

A SERMON

(taken from Paxton Hood's 1900 edition of Christmas Evans's Life
and translated from the Welsh)

by

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(1766 – 1838AD)

THE TIME OF REFORMATION.

“Until the time of reformation.”—Heb. ix. 10.

The ceremonies pertaining to the service of God, under Sinaitic dispensation, were entirely typical in their character; mere figures of Christ, the “High-priest of good things to come, by a greater, and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands;” who, “not by the blood of goats, and calves, but by His own blood, has entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” Sustaining such a relation to other ages, and events, they were necessarily imperfect, consisting “only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances,” not intended for perpetual observance, but imposed upon the Jewish people merely “until the time of reformation,” when the shadow should give place to the substance, and a Greater than Moses should “make all things new.” Let us notice the time of reformation, and the reformation itself.

I. Time may be divided into three parts. the Golden Age before the fall, the Iron Age after the fall, and the Messiah's Age of Jubilee.

In the Golden Age, the heavens, and the earth were created; the Garden of Eden was planted; man was made in the image of God, and placed in the garden, to dress, and keep it; matrimony was instituted; and God, resting from His labour, sanctified the seventh day, as a day of holy rest to man.

The Iron Age was introduced by the temptation of a foreigner, who obtruded himself into Paradise, and persuaded its happy denizens to cast off the golden yoke of obedience, and love to God. Man, desiring independence, became a rebel against heaven, a miserable captive of sin, and Satan, obnoxious to the Divine displeasure, and exposed to eternal death. The law was violated; the image of God was lost, and the enemy came in like a flood. All communication between the island of Time, and the continent of Immortality was cut off, and the unhappy exiles saw no hope of crossing the ocean that intervened.

The Messiah's Age may be divided into three parts; the time of Preparation, the time of Actual War, and the time of Victory and Triumph.

The Preparation began with the dawning of the day in Eden, when the Messiah came in the ship of the Promise, and landed on the island of Time, and notified its inhabitants of His gracious intention to visit them again, and assume their nature, and live and die among them; to break their covenant allegiance to the prince of the iron yoke; and deliver to them the charter, signed, and sealed with His own blood, for the redemption, and renovation of their

island, and the restoration of its suspended intercourse with the land of Eternal Life. The motto inscribed upon the banners of this age was,—“He shall bruise thy heel, and Thou shalt bruise his head.” Here Jehovah thundered forth His hatred of sin from the thick darkness, and wrote His curse in fire upon the face of heaven; while rivers of sacrificial blood proclaimed the miserable state of man, and his need of a costlier atonement than mere humanity could offer. Here, also, the spirit of Messiah fell upon the prophets, leading them to search diligently for the way of deliverance, and enabling them to “testify beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

Then came the season of Actual War. “Messiah the Prince” was born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling bands, and laid in a manger,—the Great Deliverer, “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” With His almighty hand, He laid hold on the works of the devil, unlocked the iron furnace, and broke the brazen bands asunder. He opened His mouth, and the deaf heard, the blind saw, the dumb spoke, the lame walked, and the lepers were cleansed. In the house of Jairus, in the street of Nain, and in the burial-ground of Bethany, His word was mightier than death; and the damsel on her bed, the young man on his bier, and Lazarus in his tomb, rising to second life, were but the earnest of His future triumph. The diseases of sin He healed, the iron chains of guilt He shattered, and all the horrible caves of human corruption and misery were opened by the Heavenly Warrior. He took our yoke, and bore it away upon His own shoulder, and cast it, broken, into the bottomless pit. He felt in His hands, and feet, the nails, and in His side the spear. The iron entered into His soul, but the corrosive power of His blood destroyed it, and shall ultimately eat away all the iron in the kingdom of death. Behold Him hanging on Calvary, nailing upon His cross three bills, the handwriting of the law which was against us, the oath of our allegiance to the prince of darkness, and the charter of the “everlasting covenant;” fulfilling the first, breaking the second, and sealing the third with His blood!

Now begins the scene of Victory and Triumph. On the morning of the third day, the Conqueror is seen “coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah.” He has “trodden the winepress alone.” By the might of His single arm He has routed the hosts of hell, and spoiled the dominions of death. The iron castle of the foe is demolished, and the Hero returns from the war, “glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength.” He enters the gates of the everlasting city, amid the rejoicing of angels, and the shouts of His redeemed. And still He rides forth in the chariot of His grace, “conquering, and to conquer.” A two-edged sword issues from His mouth, and, in His train, follow the victorious armies of heaven. Lo before Him fall the altars of idols, and the temples of devils; and the slaves of sin are becoming the servants, and sons of the living God; and the proud sceptic beholds, wonders, believes, and adores; and the blasphemer begins to pray, and the persecutor is melted into penitence, and love, and the wolf comes, and lays him down gently by the side of the lamb. And Messiah shall never quit the field, till He has completed the conquest, and swallowed up death in victory. In His “vesture dipped in blood,” He shall pursue the armies of Gog and Magog on the field of Armageddon, and break the iron teeth of the beast of power, and cast down Babylon as a mill-stone into the sea, and bind the old serpent in the lake of fire, and brimstone, and raise up to life immortal the tenants of the grave. Then

shall the New Jerusalem, the metropolis of Messiah's golden empire, descend from heaven, adorned with all the jewellery of creation, guarded at every gate by angelic sentinels, and enlightened by the glory of God, and of the Lamb; and the faithful shall dwell within its walls, and sin, and sorrow, and death, shall be shut out for ever!

