FRUITS OF THE REVIVAL.

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SERMON

Preached at the United Thanksgiving service of Evangelical Churches in Boston on Nov. 29, 1877

BY

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“Being enriched in everything in all bountifulness which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. – 2 Cor. 9:11.

This text is part of a somewhat involved and intricate passage. But in looking back for the thought from which it springs, we find this: “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work.” The abounding grace of God is the spring and incentive of good works. As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor.” Admirable lesson for Thanksgiving day! The grace of God leading to kindness and charity towards the poor, and to large and widespread bounty towards the needy and dependent. And so the apostle is arrested for the moment by this thought, and then he breaks out into one of those grand benedictions to which he is so given, when his mind kindles before any great thought.

“Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply you seed sown. And increase the fruit of your righteousness.” And then returning again to the main current of his thought, he adds another idea, viz., the abounding grace of God the occasion of thanksgiving. “Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. When God’s grace is abundantly bestowed it enriches us in everything – in good works and in charity, in religious fruitfulness and righteousness, - and all furnishes occasion for thanksgiving to God. Now as I look over the year which lies behind us, and ask what is the most signal and conspicuous mercy of the year, I find it to be this, that God has made grace to abound towards us—grace to the truest scriptural sense of the word—“the grace of God which “hath appeared unto all men teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust we should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present world.” From the great evangelical work which was just beginning a year ago, we have received such a
widespread and gracious spiritual refreshing that few of us, I imagine, have begun to take it in. And even now we are not upon the receding but upon the advancing wave of that revival, unless we have received the grace of God in vain. Such blessings of every kind as have flowed from this work call for the profoundest gratitude; and so instead of the secular or, moral or political reflections in which it is thought fitting to indulge on such an occasion, I have chosen to review with you this morning some of the blessings which have come to us through the great evangelistic movement of the past year under the labor of our brethren in the Lord, Messrs. Moody, Sankey, and to stir you up to the thanksgiving which they are fitted to awaken.

The first blessing for which I call you to be grateful in connection with this work is the fresh emphasis and enforcement which the doctrines of grace have received in this community. Grace in the hearts and lives of Christians in the only thing that can preserve the doctrines of grace in the creeds of Christians, and hence a revival of grace must always be, according to its extent and genuineness a revival of evangelical doctrine. And in using this phrase “evangelical doctrine” I am not about to make any reflections on other doctrines, only, we believe, that as in the human body there are vital parts, to maim or injure which is certain death, so in the body of Christian faith there are vital doctrines – doctrines which cannot be denied without bring death to souls, and certain decay to the spiritual life of a community. Such doctrines, in brief, as man’s natural depravity; his need of regeneration by the Holy Spirit in order to be saved; his justification from sin only through the righteousness and death of Jesus Christ, and such doctrines as the infallibility of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ; his vicarious atonement on the cross; his resurrection and ascension, his mediation and intercession and his second coming to judgment – these are doctrines of Scripture which no age and no community has been able persistently to deny without imperiling the eternal life of souls. Now the danger is that in times of spiritual dearth and declension the lines in which these doctrines are written may become blurred and indistinct. Our theologians are busy in retracing and deepening them; and our skeptics are equally busy in sponging and erasing them. But their preservation does not rest altogether with the theologian, nor their erasure, altogether with the skeptic. An evangelic life is the only guardian of evangelic doctrine. The lines of doctrine, like the features of the face are written from within and not from without by the sure though unconscious moulding of faith and love in the soul of the Christian, and altogether by the graving tool of the theologian’s logic working upon our creeds.

Well now, as I have said, these lines of doctrine are constantly fading out from the apprehension of society. Young men coming to cities and country towns with the strong impress of Christian training stamped upon them watch the whispers of a more liberal faith of which the air is full – and then comes the suspicion, that perchance the parental training had been too rigid and straight-laced; and little by little the deep impressions of early training get toned down, if not quite wiped out. The worshipper in our churches gets, in the course of years, to lose his sense of the serious meaning of gospel truth; perhaps through noting the worldliness and indifference of those professing it – perhaps through the vitiating influence of his own self-indulgence and before you know it he has inscribed that vital word “non-essential” upon doctrines which are written in the very blood of the Son of God. The great mass of easy-going good-natured, cheerful people, who wish to be religious, but who are impatient of anything that gives
too serious an aspect to life, persuade themselves that such doctrines as we have mentioned are at war with their comfort and cheerfulness; and so if they do not erase them from their convictions, they interline and underscore them with such reductions and qualifications as render them of none effect. Now many and how fatal are the influences against which we have to contend in our effort to hold men’s consciences and convictions to these solemn truths. And in spite of the earnest utterances of the pulpit, we find their grasp of the truth relaxing, and these strong lines of doctrine fading out of the public apprehension. And is there no help for it? There is one certain and infallible remedy. Let a fresh tide of religious life be poured through society, such as we have experienced during the last year, and these doctrines will stand out again as distinctly as the purple veins stand out upon the forehead, when, by vigorous exercise, the blood has been made to bound through its courses. It is a renewed Christian life, which, above all things else, can effect a renewal of true and vital Christian doctrine.

