

A Message from God.

A New Year's Discourse preached at the First Presbyterian Church, Washington Square, Jan. 6, 1867, by Rev. Albert Barnes.

It is not necessary to my purpose to explain the circumstances under which these words were used; nor is it necessary at all for my purpose to vindicate the conduct of the man who used them, or to inquire whether the act which he performed was in any respect a justifiable act.

Whatever message to a human being through the Bible has been presented to the world, may be regarded as a message of God addressed to each of us, by the permission of His providence, or by his direct command.

A message from God may be brought to man in such a way as to make him turn pale and tremble. And it may be hardly conceived possible that a message should come to us directly from God—where we are assured it came from Him—without making us turn pale and tremble, when we consider the source of the message and when we ponder in regard to its meaning.

It is not necessary further, in order that the message should come, that it should be conveyed by the instrumentality of an angel, or by the voice of God directly speaking to us.

With this understanding with regard to what constitutes a message from God, it is no presumption for me to come before you on the first Sabbath of the new year, and say, I have a message from God to you.

There are several points to which I wish to call your attention, in regard to that message, which will be appropriate to the occasion.

The first thing God commands each one of you to remember is, you are mortal! You remember the example of the prince who directed the servant who each morning should call him, to say, "Sire, remember thou art mortal!"

Now, that God directly issues this commandment, and that He desires it shall be kept directly before your mind, is apparent from the Scriptures, and from the evidence occurring under His providence.

I need not say that this is God's commandment, that it is a commandment which He addresses to the children of men, to consider they are guilty of violating His laws, and on the presumption that all the children of men are guilty, in having, in one form or another, violated that law.

The message of John the Baptist, appearing at the beginning of our dispensation, was, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The message of our Saviour was, "Repent!" And that this He delivered for all, even for those who think themselves not to have grave sins, is pointedly illustrated in the New Testament.

There were present on one occasion with the Saviour, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. The Saviour said to them,—"Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galilees, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Now, my friends, we have together commenced the new year as sinners; and some of us, it is to be feared, as impenitent sinners, that have not yet exercised godly sorrow on account of our sins. What is to be done in regard to sin; and what is the propriety of exercising repentance in regard to sin at the commencement of the new year?

In regard to what has to be done, you cannot change the past. That is fixed as the throne of God, and is not to be reversed. The thing done cannot be undone; but the record of it is eternal, and God can call it up at any moment. What can be done in regard to it? Very much of the wrong you have done through your sins cannot be repaired by any power of yourself, and will not be done by any power of God Almighty. It is a fixed fact in its results. The man that has murdered another man cannot by repentance recall the dead man to life again. The man who has led one astray from the paths of innocence, cannot restore innocence to that deluded and degraded one. You cannot go back and change those evils.

What can be done then in regard to sin? These things may be done: You can exercise godly sorrow in regard to these sins. You can bring those sins before God, imploring forgiveness. You can do another thing. There are some evils you can repair. Though you cannot restore the dead man from his grave, or restore innocence to those made guilty, yet if you have ruined a neighbor, you can repair the wrong. If you have cheated him, you can acknowledge it and make reparation. If you have defrauded the government, there is a conscience depository in the government to which you may do an acknowledgment. If you have slandered a man, you can go and face the wrong you have done, and attempt to arrest its progress in the community.

There is another thing you can do. If you cannot repair the wrong to the individual, if the young man you have ruined is in the grave; if the young man you have made an infidel cannot now be reformed, you can do another thing—what Saul of Tarsus did. He had persecuted the Church, and though he could not recall the martyred one from the grave, after he had sent them to eternity, he could yet go abroad every where, proclaiming the truth of the gospel which he had persecuted, seeking to save others from death by referring them to the Saviour. So, though you have done evil in the way you cannot repair, yet, by a life of piety and devotion to the truth of God, you may endeavor to extend truth in the world where you have spread error, and save thousands from wrong where you have ruined others. This may be done at the commencement of the new year. And why?

And there were thunders, and a voice, and a sound through the midst of the fire, accompanying the giving of the law. Now, as a part of my services this morning, a part of the message I bring you from God, it is not improper I should remind you in a few words of that law is, thus given to you. Our Episcopal brethren, with great propriety, read these laws in every morning service, and they append, with great propriety, at the close of each one of them, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

The law of God is addressed to you in these words:— Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, that thou keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy mail-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

Now, that is the law of God, the law of God unrepelled; the law of God binding on nations, on kings, rulers, and all princes and legislatures, and on all the people. It is the law of God binding on you—each one of you as an individual—to be observed in all fidelity and honesty, through all the days of your life.

Perceive how specific it is; it is not general. Thou shalt not have no other gods before me! Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image! Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain! Thou shalt not take the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work! Honor thy father and thy mother! Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not commit adultery! Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt not bear false witness! Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbor's!

