

# A SERMON AGAINST MURDER.

## The Characteristic Crime of the United States.

From the News and Courier.

The following plain but thoughtful and suggestive sermon against murder, a crime now so common in our State and never capitally punished where it is committed by white men, was delivered in the Presbyterian Church, at Yorkville, by the pastor, Rev. W. S. Neville. The suggestions of speedy trial and no bail, in all cases of homicide, should receive the serious consideration of our people if they are really in earnest in their expressed wish to put a stop to the prevalence of bloody crimes:

"Moreover, ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall surely be put to death."—Numbers xxxv, 31.

This text brings to our attention the general subject of murder.

Let us consider first the enormity of the crime. God teaches us in His word that murder is one of the most atrocious crimes that can be committed by man; and our enlightened judgment corroborates God's estimate of this sin. There is more involved in this sin, perhaps, than in any other. In order to realize, to some extent, at least, the comprehensive sweep of the issues involved in this sin, just consider, for a moment, how the man who is murdered is affected. He is ushered into the untried and awful realities of eternity, and, as a rule, without a moment's warning. His connection with this world is forever severed and his destiny is eternally sealed.

The man who commits murder is assuming a prerogative which belongs to God exclusively, and one which is especially sacred to Him. Hence the man who takes this prerogative and exercises it without the direct permission of God is guilty of a very heinous crime in the sight of God.

Murder is sacrilege in God's sight. It is infinitely different from taking the life of a dumb brute. It is not only violating a commandment of God—this is bad enough—but it is defacing the image of God. It is practically an effort to put an end to a being who is made in the image of God. Yes, the murderer does all he can to annihilate not only a product of God's creative power, but a person who was made in the image of God and who bears upon his very being the stamp of Deity.

Oh, how deep a man has sunk into the depths of iniquity who can commit this crime! Human language is too weak to depict the real character of this sin. It is as black as hell itself.

Take as an example to illustrate the real character of this sin the horrible crime committed a short time ago at Lake City, in our own beloved State. By looking at that crime you can have some conception as to the real character of murder. Look at the dark picture. Men going to the home of an unprotected family in the darkness of the night, while the inmates of that home are asleep, and actually setting fire to the house; and then shooting the poor creatures down like rabbits as they try to escape from the advancing flames! See that mother, with the true instinct of a mother, carrying in her arms her infant child, thus helping the helpless, and these fiends in human form actually shooting the little innocent child! Could the devil himself have been guilty of a more atrocious crime? And just to think, my friends, that this cowardly crime, this devilish deed, was committed by South Carolinians! We have been proud of our bravery and chivalry; and justly so; but a black blemish has been placed upon our fair escutcheon. Who would have thought that a sufficient number of South Carolinians, even from the mountains to the seaboard, could have been found who would commit such a cowardly act! Let us hope that the number in our beloved State who are capable of committing such a crime is very small.

In the next place let me call your attention to the fact that this crime is on the increase, especially in this country. Statistics show that murder in the United States is increasing with startling and alarming rapidity. The number has been growing until now there are more than ten thousand homicides committed in this country in one year. The number did not exceed the one thousand mark till 1886. Just think of it; more than ten times as many homicides now as there were twelve years ago! Then consider how the number of lynchings has increased in this country. In 1886 there were in the United States 133 lynchings, and in 1895 there were 263, nearly twice as many in less than ten years.

When we study these figures it is not surprising that thoughtful people are everywhere considering the subject and trying to devise some means by which the great evil may be abated. In England, which has a population of about 30,000,000, there are only 377 murders on an average every year. Truly can we say that our land is a polluted land, and that we are living in an age of murder as far as this country is concerned.

Let us consider now some of the causes which have led to the increase of this crime in this country. Sometimes by discovering the causes of a malady, an efficacious remedy can be prescribed.

What are the causes for so much bloodshed in our land?

Of course, the great cause of murder is the depravity of the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." While the depravity of the human heart is the fountain head of this deadly stream of murder and iniquity, it is not the cause that demands our attention just now; for this cause has been in existence ever since the first murder was committed, and it will continue to exist as long as there is a human heart that remains in a state of total depravity.

Let us notice some of the causes which have been at work for the last few years as instruments in increasing the number of homicides in our land.

