

SALVATION AND PROSPERITY:

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

BALTIMORE,

BEFORE THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE MARYLAND DISTRICT,

OF THE

METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH,

AT THE OPENING OF THE ELEVENTH SESSION,

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S E R M O N .

Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.—PSALM 118. 25.

THE text is one of those numerous examples, which occur in the Book of Psalms, of great intensity and earnestness in prayer, and is an expressive model of the fervency of spirit with which we should ever call upon God. Some special and very interesting object of solicitation seems to have engrossed the mind of the Psalmist; which, by considering the context, and the interpretations bestowed upon it, both by Jewish and Christian writers, we shall find to be wholly spiritual in its nature; or, in other words, that this Psalm is prophetic of the coming of Christ, and of the spiritual blessings promised to accompany his reign.

Of such import evidently are the following verses: Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee; for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. The evangelical reference of these verses, and especially of the two last, will readily be perceived, when we call to mind, that both our Saviour and the Apostle Peter applied them with emphatic distinction to himself, as the promised Messiah.

It is said also, by an able commentator; That learned Jews, both ancient and modern, confess, that reference is here made to Christ and his kingdom; and, on that account, probably, it was, that this Psalm was always repeated or sung by them after their passover. In accordance with which, and as carrying out the same allusion, the Church of England has appointed the same portion of Scripture as a part of her ritual for Easter Day, to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, and his glorious exaltation as Redeemer of the world.

Again: This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it; upon which verse Bishop Horne makes the following instructive and beautiful comment: 'Of the day on which Christ arose from the dead, it may, with more propriety, than of any other be affirmed, this is the day which Jehovah hath made. Then it was, that the rejected stone became the head of the corner. A morning then dawned, which is to be followed by no evening; a brighter sun arose upon the world, which is to set no more; a day began, which will never end; and night and darkness departed, to return not again. For thus saith the Lord to his Church by the prophet Isaiah: Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.'

To which, as suitable to our present purpose, and as finely illustrative of the spirit and design of this sacred book, we will add the following remarks of the same excellent prelate. 'The Psalms of David convey those comforts to others which they afforded to himself. Composed upon particular occasions, yet designed for general use; delivered out as services for Israelites under the law, yet no less adapted to the circumstances of Christians under the gospel; they present religion to us in the most engaging dress; communicating truths which philosophy could never investigate, in a style which poetry can never equal; while history is made the vehicle of prophecy, and creation lends all its charms to paint the glories of redemption. Calculated alike to profit and to please, they inform the understanding, elevate the affections, and entertain the imagination. Indicted under the influence of Him, to whom all hearts are known, and all events foreknown, they suit mankind in all situations, grateful as the manna which descended from above, and conformed itself to every palate. The fairest productions of human wit, after a few perusals, like gathered flowers, wither in our hands, and lose their fragrancy; but these unfading plants of Paradise, become, as we are accustomed to them, still more and more beautiful; their bloom appears to be daily heightened; fresh odours are emitted, and new sweets extracted from them. He who hath once tasted their excellencies, will desire to taste them again; and he who tastes them oftenest will relish them best.'

We shall now proceed to examine the points of doctrine and instruction which the text presents to our view.

1. The Psalmist prays for two expressions of the Divine favour, salvation and prosperity.

2. These he asks with great importunity of spirit, and with seeming confidence of the success of his petitions.

3. And, lastly, he prays for their bestowment now. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity.

First. THE BLESSINGS BESOUGHT.—These we shall consider separately, and in succession, and attempt to apply them as present circumstances seem to suggest and require.

1. *Salvation.*—This point we shall present in a few brief remarks, inclusive, however, we hope, of its general scriptural nature and character. As a doctrine of christianity, salvation implies deliverance from sin, in proper accordance with our Saviour's redeeming mediation, and the professed object of his coming into the world. Said the angel to Joseph, in reference to the birth of Messiah, as recorded by St. Matthew, Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. And in confirmation of the same truth, as also in exclusive restriction of it to the offices of Christ, the Apostle Peter declared boldly to the priesthood and rulers of Jerusalem, Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

But this great deliverance includes several important particulars or acts, which we may now summarily notice. Sin is represented in the scriptures as exerting its influence upon the condition of man, in various forms; by obscuring his intellect, perverting his will, and corrupting his affections. In consequence of which our whole moral nature is in a state of ruin, and offensive to the holiness of God, till it is repaired and purified by the blood of Christ. It is his office, then, to save us from this deplorable condition, by over-ruling and destroying the dominion of sin in our hearts. Accordingly, he said to the Jews, 'Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin; but if the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' Which is still more fully explained and illustrated by the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans; wherein he exhibits this great change effected in our spiritual emancipation by faith in the death of Christ, not only as preliminary to the inception of all experimental godliness, but as prerequisite to any advancement in holiness and virtue. 'For,' says he, 'when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' This is the first step in the work of our salvation.

