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NATIONAL PREACHER:

OR

ORIGINAL MONTHLY SERMONS

FROM

LIVING MINISTERS OF THE UNITED STATES.

EDITED BY

REV. AUSTIN DICKINSON.

NEW-YORK.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that
publisheth peace.—ISA. LIII. 7.

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SERMON CXXV.

BY ALBERT BARNES,
PHILADELPHIA.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

MATT. v. 14, 15, 16. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

This passage of Scripture implies that there is a difference between Christians and other men. It is a radical and permanent distinction as regards their principles of action. My object is to show that this difference *will manifest itself in the life*. This I shall endeavor to do by showing,

I. That this difference *will be developed*; and

II. By inquiring what there is in the circumstances of the Christian adapted to *bring out* his principles.

The first point is that the principles of Christian piety will be *in fact* developed in the life. By this I mean, that he who is truly a Christian in his heart, will be in his life; that his conduct will be not merely that of a professor, or a moral man, or an amiable and estimable member of his family and the community; but that he will be a *religious man*; that you may know *where to find him* on any subject pertaining to the kingdom of Christ. Now that this will be the case, it does not require many words to prove. For

1. *The nature of the change is such that it cannot but develop itself*. Regeneration effects no direct revolution in the *intellect*, but it does in the heart; none in the essential stamina of the mind, but it does in the principles of action, and in the volitions, desires, and preferences of the man. Nor is it a slight change. It is so great as to make it proper to apply to it the terms new creation, new birth, and life from the dead. There is no other change in the human mind like it—none so deep, so thorough, so abiding. This is so clear in the Bible as to need no further proof. Now the proper place to manifest such a change is in the life, and such a change if it exist *will be manifest* there. Neither the nature of mind nor of religion, will, or can, prevent it. Important revolutions in a man's principles on any subject we expect will be exhibited there. Nor have we any evidence that they have occurred until we witness them in a man's department.

But the change in a man's religious views and feelings in regeneration, is one that affects him not in any one department of life, but in all. It is not a revo-

lution whose effects we expect simply in the church, or in the family; in the external conduct, or in the abandonment of vices; but in all the appropriate circumstances of the man's life. If a revolution like that exist, it will be seen. It will constitute him a new man in Christ Jesus.

2. The same thing is clear *from the declaration of the text*. It is not, *ye ought* to be the light of the world, but *ye are*; not that Christians *should be* like a city set on a hill, but an affirmation that *they are* such. Though exhortations are addressed to Christians in the New Testament urging them to a life of faith, yet they are also addressed as actually putting forth the principles of piety, and as true to their God and Savior. *Ye* who were some time darkness *are light* in the Lord. Believing, *ye rejoice* with joy unspeakable and full of glory, *receiving* the end of your faith, the salvation of your soul. I thank my God, says Paul to the Romans, that your faith *is spoken of* throughout the whole world. None of us *liveth* to himself, and none *dieth* to himself. It is unnecessary to multiply passages. All know that the New Testament abounds in expressions declaring the matter of fact that the gospel *has* an ascendancy in the minds of its friends. Nor would it be necessary to advert to this circumstance were it not that so many Christians are in the habit of regarding the Bible rather as filled with *exhortations* and *commands*, which they are not *expected* to comply with, than with sober statements of what the gospel actually does accomplish among men. The truth is, God contemplated that the gospel *should* have effect; and such *was*, in sober verity, the early effect of the gospel, that Paul could address *any church* as actually manifesting the mighty change wrought by the spirit of God. *Ye are* our epistle, said he to the church at Corinth, the living, standing proof at once of the power of the gospel, and of the effect of his ministry. *We* have fallen on different times. The language addressed to churches is not, *ye are*, but *ye ought* to be, the consistent followers of the Lord Jesus. O when shall we be free from that miserable theology which only chills, and paralyzes, and freezes; that false philosophy which fetters the soul, and binds the energies of the children of God; and that spirit of slumber which compels the ministry, if they would speak the truth to their people, to say, *ye ought* to be the devoted followers of Christ, and which seals our mouth when *we would say, ye are* living monuments of the power and grace of God.

