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SERMON CCLXX.

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I WOULD NOT LIVE ALWAY.

JOB VII. 16.—*I would not live alway.*

It is, I suppose, universally admitted, that the love of life is natural to man; and there are certainly many things connected with the present state of existence to render life desirable. The world in which we dwell has been admirably fitted up for our convenience and comfort; and there are good gifts constantly coming down from the Father of mercies, to sustain and cheer us during our residence here. There are opportunities here for doing good; for administering relief to the needy and wretched; for aiding the cause of truth and piety; and thus glorifying God in our body and spirit. There are the means of working out our own salvation; of laying up treasure in heaven that will satisfy and endure; and even the afflictions of the present become a furnace in which the soul is prepared to shine with increasing beauty and brightness in the future. And there are some of the Christian graces, for the development of which this is the only theatre; for when injury ceases, there will be no occasion for forgiveness; and when suffering ceases, there will be no demand for patience. Indeed, there is good reason why every individual should be thankful for his present existence: even though he perverts it to his eternal ruin, yet the hours of life are golden hours; they are given to be a blessing, and praise is due to Him who bestows them.

SERMON CCLXXI.

BY REV. W. B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

THE CROWN OF THORNS AND THE MANY CROWNS.

MATT. XXVII. 29.—*And when they had platted a crown of thorns they put it upon his head:*

— IN CONNECTION WITH —

REV. XIX. 12.—*And on his head were many crowns.*

These two passages, as you will remember, refer to the same glorious personage, though they represent him in different and opposite conditions.

The former represents him in the depth of his humiliation: not only as an inhabitant of this world of sorrow, and an heir to the common sufferings of humanity, but as in the midst of that protracted scene of anguish in which he yielded himself up a sacrifice for the sins of men. The latter represents him in his glorified state; as occupying the mediatorial throne; as exalted to be head over all things to the church, and receiving the grateful homage of adoring millions. Christians, each of these passages announces a fact into which the angels desire to look; and the two facts, viewed in their connexion, may very properly form the basis of our sacramental meditations. Let us, then, before we surround the table, dwell for a few moments upon the "crown of thorns" and upon the "many crowns;" and show how the wearing of the one stood related to the wearing of the other.

"And when they had platted a CROWN OF THORNS, they put it upon his head."

When we read that our blessed Lord suffered the ignominious death of the cross, it is only a very inadequate idea of his sufferings that is conveyed to the mind. He might have been crucified without having endured the agony of the garden; without having been betrayed by one disciple, and denied by another, and deserted by all. He might have been crucified without going through with

that scene of horrible insult and cruelty to which he was subjected in the pretorium; without being gorgeously arrayed, in derision of his claims as a king; without being saluted in mockery by a blood-thirsty rabble; without having his sacred temples perforated by a crown of thorns. Indeed, it is the CIRCUMSTANCES of his crucifixion, especially in those which constituted the horrible preparation for it, rather than in the event itself, that we are to look for that which gives it such fearful prominence in the annals of suffering.

It is one of these circumstances only that is recorded in our text; and though our familiarity with it may diminish the influence which it is fitted to exert, yet where is the individual who can hold it to his mind without some tender and painful emotions? Suppose, at this moment, you were to see a crown of thorns brought forth to be placed upon the head of some person in this assembly—if you please, upon one whom you regard as your enemy—one whom you pass silently, when you meet him in the street; suppose you should see it laid carefully upon his head, and then pressed down, so that the thorns might penetrate deeply, and in a moment should see his entire body enveloped in purple gore—I ask you whether such a spectacle would not cause your own blood to set back with horror? And yet this was just what occurred in reference to our blessed Redeemer, the record of which you have perhaps read or heard a thousand times, without ever being deeply or seriously affected by it. My Redeemer wearing a crown of thorns! Was it not enough, blessed Jesus, that thou shouldst have endured that bloody sweat; that thou shouldst have felt that cruel scourge; that thou shouldst have worn that scarlet robe; that they should have bowed the knee in mockery, and deridingly hailed thee as a king? No, thou must wear the crown of thorns—thy murderers are not satisfied—the malignant spirits of hell are not satisfied to have thy blood, except as the result of a protracted and lingering scene of torture; and into that scene the crown of thorns must enter!

