

A SERMON FOR SUNDAY

AN ELOQUENT DISCOURSE BY THE REV. D. D. MACLAURIN.

Subject: Love and the Vision of God—Love is the Only Interpreter of the Kingdom of Heaven, of All the Spiritualities—The Riddle of Self.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—Sunday morning, in St. John's M. E. Church, the Rev. Dr. Donald D. MacLaurin, pastor of the Second Baptist Church, Rochester, preached to the united congregations the final sermon in a series of eight on "The Greatest Thing in the World." His special subject was "Love and the Vision of God; or, the Eye That Sees All Wonders." The text was from 1 Corinthians xiii:12: "For now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face." Dr. MacLaurin said:

Love is the only interpreter of God. We saw last Sunday that to love only a divine revelation made, and that to perfect we only can perfect divine disclosures be made. The converse truth is equally valid, namely: "That love is the only interpreter of God, of all in the kingdom of God, of all spiritualities. Nor must you think that this is strange or arbitrary. We sought in all our services to discover analogy between the laws of the spirit- realm and the laws with which we are familiar.

You will find that this, namely: That love is the only interpreter, is part of the discipline of life in every direction, as some one has well said: "Love sees farthest, hears quickest and feels deepest."

Two illustrations of that proposition have been given; one with regard to the realm of nature. Let us say that two men are journeying through your beautiful park; one sees the general conformation, the general outline of street and sweep of field and shimmering lake, and he notices that there are trees bordering the drives and walks, but that is all. He has his eyes chiefly on the ground. He does not hear the birds; or, if he does, it is not to discern one songster from another. Now take the other. This man not only sees the general conformation of the landscape, the general plan of the artist who laid it out, but he sees the trees, he sees, he distinguishes one from another. He notes the flowers that spring; he notes not only the songster that sings, but he knows its life and story. He sees the shimmering pond and lake and the reflected overhanging foliage and is ministered to by them. At the end of the journey the latter man is enriched in his mind and heart. What has made the difference between the two men? The one has been, and is, a lover of nature. He is a student of nature because he loves it. And nature is kind; nature knows her lovers, and so she makes disclosures to him that the other man does not get.

Two men visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and let me say to those who may not have seen those art treasures, it is worth a visit and much study. One of these men hurries through it in a perfunctory way. O, he notices there are large pictures and small ones, but he has no time for those little bits of paintings that adorn the walls. If there is a big gilt frame on one of the pictures, he admires it greatly, but it is a bore, and he hurries out, and wonders why people find so much in the art galleries of the world. The other man discovers in some small piece the product of a master, and he stands entranced before it for hours; and you will see his eyes suffused with tears, and if you notice you will see his lip is tremulous. He pays no attention to the frills; he sees the soul of the artist, and he is profoundly stirred. I have seen men die in tears before some masterpiece in the galleries of Europe; their soul finds the soul of the artist. They interpret him in his finest moods; they have come to know him.

Such men come nearest to interpreting the Creator, Himself; for of all the sons of men none stand higher than the artist. He who can take a piece of raw material, a piece of ordinary canvas, and make it ripple like a river, make it roar like the mighty ocean, carrying a ship full rigged upon its bosom; a man who can make it blossom into a rose, or who can paint upon it a battle scene, preserving the heroism and valor of men; a man who can, by color, lay before you all that is beautiful, all that is divine in the world, surely stands first among the sons of God, and nearest to the Maker Himself in that he is a creator.

The lover of art sees this. To him these things are disclosed, while the man who does not love sees little. The same is true between men. To whom do you disclose yourself? Who is able to interpret you? The man who hates you? Surely not. He is always misreading you, misinterpreting your motives. It is the man who loves you. He interprets you, he knows you.

So I think the proposition is justified that love is the only interpreter of God. This brings me to the first point I desire to bring to you this morning, namely, this: That there is a time in the life of every man when he has no vision of God and spiritual realities. I wish you to mark that. There is a time in the life of every man when he has no vision of God and spiritualities. It covers all that period of his life during which he is unregenerate, when there is absolutely no vision of God and spiritual realities. The Apostle Paul will justify that assertion, for you will find him saying in this same epistle, that "the natural man perceiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them because they are spiritually judged."

