

## **“MY WORD SHALL NOT PASS AWAY”**

Our meeting this morning is one illustration of an extraordinary statement made by Christ when he was upon the earth. He said,

*“My word shall not pass away.”*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we take these words as a matter of course, many, many great and apparently durable things have passed away since Christ uttered them, but his words remain—both as matters of record, and as matters of influence and power. It is very profitable to go back to the time of their utterance, and to realise how unlikely from appearances and natural probability it was that they would prove so true.

Consider who he was that said them—a quiet private carpenter, repudiated as a demented person by the influential people of his country. If he had been a king—if he had been such as David was—God’s accepted captain of the tribes, with all wealth in his control, and willing scribes and servants ready to preserve his words; if he had even been such as Herod was, or the high priest of his own day—with power and popularity on his side, there might have seemed a chance that his words would last. Men in such a position have it somewhat in their power to command the hearing of posterity. But Jesus had none of these things. He was a poor man of no social standing—a man hated of the people’s leaders—a man whose friends were illiterate fishermen: a man who had no schemes of human ambition: who looked to early death as the finish of his work, and who lacked, in a word, every human power or opportunity to secure the perpetuity of his words. And yet here they are in our hands and hearts this morning. The words of the great people around him are all lost in oblivion in connection with the narrative of this man. But the words of the *“despised and rejected of men”* are among the indestructible records of the earth and among the most powerful influences that move mankind. How is this? There is an answer which most powerfully strengthens our faith. The answer is furnished by the history of the case. The enemies of Christ crucified him; and had he remained dead, is it possible that his words could have survived? Would not his disciples in that case have been scattered to the winds, and his work forgotten like a thousand other personal episodes of history which have come as bubbles on the surface of the stream of time and burst? On the contrary, his disciples presented a bold front to the nation that killed him. They asserted that he had risen from the dead: that they had often seen and eaten with him since his resurrection: that they had had his company for six weeks: that he had taken formal leave of them: that he had commissioned them to preach his name to the faith of men for the remission of their sins and the attainment of everlasting salvation at his coming again; and that he had vouchsafed to them, since his departure, in fulfilment of the promise made before his departure, the power to work miracles as God’s confirmation of the truth of their testimony to his resurrection. They could have no object in asserting such things except the truth of them, especially as the authorities made it a penal offence to preach the name of Jesus. Thousands believed them, and *“took joyfully the spoiling of their goods”* at the hands of the authorities. Thus the foundations of “Christianity” were laid: and thus it came to pass that the words of Christ, instead of passing away, became one of the abiding institutions of the earth, and have come down to us with the power they exercise in every heart that opens to them.

This is what we may call the circumstantial explanation of the fact that the words of the carpenter of Nazareth have not passed away: but see what it involves: that Christ rose and lives; for had he not risen, there could have been no apostolic testimony; and were he not alive, there could not have occurred that shedding forth of power on the day of Pentecost, that qualified the apostles to perform miracles in attestation of their work. And had there been no apostolic testimony, and no miraculous confirmation of their word, there could have been

none of that faith produced in the Roman Empire, which, at the close of the first century, extended to the farthest provinces and embraced many thousands of believers. There would and could have been no New Testament such as has been in the hands of all believers from that day to this, and which forms the foundation of our faith. In a word, the words of Christ must have passed away. But they have not passed away: and it is because they are divine, as he said,

*“The words that I speak unto you are not my words but His that sent me.”*

Heaven and earth may pass away, but his words will not, cannot pass away.

We build on a great and strong rock when we build here. It is a rock that embraces the whole Bible, as when he said,

*“Search the Scriptures . . . they are they which testify of me . . . The Scriptures cannot be broken.”*