Next, as consequent upon it, and upon the transfer of our love and homage from Satan to God, our Saviour likewise delivers us

from the guilt and condemnation of sin. If the submission of the heart to the dominion of Satan were lawful and right, there would of course be no consciousness of guilt, and no sense of shame or remorse in obeying his will. But we know and feel that all such service is a violation of our duty to God; and is, in fact, nothing less than idolatry and rebellion against Him. He, and He alone, as our Creator, Redeemer and Judge, is entitled to our supreme and entire homage and worship; and, therefore, no man can be at peace, or free from self-reproach and guilt, whilst he is conscious of obeying the will of another, when his whole obedience is due, and should be rendered to God. And equally sensible is he of his own total inability to release himself from the galling servitude by which he is enslaved, and under which he suffers; and, accordingly, in those moments, when his mind is enlightened and convicted by the spirit of God, and a sense of duty prevails in him over the power of passion, he is ready to weep with Saul of Tarsus, because of the imbecility of human resolution, and, in bitterness of spirit, to exclaim; 'O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death!'

Then it is, that discerning the sufficiency and suitableness of the Saviour's atonement, he apprehends it by faith, receives a gracious pardon, feels that all conscious guilt is removed, and, with the Apostle, cries out; There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus; for, being justified by faith, he has peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

With this removal of the guilt of sin, is also connected deliverance from its penalty, from which we are rescued and saved by the mediation of Christ, and by that alone.

There is no rule in all the government of God more positive, or more certain of execution, than that sin, unrepented of and unforgiven, shall be punished. The wages of sin is death. This principle we may trace from the fall of man, throughout the whole economy of Jehovah's dispensations, patriarchal, legal and evangelical, up to the consummation of his rectoral system in the general and final judgment. Witness it, as awfully and memorably displayed, because of their fulness of iniquity and guilt, in the destruction of the cities of the plain. The sun was risen upon the earth, when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

Again, in the sententious but pointed and fearful declarations of the Book of Proverbs; Because I have called, and ye refused; I

have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind.—It is enough, my brethren, to be given up and forsaken of God; ah! and much more than enough; but, beyond this, in the agonies of fruitless remorse and despair, to be met and saluted only with the bitterness of divine wrath and derision, is doubtless withering beyond all the power of language or of thought.

Hear it, once more, in the close of that graphic delineation which is given by our blessed Lord of the solemnities and retributions of the Judgment Day, as recorded in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew: 'Then shall the king say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.'—But from such a dreadful issue, the eternal ruin of the soul, it is the gracious province of Christ to save us, through faith in his blood. For, says the apostle, 'He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.'

To these benefits, flowing from the death of Christ, in our deliverance from the afore-mentioned evils and consequences of sin, must be added, as included in that salvation which he has procured for man, the great counter-change which may be wrought in our hearts and lives by the spirit of God. This is what is meant in the Scriptures by the doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth; a change, which, according to the authority of Christ, is necessary and indispensable to every man, to fit him for admission into the Kingdom of Heaven. This necessity arises out of his apostate and fallen condition, in virtue of which, as already shown, sin reigns in his disposition and character, blinds and hardens his conscience, perverts and pollutes his affections, and makes him, by wicked works, an enemy to God. Hence, to reinstate him in his forfeited holiness, and in communion with his Maker, he must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, and be made a new creature; not only must the power of sin over him be destroyed, but grace must reign in his heart; the emotions and habits of sin must be subdued and abandoned, and those of holiness superinduced and cherished; otherwise, he can enjoy no quiet of soul, no peace with God, nor any hope of Heaven.

This change, wherever it takes place, is the work of the Spirit of God, as procured for us by the mediation of Christ, upon our repentance and faith, and consists in a conscious assurance of soul, that God has forgiven our sins, has shed abroad his love in our hearts, and made us his adopted and spiritual children. This is Scriptural re-

generation, which the Bible represents to be the result of the Holy Spirit's influence upon man, and of that alone, both in view of the work which is wrought in us, and of the testimony which accompanies that work; the divine power being necessary to convert the soul, because no other is competent to effect it; and the testimony of the Spirit being equally necessary to assure us of the fact, seeing, in a matter of so much importance, and according to the nature of the case, no other could be depended on.

