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→ SERMONS ←

PRAYER ANSWERED.

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So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.—I KINGS xviii., 42.

CARMEL is a hallowed spot to the Church. We tread its soil, even in imagination, with solemn step, and could we but, in the body, stand on that historic mountain, it would be a privilege whose value could not be estimated in earthly coin. So grandly beautiful is it, that the sacred writers could find no better type of the Bride of God, the blood-washed Church, and as they gazed on its wooded sides rising above the smoke and dust of the valleys, on its majestic peak crowned with verdure and sunshine, they thought of the Church in her sanctified beauty, clothed with the garments of salvation and crowned with the glory of God. "Thine head upon thee is like Carmel" (Song of Solomon). "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon" (Isaiah xxxv., 2).

But this hill of luxuriant beauty is of peculiar interest to the Church, because upon its sides was witnessed one of the sublimest miracles recorded in the Bible, and on its summit one of the grandest divine testimonies of God to His covenant faithfulness in answering prayer. We will not pause to consider the first, for you are all familiar with the picture of the heroic prophet Elijah, standing in the presence of the gorgeously robed priests of Baal and of a vast multitude of God's people who had dishonored Him by idolatry, standing by the altar which

lived in obscurity and poverty, to demand supreme faith in one who was rejected by His own people and who died in disgrace, and find all men drawn to Him, and the world believing in Him, this is the most extraordinary phenomenon in the annals of mankind. The wonder is not lessened when viewed from another point. Christ is the Holy One of God, the representative and embodiment of perfect righteousness, justice and truth. As such, one might suppose, He would be held in abhorrence by a race of godless and guilty men. Yet these wicked men, the very chief of sinners, have come to Jesus and embraced Him as the one altogether lovely. In multitudes lying under the spell of inborn depravity, the enemies of God and the willing slaves of Satan, the preaching of Christ has awakened faith and has made of them new creatures.

VI. "Received up into glory." This describes of course the ascension. As on earth, in the ungodly world, a reception was given Him, and He won the faith and loyalty of men, so in Heaven there was a lifting up of the mighty gates and an opening of the everlasting doors to admit the King of Glory. There He was received to abide forever, the Lamb standing in the midst of the Throne, the mystery of the earth, the wonder of the skies—there as here the Name above every name.

"To Him be glory evermore!"

→ A Service for Parents ←

PARENTAL ANXIETY AND ITS ALLEVIATION.

BY T. DEWITT TALMAGE D.D., BROOKLYN PRESBYTERIAN TABERNACLE.

Seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life.—GENESIS xliv., 30.

THESE words were spoken by Judah, as descriptive of the tenderness and affection which Jacob felt toward Benjamin, the youngest son of that patriarchal family; but they are words just as appropriate to many a parent in this house—since "his life is bound up in the lad's life." I have known parents that seemed to have but little interest in their children. A father says: "My son must look out for himself. If he comes up well, all right; if he turns out badly, I cannot help it. I am not responsible for his behavior. He must take the same risk in life that I took." As well might the shepherd throw a lamb into a den of lions and then say: "Little lamb, look out for yourself!"

It is generally the case that even the beast looks after its young. I have gone through the woods on a summer's day, and I have heard a great outcry in a bird's nest, and I have climbed up to see what was the matter. I found out that the birds were starving and that the mother bird had gone off, not to come back again. But that is an exception. It is generally the case that the old bird will pick your eyes out rather than let you come nigh its brood.

The lion will rend you in twain if you approach too nearly the whelps; the fowl in the barnyard, clumsy-footed and heavy-winged, flies fiercely at you if you come too near the little group, and God intended every father and mother to be the protection and the help of the child. Jesus comes into every dwelling and says to the father or mother: "You have been looking after this child's body and mind; the time has come when you ought to be looking after its immortal soul." I stand before hundreds of people with whom the question morning, noon, and night is: "What is to become of the child? What will be its history? Will it choose paths of virtue or vice? Will it accept Christ or reject Him? Where will it spend eternity?"

I read of a vessel that foundered. The boats were launched; many of the passengers were struggling in the water. A mother with one hand beat the waves and with the other hand lifted up her little child toward the life-boat crying: "Save my child! Save my child!" The impassioned outcry of that mother is the prayer of hundreds of Christian people who sit listening this morning while I speak. I propose to show some of the causes of parental anxiety, and then how that anxiety may be alleviated.