Let not refuge be attempted here in the plea that the people whom Paul addressed *had been* heathen, and that therefore the change would be more manifest, and this sort of appeal would be more proper. True, they had been heathen; and the change was a proof which no infidel has met *yet*, that the gospel was from God. But the ground of the address to the primitive Christians was not *what they had been*, so much as *what they then were*. Besides, is it reserved for us to meet a remark like this, that a people nursed in heathenism, but yesterday degraded to the level of the brute, and sunk in every species of abomination, were to be addressed as actually *in advance* in Christian principles of the people of *our* times, and trained from their earliest years in the great principles of the Christian religion? Are we to expect more living demonstrations of the power of piety from the recovered population of Athens, Corinth, and Rome, than from the people of these times; more of its ceaseless energy and heavenly influence on the population of Caffraria, and the Sandwich Islands, and Burmah or Hindoostan, than in the churches of this land? No, my Christian brethren, the gospel contemplates it as a matter of *sober fact* that we can appeal to you and to all Christians and say, *ye are*—not *ye ought* to be—the light of the world. We can address the language of obligation and of duty to the most degraded population on the globe; we can approach the profligate, and the profane, and the pagan, with the language, *ye ought* to be humble followers of God. We can approach true Christians with the language of certainty, and say, *ye are* the

salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world. Nor is any man a Christian who cannot be addressed in that language.

3. The same thing is clear if we look at *the instances which are mentioned in the New Testament*. In the case of Christ it is beyond the possibility of doubt. Nor is it unfair to adduce him as a case in which the principles of religion were developed. True, he had no unholy propensity, and needed no change. But his principles were put to the test—and to a test unequalled in the life of man. On one occasion such was the *pressure of circumstances*, such his intense anxiety, and such the magnitude of the great inquiry, that he said, Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour—this impending calamity—this terrific, sad, and painful death? Shall I abandon this work; yield in the conflict; and pray to God to save me from approaching woes? His own decision is well known. Father, glorify thy name. Let calamity come; let me suffer; let me die; but honor thou thy name. Scarcely less clear was the case of the apostles. Who could doubt what were the principles of Paul? And yet Paul at conversion *might* have pleaded what would be pleaded by thousands of professors as the reason why their religious principles are obscured. It was not that he had no prospect of honor and ease and affluence that he became so decided a Christian. The path to fame and wealth was open before him. O how much persecution, and poverty, and contempt, and danger, might he have avoided by a little of that regard to ease and affluence which thousands bearing the same honored name of Christian manifest! How easy for him also to have sunk the Christian in securing the honors of office, the friendship and applause of mankind. But Paul judged differently. So of Peter, of John, of Moses, of Daniel, of Ezra, of Elijah, of John the Baptist. See Abraham, leaving the land of his fathers at the command of God; see Moses despising the splendors of royalty; see Daniel encompassed with danger and death; see the martyrs, witnesses for God while the flame encompassed the body, or their sinews were torn by the rack; see the Son of God, always the friend of his Father, always showing what he was; and you have an illustration of what the Christian principle is, and is intended to be.

4. *There is no principle in the universe that can be brought to bear on the mind with such weight as the religion of the gospel.* There is nothing that can develop the principles of man if it be not the gospel. And yet we know it is easy by far inferior tests to find out a man's character. Horace Walpole long since remarked, that every man has his price. A man whose predominant passion is avarice can be corrupted. A small sum may not do it, but you may multiply the temptation till his principles shall come out. Thus, it was not a trifling bribe that could move Lord Bacon. But he *might* be bought, and it was done. One form of pleasure or one degree of vice may not corrupt a man, but another will. So the natural principles of the heart may be brought out. Your father languishes on a bed of death. His dying sufferings will recall you from the place of folly or business to minister to his wants; or in other words, the principles of filial affection will overcome those which are leading you to vice.—Your country bleeds. It will test your patriotism. Its great sufferings may overcome the love of the fireside, and you may welcome the toils of the camp, and the perils of the field. The sufferings of your country have *brought you out*, and shown what you are. But none of these motives test the character like the religion of Christ. God, by that plan, designed to effect what no other plan could do. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be manifested in us. Law, philosophy, morals, had failed to restrain and reform men. But the gospel has been effect-