But this salvation includes, secondly, security, as well as deliverance and renewal; and, consequently, our defence and preservation from sin, and from those temptations which, if yielded to, would again involve us in condemnation and guilt, else the change already effected in us, and the grace communicated to our hearts, would be of little avail, seeing all sin is of one common nature, however differing in degrees of enormity, and must be hateful in the sight of God; and seeing, also, such is the native weakness of man, and so many and powerful are his spiritual foes, that, notwithstanding the great work done in us, we should again sin against God, unless supported and protected by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is our only security, even of the regenerate, who have been called out of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and to enjoy it, brethren, we must daily live by faith in Christ, be habitually found in the means and ordinances of religion, and depend on the same divine agency to defend and sustain us, that at first imparted to our souls spiritual life and being. Hence, we are exhorted to grow in grace; to make our calling and election sure, as it is not so merely in virtue of our regeneration, with the encouraging assurance given, that, if we do these things, we shall never fall; otherwise, we may; and that, finally, an entrance shall be administered to us, abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These topics might be still enlarged on, and even to edification and advantage; but, as they are so frequently themes of pulpit instruction, we forbear to pursue them further, to make way for another branch of the subject, which justly claims our very serious consideration.

2. The Psalmist prays, in the second place, for prosperity. O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. This is a state or condition which might, properly enough, be applied to personal and individual character, as implying the advancement of believers in holiness and usefulness; but we propose, now, to take a more extended view of the subject, though still comprising individual experience in its application to the Church of Christ, and more particularly to ourselves, as a branch of that church.

But what is prosperity? This, as to its nature and circumstances, should certainly, first of all, be clearly understood. Otherwise, in praying for it, we might ask for a curse, instead of a blessing, for what would seriously weaken and injure us, instead of promoting our spiritual welfare.

A nation may be said to be prosperous, not in virtue, merely, of its large, but neglected and impoverished domains; of its numerous and expanded, but ignorant and degraded population; nor of the discipline and valour of its soldiery, or the pride and strength of its navy, when the one is maintained to uphold corruption and oppression at home, and the other, for purposes of aggressive conquest abroad; but that nation is prosperous, whose government is founded and administered upon an equal and equitable constitution, about which all hearts are entwined; in which integrity controls all its public functionaries and all its public measures; when, through its whole community, the blessings of civilization, of learning, and of religion are felt and enjoyed, and when all its enterprises upon land and upon water, are conducted in the spirit of a genuine patriotism, and an enlightened and liberal philanthropy. Happy are the people that is in such a case.

With this analogy before us, we may now apply the subject to the Church of Christ, as supposing whenever she is prosperous, a condition of present soundness and security, and the prospect of increasing enlargement and success, not, however, in the worldly wealth and influence of her members, but in their holiness and true christian character—not in the learning, merely, and eloquence of her pulpits, but especially in the apostolic zeal and usefulness of her ministers; not in the extent of territory which she claims, and professedly covers, but in the redeeming influence which it is her province and her glory to exert; nor yet again, in the external splendour and magnificence of her courts and sanctuaries, but in the precious and delightful truth, that she is pure and undefiled, and, like the king's daughter, all glorious within.

Let us, then, consider what is necessary to the prosperity of our own church, as regards her internal condition and character. This implies, first of all, the spiritual soundness and health of individuals, both ministers and members, without which, any external appearances, however flattering and imposing, may be only deceptive and ruinous. The human body is in health, and consequently prosperous, when the heart pulsates regularly, and propels the current of life, in all its refreshing and sustaining influence, to every part of the system; otherwise, all may be disease, and in peril of death, notwithstanding any tinsel and display of outward vesture and ornament.

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So, my brethren, of our beloved church. ~~The~~ internal prosperity embraces and requires, as essential to the foundation of her Christian character, individual knowledge and experience of religion, both in preachers and people. Without this, we have not taken even the first step in the matter, and deserve not a name amongst the Israel of God.

The glory of the Christian Age consists in the presence and conscious manifestations of God's Holy Spirit, in his great work of convincing, and renewing, and sanctifying the heart of man. Accordingly, we live under a dispensation, not of prophecy and figure, but of truth and reality; not of types and shadows, but of substance and experience. The promised Saviour has come; the sacrifice for sin has been offered and accepted; the Holy Spirit is given, and now men every where are commanded to repent and believe the gospel, in order to present and actual forgiveness—to sensible and conscious salvation. Any thing short of this, is mere Judaism; is but philosophy; is, at best, nothing more than the semblance and the shadow of what Christ has rendered possible for us, and without which we are already dead here, and must be damned hereafter.

