

IS VERY REFRESHING

Dr. Talmage, in This Discourse, So Represents Religion.

He invites All the World to Come and Receive It—Christ's Eternal Fountain Satisfies the Soul.

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Washington, Aug. 11.

In this discourse Dr. Talmage represents religion as a great refreshment, and invites all the world to come and receive it; text, Genesis, 29:8. "We cannot until all the flocks be gathered together and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

A scene in Mesopotamia, beautifully pastoral. A well of water of great value in that region. The fields around about it white with three flocks of sheep lying down waiting for the watering. I hear their bleating coming on the bright air and the laughter of young men and maidens indulging in rustic repartee. I look off, and I see other flocks of sheep coming. Meanwhile Jacob, a stranger, on the interesting errand of looking for a wife, comes to the well. A beautiful shepherdess comes to the same well. I see her approaching, followed by her father's sheep. It was a memorable meeting. Jacob married that shepherdess. The Bible account of it is: "Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept." It has always been a mystery to me what he found to cry about! But before that scene occurred Jacob accosts the shepherdess and asks them why they postpone the slaking of the thirst of their sheep and why they did not immediately proceed to water them. The shepherdess reply to the effect: "We are all good neighbors, and as a matter of courtesy we wait until all the sheep of the neighborhood come up. Besides that, this stone on the well's mouth is somewhat heavy, and several of us take hold of it and push it aside, and then the buckets and the troughs are filled and the sheep are satisfied." "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

Oh, this is a thirsty world! Hot for the head, and blistering for the feet, and parching for the tongue. The world's great want is a cool, refreshing, satisfying draft. We wander around and we find the cistern empty. Long and tedious drought has dried up the world's fountain, but centuries ago a Shepherd, with crook in the shape of a cross and feet cut to the bleeding, explored the desert passages of the world and one day came across a well a thousand feet deep, bubbling and bright and opalescent, and looked to the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, and cried out with a voice strong and musical, that rang through the ages: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

Now a great flock of sheep to-day gather around this Gospel well. There are a great many thirsty souls. I wonder why the flocks of all nations do not gather, why so many stay thirsty, and while I am wondering about it my text breaks forth in the explanation, saying: "We cannot until all the flocks be gathered together and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

If a herd of swine come to a well, they angrily jostle each other for the precedence; if a drove of cattle come to a well, they hook each other back from the water, but when a flock of sheep come, though a hundred of them shall be disappointed, they only express it by sad bleating, they come together peaceably. We want a great multitude to come around the Gospel well. I know there are those who do not like a crowd; they think a crowd is vulgar. If they are oppressed for room in church, it makes them positively impatient and belligerent. We have had people permanently leave church because so many other people came to it. Not so did these oriental shepherds. They waited until all the flocks were gathered, and the more flocks that came the better they liked it. And so we ought to be anxious that all the people should come. Go out into the highways and the hedges and compel them to come in. Go to the rich and tell them they are indigent without the Gospel of Jesus. Go to the poor and tell them the affluence there is in Christ. Go to the blind and tell them of the touch that gives eternal illumination. Go to the lame and tell them of the joy that will make the lame man leap like a hart. Gather all the sheep off all the mountains. None so torn of the dogs, none so sick, none so worried, none so dying as to be omitted. Why not gather a great flock? All this city is a flock, all New York is a flock, all London is a flock, all the world is a flock.

This well of the Gospel is deep enough to put out the burning thirst of the 1,600,000,000 of the race. Do not let the church by a spirit of exclusiveness keep the world out. Let down all the bars, swing open all the gates, scatter all the invitations. "Whosoever will, let him come." Come,

white and black. Come, red men of the forest. Come Laplander, out of the snow. Come Patagonian, out of the south. Come Indians. Come painting under palm leaves. Come one. Come all. Come now. As at this well of Mesopotamia Jacob and Rachel were betrothed, so this morning at this well of salvation Christ, our Shepherd, will meet you coming up with your long flocks of cares and anxieties, and He will stretch out His hand in pledge of His affection, while all Heaven will cry out: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him!"