1. Sentimentalism of the age is one cause. Many men think that it is barbarous to punish even the most notorious scoundrel who has committed an atrocious crime, except in the mildest manner. This idea has so taken hold of the people in some quarters that they have practically annihilated in their wicked and distorted imaginations the reality of sin, and the doctrine of retributive justice. This new theology has gone into some churches and even into some pulpits. You can hear of men even in the pulpit now hooting at the doctrine of future punishment, and these men profess to be ministers of that Christ whose preaching had so much of this doctrine in it. They are too sentimental, falsely so-called, and too cowardly, rightly so-called, to teach what Christ preached. They have so magnified the love of God that they have completely destroyed in their minds the justice of God.

As long as the tendency continues in this direction you may expect an increase of crime, not only of murder, but of other crimes also. If murder is to be arrested in its bloody and hellward march, there must be a return in our believing, and in our preaching, and in our practice to the doctrines taught by Christ and Paul and Augustine and Knox and Spurgeon. You teach men that God is all love and only love, and that the doctrine of future punishment is a freak of the bewildered imagination; then you open the flood-gates of iniquity and our country will be swept by a deluge of destruction. Men may think that they are in this way destroying a hell in the world to come, but they are in reality laying the foundation for a hell in this world as well as in the future world.

2. Lack of home training is another cause of the increase in crime. I think that any man of serious thought who takes a calm and dispassionate view of the situation along this line will certainly behold a scene which is, in the highest degree, alarming and distressing. Whenever authority in the home is not exercised by the parents and is ignored by the children, as it is at the present day, it takes no man of broad intelligence to explain the prevalence of so much crime in our country. The home is the fountain head of society, and the stream can never rise above the fountain. You sow the wind in the home and you will reap the whirlwind in society.

We see the bad effects of this lack of home training manifesting themselves everywhere in the land—in the school room, in the State government, and in society generally. People have very little respect for properly constituted authority, and very little reverence for law. The teacher who tries to administer discipline in his school to-day, especially as it was prescribed by one of the wisest men that ever lived, is in great danger of incurring the wrath and displeasure of the parent. People to-day are a great deal wiser (in their own estimation) than ever Solomon was. He believed in the proper use of the rod, but people now look upon that instrument as relic of a barbarous age. Yes, and we are reaping the fruits of this so-called superior wisdom, and we are going to reap more of them, if things continue as they are now going. I would rather have the old, unadulterated Puritanism of the past in our homes a thousand times, than the reckless government which prevails in so many families to-day.

3. Disregard for law and the authorities of the law is another cause which is at work in producing so much crime. The spirit of lawlessness seems to have taken hold of the people in every section of the land. The great question that concerns many is: How can I violate the law and escape punishment? They have no respect, whatever, for the law, nor for the authorities of the law. The violation of the law troubles them no more than the eating of a palatable

and wholesome meal would do when they are hungry. People should be taught to reverence the law, and to look upon the officers of the law as servants of the Almighty. And until this is done there will be no change for the better in the present state of affairs.

4. Intemperance causes many murders. How many men have been ushered into eternity without a moment's warning by this enemy of mankind! And yet there are many people who want to license this agency of evil and send it abroad through the land upon its mission of destruction.

5. Carrying concealed deadly weapons is another cause of so many murders. It seems that there are many men to-day who look upon the pistol as a necessary part of their toilet. It certainly has a bad look. The man who carries the pistol is prepared to use it when the opportunity presents itself. He certainly would not carry it unless he thought there was a probability that he would need it. When a man carries a pistol in his pocket it is frequently an evidence that he carries murder in his heart. Many a man has been killed by the ready pistol which was close at hand who would never have been killed if the pistol had not been there. Such killings usually result from some momentary excitement. If the men involved had time to think about the issues at stake, perhaps, in nine cases out of ten the killing would never occur. But the ready pistol is at hand to do its work; it is brought into requisition and life is destroyed.

6. Failure to execute the law is the last cause that I shall mention, and this cause needs to be emphasized. The fact that so many murderers are acquitted encourages this crime, and has been one of the chief causes of its increase. In 1886 there were in this country 1,140 homicides and only eighty-three legal executions. In 1895 there were 10,500 homicides and about 153 legal executions. More than seven times as many homicides in less than ten years, and not twice as many legal executions! Here is a satisfactory explanation of the rapid and alarming increase of this crime. Our Courts fail to do their duty. Instead of being Courts of justice, as they are called, they are frequently places where justice is outraged. It is almost impossible these days to convict a man who has money and social standing.

Let me call your attention now to the remedy.

