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Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

*Edited by George S. Woodhall
1813 V.*

*Woodhall
Editor*

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech
you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled
to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

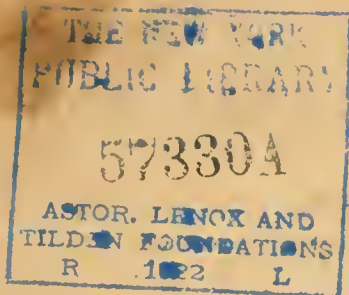
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*New Jersey
ZIX*



District of New-Jersey, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.

SERMON XXIV.

**WISDOM RESULTING FROM NUMBERING
OUR DAYS.**

Psalms xc. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

BY THE REV. AMZI ARMSTRONG, A. M.

Pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation of Mendham.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON XXIV.

Psalm xc. 12.—So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

NONE of us expect to continue here forever. By unquestionable evidences we have been convinced, even from our early childhood, that the time will come when we must leave these earthly scenes, and, the number of our days being run out, we must lie down in death. Nor do any of us ever indulge the expectation that the period of our earthly cares and enjoyments will be lengthened out to an *hundred years* to come. Yet how little influence does this sure conviction usually have upon our thoughts and purposes.

It is an observation of an ancient sage, daily verified, that “though all men expect to die, and are looking for a state of existence beyond the grave; yet they are busy in providing for this life as though it were never to have an end, and for the life to come as though it were never to have its beginning.”

We all feel a deep and lively interest in that existence, and in those intellectual endowments, which God has given us: and if truly wise, we would make it our especial care so to order and improve this beginning of our existence in the present life, as not to be increasing a load of miseries upon it; and so that we might seem, to ourselves at least, to exist for some worthy purpose, and for some desirable object and end. It was for this, that Moses addressed unto God his prayer in the words of

our text. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The psalm is entitled, "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God," and is supposed to have been composed by him on that awful occasion, when the oath of God cut off the expectations of the faithless Israelites in the wilderness, and condemned them never to enter the promised land. The life of man had been gradually shortening since the days of Noah, and on this occasion seems to have been reduced at once to the standard of three score years and ten, where it has ever since continued. In addition to this, that whole generation of the children of Israel, except Joshua and Caleb, were put under the curse of God, sanctioned by his oath, to end their days in the wilderness within the space of forty years. Some would die sooner, most of them before that time should expire, but not one of them should live beyond it. This led Moses devoutly to pray to God, that as the only remedy left them in their case, he would teach them so to consider the number of their days, and to be warned by the bounds God had set to their years, that they should feel the importance of a diligent improvement of them in the ways of *wisdom*, and not be left to waste them in unprofitable employments, or in unavailing complaints.

We, too, have our bounds set us. The appointment of God has limited the period of our continuance here; and though none of us know how soon we may die, yet we all know that every passing year takes one from the little circle of three score and ten, beyond which none of us can hope for much enjoyment in our worldly pursuits or pleasures.

In numbering our days, we must therefore count the few years that lie between us and seventy, as the full

complement of all we may expect. And probably the greater part of those of us who have not yet attained it, will never reach that extent of life. But we must expect, that from year to year, and from month to month, our numbers will be lessened, and we must go down successively to the grave.

Shall not these considerations lead us to apply our hearts unto *wisdom*? I do not, indeed, expect that any considerations or any means will ever wholly remove from any of us all our folly or madness on this side the grave. But surely it might be expected of us as rational creatures, so solemnly circumstanced as we are in regard to death and eternity, that we should have some purpose worthy of life, and some object that would make the continuance of our existence desirable. Nor can we well answer to our own understanding and judgment, and much less to our consciences, if we are wearing out life in any inferior purpose, or wasting day after day of our existence, without an object or an end.

Let us devote the present hour to a candid self-recollection and examination of ourselves on this interesting concern. Let us severally recollect the purposes by which our lives are guided, and the ends for which we live; and consider whether they are such as are worthy of rational and immortal beings, such as we ourselves can be satisfied with.

