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SERMON V.

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THE POWERS OF DARKNESS HAVE THEIR HOUR.

“BUT this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”—LUKE xxii. 53.

IN every great struggle, whatever the character of the cause, or of the combatants, and however decisive is to be the ultimate victory, there is a season of uncertainty and suspense, when success seems to sway now this way and now that, and the party destined to be defeated has his turn of confidence, and the lookers on are in doubt how the day is to be decided. But such seasons are not ordinarily of long duration, though they may be renewed again and again before the final victory is reached. And they have lessons to teach us of vast importance; and uses, toward the great end for which every wise and righteous struggle is attempted, of incalculable value.

It is too obvious to have escaped the notice of discerning minds, even without the aid of revelation, and still more with it, that there is going on, and has been ever since creation, a mighty con-

test between two great moral powers. The wise men of the ancient pagan world saw this, though they were entirely at fault when they undertook to account for it. The system of dualism which prevailed extensively in former days all over the East, and is exemplified in the Persian doctrine of a good and evil being dividing the supremacy of the universe, and ever contending for the mastery, does but represent what is the result of observation, true in respect to its outward facts, though failing to penetrate to the interior causes. The Scriptures teach us that there is no equality nor approach toward equality, either in power or extent of dominion, between good and evil. The one is omnipotent, the other a finite and only permitted exception. The Lord of righteousness and truth holds the Prince of Darkness, error, and sin subject to his irresistible sway, and is sure ultimately to destroy all his works and "bruise" him "under his feet." And yet, for wise reasons, inscrutable to us, he has seen fit to give both him and the malignant and hateful cause which he represents a certain latitude, purposing to overrule the whole for the wisest and best ends.

Hence we find, all the world over, manifest tokens of such a contest. Good and evil are militant here, truth and error, are militant. The Church, which is the great earthly representative and embodiment of the cause of truth and righteousness, is militant. Its members and advocates are set forth by their divine Master as sheep among wolves. They are obliged to watch, to take to themselves the whole armor of God, to resist steadfastly, to be on their guard against the seductive influence even of the smiles and frowns of the world. Nor have we reason to believe that this external struggle is anything more than the out-cropping of a far deeper antagonism that goes down to the very foundations on which all our hopes rest. Under the permission of the great Lord of the Universe, there is a contest going on at the very seat of empire. Evil is measuring its strength with good on the largest scale. The Prince of Light himself is assailed by the Prince of Darkness, and that with hope to succeed. And as in the struggles which we witness on a small scale in this lower sphere, such is the swaying to and fro of the battle, that the weak hearts of good men often palpitate with apprehension, so it would not be strange if, in the grander and to us invisible sphere, strong angels, looking on, should sometimes need to summon all their faith to feel perfectly unmoved, though under the banner of Omnipotence. The uncertainty is in *us*; that is, in our short-sightedness not in the cause, assuredly not in God, who from eternity decrees, and it is fixed.

It has pleased God, in his infinite wisdom, to allow one grand action in this mighty contest to take place on earth—a grand encounter, not between subordinates, but between the rulers them-

selves of the conflicting hosts. Its field was the life of Jesus, in which the Lord of glory stooped to conquer. It culminated at the cross, where in being vanquished, he was the vanquisher, and submitting voluntarily to be overcome, he rose triumphant and led captivity captive.

That was a dark hour when the Son of God, all bleeding with the sweat of Gethsemane, was seized by a ruffian band and hurried off to be crucified—when Judas kissed him, and Peter denied him, and the fearful train of his mockings, scourgings, and buffetings began. We need not wonder that the weak faith of his disciples flickered, and they were ready to give up and say it is all over, for his own fainting flesh needed an angel's strengthening, and even his human soul revealed itself as ready to faint, in the bitter cry: "My God! My God! why hast they forsaken me?" That was the hour in which the hosts of Satan, which invaded and took possession of this world of ours at the fall of Eden, but to subdue which the Captain of our salvation had himself come and taken the field in person at the head of his faithful ones, seemed on the point to get a finishing victory. "This," said he to the band that were sent to take him, "is your hour, and the power of darkness."