I find the first cause of parental anxiety in the inefficiency and imperfection of parents themselves. We have a slight hope, all of us, that our children may escape our faults. We hide our imperfections and think they will steer clear of them. Alas! there is a poor prospect of that. There is more probability that they will choose our vices than choose our virtues. There is something like sacredness in parental imperfections when the child looks upon them. The folly of the parents is not so repulsive when the child looks at it. He says: "Father indulges in it; mother indulges in it; it can't be so bad." Your boy, ten years of age, goes up a back street smoking his cigar—an old stump that he found in the street—and a neighbor accosts him and says: "What are you doing this for? What would your father say if he knew it?" The boy says: "Oh, father does that himself!" There is not one of us this morning that would deliberately choose that his children should in all things follow his example, and it is the consciousness of imperfection on our part as parents that makes us most anxious for our children.

We are also distressed on account of the unwisdom of our discipline and instruction. It requires a great deal of ingenuity to build a house or fashion a ship; but more ingenuity to build the temple of a child's character, and launch it on the great ocean of time and eternity. Where there is one parent that seems qualified for the work there seem to be twenty parents who miserably fail. Here is a father who says: "My child shall know nothing but religion; he shall hear nothing but religion; he shall see nothing but religion." The boy is aroused at six o'clock in the morning to recite the Ten Commandments. He is awakened off the sofa on Sunday night to see how much he knows of the Westminster Catechism. It is religion morning, noon, and night. Passages of Scripture are plastered on the bedroom wall. He looks for the day of the month in a religious almanac. Every minister that comes to the house is told to take the boy aside and talk to him, and tell him what

a great sinner he is. After a while the boy comes to that period of life when he is too old for chastisement, and too young to know and feel the force of moral principle. Father and mother are sitting up for the boy to come home. It is 9 o'clock at night—10 o'clock—it is 12 o'clock—it is 12.30, and they hear the night-key jingle in the door. They say he is coming. George goes very softly through the hall, hoping to get upstairs before he is accosted. The father says: "George, where have you been?" "Been out!" Yes, he has been out, and he has been down, and he is on the broad road to destruction for this life and the life to come. Father says: "There is no use in the Ten Commandments; the Catechism seems to me to be an utter failure." Ah, my friend, you make a very great mistake. You stuffed that child with religion until he could not digest it; you made that which is a joy in many households an abhorrence in yours. A man in middle life said to me: "I can't become a Christian. In my father's house I got such a prejudice against religion I don't want any of it. My father was one of the best men that ever lived, but he had such severe notions about things, and he jammed religion down my throat until I don't want any of it, sir." There have been some who have erred in that direction.

There are households where mother pulls one way and father pulls the other. Father says: "My son, I told you the first time I caught you in a falsehood I would chastise you, and now I am going to do it." Mother says: "Don't. Let him off this time." In some families it is all scolding and fretfulness with the child; from Monday morning to Saturday night it is that style of culture. There is more health in one good thunder-storm than in three or four days of cold drizzle.

Here is a parent who says: "I will not err on the side that parent has erred, in being too strict with his children. I will let mine do as they please. If they want to come in to prayers they can; if they want to play at cards they can; they can do anything they please—there shall be no hindrance. Go it! Here are tickets for the opera and theatre, son. Take your friends with you. Do whatever you desire." One day a gentleman comes in from the bank to his father's office and says: "They want to see you over at the bank a minute." Father goes into the bank. The cashier says: "Is that your check?" Father looks at it and says: "No, I never gave that check: I never cross a 't' in that way; I never make the curl to a 'y' in that way. It is not my check; that's a forgery. Send for the police!" "Ah!" says the cashier, "don't be so quick; your son did that." The fact was that the boy had been out in dissipating circles, and ten dollars and fifty dollars went in that direction, and he had been treated and he had to treat others, and the boy felt he must have five hundred dollars to keep himself in that circle. That night the father sits up for the son to come home. It is one o'clock before he comes into the hall. He comes in very much flushed, his eyes glaring and his breath offensive. Father says: "My son, how can you do so? I have given you everything you wanted and everything to make you comfortable and happy, and now I find, in my old age, that you are a spendthrift, a liber-

time, and a drunkard." The son says: "Now, father, what's the use of your talking in that way? You told me I might have a good time and to go it I have been acting on your suggestion, that's all." And so one parent errs on one side, and another parent errs on the other, and how to strike a happy medium between severity and too great leniency, and train our sons and daughters for usefulness on earth and bliss in Heaven is a question which agitates every Christian household in my congregation.