They who live only for *mischief*, whose chief purpose is to *distress and trouble their fellow-creatures*, and who glory in *polluting the world with their crimes*, cannot endure reflection. And they whose chief object is the enjoyment of *sensual pleasures*, often render themselves almost as incapable of reflection as the beasts of the field, with whom they hold an inglorious competition. I do

not now address my discourse to such, but only to sober-minded people, who mean to live honestly, and wish to live creditably amongst their fellow-men. Of these there is at all times a very considerable portion, especially of those who approach to, or have passed the méridian of life, who from disappointments, from the straitness of their circumstances, or from want of a native energy of mind and disposition, readily give over all ambitious prospects, and aim at nothing more than by their daily cares and labours, with perhaps the assistance of a little patrimony received by inheritance from those who have gone before them, to provide for their daily wants, and, if they have a family dependent on them, to rear and to support their family in an honest and creditable way. As members of society these are useful people ; and as they are honest and industrious, they are worthy of respect. But as intelligent beings, can they be contented to live for *no other purposes than these* ? It is a dull and tedious round of cares, and labours, and anxieties, and at length they must lie down in death. Is life worth possessing ? Is their existence endeared to them for only *such purposes* as these ? Would it not make even life itself a *burden*, if they knew they were bound to continue it in such a form and manner forever ? There is in the human mind a native power of generous, expanding thought, and of noble expectation, that must make it sick of life, and feel existence itself a burden, if such must be its only end and object. It is not however my wish to make such people sick and tired of life ; but to call their attention to an object and purpose that will afford scope and employment for their noblest powers of thought and expectation, and that may call into life that pulse of immortality, which lies stifled and languid in

their breasts. I know the rich and the powerful often look down with a kind of pity and contempt on such people, and wonder what can make life desirable to them. Yet they have as deep and true an interest in that precious treasure of existence, which God has given them, as those who affect to despise them; and to pervert or waste it, is as great a loss, and must be followed by as deep misery. Would they apply their hearts to learn wisdom—to *know* and to *fear* the Lord; and were their daily cares and labours relieved by frequent intercourse with heaven; did they daily commune with God by prayer and praises, and by devout meditations in his word; and could they feel themselves to be the heirs and expectants of the kingdom of their Father above, and to be training up those entrusted to their care in the same hope and expectation, they would *then* feel that life is worth possessing—that existence is indeed that precious blessing which our great and good Creator designed it to be.

There *are* those of this class of people, and I hope not a few, whose chief purpose is, amidst all their cares and labours, to serve and honor their Lord; whose end and object is to learn, and to obey his will: and while he inspires them with the blessed hope of heaven, through the sacrifice of the cross, they feel that they possess a treasure in that existence which God has given them, for which kingdoms and worlds would be a poor and despicable exchange. Every year, as it rolls round, brings them nearer to their rest from their labours, and to the full commencement of their eternal joys. They number their days, and applying their hearts to wisdom, they cheerfully bid them roll on, and bring the wished for hour. There is *another class* of people who perhaps think

they can enjoy life without these comforts, and prize existence without these hopes. With enough in their possession to give vigor to their activity, and afford an opportunity for their usefulness among men, they are *active and diligent in business*, and endeavor to satisfy themselves with the idea that they are *doing well for themselves and theirs*, and filling up their places usefully and honorably in society, in whatever relates to the *present life*.

It is true, these are just grounds of self-approbation ; and every reasonable man will enjoy a satisfaction in the consciousness that he acts his part well in life. But is this enough to satisfy an immortal mind? When they consider that they are endowed with powers and affections to love supremely the ever good and glorious God, their Maker and Redeemer, and to be active and useful in his service ; and that they are capable of being forever happy in a participation of his love and favor, and of his life-giving presence ; and in the consciousness of this, begin to number their days, and consider how little time remains for them to shew their love and obedience to God, before their everlasting destinies shall be fixed by the righteous Judge, can they feel that they are living to any good purpose, and be contented in the idea that they are doing well for *this life only*? This would be to reduce themselves to the level of beasts of burden, many of whom fill up their places well, and are of real use and service in the world. But the immortal mind disdains such degradation ; and whenever it gets relief from the fatigues and hurry of business, it aspires to something more noble, and more congenial to its native powers, and to its original destination. And if it be destitute of the feelings of true piety, and a stranger to the hope of a blessed immortality, it must feel life to be a burden, and existence itself not worth possessing, for the

mere purpose of *worldly business*, which death will soon interrupt, and for the enjoyment of a few social pleasures and endearments, which are liable at any moment to be finally broken up, and must inevitably soon end forever.