ual. In millions of cases men have been changed, redeemed, purified, saved. So that it has become an established matter in God's government that the gospel is powerful enough to overcome all the tendencies of sin. It will unclench the hands of the stoutest avarice; silence the profaneness of the boldest blasphemer; make pure the most corrupt heart; and stay the strides of the most haughty. There is not a grasp on gold, or pleasure which the gospel has not the power to break. And there is not a sinner who, if he fairly comes under its dominion, will not become a holy man. Your strongest propensities it may subdue. Your proudest systems of morality it may destroy; and your most gigantic schemes of corruption it may demolish in the dust—for thousands of such sinners as you are it has humbled, prostrated, changed into holy men. Nor persecutor is secure that he can accomplish his scheme before he shall be arrested by it. The band sent to arrest the Savior were awed, humbled, convinced by his eloquence, and returned, saying, Never man spake like this man. Paul was arrested in his mad career, despite his malice, and his commission. Now can it be that this mighty gospel that is appalled by no towering crime; that cowers before no propensities; that fears no titles, no splendor, and no renown; that prostrates haughty man as easily as does the tempest the proudest oak or cedar of Lebanon; that can enter any circle of corruption, and shed the peace of Eden around the habitation of the profane, and the scoffer, and the drunkard; that carries its principles into the profoundest minds, and sheds its humility into the proudest hearts, is it possible that it can exist, and not be manifest? Can it do all this, and no one know it? Can it live and act thus, and never be developed? Then may the light rest on the mountain top and the vale, and no one see it. Then may the city lift its turrets to the clouds, and be invisible. Then may the winds of heaven prostrate the pride of the forest, or the habitations of men, and no one know it; and then may the ocean swell, and pour its surges on the shore, and no one be aware of commotion. It must, it will stand out in the view of man. If it accomplishes such changes, they will be seen, and if it ever grasps any human spirit, it *must* show its power in the life. We are prepared to remark,

II. *That the world is fitted to develop the principles of men, and eminently those of the Christian.*

The plan of God in his moral government is to test the character; nor are any rewards conferred until the character is ascertained. The whole arrangement of his moral government is such as to show what man is, and such as to make the sentence of the day of judgment *be seen* to be just. Men are suffered to become learned, to see whether they are disposed to employ their learning for the welfare of the universe. They are suffered to accumulate wealth, that the native propensities of the heart may be brought out. Objects of fame, of ambition, of pleasure pass before the mind. It is not that God may *know*, but that a fair trial may be made. *Before* that trial shall be made, a sentence of condemnation would *appear* to be unequal. *When* man has been fairly tried, when virtue and vice, heaven and hell, honor and dishonor have been fairly brought before him, it is right that God should address him, and say to him, Bear that character with you to eternity.

Again. The organization of the world is adapted to develop the character of the hypocrite. Were true religion less decisive and less powerful, it would be more difficult to determine on the character. But religion is designed to produce a thorough change in all the man. It becomes then a matter comparatively easy to determine the character of those whom the Savior describes as neither cold nor hot—those that have a standing among the professed people of God, and yet in works deny him. In a world like this, and in a community organized as the Christian church is, man never need mistake his own character. It is not the

fault of God if men are deceived. So decisive is the gospel that it must, and will, produce the effect of testing the man. He that is not with me, said the Savior, is against me. Look at any instance of a hypocrite in the church, and there *will* occur occasions when his character shall be fully tried, and when it shall be seen whether he is willing to surrender the world for the sake of the gospel. Judas must find an occasion to manifest his avarice, and sunder the slender and feeble bond by which he was united professedly to the Savior. It was done, and he fell. He *had his price*; and such was the paramount ascendancy of the love of gold in his heart, that for thirty pieces of silver—a price at which religion has been often sold—he was willing the Lord of glory should die. Achan must find an occasion in which his prevailing principle should be tested. The occasion arrived, and for a wedge of gold, and a goodly Babylonish garment, he exposed the camp of Israel to the vengeance of God. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the same principle was again to be developed—and their lives paid the forfeit of the accursed love of gold in the church.