You notice that this well of Mesopotamia had a stone on it, which must be removed before the sheep could be watered, and I find on the well of salvation to-day impediments and obstacles which must be removed in order that you may obtain the refreshment and life of this gospel. In your case the impediment is pride of heart. You cannot bear to come to so democratic a fountain; you do not want to come with so many others. It is as though you were thirsty and you were invited to slake your thirst at the town pump instead of sitting in a parlor sipping out of a chased chalice which has just been lifted from a silver salver. Not so many publicans and sinners. You want to get to Heaven, but you must be in a special car, with your feet on a Turkish ottoman and a band of music on board the train. You do not want to be in company with rustic Jacob and Rachel and be drinking out of the fountain where 10,000 sheep have been drinking before you. You will have to remove the obstacle of pride or never find your way to the well. You will have to come as we came, willing to take the water of eternal life in any way and at any hand and in any kind of a pitcher, crying out: "Oh, Lord Jesus, I am dying of thirst! Give me the water of eternal life, whether in trough or goblet! Give me the water of life! I care not in what it comes to me." Away with all your hindrances of pride from the well's mouth!

Here is another man who is kept back from the water of life by the stone of an obdurate heart which lies over the mouth of the well. You have no more feeling upon this subject than if God had yet to do you the first kindness or you had to do God the first wrong. Seated on His lap all these years, His everlasting arms sheltering you, where is your gratitude? Where is your morning and evening prayer? Where are your consecrated lives? I say to you, as Daniel said to Belshazzar: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and all thy way, thou hast not glorified." If you treated anybody as badly as you have treated God, you would have made 506 apologies; yea, your whole life would have been an apology. Three times a day you have been seated at God's table. Spring, summer, autumn and winter He has appropriately apparelled you. Your health from Him, your companion from Him, your children from Him, your home from Him, all the bright surroundings of your life from Him. Oh, man, what dost thou with that hard heart? Canst thou not feel one throb of gratitude toward the God that made you, and the Christ who came to redeem you, and the Holy Ghost who has all these years been importuning you? If you could sit down five minutes under the tree of a Saviour's martyrdom and feel His lifeblood trickling on your forehead and cheek and hands, methinks you would get some appreciation of what you owe to a crucified Jesus.

Heart of stone, relent, relent.
Touched by Jesus' cross, subdued;
See His body mangled, rent,
Covered with a gore of blood.
Sinful soul, what hast thou done?
Crucified the Eternal Son!

There are men who are perfectly discontented. Unhappy in the past, unhappy to-day, to be unhappy forever, unless you come to this Gospel well. This satisfies the soul with a high, deep, all absorbing and eternal satisfaction. It comes, and it offers the most unfortunate man so much of this world as is best for him, and throws all Heaven into the bargain. The wealth of Croesus and all the Rothschilds is only a poor, miserable shilling compared with the eternal fortunes that Christ offers you to-day. In the far east there was a king who used once a year to get on the scales, while on the other side the scales were placed gold and silver and gems—indeed, enough were placed there to balance the king. Then, at the close of the weighing, all those treasures were thrown among the populace. But Christ to-day steps on one side the scales, and on the other side are all the treasures of the universe, and He says: "All are yours; all height, all depth, all breadth, all eternity—all are yours." We do not appreciate the promises of the Gospel.

Come also to this Gospel well, all ye troubled. I do not suppose you have escaped. Compare your view of this life at 15 years of age with what your view is of it at 40 or 60 or 70. What a great contrast of opinion! Were you right then or are you right now? Two cups placed in your hands, the one a sweet cup, the other a sour cup. A cup of joy and a cup of grief. Which has been the nearest to being full, and out of which have you the more frequently

partaken? What a different place the cemetery is from what it used to be! Once it was to you a grand city improvement, and you went out on the pleasure excursion, and you ran laughingly up the mound, and you criticised in a light way the epitaph. But since the day when you heard the bell toll at the gate when you went in with the procession it is a sad place, and there is a flood of rushing memories that suffuse the eye and overmaster the heart. Oh, you have had trouble, trouble, trouble! God only knows how much you have had. It is a wonder you have been able to live through it.

If I could gather all the griefs of all sorts from these crowded streets and could put them in one scroll, neither man nor angel could endure the recitation. Well, what do you want? Would you like to have your property back again? "No," you say as a Christian man; "I was becoming arrogant, and I think that is why the Lord took it away. I don't want to have my property back." Well, would you have your departed friends back again? "No," you say; "I couldn't take the responsibility of bringing them from a tearless realm to a realm of tears. I couldn't do it." Well, then, what do you want? A thousand voices in the audience cry out: "Comfort. Give us comfort!" For that reason I have rolled away the stone from the well's mouth. Come, all ye wounded of the flock, pursued of the wolves, come to the fountain where the Lord's sick and bereft ones have come. "Ah," says some one, "you are not old enough to understand my sorrows. You have not been in the world as long as I have, and you can't talk to me about my misfortunes in the time of old age." Well, I may not have lived as long as you, but I have been a great deal among old people, and I know how they feel about their falling health and about their departed friends and about the loneliness that sometimes strikes through their souls.