The natural man is not in the realm in which he can interpret spiritual realities. This mysterious force in the organic kingdom we call life. Who knows the organic kingdom we call life? Who knows what it is? But we know it is there, and we know it weaves bodies in which it dwells; that it is a miracle and that it performs miracles of transformation. We are acquainted with it. They would not call it a miracle were they to know what it is. When life is busy, it is performing these transformations, but the atom cannot understand the results of life forces; they are foolishness unto it. They are utterly contrary to all it knows of the operation in its kingdom.

Now, do you know there is another kingdom? A third kingdom, which is above the organic and in which all higher life forces dwell; a third kingdom whose force is the spirit of the living God. And until a man has come into the life of that kingdom everything that we say transpires in it is foolishness to him in the natural kingdom, just as Paul says, "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, for they are spiritually judged." He has not entered that third kingdom. He does not know its law. He does not understand its phenomena; in fact, he does not see them. Which things? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things"—What things, Paul? "The things that God has prepared for them that love Him." So there is a time when there is absolutely no vision of God, and no vision of spiritual realities,

and it is vastly valuable that men both in the church and out of it shall recognize that great fact. Had men out of the church discovered that great fact, they would have been saved from many failures, as Bobby Burns in another connection says: "It was free money a blunder free us, and foolish notion."

Not until a man has been touched by the finger of God will his ears be opened to the harmonies of the third kingdom; not until his eyes have had the vision of that kingdom and his heart made capable of receiving that kingdom—not until these transformations have come to him, can a man know spiritual realities at all. So I affirm that there is a time in the life of every man when there is absolutely no vision of God and no vision of spiritual realities.

Let me now notice in the second place that there is a time when the vision of God and spiritual realities is enigmatical, "for now we see in a mirror darkly." That word "darkly" is a translation of a Greek phrase meaning, "in a riddle," and thus you, who have a revised Bible, will find that the phrase "in a riddle" is placed in the margin, for what Paul meant is this, "For now we see in a mirror, in a riddle." Of course, they did not have the mirrors which we have now in the apostolic age. Him forevermore.

Beloved, we will never all meet together here, but we may all meet together yonder. We will never all see each other, therefore, here. Let us so live that we shall all see each other yonder, when we have come up, like Him, to meet the hosts out of great tribulations, it may be, having our robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Till then, good-bye.

That which they had was a metal polished on one surface; sometimes of silver, but usually it was a round piece of metal polished as well as they could do it, to which was attached a handle. Now, you can see such a mirror would not reflect clearly, as our splendid mirrors do, the images that were before it. Now it is that furnished the Apostle Paul with this striking illustration: "For now we see in a mirror, in a riddle."

Why, the gospel itself, is as a camera obscura, in which we see reflected the things of eternity. What we see is not the thing itself, but only the reflection of it. What we see cannot be the thing itself, but only the reflection of it. That is what the gospel is. The fourfold gospel does not give us the living Christ; it only gives the image of the living Christ. It is imperfect in so far as man has had part in it, and in so far as the reflector will give only an imperfect image of the reality, and we must never forget the fact that what we are looking upon in spiritual things is not the objects themselves, but only the reflections. Nor must we forget that the definition is made enigmatical, that the objects look like riddles to us also, because the eye of the soul has not a clear vision. What we see, depends on what our heart is. How often we are troubled by the mists and fogs that arise from the lower levels of our own lives. How often you and I know what it is to be lost in the fogs that settle down upon us as the racing yachts were lost the other day in their final reach for the goal; utterly lost, hidden themselves and hidden from all about them; and like the challenger, we are apt to get out of our course and lose time in the race for the goal. So we must not forget that both the mirror and the eye that sees contribute toward the enigmas of our life and the enigmas that surround us.