1. The slayer should be brought to a speedy trial. The longer the murderer can have his case put off, or continued in the Courts, the stronger the probability that he will be cleared of his crime. If he, has a bad case, this is the course he pursues. How many guilty men have gone free because their cases have been postponed from time, till the people have lost interest in them or some important witness had died. It is a shame! The newspapers tell of a case that occurred recently in Alabama, where a man murdered a woman. It took five years to settle the case. The man had advantage of five trials. At the first he was sentenced to death; at the second, to life imprisonment; at the third, to fifty years' imprisonment; at the fourth, to ten years' imprisonment, and at the fifth he was cleared altogether. This may be an extreme case, but it illustrates what is going on every day in our land.

When a human being is killed the matter ought to be settled just as soon as possible. The law ought to be so framed that an extra Court could be held in such cases, and have the man who is charged with such a crime tried immediately. If the man is innocent he ought to want this; and, if he is guilty, the community and law and justice ought to demand it. If this could be done—and it can be—it would exert a tremendous influence in the right direction. But how is it now? Everything seems to be in the murderer's favor. The poor man, who is dead, has very few rights, even before the law, as it is administered at the present day. And yet God's word says that the murdered man's cause is so just and righteous as to demand nothing less than the blood of the man who shed his blood and to demand it as early as possible.

Suppose that a murder case could be settled, as a rule, in ten days after the crime had been committed, and the guilty man executed in twelve days after the murder! What an impression it would make on the entire community and what a terror it would be to evil-doers! But the way things are conducted now the time which elapses between the commission of the crime and the final adjudication of the case is so long, that, practically, in the minds of the people, there is no connection between the two events. The murder seems like a dream.

2. A large reward ought to be offered for the man who has done the killing, and when it is known who committed the deed, the reward ought to be offered for the man, and not simply for his conviction. A reward offered for a man's conviction is a very weak incentive these days to induce people to try to capture him. When a man

flee from the authorities, it is prima facie evidence that he is guilty. For, as a rule, now it is to the interest even of the guilty man to give himself up. So few are convicted these days that usually the safest place for the murderer is in the Court room, for he may expect soon to be made free there by law. When one person takes the life of another and flees from the law, the State ought to offer a very large reward for the man. This would be productive of two good results—it would encourage a faithful effort to secure the man, and it would make the impression on the minds of the people that the State puts a high valuation on human life.

3. The man who has killed his fellow man ought not to be let out on bond, guilty or innocent. He may be innocent of murder. If so, there is no disgrace in remaining a few days in prison. A speedy trial will soon set the innocent man free. The right to let men out on bond who are charged with murder is greatly abused, and no doubt has been the cause of many a guilty man becoming free in the end. It is almost impossible to convict a man who has been out on bond, practically a free man. The murderer knows this. Hence about the first thing his lawyers do after he has been placed in jail is to try to get him out on bond. The law ought to be so changed that this evil will be stopped.

4. The law against carrying concealed deadly weapons ought to be enforced better than it is. It is a good law. In fact, it would be well to have a law forbidding the manufacture and sale of the pistol. There is very little legitimate business for the pistol to do in this world; it is so small, compared to the great evils wrought by it that its utter destruction and annihilation would be a great blessing to the race.

5. The people ought to hold the officers of the law responsible. If the officers fail to enforce the law, the people ought to rebuke and condemn this failure in no uncertain sounds. If public sentiment against lawlessness were stronger, if the officers knew that they would be held responsible by the people, then there would be a more rigid enforcement of the law, and this, of course, would decrease the lawlessness that now prevails in the land. Public sentiment needs to be toned up and made so strong that it will be felt both by the evil doer and by the officer of the law.

6. The law against murder should be enforced. The guilty man should be punished. The penalty that is prescribed against murder both by human and Divine law is death. Hear what God says: "Moreover, ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death." Again, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he him." This is God's law on the subject of mur-

der. The murderer has caused death, and he is to pay the penalty of suffering death himself. There is no alternative. There is no recommendation to mercy. This is a modern device and of human origin. Death is the penalty. It is severe, but no more so than the crime.

The way to stop murder is to enforce the law against the crime. As long as the murderer stands a good chance to be acquitted there will still be an increase in this crime. But if a man knows that murder is the sure road to the gallows he will think a long time before he will commit the crime—in fact, he will think about it so long that in the great majority of cases the crime will never be committed, at least as far as the overt act is concerned. It is said that when capital punishment was abolished in Italy, in 1895, that there was an increase of murders of 42 percent. The best way to decrease the number of murders is to increase the number of hangings.

In conclusion, let us go away from this place deeply impressed with the gravity of this subject. It is important that all good people and all good agencies should raise their voices and their influence against this gigantic evil, which has been on the increase to such an alarming extent in the last few years. The press, the pulpit and the people ought to unite their forces and their resources to crush out this atrocious and national crime.

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