Have all amongst us, then, truly repented of sin? Are all soundly converted to God? Do all now enjoy the witness of the Spirit to an inward state of acceptance through Christ? And are all striving to improve the grace given, and to attain our full privilege, perfect holiness below? If so, then, as a proof of it, and of our prosperity as a Christian church, we shall next exemplify genuine religious experience by a consistent religious deportment. This we shall demonstrate in amiableness and gentleness of spirit; in purity of conversation and intercourse; in a punctual attendance upon the means of grace; and, lastly, in acts of kindness to the sick and afflicted, and of alms-giving to the poor and suffering, whom the providence of God has committed and entrusted to our pity and assistance.

Again: In order to that prosperity which comports with the real nature of the case, it behooves us, brethren, to respect and maintain our own peculiar and distinctive institutions. First, of discipline—that it be received and acknowledged as we have devised it with our own heads, and framed it with our hands. There it stands on plain and legible record; and, if not honestly and candidly acknowledged to be of solemn and binding obligation upon us—there it must stand as an enduring monument of rebuke and reproach to us as a Christian people.

But not only acknowledged—it must also be administered and enforced, as we have made it, and in view of the ends for which it was made, else it will remain a dead letter, and, possibly, prove far worse

than useless, whereas, under its lawful and appropriate enforcement, private members of the Church will feel and discharge their proper relations and duties; and official members, their high and sacred responsibilities. And then mark the happy and salutary results. In that case, the weak will be strengthened, the timid encouraged, the wavering and wandering reclaimed and confirmed; the faithful will grow yet stronger in the Lord and in the word of his grace; and we shall be owned and blessed of God in our closets, in our families, and in our solemn assemblies. And, under such an exercise of discipline, if need be, with the consent of all, because for the safety of all, the faulty and incorrigible will be disowned and dismissed.

2. *Of ministrations.*—This institution, doubtless, is not peculiar to us, except as it is modified according to the distinctive plans and operations of Methodism. But what is true, and a duty, in a general application, to the ministry of the Word, is equally so with respect to any modified arrangements of the sacred office, when they do not conflict with the great principles which Christ himself has ordained and enjoined.

As concerns ourselves, this is not the place for discussing the subject, upon the merits of its scriptural authority and propriety, in regard to the peculiarities of our own system, nor indeed amongst us is it now to be considered a subject of debate, for we have long since settled it by conventional agreement, as tested by a fair and successful trial with our fathers before us, and as being still adapted to the circumstances and emergencies of our own age.

But, from reasons of utility at this time, in order to awaken in us a clearer and stronger sense of duty upon the subject, and to impress its scriptural authority and importance more deeply on our minds, it will not be improper to consider the following distribution of ministerial officers in the church, as stated by the Apostle in the 12th chap. of the Ep. to the Rom. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth with diligence; he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness. This distribution comprises in effect, all the minor as well as greater duties of the sacred office; and in the classification of ministerial services, upon the plans of methodism, it is, we apprehend, more literally attempted; and, probably, more fully carried out than in any other ecclesiastical system in christendom. Then, as we profess to be methodists, this of course, is the arrangement

under which we are organized ; and, as our own deliberate act, it rests with most solemn weight upon our respect and observance.

Whether, therefore, in view of official designation, the officer be the President of a District, the Superintendent or Assistant of a circuit or station, a conference missionary, an unstationed minister or preacher, an exhorter or class-leader, it should be remembered, that he is such by the highest official authority ;—supremely from Christ, subordinately from the church ;—and he is consequently under sacred and imperative obligations of duty and service in his appropriate sphere of action.

The rule here will apply equally well to all grades of official appointment, but we mean to restrict it for the present to ministerial responsibility. On the part of the minister, then, it is first of all required of him to consider the nature of his engagement ; that it is reciprocal in its obligations between him and the church—whilst both are equally under the authority of Christ—further, to be faithful to his trust, and to do the work to which he has been appointed, and which he has at least consented to attempt.

Fidelity, when examined and applied in the case, will be found to cover the whole ground ; the appointments and engagements to be fulfilled, the qualifications requisite for an efficient and proper fulfilment of them, and the zeal and spirit with which each is to labour in his department of the work. It is required in stewards, says the apostle, that is, in ministers, for of such he is speaking, that a man be found faithful.

