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SERMON IV.

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OUR SALVATION NEARER.

ROMANS, XIII. 11.—Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Human life is a journey, or a voyage, or a race. In its progress we are all tending toward a distant, but a certain point; a port, a goal, a home, it may be, from whence we shall never return to the place from which we have taken our departure.

In the Scripture this fact is sometimes presented, in the way of warning. We may incur the most dreadful loss, if we are careless and neglectful of our bearings, or flag in our exertions. We are moving over a full sea: there are fogs and tempests. There are a thousand devious paths into which our footsteps may be beguiled. There are a thousand enemies, and in one moment the gayest hopes may be dashed to ruin.

In the text, the thought of this continual progress toward the desired haven is presented, to induce serious consideration; to stimulate our flagging energies; to rouse to wakeful diligence; to encourage the full assurance of hope and activity, with the certainty of the benefit to which, if we are in the right course, we are approximating; "and that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

The bones of God's ancient people bleached in the wilderness, fallen there because of their unbelief; shall your souls perish too, from the very threshold of salvation? *Shall* He swear in His wrath concerning *you*, ye shall *never* see my rest?

SERMON V.

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ECONOMY A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

“When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”—St. JOHN vi. 12.

These words occur in the account of the feeding of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes, a miracle which alone, of all our Lord's mighty works, is recorded by all four of the Evangelists. This circumstance has led some to consider the miracle as particularly significant and marvellous, and, for that reason, so carefully recorded. It is hard to see, however, in what respect there was a greater display of Divine power, in thus creating food on the instant, than there was in turning water into wine, or in hushing a furious storm by a word, or in calling a dead man out of the grave wherein he had lain four days. A more natural explanation of the fact is gained by considering that the three first Evangelists, in giving a synopsis of our Lord's life, would naturally record this as they did others of his miracles of mercy, while the fourth one, who wrote a supplementary gospel, was induced to depart from his usual custom, of omitting what the others had stated, and to mention this one, because it furnished the occasion of one of our Saviour's discourses, of which he alone was inspired to preserve the record.

But whatever may have been John's motive for recounting the miracle, he alone has stated the interesting circumstances mentioned in the text. All inform us that the twelve baskets of fragments were collected after the multitude had been fed, a statement which shows how ample and complete the supply had been, and also brings the occurrence into harmony, with the similar, but less striking miracle told of Elisha, (2 Kings iv. 42-44.) in which twenty barley loaves and a few fresh wheaten ears were made to supply a hundred men, so that there was left over a quantity which was not needed. The text informs us that the gathering of the baskets full was not an accidental thing, nor even a spontaneous impulse of the disciples, but the result of a spe-

cific direction given by our Lord. And this for a reason assigned, not, as some (Alford *in lo*) have said, to supply the Apostles' future wants, although the fragments were, no doubt, used for that purpose ; nor as others (cf. Stier) suggest, to prevent the people from foolishly carrying away portions "as relics," for such an attempt, even if made, would defeat itself, but as our lord said, "that nothing be lost." It is a proverb confirmed by all human experience, that, "what comes easily goes easily," and nothing would have been more natural than for the entire multitude, disciples and all, after having been so abundantly fed without any effort of their own, to cast idly away the broken food that remained, as if unworthy of notice or care. But he who knew what was in man, seized just this occasion to inculcate a principle of universal application. The stores of Omnipotence are indeed inexhaustible, and the living proof was before the eyes, but nothing was to be wasted. The same power which had satisfied thousands out of a few loaves and fishes, could repeat the operation every meal time ; still the law was, that nothing should be lost.

