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THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION ; OR, BRINGING LOST MEN HOME TO GOD.*

2 Cor. 5: 18. "And hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation."

My brethren of the graduating class, it is to you particularly that the commencement preacher is speaking this morning, to you so soon to embark upon your active and blessed work. He earnestly desires to do you real service to-day, and hence he means to bring you, straight from the word of God, a divine message. It will be his aim not to wander one moment from his text, but to unfold and apply just what is here said in the Scriptures.

The words announced simply introduce the subject which the subsequent context develops, namely, the ministry of reconciliation.

This ministry is a service, the object of which is to effect a complete reconciliation between God and man, or, to use the imagery of the parable of the prodigal son, to bring men home to God. The rendering of this blessed service, Paul declares, is given unto us, that is, unto the whole company of believers, the church of God in this world, the body of Christ, out of whom, however, as we shall see later there are certain men chosen, who are to devote themselves more particularly to the "word of reconciliation."

It is this ministry committed to the church and particularly to the preachers of the gospel, this work of bringing lost men

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ETERNITY THE PROPER STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT.

BY REV. J. GRAY McALLISTER, D. D.

Mal. 3: 18, "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

These are the words of the man whose writings closed the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. The time in which they were spoken and the circumstances which gave them utterance add to their force. The Jews, in punishment for personal and national sins, had been carried captive to Babylon. The general of the great king Nebuchadnezzar had invaded their land and laid siege to their capital city Jerusalem. He had broken down the walls of the city and destroyed the chief palaces, and had fired the temple and broken in pieces the two great brazen pillars, Jachin and Boaz, that had stood as the support and pride of the temple. He had taken the sacred vessels of the sanctuary, and these, together with the best of the people who had remained from the former campaigns of conquest, he had carried with him to his own land, leaving a desolation that is pictured for us in pathetic terms by Jeremiah in the Book of Lamentations. This captivity lasted as we know for seventy years, during which time Daniel, who had been carried captive as a young man, had grown to full manhood and on to old age, living to see the desecration of these sacred vessels of the sanctuary when Belshazzar and a thousand of his lords drank wine out of them; living also to see the downfall of Belshazzar's kingdom and the entrance of another. This came to pass under Darius the Mede; and soon Cyrus arose, the man of whom Isaiah had spoken as the anointed of the Lord, sent to fulfil his purpose; and Cyrus not only permitted but urged the Jews to return to their own land and to rebuild their temple and city. Acting under this encouragement more than fifty thousand of them returned at one time, and soon the temple was finished, and dedicated with

services that were impressive and yet were pathetic, as the older men among the number remembered the glory of the former temple and contrasted with it the insignificance of the new. Years later Nehemiah came and rebuilt the walls of the city, and zeal for righteousness was at its height; but in the twenty-five years that followed, this enthusiasm flagged and the people had fallen into great and grievous sins. Three of these sins are singled out for mention and condemnation in the prophecy of Malachi: the corruption of the priesthood, the cruelty of the people and the falseness of their worship. Against these sins Malachi raised his voice in protest, and no doubt shocked his hearers when he called sins by their own name.

But there is a rift in the cloud: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." And it is added: "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." The "day of the Lord" here spoken of has been identified as not only the day in which Christ should appear on earth, but as that other day in which he should appear the second time without a sin-offering unto salvation; the day that should usher in the eternal years of God. This, then, suggests to us our subject: "Eternity the Proper Standard of Measurement."

I. Eternity is the proper standard for the measurement of *Personal Worth*. The word "worth" is a word that has degenerated in our language. To ask to-day what a man is worth is to ask not what he is in personal character, but what he *has*: what fortune he has in lands, what balance he has in bank, what money he has on investment. This is merely a straw showing what was prevalent in Malachi's time. The chief men of his time were men who did not "fear the Lord"; were men whose very sacrifices were an abomination in the sight of God; were men who had gone to the length of thinking that how they lived mattered very little, when in fact it mattered very much.

The despised men of Malachi's time were a small band that met for conference and encouragement. They were men who "feared the Lord,"—with a righteous and a reverential fear becoming in those whose term of life was absolutely in God's keeping; whose daily food came because God gave the land and the seed and the showers and the sunshine and the strength that tilled and gathered; whose religious life had been instructed out of God's gracious Scriptures and quickened by God's gracious Spirit and enriched by blessings unnumbered and undeserved.

They were men who not only "feared the Lord";—they "thought upon his name." They meditated upon his character, as he had revealed himself as the God of power in creation, as the God sovereign among all his works, as the God of the Covenant sealed with blood.

They were men who not only "feared the Lord" and "thought upon his name,"—"they spake often one to another." They spoke of the wickedness that was all about them like a serpent's deadly coil. They spoke of the holiness that God demanded of his followers. They spoke of their desire and purpose to live : life that should be away from this wickedness and in keeping with this holiness; they spoke of their struggles in attempting to do so; of their growing faith and of their hope for better things to come.

