

A GOSPEL ARBOR.

Rev. Dr. Talmage Tells How to Construct It.

Branches for Peace, Pine Branches for Health and Palm Branches for Victory—A Rural Sermon at a Rural Resort.

The subject of Rev. T. De Witt Talmage's recent sermon at the Hampton, N. Y., was "The Bower of Three Branches." His text was Nehemiah 11: 15: "Go forth unto the mount and fetch olive branches, and palm branches, and myrtle branches of thick trees, to make booths."

It seems as if Mount Olivet were un-mounded. The people have gone into the mountain, and have cut off tree branches, and put them on their shoulders, and they come forth now into the streets of Jerusalem and on the housetops, and they twist these tree branches into arbors and booths. Then the people come forth from their comfortable homes and dwell for seven days in these booths or arbors. Why do they do that? Well, it is a great festival time. It is the feast of tabernacles; and these people are going to celebrate the desert travel of their fathers and their deliverance from their troubles, the experience of their fathers when, traveling in the desert, they lived in booths on the way to the land of Canaan. And so these booths also become highly suggestive—I will not say they are necessarily typical, but highly suggestive—of our march toward Heaven, and of the fact that we are only living temporarily here, as it were, in booths or arbors, on our way to the Canaan of eternal rest.

And what was said to the Jews literally to-day be said figuratively to all this audience. Go forth into the mountain and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths. Yes, we are only here in a temporary residence. We are marching on. The merchant princes who used to live in Bowling Green, New York, have passed away and their residences are now the fields of cheap mechanics. Where are the men who fifty years ago owned New York? Passed on.

There is no use in our driving our stakes too deep into the earth; we are on the march. The generations that have preceded us have gone so far on that we can not even hear the sound of their footsteps. They have gone over the hills, and we are to follow them. But, blessed be God, we are not in this world left out of doors and unprotected. There are gospel booths, or gospel arbors, in which our souls are to be comforted. Go forth unto the mountain, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, and build booths.

Well, now we are to-day to construct a gospel arbor, or gospel booth, and how shall we construct it? Well, we must get all the tree branches and build. According to my text we must go up into the mountain and bring olive branches. What does that mean? The olive tree grows in warm climates, and it reaches the height of twenty or twenty-two feet, a straight stem, and then an offshoot from that stem. And then people come and they strip off these branches sometimes, and when in time of war the general of one army takes one of these olive branches and goes out to the general of another army, what does that mean? Why, it means unsaddling the war-chargers. It means hanging up the weapons. It is but a beautiful way of saying, Peace!

Now, if we are to-day going to succeed in building the gospel arbor, we must go into the mountain of God's blessing, and fetch the olive branches, and what else we must have, we must have at least two olive branches—peace with God and peace with man. When I say peace with God, I do not mean to represent God as a bloody chieftain, having a grudge against us, but I do mean to affirm there is no more antagonism between a hound and a hare, between a hawk and a pullet, between elephant and swine, than there is hostility between holiness and sin. And if God is all holiness, and we are all sin, there must be a reconciliation; there must be a reconstruction, there must be a treaty; there must be a stretching forth of olive branches.

There is a great lawsuit going on now, and it is a lawsuit which man is bringing against his Maker; that lawsuit is now on the calendar. It is the human versus the divine; it is iniquity versus the immaculate; it is weakness versus omnipotence. Man began it; God did not begin the lawsuit. We began it; we assaulted our Maker, and the sooner we end this part of the struggle in which the finite attempts to overthrow the infinite and omnipotent, the sooner we end it the better.

Travelers tell us there is no such place as Mount Calvary, that it is only a hill, only an insignificant hill; but I persist in calling it the mount of God's divine mercy and love, far grander than any other place on earth, grander than the Alps or Himalayas, and there are no other hills as compared with it; and I have noticed in some of the wheels of the cross of Christ set forth, it is planted with olive branches. And all we have to do is to get rid of this war between God and ourselves, of which we are all tired. We want to back out of this war, we want to get rid of this hostility. All we have to do is just to get up on the mount of God's blessing, and pluck these olive branches and wave them before the throne. Peace through our Lord Jesus Christ!

