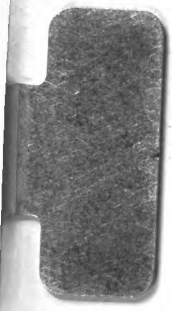


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SURE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY.

A

FAREWELL SERMON;

PREACHED ON OCCASION OF RESIGNING THE CHARGE OF THE
THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NEWARK, FOR A
PROFESSORSHIP IN LANE THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY, NOV. 22, 1835.

BY

BAXTER DICKINSON.



NEWARK, N. J.

PUBLISHED BY THE THIRD CHURCH.

West & Trow, Printers, 13 John-street, New-York.

1836.

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FAREWELL SERMON.

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To the Rev. Baxter Dickinson.

DEAR SIR,

The undersigned, a Committee in behalf of the Session and Trustees of the Third Presbyterian Church, respectfully request for publication, a copy of your discourse of last Sabbath afternoon. Though you have heretofore declined similar applications, we confidently trust you will not deny us this parting memorial of your faithfulness.

With unabated esteem,

Yours, sincerely,

H. MC DOUGALL,
J. G. GOBLE.

NEWARK, NOV. 28, 1835.



West & Trow, Prs., New-York.

S E R M O N .

Acts xx. 32.—And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

THE apostle Paul, when he uttered this benediction, was at Miletus, a town on the western coast of Asia. He had planted many churches in different parts of Europe, and particularly in the Grecian states; and he was now on his way to Jerusalem, from which he had been absent a number of years. Arrived at Miletus, he sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus—a church not far distant, on which he had bestowed much labor and concern, and for which he still cherished a strong affection. The elders came at his invitation, and the interview was one of great interest. The apostle could stop but a short time, for he must, if possible, be at Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost. He availed himself of the occasion, in reviewing his labors among them, glancing at his prospects, and giving suitable counsel and exhortation. In this connection he uttered the bene-

diction before us, closed with prayer, and departed amid the cordial salutations and tears of the brethren, who all accompanied him to the ship.

Coming before you for the last time as your minister, I have been led by my feelings, to adopt this parting benediction as the theme of discourse. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." I can attempt little more, on this occasion, than to bring to a natural close, a ministry of six years among you, assuring you all of my kindest feelings at parting, and pledging my grateful and affectionate remembrance. I shall, in imitation of the apostle at Miletus, just advert to the character and results of my ministry here, and then make a few suggestions with reference to your future welfare.

The apostle, in review of his labors, adopts language peculiarly strong. "Ye know," says he, "from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly and from house to house; testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." I cannot venture to apply this

language, in its full import, to my own ministry. It has had its imperfections: and I can only say, it has been my honest endeavor to act upon the principles of ministerial duty here avowed by the apostle. It has been my aim to illustrate and enforce the great truths and duties of the Gospel, and to give to the several parts of the Christian system the attention which their comparative importance demands. I have ever felt the obligation to make an unreserved exhibition of what God has revealed. I have remembered that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And I have considered also, that "wo is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." Under such impressions, I have tried to exhibit the amazing truths of God, whether joyous or painful, so plainly as to lodge them in the understanding, and so affectionately as to commend them to the conscience and heart. I have supposed it the great design of preaching, to bring men back to God; to render men holy. With this view, I have labored to alarm the careless with a sight of their guilt, to guide the inquiring to a Saviour and Sanctifier, and to console and animate the humble; and I have freely testified to all, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

This ministry has been received with all the external attentions it has merited, and more. The congregations have been large and serious; and it is consoling to me, on leaving, that I see you in

circumstances of rare prosperity, as respects union, strength, and readiness to every good work—circumstances rich in promise of future good.

But the connection, I would hope, has still higher claims to a grateful review. It was formed for purposes grand as immortality; and though there has been too much of coldness, and worldliness, and mere formality, we have not plodded on through the whole without evidence of God's special presence and power. There have been cases of hopeful conversion little noticed, because silent and solitary. There have been times of the marked displays of Divine grace. Two hundred and thirty-two have been added to the communion—about half the number by a public profession. Many, who had previously entered on a life of godliness, I would hope, have been quickened in the heavenly race. The cause of Christian charity, in its varied forms, has been honorably sustained. Through Sabbath school and Bible class instruction, there has been a very marked improvement in the religious knowledge and habits of the young. And, in common with the friends of God and man in other places, we are permitted to review with satisfaction our efforts in the great temperance cause.

