



MR. FOSTER'S SERMON,

AT THE

Ordination

OF THE

REV. OLIVER DODGE.



THE
DUTY OF GOSPEL MINISTERS,

ILLUSTRATED, IN A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. OLIVER DODGE, A. B.

TO THE

PASTORAL CARE OF THE

Catholic Reformed Church and Society,

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A N

Ordination SERMON.

LUKE IX. part of the 60th verse.

—BUT GO THOU, AND PREACH THE KINGDOM
OF GOD.

THIS passage contains the instruction given by our blessed Lord, to one whom he called, commissioned, and sent forth to preach the gospel. From it, I will endeavour to shew you,

I. WHAT we are to understand by the kingdom of God.

II. WHAT is implied in preaching this kingdom.

III. WHY the kingdom of God must be preached.

I. I am to shew what we are to understand by the kingdom of God.

AND, by the kingdom of God in the text, in the more extensive sense of the word, we are to understand, that universal dominion and authority God has over all the creatures he has made in heaven, and
upon

upon earth. He alone, who made the material, animal, and rational worlds, is perfectly acquainted with the relations, connections, and dependencies of creatures and things, and the ends for which they were made. He is able to animate and direct them thereto. The order, beauty, and usefulness of this lower world. The harmonious motion, and powerful influence of the heavenly bodies, proclaim his government and constant care.

He has established the sun, the greatest light, and brightest monument of himself, in the world of nature, to deliver it from chaos and darkness. And over the moral world he has exalted his word above all his name, by which he rules and governs among the children of men.

Various have been God's methods of governing and bringing forward the moral world to perfection and happiness, since the memory of man upon earth. But as they all originate in his goodness, and tend to the happiness of mankind, they may be considered as one. The vision of God with a lost world, is *one*, and the interpretation *one*! For if we separate the religion of nature from that of the bible, and detach the religion of Jews from that of christians, we shall destroy all religion. Christ's church has ever been one from the days of Adam, to this day.—
"My dove, my undefiled is One."

The intervening rites, ceremonies, and laws that took place before the coming of Christ, were not designed to militate against the promise made to Adam, and afterwards renewed to Abraham. Of this, St. Paul gives us the fairest assurance—*"And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was some hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."**

* Gal. 3. 17.

God's design has ever been, to save mankind by a constitution of grace established in Jesus Christ. Proclamation of this was made to the world, soon after the apostacy, in the cool of the day, and the glorious plan was opening by degrees till the advent of Christ. The religion of the Jews was evidently founded upon this, and the religion of nature is valid, and will be accepted according to the mercy and grace of the gospel. "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."* This being the last and highest administration in the universal dominion of *Jehovah*, and the brightest display of *himself*, may be called the kingdom of God in the fullest sense. All affairs in this kingdom the Lord Jesus Christ is commissioned to manage; who in prosecution of this trust came into our world, and became the first preacher of the gospel, or good news of it. And he called and sent out others, both before and after his resurrection, upon the same important errand.

II. - I proceed to shew what is implied in preaching this kingdom. And it implies,

1. Preaching the natural attributes or perfections of *Deity*, as they are discovered in his making, upholding, and governing the world; and the obligations they lay men under to virtue and religion. In the book of nature, the eternal power and Godhead are seen, and men left without excuse. And principally his moral excellencies, as they are opened to view in the book of grace. *That God is love!* and that the coming and death of Christ, and the assurance of pardon and mercy, upon repentance and faith, are effects of this love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son. God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world;

* Rom. 2. 16.

but that the world through him might be saved." §

All true religion springs from right apprehensions of God, as clothed with his whole character, as *infinitely pure and holy*, as well as *eternal and omnipotent*. This view of the divine character, gives us the fullest evidence, that God could not be the author of sin, which is opposed to his nature and law. But that sin is an abuse of that noble endowment, *liberty*, the resemblance of deity in man. A defect, and can have no cause but the sinner.

