



THE
NATIONAL PREACHER.

Vol. XXXIX, No. 2.]

FEBRUARY, 1865.

[Whole No. 353.]

SERMON IV.

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NEW YORK.

OUR SALVATION NEARER.

ROMANS, XIII. 11.—Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Human life is a journey, or a voyage, or a race. In its progress we are all tending toward a distant, but a certain point; a port, a goal, a home, it may be, from whence we shall never return to the place from which we have taken our departure.

In the Scripture this fact is sometimes presented, in the way of warning. We may incur the most dreadful loss, if we are careless and neglectful of our bearings, or flag in our exertions. We are moving over a full sea: there are fogs and tempests. There are a thousand devious paths into which our footsteps may be beguiled. There are a thousand enemies, and in one moment the gayest hopes may be dashed to ruin.

In the text, the thought of this continual progress toward the desired haven is presented, to induce serious consideration; to stimulate our flagging energies; to rouse to wakeful diligence; to encourage the full assurance of hope and activity, with the certainty of the benefit to which, if we are in the right course, we are approximating; "and that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

IF YOU ARE GENUINE CHRISTIANS, YOU ARE GOING TO HEAVEN! The consummation of your faith and hope continually draws nearer. To some, indeed, it is very near. This, then, is a very interesting motive to prompt your zeal and stimulate your activity.

For, observe, that in the text we are supposed to be asleep, forgetful, lethargic, indolent.

All men are naturally thus in regard to spiritual and eternal things. To them they are dead; while they awake and are all alive in the pursuits of the world, and of sin, and unbelief.

This was the character and condition of Christians, like all other men, before they believed. And even now, they are imperfect, in faith and in love, in duty and in patience. They often relapse into transgressions; they relax effort; they lose vigor; they anticipate rest and ease too soon; they mistake the nature of Christian obligation. Backsliding, worldly-minded, prayerless, unmindful of spiritual prosperity and listless towards eternal things; they have no conversation in heaven; they walk not as children of the day; they do not watch; they sleep.

Hence, even they are called to remember, and reflect on their approaching end. The day is at hand; let them therefore cast off the condition of the night; let them banish sloth; let them be up betimes for the morning; let them emerge from the darkness, the inaction and the torpor; let them be arrayed and girded with the graces of the Christian life, ready for their work, ready for their judgment, ready and looking for their reward in glory.

The night is spending fast,—already the day of spiritual duty and privilege and blessing, is dawning. Soon will it shine—higher and brighter—more and more to the perfect day.

It is high time then to wake out of sleep—for now is our salvation nearer, &c.

This consideration should,

I. In the first place, stir us up to great diligence in the duties that are incumbent on us as Christians, in the little and diminishing time that remains to us for their accomplishment.

We are to glorify God here, in a style which is not possible in Heaven. Here we are to grow in grace, and increase to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Our corruptions are to be subdued; our evil passions to be overcome; our vain, malicious, discontented, envious, revengeful feelings to be corrected, or rather extirpated; our hearts to be purified by faith; our affections to be elevated; our love to be warmed; our knowledge enlarged; our patience perfected; our usefulness augmented; our light must shine; we must do good as we have opportunity to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.

We must “serve our generation according to the will of God.

Other men are to be won by our efforts and by our good conversation in Christ—who may be our companions in glory. *There* we shall serve God and glorify Him. But *here*, there are attainments and services appropriate to our present condition and relations. We often confess our short-comings and our sins: but, however, we may view them or forget, or ignore them, we *do not desire to be found in them and under their dominion at death*, nor expect to stand in judgment under their burden, nor to enter heaven with them. We often live, and indulge ourselves in passions and thoughts and purposes, *in the midst of which we neither intend, nor wish to die*; which we know cannot help us on to heaven, and must thence forever be excluded, or they will exclude us. How long, then, do we mean to cherish them? If ever, then, we intend to do all our duty to ourselves, to our neighbour, to God, to our soul's peace, we must be about this business now. We need all the time that yet remains to us, and to strive, with all the aids of grace, to get the mastery at once over the evil that is in us, and to do the good that God commands us, for the night cometh in which no man can work.

