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## SERMON XXXII.

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### THE VALUE OF FIFTY-TWO SABBATHS IN THE YEAR.

“The Sabbath was made for man.”—MARK 2 : 27.

AND like every other divine arrangement, it is full of benevolence towards man. It is replete with good, and with no evil. No individual is made the worse by observing it as it was designed that it should be observed; there is no one that might not be made better and happier by it; there is no family that keeps it in a proper manner into which it brings disease, or poverty, or discord, or tears, or vice; there is none which it does not contribute to purify and elevate; there is no neighborhood, city, nation, which is not made more orderly, intelligent, and happy by its observance; none that now desecrates the day that might not derive important advantages by regarding it as a season of sacred rest.

The last Sabbath of another year is closing. A few moments of its light yet linger in our land, and in a brief period the last

Sabbath of the year will have closed on twenty millions in our country; on nine hundred millions of immortal beings on the earth. Can there be a more appropriate employment, as its beams linger and play on the city of our habitation, and on the spires and mountain-summits of our land, than to improve its last moments with reflections suitable to the end of such an unusual occurrence of our lives, as the closing of the Sabbath and of the year together? Let us notice the thoughts suggested by these two topics: The Sabbaths of a year, and the fact that they are closing.

I. The Sabbaths of a year. Perhaps we may find something in these words that may be worthy of serious reflection. If we do, it will be in the amount of time thus set apart in a year for a specified purpose; the design for which it is set apart; the place which it occupies amidst the other days of the year.

(1) The amount of time which is thus set apart for a specific purpose. From the year, itself a brief period, there is abstracted for the purposes of the Sabbath one seventh part of the whole—fifty-two days—almost two entire months. Perhaps we may, in some respects, best estimate the value of this time, by supposing that it were continuous time, taken together from any one period of the year, instead of being distributed along in small portions through the whole. To see its value, then, it may be proper to inquire what could be accomplished during those fifty-two days in a year, in the ordinary employments in which men are engaged; and perhaps some estimate of their value may be obtained by considering what might have been gained by them if they had been devoted to the usual pursuits of life. I refer to this estimate now, on the supposition that in reference to the prosecution of the ordinary pursuits of life with vigor and with profit and with health, it makes no difference as to the other days of the year, whether these fifty-two days are devoted to worldly occupations or to religion. Let us see, then, by what rules, according to this mode of estimation, their value is to be measured.

The day-laborer, the mechanic, the farmer, would estimate their value by what he has been able to earn on fifty-two other days of the year; and that is what the Sabbaths of the year would be worth to him in the ordinary way in which he estimates the value of time. If he has at other times earned one dollar a day, the Sabbath, on this supposition, has taken fifty-two dollars from the sum total of his earnings during the year; that is, the law of religion, and the customs of the community, have cost him this sum. If on an average on other days he has earned five dollars a day, the tax on his earnings by keeping the Sabbath has been swelled to more than two hundred and fifty dollars. The merchant, on this principle, will multiply the average of his gains on the other days of the year by this number fifty-two, and this will show him

how much the Sabbath ought in some way to be worth to him. The professional man will inquire what was the amount of his earnings on any other fifty-two days, and what they might have been on these; the traveler, how far he might have proceeded on his journey; the student, how many more books of classic-learning, or law, or medicine, or history, he might have read in fifty-two continuous days; the votary of pleasure, how much more might have been enjoyed if the theaters had been open, and if the customs of the community had sanctioned parties and dances on those days now kept as sacred time.