And were this requirement acted on and more generally carried out, not only would brethren be more useful and happy in themselves, but no doubt the confidence and affection engendered thereby, would prompt our churches and congregations to provide more liberally and efficiently for the domestic support and comfort of their ministers and preachers.

To this may be added perseverance, and patient toil in the glorious enterprise in which we are engaged ; that we lay deeply to heart its importance and truth, and do not for small and trivial reasons, abandon a field of labour, and thereby expose to perish precious and immortal souls for whom Christ died. To this we are admonished, and in it we are also encouraged and sustained, by the example of the apostle Paul, who, for the salvation of man and the glory of God encountered difficulties, and braved hardships which we shall never be called to face ; and with a magnanimity of soul befitting a herald of the cross, and his great and heavenly commission, exclaimed, even whilst the terrors of martyrdom immediately confronted him : None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which

I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Hence the abundant and enduring fruit of his labours, and the glorious and signal triumph of his end.

After having preached the gospel of Christ over the length and breadth of the Roman empire, and founded societies and churches in every city and town; after having indoctrinated and confirmed them in the principles and morals of the christian faith; after watering them with tears of unspeakable affection and solicitude, and animating them by his own unshaken confidence in the truth and hopes of the gospel; at the close of this interesting and useful career, mark the great and divine prospects of his soul. I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day. What a model, my brethren, for our patient and persevering imitation.

But, in the next place, these duties of the ministry are co-ordinate with correspondent obligations on the part of the membership. First of all, that official services authorized and ordained by the church, be sustained by the people, and always treated with that respect which is due to the ministerial office, and which is necessary to its efficiency and usefulness. We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. That the duty involved in this point may be felt, and duly appreciated, it is merely required of us to remember our own official acts; that in virtue of them, brethren have been appointed to posts of responsibility and trust; and doubtless we shall then be sensible of the obligation, not so properly laid on us as assumed by us, to sustain them in the important relations which they are called to fill.

This is the aspect in which we desire to present the subject, and in which it must be felt, if it is to exert any just and permanent control over our principles and conduct. With this impression upon our minds we will give our punctual and devout attendance at the house of God—morning and evening of the Lord's day, and at other times—not simply because a favourite minister is to preach, but from higher motives, because the sanctuary of Jehovah is to be open for the solemnities of his worship, and its appropriate and delightful ordinances conducted by his servant, whom, under God, we assisted in appointing to his responsible vocation,—to which may be subjoined, as a reason drawn from the influence of social and personal considerations, involving at the same time most seriously the bearing and fruits of ministerial labour; how chilling and discouraging must be the effect produced upon the mind of any minister—

especially of a sensitive and modest man—when he stands up in the pulpit, instead of attentive and listening hearers, to be obliged to address empty pews or seats, with here and there a drowsy and nodding figure in some awkward imitation of a human being.

It is useless to urge that the crowd will attend only upon eloquent and popular preachers; and that it is human nature, the world over, to act in this way. It is so, because the church will have it so, and it is doubtless high time we had learned that human nature is not of necessity regenerated and sanctified nature, and it is our duty also to teach the world to know the difference by our spirit and example.

That we are not laying down any absurdity or paradox, or claiming too much upon the point under consideration, is clear, both from gospel and from fact; for without producing the authority of the former, it is well known, that in times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, when our souls are stirred up within us, and sinners are awakened and converted to God, then a sense of duty easily takes the place of a false principle, and we hasten with delight to the house of God, not to be entertained by the rhetoric of the pulpit, but to be fed with the bread of life.

Then it is also, as is equally well known, that the unbelieving and unconverted will crowd the sanctuary, and fill it to overflowing, because they discern that God is in and among his people of a truth.

Does our beloved Zion languish, and are we willing, brethren, to join in praying for her prosperity? Remember then that we must have it in this way, or not at all—in the way of duty—the way that Christ himself has appointed, and we ourselves have conventionally agreed on and ratified. If it comes in any other form, it will be but a thief or a robber—a wolf in sheep's clothing—that may promise much, but will assuredly disappoint more.