It is in this way, we are to glorify God on the earth. We are not our own; he has bought us, with a price; our bodies and our souls are to be employed for him. All our obligations to His grace, to his command, and his exhortation; all the sense of grateful dependence and thankful enjoyment of his blessings, various and undeserved, through all our lives thus far; and all our privileges in the gospel, and in the midst of the heavenly places into which we are raised up by Christ Jesus, in the precious truths and exalted worship of the house of God, and in the exceeding great and precious promises of his faithful word;—all the mercy and love displayed in the gift of Jesus Christ; all our redemption by his blood, and our high destiny as the heirs of heaven; and all the purpose and object of our creation and our regeneration by the Holy Ghost, that we might be a peculiar, a holy, a zealous people for God; and all the consideration of our own peace and comfort, in doing and suffering the will of God for our sanctification and salvation;—and the thought that time is allotted to us for all this very work,—and the fact that our Redeemer and Lord, claims us for it, and expects it of us,—that his claims reach onward through eternity, and pervade every world, and his service is the employment of Heaven and the fit occupation of the earth,—and that thus we become meet for the divine inheritance;—nay, when we have done our utmost we are still unprofitable servants, and far below our duty;—all this impels us to break off sins by righteousness, to let the time, past of our lives suffice for the low and selfish ways of a carnal world and a corrupt nature, and to be diligent, expectant, earnest, like men acquitting ourselves, and as faithful servants,

looking for the coming of their Lord, to reckon with them and to reward them.

Have any of you, beloved, a well founded hope in Him? Surely you will exercise it in waiting for him, in serving, and in glorifying and praising Him, all the more as you see the day approaching. Have you not such a hope? Remember all his benefits: his goodness leads to repentance, and to the attainment of that hope which maketh not ashamed.

Consider, all of you, *how much of our time has been misspent*, that ought to have been devoted to God, and laid out for heaven in becoming more and more in sympathy and adaptation for its high service and joy. "We were the servants of sin," of wordly lusts, and selfish desires. And is it not enough that we have so long "wrought the will of the Gentiles," in living so much like thoughtless, sensual, and unbelieving pagans? Consider, too, *how near we are to our end*. We may regret the evil of our past life, yet rejoice too, on some accounts, that it is past, its sorrow with its sin so far gone. But *what shall we do in the future?* We cannot atone for our past sin. *That may be remitted* through the blood of Christ if we are truly penitent. But penitent we must be—and all the future must vindicate the sincerity of our repentance, as we follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. But how little is the time that is left for this indispensable attainment? The night cometh in which no man can work. Hence, the more earnestly should we arouse, and act, that the very little point of time,—the moment's space that is left for our use, should be adequately occupied and employed.

But, now, in connection with this thought, we may,

II. In the second place, consider the nearness, the nature, and the place of our salvation, and be stimulated to a more active, increased, and becoming preparation for the companionships and service of heaven itself.

It is an amazing thought, yet it is true, and I repeat it, that if you are Christians indeed, you are *shortly* to be introduced into that blessed abode!

What a change from the present, what a revolution in all our circumstances and associations! What a disencumbering of all this array of our flesh, with all its interests and pleadings, its wants and its blinding deceits, which have so often imposed upon us the pretences of selfishness, and pride, and ungodly lusts, to nourish and strengthen our baser passions, and to sanction our inconsistencies and ways that are not good, nor after the simplicity, the meekness, and the purity of Christ, our life and our example! What an unveiling of all hearts, and of our hearts! What seeing as we are seen, and knowing as we are