Again, parental anxiety often arises from an early exhibition of sinfulness in the child. The morning-glories bloom for a little while under the sun, and then they shut up, as the heat comes on; but there are flowers along the Amazon that blaze their beauty for weeks at a time; but the short-lived morning-glory fulfills its mission as well as the *Victoria regia*. There are some people who take forty, fifty, or sixty years to develop. Then there are little children who fling their beauty on the vision and vanish. They are morning-glories that cannot stand the glare of the hot noon sun of trial. You have all known such little children. They were pale; they were ethereal; there was something very wonderfully deep in the eye; they had a gentle foot and soft hand, and something almost supernatural in their behavior—ready to be wafted away. You had such a one in your household. Gone now! It was too delicate a plant for this rough world. The heavenly Gardener saw it and took it in. We make splendid Sunday-school books out of such children, but they almost always die.

After the boy or girl comes a little further on in life the mark of sin upon them is still more evident. The son comes in from a pugilistic encounter in the streets, bearing the marks of a defeat. The daughter practices positive deception, and the parent says: "What shall I do? I can't always be correcting and scolding, and yet these things must be stopped." It is especially sad if the parent sees his own faults copied by the child. It is very hard work to pull up a nettle that we ourselves planted. We remember that the greatest frauds that ever shook the banking-houses of the country started from a boy's deception a good many years ago, and the gleaming blade of the murderer is only another blade of the knife with which the boy struck at his comrade. The cedar of Lebanon, that wrestles with the blast, started from seed lodged in the side of the mountain, and the most tremendous dishonesties of the world once toddled out from the cradle. All these things make parents anxious.

Anxiety on the part of parents also arises from the consciousness that there are so many temptations thrown all around our young people. It may be almost impossible to take a castle by siege—straightforward siege—but suppose in the night there is a traitor within, and he goes down and draws the bolt and swings open the great door, and then the castle falls immediately. That is the trouble with the hearts of the young; they have foes without and foes within. There are a great many who try to make our young people believe that it is a sign of weakness to be pure. The man will toss his head and take dramatic attitudes and tell of his own indiscretions, and ask the

young man if he would not like to do the same. And they call him verdant, and they say he is green and unsophisticated and wonder how he can bear the puritanical strait-jacket. They tell him he ought to break from his mother's apron-strings, and they say: "I will show you all about town. Come with me. You ought to see the world. It won't hurt you. Do as you please, it will be the making of you." After a while the young man says: "I don't want to be odd, nor can I afford to sacrifice these friends, and I'll go and see for myself." From the gates of hell there goes a shout of victory.

Young man, hear it. How many traps there are set for our young people! That is what makes parents so anxious. Here are temptations for every form of dissipation and every stage of it. The young man when he first goes into dissipation is very particular where he goes. It must be a fashionable hotel. He could not be tempted into these corner nuisances with red-stained glass and a mug of beer painted on the sign-board. You ask the young man to go into that place and he would say: "Do you mean to insult me?" No; it must be a marble-floored bar-room. There must be no lustful pictures behind the counter; there must be no drunkard hiccoughing while he takes his glass. It must be a place where elegant gentlemen come in and click their cut glass and drink to the announcement of flattering sentiment. But the young man cannot always find that kind of a place; yet he has a thirst and it must be gratified. The down-grade is steeper now, and he is almost at the bottom. Here they sit in an oyster cellar around a card table, wheezing, bloated, and bloodshot, with cards so greasy you can hardly tell who has the best hand. But never mind; they are only playing for drink. Shuffle away! Shuffle away! The landlord stands in his shirt-sleeves with hands on his hips, watching the game and waiting for another call to fill up the glasses. It is the hot breath of eternal woe that flushes that young man's cheek. In the jets of gaslight I see the shooting out of the fiery tongue of the worm that never dies. The clock strikes twelve; it is the tolling of the bell of eternity at the burial of a soul. Two hours pass on, and they are all sound asleep in their chairs. Landlord says: "Come, now, wake up; its time to shut up." They look up and say: "What?" "It's time to shut up." Push them out into the air. They are going home. Let the wife crouch in the corner, and the children hide under the bed. They are going home! What is the history of that young man? He began his dissipation at the Fifth Avenue hotel, and completed his damnation in the worst grog-shop in Navy street.