For all that has been effected during our connection, we give honor to Him alone, without whose blessing Paul might plant and Apollos water in vain.

On the details of this ministry, it would be

unsuitable here to dwell. God grant, that with all its imperfections, the great and final review of it, may be an occasion of our mutual and everlasting joy.

I proceed, as proposed, to a few suggestions, with reference to your future prosperity.

1. You cannot too soon have a *stated, evangelical, and devoted ministry*.

I take it for granted, no one would wish the worship of the sanctuary suspended. All, however, may not feel alike, as to the expediency of a speedy settlement of a minister. I could wish that, on this point, there might be but one opinion. An occasional or temporary supply, may go through with the duties of the Sabbath to acceptance; it may discharge some of the other more general and necessary duties of a pastor; but it can never fully meet the wants of a people. There is something in the pastoral relation to create interest, and to inspire peculiar affection and confidence—circumstances indispensable to the highest degree of usefulness. And for this reason, with others, I have felt it my duty, except in peculiar cases, not to encourage the ordination of men merely as evangelists. A long interruption to the settled ministry almost necessarily leads to religious indifference, or fearful distraction. There are many interests to be attended to among every people, of which a pastor only can form a just conception, and on which a pastor only can be expected to bestow a suitable attention.

But another point of greater importance relates to the *character* of the ministry you select. I said, it should be *evangelical*—in other words, one that will faithfully exhibit the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is a quality of such fundamental importance, that, for the absence of it, no combination of other excellences can atone.

As to my views of Christian doctrine, I trust there is no misapprehension; and, consequently, as to my views of what constitutes an evangelical ministry. The scheme of Gospel truth, as I have endeavored to inculcate it, contemplates the existence of one only living and true God: it contemplates such a mysterious, though real distinction of persons in the Godhead, as renders proper the appellations, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—one God. It regards man by nature, and in consequence of his connection with the first apostate pair, as a sinner, utterly alienated from God, and in a state of ruin. It ascribes to the Lord Jesus the prerogatives of supreme divinity; and regards his mediatorial work, his work of humiliation, as an adequate source of relief, and the only source of relief, for guilty and lost man. It holds to the obligation of man at once to repent of his sins, and by faith to embrace Christ as his Saviour. It holds to his possessing all the faculties necessary to a free moral agency, and an immediate compliance with Gospel requisitions: while, at the same time, it acknowledges that such is his perverseness, that he is made willing only in the

day of God's power, and becomes a child of spiritual life only by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It recognises an eternal and unchangeable purpose of God, to justify and save some of our guilty race, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. It cherishes the idea, that the grace and power of God, in connection with their own efforts, will carry his people forward through all the conflicts of life, to the glory and joy of the upper world. It anticipates a judgment to come, and a state of endless blessedness for the righteous, and of endless misery for the wicked.

Other truths are comprised in the Christian system, but these are fundamental. They are all truths which the minister of religion must constantly illustrate, defend, and urge—because there is attached to them immeasurable importance. Nor can a ministry be much valued as a means of eternal life, which does not make a full avowal of these truths, and a lucid illustration of them, in all their practical bearings.

To a ministry giving prominence to this system of truth, this field of Zion has been accustomed from the very childhood of you all. God has ever blessed it, here and elsewhere; and its mighty influence in preparing souls for heaven, will be told in the everlasting songs and glories of multitudes which no man can number.

In the selection of a pastor, caution on this point is, perhaps, more important at present, than at

some preceding periods. We live in times of independent thought and conflicting views on every subject. There is pride of opinion, and too much angry controversy. In these heated collisions, I have supposed there was a middle ground, sanctioned by both the Bible and the standards of our church—ground on which the great body of our churches and ministers are disposed to plant themselves—cherishing confidence, and acting in concert, though still having slight shades of difference—difference principally of a philosophical cast. You want a ministry of truth—of the whole truth—without question; but not surely of mere speculation, and much less of wrangling controversy: a ministry, not of bigoted attachment, on one hand, to all the precise phraseology of other ages, denouncing as heretical all that do not choose to adopt it; nor, on the other, one that rudely, recklessly, I had almost said profanely, sweeps aside all that is ancient in principle and practice, apparently for the very reason that it is old.