So the standards of Malachi's time. But the time would come when these standards would be reversed; when these chief men would pass through the fire and burn as stubble, and when these despised men would be among the number whom God would bind up in his peculiar treasure. Not Time, but Eternity, was to be the proper standard of measurement.

And what is this but saying that *character counts for much with God?* It counts for so much, indeed, that it is made the very purpose of your life and mine to live a holy life. The command that was given in olden times to the priests to be in turn transferred to the people was, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy." The distinction that was made all through the Old Testament between things clean and unclean was a distinction that was meant to emphasize the necessity of holiness on the part of

worshippers. And when Christ came to earth he came to deliver us not so much from the *punishment* of sin, as from *sin itself*, and to "purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world"—Why? "That we should *be holy and without blemish* before him in love." "Foreordained to be conformed"—to what?—"to the image of his Son," who was "holy, harmless and undefiled."

This, indeed, is not to say that in the day of judgment you and I are to stand or fall on the basis of personal character. Christ's worth, and not our own, is to avail for us in that day. But the point cannot be too often made or too strongly insisted on that unless the purpose and the bent of our lives be *holiness*, we have no part in his salvation, we are not sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

What standards, then, are you setting up for yourself or for others? Are you despising yourself to the extent that you are not true to yourself? And are you esteeming others, not because they have position, or culture, or reputation, or wealth, but because they have that without which not one of these is worth a straw—nobility of nature?

If the standards are to be reversed or revised in time to come, then surely it is the part of wisdom to reverse or revise them now.

II. Eternity is the Proper Standard for the Measurement not only of Personal Worth, but also of *Personal Work*. "Then shall he return and discern," not only "between the righteous and the wicked," but "between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." The service that these men were rendering in Malachi's time was a service that was based in conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. The priests who were set to order this service were despising it. Instead of leading the people into the covenant they were driving them away from the covenant. Instead of teaching the people to keep God's law, they were, by life, at least, leading them to break the law. And like priest, like people. While these people were standing as penitents at the altar, they were at the same time divorcing their

wives in order to make way for others. While these people were pretending to offer the best of their flocks in sacrifice to God, they were in reality offering the lame and the blind and the maimed from among their flocks. While these people were professing to be the people of God, deep down in their hearts and in the daily practice of their lives they were saying, "What profit is it that we serve the Lord and that we go mourning all day?" But the time would come that would set all this false and foolish service in its own light, and when those who worshipped God in truth would be made manifest. Not Time, but Eternity, was to be the proper standard of measurement.

How abundantly this has been illustrated in the history of our own times! In 1837 Mary Lyon founded Mt. Holyoke Seminary. Twelve years later she passed away; but within those twelve years more than three thousand young women had passed under her educating hand to receive indelibly the impress of her pure, strong character. Forty-five years later, in far South Africa, Andrew Murray read the biography of this woman and the biography of her student graduate, Fidelia Fiske, the "Mary Lyon of Persia," and under the influence of those two books founded the Wellington Seminary, which itself has been the parent of more than a dozen Christian schools in that far-off land. How mighty has been the influence of the work of Mary Lyon! Yet the results of that work we do not fully know, for eternity alone can reveal them.

This is but one illustration out of many. Out on the firing-line of missions more than one worker is toiling on in the darkness, living for years, perhaps, and like William Carey, seeing no results of his work, but unlike William Carey, dying and thinking his work a failure.

And here in the homeland you are seeking, it may be, to advance the kingdom of our Lord. By your conversation, by your instruction in the home and in the Sabbath-school, and best of all by your personal life you are seeking to bring the rule of Christ to bear on the hearts of men. And yet the visible results seem, nothing. What must be the answer? This: that we can-

not as yet fully measure these results, for Eternity alone can reveal them.

Sow a field of wheat to-day, and you do not reap the harvest to-morrow. There must come the protecting snows of winter, the rains of spring and the sunshine of summer before the green turns to gold and the harvest is come. This is the illustration Christ himself used. He was sitting wearied at Jacob's well and saw the Samaritans coming to him, and he said to his disciples: "Say not ye there are yet four months and then cometh harvest: I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields that they are white already to harvest"; and then added, "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit *unto life eternal.*" And Paul the apostle said, "Be not weary in well doing, for *in due season* we shall reap, if we faint not." And the Apostle John, facing the glories of the new Jerusalem, could say of the saints that "their works do follow them";—do follow them not only *here* in the good that grows, but *there*, where all the influences we have started in this world come to their harvest and sowers and reapers rejoice together. The Apostle Paul gave it as the conclusion to his most memorable discourse on the Resurrection: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that *your labor is not in vain* in the Lord."

III. Eternity is the Proper Standard for the Measurement not only of Personal Worth and of Personal Work, but also of *Present Trials*.

