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SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE

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IN BOSTON,

ON THE AFTERNOON OF THE

FOURTH SABBATH IN JULY, 1818.



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SERMON.



HEBREWS, xii. 2.

“ Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

BY casting an eye on the context, it is at once discovered, that the design of the Apostle was to induce his christian brethren to stedfastness and perseverance in the christian profession. That he might the better succeed in this most laudable attempt, he sets before them certain characters as examples. He adverted to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, &c. and finally, he comes to Jesus, as the chief of all, as to a perfect directory.

Much might be said on the great propriety of the Apostle's method here observed. Nothing is more serviceable in pointing out the duties involved in any profession, nor is there any thing more powerful to incite to the performance of such duties, than example. The examples set forth in the context, seem admirably calculated to give us just conceptions of the real object of the christian dispensation, the duties incumbent on its votaries, and the reward held out to induce the professor to faithfulness.

The design of this Sermon, as a distinct object, is to settle a question respecting the great influential

object held out as a reward for christian labours and christian sufferings.

It is a most reasonable thing, that a reasonable reward should be expected for services of all kinds, and it is equally as absurd to expect faithfulness in ourselves or in others, without the expectation of an adequate reward, as it is to promise ourselves a compensation for services infinitely greater than such services can merit.

Should the labourer, whom you might employ, absurdly calculate, that at the close of day he should be put in possession of your whole estate, as a righteous compensation for his day's work, he would, no doubt, be offended, should one inform him that no such reward would be allowed for his services. And it is evident, that his absurd calculation, in this case, is the cause of his disappointment. If he had been reasonable in his expectations, he would have been satisfied with a compensation proportioned to his services. So, when christian professors promise themselves immortality and eternal life, as a recompence for their labors in the cause of religion, they prepare themselves to be disappointed. They infinitely overrate their work. Nor will they at once be satisfied by being told, that though their good works can never merit the expected reward, yet shall they receive a reasonable compensation for all their services and for all their sufferings; and moreover, that what they had expected as a compensation for their work, they have as a gift of God; not because they merit it, but because it was the will of our Heavenly father to give unto us eternal life in his son. The reason why this information is not satisfactory is, because if works cannot merit immortality and eternal life, and if God has been graciously pleased to give mankind this invaluable inheritance in Christ Jesus, then those who have no good works to recommend them, are equal heirs with themselves.

This is too humiliating. What, shall our wicked, unbelieving, unconverted, unregenerated neighbors be clothed in the beautiful robes of immortality, and shine as brilliantly in the righteousness of God in the eternal world as we? We who have borne the burden and heat of the day, we who have been regenerated and born of the spirit, who have believed in Jesus and laboured in his cause, are we to be placed on a level with these spiritually blind, halt, and leperous? Could we be persuaded into this belief, we would at once forsake the religion of Christ, his divine commands we would treat with utter neglect, our sinful propensities should all be gratified, and sensual indulgence should be our constant employ. The sabbath, the sanctuary, the holy services of devotion would be all beneath our notice, there would be left no inducement to deny ourselves and to bear the cross of Christ. In one word, if you take away the awful penalty of eternal punishment for unbelief and sin, we would not believe in Jesus nor would we obey his laws. The substance of all this, my brethren, is constantly held up and earnestly contended for by the professed enemies of the faith we profess, and the holy vocation to which we have been called. The foregoing insinuations are practiced on minds naturally feeble and habitually timid; the fond, the pious matron is told, that if the dreadful penalty of endless punishment be not enforced on the minds of her sons and daughters, she has no right to expect them to be either religious or virtuous. It is contended that this penalty is an indispensable requisition, in the cause of religion and morality, and that to deny it is to open the door of impiety, and every sinful practice.

Let us ask the question, whether the author and finisher of our faith undertook the work of man's redemption, whether he faithfully laboured and suffered in this cause under the penalty of eternal condemnation. Did he behold in his adorable fath-

er a lowering vengeance which threatened his eternal banishment from his father and his God, if he refused the mighty undertaking? It can hardly be necessary to explain how this question relates to our subject. The bearer already discovers that if such a penalty was not necessary in the commencement of this ministration, it cannot be in the prosecution of it; if it was unnecessary to induce the captain of our salvation, why is it necessary to engage the disciple?

Surely it was not to purchase his father's love, that the son of God, condescended to become poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, for this he fully possessed before. The testimony of the father is, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Not to purchase eternal glory, life and immortality did Jesus undertake the work of man's salvation; for of all this was he an heir before the foundation of the world. Never did the blessed redeemer inform his disciples that the dreadful penalty of everlasting destruction lay before him; and that to avoid the indispensible catastrophe he must do the whole work of him who sent him. And as he gave no intimation of any such penalty for himself, so he never made use of it as a mean to induce any one to become his disciple, or to continue faithful to his cause.