It becomes us to beware lest we presumptuously and profanely apply to ourselves and our petty trials and struggles what belongs exclusively to him, who as far surpasses us in the depth of his sufferings as in the dignity of his exalted nature. And yet we can not but remember that he is our pattern; and, in all the opposition when he encountered, was fighting our battles and bearing our infirmities. We can not but remember that he embodies in himself, in his own person and history, the whole cause of truth and righteousness which it is his purpose to establish. Every one of its struggles are but part and parcel of his great struggle. It is the same, essentially, whether it takes place in some secret corner of a Christian's heart, or on the broad historic field of a nation or a continent—the same when the war is that of the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, as where lust, pride and selfishness, taking on some outward organization and pursuing some outward object, contend in arms or with the weapons of detraction, sophistry, or political combination, to obstruct the progress of religion and humanity, or to establish some destructive falsehood. The human combatants may be partly wrong or partly right on both sides. But wherever there is a right and a wrong *principle* contending for the mastery, there is the cause of Christ on the one side and the cause of error, sin, and Satan on the other. And in every such case, as the disciple is not above his Lord, the sincere supporters of the cause of truth and righteousness must expect to experience, in their degree, the same vicissitudes, and be subject to the same sort of conditions.

1. Taking our stand, then, upon these principles, and judging in the light of the great fact in our Lord's history brought to view in the text, we conclude, in the first place, that, in the progress of every great and good cause, occasions must be expected to arise when, to a superficial eye, it would seem as if the evil power was going to triumph.

It is manifestly not the plan of divine wisdom to give to the righteous cause an easy victory. It must be won by effort. It must be pursued with patience and perseverance against discouragement. The best of our resources and strength must be put in requisition. Ease and comfort and every sort of inferior interest must be subordinated, and, if need be, sacrificed in order to secure it. After all, we must be made to feel that our best and strongest efforts cannot but fail, unless a higher power interpose in our behalf, working with us and for us; that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the merit to those who might seem to have achieved the most, but the glory and the power belong wholly to Him in whose hands the ablest and most faithful men are but instruments.

In order to bring about these and the like conditions, discouragements, and what we are wont to call ill-success, perform an essential part among the forces of progress. It has been so throughout the history of the world at all its memorable stages. The most rapid advancement has not been made at those periods when the current glided smoothly over an even surface: but rather at those when, choked with vast obstructions and confined in narrow space, it gathered up its chafing waters, and, defiant of opposition, rushed on, carrying every thing before it. The point of time immediately preceding those on-rushings has been almost always one not of fierce conflict only, but of painful discouragement. And for this reason it is, no doubt, in the wisdom of that far-reaching and deeply-penetrating providence, whose prerogative it is to bring good out of evil, and whose grandest opportunity is ever found in man's extremity, that we find these points, black as the curtains of midnight sometimes to the eye of nature, all down the progress of the world in the experience of every good cause.

If we look into the history of the individual soul, in those cases in which the moral struggle constituting the birth-throes of the new spiritual life is most apparent, the moment of divine peace and the sense of safety in God is very apt to be in close proximity with the hour of fiercest agony, and the near approach to a state of despair. The experience of the Apostle Paul shows us that the same is true of the fierce conflict of which the Christian's heart is the arena. His cry of agony, "I am carnal, sold under sin!" "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" is the immediate precursor of the comforting assurance: "There is now, therefore, no condemnation."

And what is true of the inward conflict, is equally so of those more material ones which take place on the open field of the world. Review the annals of much-favored and heaven-guarded Israel. How dark seemed the prospect of their future when, in Egypt, they cried unto the king, and received for answer; "Ye are idle, ye are idle, there shall no straw be given you. Get you unto your burdens!" How low lay the crushed cause of true religion when that mighty man Elijah, the Tishbite, ran away three days' journey into the wilderness, and sat down under a juniper-tree and cried: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers!" How utterly lost seemed it when, the ark of God being taken captive, the aged Eli fell back in his seat and his neck brake! And how almost desperate when in the rebellion and civil war which broke out in the reign of David, "tidings came to the king, saying the hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom, and the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased with Absalom;" and the king himself, being a fugitive, "went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up and had his head covered, and he went bare-foot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up weeping as they went." Ahithophel, the king's trusted counsellor, had gone over to the rebel side, and lent all his shrewdness and experience against the master who had trusted him; and Shimei, taking advantage of his monarch's weakness, cursed, and taunted, and threw stones at him, as if he were some contemptible vagabond.