Now, on the supposition on which we are now proceeding, that a man could do as much work, perform as much study, or taste the sweets of pleasure as much on the other days of the year if he did not observe a Sabbath, its value to any one, in this point of view, must be estimated by what those days would have been worth to him in the ordinary employments of his life; and that is the pecuniary price or tax which he pays for the observance of the Sabbath. I believe, indeed, that this estimate is to be materially modified by the fact that the proper observance of a day of rest is really no loss to man as a laborer, or a student, or a traveler, or in the lawful enjoyments of life, but that in fact the remainder of the year is worth more to him in these respects than it would be if it were a period of continuous labor without any interruption or rest; but still this is the pecuniary value which is to be fixed upon the time as such. This would be the way in which any other fifty-two days would be estimated, if, for example, a man were required to leave his farm and engage in the duties of a soldier or a juror. And it is a fair inquiry before a man who keeps the Sabbath, and who is accustomed to affix a certain value to his time, whether, as the Sabbath is actually employed, it is in fact worth to him as much as these dollars would be which he might have earned; or as the progress which he might have made in his journey, his studies, or his pleasures, would have been. In making this calculation, it would indeed be proper to consider how much he owed to it on the other days of the week on the score of health, and vigor, and general happiness; and, also, whether he has not other interests of as much value as pecuniary interests, which have been promoted by this; in other words, whether the fifty-two days could have been more profitably employed than they have been by one in the circumstances in which we have been, and with the interests which we have to secure; for it is in some proper sense a fair inquiry what these fifty-two days that have been abstracted from the ordinary employments of life, and in which those employments have been suspended, have been worth to him. And that would be one way of determining whether the appointment of the Sabbath is a wise or an unwise appointment.

I have aimed in this way to show you the value of the Sab-

bath, by supposing that those fifty-two days had been taken together from any one portion of the year, and by applying to them the ordinary measure by which we determine the value of our time. Now, on this way of estimating these days, it is clear that they should not have been spent without securing to us something in actual value that would be in fact a compensation for the tax or price which we have paid for the Sabbath. It is clear that they might have been turned to great account. Suppose you were to take any continuous fifty-two days to read the Bible, and to pray, and to pursue a careful inquiry into the state of your opinions on religion. Suppose you were to take the entire two months of the new year that is to open upon us to devote to a serious inquiry whether you are prepared to die. Suppose you were to devote them to the single purpose of becoming a Christian—by withdrawing from the world, suspending your business, excluding yourself from all amusements or cares that would distract the mind—can you have any reasonable doubt that in that time you could prepare to meet God, and could lay a good foundation for eternal life? I think that no one could reasonably doubt that in that period, by careful study and prayer, he could settle the inquiry to his own satisfaction about the life to come. And yet the Sabbaths distributed through the weeks of the year would furnish just as much time for this as in the case supposed, and would have greater advantages with reference to this end than if taken as continuous time from any one portion of the year. And can you have any reasonable doubt that if you had given your minds to a careful preparation for heaven during the Sabbaths of this whole year, with such attention as you might have bestowed on the subject on the other days of the week without interfering with your worldly business in any way, you might have been this day a true Christian—a child of God—an heir of heaven?

(2.) These thoughts will have additional impressiveness if we consider a second circumstance—the place of the Sabbath—the manner in which your Sabbaths have been scattered along among the other days of the year. It is easy to conceive, on the supposition that God had intended to set apart such a portion of time as one seventh to be kept holy, that that period might have been taken as a continuous period, either, say at the beginning, or at the close of the year—either at the end of the year, to reflect on the past, and to gather up the lessons which so many successive days might have suggested to the mind, and to rest after so long uninterrupted labor; or at the beginning of the year, to prepare man for so long a period of unbroken toil. One ignorant of what man is, and man wants, or one unskilled as to the actual working of any such system, would have done this as Mohammed designated an entire month to be observed as a month of fasting—with infinite inconvenience to all who attempt to observe it. But the divine arrange-

ment has been different, and it may be well to dwell a moment on that arrangement as one of wisdom and benevolence.

(a) What, then, is the fact in regard to the wisdom and the benevolence of this arrangement? It will be clearly seen in these things :

The Sabbaths have been distributed along through the year when the mind and the body needed rest: at intervals sufficiently near, and sufficiently remote, if not to meet an essential law of our nature, yet, as all experience shows, adapted to the best state of the bodily health, to the best exercise of the mental powers, and to the accomplishment of the most possible by the labor of the body and the mind; for nothing is now better established than that if man wishes to make much of life, he will not be a loser, but a gainer, by observing days of rest occurring at about the periods designated by the Christian Sabbath. This purpose would not have been secured by the observance of a continuous period of rest at any one portion of the year.