But sin even does not stop here. It comes to the door of the drawing-room. There are men of leprous hearts that go into the very best classes of society. They are so fascinating—they have such a bewitching way of offering their arm. Yet the poison of asps is under the tongue, and their heart is hell. At first their sinful devices are hidden, but after a while they begin to put forth their talons of death. Now they begin to show really what they are. Suddenly—although you could not have expected it, they were so charming in their manner, so fascinating in their address—suddenly a cloud blacker than was ever woven of midnight or hurricane drops upon some domestic

circle. There is agony in the parental bosom that none but the Lord God Almighty can measure. Oh, there are scores and hundreds of homes that have been blasted, and if the awful statistics could be fully set before you your blood would freeze into a solid cake of ice at the heart. Do you wonder that fathers and mothers are anxious about their children, and that they ask themselves the questions day and night: What is to become of them? What will be their destiny?

I shall devote the rest of my remarks to alleviation of parental anxiety. Let me say to you, as parents, that a great deal of anxiety will be lifted if you will begin early with your children. Tom Paine said: "The first five years of my life I became an infidel." A vessel goes out to sea; it has been five days out. A storm comes on it; it springs a leak; the helm will not work; everything is out of order. What is the matter? The ship is not seaworthy, and never was. It is a poor time to find it out now. Under the fury of the storm the vessel goes down with two hundred and fifty passengers to a watery grave. The time to make the ship seaworthy was in the dry-dock, before it started. Alas for us, if we wait until our children get out into the world before we try to bring upon them the influence of Christ's religion! I tell you, the dry-dock of the Christian home is the place where we are to fit them for usefulness and for heaven. In this world, under the storm of vice and temptation, it will be too late. I stood in a house in one of the Long Island villages, and I saw a beautiful tree, and I said to the owner: "That is a very fine tree, but what a curious crook there is in it!" "Yes," said he, "I planted that tree, and when it was a year old I went to New York and worked as a mechanic for a year or two, and when I came back I found that they had allowed something to stand against the tree, so it has always had that crook." And so I thought it was with the influence upon children. If you allow anything to stand in the way of moral influence against a child on this side or that side, to the latest day of its life on earth and through all eternity it will show the pressure. No wonder Lord Byron was bad. Do you know his mother said to him when she saw him one day limping across the floor with his unsound foot: "Get out of my way, you lame brat!" What chance for a boy like that?

The young men come to the door of sin. They consult whether they will go in. The one young man goes in and the other retreats. Oh, you say, the last had better resolution. No, that was not it. The first young man had no early good influence, the last had been piously trained, and when he stood at the door of sin discussing the matter, he looked around as if to see some one, and he felt an invisible hand on his shoulder, saying: "Don't go in! don't go in!" Whose hand was it? A mother's hand, fifteen years ago gone to dust. A gentleman was telling me of the fact that some years ago there were two young men who stopped at the door of the Park Theatre, in New York. The question was whether they should go in. That night there was to be a very immoral play enacted in the Park Theatre. One man went in, the other staid out. The young man who went in went on

from sin to sin, and through a crowd of iniquities, and died in the hospital of delirium tremens. The other young man who retreated chose Christ, went into the Gospel, and is now one of the most eminent ministers of Christ in this country. And the man who retreated gave as his reason for turning back from the Park Theatre that night, that there was an early voice within him saying : "Don't go in ! don't go in !" And for that reason, my friends, I believe so much in Bible-classes. But there is something better than Bible-classes, and that is the Sunday-school class. I like it because it takes children at an earlier point ; and the infant-class I like still better, because it takes children before they begin to walk or talk straight, and puts them on the road to heaven. You cannot begin too early. You stand on the bank of a river flowing by. You cannot stop that river, but you travel days and days toward the source of it and you find after a while that it comes down dropping from the rock, and with your knife you make a course in this or that direction for the dropping to take, and you decide the course of the river. You stand and see your children's character rolling on with great impetuosity and passion, and you cannot affect them. Go up toward the source where the character first starts, and decide that it shall take the right direction, and it will follow the path you give it.

