

SIN IN HIGH PLACES.

Dr. Talmage Says the Same Law of Right and Wrong Should Apply to Both Rich and Poor.

THE FASCINATION OF FRAUD.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—In this discourse Dr. Talmage shows that there is a tendency to excuse brilliant faults, because they are brilliant, when the same law of right and wrong ought to be applied to high places and low; text, Daniel iv, 33. "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men and did eat grass as oxen."

Here is the mightiest of the Babylonian kings. Look at him. He did more for the grandeur of the capital than did all his predecessors or successors. Hanging gardens, reservoirs, aqueducts, palaces, all of his own planning. The bricks that were brought up to-day from the ruins of Babylon have his name on them. "Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon." He was a great conqueror. He stretched forth his spear toward a nation, and it surrendered. But he plundered the temple of the true God. He lifted an idol, Bel Metradach, and compelled the people to bow down before it, and if they refused they must go through the red-hot furnace or be crushed by lion or lioness. So God pulled him down.

He was smitten with what physicians call leucanthropy, and fancied that he was a wild beast, and he went out and pastured amid the cattle. God did not excuse him because he had committed the sin in high places or because the transgression was wide resonating. He measured Nebuchadnezzar in high place just as he would measure the humblest captive.

But in our time, you know as well as I, there is a disposition to put a halo around iniquity if it is committed in conspicuous places, and if it is wide resonating and of large proportions. For crime in high places, and there is not a State or a city and hardly a village which has not been called to look upon astounding forgery, or an absconding bank cashier, or a president, or the wasting of trust funds or swindling mortgages. I propose, in carrying out the suggestion of my text, as far as I can, to scatter the fascinations around iniquity and show you the sin in high place or low place, and that it will be dealt with by that God who dealt with impaled Nebuchadnezzar.

All who profess to feel that two kinds of sermons are necessary—the one on the faith of the gospel, the other on the morality of the gospel—and the one is just as important as the other, for you know that in this land to-day there are hundreds of men hiding behind the communion tables and in churches of Jesus Christ who have no business to be there as professors of religion. They expect to be all right with God, although they are all wrong with man. And, while I want you to understand that by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified and a mere honest life cannot enter heaven, I want you to understand that the sin in high place or low place, and that it will be dealt with by that God who dealt with impaled Nebuchadnezzar.

It seems to me there has not been a time in the last fifty years when this latter truth needed more thoroughly to be presented in the American churches. It needs to be presented to-day.

Look upon all the fascinations thrown around fraud in this country. You know for years men have been made heroes of and pictorialized and in various ways presented to the public, as though sometimes they were worthy of admiration, if they have scattered the funds of banks or swallowed great estates that did not belong to them. One young man in particular, I want you to understand that the sin in high place or low place, and that it will be dealt with by that God who dealt with impaled Nebuchadnezzar.

So a peddler came down from New England many years ago; took hold of the money market of New York, flouted his abominations in the sight of all the people and defied public morals every day of his life. Young men looked up and said: "He was a peddler in one decade, and in the next he was one of the great financiers of the stock market. That's the way to do it." To this day the evil influence of that profligate financier has been felt and with it the past few weeks he has had conspicuous honors.

There has been an irresistible impression going abroad among young men that the poorest way to get money is to earn it. The young man of today, and the young man of the young man of humble apparel: "What! You only get \$1800 a year? Why that wouldn't keep me in pin money. I spend \$5000 a year." "Where do you get it?" says the young man. "Oh, stocks, enterprises, all that sort of thing, you know." The plain young man has hardly enough money to pay his board, has to wear clothes after they are out of fashion and deny himself all luxuries. After awhile he gets tired of his plodding, and he goes to the man who has achieved suddenly large estate, and he says, "Just show me how it is done." And he is shown. He soon learns how, and he is almost all the time idle now and has resigned his position in the bank or the factory or the store he has more money than he ever had, and he has a silver watch for a gold one with a flashing chain, sets his hat a little further over on the side of his head than he ever did, smokes better cigars and more of them. He has his hand in. Now, if he can escape the penitentiary for three or four years he will get into political circles, and he will get political jobs and will have something to do with harbors and pavements and docks. Now he has got so far along he is safe for perdition.