You will bear me witness, that I have never sought your edification and eternal life, by the intricacies of mere metaphysical speculation, nor the anger, wrath, malice, and evil speaking, of heated theological controversy; while the doctrines of our church and the truths of the Bible have been kept constantly before you. God grant that this pulpit may ever throw around the strong light of heavenly truth, but never become the arena of profitless and unchristian conflict! May the doc-

trines of the cross here distil as the dew—doctrines full of consolation to the penitent, and alarm to the rebellious; but the wisdom and power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth.

But you need not only a stated and evangelical, but also a *devoted* ministry. And by a devoted ministry, I mean one which is uninterruptedly occupied with its appropriate business—one which engages the best powers of the man—one characterized by a manifest attachment to the kingdom of Christ, and a deep interest in the spiritual welfare of men.

There is enough in the appropriate work of a pastor, to occupy his entire time—to absorb all his powers of thought, feeling, and action. He should, therefore, be exempt very much from secular anxieties and business; and hence he should be liberally, promptly, and cheerfully supported. It will be ruin to his influence, and destruction to his charge, if, from any cause, he is led to cherish a worldly spirit and deportment. You may have an enlightened, eloquent, and strictly evangelical ministry; and it may accomplish little towards building up the church and saving souls, unless it be really interested in the holy and heavenly office;—unless it breathe the true spirit of piety, and exemplify the varied bright virtues of the Christian character, and evince that the man regards himself as engaged in a most sacred and momentous work.

On these topics, important as they are, I can-

not dwell. May the Lord, all-gracious, send you a pastor after his own heart.

2. Another thing important to your welfare, is a spirit of uniform and elevated piety in the church.

With the fraternity of professed believers there exists a mighty influence. They are a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid. They were designed to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. They can give energy and effect to the ministry of reconciliation, or they can abridge its influence, so as to render it nearly powerless. Their godly walk and conversation give courage and animation to the pastor. They furnish a standing and palpable testimony to the truth and importance of the messages he brings. Their bright example sends alarm to the consciences of the worldly, the vicious, and the proud. The religious prospects of any community are cheering or alarming, very nearly in proportion to the degree in which the Gospel shines forth in the lives of its professed friends.

Be aware, then, of the responsibilities resting upon you. Can it be justly asked, What do ye, more than others?—Is your life characterized by backsliding, and devotion to objects of merely temporary interest? The cause of religion must feel the withering influence. Spiritual death, in all its horrors, will reign around you, and the multitude be seen eagerly pressing on to a miserable abyss. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate. Put on the armor of light. At all times,

shed around you a pure and healthful influence; and thus give efficiency to the ministry of reconciliation, and secure the blessing of Heaven on your families, and on generations that may come after.

3. You will need, also, a temper of mutual concession and forbearance.

You cannot too deeply feel the importance of being at peace among yourselves. Discord and strife are not more destructive to social happiness, than to religious improvement. To whatever the contention may relate, it arrests the great work of preparing souls for heaven. And the strife is peculiarly unhappy, which arises from conflicting partialities so common in the settlement of a minister.

To expect a community to feel and think all alike, on any subject, is idle. It is not, therefore, probable, that all will think alike in reference to any preacher they may hear. It is consequently necessary to cherish a conciliating and yielding spirit. Every one should avoid claiming that his own wishes shall be entirely gratified, and that his judgment shall be a criterion for all the rest. Such claims cannot be admitted; and from them can arise only jealousy and conflict.

To avoid circumstances so deplorable, let each restrain every feeling of envy, pride, and selfishness; and cherish only kindness, forbearance, and fraternal love. Put away, says the apostle, all anger, wrath, malice, and evil communications out

of your mouth ; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In this forbearance and concession, it is not to be understood that conscience may be sacrificed—that truth, and the cause of piety and salvation, may be put in jeopardy. But while you strive together for the faith of the Gospel, and maintain an inflexible integrity, study the things that make for peace, and the things whereby one may edify another. Let nothing be done through strife, or vain-glory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Thus, it is to be hoped, will the good providence of God concentrate your hearts on a spiritual shepherd worthy of your confidence ; and thus may the light of this Zion break forth as the morning, and its salvation as the noon-day. May you never feel, yourselves, nor entail upon those who come after you, the blasting influence of a spirit of party.