Oh, how much CRUELTY was there in putting this thorny crown upon the blessed Redeemer's head! Had he done anything to provoke such barbarous treatment? Nothing else than to strain every nerve, both in action and in suffering, to bless and save the world. And yet here he is, with all the sensibilities of human nature in lively exercise, with the same kind of flesh and blood, of nerves and fibres, that you and I possess, bleeding, agonizing, under a crown of thorns; and even this was only a drop in the flood of anguish which was constituted by the whole scene in all its preparatory and attending circumstances!

But there was CONTEMPT as well as cruelty implied in putting this crown upon his head. It is far easier to bear bodily suffering than reproach and ignominy; but in the crown of thorns there was involved not less of the latter than of the former. Jesus had, without the semblance of ostentation, and yet with the conscious dignity of truth, declared himself a king; and hence they array him in mock majesty, and put a crown of thorns upon his head, in derision of the authority which he claimed, and pass before him bowing the knee and insultingly casting his own words into his teeth. Never was there so much of ignominy heaped upon any other being. The ingenuity of hell itself was tasked to make that man of sorrows appear unworthy of a place on God's footstool; and when he sunk at last into the arms of death, he sunk under a burden of ignominious torture.

Such was "the crown of thorns" which Jesus wore on Calvary. Let us now pass from a consideration of this to a view of the "MANY CROWNS" which he now wears in heaven. When the beloved disciple saw him in his glorified state, he declares that "on his head were many crowns."

It is evident from the connexion in which these words occur, that they refer rather to his mediatorial dominion than to his absolute and original proprietorship of all things. As God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the universal Sovereign, well may the whole creation crown him Lord of all; but that there is particular reference in THIS passage to his mediatorial glory, is evident from the fact that he is here called by the peculiar names by which Christ as Mediator is designated; such as "the Faithful and True," and especially, "the Word of God;" and moreover, the whole scene which is here described seems to recognize him exclusively in his mediatorial dignity. What then, more particularly, are we to understand, by his having upon his head "many crowns?"

It implies that he has the whole creation in subjection to his authority; that every thing lives, and moves, and acts, as the effect of his will; that every event is rendered tributary to his purposes, and every creature is made to minister to his glory.

Look abroad upon THIS EARTH, and you behold nothing but what is included in the Mediator's dominion. When you see imprisoned nature bursting from the grave of winter into the bloom and melody of spring; when you see the golden harvest falling before the reaper's sickle; when you view the mountain proudly lifting itself among the clouds; when the thunders roll and the lightnings play around you; when the cattle sport themselves on a thousand hills,

and the air as well as the earth seems teeming with a busy population; in all this infinitude of existence, there is not a being, not an object, but is subject to the Mediator's control—not one but according to its nature is rendered subservient to his will. The conflicts of nations the convulsions of empires, the pestilence that stalks through the world, the earthquake that swallows up cities, all seem to be adverse to the purposes of Messiah's reign; and yet they are part of the instrumentality by which he is accomplishing the vast designs of his government; they are all under his direction, tending to a result by which his mediatorial glory will be completely illustrated. He has the hearts of all men in his hand; of all good men, and of all wicked men; and while by his grace he constrains the former to do his will, by his wisdom and his power he renders the latter also instrumental of promoting his glory. Even those who fight against his cause are compelled to become tributary to its interests; the wrath of man he causes to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains.

Next, fasten your eyes upon THESE VISIBLE HEAVENS; upon this magnificent arch above you, in which you behold the sun by day and the moon and the stars by night: especially contemplate the evening sky, apparently studded with innumerable gems, but really peopled with an infinity of worlds, each of which performs its stated revolution, while all move together in perpetual and unbroken concert; and here again you have discovered nothing so vast but that it is moved by the Mediator's hand, and accomplishes the Mediator's will. What the character of the inhabitants of those worlds may be, or what revelations of divine wisdom may be made to them, we know not; but we do know, from the lively oracles, that they belong to the dominion of the Son of God.