2dly. It implies, preaching the ruin of the moral world, by sin, and their recovery to virtue, happiness and perfection, by Christ and grace. All the institutions of the gospel kingdom, are founded upon the death of Christ, and designed to make men good and happy. The sacraments of baptism, and the supper, have a direct tendency to this end: by the one we are declared members of the church of Christ, and in the other we see the love of Christ in laying down his life for us. Ministers are sent out into the world, to sow the seed of the kingdom, to cultivate the minds of men, to plant trees of righteousness and water them. That, "instead of the thorn, may come up the fir-tree, and in stead of the brier, may come up the myrtle-tree, and it shall be unto the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." †

The nature, ability, and present situation of mankind, the subjects of this kingdom, is to be preached. That they are the offspring of God, endued with reason, understanding and liberty, and are designed for immortality and glory. "Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold." ‡ But here the disciple sent out to preach the kingdom of God, will carefully avoid the two extremes.

The one, considering men as possessed of power and ability for holy acts and exercises, without the aid of God's grace, and the sanctifying influences of the *holy spirit*—This is dangerous, and absurd. For on some it will draw a carnal security and careless neglect of the duties of the kingdom of God, till towards the close of life, and others it will inspire with a degree of pride, not tolerated, by that scheme of grace in Christ, which is calculated to humble the sinner and exalt the glory of divine grace in his salvation. The other is, representing mankind, since the apostacy, as wholly unable to obey the laws of God given us by Jesus Christ; and that their conversion is brought about by a physical power, without the concurrence of any care, or endeavour of theirs. This doctrine was once true, namely, from the time Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, 'till the Son of God appeared, in the cool of the day. And being commissioned from heaven, laid the foundation, and erected the banner of the kingdom of God, where sin, and the devil had conspired, to destroy the world. Since which time the sentiment is dishonourary to God, who has adopted a solemn course of moral means and motives with mankind, for the cure of a disease they brought upon themselves by the abuse of their moral powers. And it is equally destructive to the souls of men. Avoiding these, the preaching disciple, will call upon men, to consider, to study the evidences on which the christian religion is founded, to examine the scriptures, and yield their assent to gospel doctrines, their obedience to gospel precepts, and their hope to gospel promises—to deny all ungodliness and every worldly lust. And he will be careful to warn them not to put their doings in the place of Christ and grace, but consider them as duties enjoined by *him* who

sustains the great chain of causes and effects, and whose agency pervades and animates the worlds of nature and grace.

3dly. It implies, preaching the glories of Christ's person, the perfections of his nature, his ability and desire to save men. And the offices he sustains in the kingdom of grace, the advantages we derive from his humiliation and death, his resurrection, ascension and advocacy with the *Father*. These are some of the peculiarities of the gospel kingdom, which have called forth the wonder, and kindled the devotion of more worlds than this! St. Paul was a man of great abilities, and learning: but he renounced his former pursuits, and counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. That we are justified by grace, through the redemption in Christ, and have peace with God; *He* having made peace by the blood of the cross, are important branches of gospel preaching. That the zeal of Paul and the eloquence of Apollas are insufficient to form men to newness of life and to new obedience, and prepare them for the immortal honours of the heavenly world, without the concurring influences of the holy spirit. Conversion from all sin to God, and duty, by the instrumentality of the word, ordinances and providences, and the moral power and energy of the divine spirit, is to be preached. To accomplish this is the end of all God's dispensations with man, and it is what all men should aim at in their duties to God. So doing, we are workers together with God, comply with the great and good designs of his grace, act from the highest motives and best principles our natures are capable of. We shew by such a conduct that we love God, and are preparing ourselves, under divine influence for the enjoyment of him in the perfect world.

4thly.