Turning from these ancient days to those subsequent to our Lord's ascension, we hardly know where to select, so numerous and striking are the examples that crowd themselves upon our notice. The little shivering band assembled in 'an upper room, the martyrdom of Stephen, the imprisonment of Peter, the conspiracy against Paul at Jerusalem, the martyrdom of almost all the Apostles, the persecutions under the Roman Emperors, the spreading heresies and schisms, the internal contentions, the fearful papal apostacy, the martyr deaths of Wickliffe and Huss, of Ridley, Latimer, and Rogers, the triumphant prevalence of infidelity at certain periods in France, England, Germany, and America, and more disheartening than all, the periods of almost universal apathy and worldliness among those who professed to love and honor the holy Gospel, are witnesses, standing all along the line of the Christian history, that the most sacred and divine of causes has not been without its season of deep depression. The attentive reader of history marks them (and almost shudders as he reads) at several memorable crises in the progress of the Protestant Reformation. The cause of missions to the heathen has again and again fallen upon them in almost all parts of the field of its efforts. They form a conspicuous feature in the struggles for civil

liberty in England and on the continent of Europe. They sorely tried the patriotism and perseverance of our fathers at many a disheartening crises in our own revolutionary struggle.

II. At periods like these, the question that springs most spontaneously to the lips is that of the souls of the saints under the altar: "How long?" While they last, the faith and courage of the best and strongest men are put to the severest test. Troubles thicken upon them, and come trooping in from the most unexpected quarters. Resources fail where they were expected to be most abundant. Disasters, as unlooked for as they are overpowering, frustrate the most prudent schemes and render nugatory the most laborious and expensive preparations. Dissentions and betrayals within the camp correspond to plots and hostile onsets from the beleaguering forces. Faint-hearted friends fall off and say it is of no use to contend farther. False friends, no longer kept in awe by the idea of power, take occasion to unmask themselves. The really indifferent throw the weight of their numbers against what now appears the unprosperous side. The sympathy of the world, which was fondly counted upon, discovers itself to be only sympathy for what favors their own interest. Foes take courage to do what they would not dare to do in other circumstances. Demolished foes—old vanquished principles of error and inhumanity, rise and re-assert themselves with startling impudence. Calumny is busy; taunts and sneers abound; cursing tongues are let loose. It almost seems, so strange is the concurrence of adverse influences, as if the providence of God itself was setting the mark of his disapproval on the cause which was undertaken in simple obedience to his will. And the enemies of all good cry: "Aha! so would we have it."

IT IS THEIR HOUR, and they must make the most of it. It is the hour of trial, of discipline, of severe testing to the champion of the righteous cause. He was as certain to pass through it, when he undertook the holy enterprise, as night to follow day, or storms to alternate with sunshine. He does but share in this experience the lot of the most noble and excellent.

It is their hour. But these words suggest an animating truth adapted to sustain the patience and nerve the perseverance of good and true men under their severe discouragements. It is *but* for an hour, for a certain limited and comparatively short time, that the hostility of the powers of darkness will be suffered to hinder the righteous cause. So it has always been throughout the history of the world, and so the explicit teachings of the holy Scriptures and all the known principles of God's government over the world assure us it will be. Longer or shorter, severer or lighter, more extensive or more limited, more frequent or at greater intervals, such seasons are exactly marked by that divine

Wisdom which, to accomplish the best ends, afflicts his people "in measure," and does not "leave them wholly unpunished."

