



SUNDAY READING

MORNING SERVICE.

MORNING.

Through Christ Jesus we have access in one spirit unto the Father. For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of children, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth with our spirits that we are the children of God.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things unto them that ask Him.

And this is the boldness which we have towards Him, that if we ask according to His will He heareth us. Let us, therefore, draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

A Prayer.

O God who has included all Thy commandment of love, so that if we love not our neighbor we cannot fulfil Thy law; we humbly pray Thee to create in our hearts such a sincere and fervent love of one another, that we may be children of our Father in Heaven, and true disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN.

O Thou great friend to all the sons of men,
Who once didst come in humblest guise below,
Sin to rebuke, to break the captive's chain,
And call Thy brethren forth from want and woe:
We look to Thee: Thy truth is still the life
Which guides the nations, groping on their way,
Stumbling and falling in disastrous night,
Yet hoping ever for the perfect day.

Yes! Thou art still the life: Thou art the way
The holiest know: Light, life, and way of heaven!
And they who dearest hope, and deepest pray,
Toll by the light, life, way, which Thou hast given.

Of Avoiding Many Words.

Fly the tumult of the world as much as thou canst; for the trotting of worldly affairs is a great hindrance, although it be done with sincere intention.

For we are quickly defiled, and enthrall by vanity.

Often times I could wish that I had held my peace when I have spoken, and that I had not been in company.

Why do we so willingly speak and talk one with another, when notwithstanding we seldom cease our converse before we have hurt our conscience?

The cause why we so willingly talk, is for that by discoursing one with another, we seek to receive comfort one of another and desire to ease our mind wearied with many thoughts.

And we very willingly talk and think of those things which we most love or desire; or of those things which we feel to be against us.

But alas, oftentimes in vain, and to no end; for this outward comfort is the cause of no small loss of inward and divine consolation.

Therefore we must watch and pray, lest our time pass away idly.

It is lawful and expedient for thee to speak, speak those things that may edify.

Evil habits and neglect of our own growth in grace do give too much liberty to inconsiderate speech.

Yet discourse of spiritual things doth greatly further our spiritual growth, especially when persons of one mind and spirit associate together in God.

SERMON.

The Ministry of Sorrow.

BY REV. LEWELYN D. BEVAN, D. D.

"For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."—Heb. xii: 6.

There is no fact in human life more certain than universality of suffering, and there is, perhaps, nothing for which a man finds a greater difficulty to discover an adequate or satisfactory reason. Man is made to mourn: of that there is no doubt. But he would be a bold man who should declare that man was made for mourning. Sorrow is not natural: the instinct of human nature is to rebel against it, to fight it off, to avoid it: and the instinct is divinely given. Try and explain this sorrow which we all know upon natural grounds, and you must fail; even when you have dealt with cases of what we might call deserved suffering: when it seems just to say, "It served him right," when we can see the immediate connection between the wrong and the suffering which the wrong produces in the very person who committed the wrong, or when we can trace the moral results of suffering in everything that is brought about in heart and conscience and life, there still remains a large residuum which baffles all interpretation, and defies every endeavor to allay or soothe. Take, for example, the loss of those who seem most necessary. At the very moment, the critical moment, when they are required they are taken away. Any time but that, and the removal would have seemed to have lost much of its painfulness. We ourselves, who are gathering in this great council, feel it deeply, acutely, that the very man of all others whom we expected as a guide and leader, to whose suggestion the council owes its holding, in whose wise care it would have been led on to perfect and complete success—he is the one who vanishes: and upon the very eve of our assembly, the very time when we needed him most, he is gone, gone from our friendship, gone from our council.

Little children suffering—who can explain it? I have oftentimes seen good reason for my own suffering. I see many of you here this morning: if you suffered a little bit we should not very much wonder at it, and perhaps we not altogether sorry, hoping that it might do you some little good. But a little child! a child who has just opened its eyes upon this life, who can tell how it suffers? It can only lie on the mother's knee, and

moan and wail and gather round about it the little knot of loving ones who watch it, and wonder, without anything of explanation, why that child should suffer.

Rachel, mourning for her children, will not be comforted: and Rachels, believe me, will be found in every generation. So long as man continues there will be mourning ones who will not be comforted: and as we see their refusal to receive comfort, we can only say it is natural, it is God given, it is divine. For the bible does not solve the difficulty. The bible deals with the subject practically and only practically. The bible never satisfies your speculative inquiry. No question is solved by the book so as to answer everything that you can ask. It is only solved so that you can live as faithful servants of the Eternal One. And the bible shows us the relation of suffering to sin. But, finally, it bids us fall back upon God. He will do right. He will make all well. He is the great comforter of man. It finds a light even in our darkness. It declares that sorrow is chastening, that the christian man for himself and for his brethren can rejoice even in chastening; for it is the work of the loving Father. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It does not satisfy your intellect, but it will satisfy your heart. It will not take away every doubt, remove all the difficulties of the situation in which you find yourself: but it will give you the holdfast to the hand of God: it will reveal to you the gracious eye that is looking down upon you in mercy: it will open to you the heart that knows your sufferings, nay, perhaps, indeed, inflicts them, because He is wise and gracious, and loves you even while He chastens.