known ; yea, what a *being seen*, and *being known*, just as we are, and for exactly what we are worth ! Men have sometimes foolishly wished that all mankind wore windows in their breasts, so that the secrets of all hearts might be read. Such knowledge would be unfit for us here ; it would be intolerable. But, in heaven, it *will* be realized ; and all companionships, associations, relations, will be transparent, as they will be harmonious. But, while there, all will be confidence and love, and the happiness of heaven, once gained, shall be unalloyed, I cannot help thinking, sometimes, that in *the near view of approaching death*, there may be misgivings, and a dread of meetings and disclosures, and adjustments (if not of partings), as if they would, for a moment at least, be embarrassing and inflict a pang ! It seems now, to us, to be natural to feel as if, in that solemn hour, we might, even though pardoned and purified, and fearing no evil, nevertheless anticipate such meetings with those who have gone before us, with such reflections as these : “ How we may have been partakers with each other’s sins ; how we may have treated each other with neglect, or unkindness, or injustice, or cruelty ; how we have lived after they died ; and, now, we are about to meet them, recollecting our dishonor to their memory, though we cherished it, and how we did injustice to their hearts’ hopes and to those they left behind them ! ” Friends that were unreconciled ; families that were alienated ; wounds that rankled in secret, until death itself came and found us, remorseful enough, albeit penitent for all this, but penitent, perhaps, only in that last hour of earth when conscience shook us, and repentance seemed too late, and reparation was no longer possible ! To injure the living is bad enough ! but to injure the dead ! and to remember those injuries over which the grave has closed ! and to anticipate, with shame, such meetings with those whom we have long believed, and comforted ourselves with believing, were in heaven ! Surely, it would not be strange if we thought beforehand of that hour with misgivings and downcast hearts, and the fear of hearing them say, “ Is this thy kindness to thy friend ! ” And *more than all this*,

“ When Thou my righteous Judge shall come
To take Thy ransomed people home, ”

when, with faith and hope, are still mingled our penitent tears and the consciousness of all our misdoings, even while we are trusting in Jesus and *are* reconciled to God, there *would seem* to linger around that dying hour, some dread, and shame, and sense of unfitness in us, even for that gracious, yet solemn interview with our God and Saviour ! some shadow from the past projected forward to the very hour, when

“ Our Lord shall stand disclosed
In majesty severe ” —

something of that feeling of which, even now, we *are* conscious. while our soul, though resting as it does in the pardons of the cross, still confesses as we sing,

“ When, rising from the bed of death,
O'erwhelmed with guilt and fear,
I see my Maker, face to face,
O, how shall I appear ! .

Yea, still, while pardon may be found,
And mercy may be sought,
My heart, with inward horror shrinks
And trembles at the thought ! ”

And what does all this suggest, but that, now, in the accepted time and the day of salvation, we should make our calling and election sure, and seek for immediate and perfect reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, and *as* the fruit of it, live in friendship with our fellow Christians, and dwell in love with our kindred, and confess our faults. one to the other, and make all restitution for injuries, and forbear one another in love, and so live in mutual confidence that our prayers may be offered without hindrance, as becomes those who are heirs together of eternal life, and expect to live together and to love each other forever in heaven.

In the bright world to which we go, are already gathered and garnered all the dear loved ones who died in Christ, and crossed the flood before us, with hopes and prayers for our coming to join them : there, too, are all the saints of all ages, the spirits of just men made perfect ; the holy prophets, apostles and martyrs who sealed their testimony for Jesus with their blood ; there, too, the innumerable company of angels ; there too is Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and God, the judge of all. There, too, in the heavenly City, there is perfect purity and joy, and an eternity of holy employment, and the service of God day and night in his temple. There, even now, where we expect to come, God is governing, Christ is interceding (a priest upon his throne) ; the Spirit is ever proceeding from the Father and the Son to sanctify His people who are yet upon the earth ; and the angels that excel in strength, also, go forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation ; and there the redeemed from earth are praising glorifying, and serving, and enjoying God day and night in His temple forever. There is no unholiness, no note of discord, no unfriendly hearts, no rebellious temper, no disobedience nor imperfection whatever. If you are Christians *you are to be joined to that glorious company* and pure and lovely life. Every year, and every day, is bringing you nearer and nearer to it.

