

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND J. C. RYLE, D.D.,

Lord Bishop of Liverpool

LONDON HODDER AND STOUGHTON

PATERNOSTER ROW

MCM

PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years*’ ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,
Archdeacon of Warrington,

LIVERPOOL, *March 1st, 1900.*

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900. [Bishop Ryle died 10th June 1900.]

DANIEL

“Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”—DANIEL vi. 5.

IT would be impossible, I think, to imagine a higher testimony to a man’s character than you have heard in these words. You know how ready the world is to find fault with a Christian—how closely his conduct is watched, how eagerly his shortcomings are proclaimed—and happy indeed are those who by grace are so enabled to live, that the godless and profane can find no occasion against them.

In order, however, that you may fully understand the peculiar value of the testimony in my text, you ought to know something of the time and circumstances in which it was given.

Daniel, who was a prince of the royal family of Judah, and descended directly from David, had been carried to Babylon as a prisoner, with many other Jews, when Jerusalem was destroyed. While there, it pleased God to bring him into favour with the heathen kings of Babylon, and he was advanced to great dignity and honour. Nor was his honour ever taken from him; for when Belshazzar was overthrown, and the kingdom of Babylon was taken by the Medes and Persians, the Lord inclined the heart of Darius the Mede to make Daniel the first among his counsellors, who ordered all things under the king. But the wicked followers of Darius became jealous of Daniel. They made a conspiracy against him, and for a while they succeeded; for they obtained a decree that Daniel should be cast into the den of lions. But God, whom he served, here came to his assistance: he was miraculously preserved; his enemies were condemned, and perished in his stead; and King Darius gave glory to God.

Such is a short account of the interesting history which you will find in the chapter from which my text is taken—a chapter which I take occasion to recommend to your particular attention.

I purpose this afternoon to speak on two points only in this history. One is the character of Daniel, which here came out like gold from the fire, as an example for your imitation. The other is the mysterious dealings of God with him, as a ground for our instruction and comfort. May God the Holy Spirit apply the subject to all your consciences; may none of you be content with admiring the faith and patience of the saints, but may you be led to pray for the grace of God, that you may follow in their steps.

I. First, then, with respect to Daniel’s character, I would observe there are *three points* to be especially noticed.

(a) There is his steady walk with God. He was now ninety years of age; he had spent more than the ordinary life of man in the very heart of a wicked

city and a corrupt court. He had riches and honours and everything to make this world enjoyable; but he never turned aside from the narrow way, either to the right hand or the left. The eyes of all were fixed upon him; many envied and hated him. They examined his public conduct; they inquired into his private character; they sifted his words and actions; but they sought in vain for any ground of accusation. He was so steady, so upright, so conscientious, that they could find no occasion or fault in him—they could not touch him except as concerning the law of his God. Oh, what an unanswerable argument is a believer's life! Oh, what an epistle of Christ is the daily conduct of a child of God! Men cannot see your hearts, nor understand your principles, but they can see your lives; and if they find that pious masters, servants, brothers, friends, sisters, husbands, wives, do far exceed all others in their several positions, then you are bringing glory to God and honour to your Redeemer. Think not that your profession is worth anything, if it is not known of others by its fruit; without this it is little better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. We do not find that Daniel blew his trumpet before him, and talked everywhere about his own experience; but he walked close to God, and his life spoke for him, and his character became known in Babylon, and even his enemies were obliged to confess, The hand of God is here, the Lord is with this man of a truth.

(b) Another point which I would have you notice is Daniel's habit of private prayer. This was the hidden cause of all his steadiness, and it was discovered accidentally on this occasion. It seems that his enemies had obtained a decree of the king, that whosoever should ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days should be cast into the den of lions. And having laid this snare for this holy man, we read that they assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before God.

We are also told that he was in the habit of kneeling upon his knees and praying three times a day; this was the practice of holy David, as we read in the Psalms, and this was the spirit of the centurion in the Acts, who prayed to God always. So Paul exhorts the Ephesians to pray always with all prayer and supplications, and the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing; and such has been the habit of all the most eminent saints of God: they have not been content with a few cold heartless words every morning and every night, they have lived in the spirit of prayer, and sent up many a short earnest petition throughout the day.

