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COUNSEL TO THE CARELESS.



A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH,

MONTREAL; 6TH AUGUST; 1865,

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER ROSE.



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S E R M O N .

“Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.”—*Hebrews* x. 25.

The heart of the sincere Christian is often saddened with the reflection that, in this land of Gospel light and liberty, in this land of Bibles and Bible ordinances, there are so many who willingly forsake the assembling of themselves together from the public worship of God.

We heartily sympathise with the aged or infirm, whose trembling limbs are no longer able to carry them to the house of the Lord, whither they were wont to repair in the days of their strength.

We feel deeply for the sick, and the dying, who hear the sound of the Sabbath bells summoning the people of the Lord to the courts of Zion, while they themselves are confined to the dwellings of Jacob.

We feel for all, who, through the restraints of Divine Providence are prevented from going to the House of God, while their souls are longing and yearning to join in the enlightening, enlivening, elevating, and sanctifying services of the sanctuary. But we tremble to think of the low, deplorable spiritual condition of those careless, lukewarm, professing Christians, who, although in health and strength, avail themselves of the most trifling excuses to absent themselves from the public assemblies of the people of God.

They are ready to meet in any other house but the house of God. They are ready to accept any other invitation but the invitation of God. They are ready to enter any other service but the service of God. They are ready to engage in any other worship but the worship of God.

They require no pressing invitation to go to places of profit, recreation, or amusement. Present them with tickets of free admission to a soiree, or a concert, or a ball, or the theatre, and readily they will stretch a point to be present. Invite them to a feast, or a merry making of any kind, and if otherwise disengaged they accept the

invitation with evident satisfaction. But ask them to go to the Church on Sunday, or to a prayer meeting, or to a Missionary meeting during the week, and at once they shew a decided disinclination, if not a positive dislike, to comply with the request. Moreover, their aversion to spiritual and Divine things becomes too painfully apparent, from the various paltry excuses which they put forth as hindrances to their regular attendance on the public ordinances of Religion. When we ask them—Why they do not attend any place of public worship? Why they neglect the performance of so important a duty? Why they deny themselves the benefit of privileges so precious? Why they so slight a boon, for the preservation of which holy Martyrs of old, and our own covenanting Fathers struggled, suffered, fought, bled, and died? When we ask them plainly why they do not go to the house of God? to that house, where God desires to meet with them, where God Himself delights to meet with them, and where God Himself has promised to meet with them and bless them. In short, when we ask them why they have forsaken the assembling of themselves together for Divine Service, they have always a number of trifling excuses, ready-made at the tongue's end, with which they shamelessly attempt to palliate or justify their careless, Godless, Christless conduct.

Amongst the poorer classes, a very general excuse is the want of good clothing, or what they call their Sunday clothes. They require this, that, or the other part of dress, or little article of finery without which, they foolishly conclude that they cannot appear in the congregation of the worshipping people of God.

Others, again, who cannot plead the want of proper clothing, are ready with the excuse that their little household concerns require all their time and attention; that their young families claim their constant care on Sundays, as well as every other day of the week, and that their varied domestic duties tie them down hand and foot to their own houses, and prevent them from assembling with others in the house of God.

There are many more whose constant excuse is, that they are so fagged and fatigued, so wearied and worn out with the hard work of the week, that the whole of the Lord's day is necessary for bodily rest, recreation and refreshment. While making these and similar excuses, there are many who still express the hope that the obstacles

now standing in the way of their attendance may, sooner or later, be removed, and then they will gladly avail themselves of every opportunity of attending public worship and joining in the sacred services of the sanctuary.

The excuses made for absence from the church have become so common in our day, that there is a loud demand for their exposure and condemnation. For we need scarce say that the excuses we have mentioned, and others of a kindred character, are very often, indeed, almost invariably, unreasonable and altogether unjustifiable. They cannot stand the test of close examination here, nor will they prove satisfactory in the judgment hereafter.