These are the three facts that lie in this text of ours: sorrow, discipline, love. The acceptance of God's mercy, I remark, in the first place, does not assure the believer from the lot of the sufferer. It is perfectly true we may promise to him who accepts the gospel much joy and much pleasure. If you will only take Jesus Christ, my friend, you will find it the beginning of gladness in your lives. There is a joy even in the grace of God that comes to us through Jesus Christ with which no stranger can intermeddle. The relation of God into which you enter by obedience is itself a cause of joy. For a man to place himself in harmony with the Divine law: for him to say, "No longer will I but thine be done," for him to seek no more his ends but the Divine ends: he will find therein the peace, the calm, the quiet restfulness, enter his spirit, and will give him infinite delight. All the laws of being—not only your own, but those around you—all become harmonious. Obey God, and you are at once in accord with the great principles upon which all life is governed. As long as you disobey God, as long as you fail to fulfil His will, you are perpetually meeting opposition. There is no harmony. The relation between you and the external world is a relation of conflict, not a relation of mutual action and interaction. But the moment you have set yourself right with God, with God's universe, peace and harmony and calm and blessedness come into your soul. When you are at peace thus with all things that God has made, that is a state of forgiveness. What a blessed thing it is when we have done wrong to our friend and have acknowledged it, and owned up, and sought his reconciliation, and he puts out his hand and says, "Not another word: do not refer to it, it is forgotten"—what calm and quiet, what blessedness and peace! And oh! dear friends, when it is the Divine Friend, when it is God Himself who speaks the word in peace and pardon, and when there waves over our heads, bowed down in sorrow and in shame the tender hand of Christ Himself and His word is uttered, "Go in peace and sin no more," then our souls are jubilant, then we seem to hear the very angels sing, then the blessings and peace of heaven itself is ours: and the man who has made himself right with God has entered into that blessedness and joy that none other can understand.

And more than this, there are special promises that are attached to godly living. God directly blesses the man who serves him. I know sometimes you hear people talk about a statement of this sort as if there were a kind of smugness as if it had a sort of Pharisaic tone about it as if men who believed in this had a pleasant regard for themselves that they were peculiarly his friends and favorites of God. That may be so; but nevertheless, it is a fact God directly blesses the man who serves Him. The old testament is full of promises of that kind. The new testament, though it deals rather with moral and spiritual conditions, always confirms them. It tells us that it is the pleasure of the Father to give us these things. Christ does not particularize them. He gathers them up into just that one description, and says, "These things,"—wealth, pleasure, the joy of friends, the peace of your home, the joy of those who are round about you, the fame, the honour that men will give you these things it is the pleasure of the Father to give: they will all be added unto you if you seek first of all the kingdom. Christ does not need to make a specific blessing for each of them, but He leaves them just in the great lump which He has given Himself. But He gives them. Take a body of christian men: they are the most joyous men in the world; and yet a congregation of christian people, who for twenty, thirty, or forty years have been walking in the ways of God. There is more health, there is more happiness, there is more secular joy in that company than in any other such sized company in all the rest of the world. A christian congregation is not a congregation that has the most sorrowful faces. If you want to see the most sadness, brethren, go to the places of pleasure; see men and women

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more sin, no more evil, no more disobedience, no more willfulness in their hearts. Happy people, happy people perchance in their ignorance of themselves; happier still in their ignorance of what other people think of them! Ah, brethren most of us I fancy, know something of the evil that is still here—passions that boil and rage within us the meanness of spirit that sometimes tempt us to disgraceful acts, to cowardice and shame; the self-assertion that makes us forget that we are no longer our own, but that we are bought with a price; the very strength of our character that makes us rebellious. Have you none of them? Is this a congregation in whom there is no sin remaining? Oh, transcendent hosts of heaven! Oh, company of sanctified and glorified; it is strange that you are here to listen to the words of a mortal man if that be so. Nay, nay, brethren, I know you better for I know myself better. You are here with your sins, and some of you, not so long ago, have been down in the dark, deep valley. It has been a grim battle. Thank God if you have conquered. But, oh, it may be you are here today to say, broken! lost again! failed again! beaten again! My friends, thank God, then, if He chastens you; thank God if He lays upon you the hand that may be heavy, the scourge that may be sharp. For, believe me, it limits, lessens, drives back the evil. "For whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