Now this is a fact of which I for one have been sadly sensible during my eight years’ ministry in this city, the indifference and dislike of the positive doctrines of grace by the great multitudes of the people. I speak of it not for the regret I feel for they should differ from me in their religious opinions. That’s not a matter to be cared for or mentioned. But I do want that men should be saved. And without faith I know of no salvation. “For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” And how shall they hear if they turn away from Christ’s ambassadors; and how shall they believe if the own not the Scriptures as God’s own word, and how shall they be saved except they believe on the Son of God? With such view of the matter as this—any eclipse of faith, partial or total, or any widespread, letting go of the doctrines of grace, we must look upon with sorrow, we must lament with weeping as the certain precursor of spiritual death to multitudes. And yet what minister has not seen these vital symptoms, all above him—the easy shuffling off of all serious though about sin and salvation, the light dismissal of all admonition about judgment and wrath to come, as though they were but the weak superstitions of an outgrown age, and the expressions of surprise and wonder that anybody should still cling to such antiquated notions.

But there has been a change in this respect in public sentiment. I am as sure of it as I am of the most tangible fact which you can mention. Men by scores and hundreds are ready to be told that they have souls to be lost or saved, who a little while ago denied it. To many, who before were semi-skeptics, such words as sin and salvation by grace, and justification by faith, have a meaning which they have not had before. I am sure I cannot be mistaken in say this. I am profoundly struck with the fact every day in meeting men. There has been a revival of evangelical doctrine, and I beseech you to make it the theme of thanksgiving and praise to-day.

If you ask how this had come about I shall be borne out by all of you in attributing it largely to the clear and ringing proclamation of the old gospel truths by Mr. Moody and his associates. I believe the Lord has scores of ministers who have been preaching the same gospel for years, but in the providence of God a wider hearing has been accorded to him than to any of us; and knowing the character of his preaching, we pray God that that hearing may be yet wider and wider. And so we recognize with gratitude his great service, under God, in stamping back the old truths into the fading convictions of the people.
But there has been a secondary agency effecting this result – an agency that will continue to act long after the evangelists are gone and the Tabernacle has been torn down – I mean the quickened religious life of the people. The reaching has begotten life, and life has reproduced doctrine. The times of refreshing have come to us, and the streams of grace rising and sweeping on, have washed out the old channels of doctrine, which had been filled with debris of doubt and unbelief; and if by the grace of God, the current shall still move on unabated, these channels will be cut deeper and deeper, till the outlines of truth will be as distinctly visible in the public conviction as the rivers are upon a landscape.

In saying that a revived spiritual life in the hearts of the people has the tendency to reproduce clear doctrinal convictions in the public mind, I am saying what I believe to be warranted by Scripture as well as established by fact. What did our Lord mean when he said: “If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine”? He did not assert a mere arbitrary rule. He did not announce a mere natural fact. It is true in everything. Obedience is the door to knowledge; doing is the path to knowledge; doing is the path to knowing. But read another saying of Christ about the will of God, and let it throw its light upon this: “And this is the will of God, that every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him should have eternal life.” [John 6:40] To do the Lord’s will is first of all to believe on his Son; to believe on his Son; to believe on his Son is to have eternal life. To have eternal life is to have a divine eye opened within the soul, and a divine instinct kindled in the heart for seeing and loving. What before was meaningless: and incredible and repulsive.

Another blessing which calls for our special thanksgiving in connection with the work is the manifest strengthening of the bonds of charity between brethren of different names.