This is a proper place to notice another branch of laical responsibility, as being more vitally concerned, than is commonly thought, in the spiritual welfare and prosperity of the church. We mean the well timed and wholesome arrangement and administration of fiscal measures. The principle, which, as to its equity and reasonableness, should regulate the whole matter, is with great explicitness laid down in the Scriptures of the New Testament. In commissioning and sending out his twelve Apostles, our Saviour said to them, 'Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey; neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves, (for the workman is worthy of his meat.)'—according to another Evangelist, of his hire—not implying, as is too often the construction of the passage, that ministers of the gospel must needs be destitute of the comforts of life, and should go even naked and barefoot, literally, to fulfil

the intentions of Christ, but, on the contrary, evidently, and very forcibly teaching that, in virtue of devoting themselves to the service of God and the church, ministers should not provide the articles above enumerated at their own cost, but that such things should be furnished at the expense of those for whose benefit their time and services are given and employed.

So also says the Apostle Paul, in a clear and practical comment upon the doctrine of Christ, predicating his argument, first, upon the benevolent spirit and humanity of the law in its provision, that even the labouring brute shall share in the fruits of his toils. 'Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn;' and, secondly, upon the just and equitable economy of maintenance provided for the Levitical priesthood, that they which minister about holy things should live of the things of the temple. 'Even so, says the Apostle, hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.'

That some of our stations and circuits are well regulated in this respect, or at least provide efficiently for their preachers, as the fruit of a good general system, or of great personal liberality, is well known; but that others are too deficient, and that to their own spiritual disadvantage must, we presume, be equally admitted; whilst at the same time, it is not owing so much to the want of means or of generous feelings, as of proper financial arrangement and administration.

The fact is deplorable, and the results most fearful and injurious. Look at them in their unhappy details. Some of our most valuable and useful ministers are, in consequence, compelled to locate; others, for the same reason, are afraid to enter into the work; the characters of worthy and respectable men are assailed for neglect of duty, when, too, the very emotions and cries of nature have obliged them to abstract time from official services in order to look up some scanty subsistence for their suffering families.

Yet more; interesting and promising appointments have been broken up and abandoned, the church discredited, and scores and hundreds who promised well and might have been added to her communion, have, for the want of proper and continued attentions, gone back to the beggarly elements of the world.

Nor is it any relief to the case, that ministers of other churches are in the same predicament. The evil may be greatly increased, but certainly it can never be removed or alleviated by such examples or alliances.

These points which we have thus enumerated and considered, enter, most essentially, into the nature of that internal prosperity

which, in our judgment, we need as a church of Christ, and without which, as already stated, any other condition would be of little value, and probably delusive. But, in the consideration of the subject, it becomes us to take some notice of our external prosperity.

On this point it may very justly be assumed, that the outward and relative prosperity of a church naturally implies its fair and reputable standing and estimation with other Christian churches. But, to secure and maintain this for ourselves, a matter too of no small importance, we must continue, brethren, sound in the doctrines and faith of the gospel, in morals pure and above reproach, and, as members of the same spiritual household, united and attached to each other in bonds of true Christian love.

Next, for purposes of instruction at home, and of usefulness abroad, it will become us to be especially careful in the admission of candidates for the ministry of the word; seeing to it, that they are men taught of God, have a just sense of the solemn responsibility which they propose to assume, and, in virtue of the requisite qualifications, will prove themselves workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

But on this point simple requisition is not alone sufficient; the church must superadd and furnish the means and facilities of proper instruction and qualification. For, although extensive and profound learning is not indispensable, and, apart from the grace of God, could never qualify any man for the duties of the ministry, yet various and cogent reasons conspire to show the necessity of no inconsiderable amount of literary and theological preparation. The fact in the premises, that the Bible is the most important of all books, and that the gospel ministry justly takes precedence of every other employment, is proof conclusive of the need of study and diligent application; that the doctrines and truths of our holy religion may be well understood, and clearly expounded and enforced.

In addition, the care with which our Saviour instructed and prepared the twelve apostles and first teachers of christianity, the thorough and competent tuition under which the apostle Paul was fitted for the work, the many and pointed rules and admonitions laid down by him in his epistles on the subject of ministerial duties and qualifications, the approval which intellectual culture so universally meets in our enlightened age, and the success attendant upon it, when it is accompanied by the grace of God, and the Spirit's unction; the sense of the church as already expressed in the course of studies which she has prescribed to candidates for her ministry, and the very commendable taste and ardour manifested by our younger brethren for mental improvement, according to their opportunities and means,

with our numerous and pressing wants for supplies each conference year; all unite and combine in adding strength to the argument, not only in behalf of the importance of ministerial acquirements, but also of suitable schools and seminaries at which they may be attained.