But I want you to remember, O father ! O mother ! that it is what you do that is going to affect your children, and not what you say. You tell your children to become Christians while you are not, and they will not. Do you think Noah's family would have gone into the ark if he had not gone in ? They would say : "No, there is something about that boat that is not right ; father has not gone in." You cannot push children into the kingdom of God ; you have got to pull them in. There has been many a general in a tower or castle looking at his army fighting, but that is not the kind of a man to arouse enthusiasm among his troops. It is a Garibaldi or Napoleon I., who leaps into the stirrups and dashes into the conflict, and has his troops following him with wild huzza. So you cannot stand off in your impenitent state and tell your children to go ahead into the Christian life, and have them go. You must yourself dash into the Christian conflict ; you must lead them and not tell them to go. Do you know that all the instruction you give to your children in a religious direction goes for nothing unless you illustrate it in your own life ? It is what you are, not so much what you teach.

Have a family altar. Let it be a cheerful place, the brightest room in your house. Do not wear your children's knees out with long prayers. Have the whole exercise spirited. If you have a melodeon, or an organ, or piano in the house have it open. Then lead in prayers. If you cannot make a prayer of your own take Matthew Henry's prayers, or the Episcopal prayer-book. None better than that. Kneel down with your little ones morning and night and commend them to God. Do you think they will ever get over it ? Never ! After you are under the sod a good many years there will be some powerful temptation around that son, but the memory of father and mother

at morning and evening prayers will have its effect upon him ; it will bring him back from the path of sin and death.

But I want you to make a strict mark, a sharp, plain line between innocent hilarity on the part of your children and a vicious proclivity. Do not think your boys will go to ruin because they make a racket. A glum, unresponsive child makes the worst form of a villain. Children, when they are healthy, always make a racket. I want you at the very first sign of depravity in the child to correct it. Do not laugh because it is smart. If you do you will live to cry because it is malicious. Do not talk of your children's frailties lightly in their presence, thinking they do not understand you ; they do understand. Do not talk disparagingly of your child, making him feel that he is a reprobate. Do not say to your little one : "You're the worst child I ever knew." If you do he will be the worst man you ever knew.

Are your children safe for heaven ? You can tell better than any one else. I put you the question : "Are your children safe for heaven ?" I heard of a mother who, when the house was on fire, in the excitement of the occasion got out a great many of the valuable things—many choice articles of furniture—but did not think to ask until too late, "Is my child safe ?" It was too late then. The flames had encircled all ; the child was gone ! Oh, my dear friend, when sea and land shall burn in the final conflagration, will your children be safe ?

I wonder if what I have said this morning has not struck a chord in some one in the audience who had a good father and mother, but who is not yet a Christian ? Is that your history ?

Do you know why you came here this morning ? God sent you to have that memory revived. Your dear Christian mother, how she loved you ! You remember when you were sick, how kindly she attended you ; the night was not too long, and you never asked her to turn the pillow but she did it. You remember her prayers also. You remember how some of you—I do not know where the man is in the audience—how some one here broke his mother's heart. You remember her sorrow over your waywardness. You remember the old place where she did you so many kindnesses, the chairs, the table, the door-sill where you played, the tones of her voice. Why, you can think them back now. Though they were borne long ago on the air, they come ringing through your soul to-day, calling you by the first name. You are not "Mr." to her ; it is just your plain first name. Is not this the time when her prayers will be answered ? Do you not think that God sent you in to-day to have that memory of her revived ? If you should come to Christ this morning, amid all the throngs of heaven the gladdest of them would be your Christian parents who are in glory waiting for your redemption. Angels of God, shout the tidings ; the lost has come back again ; the dead is alive ! Ring all the bells of Heaven at the jubilee ! Ring ! Ring !