Cultivate the same temper towards all about you. It is a satisfaction to leave this interesting field of labor with ample proofs of a strengthening kindness, confidence, and friendship, between the members of the different churches. May this union in the truth and love of the Gospel be firmly cemented ; and the immense moral power of these churches never be wasted in conflict, but all be directed in harmonious and vigorous action, for the honor of Christ, and the salvation of the world.

4. Let me urge a steady and zealous regard for the religious improvement of the young.

Instead of the fathers, will very quickly be the children, here, as well as elsewhere. And your destiny, as a people, is depending, under God, upon the character they assume in early life. Let their religious education be neglected; and it is easy to foresee, that this fair heritage may very soon be overrun with infidelity and vice. But let means of religious improvement be zealously pursued, and it is safe to calculate on successive generations, characterized by reverence for the Gospel and devotion to the Most High.

Among the means of religious improvement to the young, the system of Bible class and Sabbath school instruction holds a prominent place. It is a means which, with us, has been attended with very important effects. There is no labor or sacrifice, in which I have stronger confidence of success, than in aiding these institutions. And it would be a most cheering fact, could I be assured this hour, that the Bible class and the Sabbath school, with their library, would at all times receive that countenance and support among you, which their great importance demands. Let the citizen sustain them as a means of producing an enlightened, sober, and elevated state of society. Let the father and the mother sustain them, as a source of temporal and immortal blessings to their offspring. Let the Christian zealously sustain them, as a nursery for the church, and for heaven. Sustain and encourage them by your counsels, your donations, your active services, and your prayers.

Look to the character, and guard vigilantly the deportment of the young. Let them be trained to reverence and love all that is sacred, and to practise all that is pure, generous, and noble. Let the Gospel get its firm hold upon their hearts, and they are secure against vice and ruin; and you may then leave them, and go down to the grave, with little anxiety about their welfare; for God is their defence.

5. Let me urge a generous support of the benevolent movements of the age.

I have felt it my duty to keep the great system of religious charity steadily before you; both with reference to your own good, as a people, and with reference to the wants and woes of the world. And it has been matter of joy, to notice the cheerfulness, and increasing liberality, with which you have responded to the calls of Divine Providence. It is a period calling for action, self-denial, enlarged sympathy, and unfailing benevolence. And there is every indication that the demand on the enterprise and offerings of the church is to be still greatly augmented. Our country, exalted among the nations, is to be saved, and its glory advanced and perpetuated, only by the influences of the Gospel. And the world is to be rescued from the darkness of ages to the knowledge of Christ, and the love of God. To secure these great results, must be the aim of every generous heart. And the time for bold plan and action is evidently come. Be it your ambition, then, to bear an honorable

part in the holy enterprise. Nothing will give me higher satisfaction, than to hear that you are abounding in these labors of love, more and more. God has prospered you, and is still abundantly prospering you. When counting up your gains, when looking on your wealth and splendor, when sitting in your beautiful temple, and rejoicing amid rich religious privileges, O think of the destitute, millions on millions! Remember, God is no respecter of persons; he loves them, as well as you: his sun shines as brightly on their fields: the Saviour embraced them in his last message; and his Gospel can prepare them, as well as you, for his second coming and glory. Enter, then, fully into his great plan of mercy, and rest not till he has the whole earth for his possession.

6. Let me urge you to cultivate, habitually, the spirit of prayer.

For every species of prosperity, man is dependent on God. But in a peculiar sense is he dependent for spiritual blessings. In addition to the stated ordinances of the Gospel; in addition to a ministry which shall clearly exhibit the momentous truths of revelation; and in addition to those other means of religious improvement, which are ordinarily associated with Gospel ordinances, you need the quickening and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but God giveth the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any

thing, neither is he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

This dependence originates the duty of humble, importunate, and persevering prayer. "Yet for all this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Such prayer secures the approbation and blessing of God, in all circumstances of life; but peculiarly in connection with efforts that respect the great interests of the soul. Such prayer gives beauty and strength to the church. Such prayer gives power to the ministry. Such prayer opens the windows of heaven; it causes the skies to rain down righteousness, and the earth to bring forth salvation.

