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RIGHTEOUSNESS TAUGHT BY DIVINE JUDGMENTS.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED IN ANTRIM, N. H.,

BY THE

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S E R M O N .

ISAIAH 26 : 9. When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

We can never be without abundant cause for thanksgiving, and it would be a profitable exercise to-day to recall to mind the many tokens of God's past and present goodness, and so stir up our hearts to unite fervently in the praises of Him whose hand of mercy is over all. But let me speak to you of our country, its condition and its hopes. The Lord has bestowed on us a goodly heritage. We have a land abounding in all resources of material comfort and wealth and in all means for mental and moral improvement and social happiness. But now our nation is in trouble ; the judgments of God have come upon us, and it becomes us to look for the lessons of righteousness which these judgments are designed to impart. The prophet affirms that when the Lord's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Surely we have troubles enough to turn our hearts to the pursuit of wisdom.

The process by which these troubles have been brought upon us, is familiar to all and needs only to be briefly recited. Our ears had long been accustomed to threats of resistance to federal authority. Dishonorable concessions, to put off the day of evil, had been made till forbearance

ceased to be a virtue. Intended treason was long and boldly proclaimed in our halls of national legislation and met with scarcely the semblance of rebuke. Our Chief Magistrate was surrounded by those who were plotting destruction to the Union and who did not leave their high stations, where they were bound by the most solemn obligations to maintain the federal constitution and laws in all their integrity, until they had done their utmost to place the whole fiscal, military and naval power of the nation in the hands of those who, in their hearts, were already in rebellion. Repeated efforts at compromise were made. Concessions were proposed more liberal than honor or justice demanded. But the time, consumed in vain attempts to adjust differences, was only used to strengthen the hands of treason. The crisis at length came and the government had no alternative but to engage in a most violent conflict for its own existence. No truth is more plain from the whole course of events, than that the loyal states have been forced into this civil strife against their will and against the power of honorable prevention.

This war has been most wickedly forced upon us. Of this there seems no room for doubt. Yet I do not say that the North has been guilty of no wrong. Many honest efforts have been made to correct northern sentiment when it was manifestly unsound. But northern faults have been often unduly magnified as compared with wrongs perpetrated by the South. Fanatical opinions, upon the great questions at issue, have been promulgated in both sections of our country. But truth requires the confession that great forbearance has been practiced upon the part of the North. And for this we have no reason to be sorry: for it helps to convince the world, so far as the world is in a mood to be convinced, that our cause is most just. We would have avoided a sectional collision; but we could

not. We might have disfranchised ourselves and put the reins of government forever in the hands of the South ; or we might have submitted to the dismemberment of the Nation. When plundered of our army and navy and military fortifications, we might have let the plunderers alone and said "depart in peace." I said, we could have done these things ; but could we ? Could we have yielded such a birthright without a struggle ? Can we look back to revolutionary sires, and would not their blood cry out for very shame if compelled to flow through the veins of such an unworthy generation ! Could we proclaim to the world that the experiment of a free government must forever be regarded as a failure !

Truly, we had no choice but to fight or make ourselves a by-word in the whole earth. A sad necessity was laid upon us which we could not in honor and justice escape. I do not hesitate the assertion that no people ever went to war for a more righteous cause than that which impels the loyal states in this conflict.

And yet we must not forget that these troubles are the judgments of God upon us. It is easy to trace secondary causes. It is easy to see that the great design of this unparalleled rebellion, was to establish more firmly and permanently the institution of human slavery. For many years, political leaders at the South have preached the right of *secession*, a right perfectly incompatible with the existence of any reliable government. But in this way it was sought to prepare the popular mind for the basest treason the world ever saw ; and not a thing has been left untried to stir up the most intense hatred toward the free North ; and when it was made plain that the slave interest could no longer rule the Nation, then came rebellion. In discreet sayings and actions, both North and South, may have hastened the conflict ; but a permanent peace was utterly im-

possible while one section of the country had a growing conviction, not only that slavery was lawful and justifiable under due restrictions, but that it was truly a sacred and divine institution and needful to the highest interests of society: and the other section had an equally growing conviction, founded upon the increasing developments of the system; that human bondage, the holding of men as chattels, subject to the will of the basest masters as well as the best, was a tremendous wrong, utterly incompatible with those institutions which necessarily belong to a free people. The war is emphatically one between freedom and slavery. Can our hearts hesitate for a moment which side should triumph?