O, it don't make much difference what the world thinks of you—what this king, that queen, that Senator thinks of you. But come into the warm, intimate, glowing and everlasting relationship with the God of the round universe; that is the joy that makes a halloin' seem stupid. Ah, why do we want to have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ? Why, if we had gone on in ten thousand years of war against God, we could not have captured so much as a sword or a cavalry stirrup, or twisted off one of the wheels of the chariot of his omnipotence. But the moment we bring this olive branch and all heaven opens to our side. Peace through our Lord Jesus Christ; and no other kind of peace is worth any thing.

But then we must have that other olive branch, peace with man. Now it is very easy to get up a quarrel. There are gunpowder Christians all around us, and one match of provocation will set them off. It is easy enough to get up a quarrel. But, my brother, don't you think you had better have your horns sawed off? Had you not better submit an apology? Had you not better submit to a little humiliation? O, you say, until that man takes the first step I will never be at peace with him; nothing will be done until he is ready to take the first step. You are a pretty Christian. When would this world be saved if Christ had not taken the first step? We were in the wrong, Christ was in the right—all right and forever right. And yet he took the first step. And instead of going and getting a knotty scourge with which to whip your antagonist, your enemy, you had better get up on the radiant mount where Christ suffered for his enemies, and take that olive branch, not stripping off the soft, cool, fragrant leaves, but leaving them all on, and then try on them that goodly switch. It won't hurt them, and it will save you. Peace with God; peace with man. It is not that these two doctrines you are Christians.

Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love; The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above. From sorrow, toll and pain, And sin we shall be free; And perfect love and friendship reign Through all eternity.

But my text goes further. It says: Go up into the mountain and fetch olive branches and pine branches. Now what is suggested by the pine branches? The pine tree is healthy; it is aromatic; it is evergreen. How often the physician says to his invalid patients: "Go and have a breath of the pines! That will invigorate you." Why do such thousands of people go south every year? It is not merely to get a warmer climate, but to get to the influence of the pine. There is health in it, and this pine branch of the text suggests the healthfulness of our holy religion; it is full of health, health for all, health for the mind, health for the soul.

I knew an aged man, who had no capital of physical health. He had had all the diseases you could imagine; he did not eat enough to keep a child alive; he lived on a beverage of hosiannas. He lived high, for he ate every day with his knife. He was kept alive simply by the force of his holy religion. It is a healthy religion; healthy for the eye, healthy for the hand, healthy for the feet, healthy for the heart, healthy for the liver, healthy for the spleen, healthy for the whole man. It gives a man such peace, such quietness, such independence of circumstances, such holy equipage. O that we all possessed it, that we all possessed it now. I mean that it is healthy if a man gets enough of it. Now, there are some people who get just enough religion to bother them, just enough religion to make them sick; but if a man takes a full, deep, round inhalation of these pine branches of the gospel arbor, he will find it buoyant, exuberant, undying, immortal health.

But this pine branch of my text also suggests the simple fact that it is evergreen. What does this pine branch care for the snow on its brow? It is only a crown of glory. The winter can not freeze it out. This evergreen tree is as beautiful in winter as in summer. And that is the characteristic of our holy religion; in the sharpest, coldest winter of misfortune and disaster it is as good a religion as it is in the bright summer sunshine. Well, now that is a practical truth. For if I should go up and down these aisles, I would not find in this house fifty people who had had no trouble. But there are some of you who have special trouble. God only knows what you go through with. O, how many bereavements; how many poverties, how many persecutions! How many misrepresentations! And now, my brother, you have tried every thing else, why don't you try this evergreen religion? It is just as good for you now as it was in the days of your prosperity; it is better for you. Perhaps some of you feel almost like Munkie Backie, the fisherman, who was chided one day because he kept on working, although about every day he buried his child. They came to him and said: "It is indeed time for you to be mending that boat which this afternoon you buried your child." And the fisherman looked up and said: "Sir, it is easy for you gentlemen to stay in the house with your handkerchiefs to your eyes in grief; but sir, ought I to let the other five children starve because one of them is drowned? No, sir, we man work, we man work, though our hearts beat like this hammer."

