a moment. He braved the danger. He was prepared for such an eventuality, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, his companions, who, in a similar predicament with regard to the fiery furnace, while declaring God’s ability to deliver them, said that even if He did not deliver them, they should refuse to bow down to the golden image. Is it necessary to point the lesson? Let us not be intimidated by the cry of rashness and imprudence when we propose to obey God rather than man. It is easy to call righteousness by wrong names, as it is easy to gild over unscriptural things by pretty titles. Let us be led of the spirit in all circumstances and we shall be safe. A thorough course of well-doing in the fear of God, and a fearless encounter of all the consequences of duty, will give us a place by the side of Daniel in the kingdom and age to come, when a compromising course for present advantage would entail the terrible result, that we should be pronounced unfit for the divine service and the divine glory of that glorious state.

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