Looking back upon the past, who of us would have wished our Revolutionary fathers to have had an easier task? It was their sufferings and heroic conflict with opposing difficulties that procured some of the best elements of the inheritance they left us. And looking back upon the vicissitudes which have attended thus far our own fearful struggle, what discerning mind, bent on securing, not peace and union only, but the highest permanent well-being and true excellence of a great Christian nation, can have the slightest regret that God did not permit victory to perch at once on our vain-glorious and self-confident banner? We were not fit for it. We were in no condition of mind to make a worthy use of it. There was need, first, of the fiery baptism of national suffering, apprehension, and mortification, to consume the encumbering chaff of our follies and purge out the corruption of our public and private vices; to arouse the people to a true sense of their privileges and the noble mission for which God's providence had planted them here: to call forth their best energies, and supplant selfishness and party spirit with generous patriotism and a spirit of self-sacrifice, and, more than all, to awaken in us a sense of our dependence upon God, and make us feel how completely we lie in his hands and are subject to his providential disposal. If in this hard school we prove ourselves docile scholars, and if, as we confidently believe, the line of God's great purposes of beneficence, of the establishment of wise laws and healthful authority, of securing liberty and the blessings of brotherhood to all that wear the form and possess the attributes of man, of diffusing Christian knowledge, order, and virtue among all nations, and proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the remotest corners of the earth—if the line of all these great and glorious aims of the divine bounty lies in the path of our success in this great enterprise, we have no occasion for discouragement. Assuredly the hour of darkness and solicitude will ere long pass away, and all these numerous and formidable obstacles, both at home and abroad, which have thus far tasked our faith and perseverance, will give place to the serene consciousness of having accomplished a most noble work for our age and for posterity, for humanity and for the cause of God.

It is their hour. It will last, in this case as in every other, whether on the field of the world or within the narrower walls of the individual heart, in the mere spiritual struggles which the Church carries on against infidelity, heresy, and cold impenitence, or those in which the moral force comes in collision with material ones and demands material weapons and the intervention of the State, just so long as Divine Wisdom sees the need of its fierce but purifying fires, in order to prepare his people for a true victory, not of selfishness and pride, but of truth, beneficence, and godliness.

III. And now the question, most important, because most practical of all, presents itself, in the third place : What will the wise man do during the continuance, or in view of the possibility of such seasons? I can of course, in the time that remains to me, offer only a few cursory suggestions.

In the first place, it seems most obviously the part of wisdom that we betake ourselves to the profoundest thoughtfulness, study, and self-reflection. The difficulties that, like armed bands, come trooping upon us, summon us to measure carefully not only our abilities and resources, but the real strength and virtue of our cause, the motives which animate us, and the precise aim which is to be kept steadily in view. We are so apt to get corrupted in our motives, and wander, before we think of it out of the high road of duty, into some by-path of selfishness or ambition ; we are so apt, even where we have " begun in the spirit," to be caught seeking " to be made perfect by the flesh ! " It requires the most vigilant watch, the most careful and frequent re-examination, to prevent the worthiest cause from being betrayed in such hands as ours. In view of such seasons, our faith and courage need to be re-inforced by new contemplations on the sacred and binding reasons which impelled us to the undertaking—the unanswerable *must* and *ought*, which left us no alternative but to contend and conquer. The question, too, requires to be considered, whether we have done our duty thus far, and brought to bear upon the enterprise that strength and zeal and patience and heroic self-devotion which its intrinsic worthiness and pressing claims on us entitled it to demand. We need especially to consider where our great strength lies, and whether forgetfulness of *that* be not the reason that Samson finds the murderous Philistines upon him, and he, with all his giant muscles, weak like any other man !

We are summoned in the next place, to divest ourselves, and, as far as may be in our power, divest others who act with us, of every encumbering passion and side interest, that we may devote ourselves with concentration of energies to the duty and work of the hour. Thousands lose their immortal souls, because, in seeking salvation, they are divided in their purposes. Thousands of professed Christians almost waste their lives because, in their purpose to serve God and get the victory over the world, there is no singleness. So in the struggles of the Church. So in those great national struggles in which, under the guise of material and temporal issues, are involved great fundamental principles of humanity and religion. The State is just as much a divine institution as the Church. The sword, when wielded for the defence of a nation, in accordance with the law which bids the powers that be bear it not in vain, is as truly an instrument of God as the sword of the Spirit. And fearful as it is, if a cause demands the taking of it, it demands equally the wielding of it effectively. Our pres-