It is not this withering passion alone that will be tested by the gospel. It is adapted to try the hypocrite in all his subterfuges, in all his mental reservations; in all his *evasions to escape* the simple and decided duties of Christian piety. Every demand of truth or duty brings his character *out*. The doctrines of the gospel disturb or disgust him. Those solemn and awful, and yet tender truths, which go beyond the coldest moral sentiments, and which speak of the just government of God, of sovereignty, of election, of hell, of holiness, and prayer, trouble him. Those expressions of pure and advanced piety which speak of the higher joys of the Christian, and tell of communion with God, disquiet him. Those sentiments which speak of active piety, which call on him for decided zeal in the cause of God, irritate him. Those assaults which religion makes on his corrupt feelings, those reproofs which she administers when he conforms to the world, those denunciations which thunder along his path when he lives *just like other men*, and is ashamed of the religion which he professes to love, provoke him. His mind is ruffled by the demands of a life of sincere and prayerful piety. And hence Job asks, respecting the hypocrite, "Will he always call upon God?" The movements of piety enrage him. Efforts made to advance the religion of Christ find no response in his bosom, and meet only sour, cold, and repulsive feeling. A revival of religion is a phenomenon in which he has no interest—which is neither the object of his solicitude nor prayer. The great movements of Christian benevolence excite no kindred emotion in his soul. Efforts or wealth in that cause are deemed by him a *dead loss*. He has no tears to shed over suffering and sinful man. Now every time the gospel is offered to such a man in any of its forms, it tests the character. As if God would not suffer him to go to hell without knowing what he is; as if he would meet him at every corner; test him in all the departments of his soul; and throw himself in the way of the sinful and wretched man; he has varied the tests of the man's character, so that he cannot *but* know what manner of spirit he is of. By searching and uncompromising doctrines; by truths repulsive to the native heart; by demands on his piety and his prayers occurring every hour, in his family, in his professional life, in his intercourse with man, in the great designs of Christian benevolence, he meets the man everywhere, and gives him an opportunity to determine whether he will serve God or mammon. One thing is clear. Whoever goes down to wo murmuring at the justice of God, or complaining that there was no opportunity to test the character, it will not be the man deceived in a Christian church. Whatever the pagan, or the Jew, or the Mussulman may do, it is clear, that no man goes from the bosom of the church of God to the judgment of condemnation without having his character fairly brought out, and fully seen in the eye of the universe. When year after year passes by, and the man still retains his place

at the communion table, and *will* not be a Christian; and when having gone through ten thousand trials where he had an opportunity to show that he was a pious man and did not, no blame will be by him attached to God if he dies thus, and his home be made with other hypocrites and unbelievers; and the wonder is, that in these circumstances man *will* retain such a place in the church of God, and subject himself to all the goadings of a guilty conscience, and the irritations of truth, and the corrosions of remorse, and the consciousness of inconsistency for the poor and paltry benefits that result from professed adhesion to the people of God. The hypocrite will go to eternity thoroughly tested; and as God manifestly intends that his condemnation shall be monumental and admonitory with a disastrous pre-eminence, even in hell, so he has taken care that the case shall be fairly brought out, and that the wretched man shall have full opportunity to escape the terrific pangs of the second death.