You may have had accumulation of sorrow and misfortune. They come in flocks, they come in herds upon your soul; and yet I have to tell you that this religion can console you, that it can help you, that it can deliver you if nothing else will. Do you tell me that the riches and the gain of this world can console you? How was it with the man who had such a fondness for money that when he was sick he ordered a basin of gold pieces to be brought to him, and he put his gouty hands down among the gold pieces, cooling his hands off in them, and the rattle and rolling of these gold pieces were his amusement and entertainment. Ah, the gold and silver, the honors, emoluments of this world are a poor solace for a perturbed spirit. We want something better than this world can give. A young prince, when the children came around to play with him, refused to play. He said: I will play only with kings. And it might be supposed that you throw away all other so-called pleasures for the sake of this imperial joy. Ye who are sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty ought to play only with kings.

The hill of Zion yields A thousand sacred sweets, Before we reach the heavenly fields Or walk the golden streets.

But my text takes a further step and it says, "Go into the mountain and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and palm branches." Now, the palm tree was very much honored by the ancients. It had three hundred and sixty different uses. The fruit was conserved; the sap was a beverage; the stems were ground up for food for camels; the base of the leaves was turned into hats, and mats, and baskets; and the leaves were carried in victorious processions; and from the root to the top of the highest leaf there was usefulness. The tree grew eighty-five feet in height sometimes, and it spread broad leaves four and five yards long; it made usefulness and it made victory; usefulness for what it produced, victory because it was brought into celebrations of triumph. And O, how much we want the palm branches in the churches of Jesus Christ at this time! A great many Christians don't amount to any thing. You have to shove them out of the way when the Lord's chariots come along. We don't want any more of that kind of Christians in the church.

The old maxim says: "Do not put all your eggs into one basket;" but I have to tell you in this matter of religion you had better give your all to God, and then get in yourself. "O," says one, "my business is to sell silks and cloths." Well, then, my brother, sell silks and cloths to the glory of God. And some one says: "My business is to raise corn and carrots." Then, my brother, raise corn and carrots to the glory of God. And some one says: "My business is to manufacture horse shoes." Then, my brother, manufacture horse shoes to the glory of God. There is nothing for you to do that you ought to do but for the glory of God.

Usefulness is typified by the palm tree. Ah, we don't want in the church any more people that are merely weeping willows, sighing into the water, standing and admiring their long lashes in the grassy spring. No wild cherry, dropping bitter fruit. We want palm trees, holding something for God, something for angels, something for man. I am tired and sick of this fat, insipid, satiated, namby-pamby, highly-tighty religion! It is worth nothing for this world, and it is destruction for eternity.

Give me five hundred men and women fully consecrated to Christ, and we will take any city for God in three years. Give me ten thousand men and women fully up to the Christian standard; in ten years ten thousand of them would take the whole earth for God. But when are we going to begin?

Lady, the great traveler, was brought before the Geographical Society of Great Britain, and they wanted him to make some explorations in Africa, and they showed him all the perils, and all the hard work and all the exposure, and after they had told him what they wanted him to do in Africa, they said to him: "Now, Lady, when are you ready to start?" He said: "To-morrow morning." The learned men were astonished; they thought he would take weeks or months to get ready. Well, now, you tell me you want to be earnest for Christ; you want to be earnest in Christian service. When are you going to begin. O, that you have the decision to say, "To-day I will!" Go now into the mountain and gather the palm branches. But the palm branch also meant victory. In all ages, in all lands, the palm branch means victory. We are by nature the servants of Satan. He stole us, he has his eye on us, he wants to keep us. The words come from our Father that if we will try to break loose from this doing of wrong, our Father will help us; and some day we rouse up, and we look the black tyrant in the face, and we fly at him, and we wrestle him down, and we put our heel on his neck, and we grind him in the dust, and we say, "Victory, victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, what a wonderful thing it is to have sin under foot and a wasted life behind our backs." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." "But," says the man, "I feel so sick and worn out with the ailments of life." You are going to be more than a conqueror. "But," says the man, "I am so tempted, I am so pursued in life." You are going to be more than a conqueror. "I, who was going to be more than a conqueror." "I, who was going to be more than a conqueror." Yes, unless you are so self-conceited that you want to manage all the affairs of your life yourself instead of letting God manage them. Do you want to drive and have God take a good seat? O, no, you say; I want God to be my leader. Well, then, you will be more than a conqueror. Your last sickness will come, and the physicians in the next breath will be talking about what they will do for you. What difference will it make what they do for you? You are going to be well, everlastingly well. And when the spirit has fled the body your friends will be talking as to where they shall bury you. What difference does it make to you where they bury you? The angel of resurrection can pick you out of the dust anywhere, and all the cemetaries of the earth are in God's care. O, you are going to be more than a conqueror. Don't you think we had better begin now to celebrate the coming victory? In the old meeting house at Summerville my father used to lead the singing, and he had the old-fashioned tuning fork, and he would strike it upon his knee, and then putting the tuning fork to his ear catch the right pitch and start the hymn. But, friend, don't you think we had better be catching the pitch of the everlasting song, the song of victory, when we shall be more than conquerors? Had we not better begin the rehearsal on earth? "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