Such an arrangement would, moreover, we are fully satisfied and convinced, induce many to turn their thoughts to the subject, and we trust with proper views, who else may be entirely discouraged from the attempt; from the want of that assistance which is requisite to furnish them with the necessary qualifications.

Then, in our relation to other christian communities, it doubtless is our duty to treat with kindness and respect their characters and claims, under the charitable hope that they as well as we are sincerely engaged in the glorious enterprise of endeavoring to promote the happiness and salvation of man.

Outward prosperity supposes, moreover, that we are not standing still, nor are we content to live within narrow limits, when so much land remains to be possessed; that, under the impulse of this sentiment, our borders are extending and enlarging; that sinners are converted under our ministry, and members added to our communion, as the effect and fruit of a heavenly and expanding zeal, which is not satisfied to eat its morsel alone, but in gratitude for God's grace, and in love for the souls of men, desires and longs that thousands more, and thousands still again added to them should come to Christ and live.

Lastly, it implies that our church take and occupy her relative and efficient place, in concert with other churches of Christ, in the great moral and evangelical measures and plans of the present age. The gospel of Christ is no sectional or exclusive system; it contemplates the salvation of a world; and, accordingly, our Saviour commanded his apostles to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Under His sanction and authority, therefore, it rests as a standing obligation upon the church in every successive period of her existence, to aid in carrying out the great and benevolent object of His mediation for sinners. As a branch of His church, then, we cannot discharge our duty or expect the candle of the Lord to shine in our midst, if we remain indifferent to one essential end of our Christian organization, and neglect the means by which, in plain accordance with the Saviour's designs, it is instrumentally to be carried into effect.

Such, beloved brethren, in our judgment, are some of the essential elements of that prosperity which is desirable to our church, in view both of her internal condition and economy, and of her external relations and affinities.

Second. Let us, in the next place, consider WHY THEY ARE PROPER SUBJECTS OF PRAYER, AND AS WELL THE CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH THEY SHOULD BE DESIRED AND ASKED. 'Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.'

The authority from Scripture for offering prayer to God in any case, fully justifies us in praying for the blessings named in the text, and also precisely as we have applied the subject to ourselves. First, God only is the fountain of mercy and grace, and he alone is able to save and to prosper. Accordingly, he has commanded all the ends of the earth to look unto him, and be saved; as his prerogative and right; assuring us that it is the very essence of idolatry, and therefore the greatest offence against his sovereignty and throne to pray for pardon and salvation to any other being. For this end, in view of the apostacy and guilt of man, involving, likewise, his insufficiency and his unworthiness, God has most graciously sent into the world his Son, our Saviour, to redeem us from ruin and death; has given the Holy Spirit to enlighten our ignorance, sanctify our natures, and help our infirmities; has appointed the ordinances and means of religion; has, again and again, directed us in his word to seek his face, and has promised in the most inviting terms, that, if we do so, we shall assuredly find mercy and salvation. As there is truth and sincerity with God, as He is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; as, also, there is with him unlimited power, as well as infinite love; for, hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? then may we pray unto him, expecting to receive.

But, in addition to all this, the certain availableness of prayer, when offered aright, as an essential doctrine of holy writ; and, in this view of it, is presented under various aspects, as a duty and a privilege, to be made for ourselves, and as well for others; for our own personal and complete salvation, for the salvation of sinners, and for the sanctification and glory of the church. In proof of this point, we need simply refer to the instructions of our Saviour to his disciples, as to the mode and success of prayer, whether for private or social ends; teaching us to ask, that we may receive, to seek that we may find, and to knock, that it may be opened to us; and that when two or three are met in his name, and shall agree as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of his Father who is in heaven.

But once more on this point, and in conclusion of it, prayer, as it is so available, is likewise essentially necessary; for without it nothing spiritual and saving is given or obtained; and of that nature certainly are the blessings under consideration. However long

the providence of God may bear with the sinner, and, in patience, endure his rebellion and ingratitude, to give him space for repentance and reformation; however much he may prosper the fruit of his labour and toil, and cheer his heart with food and gladness; in virtue of his covenant with man, that, while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease; yet, as to grace on earth, and salvation and glory in heaven, neither has ever been given, nor ever will be, without humble, earnest, and sincere prayer to God. Pray we must then, if either we will be saved as individuals, or prospered as a church of Christ.