Again. The organization of the world is such as to bring out the character of the sincere Christian, and one grand point of God's moral government was so to shape the economy of human things as to open the finest field for its display. Religion starts into life principles of action that are ultimately to have the ascendancy in the soul. It calls up dormant powers—awakes new energies—urges to conflict with the powers of darkness—and bids man grapple with invisible and most mighty foes. Let any Christian contemplate for one moment the situation in which he is placed, and then let him ask, whether this organization does not contemplate the fact that his piety will be developed. What is religion? It contemplates the subjugation of his native propensities; the overcoming of his evil passions; the purification of a corrupt heart; the discipline of a vain, and wayward, and rebellious mind. It demands that chastened and serious feeling should take the place of frivolity; prayer, that of thoughtlessness; the love of God, that of the love of fashion; and delight in the scenes of devotion, the place of delight in the scenes of amusement and vanity. Can these exist, and not be manifest? And is it not the very nature of godliness that it should stamp itself in the life in letters indelible and legible by all men?

See the condition of the church of God. What *may* be in better times—in those brighter periods of the world to which human affairs, under the gospel, are tending—we know not; but hitherto, and even now, there is just enough of opposition among men to all that is pure, and meek, and humble to make it indispensable that there be a line distinctly drawn between the friends and the foes of God. Christians have been a little band—a remnant amid the tribes of men. They, spiritually alive, move among the dead. They tread a world in possession of the enemies of God. They are the healthy among the sick—the sane among the insane—the sober among the gay—the pure among the dissolute—the living among the toms. Their very presence is a rebuke on human pursuits; their views a reprobation of the opinions of others; their lives a living remembrancer of the folly and crimes of men. Now there is not a single principle of your religion, that is peculiar to it, which the men of the world do not at heart *hate*; and in relation to which they will not manifest their hatred in appropriate times and ways. In proof of this I need only refer you to your own native feelings respecting the piety of the gospel. I *could* point you to the opposition to the *same* principles in the life and death of your great Master and Redeemer. And I could point you to a thousand fires of persecution lighted up in the darkness of past generations, shedding their beams on times of profound night, and on skies of thickened clouds, fires lighting the steps of one generation to another—to the gardens of Nero, to the vallies in Piedmont, and to the flames of Smithfield. I could point you to thousands of dungeons dark and dismal, where holy men have drawn out their lives, illustrating the estimate in which their piety is held by the men of this world. But it is not needful. I affirm that

there is opposition enough in any age to *test* your character and show what you are. It may meet you in the family, and the eye of a father shall reprove you for being a Christian; or the tongue of a brother shall deride you for your serious piety. It may meet you in the circle of friends, and the voice of professed affection shall speak of you as gloomy and superstitious for your humble and conscientious regard for God. It may meet you in public and political life, and subject the soul to a daily and constant test whether there is strength of piety sufficient to *avow* the despised doctrines and precepts of the cross, and to make them the governing principle of the life. They who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; and one design of persecution is to *develop* the strength of the Christian principle.

There are *allurements* enough to try the Christian principle, and to show to the believer what he is. A corrupt and giddy world is around him testing his character. Places of amusement open their doors. The sound of the viol, the harp, and the organ invite you. Nay, deeper and still more damning places of guilt often are presented to the Christian. The theatre, the places of abomination where God is derided and virtue defied, and ridiculed, and cursed, dare to invite even a *friend of God*. And all such allurements try the character: they *ascertain* whether you have strength of Christian principle to resist the sin when it is presented in alluring forms, and maintain your integrity when the voice of the syren invites you. So the path of ambition is opened before a man to see whether he will consent to *sink* the Christian character for the sake of office; whether he can climb the steps of fame with Christian simplicity of character; or whether he prefers the vale of humble piety, content with the esteem of men and the unalloyed hopes of heaven. So the business, the enterprise, the gains of commerce are presented to the view. The splendors of wealth allure; the ports of the world are open for successful commerce; wealth glitters in the eye, and it invites you to toil and enterprise. That you should refuse to devote yourself to industry, and make full proof of commercial skill will not be maintained. But who would dare to maintain that here was no signal and eminent trial of the Christian spirit?