And now let faith penetrate beyond the range of mortal vision, to THE REGION OF IMMORTAL LIGHT AND GLORY, where there is no need of the sun nor of the moon, for the Lord God is the light thereof; and there, too, does the Mediator exercise his dominion; nay, that is peculiarly and pre-eminently the seat of his gracious dominion; for there every heart beats in unison with his will, every tongue is ready, and every harp is strung, to show forth his praise. If you will know the loyalty of the ransomed and the glorified to their King, listen to that report which an eye-witness made of his visit to the heavenly city: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living ones and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the

Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor and glory and blessing !”

And if you draw near and stoop over the verge of HELL, even there—though there is wailing and torment and blasphemy, yet even there, amidst all those night shades of eternal death, the Mediator still exercises his reign; he reigns over those imprisoned spirits in wrath and justice; and the most fearful attributes of his character are written on the smoke of their torment, which ascendeth up for ever and ever.

The Mediator’s reign, then, is absolutely universal. Not the most magnificent globe that sweeps through immensity, nor the least dust of the balance that is borne upon the wind; not the brightest seraph in heaven, nor the blackest fiend in hell; not the grandest or the most insignificant event that ever occurs in any world; is without the range of his empire. In reference to the splendor and the perpetuity of such a reign, may he not well be represented as wearing many crowns ?

Yes, I repeat, the personage who wore the crown of thorns once, and he who wears the many crowns now, is the same; and it was his wearing the one which constituted his preparation for wearing the other.

Such sufferings as the Redeemer experienced when the crown of thorns pierced his head, could never have been inflicted upon such a personage as he was, but for the accomplishment of some mighty purpose;—never could have been inflicted upon him under the government of a wise and righteous God, but in consideration of their being followed by some glorious reward. And this is just in accordance with the fact as it is stated by the prophet Isaiah: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.” The government of the world becomes his in his mediatorial capacity, by purchase. It is because he died in ignominy upon the cross, that he has had all things put under his feet, being made head over all things to the church. It is because he received meekly and calmly the crown of thorns, that those many crowns, radiant with countless gems of glory, now glitter, and are destined for ever to glitter, upon his head.

And now, let me ask, what Christian among you all would desire to go to heaven on a flowery bed of ease? This was not the way in which Jesus gained possession of his many crowns; nor is it the way in which those who profess to be his disciples should de-

sire to be led on to their final reward. Oh, brethren, methinks our subject consecrates every scene of trouble. Methinks it consecrates the Christian's deathbed, and the Christian mourner's weeds, and every heaving of the bosom which grief occasions in this vale of sorrow. For, Christian sufferer, those tears of thine are a seed which are destined to yield a harvest of glory. Thou art travelling upward, to a world where songs shall take the place of groans; and a crown of life shall mark thee as an eternal conqueror. Be still, then, though thou art bending in anguish, to catch the last whisper of thy dearest friend. Be still, though thou art just going down into the dark valley; for this momentary tempest is the harbinger of a serene eternity. Surely thou mayest afford to be still, when Jesus, thy Saviour, calmly endured the crown of thorns!

And, finally, our subject supplies us with a most appropriate theme to take with us to the sacramental table. Christian, meditate upon the crown of thorns. Meditate upon the many crowns. Meditate upon the one as the glorious consequence of the other. And if you do this, in a proper manner, you will feel in your heart, throbs of penitential sorrow; your faith will kindle into brighter exercise; your hope in God's gracious covenant will grow stronger; and perhaps the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory may fill and satisfy your soul. Join, then, ye ransomed saints, while you are assembled to commemorate your Redeemer's death, while you have the crown of thorns and the many crowns before the eye of your faith—join in the exercise of devout gratitude, join, in anticipation of the joys of his presence—one and all, join, to crown him Lord of the Creation!