Moreover, we are told that Daniel prayed with his windows open towards Jerusalem, and this is a most important circumstance. He did this, and so did every pious Jew, not only because it was the land of his fathers and the land of promise, not simply because God would be worshipped there and there only, but chiefly because all the types and emblems of the Messiah, the one

way of salvation, the altar, the sacrifice, and the high priest, were to be found there. And so also we, if we would have our prayers heard, must pray towards the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Temple, our Altar, our High Priest and our Sacrifice. These are the prayers which God will answer; this is the only way by which we can draw near with confidence, and find grace to help in time of need. Mark well, beloved, the habit of private prayer: here is the secret of that steadiness which Daniel showed in Babylon—here was the staff which preserved him upright in the middle of temptations.

We know that he had all the cares of government upon his shoulders. He must have been surrounded with the business and affairs of nations,—but none of these things prevented him from drawing near to God.

Nor was he a man to say “I am a chosen servant of God, I need not be so anxious about means”; he knew that God would keep him, but not unless he showed anxiety to have protection, not without diligence in using all the means of grace. Oh, he will rise in judgment and condemn many a one, who dares to think that he will find mercy while he lives in the neglect of regular heartfelt private devotion!

(c) The last point to be observed in Daniel’s character is his faith, his confidence in God. The decree appeared, forbidding all sorts of worship for thirty days on pain of death; and oh, how many professors of our generation would have held their peace! how many would have said, “It is but a short time, we need not give offence; the Lord doth not require us to lose our lives in His service”? But look at Daniel: he knew that the writing was signed,—he knew that he was watched,—he knew that his life was at stake,—and yet he went to his house and kneeled on his knees and prayed as he did aforesaid. He did not on the one hand run into danger, nor did he on the other flinch from it: here was no carnal policy, no time-serving, no crooked contrivance, no love of expediency. He made a straight path for his feet; he did as usual, neither more nor less; and why? Look at the twenty-third verse: he believed in his God. Mark here the fruits of daily communion with God; see how a habit of prayer will produce quietness and assurance in the hour of trial and difficulty.

There never have been wanting lewd men of the baser sort, who say, Where is the use of your praying? what good will it do you? But wait till the days of affliction come upon you, and the Lord will provide you with an answer. A habit of prayer will impart special reliance upon God in time of danger; it will give a special boldness; it will secure a special deliverance, for them that honour God He will honour. Happy indeed are those who, like Daniel, pray without ceasing: they will find within them the same spirit of faith, they never need fear being surprised, they are like him, always the same and always ready.

II. Let us now consider the other branch of our subject: I mean the mysterious dealings of God with His faithful and holy servant.

(a) Observe, then, there was first a season of darkness. Who would have supposed that God would have allowed iniquity so far to triumph as to leave Daniel in the hands of enemies! Who would have thought that this pious old man would be cast into the den of lions. But God's ways are not as our ways; and wonderful as it may appear, the wicked were permitted to work their will for a season: he was accused of breaking the laws; he was pronounced guilty; he was condemned to death; the king laboured to deliver him, but he could not; the decree could not be altered—Daniel must die. He was let down into this pit—the den of savage beasts, and a stone was laid upon the mouth of the den. And then, no doubt, he was looked upon as one dead; sin appeared to have prevailed, the wicked rejoiced at their success, and the righteous, the little flock at Babylon, wept and mourned to think that a brother, a faithful witness, had been taken from the earth.

Pause here, beloved, for an instant. This hour of darkness seems to you a mystery. But is it not agreeable to all the dealings of God with man? Do you not often see things hard to be understood in the world around you? How often the wicked prosper, and have all that man could desire; how often iniquity abounds and the love of God waxes cold—and the righteous are oppressed and silenced and afraid; how often it seems as if the Lord has forgotten this earth, and cares not though His servants are persecuted and His name blasphemed. How often we feel disposed to cry, how long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge Thyself on the ungodly!

And does not the Christian often see things hard to be explained in his own heart? Is he not often tried with seasons of darkness and sorrow? Yes: many a believer can testify that sometimes he has felt like Paul before his shipwreck; neither sun nor stars have appeared for many days, and almost every hope of being saved has been taken away,—many a one could tell you that the enemy has sometimes come in upon him like a flood. He has been overwhelmed with afflictions and temptations, he has been ready to cry out of the deep, as it were, “Lord I am sinking, my soul is among lions, I am destitute, afflicted, tormented, deserted, forlorn, forsaken.”