The Sabbaths have been distributed along by this arrangement in such a manner that nothing that is valuable is interrupted by it. The period of the Sabbath, compared with the whole of the week, is so short that it constitutes no interference with the regular business of life. This could not have occurred by the designation of a long, continuous period. The adjournment of a court for fifty-two days; the suspension of the labors of farming; the occurring of such a period in the season of sowing or harvesting; the closing of all stores and all shops of mechanics; the suspension of all travel — any one can see how impracticable this would have been, or how it would have interfered with the regular business of human life. As it is, the taking of this amount of time from the year, really interrupts nothing. The farmer is not so interrupted that he can not sow or gather his grain; the merchant, that he can not regularly prosecute his business; the mechanic, that he can not carry on his regular employment; the traveler, that he can not pursue his journey; the student, that he can not resume with freshness his lesson where it was suspended; the courts, that they can not take up a cause at the point where the testimony was arrested; and the advocate, that his argument when resumed will not be as impressive as if it had not been suspended. These days have been distributed along when, perhaps, but for such an interruption, some powerful vice or evil habit would have obtained a hold which could not have been dislodged from the soul. At the end of every six days there has been an arresting of such worldly and evil influences, and the incipient habit has been broken, and time has been given for reflection, and the mind, perhaps unconsciously to itself, has been brought under other and holier influences. Were there no other good in the case, it is much in the cause of virtue to break in upon any forming habit of evil in every

seven days, and no man knows how much he owes to that one simple fact in the formation of his own character.

The Sabbaths of the year are so distributed as not to be tedious. The day when it occurs is long enough as a season of rest; not so long as to become necessarily irksome. As man is now constituted, you could hardly calculate that a season of religious rest could become otherwise than tedious by the long, continuous period of something like two months, nor could you then well meet the complaint of ancient avarice: "When will the Sabbath be gone that we may set forth wheat?" (Amos 8: 5.) As it is, the Sabbath need not be a wearisome or irksome period of human life. If it is, it is because men choose to make it so. Its grateful rest comes in when there has been so much of turmoil and toil, and when the powers are so much exhausted, as to make it needful; it has enough in which the heart may be interested to occupy all its moments; and its fast-fleeing hours are gone before they necessarily become irksome, and as soon as man could reasonably desire to return again to the business or the pleasures of this life.

(b) Now, this arrangement has been continued along in our journey of life through another year. No man's business has been injuriously broken in upon; no court has been adjourned with detriment to the interests of justice; no student has suspended his duties with damage to himself; no mechanic has closed his place of business with any loss to his customers or to himself; and no man has been laid by for tedious successive weeks on his journey. No farm has remained unplowed when it was desirable to plant or sow, and no harvest has rotted in the fields because the farmer felt himself bound to keep a long period of holy time. Yet the year has been interrupted so as to comprise this whole period of fifty-two entire days. Fifty-two times the affairs of the world have been suspended by common consent all around you, to remind you that there is a God; that there is another world; that there is a place of perfect cessation from toil; and that man has higher interests than those which pertain to the present life. Fifty-two times all the courts have been suspended; the stores have been closed; the exercises in colleges and schools have been arrested; the apprentice has been released from toil; the hired laborer has ceased to be bound by his contract to work; and the slave has had no task, and has felt that, to some extent, the time was his own, and that he too might think of heaven. Fifty-two times the axe of the woodman has ceased to be heard, and the noise of the spindle and the loom has died away, and the plow has been left standing in the furrow. Fifty-two times during the year you have been solicited to take up your Bible and to search diligently after truth; fifty-two days have you been invited to the sanctuary; through fifty-two days you have had nothing else to do but to prepare for heaven.