But why was this penalty unnecessary to engage the captain of our salvation, to undertake, and to prosecute effectually our redemption? Answer: the love which he had for our sinful world, was sufficient to induce him to give himself a ransom for all men. If it be an undeniable maxim with the philosopher, that in accounting for any of the phenomena of nature, no more cause should ever be sought than what is adequate to the effect, may we not with equal propriety contend, that if we have found a sufficient cause for any of the divine phenomena of the dispensation of grace, we expose ourselves to err by seeking after other causes in the regions

of imagination? The scriptures account for the cause of man's redemption as follows: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." Because God loved us he sent his son to be every thing to us, which by grace he is made; such as "Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption." And as this love in God towards man was sufficient to produce this unspeakably glorious event, there was no need of any other cause, no other can be found. No other can possibly exist. For if this cause was sufficient, and did produce the effect, it was not produced by a different cause. As a motive which moved Jesus to die for man, the divine testimony explicitly declares, that "he loved us and gave himself for us." The love of Christ to sinners, is assigned as the cause, which moved him to give himself for us. If this was the cause, and if this cause did produce in him a willingness, then we have no occasion to seek for any other; nor can there be any other cause, that is, no other distinct from this.

What was the "joy that was set before him," for which he "endured the cross, despising the shame?" It was the accomplishment of the glorious object for which he laboured. "He loved the Church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The joy that was set before him, was a world redeemed, sanctified, cleansed, and glorified in the Lord our righteousness. This object perfectly answered to the love which he had for the world; it was all his love for us desired. And when in pursuit of this soul-rejoicing object, and in possession of full assurance respecting obtaining the end of his labors and sufferings, he despised all the shame, all the contempt and abuse which he received from his enemies.

This consummate joy which was set before Jesus rendered all his labors and all his sufferings his meat and his drink. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." "We have seen and do testify, that the father sent the son to be the Saviour of the world." "He shall save his people from their sins." "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son." "For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." That is, saved from sin, from unbelief, from idolatry, from moral darkness, and all the evils of unreconciliation to God. For "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to them their trespasses."

It may be proper to remark, that the Saviour was appointed, not to prevent the wicked from becoming blind, or the transgressor from going into prison, but "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that set in darkness out of the prison house." The Saviour's grace was not designed to prevent that death which was the curse of the law from coming upon the transgressor, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Such was the object of the Saviour's labors and sufferings, and such was the joy and reward set before him, concerning which it is written. "He shall see of the travel of his soul, and shall be satisfied, for by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities."

We may now advert to some of the examples which the Apostle has seen fit to associate in our context. For instance, Abraham: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance, obeyed and he went out, not knowing whither he

went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country; dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promise offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure." Was Abraham threatened with eternal condemnation, with everlasting torments in the future world if he refused to obey God? Did the God of Abraham put him on trial between the penalty of eternal misery, or the offering up of Isaac? Have we the least intimation that Abraham's faith or obedience was the effect of such a penalty? Surely we have not. Abraham's faith was the effect of the divine promise, accompanied with miraculous evidence, and his obedience was the effect of his love of God, and his confidence in his unalterable word. He was fully persuaded, that he who had promised him his son, and had fulfilled that promise notwithstanding the natural improbability of the event, could if he pleased, raise the darling of his soul from death, and make him a great nation, and in him bless all the nations of the earth.

Perhaps our limits will allow us to notice what is said of Moses. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chusing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches, than the treasures in Egypt. How shall we account for this remarkable choice of Moses? When an infant he was lodged among the flags, by the brink of the Nile, while his little sister Miriam watched afar off to see what would be the fate of the child. There lay the future Saviour and deliverer of his people. Pharaoh's daughter came to the place, heaven directed her; she found the infant and had compassion on it. She nursed it and it became her son. He was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, at that time the most

learned nation on earth. The honors and favours of the Court were his. Whatever is calculated to flatter the vanity of youth, feed the natural pride of the human heart, and influence ambition were at his devotion. From moving in such a circle of honor, what could induce him? He looked on the sufferings of his brethren, he saw them in the "iron furnace" of affliction, the soul of philanthropy, of the genuine patriot, was moved with compassion's irresistible force. He chose his lot with his people.

At the special command of God, and under his divine direction, he undertook and finally accomplished the redemption of the family of promise. Here let us ask, did Moses refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chose to suffer affliction with the people of God in preference to enjoying the treasures of Egypt, undertake at the command of God the deliverance of Israel under the penalty of eternal misery in the future world? Is there in the whole account we have of these remarkable events any intimation that Moses was threatened with this endless torture in the coming world, which is now held up by professed ministers of gospel grace, as an indispensable foundation of faith, piety and virtue?