Again. There is enough of *affliction* in the world to try the Christian. Nor is there one of us who, in the course of our lives, shall not have full opportunity to show what we *are* in times of trial, bereavement, and wo. God designs that there the Christian principle shall triumph; that it shall be fully equal to all the pains that we may be called to endure. He *varies* those afflictions to bring us fully and fairly out. Now he takes away our health, to see how we will bear protracted disease; now he removes our property, to see how we will bear the loss of an idol; now he cuts down the child of our hopes, and tries whether we will be still and know that he is God; and now he opens before our own view approaching death, to try whether we have confidence enough *in him* to commit our departing spirits to the guidance of his unseen hand. In all these scenes it is designed that our piety should shine forth with a benign and pure effulgence—brightening like the beams of the morning, and burning with intenser rays like the sun as it ascends above the clouds, or looks forth from the tempest to ride the meridian sky.

God has placed us in a world eminently adapted to call forth the peculiar principles of the Christian; and in a world too, where, if those principles are *not* called forth, it is full proof that they do not exist. See a race of sufferers; a world of mourners; entire tribes of sinners. Christians, you hold in your hands that gospel which will send peace around the globe—that glorious gospel of the blessed God that may enlighten all nations, alleviate every sorrow, comfort every mourner, and change the aspect of every kingdom and tribe of men. Nor can you be inactive, or undecided on this subject. Every time this great

question is presented to you, in whatever form, it calls on you to act. Every plan of benevolence that is submitted to you affords an opportunity to *test* your character, and will actually *develop* that character. And as if God would present to his people the *highest* possible inducements to devote themselves to the good of men, he has placed before them an entire world of sufferers and sinners, that they may make *full* proof of their Christian principle. As if he would excite them in the highest manner, he has foretold brighter days of the church, and assured us that times are advancing that shall correspond with the deepest desires of the people of God. And as if he would set his seal to the expression of Christian feeling in regard to the pagan world, he has followed the efforts of his people with a signal blessing. Now it was precisely this state of things that called forth the burning ardor of Paul. Nay, more, it was the view of the deep guilt and woes of suffering man that moved the Son of God with compassion, and led to the self-denial of his ministry, and the agonies of the garden and the cross. I need not add, that if the woes and dangers of man found their way to the bosom of God's own Son, it is not to be wondered at that they should find their way also to all who are his followers. Can a man be a Christian whose bosom *does not* respond in this to the feelings of the Lord Jesus? If I have read the oracles of religion aright, he cannot.

Once more. Every Christian is placed amid domestic scenes and circles of friendship that will bring out his character. You have a child unrenewed. That child will soon stand at the bar of God. Nay, that child shall tread the deep profound of the eternal world, and live for ever. Need we put to a Christian parent, to excite his interest, the question whether that child shall live for ever in heaven or in hell? There is a feeling in a *Christian* bosom that anticipates this question, and there is much in the situation of that child to bring the Christian out and develop his character. You have a parent who has watched over your infancy, and been always kind; but that parent is not a Christian. Can there be any thing among mortal men so fitted to call forth deep feeling in the youthful Christian bosom as the sight of the parent's venerable locks, and the feeling that that parent is going unrenewed to the bar of God? You are a brother, or a sister, or a friend. The leaden, slow-moving ages of eternity are before your unconverted friends; and what in all the universe is better fitted than this to call forth all the Christian within you to humble and holy effort to save those friends from the deep shades of eternal night? You are members of a Christian church. Does it slumber? Have the shades of a heavy night fallen on our eyelids? Are there hundreds who have no professed interest in all that the Redeemer has done to save them? Are they unrenewed, unpardoned,—what is, alas! most deeply melancholy—unconcerned, and unalarmed? They go to eternity, and they appeal to the Christian to put forth all his efforts to save them from death. You live in an age when your influence in the cause of revivals and Christian benevolence may be felt around the globe. The utmost pagan tribe; the blackest, foulest cell of guilt, and filth, and wo; the darkest dungeon of depravity on pagan soils *may* be reached by your benefactions. A revival of religion in any church, such as existed in the day of Pentecost, *might* be felt in its influence in all this land, and in every land. The development of your Christian principles, my fellow-members of the church, is what the world demands, and what the Savior who died asks of you. If his death will not do it, there are no motives in the universe that will. There is no other blood; there are no other groans; there can be no more such dying agonies.