It is quite a long road sometimes for a man to travel before he gets into the romance of crime. These are caught who are only in the prosaic stage of it. The sheriffs and constables would only leave them alone a little while they would steal as well as anybody. They might not be able to steal a whole railroad, but they could master a load of pig iron.

Now, I always thank God when I find an estate like that to go to smash. It is plague struck, and it blazes the nation. I thank God when it goes into such a wreck it can never be gathered up again. I want it to become so loathsome and such an insufferable stench that honest young men will take warning.

If God should put into money or its representative the capacity to go to its lawful owner, there would not be a bank or a safety deposit in the United States whose walls would not be blown out, and mortgages would rip and parchments would rend, and gold would about, and beggars would get on horseback, and stock gamblers would go to the almshouse.

How many dishonesties in the making out of invoices, and in the falsifying of customers of rival houses, and in the making and breaking of contracts. Young men are indoctrinated in the idea that the sooner they get money the better, and the getting of it on a larger scale only proves to them their greater ingenuity. There is a glitter thrown around all these things. Young men have got to find out that God looks upon sin in a very different light.

And remember that the man who gets his gain by iniquity will soon lose it all.

One moment after his departure from life he did not own an opera house, he will not own a certificate of stock, he will not own one dollar of Government securities, and the poorest boy that stands on the street with a penny in his pocket looking at the funeral procession of the dead cheat as it goes by will have more money than that man who one week previous boasted that he controlled the money market.

So there has been a great deal of fascination thrown around libertinism. Society is very severe upon the impurity that lurks around the alleys and low haunts of the town. The law pursues it, it smites it, it condemns it, it destroys it.

You know as well as I that society becomes lenient in proportion as impurity becomes affluent or is in elevated circles, and finally society is silent or disposed to palliate.

Where is the judge, the jury, the police officer that dare arraign the wealthy libertine? He walks the streets; he rides the parks; he haunts his iniquity in the eyes of the public.

Sometimes it seems to me as if society were going back to the state of morals of Hercules, when it sculptured its villainousness on pillars and temples wall on the lava of a burning mountain could hide the immensity of crime. At what time God will rise up and extirpate these evils upon society I know not nor whether He will do it by fire or lightning or earthquake, but a holy God, I do not think, will stand it much longer. I believe the thunderbolts are hissing hot, and that when God comes to chastise a community for these sins, it will be executed. He has uttered Himself more bitterly than against any other, the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah will be tolerable as compared with the fate of our modern society, which knew better, but did worse.

We want about 10,000 pulpits in America to thunder, "All adulterers and whoremongers shall have their place in the hell that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." It is hell on earth and hell forever. We have got to understand that iniquity on Columbia Heights or Fifth avenue or Beacon Hill is as damnable in the sight of God as it is in the slums.

Whether it has canopied couch or eider-down or dwells amid the putridity of a low tenement house, God is after it in His vengeance. Yet the pulpits of the Christian church has been so cowed down on this subject that it hardly dares speak, and men are almost apologetic when they read the Ten Commandments.

The look at the fascinations thrown around assassination. There are in all communities men who have taken the lives of others unlawfully, not as executioners of the law, and they go scot free. You say that they had their provocation. God gave life, and He alone has a right to take it, and He may take it by visitation of Providence or by an executioner of the law, who is His messenger. But when a man assumes that divine prerogative he touches the lowest depth of crime.

Society is alert for certain kinds of murder. If a citizen going along the road at night is waylaid and slain by a robber, all want the villain arrested and executed. For all garrotting, for all beating out of life by a club or an axe or a slung-shot, the law has quick spring and heavy stroke, but you know that when men get affluent and high position and they veer their wrongs by taking the lives of others great sympathy is excited. Lawyers plead, ladies weep, judge halts, jury is bribed, and the man goes free. If the verdict happens to be against him a new retrial is called on through some technicality, and they adjourn for witnesses that never come and adjourn and adjourn until the community has forgotten all about it, and then the prison door opens and the murderer goes free.

