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→ SERMONS ←

THE VALUE OF THE WORD OF GOD.

BY D. H. MACVICAR, D.D., LL.D., PRINCIPAL OF THE PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE,
MONTREAL, CANADA.

The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.—PSALM cxix., 72.

THIS is not an utterance in depreciation of gold and silver. It is precisely the reverse. It sets a high, a very high value upon them; and when sentimental pietists declare that they despise money and esteem gold as good for nothing, very many sensible people set it down as so much empty rant and nonsense. God does not say that gold is good for nothing; on the contrary He makes it the very symbol of His richest spiritual gifts and blessings. Jesus says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich;" and He represents the very streets of the New Jerusalem as paved with pure gold. What God says is that while this creature of His is highly prized among men, and made the standard of value in the commercial sense of that term, there is something else of infinitely greater worth to man—something which in its far-reaching influence not only quickens the pulse of commerce and causes general thrift among the nations of the world, but also moulds the character and destiny of man for time and eternity. "The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." How is this? How can we fasten this in our minds as a practical ruling conviction? We may answer generally that gold belongs to a man's environment, while the law of God enters into the inner man—the immortal spirit

→* Young Men's Service *←

THE TRUE INSPIRATION OF LIFE.*

BY JOHN HALL, D.D., LL.D., FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.—GAL. ii., 20.

THIS occasion represents the setting out in life of a number of young men who have been under "tutors and governors." The question comes up as a practical one: Under what inspiration should they set out on their paths? Can they find a loftier motive than the apostle presents when he says, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"? These words supply us with the topic for this hour—the true inspiration of life. All the incidents that led to the Declaration of our Independence as a nation will illustrate how the apostle was led up to the decision in favor of trusting, following and serving Christ, no matter how much it cost or what sacrifice it involved. He broke with the world. He broke with Judaism as far as it opposed Christ. He made himself one with the Crucified. "God forbid," he said, "that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus." On the basis of fact and feeling he became one with Christ. He is crucified with Christ, yet he lives, yet not he—not Saul of Tarsus—not the persecuting Pharisee, but a new man, a man inspired by Christ, so that Christ lives and rules in him. The life he lives in the flesh is by the faith of the Son of God. It is common to charge preachers with dwelling on the life to come to the neglect of the life that now is. For this imputation there is color, so far as this, that the lives of some professing Christians are below the Bible ideal. They are truly described as "Godward very good, but manward in need of watching." We have to guard against justifying this imputation. But the criticism itself is less philosophical than it appears, and the Bible is clear and full about the present life. No such objection, however, can obtain against the discourse now to be delivered. Here is the truth about "the life that now is."

I. The motive power of, the true life, "Faith in the Son of God." The motive power of faith may be illustrated from the course a man pursues when he has to invest in estate, banks, stocks, and after adequate inquiry has faith in certain things and acts accordingly. A similar mental process is carried forward in choosing a profession, in selecting a physician, in employing a lawyer and in the various emergencies of life. The individual weighs evi-

* Baccalaureate sermon delivered at Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va., June 14th, 1885.

dence, considers and decides. These illustrations are not foreign to the case in hand. We need a Physician, an Advocate, a Leader, a Commander, a Captain of salvation, an Inheritance. We examine and decide. This, however, is to be remembered, that to make Christ and the attractions of the cross as real to us as earthly things, we need and receive the help of the Holy Spirit. Then the analogy holds. We decide upon reports, on knowledge gained, on convictions. If it be asked, from what source this knowledge can be sought? From the reading of Christian biography, from the study of the history of the Church, from observation of individual character and, above all, from the authoritative Word of God. Faith rests on the knowledge thus gained. This knowledge presents Christ to the soul as a Saviour. The soul accepts Him. This is the motive power in the soul. This is the inspiration of life. "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, etc."