Such, we may add, was the doctrine of the apostles and of the early and primitive church, and numerous and instructive examples have they left us of their practical confidence in it; and such equally was the doctrine and consequent practice of our fathers, in the days of Wesley and Whitfield, in view of which an able and disinterested writer has bestowed upon Methodists as such; one of the most distinguished and valuable compliments they have ever received. 'After men became Christians,' says Dr. Paley, in his Evidence of Christianity, 'much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourse with one another, and correspondence with other societies. Perhaps their mode of life, in its form and habit, was not very unlike the *Unitas Fratrum*, or the Modern Methodists.' Alas! my brethren, that this glory should ever have departed from the churches of Christ. May God grant to let it rest upon us as a people, and in all our spirit and actions to shine as our beauty and our defence.

Third. Lastly, brethren, we are encouraged from the doctrine of the text and the example of the Psalmist, to ask these blessings now. 'Save now,' &c. Under any circumstances this prayer would be appropriate and becoming, seeing we are never free from want, and are always dependent on God for help; but especially is it so at the present time, if we have at all succeeded in a faithful sketch of our ecclesiastical condition, and of the agencies necessary to sustain and improve it.

Within ourselves, as individuals and as christian societies, it is evident that we need a more elevated and scriptural piety; more of the spirit and temper of the gospel of Christ; a greater regard for our numerous and inestimable privileges, and more heartfelt concern for the influence of religion upon our families, and on all connected with our communion and fellowship. These things we all feel and acknowledge, notwithstanding any equality or even advantage we

may have in a comparison with others ; and whilst we acknowledge them, I sincerely trust that it is our fervent wish, that, in all such respects, our condition may be improved. If so, now it needs to be done, and now it may be done.

Add to this the interesting retrospect which presses itself upon us, of past circumstances and difficulties, connected with our history as a separate christian people. Several important and eventful years have rolled over our heads since we were called under God's wise and well directed providence, to an independent rank and heritage amongst the churches in this land. And, although in that time, it has been our lot to encounter many and various conflicts, both external and domestic, still under the mercy of Heaven, we survive them all as a church of Christ, and hope yet to live. God in his grace and goodness has often smiled on our labours, and crowned them with his blessing ; and as we have needed, has raised up for us able and useful ministers of his word, under whose instrumentality many have been awakened out of the fatal slumbers of sin, to open their eyes in transport and gratitude upon the glorious day of their merciful visitation. But notwithstanding these things, great and numerous are our present wants, and urgent is the necessity and obligation upon us to cry out for divine favour and help. Not a few of our valued and useful preachers, and still more of our dear and beloved membership, have been summoned from our ranks, and taken from labour to reward ; but, with this diminution of society, and assistance, our work is no ways lessened, nor our responsibilities at all abated. The field before and around us is whitening for the harvest, and calls aloud for efficient and instant labour and culture.

In our own state, several counties on its eastern shore have, to this day but very partially felt our influence, whilst, in its western districts, still more scarcely know us at all, even in name ; and then in Virginia, in Delaware, and Pennsylvania, we are now barely touching isolated points on large and inviting surfaces, which, in their entire length and breadth, are languishing for the want of spiritual husbandry and improvement. And this, notwithstanding the well meant and well directed labours and efforts of other christian churches. These surely are reasons loud and eloquent, why we should be fervent in prayer, and firm and united in patient co-operations.

In conclusion, brethren, another conference occasion has again convened us from the different departments of our vocation and ministry, to join in official deliberations upon our spiritual concerns and interests ; and whilst so employed, we shall constantly need assistance from above, to guide us in our counsels, and govern in our

decisions; that with the judgment and forbearance, and dignity, becoming the servants of Christ, and the members of his body, we may be enabled to transact the business of the present session, to the glory of God, and the advancement of his cause and kingdom.

On an occasion like the present, it becomes us particularly to remember, that it is not merely the temporal business of the church, however important, but also, and more especially, its spiritual concerns, that we are called on to attend to; that it being with us a season of much fervency and engagedness in prayer, and of great zeal and faithfulness in our pulpit labours, God may be pleased both to smile upon our official counsels, and to bless abundantly the word of his grace to the salvation of those who may attend upon it.

It is then a fit time now, when so many ministers of the sanctuary are met together, and with them official delegates of the churches from the various sections of the district, and all assembled with the single and professed object of promoting the welfare of Zion;—it is doubtless a fit time, to look unto God for present salvation and prosperity. And sure I am it will come, yes, verily will it come, like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth; if we have faith in God's promise, and wait for its fulfilment. Let us then come up to the work with one heart, and all unite in the holy resolution; that for Zion's sake we will not hold our peace, and that for Jerusalem's sake will we not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.