Let us look for a moment or two at life's riddles as they relate to God Himself. Now, I have a deal of sympathy for the multitudes of men who find it hard to see God. They hear from the pulpit of "God's omniscience, His omnipresence, His eternity, He fills immensity, God is spirit." Now, what sort of an idea can a man get from these descriptions of the Eternal? And he hears, "You must love God," that the same sort of the gospel in a word, so far as duty is concerned, is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." And he says to us, "How can I love Him? He is inconceivable to me. I cannot form an image of Him. I cannot see Him to know Him, to love Him."

Now God understands this a heap better than many theologians do. So He said the "Utterance of God," the Word, shall come into human relations; He shall descend the ladder of divinity, emptying Himself, until He reaches the lower rungs of humanity, until He shall move in the valley of human life so that men can touch Him, so that men can hear His voice, so that men can look upon His face and in hearing Him and in touching Him and in seeing Him, they shall hear and touch and see the living God.

God cannot be seen by any eye; there is no mirror large enough to reflect Him, and even in that which is "the express image of His person," the Christ I have been talking about, we have been seeing, as I said only a moment ago, only the reflection of Him. We do not see Jesus; we only see the image of Jesus in this fourfold or fivefold mirror, the New Testament. I am saying this in order to relieve skeptic minds of real difficulties. I am saying this to relieve Christians of real difficulties.

The one thing we need to cultivate above all else is sincerity. We should not say that we see God when we do not. We should not pretend to have larger visions than we possess. When it is impossible for us to have a clear, clear cut definition, we should simply wait and realize with the Apostle Paul that what we see is really in a mirror, and makes it look like riddles to us very often.

We are puzzled over the mystery of the incarnation. How could God come down and clothe Himself in an infant of days. Our unlighted friends are trying hard to eliminate the miracle of the incarnation from theology; they had better realize their limits; there are lines in the image we cannot understand. The mystery of the Trinity. Who can comprehend that august doctrine? We must simply wait. There are so many things we cannot compass that if we try to we shall find ourselves hopelessly landed in the fog. We just want to remember that what we have, even in the Bible, is only a mirror in which we see, as only in a riddle, the realities.

Now let us notice again life's riddles as they relate themselves to ourselves. What strange creatures we are. What strange things you and I sometimes do! How unaccountably we sometimes act! What riddles we are to ourselves! Can you understand why you took a given course the other day? You step aside from your own ideals and your own predeterminations, as to what your career should be. Can you understand why you said those things the other day? Why you were so blind as to do those things? How often men have said to me, "I cannot understand myself; I do not understand why I did that thing. Why, really, I cannot explain it." You cannot, unassisted person, you cannot explain why you remain in a state of alienation from God. If what the Bible says is true, there is pending over you an endless hell, or there is awaiting for you an endless life of bliss. Now, would you not think that such alternatives, "a kingdom or wrath," open to you, you would settle the great question? Why, some of you have lived for sixty years with the greatest problem in the universe still unsolved. It has been

my privilege to deal with a great many men who had lived until they were thirty or forty or fifty years old, and many of them have said, I cannot understand why I did not yield before. What riddles we are to ourselves! How strangely we act!

How often men fail in their strongest point! Why, you would say, for instance, that an Elijah would never be found a quaking coward, whining under a juniper tree; a man who could defy the king and, what is worse, defy the woman, the wife of the king, falling down and asking that he might die. Elijah is not the only one. Some men that you know have failed, when they failed, in their very strongest point. What an enigma we are to ourselves. Who can understand himself? I would give more to know my own self than all else beside, save God and Jesus Christ.

But look at the enigma of so many lives. Take, for instance, the problem of personal suffering. Why is it that there is so much suffering? Why is it that some of the best people are crucified so awfully? Why is it that some of the most refined souls have the arrows driven furthest into their quivering hearts? Do you know why? Can you explain it? Can you explain the reverse that come, and come to the very best of people? Do you know why some of the noblest of men and women are reduced from comfort, from affluence, through the meanness of their own children or through the rashness of trusted friends, to almost penury?