II. What is the basis of this faith? "He gave Himself for me." The question was as to sin's penalty. Shall the sinner bear it? or shall a substitute? And when on the sinner the punishment must be perpetual. "He" gave Himself. We find this amply illustrated in the Bible descriptions of Him—illustrated from the account of His expressed convictions through His life; from the baptism which He longed to have over; from His bearing to Pilate, to the scoffing crowd in contrast with the piteous cry, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Here was the real agony. There was no plea for compassion to Pilate. There was prayer for the ignorant instigators. But there was agony of soul before Him with whom He had to do when satisfying divine justice and giving Himself for us. And why did He give Himself for us? The reason is "He loved me"; and why? I freely confess, I cannot tell. The fact of it is one thing. The underlying reason is another—and inexplicable by His nature. It is pity. It is compassion. It is grace.

III. The way in which this inspiration works. Its sphere is the flesh, as distinguished from the future life—the life in the flesh that He lived in Corinth, Rome and elsewhere. That life resembles the life we have to live, learning, earning, in our callings, in all our conditions in this present world. This new life begins in the opening of the eyes, as the prodigal's new life began, and it proceeds in a great measure like his. It is not opening the eyes alone, nor resolving on general reform and working towards it. But it is saying, "I will go to my Father," and going. It is not always intelligent. The prodigal did not expect to be taken back nor perhaps to be even put among the servants. But he went and was restored. Now what would you expect him to be in that father's house? So it is with the new life. The enlightened soul says: "He loved me. He loved me. I love Him back again, and will live to Him."

But this good intention is not left to the best light in us, to the mere "Christian Consciousness." God's Word comes in again, a rule for living as it was a ground for believing. "What wilt Thou have me to do?" asks the soul, and God's Word, unfolded by the Inspiring Spirit and throwing steady light upon providences, gives the answer. So the saintly man becomes a Bible

student. How insincere professors dislike this guidance is illustrated in the case of Alexander the Great and Callisthenes.

IV. What are characteristics of this life? It is characterized by loyal devotion, by gratitude, by sympathy. It is not all head, nor all heart, nor all hand, but the whole man, the entire life moulded by the divine will and inspired by an intelligent, loving regard to a divine, holy person of whom the believer says, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." It has in it also the imitative element. It is the "imitation of Christ." How deeply does all this concern the whole body of professing Christians, each individual Christian professor and each student going forth from this University!

What an earnest appeal do these words make to all who exercise no faith in Christ, who have no such holy motives actuating them in life and who cast aside a salvation so free, so great, so urgent!

THE THIEF'S PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER.

BY A. J. BATTLE, D.D., BAPTIST CHURCH, MACON, GA.

Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom, etc.—LUKE xxiii., 42, 43.

THIS is the briefest, strangest and most momentous of interviews. Brief, in that it required only a few seconds for the earnest appeal and the gracious reply. Strange, in that such an appeal should come from such a man in such circumstances, and should evoke so prompt and gracious an answer. Momentous, in that it illustrates the power of divine grace in a critical moment, and sheds so blessed a light on the future.

I. The prayer analyzed: 1. It implies a belief in the superior dignity, power and goodness of Jesus, "Lord." 2. It was the prayer of conscious helplessness and want, "Remember me." 3. It recognized the Messiahship of Jesus, and evinced his belief in the future triumph of Christ the King—"When Thou comest in Thy kingdom." 4. Hence it was the prayer of true faith.

II. The gracious reply—it opened Paradise to the robber. 1. What is Paradise? It lies just beyond the river of death. 2. It is the realm of the disembodied spirit. 3. It is a place of happiness. 4. The peculiar characteristic is blissful rest. 5. The chief element of happiness is companionship with Christ.

III. Inferences: 1. It is a state of consciousness. 2. It is not purgatory. 3. The inhabitants do not wander back to earth and do not perform the office of guardian and ministering angels. 4. They are not called back at the demand of so-called spiritualists. 5. Tidings may reach them from earth, carried by the ascending angels. This state of blissful rest terminates, when the spirit shall be reunited to the risen body, and when Christ shall come into His kingdom. The robber and all who have a place in the memory of Jesus shall have a place in that kingdom.