(3.) These thoughts may be more deeply impressed on the mind if we consider for a moment the design for which this day has been set apart. Its great purpose can be easily understood—can not well be mistaken. It is based on these truths: (a) That man has other and higher interests than those which pertain to this life. Who can doubt this? Who can doubt that those interests demand the careful attention of man? Yes, there are other ends for which to live than gain and pleasure and honor. We are all made for other purposes than these. These must be the smallest things pertaining to our welfare as creatures traveling to eternity. (b) That it is desirable to make the heart better and holier. The Sabbath pertains primarily to the heart. The intellect, the world, the wharf, the exchange, the “shop,” the courts, the money-tables—these have enough of our time through the week. It is well to devote one day to the heart, to the temper, to the affections, to self-government, to the entire contemplation of higher realities, to the enlargement and the purifying of the domestic affections, to the subjugation of evil passions. All that tends to make the heart better, and the world happier, is appropriate to the Sabbath. All that will make me less covetous, or less envious, or less irascible, or less ambitious, or less sensual, or less hard-hearted to the calls of sacred charity; and all that I can do to make my neighbor more cheerful, if sad and in affliction, or to give light to the ignorant, or peace to the dying, is appropriate to the Sabbath. All these things are well at other times, and they should not be neglected; but in a world like this it is worth the cost, of one whole day in every seven—estimate its value as you will by dollars and cents—to make the heart better, and to promote the happiness of the world. (c) And the Sabbath is *given* for these ends; for “it was made for man.” It was given for this purpose under every advantage—scattered along at reasonable and convenient intervals in life; when the affairs of the world are suspended; when all is calm around you, and invites to reflection; when the hours of the day are set apart by law and by custom for this purpose; and when you are sure that such an appropriation of these hours would meet with the approbation of God, and with your own approbation when you come to review life from the bed of death. And, (d) again, it is given for no other purpose, and you have no right to employ it for any other purpose, for God commanded, saying: “Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” Gain, and traffic, and study, and travel, and personal business, except for purposes of necessity and mercy, are a violation of the law of God; for he who said “thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother,” said also, “remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day.” Fifty-two times that command has been laid across the path of the worldly, and the

vain, and the gay, during the past year, and as many times you have been reminded that God claimed that *that* time should be devoted to him.

II. These days are ending. The sun is setting. But a few moments more of its light linger around us, and then the Sabbaths and all the other days of the year will be gone. Let us dwell a few moments on the fact that these days are closing, and in view of that ask, in this impressive moment, how they have been spent.

To some these Sabbaths have been among the most pleasant parts of their lives. The happiest moments of the year have been on this holy day; the hours which the mind would desire should be the last that should fade from the memory, if a time should come when that mind was to forget all things, would be those precious hours. The influences upon the heart most desirable to be retained, have been those which have proceeded from the observance of this day of holy rest, and the principal sorrow in the recollection of the departed days of the year is, that those holy seasons are past—a sorrow, however, which finds alleviation—as the sorrow for no other departed joys does—in the assurance that if life is prolonged that joy will certainly be renewed again; or, if life should be soon arrested, that they have been but the foretaste of the joys of the eternal Sabbath.

But is this so with all persons? Is it so with all who are professing Christians? Have we who bear the Christian name made as much of the Sabbaths of this year as we might have done for our own improvement, for our growth in grace, for prayer, for the study of the word of God, in doing good in our families, and in the world? Are there not solemn records against us for wasted hours, and for neglected duties, and for a bad example, and for unprofitable reading and conversation? Are there no records against us for what our Master regards as violations of that day; for pursuits of worldliness and sin?

