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Rev. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D.,
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THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXXI.

OCTOBER, 1919.

No. 1.

MY FIRST SERMON.

BY THE REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D., LL.D.,

Pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church, New York City.

"Let her alone; she hath wrought a good work on me." Mark 14:6.

One Sunday morning in 1869, a young theologue sat in his room at Number 9 University Place in this city contemplating a sermon on the foregoing text, which he regarded as a masterpiece of clever composition. It was his first sermon, his "trial sermon," and not unnaturally he was eager to deliver it. The church bells had ceased ringing. There came a knocking at his door and, as if in immediate answer to his wish, a messenger announced that Dr. Joseph P. Thompson of the Broadway Tabernacle had been suddenly taken ill and somebody was needed to supply his pulpit. Would the young man preach? *Would he?* How true it is that fools rush in where angels fear to tread! The youth mounted the pulpit steps of the Broadway Tabernacle that morning with a degree of self-confidence that he has never been able to command even to this day. At the close of the service he was assured by some of the ladies present that his sermon was "simply beautiful"; he knew, without telling, that it was profound. His only misgiving was lest he had preached over the heads of his congregation. He realizes now that half a century has passed—for this is the fiftieth anniversary of that notable debut—that the sermon in question was "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null."

A "FIND."

BY REV. THERON H. RICE, D. D.

Professor of English Bible and Homiletics in Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

Those of us who have been preachers of the Gospel have often found that a sermon born of a recent vivid experience of some precious truth has gone home to many a hearer as if prepared expressly for him. In other words, in preaching what was a message to our own hearts we have reached the hearts of others.

That of which I am now about to write is something which has blessed my own soul. It may be a blessing to some of my fellow-Christians. I am going to pass it on.

In calling it a "find," I mean to say only that it was a discovery to *me*. A great many others may have seen it long ago. I have encountered it in the printed books of at least two expositors since seeing it for myself in the Word of God. But to me it came with all the freshness and power of a personal discovery; I felt as grateful as if God Himself had solved for me a difficulty which had long baffled and distressed me.

It had always been clear to me that the Lord Jesus wanted his people to look for his return. It was an event I loved to think about. Few words from his lips fell sweeter on the ear than those recorded in the 12th chapter of Luke (Vs. 35-40): "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourself like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." Paul rejoices over the Thessalonian Christians be-

cause they "turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God. and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10); he describes the genuine believer as one whose "citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20); he tells us that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation" teaches us that, "denying" ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13); and on the eve of his martyrdom describes himself and all who, like him, shall receive the crown of righteousness, as "those who love his appearing." The words of the Lord Jesus Himself leave us in no doubt concerning our duty in this respect: "For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

Now obedience to the Lord's command would be quite simple were it not for one passage in the New Testament. In that one passage we seem to be instructed not to look for the Lord's return until a certain series of events shall have run its course. At the end of these events, *and not before* may we look for Him to appear. That passage is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; and because I know how irksome it is to go to your Bible and look up the reference, I am going to transcribe the whole passage here. (I shall use the American Standard Revised Version.)

"Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the

falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Several things seem to stand out here very distinctly. First that the Thessalonian Christians were troubled, "shaken from their mind" concerning "the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him." Second, the root of their trouble was an apprehension that "the day of the Lord was *just at hand.*" Third, the Apostle, in order to remove their distress and clear their minds, tells them that they are mistaken in supposing that the day of the Lord is just at hand. He reminds them that he had told them before that certain stupendous events must come to pass before the day of the Lord, which they were dreading, would break upon the world. These stupendous events had not taken place; hence Paul counsels the Thessalonians to dismiss their apprehensions on that point. It would be time enough to look for this when the series of events outlined should have run its course.

Look for what? "The coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him?" For a long time I thought so. And here was my difficulty. The same voice of inspiration which urges us to look for our Lord's return and to be always ready to receive him inasmuch as we do not know when he may appear—that same voice of inspiration here seems to inform

us that the Lord is not to be expected until certain definite things have first taken place, and urges us to dismiss all solicitude on the point as unworthy and wrong.

One day a light broke. The two expressions, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him," on the one hand, and "the day of the Lord," on the other hand, had been taken to mean the same thing. As a matter of fact do they not refer to quite distinct things? Every reader of the Bible knows that "the day of the Lord suggests distress, calamity, terror. Consult Isaiah 2, and Joel for only two of the many instances. It is called "that great and terrible day of the Lord." Paul had written to these Thessalonians in his first Epistle concerning this "day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2-9). He had told them that they were not in darkness that that day should overtake them as it would overtake those who were of the night and of the darkness (1 Thess. 5:4, 5). And Paul had written to these Thessalonians in that same first Epistle concerning that other thing—"the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him." Here is what he had said concerning that event: "For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." If the "day of the Lord" is full of terror "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him" is full of comfort. The cause of the Thessalonians' trouble was a confusing of the two things Paul had held out to them in his first

Epistle the "blessed hope" of the Christian, "the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him." What they were looking forward to when the second Epistle was written was "the great and terrible day of the Lord." Had they only taken Paul's teaching as a whole they would have understood that they need not dread "the great and terrible day of the Lord," because "the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him" would take them away from the earth before the tempest should burst on the ungodly world.

As soon as this was recognized in the Thessalonian Epistles, certain paragraphs of our Lord's Olivet Discourse came to mind. It will be remembered that Jesus paints a picture of "the great and terrible day of the Lord" in these words: "And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:25-27). That is what the Thessalonians were dreading as "just at hand." But Jesus would have his people to escape this "day," for he continues (Luke 21:34-36) "But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth" [but you need not be "on the face of all the earth," having been "gathered unto the Lord" as Paul has expressed it (2 Thess. 2:1. See also 1 Thess. 4:16, 17)]. Hence Jesus continues: "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things (the things sketched by Jesus in Luke 21:25-27) and to stand before the Son of Man."

To the writer of this paper there is great comfort in this outlook. All attentive readers of Scriptures must often have trembled at the descriptions of a time that is yet ahead of this world. Our Lord Jesus has said of it: "then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning

of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be." We may well desire to escape it and to desire that our children may escape it and all whom we love. Christ seems to have mapped out a way of escape. Those who watch and pray, who live soberly and close to him shall be taken away from the evil to come, either falling asleep in Jesus or (if alive and on the earth when the tempest is about to break) caught up together with the sleeping believers to meet the Lord in the air thenceforth to be ever "with the Lord."

Well may we treasure our Saviour's precious words, as the future grows dark with approaching judgment: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

And for our guidance while we wait we do well to lay to heart the words of Paul (1 Thess. 5:2-10): "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief, for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night nor of the darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep (that is whether we are believers 'who are alive and remain' to be caught up; or believers who have fallen asleep in Jesus and whom God will bring with Him) *we should live together with Him.*"