One of these trials is our constant struggle against sin. It was Horace Bushnell who said that "there is no war so brilliant as the war against wrong," and he might have added, "especially when that war is waged on the battleground of one's own soul." Turn to the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and you will find the Apostle Paul sketching for us three pictures. In the first of these we have Paul self-confident; "I was alive without the law once." What does he mean? He means that he did not realize the law of God as being what it was, and he thought that measured by that law he was just as good as God required him to be, or had a right to require him

to be. We see a second picture. It is Paul in despair: "Sin revived and I died." What does he mean? He means that he saw that law as being what it actually was, a holy law, and he saw his life, as measured alongside that law, as a broken and an utter ruin. We see a third picture. It is Paul in struggle: the old nature warring against the new; the old nature desiring to do the will of the flesh and the new nature desiring to do the will of God. It is a type of the struggle that is going on in each one of us.

Another of the trials of this present life is the trial of *sorrow*; and how few escape it! The Angel of Death comes and leaves behind him an unspeakable desolation. How strange it all seems that ties the tenderest must be sundered, that music the sweetest must be silenced, and that when we long for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still, there should come no response, but we must go on through the years bearing their heavy burdens! And there are sorrows worse than those of death.

What must we say to these things? This: that as yet we cannot fully measure the value of these trials. It may be that in time to come God will tell us why he permitted sin in this world of ours, when his holiness hates it and when his power could have shut it out; and if we have the answer to that question we shall have the answer to every question that vexes life, for it is the fountain question of them all. But if we are not to know *why* it was God permitted sin we shall know at least *how* it was that through struggle against sin we came to be the men and women whom God would have us be; and then we may read with clearer eyes what the apostle has written, "that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The sorrows of this present life, viewed in themselves, are among the very worst of curses. But we are not to view them in themselves. We are to come more and more, even in this life as fully in the life to come, to the viewpoint of the Apostle Paul who declared that "our light affliction which is for the

moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal wealth of glory."—Why? Where? How?—"While we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

IV. Eternity is the Proper Standard for the Measurement not only of Personal Worth and of Personal Work and of Present Trials, but as well, of *the Love of God*.

This love has been declared to us over and over again in Scripture. We are told that it is part of God's character; that "God is love." And this love has been shown to us in many ways. It is shown in the gift of His Son for us and for our salvation: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is shown in the adoption of us into the household and family of God: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God; and such we are." It is shown in the chastisements that sweep across our lives: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." It is shown in the triumph that is pledged us over all the power of the enemy: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But does it need to be said that this love is at times *obscured* to us? It is obscured by the very limitations of our nature. Even if we were in this world all that we should be, our minds could not fully conceive the love of God and our hearts could not feel its full force. This love is obscured to us by the sins that we pile up between us and God, until we seem to have forfeited not only His Fatherhood and His friendship, but also His favor. This love is obscured to us at times by the darkness of God's dealings with us, especially in sorrow, when we are ready to cry out with Christ from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But this love is to be *cleared* to us. Do you recall what the apostle has written to the Ephesians: "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, and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—Now, listen:—"That in the ages to come He might shew unto us the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."*

We can never know the greatness of God's love until we have the perfected natures that can appreciate and appropriate it. We can never know the greatness of God's love until we know the greatness of the sin to which He stooped and from which He rescued us. We can never know the greatness of God's love until we know the greatness of the sacrifice in the gift of His Son, "who having loved his own, loved them unto the end." We can never know the greatness of God's love until we know the greatness of all the other means which He is using to bring men to Himself: His Spirit, His Word, His Church. We can never know the greatness of God's love until we know the greatness of the host which He is gathering to Himself out of every nation and tribe and family of the earth. We can never know the greatness of God's love until we know the greatness of the affection which He lavishes upon His own as ages roll. The broken reflection here, the perfect image there, when Eternity shall set in its own light, personal worth and personal work and present trials and the love of God, which, as it had no beginning, shall never have an end.

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City the actors of the country have affixed a mural tablet to the memory of Edgar Allan Poe. That tablet bears the most pathetic epigraph I ever read: "He was great in his genius, unhappy in his life, wretched in his death, but in his fame he is immortal."

To-day in a cemetery just outside of a western Virginia town the grass is growing green over the grave of a humble minister of God. A pioneer in that section now busied with its growth,

*Eph. 2: 4-7.

he baptized the children of the feeble church, he married the young, he buried the dead, he preached the everlasting gospel, sowing the good seed of life and reaping no fame other than the immortality of faith and of good deeds. A simple marble shaft tells whose dust is guarded and the inscription on it from God's own word has made more than one to pause and to ask if the truest life be not found here: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Oh! friends, perhaps it is that we shall look at life differently when we view it *from the end of life*. And out in eternity where measures are to be according to truth, values will take different shapes and sizes. Men and women whom we now look down upon we shall then look up to as God's true nobility. Lives that we now call great we shall utterly despise as small. The worse than nothingness then of the "lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The more than pricelessness then of one single human soul, whom we have helped or helped to save, itself a wondrous empire; of character, an everlasting heritage; of God's will and having sought it, which is and will be indefinite peace. May this vision of eternal values be given to each one of us to-day! May we so number our days that we shall incline our hearts unto wisdom! *May we live our lives as we shall wish we had lived them when we come to lay them down!* And may we in that day be among the number of his jewels, the saved and the glorified!

Hot Springs, Va., September, 1908.