I am not going into any vague platitudes of the subject of Christian union, now, but I must speak of some facts. There are differences between Christians that are not vital in which I have used that word, that is, they do not effect the question of salvation. I do not call them non-essentials, for I suppose that with him who says that not one jot or tittle of his law shall pass away, every point and letter of his word is essential. But there are differences of apprehension concerning his word, and there are disputed questions and controverted points. But if we accept the Bible as the infallible word of God, and have been washed in the blood of the one redeeming Saviour, and regenerated by the power of the one Holy Spirit, it is certain that that which unites us is far more than that which divides us. And therefore as on non-vital points there must be union between those who agree. The exhibition of such union among the members of Christ’s body had been made one of the very tests and credentials for our Lord’s divinity. “That they all may be one... that the world may believe that thou hast sent me,” prays Jesus. And, if you will think of it, we have a better opportunity to exhibit the power of the divine life to produce unity than as though we all belonged to one church. For it costs but little to have charity towards those who perfectly agree with us; and to fellowship with those who have no differences from us. But the test of love comes in loving those who don’t disagree with us. Sort Christians out, and label them according to their persuasions, and then put them into the churches to which they severally belong, and they ought to live in harmony. But shake them all up together as was done last winter and let no one know who is who, and if then by the fine unerring instinct of divine love, they are found flowing together, and
making holy friendships, and binding their hearts in sacred covenants – that is a proof of the power of divine life in the soul to unify and compact the members of Christ’s body.

Well, this fact has been illustrated wonderfully during the last year. Scores and hundreds from the different churches were thrown together in the inquiry room in the single work of leading souls to Christ. By the force of circumstances the work had to be a work for Christ and for souls, without reference to any special church or Christians. One of the party cries which we often hear is, “Show your colors” “keep your denominational badges burnished and conspicuous.” But we could not do it, if we wished, in this work. And I think we were wise enough not to wish it. I have noticed that when a policeman would catch a wary thief he buttons his coat over his badge so as not to reveal his official character. And in winning souls, many of them suspicious of being proselytized or sectarianized, I think it is quite pardonable if we did the same thing, covered up our sectarian badges and let ourselves be known only as the servants of Christ seeking lost souls for our Master. For that I take it is our Protestant theory of evangelization. Bring men to Christ first, and then with the word of Christ in their hands and the spirit of Christ in their hearts they will find their church.

And so the work done by Christians in the revival had this marked character, that it was done directly for Christ and for souls, and not for any special church. One pastor found himself often laboring for the lost sheep of another pastor’s flock. And thus there was such a blending of interests, and such cooperation of labors that inevitably it bound Christians together as never before. There are some places where instinctively the strife of opinions is hushed. Standing beneath the cross of Christ and gazing on our dying Redeemer, we forgot our differences, and can talk only of that love that passeth knowledge. And next in sacredness to the spot where our Lord dropped his sacrificial blood on the earth, is the spot where in the agony of penitence a lost soul is kneeling to beg for mercy, while Christians in fellowship with Christ’s sufferings and in the travail of his exceeding sorrow are seeking to bring that soul from death to life. How many such scenes have been witnessed during the past year! A little group of Christians, strangers perhaps until this hour, but now kneeling together around some penitent and holding on to God in their cries till the clock tolls the midnight hour before the joyful release has come and the tidings have been flashed to heaven along the electric communication of prayer that one who was lost is found. In scenes as these that holy friendships, have been cemented! What divine fellowships have been plighted! What changeless bonds have been fastened.

From all that I can gather there was never such a union of the hearts and hands of the Christians of our city in any work as in this. That memorable scene, I shall never forget, when the pastors of New England met together for prayer and consecration in such numbers that they completely filled the body of one of our largest churches. And there, being all of one accord, in one place, they waited the power from on high. The sense of the Spirit’s presence that filled all hearts, the melting tenderness that flowed out in humble professions of pastoral unfaithfulness, the lamentations over divisions and strife among brethren; the stream of uttered prayer and the deeper tide of unuttered and unutterable supplication which we were borne along, as I look back to that day I shall ever think of it as one of the days of heaven graciously interjected into the calendar of our earthly life, to teach what it will be when the sundered body of Christ shall be reunited and his prayer shall at last be answered: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also
who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that thou has sent me."