It is our purpose, in the present discourse, to speak more particularly on the first excuse we mentioned: the want of suitable clothing. Many, alas! that there should be so many, say they cannot dress decently enough to go to church, but whenever they can manage to procure certain articles of dress, of which they now stand in need, they will avail themselves of the privilege of joining in the public worship of the Most High. Now, while we readily admit that there may be something like an honest pride in the desire to appear cleanly and comfortably clothed in the house of God, yet we are bound, to declare in unmistakeable terms, that this feeling is carried to an unwarrantable—to a senseless—foolish extent in our own country, more especially amongst professing Protestants, and with sorrow, we confess, that in this respect many Protestants might learn a lesson from their Roman Catholic neighbours, who seldom, if ever, absent themselves from their stated place of worship on account of the coarseness or shabbiness of their clothing. And why should they? Why should any one, whether Protestant or Papist? Honest poverty is not a crime of which any one need feel ashamed. There is nothing dishonourable or disgraceful in such a condition of life. On the contrary, that condition has been made for ever honourable by the Lord of the Universe, who, when He dwelt upon the earth, was poor amongst the poor. At times He had no where to lay His head. And we feel assured, that were an Angel or Archangel sent from heaven to earth, to live for a time in the flesh, he would go to the house of God as readily in the rags of Lazarus, as in the purple and fine linen of Dives. Moreover, so far from poverty being urged as a plea for neglecting the duties and shunning the delights of the

sanctuary, it affords one of the most powerful arguments in favour of a careful observance of these duties, and a frequent enjoyment of these delights.

In the course of an all-wise Providence, the Lord of heaven and earth withholds from the poor many pleasing gratifications which their wealthier brethren enjoy. But He has withheld no spiritual blessings; of these the poorest may as freely and fully partake as the richest in the land, and the services of the house of God, when reverently, and heartily and prayerfully observed, enable the poor to resist more and more resolutely and effectually their peculiar temptations,—to bear up more and more patiently against the hardships of their present lot in life, and to look forward to the future more hopefully and joyfully. Ah! brethren, the fullest and the brightest—the most glowing and most gladdening glimpses of the glories of the Heavenly Temple, are given to the humblest worshippers in God's house on earth. Blessed be God, His house is open to all, and in entering it, none need feel ashamed because their dress shows signs of poverty, or is much the worse of the wear, for God seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart, and to him the devout services of the worshipper, clothed in rags, are as acceptable as the services of those who appear in their richest raiments. The hearty prayers of the poorest mechanic in moleskin, when they are perfumed with the sweet incense of the Redeemer's merits, and offered by the Great High Priest upon the golden altar that is before the throne, are as acceptable as the prayers of Bishops or Archbishops in their costliest vestments. The praises of the labourer in homespun, sound as sweetly in the ear of the Eternal, as those of any lord of the realm. The devout adoration of the pauper, in tatters, is as acceptable to the King of Kings as is that of the Prince in his robes of royalty.

The sincere heartfelt worship of all, when offered to the Most High in the name and through the merits and mediation of the Redeemer is equally welcome, whatever be the dress or condition of the worshipper, whether the inmate of a poor-house or the occupant of a palace.

If there be one place in all the wide world where the poor need not have the slightest feeling of shame in meeting together with the rich, that place is the house of God. There the prayers are offered up which acknowledge God as the Father of all, rich and poor alike.

There that word is publicly read which proclaims the common brotherhood of man. There that Gospel is preached which exhorts us to love as brethren. There, at least, all meet on an equal footing. There, at least, there is liberty, fraternité and equality. There all will appear as sinful, weary, needy children of humanity. There all are equally standing in need of pardoning mercy. There all are asking for sanctifying and supporting grace. The poorest beggar there is only a beggar amongst beggars. And those who would dare to direct a proud look, or lift a scornful lip, or cast a disdainful glance on any poverty-stricken worshipper, forget the position in which they themselves stand there as beggars at the footstool of the throne of God. They desecrate the holy ground. They belie the prayers their lips utter. They offer an affront to the Most High in daring to despise those whom He has invited to His house, in daring to treat with contempt those whom He delights to honour, in daring to look down on those whom He desires to raise up to Himself, to adopt as His and elevate to the blood royal of Heaven.

The crowning evidence which Christ himself sent to John of His Messiahship, was this,—the poor have the Gospel preached to them,—and it is the crowning crime of the poor to refuse to hear that very Gospel which God designed for their guidance, their support, their comfort, their joy and their rejoicing here, and their elevation hereafter to a home in the Heavens, where want and sorrow are unknown, where tears never dim the eye, to that happy home where the Prince of Peace reigns supreme, and where the inhabitants shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed and lead them to living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Hearken, my beloved brethren, saith the apostle James. “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him.” When the poor are inwardly clothed with the blood-bought robe of the Redeemer’s righteousness they need not feel ashamed of their outward covering. Provided with the wedding garment which the Lord Jesus presents to His people they are always welcome to His house and His table, however coarse their other clothing.