Yes: God's ways are often difficult and mysterious to His people. We cannot see the meaning of many things which happen around us. We think them hard, we almost quarrel with the Lord's arrangements; but they that are really wise will be patient, they will wait to see the end, and lay to heart the words of the Lord Jesus, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”

(b) Come now and hear how the darkness was scattered and the light returned. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Daniel, you have seen, was allowed to go through the furnace of tribulation, but the time came at last when God interfered on his servant's behalf, and made his dealings clear and plain. Daniel was cast into the lions' den, but the Lord was with him and therefore he was safe. We read that the king, Darius, came very early in the morning to the mouth of the cave, and cried with an anxious and lamentable voice, "O Daniel ... is thy God . . . able to deliver thee." And oh, how joyful must his feelings have been when he heard the holy man's reply: "O King, live for ever; my God hath sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me!"

And need I tell you that Daniel was brought forth, and honoured and exalted; while his enemies, in their turn, were cast into the den and the lions destroyed them all? So true it is that light is sown for the righteous, that God will keep them in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on Him. So true are the words of Psalm xci: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty, He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust. . . . His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. . . . There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. . . . Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name."

(c) Consider now, beloved, what showers of good descended from this dark cloud which at one time seemed so threatening. Think what a blessed effect this deliverance would have on Daniel! What deep views of God's love and power and goodness and wisdom he would obtain! What strength it would add to his faith, what warmth to his prayers! How every grace within his bosom would shoot forth with renewed vigour. Think, too, what an impression would be made upon the godless and profane; what shame would cover the faces of those who had thought Daniel went too far and was righteous overmuch; how many would be brought to tremble and fear before a God who could deliver after such a fashion.

(d) Think, lastly, what mighty good would come to the people and cause of God, how much they would be comforted by such a miracle, how much they would be encouraged to go forward: the very thing which once appeared so untoward, which threatened the destruction of Israel and the dishonour of God, would bring glory to the Lord, and set forward the kingdom of heaven.

And so, beloved, it has always been. God's dealings may seem mysterious; but wait awhile, and the darkness shall disappear and the light shall shine and the crooked shall appear straight, and the rough places shall become smooth.

Satan doth often seem to have his own way in the world, but still there are

many proofs that the prosperity of the wicked is short, and the lying lips are but for a moment, and there are seasons when many a hardened sinner is forced to confess, “Verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.” Many a Christian would tell you that the trials and chastisements which appeared so bitter have borne most blessed fruit to his soul; he has sown in tears, but he has reaped in joy; and there are few who shall not find in the world to come that afflictions which bowed them to the dust, and were grievous at the time, were nothing less than mercies. They were the very medicines which healed their sin-diseased souls, and purified their hearts for heaven.

Who is there among you that is timid and undecided and inconsistent—afraid to do anything to displease men and yet not satisfied if he does not give his heart to God—conscious that he ought to bear the cross and follow Christ, but fearful of giving offence to the world? Go, study the character of Daniel, and make it your example. Behold a child of Adam like yourself following the Lord fully, not only when all were with him, but when all were against him; ready to lose his life in this world if so he might attain to life eternal. Are you flesh and blood? so was he; are you by nature sinful? so was he. The grace of God did make him what he was, and the grace of God can make you like him, if you are only willing. But go, confess your faith as he did: if you are ashamed of Christ, most surely Christ will be ashamed of you. The double-minded and the unstable shall never gain the heavenly crown.

Where are the men who say “We cannot do the things which you require; we cannot come to Christ upon your terms? There would be no living in the world, no caring for our families, if we took your advice. We have no time for such religion; we cannot altogether give up the world.” Oh, look at holy Daniel! He had the charge of millions upon his hands, he was the chief among the presidents of an empire. He had the management of kingdoms and their affairs; and yet—mark this, O ye despisers and lazy ones—and yet he found time to be a faithful servant of God, he found time to cultivate the vineyard of his soul most closely. He contrived to walk with God as few have ever walked. Are you wiser than he? Are your leisure hours more entirely taken up? Oh, be ashamed of vain excuses, and take this man of business for your pattern, and do not tell us you cannot come to Christ, until you have followed Daniel’s steps and prayed without ceasing.

Is there an humble-minded follower of Jesus among you? Set Daniel before your eyes. Be bold, be faithful, be meek, be persevering; endeavour to walk so uprightly that all may glorify God on your behalf, that none may find occasion against you except as concerning the law of your God.

Fear not because you sometimes walk in darkness and have no light. Remember that you cannot understand the mind of the Lord nor the meaning of His dealings. But when the clouds do compass you about, believe in God

as Daniel did; trust in the Lord Jesus at all times; sing to Him in the dungeon, as Paul and Silas; sing to Him even in the fire, as the three children did; be sure, be very sure, he who believeth shall never be ashamed.

I will add for your comfort the words of a very Christian poet, a sweet singer in Israel:—

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.”