Could these people enjoy a consciousness that they serve their day and generation according to the will of God; and did they thus affectionately discharge these social and relative duties with a pious respect to the divine command, as well as of good will to men, their course of business and of cares would wear a different aspect, and seem worthy of their time and talents. And did they know what it is to commune with God and with Christ, and to feed upon the divine promises, and have the soul enriched with the knowledge of God's revealed will and purposes, their seasons of retirement and their hours of leisure would be sweet and precious. And were their hopes fixed on the heavenly inheritance, they would then have before them an object and end on which their minds might rest with a delightful complacency; and while every day should be filled up with its duties and its comforts, they might sincerely rejoice in the progress of time, and welcome the approach of death.

Lord, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

I need not dwell upon the character and circumstances of those whose chief purpose it is to acquire *honors and distinctions among men*; or to amass to themselves *riches*, and accumulate *property* for their posterity: for although a suitable attention to these concerns is not to be condemned; yet when the mind is chiefly confined to such purposes, and men allow themselves to regard no other object or end, but *gain or fame*, it creates a sordidness in the soul, that chills every generous thought, and frowns upon every noble aspiration, and reduces it to

that mean and cowardly state, that either a continual grudging, or a trembling apprehension and fear, takes away all power of enjoyment.

The *gay*, the *vain*, the *luxurious*, and the *idle*, who seem to have no higher object than to remove themselves as far as possible from rationality, and to prevent anxieties by banishing thought and reflection, are with difficulty persuaded to give any attention to the calls of wisdom. But if ever the time come, that they begin seriously to think and ponder on their state, they will find it to be wretched beyond description.

If there be *another class* of people deserving a particular notice in the review of this interesting subject, it consists perhaps of those, who are chiefly engaged in the *pursuit of knowledge*, and make it the great object and end of their lives to explore the paths of human science and to store their minds with those treasures of knowledge, which genius and persevering industry can acquire. There is something truly gratifying to the rational mind, in searching out the causes and effects of things, and investigating the efficacious laws of nature. Nor is it unworthy of such a mind to thirst after a knowledge of what has been in times past, and what is now transacting on the great theatre of the world. But what purpose is all this learning and knowledge to serve? Intellectual enjoyments, it is true, are more congenial to the nature of the rational mind than any others. But if it is only a present and temporary enjoyment, that is procured by all this labor and study, how are the immortal powers of the mind to be benefited by all this? Can the soul of man, with all its consciousness of being destined to an everlasting existence, be satisfied with such attainments which are all soon to be blasted, and to perish in death? They may boast, as some have done, that by

these acquirements the mind is fortified against the power of *pain*, and the influence of *fear*. And yet the severity of acute disease will often put all their boasted philosophy to flight; and the agonies of death, when only beheld in their effects upon another, have made the wisest of them stand aghast and tremble. Whatever satisfaction and support the mind may derive from philosophical knowledge, in the present state of things; yet in the comparison of the present and the future, God has put such an immense difference between them, that all the best attainments of mere philosophy are but as the small dust of the balance against the weighty and all-important concerns of that which is to come. Would they bend the energies of their minds to knowledge with a view of applying it to the great concerns of that change, which must take place at death, and make it serve the purpose of preparing themselves, and helping to prepare others, for these vast and eternal concerns, their study and labor would then be turned to some good account. And if they were daily growing in the *knowledge of God and of Christ*, this would make life worth possessing. Let them once begin to number their days, and consider seriously the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the certainty and the solemnity of that great change that will take place at death, and they will soon perceive the vanity and unprofitableness of all that knowledge, that helps not to prepare for these great events, and the necessity of applying their hearts to a truer wisdom, and more enduring knowledge.