ent struggle is either all wrong, and every man who gives it the slightest encouragement to be condemned, or we are bound, at whatever cost, not for our own sakes chiefly, but for the world's, for the sake of the progress of the blessed Gospel, for the Church's sake, and for God's sake, to carry it through. Oh! how poorly have we appreciated, how feebly have we risen to the conception of the high, awful, and most responsible trust which divine providence has committed to us! Rebellion is resolute, rebellion is closely compacted, and with singleness of purpose has staked all on the terrible issue. But we with duty, loyalty, the memory of our heroic ancestors, and all the hopes of poor, oppressed humanity spurring us forward, dally and hesitate, and ask, How is this or that going to affect *me*?—the politician with a sharp eye to the future position of his party, the merchant and manufacturer to his contracts, the money-holder to his property, the military officer to his chances of preferment, and the private citizen to his comforts. We must get over all this, and, with honest, earnest patriotism, put all we have at stake, if need be, for the accomplishment of so high a sacred and wide-reaching an enterprise. Else I fear God will find it needful to apply the goad of still sharper troubles, and perhaps, which, may his mercy spare, let loose upon us those "strong bulls of Bashan," which already, with their hostile preparations and menaces of interference, have begun to beset us.

But I hasten to call your attention to one further lesson. The facts and principles which we have just been contemplating, instead of disheartening us, should prompt us, when we have done our full duty, to a cheerful reliance on the grace and overruling providence of God. There is our chief, our only ultimate dependence. We have seen enough, during the past year, to give us a taste of what such seasons are; enough, too, to evince how adequate is the divine faithfulness to bring good out of temporary evil. It may be asked, Why, if our cause be his, did he allow rebellion to obtain such fearful headway? why afflict our armies with so many defeats and repulses? why allow corruption to assume such hideous proportions, wasting the resources of the nation? why permit the angry jealousy of foreign powers to rise to such a menacing height? why let loose two of the most fearful storms of the year, just when our two great sea-expeditions were most exposed to their fury? In my turn, I ask: Why, when the conspiracy was so strong and well prepared, and treachery so rife, was the menaced Capital saved, and not one hostile foot permitted to cross the boundary of the loyal States? why, in spite of corruption and wastefulness, have the resources of the nation proved so abundant, and the people been made so willing to supply them? why, in the terrible temptest, when the power of God alone could save, were our fleets only damaged, not disabled? why was the

almost insane anger of a foreign power curbed, as if by a strong arm at the height of its vaunting? and why after so many reverses, are our fleets and armies quietly taking possession of post after post, and every day growing stronger and stronger? My single answer to both series of questions, and they require but one is: "Chastened but not killed!" "CHASTENED, BUT NOT KILLED!" It is just so that God deals always with those whose cause he acknowledges. And these experiences, while they teach us our dependence, ought, it seems to me, to animate our confidence. Let us remember that, in this as in every other just contest, our reliance is alone upon God. Our strength, our members, our resources, the skill and valor of our leaders, all are nothing, unless we have the favor of God's providence. Daily, importunately, in all our various experiences, let us commit the cause of our dear country, with all the precious and sacred interests with which we see it freighted, to our heavenly Father. And when we have done that, let us not easily be disheartened. Many a noble cause has gone through worse embarrassments. And we can go through worse. As yet the struggle has but grazed the surface of our strength and means. If need be, we must plow a deeper furrow, to reach the hard subsoil of our self-devotion. Would we but sacrifice, as a people, our vain glory, our unworthy pride, our false ambition, our revenge and self-seeking, and, trusting in God, bring out our best strength in the cause of truth and righteousness, such a people as ours might meet the world in arms. This, I believe, is no vain boast, but the simple truth. I would not fear, in such a case, England and France combined. They might sorely afflict, but could not crush us. We should come forth from the struggle battered and torn, no doubt, but with renewed confidence, and prepared for a new career of glory and beneficence.*