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City of Eternity, to thy bridal halls From this prison would I flee; Ah, glory! that's for you and me.

My text brings up one step further. It says, go forth into the mountain and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees. Now, you know very well that a booth or arbor made of slight branches would not stand. The first blast of the tempest would prostrate it. So then the booth or arbor must have four stout poles to hold up the arbor or booth; and hence for the building of the arbor for this world we must have stout branches of thick trees. And so it is in the gospel arbor. Blessed be God that we have a brave Christianity, not one easily upset. The storms of life will come upon us, but we stand strong, not only in our own justities; not only in our own righteousness; not only in our own piety; it is an omnipotent gospel. There are the stout branches of thick trees. I remember what Mr. Finney said in a school house in this State. The village was so bad it was called Sodom, and it was said to have only one good man in all the village, and he was called Lot; and Mr. Finney, preaching, described the destruction of Sodom, and the preacher declared that God would rain destruction upon his heads, because they would not stand. And the people in the school house sat and ground their teeth in anger, and clenched their fists in indignation; but before he was through with his sermon they got down on their knees and cried for mercy while mercy could be found. O, it is a mighty gospel; not only an invitation, but a warning; an omnipotent truth, stout branches of thick trees. Well, my friends, I have shown you here is the olive branch of peace, here is the pine branch of evergreen consolation, here is the palm tree of triumph, usefulness and victory, and here are the stout branches of thick trees. The gospel arbor is done. The air is aromatic of Heaven. The leaves rustle with the gladness of God. Come into the arbor. I went out at different times with a fowler to the mountains to catch pigeons; and we made our booth, and we sat in that booth, and watched for the pigeons to come. And we found flocks in the sky, and after a while they dropped into the net, and we were successful. So I come now to you, and I see flocks of souls flying hither and flying thither, O, that they might come like clouds and as doves to the window. Come into the booth. Come into the booth.

ABOUT ETIQUETTE. Concessions That Are Absolutely Necessary to Social Harmony. In arranging their methods of living and social intercourse men are striving to repress and regulate their baser lives as to make them of as little prominence as possible, and offend in the least degree the finer sensibilities. It is desirable to make the service and eating of meals not a mere feeding to which we shall go with disgust, and, if possible, not only offensive, but a positive source of refined pleasure. Hence have grown up these little customs, and customs which have excited the contempt of our thoughtless friends. If it offends my neighbors to see me shovel my food into my mouth with a knife, I will learn to use my fork, even if I do not at first feel that there is sufficient ground for his feeling. He will doubtless reprobate by refraining from dipping his fingers into certain articles of food which it distresses me to see eaten that way. And so we shall establish a little code of fourness, desiring to give the least possible offense to each other, and this will grow, as others come into our circle, into an elaborate code of etiquette. It is much easier and better for us to subscribe to and observe these little things, even when they appear to us unnecessary and even silly, than to go on in a course that we can not help seeing is offensive to our friends and gives them pain without giving us any corresponding satisfaction, and finally makes us disliked or pitied.—Good House-keeping.

—There are glimpses of Heaven granted to us by every act, or thought, or word, which raises us above ourselves.—Stanley.

—Eractness in little duties is a wonderful source of cheerfulness.—Faber.

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