But let me seriously ask of all here who are not professing Christians, to recall now the manner in which you have spent the Sabbaths of the year, and especially in view of the thoughts which I have suggested as to its design—the fact that so large a portion of the year has been separated from other time by the law of God and the customs of the community; that that time so separated has been distributed along through the year, in a manner best adapted to promote the end of the institution and to produce the happiest effects on your own minds; and that the design of the day has been to make the heart better, and to prepare for another state of being. The fair question now is, whether these designs and ends have been accomplished? Or, which is the same thing, whether you can suppose that God would designate such a day with a view to your accomplishing those things in which you have been engaged in during the Sabbaths of the year? What the em-



ployment of these portions of the year has been, you best know yourselves, and whether the recollection of the manner in which you have spent the sacred hours be that which is best fitted to give peace, on a review of life, you best can tell. If the business of the world has been pursued with as much zest and greediness on that day as on any other; if you have pursued your journeys without even pausing to show outward respect for the day; if the affairs of the world have been only nominally suspended, while your heart has been in it, and you have been forming plans of worldliness still; if you have secretly stolen into your counting-rooms to write your letters; if you have prosecuted your professional studies, or have only laid aside your professional books to read those of a lighter and more attractive kind; if it has been a day to do up the small business of the week; if it has been a day of amusement, in which, relieved from toil, you have sought mere relaxation; if it has been a day of almost insupportable tediousness because you have no love for its appropriate employments, and you have been constrained to show an outward respect for it; if you have habitually and deliberately neglected your Bible, and offered no prayer on that day; or if, instead of improving its hours to make your heart better, you have only abused them to make it worse—then doubtless you can recall all these things to-day, and this is a proper hour to judge whether that has been the wisest and the best method of spending these fifty-two days. They are gone. They can not now be recalled. But you can ask yourself whether these days were not designed for other and holier objects than these, and whether they might not have been spent in a manner better adapted to promote the great ends of human life.

A few moments of the light of the closing Sabbath of the year yet linger. The last evening of the year comes on. The evening of the year is not an inappropriate time for calm reflection—for oh! how does it remind us all that the last evening of life hastens on—that the night cometh when, all our days ended, “no man can work!”

The Sabbath and the year are closing together. What interest is there is in dwelling on the last departing moments—on the events of the year? How solemn to end these Sabbaths—to end this year! How solemn will it be to end all our Sabbaths—all our years! What recollections crowd upon us in view of the past! What thoughts press upon us in the anticipation of what is to come! What scenes have we passed through! What scenes may be before us! How the memory of sickness, and trouble, and disappointment, and bereavement, comes over many a heart to-day! How deep a sorrow perhaps would fall upon us if we knew what is to be on the next year! How the image of a dear, departed friend that began the year with us in this house, rises before the memory! With what intense interest, with what deep and unutterable

feelings, might we look upon the friend at our side, if we knew what is to come!

Another year is about to open—to some of us the last year of life; to many a year of privilege, of prosperity, and of happiness. To those of us who live, it will be another year of probation. It will have its Sabbaths and its sanctuary privileges. It will meet us to-morrow morning in a land of freedom and of Christian refinement and enjoyment. It will hold out to us the Bible still as a “lamp to our feet and a light to our paths;” it will set before us, from time to time, a preached gospel; it will appeal to us, by a thousand arguments and influences, to live unto God, and to prepare for a vast eternity. Its light, when it dawns upon us, should fill us with joy; its days should be improved in a careful preparation for the life to come; its Sabbaths, as they pass along, should be spent so as to promote purity of heart and a fitness for “the rest that remaineth for the people of God.” God grant that it may be a year replete to each one of you with abundant blessings—a year of health and prosperity and peace—a year of fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ—a year when heavenly influences will descend on all your families—a year crowned with blessings to the Church, to our common country, to the world!

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## SERMON XXXIII.

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### THE CHURCH-GOING BELL.\*

“WHEN the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.”—Exod. 19 : 13.

EVIDENCES are very numerous in the Scripture that God is pleased when his people worship him in sincerity and truth. If we look as far back as the time when Abel was offering up a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; if we see Enos and his associates calling themselves by the name of the Lord; if we see the patriarchs and their children standing around rude altars of stone, waiting for the fulfillment of covenant promises—we shall find the divine smile overhanging the worshippers; we shall then be prepared to hear a voice from above distinctly saying: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” And

\* Preached the first Sabbath after the hang'ng of a new bell.