The principle, as I have said, is of universal application. It concerns the use, not only of food and property of every kind, but also of time, of talent, of influence, of whatever we are entrusted with. And it extends to individuals of both sexes and all ages and classes, to households, to congregations, to communities, to corporations, and to the State itself. The same reasons which make it a duty for any one to guard against waste, make it an equal duty for all the rest. Yet it is a law against which plausible objections may be and are easily raised. Some say it is unbecoming the spirituality of the gospel, which treats of the great, vital relations of the soul, and does not condescend to the mint, anise, and cummin of every day life. But how great the mistake ! The gospel is a perfect rule of life, and brings under its solemn and affecting sanctions every interest of humanity. It requires body, soul, and spirit to be sanctified, and it sheds dignity upon the humblest offices of human duty, by requiring them to be in the name of Christ, and for the honor of his cause. And the reference to the garden herbs which the Jews punctiliously offered, while they utterly neglected the weightier matters of the law, is strangely out of place ; for of the two classes of obligations thus contrasted, our Lord expressly said, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." It is an old wile of the Evil One to play off different classes of duties against each other, and make the performance of the one an excuse for neglecting the other. But the true believer says with David, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right."

Others, again, object to the principle as tending to a mean, degrading penuriousness, inconsistent with largeness of heart,

or the truly generous elements of a human character. But this is confounding things that differ. The sacred Scriptures have no patience with a niggard. They denounce selfishness in every form, and at every turn. Generosity is a marked feature in the example of every eminently good man, whether of the Old Testament or the New. The roll of the saints shows many a rich man, but no misers; and many a poor man, but no spend-thrifts. It is the motive which gives character to the act. Two men may save, with pinching exactness; the one does it to hoard his filthy lucre; the other to pay off a just debt, and maintain a good conscience. Two other men may spend with equal and lavish profusion; but one does it simply to pamper his own pride and luxury, the other to glorify God and bless the souls and bodies of his fellow-men. To guard against waste does not mean to become a slave of avarice, to drown the soul in the lust of accumulation, or to act as if the chief end of man were to make or save money. But it does mean to carry the spirit of the gospel into the ordinary duties of daily life; and, as the Apostle says, "to eat and drink to the glory of God." No one, who is frugal on Christian principle, who shuns prodigality because Christ makes it a sin, who economizes because he is a steward of the Great Householder, will be in the least danger of falling into the odious meanness of a mere miser. In his case, the motive elevates and sanctifies the deed, and that which, if done from selfish or avaricious views, would degrade him alike in his own eyes and those of others, being done from noble and sacred aspirations, rather quickens and enlarges his soul.

But why is it a law of Christ that nothing should be wasted?

I answer: I. Because *what we have is not our own*. Our title to it is, no doubt, absolute and exclusive, so far as regards our fellow-creatures, but not as regards our Maker. He made it, and he made us, and both are subject to his will. The well-known injunction of the parable applies to every human being, "Occupy till I come." The Father of lights gives liberally, and upbraids not. His hand is ever open. His bounties flow in a continuous stream. Yet all are for a purpose. We are to use and enjoy, to buy or to sell, to exchange or to give, not to waste or neglect. This is the law of his universe. Use is written on all the works of his hands. Bird and beast and creeping thing, flowers of the field and grass on the mountains, the morning cloud and evening dew, the summer shower and the stormy wind fulfilling his word, all things, animate and inanimate, serve a purpose. The farther man penetrates into the secrets of nature, the more clearly does he discover traces of useful design in all that contributes to make up the beautiful world in which we dwell. And man, the head and lord of creation, as being intelligent and

rational, is the more bound to obey the same law. We are called into being to serve and glorify our Maker; and, to accomplish this end, are very variously endowed.

Now, to waste any of these endowments—*i. e.* to consume them without accomplishing any good end—is substantially to deny our stewardship, and to defeat the very object for which we were created and sent into the world. It is to do what we have no right to do. It is spurning God's authority. It is to make an ungrateful return for his benefits. It is impiously to say, "Who is the Lord, that we should serve him?" Men, indeed, do not usually look upon prodigality in this aspect. To most it seems, if an offense at all, one of a minor and very venial class. But this is because of their vague and inadequate ideas of human responsibility. The sacred Scriptures set it in a very different light. The man who wrapped his talent in a napkin, did not turn his money to a wicked end; he did not even waste the money itself; but he wasted the proper use of it; he threw away the opportunity to make some profit out of it for man's good and God's glory, and, therefore, he was condemned, out of his own mouth, as a wicked servant, and an enemy of his lord.