This cause of ours, if it be worth any thing, if it be not a mere struggle for power, or for the gratification of sectional pride, hatred and revenge, is the cause of God, and as such, only dare we lift a finger to promote it. As for England, let us not be too bitter in our resentment, but while we calmly and heroically prepare to meet any emergency, forbear the angry and provoking retort, although she did smite her best friend in the face in the time of his adversity. As for the south, millions no doubt, among its population, are but victims of a frenzied hallucinations! They are sincere. They have been practised upon. They are the victims of a deep-laid and cunningly executed conspiracy. Our hearts beat

* When the above was delivered, February 9, 1862, the aspect of our affairs was discouraging. The most recent advices from Europe represented France as resolved on interference, and England as only partially pacified after the affair of the Trent. But the next week produced a marked change. The Emperor's speech arrived, giving assurance of continued neutrality, and news of the victories of Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Roanoke Island, followed in rapid succession.

warmly toward them. Fain would we spare them one needless pang. But we must do our duty. We must, restore, in every State and corner of the land, that rightful authority which is the bulwark of their peace and happiness as well as ours. We must strike down, in the name of truth and righteousness, the hideous demon of rebellion, in whose shout of victory the appalled nations would hear the knell of freedom and the dying groans of crushed philanthropy. This, by the help of God, cost what it may, we will do.

But I must hasten to a conclusion; and in so doing, I would recall your thoughts for a moment to the broad theme of which this particular case is but an example. It would be strange indeed, if, in our thoughts and prayers and self-sacrifices and exertions at such a time as this, the struggle which is upon us as a people, and which constitutes the peculiar responsibility of the hour, did not stand prominent. Yet we need to beware, after all, lest we fix our minds too exclusively upon that. It is significant to us, as Christians, only so far as it forms a part in that great struggle, by which an oppressed world is to be disenthralled from the dominion of evil. Other contests are going on in other parts of the world, of the same character, which demand our sympathy. There is a struggle, too, for the conversion of the world, by the overthrow of paganism, superstition, and infidelity. There is a struggle, on the arena of private and social life, for the subjugation of vice and crime, and the rescue of poor lost souls from the devices of Satan and the captivity of hell. There is the inward struggle, wherein the sinner, if he does not renounce the devil and all his works, and, penitent and believing, give up himself to Christ and become his disciple, and enlist for life and death under his banner, is lost forever; and wherein the Christian, at best only partially sanctified, must "take to himself the whole armour of God," and resist even "unto blood, striving against sin."

I apprehend, my friends, the time is not far off when the demand for a holy manliness, on the part of all who would be saved in Christ's kingdom, is to be peculiarly urgent. The powers of evil, foiled and driven back on many a field, by the dissemination of Christian knowledge, by the work of missions, by the sweet and sacred revivals which have visited our own and other lands, seem gathering themselves up for another desperate campaign. Infidelity and worldliness, and all ungodliness, will try their strength again. There will be wars, there will be dissensions among brethren, there will be sophistries and scoffings, there will be seducings and persecutions. The righteous cause will repeat, in its degree, the experience of its blessed champion. Its enemies will again have their hour. But it will be only an hour. We cry: "Who is on the Lord's side?" It is time that men take their positions. Neutrality in such a conflict is rebellion. Our Captain says: "He

that is not with me is against me." "If any man will be a friend of the world, he is the enemy of God." The impenitent must be converted ; for his heart is against Christ. Though his hand may wield a valiant weapon among his friends. The undecided, the almost persuaded, are in the hostile ranks. Who will give himself, with a loyal self-devotion, to the Prince of Light and the great Captain of our salvation ? His professed followers need to gird their armour closely about them. The stirring title of a Christian soldier is to be henceforth no unmeaning metaphor. We must follow Christ where he leads, though it be to prison and to death. All heaven follow him. And he is going to conquer. The victory over the world will be gained presently, and the shout go up from disenthralled millions : The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Satan, with all his evil hosts, will lie bruised under his feet. Thrones and dominions, and principalities and powers, will fall before him ; and, as he rises to take possession of his kingdom, with his saints all clad in robes of righteousness, leading captivity captive.

———" All
The multitude of angels, with a shout
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices, uttering joy, heaven ring
With jubilee and loud hosannas fill
The eternal regions."