Now for such exhibitions of unity of hearts among brethren as this, it seems to me we have occasion to be unspeakably thankful. Much is said on the subject of Christian union now-a-days that is merely sentimental; some things are said which are foolish and impracticable in spite of it all it is a great question and dear to the Son of God. It will not be settled by controversy. It will not be hastened towards a settlement by recriminations and fault finding among brethren. It will be hastened by a deeper and ever deepening spiritual life in the heart of Christians. I have been greatly struck with the change which conversion has wrought in the face of those who have been very hardened and quarrelsome. Pugilists and rogues, who had carried their profession in every feature, have been converted, and in a little while, looking at them, the Spirit seems to have put new features into their tactics as well as new affections into their hearts. And brethren, it is a good deal so with some of the most pernicious men in the church militant. They carry the sharp lines and angles of controversy on their faces; but let them get baptized and transfigured by the spirit of God and what a change there is. You can say of them as of Stephen, and "looking steadfastly on him, they saw his face as if he had been the face of an angel. The spirit that makes us like Christ will make us like the angels, and like one another. And surely as the Spirit of God more and more possesses the church, that which divides and estranges will drop off and that which unites and harmonizes will be magnified. The great family features will come out conspicuously. Hazlitt, the essayist, says, I remember, in his mature age: "I have been struck lately in looking into the glass with my strong resemblance to my father. I never in youth was thought to resemble him, but in age my father’s features seem to be coming out more and more each year. And so, brethren a Calvinist and an Arminian, a Baptist and a Presbyterian, a Churchman and Dissenter may not look much alike. But let them grow in grace, year after year, and be filled with the spirit more and more, and it wouldn’t be strange if in old age they should say to each other. I shouldn’t have thought it." as they chance to meet, "Why how much we look like each other if we are growing in the grace of the Lord. "But all we beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed in the same image from glory to glory," To be like Christ is to be like each other. To be transformed into, the same image is to be conformed to one another. And so, brethren, while God shall permit us to remain still under the painful discipline of divisions and outward separations, let us cease chiding and blaming each other for these divisions, but let us thank the Lord for every new feature of Christ that comes out in his bride the church. The spirit has been mightily at work among us. He is mightily at work all over the earth, restoring the lost image of Christ in the face of the church. And when the work is done, then the bridegroom will come, and when the bridegroom comes there will be no more divisions. "For we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall know him as he is."

The third blessing of the revival on which I would dwell is the immeasurable good that has come to the people in conversion of souls, in reformatons of life, in regenerations of homes, and in scores of ways which I cannot mention in detail.

Grace, like the sunlight, transmutes itself into a thousand forms of blessing. It not only touches sin with its forgiveness, but I touches poverty with its benefactions, and intemperance with is reformatons, and household wretchedness with its comforts, and
bodily disease with its healing. When God makes all grace abound to us, we are
"enriched in everything to all bountifulness." And so it has been with us. Time would
fail me to tell of all that has been wrought,

But I wish to bear this deliberate testimony to the work, that having by the
providence of God been placed in the very focus of its influences, it has far surpassed my
expectations by its extent as it has exceeded my faith by its power. Never have I been
permitted to see such illustrations of "grace abounding to the chief of sinners" as I have
witnessed in some of those Tabernacle converts. All through the summer I was watching
their growth and listening to their testimonies, and I have here to say that I have been
simply amazed at some of the cases that have come under my observation. John Bunyan
says, "Some people say that when grace and good nature meet, you have a great
Christian; but I think that when grace and a great sinner meet you have the greatest
Christian" and I believe it now as I never have before. It seems literally true that those
who were the lowest down have been lifted into the highest place of spiritual power and
testimony. Lips that for years have been steeped in blasphemy, now pathetically have we
heard them pouring out their confessions of the amazing grace that has saved them!
Hands that for years have lifted daily the accursed cup to their lips, with what tenderness
and energy have they been stretched out for pleading and for rescue. I speak only of what
I have witnessed personally. If we could gather up the testimony of all the pastors and
workers, I am very sure it would only strengthen and verify mine. In the new men who
are now moving among us, who a little while ago were the most hopeless and abandoned,
a chapter on the evidences of Christianity has been opened such as unbelieving Boston
has not read for many a year.

But lest I should seem to imply that the work has reached only the lowest, let me
emphasize what in my experience has been a most grateful fact, viz., that as the
successive companies of converts have come to seek admission to the church, the sober
and cultivated gentleman and lady have stood side by side with the reclaimed inebriate
and the once outcast rumseller. This bringing together of the widest extremes, by
experience a most striking act. In all my observations of religious work I have never seen
the hand of grace reaching at once so high and so low in gathering its subjects. And it
seems to me sets the seal of divinity on the work. "God is no respecter of persons," and
the Spirit of God, in his upheavings does not generally move in the highest or in the
lowest strata of society exclusively. He strikes through and upturns all the strata, and
lays bare riches of grace as they appear in each according to its kind. I think it has been
truly so in this instance.

And would that I had time to speak of inebriates, numbered by scores and
hundreds, who have been converted and sobered. A few of them have turned....

End

This sermon was transcribed from a newspaper copy that was very badly damaged.

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