I know a woman of a refined, sensitive spirit, who has been for more than a third of a century crucified to a wooden man. Some preacher, of course herself consenting, more than a third of a century united her to that wooden man. I am not drawing upon my imagination; I have them right in my mind; I know them. Not only a blockhead of a man, but a man with a wooden heart. Just the opposite of his wife in her aspirations, refinement and sensitiveness. It was hard for me all the time I knew them not to despise him as I would a dog, and I think the only son and daughter did almost despise their own father as they would despise a cur. Now, why was that woman crucified to that man?

Here is a young woman with two or three babies, we bits of toddling things, clinging to her skirts, and that man is stricken down in the prime of manhood just when he is needed. How can we talk of the consolation of the gospel in such a case? I have not spoken at funerals for years; I only read the word of God and try to pray, bearing up to God the hearts that are before me. I will not attempt to explain what is inexplicable to myself. All I can say is what Jesus said, "Wee! I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter." And behind that I stand, waiting. It is mockery to undertake to explain to the soul in such a position the enigma that appals and overwhelms her.

I said a moment ago, for I must not leave you under a dark cloud; I said a moment ago, of this woman who was crucified for thirty years, that she was one of the saintliest and noblest women I have ever known, and what I have said of her is true. One of the most faithful in the church, loyal to the pastor, foremost in missionary work and one of the most noble souls I knew, and I am not sure but that there is the relation of cause and effect. Is not that wooden man the cause of the beauty of her character? Has not his imperfection of nature, his coarseness, driven that soul to communion with Him who is the chief among ten thousand and the One altogether lovely? And has not her contact with His transformed her into His likeness, whom she loves, not having seen?

May it not be that we grow in spite of our weights, and that these deprivations, these afflictions, this hard disposition, if you please, may it not be that they are weights intended to develop us into the larger manhood and the greater nobilities of the soul? Look at Jesus Christ. The story in brief is the incarnation, is the ministry, is Gethsemane, is the cross, is the grave. Would Jesus ever have become the world's Saviour had He not known Gethsemane and the agony of the cross? Could He have touched the heart, the very heart of the world, had He not gotten down to the very lowest depths and felt again and again the iron in His sensitive soul?

It may be, fellow sufferer, it may be gentle woman, that your deprivation, that your losses, your heart disappointments will minister to your transformation and to your final exultation, until you shall be in spiritual stature able to stand even shoulder to shoulder with the Man who was acquainted with sorrows and griefs.

Now, in conclusion, there is a time coming when we shall have the perfect vision. "For now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face."

A young girl, fifteen years of age, a laughter loving, happy Christian girl, was suddenly thrown upon a bed of severe sickness; indeed, all one side was totally paralyzed and she was stricken into almost total blindness. Her family physician, after making a very careful examination, said to the sorrowing friends, "She has seen her best days, poor child." And the laughter loving maid responded, "Doctor, now that is not true; my best days are to come when I shall see the King in His beauty." And so, beloved, our best days are to come. Your best days and mine, the days when all the mists have rolled away, when all the clouds have been dissipated by the shining of His face, the day when all the enigmas of life shall be solved, the day when we shall see the King in His beauty.

John says, "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is. You and I to be like Him who needeth not to be told about man, for He knew what was in man. You and I to be like Him, who was independent of gravity, of all material substances and force. You and I to be like Him who on the Mount of Transfiguration shone so that the disciples were dazzled even of the splendor of His garments? You and I to be like Him whom John saw in that divine theophany recorded in the last book of the Bible, vander in glory. You and I to be like Him who has overcome and is now sitting on the throne of the universe. That is what He has said, "He that overcometh will I give to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcome and am sat down with My Father on His throne." We shall see Him. We shall see Him face to face. Every problem will be solved. We shall be with Him forevermore.

Beloved, we will never all meet together here, but we may all meet together yonder. We will never all see each other, therefore, here. Let us so live that we shall all see each other yonder, when we have come up, like Him, to meet the hosts out of great tribulations, it may be, having our robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Till then, good-bye.

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