Think not then, brethren, to prosper, except in cultivating habitually a spirit of devotion. Let God be acknowledged at all times. Bring to his altar, daily, the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit. Let your interests, as a people, be brought before God in the sanctuary, in the domestic circle, in the social meeting, and in private personal communion with his Spirit. Pray habitually under the impulse of a vigorous faith; that faith which gives substance to the divine promises; which carries the immortal forward, and plants him down amid the scenes of judgment and a crumbling universe, and which opens new and eternal heavens to his enraptured vision.

If there be one thing on which your spiritual welfare, as a people, is peculiarly depending, that one thing is a spirit of united, fervent, and un-

ceasing prayer to God. I see rich blessings treasured up for you in the stores of his infinite benevolence, if you cherish this spirit; but if you suffer it to languish and die, I see only blasting, and barrenness, and gathering woes, in reserve for you and your children.

I dwell on this point, because, while no duty is so intimately connected with your prosperity, there is, perhaps, none which you are so much in danger of neglecting, as this duty of prayer. The only sure pledge of success in any important matter, is the friendship of the Most High; and it is peculiarly so in matters of religion and salvation. You need continually the presence of the Holy Ghost. You need those signal manifestations of divine grace, that have, for successive generations, characterized this spot and this region. On their continuance are suspended all your rational hopes of religious prosperity. On them hang the destinies of your children, and coming generations, for eternity. Pray, then, and labor for, and expect revivals of religion. With all the imperfections, in some cases the extravagancies, that have attended them a few years past, and at other periods, in one place and another, still they are from *God*; and they are the last hope of the church. And could I gather round me the thousands of this busy population, I would now say in the name of God, A pure revival is of more, infinitely more importance to you, as a people, than all your rising worldly prosperity, increased a million fold. For,

what are silver, and gold, and parade, and costly dwellings for a day, compared with the image of God, with salvation, with an eternal heaven, with unfading crowns of glory? While, then, your ministers plant and water in this fair field of Zion, pray, pray unceasingly, for the descent of the Holy Ghost, that he may abide with you for ever.

With this brief review of our connection, and this notice of a few things deemed specially important to your spiritual welfare, I now leave you. At such an hour, a mingled tide of feeling, reflection, and anticipation, rushes upon the mind. It is matter of devout gratitude, that our connection has been one of peculiar harmony, and that we part, cherishing sentiments only of friendship. It is matter of humble praise, that at this moment my eye can light on those among you, who, I trust, are emphatically the seals of this ministry. Ye, brethren, are peculiarly our joy and our crown. Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Forgetting the things which are behind, reach forth to those which are before.

But it is matter of pain and grief, that, in closing this ministry, I see many still far from righteousness—without God, and without hope. As respects *your* salvation, my humble efforts seem to have been all in vain. Possibly they have proved only a savor of death unto death. Some of you have, at times, been alive to your guilt and ruin, and earnestly resolved to seek salvation. But

your goodness was like the morning cloud and the early dew,—soon passing away. Others of you have, from month to month, and year to year, been but little, if any, affected by the Gospel. Ah! dying fellow-sinners! give heed for this once, I entreat you, to the parting voice of your friend. Begin *this day* the great work of salvation. Engage in it with whole heart and soul. It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life. I tremble, I shudder, to think of the bearing this ministry may have had on your immortal destiny! Spare me—O, spare yourselves the anguish of an eternal separation!

With all of us the present is indeed a solemn crisis. We meet where we have often met and mingled our devotions at the mercy-seat; but the last page in the record of our intercourse is written, and the whole is in a moment to be sealed up. The commission I received to minister for your souls has been recalled and handed back; and its results are for disclosure at the bar of the enthroned Lamb. One and another of us will, in quick succession, be summoned to our account. My eye instinctively glances forward to that great day, when, with assembled worlds, we shall all meet again. Live, live, my immortal and beloved hearers, in steady prospect of that day. Live for God, for a dying world, for heaven, for eternity.

FAREWELL!

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