And think of the scope it gives for the practice and perfection of the christian's virtues. Brethren, there is many a man whose goodness you never knew until he was afflicted. When he was in business, how sharp! When he was in life, how ambitious! When he was in health and strength, how vigorous, how resolute! He throws aside all else, and men said: "The man is hard and selfish." Then you go and see him laid upon a bed of sickness; you see him smitten; his health is gone, his friends are taken from him. Loss has come to him, and he has lost the very dearest things of life. The man is no longer a man, he has risen to an angel; the man has ascended to the heights where heroes dwell, and down in his poverty, shame, and weakness, and pain, he has risen to a greatness you never knew before. Oh, the virtues! Oh, the tenderness! Oh, the patience! If it had been always day, how little of this world would you have known! Nothing in the heavens but the great orb of light. This earth with its beauty, and that sun with its glory, and nothing else; and sometimes in this city of yours not even the sunlight to be seen—that is shrouded. But there comes the night—the night, with its cool, still shadows; the night, with its great curtain of darkness drawn across the sky; the night when fades out all earth's beauty, and the sun has vanished from the place in glory. And what is there? A universe, a delight, a beauty; a universe with ten thousand eyes looking down upon us. Darkness shows us worlds of light we never knew by day, and so the world grows larger because it has grown dark. And there is many a man and many a woman, too, the greatness of whose life, and the nobleness of whose character, is only known when sorrow swept upon them, and they entered into the night of their great pain. Thank God for the revelations of sorrow! We had been a poor world, brethren, if we had always been a joyous one; and we are rich today—rich in the infinite virtues that God Himself doth most greatly honor, because we have passed into the inheritance of the sorrowing. "Whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

And so, I say, in the next place, the sufferings of the believer are intended to be disciplines of life and ministries of character. How are we to receive these sorrows? Now, they are sent by God in order that we may be perfected. Men seem to think that sorrow comes that it may be borne; or else, with teeth set and with every nerve braced, we endure with stoical fortitude and courage. Not so. They come from God, divinely sent that we might be divinely chastened. They direct the soul to its true home and life. Even the christian man is very often tempted to be contented with the things about him, to settle down where he is. Now, man is not born for where he is. He is born to go where he is not. And so when the sorrow comes it shakes us. When the pain comes it makes us feel this is not for us some other—something else, somewhere else, some other conditions. I do not mean necessarily another world; I do not mean that any man should want to get out of this into the future, as we call it, but rather that we should change the conditions in which we live for a higher. Life eternal, remember, is a quality; it is not merely a state and you may enter into eternal life now. Your sorrows and your pains do not belong to the eternal life; and they are given to you that you may lift your spirit out of the surroundings of the present, and that you may clothe them with the glory and the blessedness that belongs to the life that lies beyond.

Yes; and these sufferings limit and destroy the evil that remains. There are some good friends who tell us that no evil remains. I know some men and women, and have much respect for them, who say that since a certain date—they can give you the very hour—there has been no

silent: God is with them. "Far off, far off, ye profane ones," was the cry of the ancient priestess. So, sometimes, should be the cry to your own souls when the presence of God is manifested in the sorrows of those you love. This is the spirit in which we should receive it, and this is the forecast of its complete removal. For the work of chastisement shall be perfected. All the dealings of God with us shall issue in the attainment of the highest conceptions of the christian life, and when sorrow shall have done its work we shall have entered into the infinite life where death itself shall die, and sin itself shall be forgotten the life that issued even out of the sins and the sorrows and the death of this life. Rejoice, brethren—this is my message—in the joy that God gives: but if there comes sorrow wait upon the Lord and rest patiently in Him: for whom He loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. May the gracious ministry of sorrow thus come with healing and with hope to every stricken heart, for His name's sake.

HYMN.
"He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them."—Mark x: 16.

Was not our Lord a little Child,
Taught by degrees to pray,
By father dear, and mother mild
Instructed day by day?
And lov'd He not of Heaven to talk
With children in His sight,
To meet them in His daily walk,
And to His arms invite?

What thought around His throne of fire
The everlasting chant
Be vaulting from the seraph choir
In glory jubilant?

Yet stoops He, ever pleas'd to mark
Our rude essays of love,
Faint as the pipe of wakening lark,
Heard by some twilight grove.

—Kable.

Prayer.

Our father in heaven, the Lord and guide of our lives, and the giver of all our good things: we bow before Thee now with humble and grateful hearts. That Thou art mindful of little children, and sufferest them to come to Thee: Amen.

HYMN.

Three in One, and One in Three,
Ruler of the earth and sea,
Hear us, while we lift to Thee
Holy chant and psalm.

Light of Lights, with morning, shine:
Lift on us Thy light divine:
And let charity benign
Breathe on us her balm.

Light of lights, when falls the even,
Let it close on sin forgiven:
Fold us in the peace of heaven,
Shed a holy calm.

Three in One, and One in Three,
Dinily here we worship Thee:
With the saints hereafter we
Hope to bear the palm.

Benediction.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.



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