And now, after this review and examination of the most favourable circumstances in human life, where we might expect, if any where, to find sources of solid and durable satisfaction, and just grounds of self-gratulation; and after finding them all barren and joyless, whenever

we begin to number our days, and to think seriously of death and of eternity; may we not fairly conclude, that *without religion, without sentiments of true piety toward God, and the hope of a lasting interest in his favor*, no situation in life can afford enjoyments worthy the immortal mind, or reconcile the judgment and conscience to a calm and patient enduring of a life, which has not *religion* for its chief purpose and the comforts, the duties, and the hopes of religion its great object and end. This is the *true wisdom* of men. As the scripture has said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments."

This conclusion is so clear and obvious, that I am persuaded it must, at every fair opportunity, commend itself to every man's conscience and judgment. And I know not how people, that allow themselves any opportunity for reflection, can get clear of it as they usually do: unless it be by that deceitful and insincere proposal of putting it off, only to some future day, when they will give it, they think, all the serious consideration it demands. But how unreasonable is this! For besides the awful uncertainty there is whether that day will ever come, and whether, if it should, they would then find themselves any more disposed to attend to the voice of wisdom; is it not most unreasonable and absurd for them contentedly to abide and wilfully to persist, even a single day, in that situation and conduct, which they themselves deliberately and unequivocally must *condemn* as both *dangerous* and *unwise*? It is all evasion and insincerity, by which they contrive to put off the conviction which *numbering their days* cannot fail to bring with it, and endeavor to excuse themselves from applying their hearts unto wisdom.

Is it not enough, my friends, that any of you have already wasted away the *third*, the *half*, or perhaps *more* of the full extent of the life of man, and have never yet pursued any purpose, or set before you any object or end, that your own judgment or conscience can approve as worth living for? Make an estimate of the days or years, that you may yet expect to live. You cannot reasonably calculate on much beyond the appointed *three score years and ten*. It is probable that the most of us will never live to see that period. Some of us may die soon; every year will thin our ranks; and no one knows but his turn may come next. So solemnly circumstanced, even can any of you be contented to spend another *year*, or even another *day*, in that which can yield no lasting profit, or solid consolation? If any can—**THEN BE WARNED—**

The holy scriptures condemn us all of apostasy and rebellion against God, and our consciences are witnesses that the condemnation is just; and the same scriptures require us to return to our allegiance, and by repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, to begin, and continue a life of religion in obedience and piety before him whom angels fear and archangels worship. Every day therefore that you neglect this, you spend in violation of your duty to God; you hold yourselves his enemies, and you reject his sacred authority. Nay more, the scripture has also warned us, and the oath of God and the blood of Christ make it sure to us, that after the short period of probation allowed us in the present life—if, when death comes, we be still found among the enemies of God, and the despisers of the cross of Christ, we must then appear before the dread tribunal of the eternal Judge, to receive the awful sentence from his lips, and depart under the curse of his wrath, into *everlasting fire prepared for the devil*.

and his angels. This is the appointed wages of sin, and this the fearful destination of them that forget God. Oh, apply your hearts *without delay* unto wisdom: all her ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Seek ye the LORD, while he may be found. Call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the LORD, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Let me now address an exhortation to such, as *have obeyed the voice of wisdom*, and have given themselves to seek and to serve the LORD. If you have done this in truth and sincerity, it is thus far well. But remember, you too have your appointed time, and God hath set bounds also to your days. If it behoves you to shew your love to God in the world, and to labor for the prosperity of religion, and for the salvation of your fellow men; if you would be well prepared for death, and fitted to enter on the joys on high; you have *no time to lose—no days or hours to waste in trifling or unimportant purposes.* The day is *spending*, and with some of you is already *far spent.* The *night* approaches. And your Saviour himself said, concerning *his* work on earth, “I must work the work of him that sent me while *it is day*; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.” If you have any thing yet to accomplish, set about it without delay; and do that which thy hand findeth to do, with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”—AMEN.