How wide a sweep does this give to the breadth of our confidence. What is written will be fulfilled. We have seen it in the past. See the course of empire as foreshown to Daniel—Persia, Greece and Rome. See the destiny of Babylon, Nineveh, Egypt and other countries as predicted by the prophets. See the history of the Jews in their dispersion, and of their land in its desolation, and their city in its destruction as all so plainly foretold by Moses and the prophets. See the first appearing of Christ in harmony with the prophecies of his birth, rejection, death and resurrection. And if the past give such confirmation to the declaration of Christ that his words shall not pass away, shall we falter about the future? Let our watchword be, Hold on. He is faithful that hath promised. He cannot deny himself even if we should give in to the insanity of denying him. Hold on, in spite of all the world. The world has always been wrong toward God in the past, and the testimony declares it will be in the wrong when Christ comes—and what is more, we can see it to be in the wrong when we try it by the Law and Testimony which God commands us to do. Noah was not afraid to be singlehanded against the whole world in his day, and why should we? —Hold on in spite of the learned. The wise of this world have always been against divine truth. They were against Christ. They were against Paul in his day, and they are against Paul’s gospel in ours. Why should we fear their opposition? They are opposed to one another. Their science is a changeable thing. Their conclusions are mostly speculations. Their system is mostly a jargon of pretentious souls. What of truth they have consists of a few grand simplicities which are as difficult of abstract conception as the deepest things of God. And, of course, if we hold on in spite of all the world, and in spite of the oppositions of its learned classes we will surely hold on in spite of our small friends who would pull the standard down, or impede the battle of the Truth, or make the commandments of God of none effect through their traditions. Above all, we must hold on in spite of ourselves. We shall often have to reason sternly with our own weak and foolish hearts. We are liable to have a feeling that the matter depends in some way upon us. If we are well and lively and bright, then the Truth seems very real and true; but if we are down and dull and depressed, we are apt to feel that the Truth is not so true then. Let us say, Away, away with all such illusions. The truthfulness of the Truth depends in no degree upon our feelings. It was true before we were born, and it will be true if we moulder in the dust. It is as true at this moment as when Israel were emerging from the trough of the Red Sea upon the other shore; or as when God caused His voice to be heard from the cloud capped summit of Sinai; or as when the walls of Jericho fell; or as when the fire consumed Elijah’s water-drenched sacrifice on the top of Carmel; or as when Daniel stood unharmed among the lions; or as when the angelic host rejoiced on the plains of Bethlehem; or as when the crucified Jesus rose triumphant on the morning of the third day. It is as independent of us as the shining of the sun. Do we fear that the sun will not rise if we oversleep ourselves? Will the ordinances of heaven and earth go wrong if we forget? No more will the purpose of God miscarry through our infirmity. Christ will come again, and the dead will rise, and the

Kingdom will be established if we were to become unable at this moment to think another thought or speak another word.

In this connection we can enter into the language of the Psalm that has been read—

*“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.”*

In the depths we may often be. There is a need for it. It is only in the depths that we fully learn the lesson of our own insignificance; and until a man has learnt this, he is not fit for a place in the everlasting with God. But there is a danger of being overdone in the process. We may be squashed out of all shape by the pressure of affliction. We may come to the conclusion there is no mercy, no hope, no salvation, because we feel so low and weak. This can only happen if we are trusting to ourselves. We may have to be brought very low to have this folly killed out of us: for it is folly. We are only created beings, and creatures of conditions. We depend upon our bread and water. We can control nothing. No wonder that the proud and lofty are an abomination to God. Tribulation is useful in bringing down high and unreasonable thoughts. It is good if it does not destroy. It will not destroy if our trust is in God. It will rather help us to trust more and more in helping us to realise that creation in no sense belongs to us, and the purpose of the Creator in no sense depends upon us. When we get so far as this we have peace—real peace. We can then say with David in this Psalm,

*“I wait for the Lord: my soul doth wait and in His word do I hope.”*

Our waiting will be both the waiting of patience and submission, and also the waiting of expectation and desire, as the Psalm goes on to express:

*“My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning.”*

As the other Psalm has,

*“As the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that He have mercy upon us.”*

In this state of enlightened experience, we shall know the truth of that other axiom of the Spirit:

*“Great peace have they that love Thy law: nothing shall offend them.”*

There is a great deal of offence in the world, whether we take offence to mean a hurt state of mind or a stumbled course of life. We may be quite sure where offence prevails, it is for the reason inferentially expressed in this statement: The Law of the Lord is not loved. We may take the term “Law” in this case in the wide sense given to it by Jesus when he asked the Pharisees on one occasion: *“Is not so and so written in your law,”* meaning something written in the Psalms. The whole Scriptures are *“the Law of the Lord,”* for they are *“all”* given by inspiration *“for instruction, for reproof,”* etc. A writing for guidance is a law: and because the Scriptures are this, from God, they are the Law of the Lord. Where this law is loved, *“nothing shall offend.”* The verse declares it: experience teaches it: reason requires it. A man may know the Scriptures, and not love them. Offence happening in that case does not contradict what is declared. A man who loves the Scriptures is the man who loves the things presented in them rather than the document that presents them, though he loves that, too, because of the other. A man might love the document as an original, striking and beautiful literary production without much taste for the things set forth. Many scholars love the Bible in this way; this is not what is meant by loving the Law of the Lord. Men love Bible localities, the Bible original languages, and Bible translations, and Bible criticism, who have no love, but a dislike for Bible Law. It is the lovers of Bible Law that are in question, and such lovers as the Bible gives us example of. Jeremiah, to wit:

*“Thy words were found and I did eat them and they are to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;”* or Job,

*“I esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food;”* or David,

*“Oh, how love I Thy law . . . how sweet are Thy words unto my taste: yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.”*

These words are not the effusions of sentimentality, but the expression of a genuine appreciation based upon discernment.