Then shall Time be swallowed up in Eternity. The righteous shall inherit life everlasting, and the ungodly shall find their portion in the second death. Time is the age of the visible world; eternity is the age of the invisible God. All things in time are changeful; all things in eternity are immutable. If you pass from time to eternity, without faith in Christ, without love in God, an enemy to prayer, an enemy to holiness, "impurged and unforgiven," so you must ever remain. Now is the season of that blessed change, for which myriads shall sing everlasting anthems of praise. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." To-day the office is open: if you have any business with the Governor, make no delay. Now He has time to talk with the woman of Samaria by the well, and the penitent thief upon the cross. Now He is ready to forgive your sins, and renew your souls, and make you meet to become the partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Now He waits to wash the filthy, and feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and raise the humble, and quicken the spiritually dead, and enrich the poor, and wretched, and reconcile enemies by His blood. He came to unloose your bands, and open to you the gates of Eden; condemned for your acquittal, and slain for the recovery of your forfeited immortality. The design of all the travelling from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven, is the salvation of that which was lost, the restoration of intercourse and amity between the Maker and the worm. This is the chief of the ways of God to man, ancient in its origin, wise in its contrivance, dear in its accomplishment, powerful in its application, gracious in its influence, and everlasting in its results. Christ is riding in His chariot of salvation, through the land of destruction, and death, clothed in the majesty of mercy, and offering eternal life to all who will believe. O captives of evil! now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation; now is the year of jubilee; now is the age of deliverance; now is "the time of reformation."

II. All the prophets speak of something within the veil, to be manifested in due time; the advent of a Divine agent in a future age, to accomplish a glorious "reformation." They represent him as a prince, a hero, a high priest, a branch growing out of dry ground, a child toying with the asp, and the lion, and leading the wolf and the lamb together. The bill of the reformation had been repeatedly read by the prophets, and its passage required the descent of the Lord from heaven. None but Himself could effect the change of the dispensation. None but Himself had the authority and the power to remove the first, and establish the second. He whose voice once shook the earth, speaks again, and heaven is shaken. He whose footsteps once kindled Sinai into flame, descends again, and Calvary is red with blood. The God of the ancient covenant introduces anew, which is to abide for ever. The Lord of the temple alone could change the furniture, and the service from the original pattern shown to Moses on the mount; and six days before the rending of the veil, significant of abrogation of the old ceremonial, Moses came down upon a mountain in Palestine to deliver up the pattern to Him of whom he had received it on Sinai, that He might nail it to the cross on Calvary; for the "gifts and sacrifices" belonging to the legal dispensation, "could not make him that did the

service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”

This reformation signifieth “the removal of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain;” “the abrogation of carnal ordinances,” which were local, and temporal in their nature, to make room for a spiritual worship, of universal, and perpetual adaptation. Henceforth the blood of bulls and goats is superseded by the great reconciling sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and outward forms, and ceremonies give place to the inward operations of a renovating, and purifying Spirit.

To the Jewish Church, the covenant of Sinai was a sort of starry heaven. The Shekinah was its sun; the holy festivals, its moon; and prophets, priests, and kings, its stars. But Messiah, when He came, shook them all from their spheres, and filled the firmament Himself. He is our “Bright and Morning Star;” the “Sun of Righteousness,” rising upon us “with healing in His wings.”

The old covenant was an accuser, and a judge, but offered no pardon to the guilty. It revealed the corruption of the natural heart, but provided no renovating, and sanctifying grace. It was a natural institution, for special benefit of the seed of Abraham. It was a small vessel, trading only with the land of Canaan. It secured, to a few, the temporal blessings of the promised possession, but never delivered a single soul from eternal death, never bore a single soul over to the heavenly inheritance. But the new covenant is a covenant of grace, and mercy, proffering forgiveness, and a clean heart, not on the ground of any carnal relationship, but solely through faith in Jesus Christ. Christianity is a personal concern between each man, and his God, and none but the penitent believer has any right to its spiritual privileges. It is adapted to Gentiles, as well as Jews, “even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Already has it rescued myriads from the bondage of sin, and conveyed them over to the land of immortality; and its voyages of grace shall continue to the end of time, “bringing many sons to glory.”

II. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new.” The circumcision of the flesh, made with hands, has given place to the circumcision of the heart by the Holy Ghost. The Shekinah has departed from Mount Zion, but its glory is illuminating the world. The Sword of Joshua is returned to its scabbard; and “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” issues from the mouth of Messiah, and subdues the people under Him. The glorious High-priesthood of Christ has superseded sacerdotal office among men. Aaron was removed from the altar by death before his work was finished; but our High-priest still wears His sacrificial vestments, and death hath established Him before the mercy-seat, “a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.” The earthquake which shook Mount Calvary, and rent the veil of the temple, demolished “the middle wall of partition” between Jews and Gentiles. The incense which Jesus offered fills the temple, and the land of Judea cannot confine its fragrance. The fountain which burst forth in Jerusalem, has sent out its living streams into every land; and the heat of summer cannot dry them up, nor the frosts of winter congeal them.

In short, all the vessels of the sanctuary are taken away by the Lord of the temple. The “twelve oxen,” bearing the “molten sea,” have given place to “the twelve Apostles of the Lamb,” proclaiming “the washing of regeneration, and

renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The sprinkled mercy-seat, with its overshadowing, and intensely-gazing cherubim, has given place to “the throne of grace,” stained with the blood of a costlier sacrifice, into which the angels desire to look. The priest, the altar, the burnt-offering, the table of shewbread, and the golden candlestick, have given place to the better things of the new dispensation introduced by the Son of God, of which they were only the figures, and the types. Behold, the glory has gone up from the temple, and rests upon Jesus on Mount Tabor; and Moses, and Elias are there, with Peter, and James, and John; and the representatives of the old covenant are communing with the Apostles of the new, and the transfigured Christ is the medium of the communication; and a voice of majestic music, issuing from “the excellent glory,” proclaims—“This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him.”

“God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” Behold Him nailed to the Cross, and hear Him cry—“It is finished!” The voice which shook Sinai is shaking Calvary. Heaven and hell are in conflict, and earth trembles at the shock of battle. The Prince of Life expires, and the sun puts on his robes of mourning. Gabriel descends from heaven, and explains to us the wondrous emblem! As set the sun at noon on Golgotha, making preternatural night throughout the land of Palestine, so shall the empire of sin, and death be darkened, and their light shall be quenched at meridian. As the Sun of Righteousness, rising from the night of the grave on the third morning, brings life, and immortality to light; so shall “the day-spring from on high” yet dawn upon our gloomy vale, and “the power of His resurrection” shall reanimate the dust of every cemetery !

He that sitteth upon the throne hath spoken—“Behold, I make all things new.” The reformation includes not only the abrogation of the old, but also the introduction of the new. It gives us a new Mediator, a new covenant of grace, a new way of salvation, a new heart of flesh, a new heaven and a new earth. It has established a new union, by a new medium, between God and man. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” “Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.” “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Here was a new thing under the sun; the “Son of man” bearing the “express image” of the living God; bearing it untarnished through the world; through the temptations and sorrows of such a wilderness as humanity never trod before; through the unknown agony of Olivet, and the supernatural gloom of Golgotha, and the dark dominion of the king of terrors; to the Heaven of heavens; where He sits, the adorable representative of two worlds, the union of God and man! Thence He sends forth the Holy Spirit, to collect “the travail of His soul,” and lead them into all truth, and bring them to Zion with songs of everlasting joy. See them, the redeemed of the Lord, flocking as returning doves upon the wing, “to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to an innumerable company of angels; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Oh, join the joyful multitude! the year of jubilee is come. The veil is rent asunder The way into the holiest is laid open. The blood of Jesus is on the

mercy-seat: The Lamb newly slain is in the midst of the throne. Go ye, with boldness, into His gracious presence. Lo, the King is your brother, and for you has He stained His robe with blood! The robe alone can clothe your naked souls, and shield them in the day of burning. Awake! awake! put on the Lord Jesus Christ! The covenant of Sinai cannot save you from wrath. Descent from Abraham cannot entitle you to the kingdom of heaven. "Ye must be born again," "born not of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but of God." You must have a new heart, and become a new creation in Jesus Christ. This is the promise of the Father.

"This is the dear redeeming grace,
For every sinner free."

Many reformations have expired with the reformers. But our Great Reformer "ever liveth" to carry on His reformation, till His enemies become His footstool, and death and hell are cast into the lake of fire. He will finish the building of His Church. When He laid "the chief corner-stone" on Calvary, the shock jarred the earth, and awoke the dead, and shook the nether world with terror; but when He shall bring forth the top stone with shoutings of "Grace!" the dominion of Death and Hades shall perish, and the last captive shall escape, and the song of the bursting sepulchre shall be sweeter than the chorus of the morning stars! Even now, there are new things in heaven; the Lamb from the slaughter, alive "in the midst of the throne;" worshipped by innumerable seraphim and cherubim, and adored by the redeemed from earth; His name the wonder of angels, the terror of devils, and the hope of men; His praise the "new song," which shall constitute the employment of eternity !