Waste often escapes notice as wrong, because it is a negative sin. It usually proceeds from the lack of thought, attention, care, and watchfulness, rather than from wilful design. But these are the very qualities which it behooves a steward to have, and the want of them may easily work as much mischief as a deliberate embezzlement of trust funds. In truth, it is negative sins which ruin the vast majority of those who are lost. It is not what men do, but what they fail to do, which brings them to final and remediless grief. In our Lord's solemn and startling picture of the last Judgment, the sentence of the condemned is made to turn upon the words—"Inasmuch as ye did it not."

Waste, then, is not simply unwise, unfortunate, and undesirable but sinful. It is a violation of undeniable duty. It is a misuse of what in fee belongs to the Lord and not to us, and, as such, subjects the misuser to a severe and searching account. Nor is it any objection to this view that many otherwise wicked persons perform this duty punctiliously and are models of judicious economy; for what they do from a bad motive, we are to do from a good one; what they practice merely for selfish ends, we are to perform out of regard to him who said Gather up the fragments, etc. Yet such persons, with all their apparent excellence in this respect, are often far astray. They are aptly represented by the disciples at the time when they, headed by Judas, reproached the loving and grateful sister of Lazarus, because she broke a costly alabaster box of precious perfumed oil, and poured its contents over the Saviour's head

and feet. "To what purpose is this waste?" was their indignant exclamation. But our Lord speedily corrected their foolish error. What box was too expensive, what perfume too rare to be bestowed upon the Son of Man, at once the creator and the Saviour of the world? How could there possibly be waste in any offering made to him? It was but the steward giving back to the principle what was his before, and, as such, was the first and most legitimate use to be made of any earthly possession. The case of Mary, therefore, settles the principle, that there can be no waste in giving to the Lord's cause; nothing is ever lost which is expended for his honor. In the eyes of worldings, or of very imperfectly sanctified believers, it may seem to be thrown away; but this is because they have forgotten the tenure of all human property, and the paramount obligations under which every one lies to his Maker.

II. A second reason for economy is, that *Prodigality always leads to other sins*, and, sometimes, by a very short road. It is true that extreme parsimony is often followed by the same result. The man who saves simply for the purpose of saving, who is bent on securing, at all hazards, every penny to which he has the shadow of a claim, is often sorely tempted to transgress the proper bounds, and violate right, for the sake even of petty gains. But this temptation does not operate where economy is studied as a matter of Christian duty, and men sedulously avoid waste, not for mere gain, but on the ground of principle. And this is the kind of frugality which the sacred scriptures inculcate and commend. But it is scarcely possible for the wasteful to avoid dishonesty. Habits of lavish and careless profusion, prosecuted for any length of time, make grievous inroads upon the largest estate, or the most generous income. But when means become contracted and resources cease to equal expenditure, the impulse is almost irresistible to keep up the style of living, either by contracting debts, which there is little or no probability of ever repaying, or by actually appropriating the property of others. The thought of retrenchment, of economy, of gathering up fragments so that nothing be lost, seems inadmissible. Such a thing has never been thought of as a moral obligation, while, as a practical measure, it runs counter to all the habits and impressions of years. Hence the children of extravagance content themselves with saying, it is too late now to begin a different course; and, accordingly, resort to one devious measure after another, until at last the kite can no longer be kept flying, and fortune and character are engulfed in a common ruin. This is the real history of nearly all the cases in which persons of good standing and respectable connections, suddenly are found to have fallen into the hands of criminal justice. They began with prodigality, and they ended in crime. Spendthrifts and wasters