We must here, however, express it as our firm conviction, that very many, indeed the majority of those who plead the want of clothes

As the cause of their absence from public worship, have another and far greater want, which they seldom admit to others, and which they scarce dare own to themselves. The great want is the want of will. In this, as in many other cases, there is a telling truth in the old saying, "Where there's a will there's a way." We have come to this conclusion from the fact that wherever we have found sincere soul-yearnings amongst poorer brethren to join in the services of the sanctuary, their ways and means were employed to enable them to do so, with such an appearance of personal cleanliness and comfort as might put to the blush, and forever stop the mouths of those who, although having a better income, are always crying out poverty, and generally wearing poverty's common badges, rags and dirt.

It would be a great mistake to conclude that where the wages brought into a family are comparatively small, there must needs be want of comfort and want of clothing; so far from this being the case in reality, it is very often where the wages are comparatively high, that there are the loudest complaints of poverty, the saddest signs of household discomfort, and the largest amount of dirtiness and raggedness and wretchedness, and not only the want of clothes, but the want of cleanliness, and not only the want of cleanliness, but the want of credit, and not only the want of credit, but the want of all comfort. With such wants there must be the want of cheerfulness. The reason of all this is too easily assigned. Wages, however good, cannot go for the bottle and the back at the same time. The money that goes for drink cannot go for dress. It is the workmen who are oftenest seen at the change-house who are seldomest seen at the Church, for want of clothes, say they; for want of will, say we. And we leave it with you to judge which of us has come to the correct conclusion.

We have often known tradesmen with a small income bring up their families in comfort and respectability, and always able, as far as clothing was concerned, to go comfortably to the house of God, while we have known many with much larger weekly wages who were always from hand to mouth, always in debt, always in want, not only of decent clothes, but of every thing else that makes home happy, this life desirable, and the prospects of a future life comforting and delightful.

In order to shew, beyond doubt, that it is not the want of clothes that prevents many, who make this excuse, from attending public

worship, we have only to revert to a sad truth, which is well known to all who have gone amongst the poorer classes with the Gospel message of salvation. In visiting from house to house it is frequently found desirable to invite those in one locality to meet in a neighbour's house for religious services; on such occasions few attend compared with the number invited. They will meet together in that same house, for hours together, to talk over the affairs of others, with which they have no earthly concern. They will meet there to gossip, and tittle-tattle, and back-bite, and make mischief, and carry scandal, and bandy trifling nonsense. But ask them to a prayer meeting there, and many of them will not venture near. A few women may make their appearance; generally, however, the men shun the place as if the plague were in it, and slink away elsewhere to pass their leisure hours in pursuits more congenial to their debased, degraded spiritual natures. The want of clothes they cannot plead, where all are expected to appear in their everyday dress. But though you take this excuse out of their mouths—the Devil is always ready to suggest some other to their hearts, and they, as his servants, are as ready to give it utterance with their lips, all the while knowing that they are telling a downright, abominable falsehood; if, thus, they are always found at the Devil's work,—what can they look for but the Devil's wages: The gnawings of the never-dying worm; the scorching of the eternal hell-flame—weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth—everlasting darkness—everlasting despair.

Some present may be ready to ask the question—what is the use of telling us of the excuses that others make for their absence from the house of God? We are not of that number; we make no such excuses; we are all regular attenders at a place of worship; Sabbath after Sabbath finds us and our families in our pews—and sacrament after sacrament, when the table of the Lord is spread, we are found there also. Truly we are not of the number of those who forsake the assembling of themselves together, such a discourse is not for us.

Patience, brethren, patience; your question is a very natural one, and we will answer it in all simplicity. Taking it for granted, that you are all ready, on each returning Sabbath morn, to say: "Let us go up together to the house of God," and from the heart we trust, that this is the sentiment of every one now present, still we have good

reasons for bringing under your consideration the excuses that others present for their absence from church. First of all, we would remind you, that although you are at present regular attenders on a preached word, you know not what you may yet be, you may be tempted to become careless, churchless and Godless, as too many alas! have been, "Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall." Perhaps the temptation offered by want of decent clothing may never have been yours, but you know not how soon it may be; God forbid that such a grievous misfortune may ever befall any one present; yet knowing that such things have happened, and may still happen, it is always well to be prepared for the worst. The wheel of fortune is ever turning, to-day up high, to-morrow down low, now at the top, in a little at the bottom. Many of rank, and wealth and power for a time, have passed their latter days in a workhouse or died on an armful of straw in a garret, unattended, unbefriended, unknown and unlamented.