After two persons have lived together for 40 or 50 years and one is taken away, what desolation! I shall not forget the cry of Dr. De Witt, of New York, when he stood by the open grave of his beloved wife and after the obsequies had ended he looked down into the open place and said: "Farewell, my honored, faithful and beloved wife. The bond that bound us is severed. Thou art in glory, and I am here on earth. We shall meet again. Farewell, farewell!"

You get a little worried for fear that some time you will come to want, do you? Your children and grandchildren sometimes speak a little sharp to you because of your ailments. The Lord will not speak sharp. Do you think you will come to want? What do you think the Lord is? Are His granaries empty? Will He feed the raven and the rabbit and the lion in the desert, and forget you? Why, naturalists tell us that the porpoise will not forsake its wounded and sick mate. And do you suppose the Lord of Heaven and earth has not as much sympathy as the fish of the sea? But you say: "I am so near worn out, and I am of no use to God any more." I think the Lord knows whether you are of any more use or not. If you were of no more use, He would have taken you before this. Do you think God has forgotten you because He has taken care of you 70 or 80 years? He thinks more of you to-day than He ever did, because you think more of him. May the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Paul the aged be your God forever! But I gather all the promises to-day in a group, and I ask the shepherds to drive their flocks of lambs and sheep up to the sparkling supply. "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth." "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." I am determined that no one shall go out of this house uncomfited. Yonder is a timid and shrinking soul who seems to hide away from the consolations I am uttering as a child with a sore hand hides away from the physician lest he touch the wound too roughly, and the mother has to go and compel the little patient to come out and see the physician. So I come to your timid and shrinking soul to-day and compel you to come out in the presence of the Divine Physician. He will not hurt you. He has been healing wounds for many years, and He will give you gentle and omnipotent medication.

But people, when they have trouble, go anywhere rather than to God. De Quincy took opium to get rid of his troubles. Charles Lamb took to punch. Theodore Hook took to something stronger. Edwin Forrest took to theatrical dissipation. And men have run all around the earth, hoping in the quick transit to get away from their misfortunes. It has been a dead failure. There is only one well that can slake the thirst of an afflicted spirit, and that is the deep and inexhaustible well of the Gospel.

But some one in the audience says: "Notwithstanding all you have said this morning, I find no alleviation for my troubles." Well, I am not through yet. I have left the most potent consideration for the last. I am going

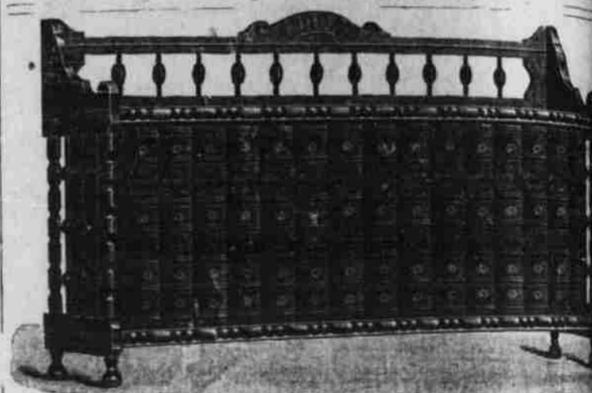
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to soothe you with the thought of Heaven. However talkative we may be, there will come a time when the stoutest and most emphatic interrogation will evoke from us no answer. As soon as we have closed our lips for the final silence no power on earth can break that taciturnity. But where, O Christian, will be your spirit? In a scene of infinite gladness. The spring morning of Heaven waving its blossoms in the bright air. Victors fresh from battle showing their scars. The rain of earthly sorrow struck through with the rainbow of eternal joy. In one group God and angels and the redeemed, Paul and Silas, Latimer and Ripley, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Payson and John Milton, Gabriel and Michael the archangel. Long line of choristers reaching across the hills. Seas of joy dashing to the white beach. Conquerors marching from gate to gate. You among them. Oh, what a great flock God will gather around the celestial well. No stone on the well's mouth while the Shepherd waters the sheep. There Jacob will recognize Rachel the shepherdess. And standing on one side of the well of eternal rapture your children, and standing on the other side of eternal rapture your Christian ancestry. You will be bounded on all sides by a joy so keen and grand that no other world has ever been permitted to experience it. Out of that one deep well of Heaven the Shepherd will dip reunion for the bereaved, wealth for the poor, health for the sick, rest for the weary. And then all the flock of the Lord's sheep will lie down in the green pastures, and world without end we will praise the Lord that on this summer Sabbath morning we were permitted to study the story of Jacob and Rachel at the well.

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