4thly. Preaching the kingdom of God, implies preaching the final issue, and result, of God's economy of grace with mankind, the rewards and punishments of the world to come. That we are not made for this world only; that God who alone hath immortality, has been pleased to give us the power and capacity of it—that this world is not our home, but the threshold of eternity, and the life we now live, a preface to one that will find no end. Here we are in a state of discipline and trial to form for something noble and lasting beyond the grave! We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is! That the wicked and ungodly who have misimproved their talents, and neglected the great salvation will be overthrown as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and repented not: That death will tear them from the dear delights of time, and hurl them to the black despair of eternity! Yes, we are in duty bound to tell all gospel despisers, that the time is not far distant when they will adopt the plaintive language of the prophet. "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bear me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying a man child is born unto thee, making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew and repented not, and let him hear the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon tide; because he slew me not from the womb: or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me."*

The most powerful arguments in support of virtue are drawn from the rewards of the invisible world. From Abraham to this day, good men have lived by faith in things to come. This is the anchor to the soul, while we are doing and suffering the will of God here. And

* Jerem. 20, 14.

at the close of life, when we are called to put off these tabernacles, and explore an unknown eternity, it fills the mind with comfort, and dispels the horror of death ! Hear the faithful apostle exclaim on the verge of eternity—" I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." † And there are no motives and arguments so influential to deter men from sin and impurity as those taken from the awful punishments of the eternal world. The idea of the *Infinite* and the fear of his wrath disturb the wicked on the journey of life. "*They travel with pain all their days,*" and at the close of life what dismay, and horror crowd upon the minds of the careless and ungodly ? The tribunal of God, and the account they have to give of their past conduct trouble their spirits ! If you endeavour to comfort them and smooth their passage to another world, they are ready to reply, our consciences tell us that we have offended God, forgotten our immortality, and neglected the grace of the gospel kingdom. O for my bible ! my minister ! is there, can there be any hope for us ? We point them to the Saviour of lost men, and lead them to that stream of grace in the kingdom of God, broad as the world and fathomless as eternity. But they die at uncertainties, a prelude to their more awful fall, before the enlightened tribunal of heaven !

The resurrection from the dead, and the eternal joys of the heavenly world are topics the disciples sent forth to preach, will insist upon. That glorious, that dreadful day, that will disclose the counsels of God and bring to light all the works of men, and settle the fate of the dead, and the living is before us ! " Marvel not at this ; for the hour is coming

in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*"

The sound of the last trumpet shall shake the solid world; yea, all things beneath the throne of God! The earth and sea shall cast out their dead; the bodies of the saints shall be fashioned like unto Christ's most glorious body, and admitted into the temple of God above! The wicked will in vain call to the rocks and mountains, saying, fall on us; for the mountains and hills shall melt like wax, at the presence of the Lord, and the earth being on fire, shall be dissolved! "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them."|| This is a day for which the world was made and is governed; a day for which God has wrought through all the revolutions of time! This is the end of that scheme of grace in Christ, and the consummation of the kingdom of God! Christ will now give up the gospel kingdom to God, even the Father, and God will rule and govern angels and men as he would have done had sin never entered the world.

But I hasten to shew,

IIIIdly. Why the kingdom of God must be preached.

And the kingdom of God must be preached,

1. Because all men have not time and ability to look into the ways and works of God, and comprehend the grace and mercy brought to light in this kingdom, by the appearing of *Jesus Christ*.

God has beautifully diversified his works both in the natural and moral worlds: and appointed employments

* John 5. 28, 29. || Jer. 6. 30.

ployments suited to the capacities and abilities of all his rational family. In this sense he has made some vessels to honor, and some to dishonor; and is said to love *Jacob* and hate *Esau*; i. e. to prefer the one to the other. The ignorant, God would have enlightened, the careless awakened, and the doubtful directed.

It is the will of God that there should be order and subordination in the world; and officers in the church, and ordinances duly administered, “for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*

2. The kingdom of God must be preached, for God will have all men to be saved, and the preaching of the gospel a means to accomplish this end. God wills that men should be saved by the gospel, as the way his wisdom has devised, and his everlasting love discovered. He hath chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy in this world in order to our being admitted to heaven hereafter. God would have men previously prepared for heaven by the gospel, “made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Men do not begin to be holy in heaven, or wicked in hell. But by their attention to, or neglect of, the gospel or kingdom of God, they are subjects meet for heaven, or become vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. The dispositions of men are formed here, that fit them for their respective places, and employments hereafter. God desires and wills that all men should hear Christ’s voice, repent, believe, and obey the gospel, and obtain salvation in this way. And he can will and desire their salvation in no other way, while he is unchangeable. “For there is no other name given under heaven, among men, whereby we must be saved.”† Those therefore who reject the gospel, sin against the only

* Eph. 4. 12. † Acts 4. 12.

remedy God has provided, and must in the eternal world, fall under his displeasure !

3. The kingdom of God must be preached, for God will judge the world in righteousness at last, and he will have men acquainted with the rule of proceeding in that solemn day. The day of judgment is predicated upon the gospel revelation, the preaching of the kingdom of God. In which day God will judge the actions of men, not his own works. Neither will he condemn any man, but for the deeds done in the body, that were forbidden by the gospel of the kingdom. Nor reward any with eternal life, but those who have patiently continued in the discharge of gospel duties, according to their knowledge and abilities, to the death. At that day good men will be admitted to heaven, being prepared therefor by faith, repentance, love and obedience. And wicked men will be separated from all good, and consigned to all evil, having before judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, by despising the the gospel, and resisting the *Holy Ghost*.

From what has been said we infer,

1. That the work of a minister is a great and important work. He is diligently to study into the word, and works of God, and faithfully declare them unto the people of his charge, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. He should be a man experimentally acquainted with the religion of the bible, and well instructed into the kingdom of heaven. He should give himself to God, before he gives himself to preaching the kingdom. He is to bring out of his treasure things new and old, but he will use the utmost prudence in the management

agement of this part of his trust, lest he offend against the generation of God's people. He will feed his people with truths that are profitable for them to know, as fast as they can comprehend them. Prejudices against truth may consist with piety of heart. We find an Israelite indeed, overlook the Saviour of the world, because he was born in a contemptible town; but had an honourable testimony in his favour that he was sincere, and without guile at the same time.

Our blessed Master had many things to say, and teach his disciples: but they were not prepared to receive them.—“Ye cannot bear them now.” The plain truths of the gospel are principally to be insisted upon; and the important duties of righteousness, charity, and purity, to be inculcated. Faith, repentance, love, and obedience are never out of season, to be preached. There are other truths, that are difficult of investigation, which many wise, and good men have desired fully to comprehend, but have not been able; these are not immediately connected with a good life, and the favour of God. “There are ford ways in the word, over which the Lamb of the flock may safely walk to Zion: and there are depths in the same word, in which the elephant may swim.” Tis our comfort amidst the darkness and uncertainty, that surround us in this state.—“If we do the will of God, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”† If we make the word the study of our best days, we shall find it our only joy, and comfort, in the saddest days of declining age. Preaching is but a small part of the work of a minister, he is to watch over his people, pray for them, and instruct them from house to house. To reprove, rebuke, and

exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. And if there is a wandering sheep, he is to bring it back to Christ's fold; and in imitation of the chief Shepherd, he is to gather the lambs in his arms. His life should be adorned with wisdom, and prudence, that his prayer, sermons, and exhortations may take effect, and his light shine before men. The Sacraments of baptism, and the supper, he is to administer to all meet subjects, and to bless the people in the name of the Lord.

2dly. We infer from what has been said, the great duty of a people who have the kingdom of God preached to them, and the ordinances of the gospel duly administered. They should praise their privilege, and be careful to improve upon the means God is using with them. 'Tis a great honour shewn them by God. Capernaum was a contemptible village, but it was exalted to heaven by having the kingdom of God preached in it. A faithful minister is a great blessing to the Church and her children, and suitable returns God expects for such mercies.

The resettling the gospel is an occasion of joy: but you should rejoice with trembling: *Fear God and his Goodness!* For the greatest curses are inflicted, as well as the greatest blessing conferred by the gospel. "To the one we are a favour of death unto death; and to the other a favour of life unto life."* 'Tis not the design of the gospel to destroy men, but to save them. It eventually proves their destruction only when they turn the grace of it into wantonness, they stop the current of gospel truth, and gospel grace, make themselves miry and marshy places; then God in dreadful judgment says, "The miry places thereof and the

marishes thereof shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt."|| The preaching of Christ was the measure tilling sin of the Jewish nation. "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers." †—"Before the throne, that is erected in the gospel kingdom, are seven spirits of God, and out of the same throne proceed lightnings, thunderings, and voices." † This is a kingdom that may be opposed, and the gracious design of it frustrated, by the wickedness of men. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as all your fathers did so do ye." O fear trifling with mercy, and gather fruit to eternal life! lest it be at last "more tolerable for the land of Sodom, and Gomorrah" than for you.

But it is time that I close the discourse with particular addresses to the parties so nearly concerned in the transactions of the day.

And, 1. to the Disciple to be sent forth to preach the kingdom of God.

Dear Sir,

YOU are now engaging in the noblest work ever assigned to mortals—to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. To trace the footsteps of everlasting love in the redemption and salvation of a lost world. And to engage men to that holiness and purity which is the end of Christ's redemption. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, you will persuade men, and warn them to flee from the wrath to come. In the language of that ancient preacher, you will endeavour to awaken the careless, "up get ye out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." Open the last solemn scene, that day of God Almighty, in which the wicked shall not

stand ! and call upon them to comply with the grace of the gospel kingdom, that it may be a day of refreshing to them. And all, whose hearts are inclined to seek the God of Jacob, whose faces are Zionward, you will encourage and comfort—" Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith the Lord—speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."

You will look into the book of providence, and give the alarm when you see divine judgments hover over this people. And if they will not hear, and attend, imitate the *Saviour*, when he saw the devoted city, and wept over it—O Pomfret, Pomfret, if thou hadst known in this thy day, the things of thy peace !

Improve every death for the awakening of the living, and consider opening graves, as loud calls to you to be faithful, and to your people to do the work of the day in its day. See that your heart is right with God, my friend, for a trying day is before ministers and people ! Go, preach the kingdom of God, guide and animate this people in the way to heaven, and at last you shall shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of God above !

2. I would offer a few words to the church and people of God in this place.

Fathers and Brethren,

WE are now to set apart to the work of the ministry, and commit to the grace of God, the man, you have chosen for your spiritual guide. We rejoice that you have asserted the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and renounced the doctrines and commandments of men in matters of religion.

religious. We wish you to run the christian race with joy, taking the bible for your *only guide*, and looking to Jesus the author and finisher of your faith. We wish you to give place to the kingdom of God, among you, and govern your hearts, and lives by the holy precepts of it, that it may be known in future time that a prophet hath been in this *Israel*. We rejoice in that you have made choice of one whose abilities and profession intitle him to take part of this ministry with us. Attend to his instructions and admonitions, and give him no occasion to say, that, he labours in vain. And if you find him to fail in any part of his duty, intreat him as a father, to take heed to the ministry, he has received of the Lord Jesus. It would be a misery for the highest officers in Christ's kingdom, to be above admonition, which is designed for the good of the meanest member.

May he, and you, long live together in peace, and be mutual helps to each other, on the journey of human life. And as you are a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men, may you conduct so as to gain the approbation of all virtuous beings.— Then you will look forward with transport, to that blessed world, where pious people and faithful ministers shall meet; where there will be no adversaries to oppose, or dangers to encounter; where there will be no more angry disputes, or unchristian censures; where there will be no more pain, persecution or death; but truth and pleasure be inseparable! Where the friends of truth, and of Jesus, its king, shall meet and dwell forever. Let us all, both ministers and people, be careful to serve God, and our generation faithfully, and govern our hearts and lives by the gospel of the kingdom of God; then we shall have within us conscious worth, and

before us a bright and noble prospect. Let the attentive multitude before me call to mind, that we are all the offspring of God, and children of the kingdom. And may we act worthy of our divine original, and in conformity to our glorious hopes! We are met upon a solemn and joyful occasion; but shall meet no more, till we go in the trackless path of death, to the general assembly above!— There may we meet, and rejoice in a kingdom that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; through Jesus Christ, our hope and Redeemer.

A M E N.