This is the law of God as addressed to all men. This is the message which I bring before you this day—that this is the law of God, and that it, and each part of it, is binding upon each individual of the human family.

III. In the third place, God commands you: at the beginning of the new year, to repent of your sins. I need not say that this is God's commandment, that it is a commandment which He addresses to the children of men, to consider they are guilty of violating His laws, and on the presumption that all the children of men are guilty, in having, in one form or another, violated that law.

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First, because God has given that year to you that you might have a longer term of probation. God could have cut you off at any month or day of the year, and you would have gone unpardoned into the eternal world; but He has spared you, among other purposes, for this one—that you might have a day of grace, an opportunity for repentance of your sins. You have made an experiment on this subject of the things of this world, and it has not produced any great benefit in you. No man has been ever benefited by profaneness; no man has got great good out of evil in any way. You have made the experiment with regard to the service of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Another reason why you should begin the year with repentance of your sins is, to check the formation of bad habits that might ruin you. It is a sad thought that there are many young men in this city who are already in the way of forming bad habits which may lead this year to their eternal ruin; but which, if checked at the beginning of the year, will be to their everlasting welfare. That bad habit has not yet seized so strongly upon you, that it may not be broken off. It may have been gaining strength for months past. You can hardly tell when it began. You can see that it is growing upon you, increasing day by day. By the end of this year, if you live, it may have become so riveted upon your soul that nothing can ever detach it.

Now, at the beginning of the year, I may venture to say there is not one I am addressing who cannot break off a bad habit; and hence I call upon you with a message from God this morning to repent of your sins and break off from the evil habit which you may have formed.

IV. The fourth thing I utter to you to-day as a message from God is to believe in Jesus Christ, to exercise faith in the Saviour. I come to you with that message from God. Do not doubt it is a message from God addressed to you at the beginning of this year.

Hear what He has said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." That is so. Hear also what He says: "He that believeth not shall be damned." That is so.

Hear again: "He that believeth on the Son hath life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Now, to whom is this said? To what class of persons is it addressed? To no particular class of individuals; to the old man, to the middle-aged man, to the young man and to the child. It is addressed to the deeply depraved and degraded in the world? Is it addressed to the poor ones? It is addressed alike to the degraded, the poor, the ignorant, and to the gay, the rich, the learned, the prosperous, the mourner, and the self-righteous, as a message from God to each man. A message from God addressed to you at the beginning of the new year to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot doubt that this is a message God addresses to you.

Why should I make it prominent on this occasion, at the beginning of the year, as a message from God? I will tell you. The saddest thing, my friends, in the remembrance of the past year, is the remembrance that you are not a Christian, that you have not faith in Jesus Christ. The saddest thing, I say, is not that you have been disappointed, that you have been thwarted in your pleasures, that you have been sick, that you have been in danger, that you have been called to part with beloved friends, to part, may be, with property, that the world has been very dark to you in reference to your future prospects,—the saddest thing is, you have passed through another year without faith in the Son of God; entered on a new year without knowing that you have given your heart to the Saviour who died for the children of men.

That proves another sad thing for you—that the prospect that you will ever become a Christian is diminishing rapidly. Year by year, day by day, to all human appearances, the prospect is dying out; that you will ever be a Christian, and ever give your heart to the Saviour.

Time was, in the recollection of most whom I address, when the name of the Saviour found a response in their hearts; when, as little children, they loved to read the story of the birth and life, and the sufferings of the Redeemer; when they listened with interest to the school-teacher, or minister, or parent, wonderfully telling that Jesus was born, and lived, and suffered, and died; when the cradle-hymn was sung by their mother, and their hearts were tender, and their eyes were immediately suffused with tears, with thinking on the sufferings of the Son of God. Oh, that these things could be recalled! Oh, that your hearts may be awakened this morning to the feelings you had in other days, to the old interest you had in the name of Jesus, in the birth of the Saviour, in the work of the Saviour, in the death of the Saviour! But that, alas! is all gone; and perchance, while I am talking to you in this manner, with this sincere earnestness, you may be smiling upon it. When I recall the scenes of childhood, of the Sunday-school, you may think it unworthy of your attention as a man. I say, it is worthy of your attention as a man.

You were right when you were a child; you are wrong now. You were right when these things drew tears from your eyes; you are wrong now, when your heart is dry and hardened. And what I say is, these things are growing worse and worse, year by year; that your minds are less impressionable than a year ago. The dark prospect this morning is, you will go through the year without knowing Christ, and enter the next world an unrepentant sinner, forever unpardoned.