often congratulate themselves that whatever may be said to their disadvantage, at least there is nothing mean about them. Yet it is certain, that generally their profusion is lavished upon themselves; and what is meaner than selfishness? And not unfrequently, as we have seen, it runs into dishonesty; and what is baser than theft, breach of trust, or fraud? It is easy to call bitter sweet and sweet bitter, evil good and good evil, but the things themselves remain unchanged; and it is time that the old-fashioned virtues of sober industry and wise economy had their due credit, instead of being thrust out of sight as things of no account in comparison with that lordly disposition which consists in scorning the smallest saving, and in being very free in the use of what turns out to be other people's money. Nobody can respect a grasping miser; but what I contend is, that nobody should respect a careless spendthrift. The latter treads as closely upon the verge of crime as the former, and, perhaps, does more mischief in the long run, by setting a bad example to the young and unthinking, by creating a false standard of excellence, and by habitually trampling under foot the true aims of human life.

III. A third reason for saving, as the text demands, is found in the *many good uses to which all savings may be turned*. The upbuilding of God's kingdom in the earth, and the consequent, or rather coincident, amelioration of the race, are to be carried on by human hands and means under the Divine blessing. In this work there is room for the co-operation of laborers of every degree and class, whether with hand, or tongue, or purse. In reclaiming prodigals, or teaching the ignorant, or diffusing the sacred Scriptures, or training ministers, or multiplying a religious literature, or sending missionaries to the heathen, there are innumerable ways in which the mammon of unrighteousness may be used to accomplish the most righteous and noble ends. So manifold are the schemes, while each concurs to the common result, that every peculiarity, I might say every caprice, of a benevolent giver may be gratified. Whatever preference he may indulge for special modes of operation will be sure to find itself suited somewhere in the wide range. Besides, as our Lord truly told us, "The poor ye have always with you." There will ever be the old and helpless, widows and orphans, the blind and the dumb, the victims of their own incapacity or improvidence, or the sufferers from others' violence or fraud. In no country of the world is there or has there been so equal a distribution of property as in our own favored land, and yet there is no neighborhood, from one ocean to the other, in which there are not objects of charity. It seems to be a part of God's continual providence that the benevolent affections of his creatures should never lack occasion for their exercise and enlargement. Cer-

tainly the call comes up unceasingly. The work never is, never will be finished.

Now, to meet these calls,—to be ready at the first cry of distress,—to have wherewith either to give to him that needeth, or to supply the great spiritual destitutions which abound in the world, there is need to obey the duty enjoined in the text. It is not the rich alone who are to provide for the poor or for the Lord's treasury. Neither the privilege nor the duty belongs to them exclusively. All are to have a part in the thrice-blessed work, and the means are to be secured by the simple method of gathering up the fragments, that nothing may be lost. Such an aim as this reflects credit upon the most trifling saving. It takes it quite out of the category of small things, and elevates it to the dignity of a virtue. Nor do those who have opportunity to know, cherish any doubt that a very large part of what is given in charity in this broad land and elsewhere, comes from savings, effected in personal and household expenditure, and that not only among the poor and persons of moderate means, but even among those who are, or are considered rich. And I do not know why it should not be esteemed just as praiseworthy to *save* money for God and humanity, as to earn it for that purpose. An authentic incident, old as it is, and familiar as it may be, will illustrate the principle. Many years ago, in England, two collectors for missions called at the house of a man of means for a contribution. As they stood in the hall, they heard the master of the house reproving a servant-maid with some severity for throwing away the small end of a candle which remained after burning. At this, one proposed they should retire, as certainly so close an economist would give them nothing. The other insisted that as they could suffer nothing worse than a refusal they should try. They did so, and at once received a roll of guineas, so much beyond anything they had expected that they could not refrain from mentioning the candle-end, and their inferences from it. "Ah," said the giver, "I am able to give so largely to your and other causes, because I guard so closely against all waste." This case does not stand alone. It can be matched again and again in our own day and land. Were it to become universal or even general for Christians to gather their fragments, in order to obtain resources for giving, no charitable or philanthropic treasury would ever labor under more than temporary embarrassment. This is a mine of wealth, the depth and richness of which no one can estimate until the trial has been made.