Where this discerning appreciation exists, then as the Scriptures declare, offence is impossible. We can see the reason when we consider the cause of the offences in connection with the state of mind generated by the word. People become offended from a great variety of causes. Perhaps they are not taken notice of. Perhaps they are slighted: perhaps they are spoken against: perhaps they are slandered: perhaps they are injured: perhaps trouble arises: perhaps hatred, strife, division, ruin. The root of the offence in all cases lies in the fact that persons offended are great in their own eyes, and indifferent to the well-being of others. Self-important people are easily slighted, and are mortally hurt by injury or insult, and are effectually driven out of the way of duty by trouble. The reason is that self-gratification is the inspiration of their life, and whatever interferes with this interferes with their peace and purpose. With those who love the Law of the Lord, it is otherwise, because the state of mind is altogether otherwise. Those who love the Law of the Lord, love the Lord Himself, and cannot in consequence think highly of themselves. God is so inconceivably great: they are so very small, they think humbly of themselves. *“Humble and contrite in heart”* is God’s own portrait of them. It is not a forced humility like the mock solemnity of hypocrites. It is not the long faced moroseness of sunless fanaticism. It is the reasonable, and even cheerful recognition of the fact—the fact that they are but flesh: dust and ashes: a wind: a vapour, as the grass that grows and withers. And of another fact that they are sinners—forgiven sinners and reformed sinners, but still sinners, permitted by favour to live: *“contrite in heart,”* sorry they are not better than they are: thankful they are what they are. And such also are men of faith: men who believe what God has promised—that He will at last fill the earth with His glory and banish death. And such are also men of obedience, who therefore act habitually on the command to consider their neighbours; to do to them as they would be done by; to look out for opportunities of helping, rather than chances of being helped; prone to love and honour others rather than hungering and thirsting for love and honour.

It is not in the nature of things that such men should be offended. You cannot offend them. You may inflict pain: you may cause grief: you cannot embitter them so that they shall stand apart and become vindictive. You cannot turn them out of the way. They love the Lord and His Law, and are waiting for His salvation; and they will outride all trouble and all injury as the cork in the storm. Where men become offended and vindictive, and slink into a corner or disappear from the field of duty, it is a certain proof that they are *“lovers of their own selves,”* and not lovers of the Lord and His Law.

*“Great peace have they that love Thy Law: nothing shall offend them.”*

If the righteous smite them, it is an excellent oil that will not break their head.

We live in an age when all this has become obsolete, and when wisdom has scarcely a chance. Self-importance has been blown into gigantic dimensions. Human pride has budded and blossomed into a stupendous tree. Nations bursting with so-called patriotism, and individuals assiduously cultivating much-commended “self respect,” “in duty to myself,” and strutting forth on the stage of life with high-sniffing lordly gait erect, and estimated by a foolish generation according to the height of their own self-estimate—have set heaven at defiance. It is for the children of God to hold fast their integrity in the midst of a *“crooked and perverse generation.”* We know where the brazen folly will end. We know who has proclaimed concerning the very epoch in which we live.

*“The harvest is ripe: their wickedness is great.”*

We know what came of a similar state of things in Israel and in the Roman Empire: disaster and woe swept over the face of society and laid the pride of man in ghastly ruin. We know what is revealed concerning the great finishing:

*“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”*

It is for us in the midst of the general craze to hold fast to truth and wisdom. Hold on to the Bible: hold on to the daily reading of the Bible: hold on to the precepts of the Bible: hold on to the duties and assemblies commanded by the Bible: hold on to the Spirit, and the maxims, and the principles, and the hopes and the loves and practices of the Bible. And we shall have great peace—even now; when the enemy is in the gate; now, when the storm is abroad; now, when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold, and brother with hatred stands ready to betray brother to death. Even now, in times of evil and stress and affliction and dishonour, great peace have they that love Thy Law; but, oh, when the storm is past, when judgment has uprooted wickedness, when mercy has established the throne in righteousness, when compassion has forgiven our iniquities, when pity has wiped the tears from our faces, when the God of Israel’s power and love hath healed all our diseases and strengthened us with immortal life, and spread the pavilions of His everlasting Kingdom in the land of promise and peace, who then shall measure the peace that will be the portion of the loved of God. God’s own word can alone adequately describe it:

*“In a little wrath, I hid My face from thee for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee . . . Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands . . . Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou shalt call thy walls salvation: and thy gates praise . . . Thy sun shall no more go down: neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”*

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