V. The fifth message I have from God this morning is, to prepare to die! I cannot doubt that is a message from God to you. It is so often mentioned in the Scriptures, "Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come!" God speaks thus to us, "Prepare to meet thy God!" It is a direct command addressed to the children of men. "Prepare to meet thy God!"

Why should this be brought before you at the beginning of the new year? I need not dwell upon the cause; the thing itself is right. You should be prepared to meet God! If I feel that something is necessary for you to prepare to meet God—to enter into the eternal world—You have your own views on the subject. Some, by morality, honesty, amiableness, think they may be prepared to meet God. Some foolishly imagine that if they become rich, or acquire fame, they will be saved. There is some conception of this matter in your minds. Take your own standard. I ask you if the thing you think necessary to be done is done at the beginning of this new year?

I beg to call your attention to another thing—the possibility that this year may close your life. It is not a pleasant thought. I say, the possibility! No man can doubt the possibility that before the next year he may be in his grave. But there is one thing—that you may die—that you may die! You say the probability is a very slight probability. So it may be—yet not so slight as you suppose. When you go to the actuary of a Life Insurance Company, tell him your age, and ask him to state what is the probability that you will die during the year 1867, and what amount of premium you will require for a definite insurance on your life, he will state, with very great accuracy, the probability. You may die in one year or another, in five years, or in one hundred, but the average probability can be accurately foretold.

VI. I have one fact more as a message from God, and that is, that you are INVITED to repent. He invites you to come to Him to secure eternal life. I need not refer you to the Scriptures. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that is athirst say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The past year may have been one of darkness. You may not see much in it to look upon with pleasure. There may have been scenes of trouble and sorrow through which you have passed; yet, with the brightness at the beginning of the year, that darkness has passed away, and the light streams upon your path. The most beautiful object in creation I know of, is, in these frosty mornings, the clear, bright diamond in the East, just at the break of day,—that large, beautiful, bright morning-star, that seems so happy, so jubilant, so joyous, in the view that the darkness of the night is passed, and that it is lighting on the day. The dark night is gone, the sun is about to rise upon the earth, and those scenes of darkness are to pass away. So, my friends, at

the beginning of the new year, if the last year has been an unhappy one with you, if there are cold shadows resting upon it, there is a bright star for each of us, gloriously rivaling the brightness of the morning-star, leading on the day of the new year; and under the auspices of that bright light that arose upon each of us to-day—that joyous, jubilant, exalted beauty—you enter upon the new year.

God in His mercy guide you with the star of day, lead you to this life in the beginning of the year, and, under His guidance, make you to be led in the path of life until you have reached the light of eternal day, and rejoice with the angelic hosts above.

MARRIAGES.

ANDERSON—LANE—December 4th, by Rev. H. Augustus Smith, Mr. EDWARD H. ANDERSON, of New York, to Miss BELLE LANE, of Philadelphia.

NIEMANN—GLENNING—At Mantua in the First Presbyterian Church on the 10th inst. by the Rev. H. Augustus Smith, GEO. W. NIEMANN to MIZZIE, only daughter of R. GLENNING, all of Philadelphia.

DEATHS.

THEODORE PRATT—In Washington, D. C. January 11th THEODORE PRATT, son of Rev. Llewellyn and Sarah Putnam Pratt, aged 4 years.

OBITUARY.

Died at his late residence in Juniata Co., Pa., January 7th, the late JOHN BEALIE, in the 69th year of his age. Early in life, the deceased espoused the cause of truth and righteousness, by a profession of faith in Jesus. He creditably filled several places of public trust in his County and State. In later years his aim and efforts were to live nearer to God, and he did it. As death approached, he gave free expression of his hopes. They were founded on the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and through Him he triumphed in the day of his death. Sleeping in Jesus, he will arise to life immortal.

Special Notices.

Philadelphia Tract and Mission Society. Office, 324 Chestnut Street.—The One Hundred and Fifty-sixth Annual Meeting, in behalf of this Society, will be held in the Green Hill Presbyterian Church, Girard avenue above 16th, on Sabbath evening, 20th inst., at 7 1/2 o'clock. Several addresses will be made. Tract Visitors' Monthly Meeting, for the N. P. District at Presbyterian Church, Buttonwood above 5th, on Friday evening, January 25th, at 7 1/2 o'clock. Public invited.

Fox River Pres. will hold its next Annual Meeting, at Stearns Point, Wis., on Tuesday, February 5th, 7 o'clock P. M. Session Records will be presented. S. H. ASHMAN, Stated Clerk. Rural Wis., Jan. 5, 1867.

The Presbytery of Chemung will hold its next Annual Meeting at Watkins, on Tuesday, 29th inst., at 2 o'clock P. M. C. C. GARR, Stated Clerk. JANUARY 7, 1867.

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