Ought it not to engage our thoughts, our hearts, our prayers, and our labors here ? Ought we not to examine ourselves to

see if we are in sympathy with the character of heavenly life ; life in heaven. Ought we not to set our affection upon it, to live for it, to acquire meetness for it, to attain by practical and experimental godliness, a *holy sagacity and skill* in God's service here, that we may be ready to be advanced to its higher forms and more illustrious exercises in the glory that shall be both brought to us and revealed in us as those whose conversation here has been in heaven! You would not have so mean an estimate and expectation as barely to get to heaven without acquaintance or fitness for its dignified and holy service! You would not be satisfied, barely to get in ; but to have an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom, etc. If the low hope (and selfish I had well nigh called it), do not entirely exclude the man who barely looks for escape and refuge, and if its lowest place be unutterably and surpassingly glorious, yet what is it to be like the elders that sit on the high thrones ; like Moses, and Abraham, and David, and Isaiah, and Paul, and John, yea to be like Christ himself!

It is this exalted company—for such exalted fitness,—we should aspire ; and all the more, as now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. As the end draws nigh—and the time is short—let us *all the more* strive to set our souls in order for the glory to which we aspire.

III. In the third place, the nearness of our salvation may well encourage joy on account of our speedy accession to our eternal home.

How would the voyager feel in returning from a foreign clime ? There wandering, he has felt amid his toilsome business and fatiguing travel and its discomforts, the pain of absence and the want of all those domestic joys which support and compensate amid manifold privations. He has been solaced by the hope of return ; and so much the more, as he sees the appointed time drawing nearer.

I have seen lads at school, mark in a column, one after another, the days that are to intervene before vacation and home ; and day by day tearing away from the column, one and another mark, gleefully watching the diminishing number that showed the shortening time.

I have myself, when thousands of miles away across the ocean, after dragging at each remove a lengthening chain, felt a sensible relief, when the eastern limit of my wandering had been reached, and the very next day would dawn on my footsteps set toward the west, and I should be homeward bound. But when the traveler realizes that he has embarked ; that each favoring gale is speeding him toward the loved shores of country and home, how little does he reckon his recent toils : he is scarcely

aware of still attendant peril ; he looks forward to the roof-tree and the fireside, which not all the waste of waters around him can efface from his anticipating heart. He fondly imagines the joyful greeting ; and when at length he discerns, skirting the distant horizon, the shores and hills of his native land, what an eager, longing, beaming eye he casts abroad to catch every loved haunt and familiar scene. There are the darlings of his enraptured heart ; he can almost embrace them from the deck on which he stands and gazes. There is the reward of his toil. He lands and gives up his soul to his sacred home-bred joys.

What are *we* now but strangers and pilgrims on the earth ? Heaven is our home. There is the city which hath foundations. The ransomed of the Lord are nearing it every day. It is theirs patiently to wait for it, while yet they are conscious of a desire to depart and be with Christ, forever with the Lord. Death itself is but a narrow sea, and it cannot make our souls afraid.

IV. The nearness of salvation is adapted to animate and comfort the heart under its varied burdens of trial and sorrow.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. In the throng and pressure, there is hope of deliverance, and of final, utter exemption from their recurrence ; and of surpassing compensation in that land where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

But, "now," many of our appointed tribulations are *actually over, and done with forever*. They are now fewer than when we first encountered them. The allotment is continually diminished by the measure of every endurance. Soon, the *very last one of all* will alone remain. Who would faint before such a prospect of the *near* termination of all his troubles. You *contend* for a glorious prize. So far from being dispirited, every new trial should be met with cheerfulness, because there is one less to encounter. Every victory gives new strength and added skill ; and greater grace and the hopes of success inspired by every previous success, or strong endurance, makes the burden lighter, and the foe less formidable, and the conquest easier ; and we are more prepared for the final struggle, and the victor's shout of triumph. You are *nearer* to the prize ; it is ready to be seized ; all things give assurance that you will gain it ; all things work together for your eternal good.