In the course of Providence, the All-wise Ruler may see it needful to lessen your means, deprive you of your property, and reduce you to poverty. But always bear in mind, that he will never wholly desert you, if you do not desert Him; that He will never cast you off, unless you cast Him off; that He will never take from you the pearl of great price, unless you throw it from you as worthless; that He will never deprive you of His best, His richest gifts, His spiritual blessings, unless ye wilfully reject them and wantonly abuse them. See, then, that ye be so rooted and grounded in love, that ye may comprehend, with all Saints, what is the height, and depth and length and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and then should adversity ever throw its gloomy shadow over your path, you will still be ready to take up the song of triumph and sing:—

Let troubles rise and terrors frown,
And days of darkness fall:
Through Him all dangers we'll defy,
And more than conquer all.

Be ye firmly established in the faith, and have Christ formed in you the hope of glory. Then, come reverses, come poverty, come want, you will still be found trusting in the wisdom and love of your Father in Heaven; maintaining His cause; walking in the ways of His commandments; keeping holy his Sabbaths; visiting His

house; frequenting His table, and preparing for His glorious presence, "where there is fullness of joy and pleasure evermore." Again, it is very desirable to bring before your notice the excuses of others that you may always be ready to meet them, and expose them and crush them, when they are made in your hearing. You may be regular in attendance at a place of worship, but I doubt not that you know many who are not. If you cannot remember any such, then we fear much that you have sadly neglected your Christian duty of maintaining the cause of the poor. We fear that you have still too much of the selfish spirit of Cain, when he said "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes brethren, you are your brother's keeper. By all the mercy that God has extended to you. By all the love which Christ has lavished upon you. By every operation of the Holy Spirit upon your soul, and by the clearest declarations of the Holy Word of God, you are your brother's keeper. When he is hungry, it is for you to feed him; when he is thirsty, it is for you to give him drink; when he is naked, it is for you to clothe him; when he is ignorant, it is for you to instruct him; when he is careless, it is for you to warn him; when he is in danger, it is for you to rescue him; when he is abandoned and degraded, it is for you to reclaim and elevate him. Listen to what the Lord requireth of thee. "It is to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house. When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh, then shall thy light break forth like the morning, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward."

When therefore, you meet with those who are heedless of Eternal realities, careless of the concerns of their precious souls, regardless of God, of the word of God, and of the house of God, it is for you to reason with them, to expostulate with them on the folly and sinfulness of their conduct, it is for you to plead with them to amend their ways. It is for you to warn them by the terrors of the Law, of the fearful consequences of a life of sin, and hardened impenitence. It is for you to encourage them, by the gracious promises of the Gospel, to return to a loving God who is willing and waiting to forgive and bless, to sanctify and save them. It is for you to lead them to a crucified Saviour who gave His life as a ransom for many, and died that they might live. It is for you to implore them by all their fears

of eternal burning, and by all their hopes of eternal joys, by all that is nearest and dearest to them, to flee from the wrath to come, to cast themselves into the arms of the blessed Saviour, who will press them to His bosom, preserve them from every danger, and at length present them faultless in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. We are well aware that many consider this as the peculiar work of Ministers and Elders of the Church, and so it is, but it is also the work of every member of the Church. It is the work of every one who professes to look for Salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing that He has drawn them to Himself, they should use every endeavour to draw others to Him, that they also may taste the joys of Salvation, and most willingly should every member and every hearer in the church, join heart and hand with Ministers and Elders, to snatch careless wanderers from the fold as brands from the burning, and go out into the highways and bye-ways, and into lanes and closes, using such entreaties and persuasions as should compel them to come in. Brethren, this is not the work of a week, nor a month, nor a year; it is life's work; it is hard work; it is discouraging work, nevertheless it is our work; the work of Ministers, the work of Elders, the work of members, the work of every christian, who is worthy of the name. Let us then be up and doing, each one in his own way, and in his own sphere of action, and with the blessing of God, much good may be achieved. The weakest christian may be instrumental in saving souls from eternal destruction. The poorest believer, by loving persuasion and kindness, may induce a neighbour to become a frequent attender at the church, where the heart may be opened and the soul saved. The Sabbath school scholar may bring a careless companion to the Sabbath school, where his eyes may be opened to the things that belong to his eternal peace. All can do something toward this great end, by words, by example, by personal influence, and by the influence of the purse, all may do something toward bringing souls to glory.

Happy, thrice happy we, if, through the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit, we should be instrumental in bringing even one to the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; "For 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."