The duty we have been considering is one of universal obligation, yet there is no country on earth where it needs to be set forth so earnestly as in our own. Many of our own people, not having informed themselves by reading or observation of the condition of people of other lands in this respect, have no con-

ception of the comparative scale of expenditure and of living. Nowhere in Europe do laboring men receive such wages or eat such food as they do here. Many of them there eat meat only on holidays, and others have for their only loaf a kind of black bread, which no servant here would look at. And as our day-laborers live thus well, so correspondingly do those who are at the next remove above them in means. The variety of dishes on their tables, and the changes of clothing during the year, the number of trinkets they wear, and the excursions they make, are such as in any country of Europe would be found only among the positively wealthy. If we ascend higher up in the scale of prosperity, we find a display of extravagance and luxury which only the pen of the satirist can properly stigmatize. Now, one unfailling consequence of these habits of profuse expenditure among all classes, (each profuse in proportion to its means,) is waste—a persistent neglect to gather up the fragments—a kind of foolish and simple pride in not stooping to economy. A German, in New York, who rose in a few years from poverty to wealth, was asked the secret of his success. His answer was too coarse for me to repeat it in his words, but the substance was: not that he was more active, industrious, or shrewd than his neighbors, but that what they wasted he saved; and the difference between them in the course of years was reckoned by tens of thousands.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say that every one should cut down his or her expenditures to the bare means of subsistence. Neither reason nor sacred Scripture require or justify this. But I do mean to say,

1. That in this country the general tendency among all classes is to a style of living quite beyond any rational estimate of what is appropriate to their circumstances.

2. That this leads, by necessary consequence, to a disregard of economy, which is in flat contradiction to our Lord's precept in the text. Of course, in this place, I cannot go into details, nor, indeed, were it otherwise proper, do I have the ability in any one case to draw the line, and declare to you just when and where you should cease to spend and begin to save. Here, as elsewhere, the pulpit states the general principle as drawn from the Sacred Scriptures, while it is left to the individual reason and conscience to make the application.

And if ever there was a period in the life-time of my oldest hearer when this duty was especially incumbent, now is that period. On the one hand, there is the loudest call for charity from the foreign mission field, from the religious wastes on our frontiers, from the victims of war in camp and hospital and on the march, from the freedmen cast by hundreds and thousands upon our hands, from the white refugees driven by barbarous-

guerrillas from their homes, and from innumerable cases of long and individual suffering. Surely, it is a double sin to waste any of the gifts of God's bounty at a time when there are so many ready to perish for the lack of them. Let, then, old and young, rich and poor, male and female, gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.

On the other hand, our country is engaged in a fearful and perilous struggle for its very life. Its best blood is poured out like water, and its public debt swelled at the rate of more than half a thousand millions a year. Sore suffering is felt all over the land. Widows and orphans abound, maimed wrecks of humanity are scattered in every neighborhood, multitudes of individuals and households are compelled, by the enormous rise in prices, to make life one long and weary struggle against privation and want.

Is this a time for luxurious living and lavish expenditure? Is it not odious, as well as unchristian to seek any kind of shabby splendor or ostentatious display? Ought not modesty, sobriety, economy, to reign everywhere throughout the loyal North, when the very flower of the nation are mowed down—mangled, maimed—by tens of thousands in a week, and the air is thick with the sighs of the bereaved who mourn for the touch of a vanished hand, the sound of a voice that is forever still? But such a course is not only unseemly—as much so as it would be to dance and frolic at a funeral—but unpatriotic, a blow at the vital interests of the country. "The person who occupies what is equivalent to the labor of a man in useless extravagance, virtually withdraws one soldier from the field, or the services of one man in producing or forwarding supplies for the defense of the country." In this case, so far from the old paradox being true, that private vices are public benefits, the wasteful prodigal benefits no one, but does injury all round. He throws away his own means, he incites the silly to rival him in his frivolous expenditure, he insults the sorrows of numberless stricken mourners, and he strikes one more dagger into the heart of his bleeding, desolate country.