If it were told you that the very last trial is come, how would you be braced up to meet it ; and especially if you were assured of success. You have that assurance. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith in the blood of the Lamb. Your armour is of heavenly temper ; and the arm of the Captain of salvation is with you ; and the joy of the Lord is your strength. And if you are very near to the gates of the grave,

why, the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death—and death, the last enemy, *shall be* destroyed. For you it is then reserved to shout, "O death, where is thy sting, etc." (1 Cor. iv. : 55-57.)

Be steadfast, then, patient, sober, and hope on unto the end. The Lord is at hand. His coming draweth nigh. Wait for Him.

Rejoice, O grieving heart!
 The hours fly fast;
 With each some sorrow dies,
 With each some shadow flies,
 Until at last
 The red dawn in the east
 Bids weary night depart,
 And pain is past.
 Rejoice, then, grieving heart,
 The hours fly fast!

V. This nearness of salvation ought to be a powerful inducement to forsake all sin and worldliness. (Vs. 12, 13, 14.)

What has a Christian so near his crown to do with the strifes, the lusts, the ways, the schemes, the beggarly elements of this passing world? You hope soon to be in Heaven. Will you live as if your home, and life, and heart, were all of the earth—earthly?

Christian! think of these things. Be diligent, that you may be found of Him in peace. Let your conversation (citizenship) be in Heaven. Let your deportment correspond with it. Be full of joy in the Holy Ghost. Be comforted. Be ashamed of sin. Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth, at the right hand of God. Endure affliction by the prospect of the coming rest. In everything give thanks, and show the temper and disposition of the guileless, peaceful, trusting, believing, loving children of your Heavenly Father. Now is your salvation nearer, etc.

Sinner! what is near to you? "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and damnation slumbereth not!" The judgment! Eternity! Eternity in Hell!

No cheering, sustained hope is before you. No attendant angels guard your way, nor accompany you to Heaven. Sorrow succeeds to your chosen joy; and death, and night, and wo, wind up the scene!

O repent, repent! The *night* cometh: the day is far spent! It is high time: Awake! awake! Will you, can you, dare you sleep on?

Jesus still waits indeed. Now, now, now is the accepted time. But *now*, if ye will hear his voice; *now*, if ye harden not your heart; *now*, it is safe, and practicable. The *alternative* may be "NEVER!" never shall ye enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

The bones of God's ancient people bleached in the wilderness, fallen there because of their unbelief; shall your souls perish too, from the very threshold of salvation? *Shall* He swear in His wrath concerning *you*, ye shall *never* see my rest?

SERMON V.

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ECONOMY A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

“When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”—ST. JOHN vi. 12.

These words occur in the account of the feeding of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes, a miracle which alone, of all our Lord's mighty works, is recorded by all four of the Evangelists. This circumstance has led some to consider the miracle as particularly significant and marvellous, and, for that reason, so carefully recorded. It is hard to see, however, in what respect there was a greater display of Divine power, in thus creating food on the instant, than there was in turning water into wine, or in hushing a furious storm by a word, or in calling a dead man out of the grave wherein he had lain four days. A more natural explanation of the fact is gained by considering that the three first Evangelists, in giving a synopsis of our Lord's life, would naturally record this as they did others of his miracles of mercy, while the fourth one, who wrote a supplementary gospel, was induced to depart from his usual custom, of omitting what the others had stated, and to mention this one, because it furnished the occasion of one of our Saviour's discourses, of which he alone was inspired to preserve the record.

But whatever may have been John's motive for recounting the miracle, he alone has stated the interesting circumstances mentioned in the text. All inform us that the twelve baskets of fragments were collected after the multitude had been fed, a statement which shows how ample and complete the supply had been, and also brings the occurrence into harmony, with the similar, but less striking miracle told of Elisha, (2 Kings iv. 42-44.) in which twenty barley loaves and a few fresh wheaten ears were made to supply a hundred men, so that there was left over a quantity which was not needed. The text informs us that the gathering of the baskets full was not an accidental thing, nor even a spontaneous impulse of the disciples, but the result of a spe-