It is not always safe to predict the result of God's special dealings with men and nations. It is not for us to foreknow the divine purposes and then lay our plans with reference to their accomplishment. The Lord will secure his ends and by the agency of man if He sees fit, but He asks no human advice. So far as we can judge, the course of the seceding states seems providentially tending towards emancipation. It would indeed be remarkable if the very efforts to perpetuate slavery forever, should be the means of its destruction. But let the Lord work as He will. His hand is in these judgments, and while He is fulfilling His designs, let us seek the lessons of wisdom and righteousness. And what are some of them?

1. The first great duty, urged upon us, in the time of these judgments, is to acknowledge God. Amid all the confusions and strifes of men and nations, there is a Being who rules over all and orders all things well. There is nothing done in this universe without His knowledge, permission, and providential control. There is a boundary set to wickedness, within which the fiercest wrath of man will be restrained. The annals of the world can not fur-

nish the record of another so great a crime as this rebellion, and yet the hand of God is in it, and will accomplish glorious ends by means of it. We have national faults and blessed will it be if they are now corrected. But how great must be the evil that calls for such a remedy?

But what are the proofs of a national recognition of God? They are to be found in the habits both of the people and of the government. Can it be truly said that the inhabitants of this land are worshippers of the Supreme Being? That a great many are sincerely pious, is not to be questioned; but is reverence for God a national trait? The first indications of right feelings toward God are to be looked for in the manner of observing the Sabbath. It is true that a great many conscientiously regard the Sabbath as the day which the Lord has sanctified for His own special worship. It is equally true that vast numbers utterly disregard the day except to devote its sacred hours to pleasure seeking. Associations have been formed with the avowed purpose of discountenancing, in every possible way, Sabbath observance, and of securing the abrogation of all civil laws, designed to preserve the day for rest and worship: and probably upon no Sabbath could we ever find one tenth part of our population in the house of prayer, either personally or by representatives. And yet there are no other such agencies for securing the blessings of civil freedom as the Sabbath and the appropriate services of the sanctuary. Without these, a nation can not possibly be free. Without these, it is impossible to secure those public and private and social virtues which are the only sure basis of human happiness. We have indeed great reason to be thankful, that the ordinances of religion are maintained to such an extent, that a large proportion of the population is brought more or less directly under their influence; yet it is most lamentably true that vast numbers pay no manner of heed

to these things, and that in many towns and neighborhoods there is no stated worship of any form. And if we look to our government, the aspect is no better. Among our civil, military and naval officers, we have some religious men, but they are considered by all as the exception and not the rule. Since this war began, the holy day has been repeatedly and without necessity, profaned by marching armies and by the clash of arms in deadly strife. Attention has been often called to the subject, yet it is too true that our armies know not the Sabbath. If our rulers think that soldiers need not the rest and the hallowing influences of the Sabbath, they may perhaps yet learn this lesson of righteousness by severer judgments.

The amount of irreligion among our military officers, showing itself in gross profanity, drunkenness, dishonesty, and other kindred vices, is truly alarming. It may well make us tremble for the men who are exposed to the influence of such examples, and who may return to their homes with ruined characters. We may well fear, too, lest severer wrath yet come upon the nation that tolerates such wickedness in high places. God is a sovereign ruler. He calls upon his rational creatures to recognize their dependence upon His holy will. In various ways he makes known his being and attributes to the children of men, and is most jealous of his honor and will not suffer the withholding of it with impunity. If men and nations will not acknowledge Him in those providences with which He blesses them, then will He compel their remembrance in those judgments with which He curses them.

And are we not verily guilty of withholding praise from Him who is the source of every mercy? Let us look at a few facts. "In accordance with a time-honored custom, inaugurated by our forefathers, and so much in harmony with the convictions of all christian people," this day has

been set apart "to be observed as a day of thanksgiving and praise." We are invited by our Governor to meet in our usual places of worship to unite in public thanks to the Lord "for the bountiful harvests with which he has gladdened the hearts of men," and for all the unnumbered benefits with which the year has been crowned. Who can say that this is an appointment which ought not to be observed ; but where are the people of this Commonwealth to-day ? A very small proportion are gathered for praise and worship, and thus recognize the hand of God in their blessings ; while the great majority are spending the day in mere feasting, worldly merriment or vicious indulgence ; as if that were the way to honor Him who is the source of every good and perfect gift.

Again, as a nation we have been proud of our country and our institutions, but have taken to ourselves too much credit. We have forgotten that God gave us this goodly land. He sent our forefathers to this western world and through their toils and hardships planted this free government. We have entered the abundant fruits of self-denying labors performed by other men, under the protection and guidance of a gracious Providence. But we talk too much as if our own skill and hands had gotten all these benefits. And now that these gifts of Heaven are in such peril that we have to fight most earnestly to prove that we have a country and government worthy of being preserved to those who may come after us, the lesson of recognizing God is set before us to be well studied. Shall we learn it and praise God for the possession of so excellent a country ? Well, if we do before it be taken from us to make us remember whence it came.

Among our choicest civil privileges is the right of suffrage. Our government places the supreme political power in the hands of the people, to be exercised in the choice of

rulers. This we regard as the great excellence of our constitution. We hold our rights to be more safe in our own hands than in the hands of a man who has the right to rule by the accident of royal birth. We think it better and safer to choose our own magistrates rather than have men placed over us without our consent. We esteem this right of franchise most highly, but have we recognized God in the gift?

The world has looked upon our government as only a partially tried experiment. Shall we pass through this ordeal in safety; or shall secession be triumphant and thus prove that a republican government has not power to maintain itself against faction and rebellion? These judgments from the Almighty are calling upon the world to come to America and learn an important lesson in the fitness and capacity of a people to govern themselves. Happy will it be for us if we come out of this school of affliction wiser in the art of self control.

2. The second lesson which it becomes us to learn, under the discipline of these judgments, is to attach more importance to *intelligence and virtue*, as the only sure basis of republican institutions. Scarcely has any political maxim been oftener repeated than this, that "None but an intelligent and virtuous people are fit to govern themselves;" and yet we are brought to the very brink of ruin by wickedness and vice. We say that slavery is the cause of the rebellion, and so it is. But if there had been throughout the land, a right understanding of that one subject, in its essential principles and practical workings, it could not have caused war. In every great moral question the appeal should be to the Bible and not to arms. But those who have done the most to disturb the nation by the discussion of this subject, have either utterly neglected the teachings of Holy Writ, or falsified the word to make it support favo-
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rite notions. If all concerned had been willing to abide by the Scriptures, we could have lived together as bretheren and had no strife. But the leaders on both sides have held extreme views, and have not submitted their differences to the Word of God.

Neglect of the Bible has been one great cause of our trouble. Nor has there been a correct understanding of the working of the system. The North has not understood it. The most active sentiments here have been too much based upon extreme cases of wrong. Nor has the South understood it. For years past, most industrious efforts have been made in the work of self-blinding, so that the people who have most to do with slavery, have really known least about its evils. They themselves have not been willing to look upon the dark side and were ready to fly into a passion if any one ventured to intimate that there was any dark side. To their disordered vision, there was no darkness about the system except the skins of its subjects, while the darkest feature was the moral blindness and the bitter spirit of persecution, which the system of human bondage so plainly fostered.

There has also been, at the South, a thorough ignorance of northern sentiment and design. The leaders in this confederated movement have perseveringly sought to increase sectional prejudice and hatred, by the grossest falsehoods. The southern people would never have entered into this conflict, had they been correctly informed of northern sentiments and designs. But unfortunately for the nation, in the absence of common schools and other means of instruction, ignorance prevails so extensively among the masses, that great numbers are just fit to be the dupes of designing men. We may well say that ignorance, the want of general intelligence as well as of Bible knowledge, is the chief support of this rebellion. It should be remem-

bered that the states, which deny their allegiance to the Federal Government, have done almost nothing for the general education of the people. Indeed many prominent men do not hesitate to affirm that the masses should be kept in ignorance. And this presents another feature of the dark side of slavery. But it is worthy of being remembered that those same states are suffering most terribly from the evils inflicted by their own hands.

The present is emphatically the time when we should be most deeply impressed with the truth, that a nation must be intelligent in order to be free. No narrow views of self interest, should hinder liberal provision for the education of the people. It is every man's duty and privilege to contribute to the establishment and support of institutions of learning. It will be a most blessed thing if these judgments impress our minds deeply with the great truth that only an intelligent people can enjoy the blessings of a free government.

But mere intelligence will not preserve freedom. An educated people can not easily become the tools of an unscrupulous ambition, but if intelligence be not under the control of right moral principle, it may be the instrument of vast mischief. A man that can not be safely trusted with the interests of others, is not fit to exercise the right of suffrage. Every vote, cast at our popular elections, has an influence upon our happiness and prosperity. The enacting of laws and putting of laws in force, the raising of taxes, the providing the public means of education, and for the security of private property, are all affected by the ballot box. Is a man, destitute of moral honesty, and of every rule of action except self-interest and passion, is such a man worthy of the high privilege of voting, and so of exerting an influence upon the destiny of the nation? It is surprising how reckless the American people have been in

the matter of voting. God has mercifully secured to us this privilege by which we can determine our own laws and their administration ; and if there be any act, bearing directly upon interests in the present life, in which men ought to feel the energetic power of an enlightened conscience, it is the placing of their votes in the ballot box. Who shall tell the result of that voting which is often done with such a reckless and selfish spirit ! We can not too highly estimate the importance of the ballot box. God has kindly put it into our hands for His glory and our good ; and yet it is through the ballot box, that a base and fanatical ambition has brought this rebellion upon us. The ballot box is a fearful engine for evil, unless it be in the hands of an intelligent and honest people.

Look then at these severe judgments, consider the manner in which they have been brought upon us, and learn this important lesson that none but an intelligent and virtuous people can be truly and permanently free. Freedom can exist only in name among the ignorant and debased, as the condition of Mexico and the South American States abundantly proves.

Let us learn wisdom from these judgments. No investment pays so well, in securing public prosperity and happiness, as that which is made in the christian school and church. Armies and navies are useful in special emergencies, but the nation that relies permanently on these for safety, is already a mass of moral corruption. A tithe of what is now spent for the destruction of human life and the creation of human woe, wisely employed, would have placed the school and the higher seminary of learning, with competent teachers, and the church with an evangelical ministry, in every part of the land. With ample means for mental culture and with a pure Gospel everywhere received, this rebellion would have been impossible. If any

man will not aid in the support of religion and learning he deserves not to be called an American ; for in his stupidity or meanness, he has despised the only foundation of republican freedom.

3. Another lesson to be learned now, is the vast importance of electing upright and intelligent men to office. I have already spoken of the value of the ballot box. It is unquestionably an instrument for good when rightly used, but it is as clear as the sun in the heavens that it has been corrupted to the basest of purposes. Why should a man wish to vote ? It is that he may secure the enactment of righteous laws and their just administration. Can you think of any other good reason ? And yet you know there are thousands who knowingly and persistently vote against righteous laws and their enforcement. Personal promotion and party triumph, are the great ends which many seek for by this agency. It is by far too near a general rule, that men are nominated for office, not from any known worth or fitness, but with reference to their availability for securing private or party interests. It is notorious that known integrity of character often renders candidates unpopular. When, some years ago, Mr. Frelinghuysen was nominated for Vice President, a leading editor of the same political party was asked what he thought of the nomination. He replied, " It will never do ! It will never do ! He is too much mixed up with the Bible Society." " Well sir," was the answer, " if it has come to this, that because a man is a christian, and president of a Bible Society, he can not be elected to high office, it is time that we should know it." And it has been coming to this, and yet the people have not considered the peril of an elective government when base and dishonorable men have the fairest chance for office.

The ballot box ought to be regarded by every American

as a sacred instrument for ~~the~~ preservation of our dearest rights ; but men have sought to control our elections, and largely gained their object, who care no more for the national well-being than the hungry lion cares for the life of the prey that lies bleeding at his feet. The means employed to secure nominations and to influence votes, are in perfect keeping with the character of such men.

The nation has been cursed with men who make politics their trade, and who for paltry gold are ready to betray the dearest interests of the land. If these things are not true, how came it to pass that this monster treason had its beginning and its strength among those who had sworn before high Heaven to protect and execute the federal constitution and laws ? If our popular elections have not been greatly abused, how comes it to pass that corrupt and ignorant men so often disgrace our halls of legislation ? If public sentiment had been sound in this matter, how could it have come to pass that such a long process should be necessary in order to sift treason, and drunkenness and every species of base profligacy from the official ranks of our federal armies ? And why must our soldiers suffer often for want of the few comforts that belong to the soldier's fare, and the nation be taxed almost beyond the power of endurance, not only to meet the necessary demands of the war, but to gratify the avaricious lust of men who are growing rich by the most unrighteous gains ?

A very important part of the inheritance, secured to us through the toils and sufferings of our forefathers, is this *right of suffrage* ; but unless we guard it with great care, it may be turned into an instrument for the infliction of righteous judgments. As a nation we have abused this right and God has permitted it to become the agent of our great danger. Where then is the remedy for these evils ? It is in the hands of the people, and nowhere else.

The government can never make itself pure so long as you, by your free suffrages, put corrupt men in authority. The evil begins in the primary assemblies where nominations are made. These primary elections should be kept from the control of designing men. Is it the part of honest freemen to allow candidates to be forced upon them whom they know to be unfit for public trust? And yet this is done. Men do not know how to break loose from the trammels of party. They are slaves to party organizations and dare not assert their birthright and vote according to the dictates of conscience.

I would not underestimate the value of sound political sentiments in candidates for office, but moral integrity is far more important. Honest men will gladly correct mistakes, but how can you expect errors to be corrected by men whom you have placed in office for no other reason than their party connection? Under the false maxim of "principles, not men," honest voters have been cheated into the support of candidates who were utterly unfit to be entrusted with public interests.

I suppose that under a constitution that provides for popular elections, we must have parties. We may reasonably expect honest differences of opinion, with regard to both the expediency of measures and the fitness of men. But there are great interests and duties to which party ties should ever be subordinate. It is most unsafe and most absurd to bestow office upon men who are not worthy of being trusted. Let office be the *reward* of *merit*; let it be conferred only on such as have proved themselves entitled to public confidence; let dishonest and profligate men understand that they have no official favors to expect from a virtue-loving people, and our public affairs will rapidly assume a brighter aspect. If we must have party lines, let one also be drawn by which all ~~laws~~ of good order,

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righteousness and truth shall be found working together for the public benefit. Good citizens need not all approve the same political measures, but they should agree in withholding their suffrages from all candidates who are not of honest report.

While then these judgments are upon us, let us learn to keep the instrument of self government free from corruption. Let us do all we can to disseminate right sentiments, and to make the people intelligent and virtuous, so that when they come together on election days, they shall act wisely and conscientiously, in the fear of God and not in the dread of party leaders.

4. These judgments that are in the land, are adapted to impart much instruction in righteousness, but the only other lesson which I will now speak of, relates to the matter of *benevolence*. We are prone to forget that all the gold and the silver are the Lord's, and that we are but His stewards in the use He will have made of it. We are disposed to hoard up or to spend in self indulgence, just as if God had no claim upon our worldly possessions. But when our sin of parsimony can be endured no longer, there are many ways by which God can make the purse to open and the heart to expand. And have we not given far too sparingly in the cause of christian benevolence? Our Savior has many representatives upon the earth in the persons of the needy. These He would have fed and clothed and educated and taught the way of life, from the bounty of those who have a larger share of worldly goods. The extension of the Redeemer's kingdom demands outlays of money. Preachers and churches, teachers and schools, must be provided for millions that are in heathen darkness and sin. For a long time the Lord has been calling upon the professedly christian world to have compassion upon those who are suffering from want or perishing for lack of spiritual food. But the work has gone on very slowly. Satan's kingdom, with all its

moral and material desolations, is yet widely spread. The bitter cry of want comes up from all parts of the earth.

In the time of these calamities, we learn that this is not for lack of means. The nation is prosecuting a war at an expense a hundred fold larger than enough to execute the most liberal plans which christian benevolence ever devised. Many think it a hardship to pay a small sum for the support of the Gospel, but now they are compelled to pay largely to furnish the necessities of war. God is making it plain that the Nation is possessed of untold resources, and if we will not cheerfully give to meet the demands of His works of mercy, then will He compel us to open widely our hands to support His works of judgment.

Nor has this lesson been wholly without its benefits. Large contributions have been voluntarily made to relieve the burdens of Government and the sufferings of the soldiers. The Sanitary Commission reports a monthly expenditure, from the free will offerings of the people, of nearly a half million of dollars. And much is also done, through other agencies, for the physical and moral benefit of the army. A truly blessed thing it will be if benevolent habits are now acquired which shall have a lasting effect upon the cause of christian charity. And an evil thing it will be if we allow the hardness of the times to hinder an active interest in the cause of the Savior.

Shall we then take to heart these lessons of righteousness? In the midst of the Nation's trials, we have great reason for gratitude. The Lord has burdened our fields and filled our garners with plenty. We have been permitted to see the desolations of this war only at a distance. Some hearts and homes are indeed in sorrow for loved ones lost, but we almost know nothing, from experience, of the actual calamities of this war. In the midst of so much cause for thankfulness, shall we not let the Lord's judgments impress His lessons of righteousness upon us?