

THE PULPIT.

A SCHOLARLY SUNDAY SERMON BY DR. WILLIAM YOUNG CHAPMAN.

Subject: Churchgoing Abolished.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—Dr. William Young Chapman, pastor of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, preached Sunday at both services in the Central Presbyterian Church. In the morning he had as his subject "Churchgoing Abolished." The text was from Revelation xxi:22: "And I saw no temple therein." Dr. Chapman said:

Among many things in this sublime apocalypse of St. John hard to be understood there is one thing that stands out with clearness and certainty, and that is the vision of the perfected church, the ideal society. It is the same church triumphant and perfect there that is militant and defective here. The same souls that struggle and suffer here are they that walk in white and wave palms of victory there. Here we see as in a glass darkly. There they see face to face. Here we know in part, there they know as they are known. John had given to him a divine horoscope, revealing the consummation and absolute perfection of the essential characteristics of the kingdom of God concentrated in the imperial capital of the universe—the city of God. By every sort of figure and symbol are its glories set forth. And we learn as much about it by what is said negatively as by what is said positively. Thus we are told it has streets of gold and gates of pearl and a sea of glass and all the most costly and beautiful things of this world, while all that is disagreeable—pain, sickness, sorrow, sin, death—is wanting there. There is nothing to hurt or annoy, no night, no more sea, no temple.

And it strikes us at first thought as very strange that there should be no temple, no central place of worship in a city which we are accustomed to think is altogether devoted to religion. And yet the text states a great truth which I want to treat broadly, and I believe the text contains easily the subject by which I have chosen to entitle this discourse, "Churchgoing Abolished." The end being attained, the means are discontinued. Hence there are no more churches, no times, nor places, nor forms; no liturgies, no rituals, no ecclesiastical machinery such as we know here.

And, surely, this must come as a welcome announcement to many a tired churchgoer in this world who finds his religious duties more or less irksome, and to many a non-churchgoer, who does not feel quite comfortable in his neglect of formal religious exercises. Many there are who indulge an indifferent hope of heaven as a sort of Mohammedan paradise, where they may enjoy an eternal holiday, basking in the uperated rays, drinking from and bathing in the waters of the fountain of life, eating the twelve manner of fruits and sipping on the glassy sea. But they would hardly be attracted to a place where this ceaseless round of ecclesiastical duties should go on forever. Imagine such a one enjoying the delights of that glorious city, coming the towers thereof, marking well her bulwarks and admiring her foundations of jasper and sapphire and chalcidony and sardius and emerald and sardonix and chrysolite and beryl and topaz and chrysolite and jacinth and amethyst, when suddenly there comes a peal from the golden bells and poor soul, he must take himself off to prayers.

Let such a one be comforted, for John says he saw no temple there, and we dare to infer from that statement that there is no synagogue, nor meeting house, nor Sunday, nor formal religious exercise, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

It becomes us to inquire more closely into the truth involved here. And if what John saw was the church triumphant, if the conditions he saw were the perfection of what is rudimentary here, if the Holy City, New Jerusalem, is continually coming down from God out of heaven, then we ought to be realizing more and more on earth that heavenly condition.

I believe that condition is illustrated by the progressive church of Christ on earth. Think for a moment of the advantages we have over the ancient Jewish worshiper. He had his central place of worship. Three times a year he must make his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, from even the remotest corner of the land. Over many a rugged mile he must travel with his family and his sheep and oxen for sacrifice and his tent and provision for his journey, in order to perform his religious duties. There at Jerusalem was the temple. There he expected to meet God, or at least there God would be propitious. There was the priest who could offer his sacrifice and present his confession to God. There was the holy place and the most holy place, the locus of the Jewish worship. Even in far off lands, when he worshiped he turned his face toward the temple, as if his heart were there, in any case.

Then, too, his daily devotions found expression in a most elaborate ceremonial. There were divers washings, as there were multifarious causes of uncleanness. There were tidings and manifold offerings. There were sin offerings and peace offerings, all associated with infinite trouble to the worshiper. These minute requirements were infinitely multiplied by the Jew in the time of Christ and His apostles, so that Peter spoke of it as a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

