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SERMON DCXCVIII.

BY REV. CHARLES ROCKWELL,

BOSTON, MASS.

A SERMON FOR THE NEW YEAR.*

"This year thou shalt die."—JER. xxviii. 16.

HANANIAH, a false prophet, denied the truth of what the Most High had, through Jeremiah, foretold with regard to the length of time that the Jews were to be captives in Babylon. He said that, within two full years, they would be freed from captivity, when the Most High had declared that they should remain there a much longer time than that. Thus was this false prophet guilty of great and daring sin against God, in boldly and openly denying what his Maker had said, and thus striving to excite the Jews to disbelieve and disobey the Great Creator and Lord of all.

Hence it was that the Most High sent Jeremiah to him, saying, "Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord. So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year, in the seventh month."

So speedy, fearful, and exact was the execution of the sentence

* Preached in Philadelphia, Pa.

Beginning at the upper and the noblest, where He ought to come in as a King of Glory, through gates of triumph, He comes round and down to the last and lowest, and retreats wistfully and reluctantly, returning often—morning, noon, and night—continually seeking entrance with marvelous patience, accepting no refusal, and repulsed by no indifference to His presence, or no neglect of His message!

If he be admitted, joy unspeakable is in the house, and shall be henceforth. The dreary dwelling is filled with light from the brightness of his countenance, and every chamber is perfumed from the fragrance of his garments. Peace and hope, love and joy, abide together the house—for Christ himself takes up his abode therein. But if, after his long knocking at the door and patient waiting for entrance, his solicitation be refused or neglected, by-and-by there shall come a time when you, who have denied him, shall be denied of him. For when you shall knock at the gate of heaven for admittance into the mansions which he has prepared from the foundation of the world, he will say unto you, as you said unto him, Depart! But that dreadful day has not yet come, and he still stands at the door—his locks wet with the dews of the morning—and waits to be invited into the chamber of your soul. Hear His voice once more, and yield to its gentle persuasion, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me!*"—*The Independent.*

PREACHING.

BY REV. M. L. RICE, D.D.

THE Word should be preached in faith. I do not mean simply, that ministers of Christ must believe the truths they proclaim, but that they should preach *with the expectation of success*. How soon, and to what extent, decided results are to be expected, must depend, to some extent, upon circumstances; but most certainly, amongst those familiar with Christianity, many of whom are children of the covenant, the faithful minister has the right to expect success under the ordinary ministrations of the Word.

The preaching of the Gospel is designed to accomplish two principal objects—the conversion of the impenitent and the edification of believers. Both these objects each minister should expect to see attained under his ordinary and regular ministrations. I desire to call attention specially to this point, because there is reason to fear that many ministers and churches do not expect success, to any considerable extent, under the weekly ministrations of the Word. The conversion of sinners, especially, is sup-

posed to belong to times of revival, when extra services shall be enjoyed. It is true, that there ever have been, and ever will be, "set times to favor Zion;" but it is no less true, that it is both the right and the duty of ministers and churches to expect to hear, from week to week, the inquiry—"What must I do to be saved?" For—

1st. They have in their hands the very means ordained of God to this end. They have that Gospel which commends itself to the consciences of men in the sight of God, which is the power of God to salvation. Surely he who goes forth at God's bidding to accomplish an end, and faithfully uses the means divinely ordained to that end, ought to expect not to labor in vain.

2d. Christ's ministers go forth, cheered by the precious promise of the Lord—"Lo, I am with you always." Following the leadings of his providence, they choose their field, and begin their work. Have they not the right—is it not their duty—to plead his promise, and expect its fulfilment?

It is not to be forgotten that *real* success is not always immediately apparent. Impressions may be made on the mind of a sinner to-day, which may not produce visible results for months or years. The precious seed are often lodged in the minds of the young, which do not produce fruit till they reach mature life. Dr. Scott states that he once complained, in a New Year's discourse, that for a whole twelvemonth he had seen no fruit of his preaching; "yet it appeared within the course of the next twelvemonth, that no less than ten or twelve had been brought to 'consider their ways' during that discouraging year." But whilst it is true that the success of the faithful minister is not always at once apparent, and that the full extent of his usefulness will never be known in this world; it is still true, that we have the right to expect evidence that our labors are not in vain.

We have not only reason to expect success, but such expectation is essential to our greatest usefulness. For—

It exerts an important influence upon the choice of subjects, and the preparation of discourses. To the minister who preaches without expecting results, there may seem to be no very special reason why one topic should be selected rather than another; or why in the treatment of a subject one method should be preferred to another. But he who aims and expects to make decided impressions, will carefully consider the characters and conditions of his hearers, and will seek to adapt the means to the end. When Paul preached in idolatrous Athens, he assailed their polytheism, and proclaimed the one true God. When he preached in Damascus, he confounded the Jews, "proving that this is very Christ." He expected success, he adapted his discourses to the people; and he was not disappointed.

2d. The expectation of success has a powerful influence upon the *delivery* of a discourse. How can the minister who has selected his subject and prepared his sermon in the confident

hope that it will feed and strengthen believers, and that it may make saving impressions upon some unconverted soul, deliver that discourse in a dull, monotonous manner, or in an artificial style? Will he not necessarily throw his whole soul into it, and compel his hearers to feel, that he feels himself speaking to immortal beings, in view of judgment and eternity? But it is not in human nature to preach thus under the disheartening influence of unbelief.

3d. It leads to earnest prayer. We know that depraved men will not be converted by the power of our arguments and the earnestness of our appeals; and we know, as well, that the growth of Christians depends upon the continued influence of the Holy Spirit. The desire and expectation of success, then, will send us to the throne of grace, there to offer "the effectual, fervent prayer." Like the Apostles, "we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word?"

4th. It will lead to careful inquiry, if success be not enjoyed, why the blessing is withheld; and thus hindrances will be discovered and removed. Those who have no particular expectation of success, are not disappointed by lack of success. Consequently no earnest inquiry into the causes is instituted. Therefore errors are not detected, and stumbling blocks are not removed. In not a few instances the cause of lack of success is in the minister himself; in other instances it is in the Church; often it is in both. Those who expect success will inquire earnestly and prayerfully why it is not enjoyed; and this inquiry, as in multitudes of instances, will secure it.

5th. It will lead to private inquiry and conversation with the pious and with the impenitent—especially with the latter. In multitudes of instances, deep impressions are made on the minds of impenitent persons under the preaching of the Word, which, with proper attention and encouragement, might result in conversion. But as neither pastor nor people are expecting such impressions to be made, their anxiety remains unknown, and worldly cares and influences soon banish them from the mind; or they continue in a dark and bewildered state for months, or years. The eye of the faithful minister who expects success, is quick to detect in his hearers evidences of serious thoughtfulness, and to follow up the impressions made under his public ministrations with suitable private instructions. He "watches for souls."

6th. It will secure the blessing of God upon the preached Word. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is as truly a Christian virtue, in relation to the duties of life, as in relation to prayer; and unbelief is no less offensive to God in the former than in the latter. "We walk by faith," as well as pray in faith. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." We honor God in believing this and similar precious promises; and we dishonor him in doubting them.