

THE = TREASURY =

AN EVANGELICAL MONTHLY
FOR PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

VOL. VII.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY, 1890.

No. 10.

→ SERMONS ←

A SUMMONS TO FRESH CONSECRATION.*

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Behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.—ST. MATT. xxviii., 9.

THERE is no one who has had any experience of Christian spiritual religion in his life, who has not at times felt periods of great depression, and consequent thereupon, languidness for spiritual activities and disability for spiritual work. Mark, we do not say that every "Christian" has felt depression, because there are a great many persons who bear the name of Christian who have never had any genuine spirituality in their religion. They have been Christians in the technical and nominal meaning of the word, but they have never had their souls stirred by the energizing influence of the love of Jesus, and thereby been spiritually vitalized; as, also, there are a great many others who would certainly not *wish* to come under the influence of such Christianity, who feel that if they were to be asked for any more than an external following after Christ, even to yield to the promptings of deepened spirituality, they would not desire it at all, nay, they would feel as if the little

* This sermon—the first preached after the summer vacation in 1889—was entirely extempore and without notes, and we are indebted to an amateur reporter for so much as could be caught in the rapid utterances of the preacher, and which is to the sermon itself rather as a woodcut to a landscape—a resemblance rather than a likeness.

(5) He forewarned the people not to trust to the fact that they were Israelites and had Abraham for their father. Some may think that they are eligible to God's favor without complying with the requirements of the Scriptures. (6) With God all things are possible. He is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. If, as some say, "these stones" mean the Gentiles; then the expression has a strong spiritual meaning, showing the power of God's grace when received by faith. (7) The time for action is at hand—the axe of judgment is laid to the root of the tree, etc. (v. 9). Now is the accepted time. (8) The people ask: What shall we do then (v. 10) to show the sincerity of our repentance? Answer: (a) The avaricious must give of their abundance to those that need (v. 11). (b) The extortioners must do what is honest and just by all men (vs. 12, 13). (c) The violent were to

be merciful and contented (v. 14). From these verses we learn that true repentance must strike a death blow at our besetting sins.

II. John's description of Jesus. Vs. 15-22. (1) He was One mightier than John, "the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose." (2) He would send upon the people the Holy Ghost, giving all believers the fire of religious enthusiasm. (3) He would show strict judgment between the righteous and the wicked. (4) These noble words of the Baptist regarding his own lowliness and the greatness of Christ show what a noble man John was. History has not produced a greater.

The other verses in this lesson tell of John being shut up in prison by Herod (vs. 18-20); and of the baptism of our Lord by John (vs. 21-22).

February 23,

The Temptation of Jesus.—LUKE IV., 1-13.

1890.

I. The design of the temptation. (1) This mysterious circumstance took place immediately after our Lord's baptism and endowment of the Holy Spirit, when He was about thirty years of age (iii., 23). (2) It was typical in design, bringing together the heads of the two kingdoms of light and darkness, and hence Christ overcame for His people and showed them how they might conquer the Evil One. It formed a part of Christ's humiliation. (3) At the time Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, by whose influence He was led into the wilderness, and by whose power He was able to conquer Satan. There are three temptations.

First: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (vs. 1-4). The temptation involved the sin of mistrust of the goodness of God. To God alone must man look to supply all his wants. Christ's reply: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone" (v. 4). This showed that our Lord depended upon a higher sustaining power than upon material things. It showed

also His confidence in what was written in God's Word. He used the written Word to frustrate the designs of Satan.

Second temptation: The worshipping of Satan. Here is the awful sin involved, for which Jesus was to be remunerated by all the kingdoms of the world. It was that Jesus was to become secular in His spirit and give Himself over to idolatry. The reply: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." This showed that Jesus Christ was thoroughly spiritual in His aims and purposes. How many to-day are yielding to this temptation of Satan.

Third temptation: A presumptuous distrust of God—wantonly demanding a display of our Lord's preserving power. It is written, says Satan, "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, to guard Thee." Jesus answers: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This was the final blow. Not being able to move Him, Satan departed from Him for a season. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

HELPS IN PASTORAL WORK

The Pastor-Preacher.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

I have intentionally compounded the two words "pastor" and "preacher," because the two offices ought to be combined in every person who is installed in the charge of a church. I fear that there

is an increasing tendency to underrate the vital importance of pastoral labors; and that the pulpit too much overshadows the duties of the shepherd of the flock. Many of the arguments for thorough pastoral work lie so patently upon the surface that they hardly require to be

recapitulated. Every sensible minister knows that by faithful visitation of his people he gains a stronger hold upon their hearts. He becomes so familiar with their faces that he is not in danger of passing them without recognition. He becomes acquainted with the children in each family—who are about the most important portion of his flock. He has the opportunity to comfort the afflicted, and to direct inquiring souls to the Saviour. All these cogent reasons require no emphasizing.

But there is one equally strong argument for pastoral intercourse with a congregation that many ministers, especially young ministers, are in danger of ignoring or underestimating. The argument is this. Every pulpit needs to be vitalized by close contact with living people, rather than with lifeless books; and the best practical discourses are those which the congregation help their minister to prepare. His books teach him many great truths in the abstract; his people can teach him those and many more truths in the concrete. By constant and loving intercourse with the individuals of his flock, he becomes acquainted with their peculiarities, and thus enlarges his knowledge of human nature, which is second only to a knowledge of God's Word. He discovers also their spiritual wants. He soon becomes convinced that they care most to have clear, strong, practical instruction about their every-day duties, trials, and temptations. They want to know not only how to save their souls for eternity, but how to save their lives in this world. They want portable truth that they can carry with them into their homes, into their sick rooms, into their stores and shops, and into every nook and corner of daily life. If a minister is a wise man (and neither God nor man has any use for fools), he will be made all the wiser by the thousand suggestions which he can gain from the immortal beings to whom he preaches.

There is about as much human nature in the pulpit as there is in the pew. We all love honest commendation and encouragement. Nothing cheers and helps a pastor more than to have his people say

to him during the week, "I thank you for last Sunday's sermon; it did me solid good; it relieved some of my doubts, it lifted off some of my loads, it comforted me under my heartaches, it brought me nearer to Christ." Such encouragements not only reveal to us what our people need, but they are an hundred-fold better "pay" than a salary. A very distinguished and evangelical minister once said to me rather sadly, "I don't get that sort of encouragement once in six months." Probably the real reason is that he spends so much of his time in his study, preparing his superb sermons, that he does not go familiarly among his flock, and give them a chance to say such cheering and helpful things. They listen to him, love him, and are proud of him, but are not enough "in touch" with him. And when I have read his masterly discourses, I have often thought that their only lack was the lack of just those tender, close, comforting home-truths which an intimate, personal intercourse with his people would suggest to him. He is a very great preacher, but perhaps would be still greater if he were a pastor-preacher.

Last summer, in Dundee, I conversed with a gray-headed member of St. Peter's Presbyterian Church, who, in his youth, listened to the sainted Robert Murray McCheyne. He spoke of him with the deepest reverence and love. But the chief thing that he remembered—after forty-six years—was that McCheyne, a few days before his death, met him in the street, and laying his hand on his shoulder said to him, kindly, "Jimmy, I hope that all is well with your soul. How is your sick sister? I am coming to see her again shortly." That sentence or two had stuck to the old Christian for over forty years. It had grappled his pastor to him. And this little narrative gave me a fresh insight into the secret of McCheyne's wonderful power. He was a man of rare spirituality and knowledge of God's Word; he was a tender, soul-awakening minister of Jesus Christ; his ministry was richly successful; and largely because he kept in touch with his people, and was a pastor as well as a powerful preacher.