Now it was immunity from these intolerable burdens that was the first great practical boon of Christianity. Our Lord stated the precious truth to the woman at the well. Said she, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (Terezim), and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It was one of the first meanings of Christ's sacrifice, to abolish the temple. When He bowed His head in death on Calvary and said "It is finished," "the veil of the temple was rent

in twain from the top to the bottom," and the whole significance of the temple service passed away. The temple itself did not long survive the death of Christ, and the ecclesiastical capital was soon destroyed. Henceforth the Church of God in the world was on a different basis. Henceforth God became accessible without offering of priest, without temple or altar, and irrespective of locality. We are enjoying in a measure that rest which Christ came to give—rest from ceremonial burdens. We are living in the dispensation of the spirit, and the church is wherever the spirit moves men to worship. Wherever the Holy Spirit has gone and planted the gospel of Christ in the hearts of men, turning their thoughts and affections to God, there is the church. It matters not whether it be in Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand. It matters not whether it be in gorgeous cathedral or in mountain cave. It matters not whether the worshiper be white or black, whether he worship on his knees or on his feet or on his back, so long as he worship in spirit and in truth. Christianity so far as it consists of a visible performance at all is the most natural and spontaneous outflow of the religious instincts to God, and religious worship is essentially a personal communion with God, and in such form and place as is best suited to the worshiper and most in accordance with the will of God.

Hence, you will see, one of the prime characteristics of the church triumphant is perfect liberty. "Get religion," said Augustine, "and do as you please." By which he meant if you truly get religion you will always please to do right. Paul means the same thing when he says, "If ye be in the spirit ye are not under the law." And Jesus meant the same when He said, "Make the tree good and his fruit will be good." And hence, the ideal Christian life is perfectly spontaneous. Obedience is not by compulsion of law, but by impulsion of love. "All the law is fulfilled in one word, 'Thou shalt love.'"

We have heard not a little about "the consent of the governed," and we are likely to hear more. The statement as it stands in that famous document will not bear a literal application. But there is good reason to believe that our fathers knew what they were talking about. If they had said, "government derives its potency from the consent of the governed" they would have been uttering the exact truth. Statutes are inoperative until the subjects consent. Perfect society implies perfect acquiescence in the will of the superior or law making power. The more society progresses toward unity, the simpler and more equitable will government become, because the more general will be the consent or acquiescence in the government. Paul says, "I consent unto the law that it is good," and in the perfect society of John's vision each man enjoys perfect liberty because the will of the governor and the governed are in perfect correspondence. Each individual does as he pleases and at the same time does as He pleases.

In some such way the perfect community is characterized by perfect unity without uniformity. Each performs his own duty in his own way, but is all the while in perfect harmony with his neighbor. Again, in the perfected society there is no distinction between the religious and the secular. Here we have our times and places of religion. We gather here in this house of prayer, believing that God is present here as He is not in other places, as, indeed, He has promised to be. It is God's concession to our limitations and infirmities. But it is far from the ideal. We are apt to identify religion with the means of religion, rather than religion itself. We get grace by our religious exercises to keep God's commandments in all our walks of life, and that is religion. The members of the church triumphant are equally religious every day of the week and every hour of the day, and hence, church-going in our sense of the word, is forever abolished. In that society, one does not need to say to his brother, "Know the Lord," for all shall know Him from the least to the greatest. There is no more preaching, "no temple therein."

Once more; it is obvious that the more faithful and devoted we are to the means of religion here the sooner we shall be fitted to do without them. Your child, learning to play the piano, finds it hard labor to spell out note by note, conforming to the rules and rudiments of practice. By and by she will go beyond the rules. She will acquire the genius of the skilled performer. And the more diligently we observe our religious duties here the sooner we shall get beyond them. The more faithful we are now to the times and places of religious worship the sooner shall we be ready for that society where all life is religious.

Zacchariah had that vision ages before John had it, when he saw "Holiness to the Lord" inscribed on the bells of the horses and the pots in the Lord's house, as sacred as the bowls of the altar; yea, and every pot in Jerusalem as holy as the vessels of the sanctuary. That was at least a glimpse of the templeless city of God.

And now shall we not keep before us that ideal? Let us not be discouraged by the great disparity between that far-off perfection and present reality. The poet well expresses our feelings:

Oh, Land of Promise, from what Pis-gah's height
Can I behold thy stretch of peaceful bowers,
Thy golden harvest flowing out of sight,
The nestled homes and sun-illumined towers?
Gazing upon the sunset's high-heaped gold,
Its crags of opal and of chrysolite,
Its deeds on deeps of glory, that unfold,
Still brightening abysses,
And blazing precipices,
Whence but a scanty leap it seems to heaven,
Sometimes a glimpse is given
Of thy gorgeous realm, thy more unstunted blisses.

Gazing upon that vision, let us be faithful to our temple duties here that we may be fitted for that city where there is no temple, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

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