Was Moses promised the reward of immortality and eternal life as a compensation for his obedience? We surely have no such account. But we are informed that "he had respect to the recompense of reward." What was this reward? That which was promised him by the angel of God in Mount Horeb; it was that he should deliver his people from bondage, and bring them into the land of promise. And when this servant of God was so happy as to realize that all Israel were landed on the opposite shore of the red sea, from Egypt, and that their enemies were destroyed, he and all Israel sang unto the Lord a song of deliverance. This was a reasonable and fully adequate recompense of reward. He now beheld nearly three millions of people, who were but a few hours before abject slaves, free and independent. Can we, without doing violence to our own understandings, pretend

that this reward was not a compensation fully adequate to the sacrifices which Moses had made in refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and for the afflictions which he suffered with the people of God? Is there a real patriot in the world who would not do as much for his country for such a reward?

Such, my brethren, are the examples which a divinely inspired Apostle has presented us, as patterns for our imitation— And now, let us carefully and with due attention look unto Abraham, let us look unto Moses, and, above all, let us look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Did those ancient worthies, did this perfect directory set us an example? Shall we then contend that the motives and rewards which were sufficient to produce such examples of faith, of piety, of patience, of labour, of sufferings and of every virtue honourable to God and profitable to man, are insufficient to produce in us an humble imitation of such examples? Shall we turn from such incitements, and seek in the wisdom of this world for an eternal, unmerciful penalty, on which to form a system of terror, contrived by priestcraft to make us religious and moral? Shall we persuade ourselves and our children to build faith and all the duties of religion on the fear of endless misery? Shall we support the dishonorable idea, that religion and morality are not worthy our attention, unless endless misery threaten on the one hand, and immortality is promised on the other? Have those who have built their religion and morality on this foundation, been able to set us a better example than the patterns quoted by the Apostle in our context? If we examine the history of this system of religious terror, shall we not be presented with a persecuting priesthood and hierarchy, and a dissoluteness in morals, which would disgrace the darkest age of heathenism?

What is the reason that a religion which promises its votaries immortality and eternal life for obedience, and threatens delinquents with the unspeakable woes of endless misery, after all produces so little vital religion or pure morality? The reason of this is found in the very nature of man, and in

the order of things. Give to men an irksome task to perform, threaten them with excruciating tortures in case of disobedience or failure, and their calculations will be to do as little of the hated work as possible and avoid the penalty. Their constant study will be to find out inventions to clip and scant the work. Whoever calculates on human nature differently will be disappointed. But give to men an employment which reason and common sense will justify, and which is naturally productive of their advantage, and let them understand, that in the very nature of things, their faithfulness will procure them a reasonable and ample reward, give them to understand the whole of their duty is planned in the wisest and best manner for their present happiness, and that no interest is to be served by their exertions exclusive of their own; the selfishness natural to men will induce them to be faithful. Present to men a religion whose services are all calculated to promote their rational enjoyment, which takes nothing from them without returning more than its value, and whose increase of duty is an increase of happiness, and there is but little danger but they will eagerly accept it and practice its precepts; this world is full of labour, toil and traffic, and the whole is carried on by the power of this principle. There is nothing that a man will not part with if he can obtain that in exchange which he values higher than that which he lets go. And if we absurdly calculate on engaging men on any other principle, we shall have the mortification of looking for them where they are not. If from promises or threatenings, or both together, people are brought to engage in a religion whose services are irksome, they will most assuredly be neglected.

Let us then enquire what will make the duties of religion pleasureable. The Redeemer says, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." What makes it so? Not because we may indulge in all manner of sin; not because there are not arduous labours to be performed; not because great sacrifices and sufferings are not to be endured, but because the duties of the religion of Jesus can never be performed but from a principle of love, and love makes the labor and the burden easy and light.

What is here contended for may be seen in the government of a family of children. If the parent calculates on the principles of terror, and expects to have his children faithful and obedient for fear of an unmerciful punishment, it is true the children may be, for a season, filled with dread and horror, but all this can never induce them to attend with a cheerfulness and pleasure to the commandments enjoined. And even when under the most fearful apprehensions, they will be scrupulous about the extent of their duty. They will invent a thousand ways to hold up the appearance of faithfulness where they have studied to come short. The idea may be extended still further, and the disobedient children may be exercised with punishments of cruel severity, such as can be seen to have no mercy or compassion mingled with them, and all this shall serve to alienate their hearts from the parent, to fix a settled hatred in their minds against every requirement, and instead of softening, harden their hearts, in room of inclining them to filial duties, turn their faces and affections directly the other way — But that kind of discipline whose pungent severity is in the manifestations of parental love, compassion and tenderness is the most sure of its object. This is “that wisdom which dwells with prudence, and finds out knowledge by witty inventions.” It so contrives the administration of chastisement, as to convince the understanding of those who are exercised by it, that reformation is the object aimed at. It invents a thousand rewards as encouragements to obedience, and is always prompt in causing the meritorious to enjoy the fruits of their labours.