Now, if capital punishment be right I say let the life of the polished murderer go with the life of the vulgar assassin. Let us have no partiality of gallows, no aristocracy of electrocution chair. Do not let us float back to barbarism, when every man was his own judge, jury and executioner, and that man has the prerogative who had the sharpest knife and the strongest arm and the quickest step and the stealthiest revenge. He who willfully and in hatred takes the life of another is a murderer, I care not what the provocation or the circumstances.

He may be cleared by an enthusiastic courtroom, he may be sent by the Government of the United States as Minister to some foreign court or modern legislature may polish the crime until it looks like heroism, but in the sight of God murder is murder, and the judgment day will so reveal it.

Now do not be fascinated by the glamour thrown over crime of whatever sort. Because others have habits that seem brilliant, but yet at the same time are wicked, do not choose such faults. Stand independent of all such influences. Put your confidence in the Lord God. He will be your strength. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord."

Cultivate old fashioned honesty. This world is full of it. Old fashioned honesty such as was spoken of by Dr. Livingstone, the famous explorer. You may not know he was descended from the Highlanders. Dr. Livingstone said the one day one of the old Highlanders called his children around him and said: "Now, my lads, I have looked all through our family line. I have gone back as far as I can, and I find that all our ancestors were honest people. There doesn't seem to be one rogue among them, and you have good blood. Now, my lads, be honest."

There are hundreds of young men who have good blood. Shall I ask three or four plain questions? Are your habits as good as when you left your father's house? Have you a good ticket in your pocket? Have you a fraudulent document? Have you been experimenting to see how accurate an imitation you could make of your employer's signature? Oh, you have good blood. Remember your father's prayers. Remember your mother's example. Turn not in an evil way. Have you been astray? Come back. Have you ventured out too far?

As I stand in pulpits looking over audiences sometimes my heart fails me. There are so many tragedies present, so many far away from God. Why, my brother, there have been too many prayers offered for you to have you go overboard. And there are those venturing down into sin, and my heart aches to call them back.

At Brighton Beach or Long Branch you have seen men go down into the surf to bathe, and they waded out farther and farther, and you got anxious about them. You said, "I wonder if they can swim?" And you then stood and shouted: "Come back! Come back! You will be drowned!" They waved their hand back, saying: "No danger." They kept on wading deeper and farther out from shore until after awhile a great wave with a strong undertow took them out, their corpses the next day washed on the beach. So I see men wading down into sin farther and farther, and I call to them: "Come back! Come back! You will be lost; you will be lost!" They wave their hand back, saying: "No danger; no danger." Deeper and deeper down until after awhile a wave sweeps them out and sweeps them off forever. Oh, come back! The one farthest away may come.

"Oh," you say, "you don't know where I came from. You don't know what my history has been. You don't know what iniquity I have plotted. I have gone through the whole catalogue of sin." My brother, I do not know the story, but I tell you this: The door of mercy is wide open. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Though you have been polluted with the worst of crimes, though you have been smitten with the worst of leprosy, though you have been fired with all evil passions, this moment on your brow, hot with iniquitous indulgence, may be set the flashing coronet of a Saviour's forgiveness.

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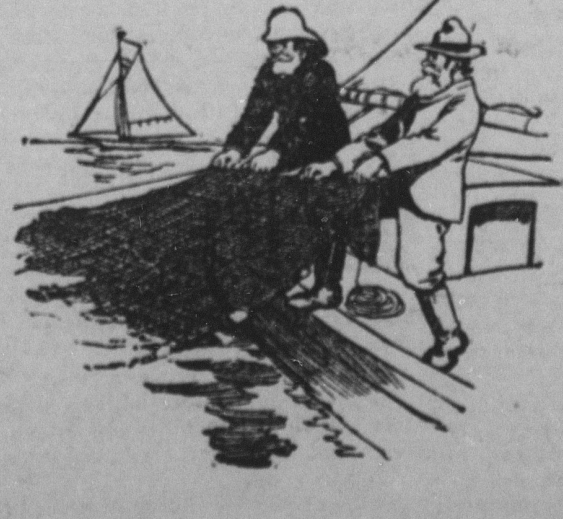
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