Duty itself is supreme delight when love is the inducement and the labor. By such a government the ignorant are enlightened, the hard hearted are softened, the disobedient reformed, and the faithful encouraged.

In viewing this general subject, and in applying it to the christian profession, duties and rewards, is it not most evident, that the penalty of eternal punishment on the one hand for our neglect, and the reward of immortality and eternal life for obedience on the other, may both of them be laid out of

the question entirely? Is it not evident that we rate our christian virtues infinitely too high, when we presume to expect an immortal state of divine and glorious felicity as their reward? What proportion is there between the labor in this case and the reward expected? Surely there is none. Nor is there any more proportion between the demerits of unbelief and sin, and the endless punishment which has been held up as its just recompense. And as it is most unreasonable to expect the everlasting inheritance of eternal life for our good works, so it is equally unscriptural. "This is the record that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his son." Why should we insist on laboring for that which God has been graciously pleased to give us in Christ? Was there ever a conclusion more unreasonable than to contend, that if our heavenly Father has, in his infinite mercy, given us eternal life in Jesus the Lord from Heaven, and if we cannot merit this treasure, which is above all price, we will therefore turn our backs on all the commandments of our God, will blaspheme his holy name, will treat the orders of his house, his sanctuary and worship with contempt, will practice every abomination, and will teach our children to do the same? This is not "laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, it is not running the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God."

How can we be the disciples of Jesus, unless we are furnished with his spirit of wisdom and love? Can we walk in his steps, do the will of our father in Heaven, patiently suffer for righteousness sake, love our enemies, and pray for them, from a different principle from that which actuated him? If he was not induced by a principle of terror, is it not erroneous to depend on such a principle? In room of facilitating the christian race, does not this principle retard it? If the principle of fear were a sufficient incentive to move us in the duties of the christian profession, is it not plain that that love

which “casteth out fear” would be of dangerous tendency? “He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” “If ye love me,” says the blessed Jesus, “keep my commandments.”

To conclude: It seems a proper enquiry, in settling the mind on our general subject, whether there be, or be not, in the natural qualities of the christian profession and duties, a value, in relation to the happiness of its votary, sufficient to amount to a reasonable inducement to attend to all its requirements?

If, on careful and due examination it be found, that the duties required by the religion of Jezus, do not contain in themselves, such qualities as will afford a reasonable compensation to the faithful in them, then it must be granted that propriety requires that some other compensation should be allowed. But should the case be so decided, it would involve another question, viz: who is so much more benefitted by those duties as to render it just for him to make up this supposed want? To be plain, if our heavenly father requires duties of us, which services are not of themselves sufficiently productive of our benefit to afford a reasonable compensation for our trouble, is he so much benefitted by them as to render it just and proper that he should grant the addition required? This can never be allowed. But surely somebody must be benefitted enough by these christian duties to render it proper that they should be at the expense of them. Any thing that will not pay its own expences, proves a want of wisdom in him who planned it.

If the scripture representation be allowed, this question is easily decided. “In keeping thy commandments there is *great reward*.” “This is the love of God that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.”

If righteousness here render it proper that we receive a compensation for it, that is not found in it, how are we to be recompenced for a life of righteousness in a future state? It seems that these queries must satisfy the rational mind, that goodness is its own reward—that righteousness is to be valued for its own intrinsic worth. And if we are correct in this conclusion,

it follows of necessary consequence, that unrighteousness is to be avoided for its own natural qualities, which are every way repugnant to our felicity. Could we all be fully persuaded that these things are so, it is reasonable to calculate that all would be pressing into this kingdom of righteousness, as it is to be supposed that men will part with what they dislike, for that which they love and highly prize.

All traffic is ventured on this principle. The purchaser never buys with a design to lose by his bargain. The merchant ventures his thousands at a foreign market on the calculation that his wares are so much wanted where he sends them, that they will bring from thence what to him is of greater value. The vicious will part with their vice when they are persuaded that virtue is better. Go offer a wicked man a suit of the best of clothing, if he will part with his rags, he will take you at your word. Why? because he knows he is a gainer by it. Why will he not part with his sins for righteousness? Because he believes as he has been taught, that righteousness will not pay its way, and that in order to be happy here he must live a sinful life.

May it please God, my friends, to incline our hearts to his "commandment which is a lamp," and to his "law which is a light." And let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus as a perfect model for imitation.

Let us practice our sentiment in all our relations in life. As companions, as parents, as children, as neighbors, as citizens, and as belonging to the great family of man, made of one blood, and as children of our Father who is in Heaven, whose tender mercies are over all his works, to whom be glory forever, through him who loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood.