

"OUR DUTY TOWARDS THE JEWISH PEOPLE"

from

*Plain Sermons
On Subjects
Practical and Prophetic*

by Alexander McCaul

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow, like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord [Yahweh] hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Lamentations 1:12.

THE pathetic appeal which I have just read was originally addressed to Babylonian idolaters. They were the persons in Jeremiah's time who saw the sorrow of the Jewish people, and yet passed by without an attempt to remove, or a word of sympathy to alleviate it. To them Jeremiah makes this appeal, "Is it nothing to you?" He did not consider that their ignorance of God's will, or of Israel's glorious destiny, was any excuse for their insensibility and unkindness. He had been guided by the Spirit of God to denounce judgments against the oppressors of his people. He knew that a righteous Judge would render recompence, and therefore calls upon them to consider their conduct and its consequences. If such an appeal was just and reasonable and merciful to these Babylonian idolaters, how much more so to those who call themselves followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet pass by the calamity of the Jewish people with the same apathy and neglect.

The sorrow of the Jewish people is still unparalleled. Neglect is still as sinful, and will ultimately prove as fatal, as it did to Babylon. The circumstances are very similar, and therefore admit of a similar appeal. Jeremiah addressed himself to the understanding of the Babylonians. He asked them to consider their conduct, and deliberately to decide whether the misery of the Jews was nothing to them. I would this day follow his example. I would say in his language, Is the unbelief and the misery of the Jews nothing to you? I would call upon you to consider your duty to that people by the light of God's word. If that word tells you that the temporal calamity and the spiritual misery of the Jewish people is nothing to you, then I would say, Leave them to perish in their unbelief. It is no concern of yours, and you will have to give no account for insensibility or neglect. But if, on the other hand, you find, upon serious examination and mature reflection, that the word of God prescribes certain duties with regard to that people, then I would call upon you to arise, and, in reliance upon the help of God, to endeavour to fulfil them; or, at least, to make up your minds to bear the consequences of wilful disobedience to the plain commands of God. The text calls our attention to two points:—

First, THE FACTS ON WHICH THE APPEAL IS FOUNDED.

Secondly, THE APPEAL ITSELF.

I. The text directs us, first, to certain facts: the first of these is the unparalleled sorrow of the Jewish people: "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." The prophet challenges us to look about among the objects of compassion, or the victims of calamity, and to

find any, whose affliction is so sore. We may look for temporal woe, or spiritual misery, and we shall find that as Israel had once a superiority in privilege, so they have now a preeminence in affliction. Where is the nation that has been so universally oppressed as the Jews? The heathen idolater of ancient and of more modern times has oppressed the Jews. The Mahometan has laid the full burden of his tyranny and cruelty upon the shoulders of the Jew. And truth compels me to add that the professing Christian has not been behind either the Heathen or the Mahometan in dealing out to the Jew a full measure of oppression. In every nation of the earth this people has felt the truth of the prediction, "Among these nations thou shalt find no ease; neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes and sorrow of mind." Where is the nation that has been subject to such universal contempt?

All mankind seems to have conspired to despise the Jews. Every sect of every creed, however differing on other points, agrees in this, to make the name of Jew a proverb, a bye-word, and a reproach. None of those things which mitigate or remove contempt resting upon the other classes of mankind has relieved the Jew. Great genius, in whatever other nation it may be found, has attracted admiration. Profound learning has universally earned respect. Great wealth has generally purchased honour, or at least bribed the good will of mankind. Devoted suffering in the cause of religion, whatever that religion be, has commanded the reverence, or called forth the eulogies, even of the thoughtless and irreligious. But to all these general truths there is one exception, and that is in the case of the Jews. They have had, and still have, talent and genius more liberally bestowed upon them than upon other nations. They have had men of profound learning and extensive erudition. Their wealth has become, however erroneously, a proverb. They have had many...[executed] rather than renounce their faith; but all these things taken together have not been able to remove the contempt, much less to obtain the respect, of even the educated and the unthinking. Where is the nation whose sufferings have been so constant and so long continued?

During the lapse of eighteen centuries they have had but an occasional respite, and that only sufficient to strengthen them for a renewal of suffering. Within a few years the active persecution of the Jews has ceased in Europe, and hatred has been compelled to be satisfied with contempt. But during the late ebullitions of revolutionary spirit on the Continent, the Jews again became the object of attack; and in Mohammedan countries "their life still hangs in doubt before them. They fear day and night, and have none assurance of their life." Other nations have lost their political existence as well as the Jews; but in a few generations their national reproach has ceased, and they have been adopted into the common family of mankind. The Jews have been preserved distinct, that all the world might know that they inherit not merely the common evils and sorrows of human nature, but that all the peculiar calamities consequent upon the curse of God have come upon them. This is one of the most awful features of Jewish calamity. It is the immediate infliction of an offended God. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." It is not a mere chastisement. The chastisement of God is a blessing, a mercy, a token of the Divine love and care.

The present misery of the Jews can be regarded as nothing but a curse—the curse of God. It is not the curse of a human father, like that which rests upon the descendants of Canaan. It is the curse of an offended God, which pursues them in every business and relation of life, and burns like fire in their bones. When I thus speak, I speak not the language of religious hate; I pronounce not the rash judgment of short-sighted man. Far be it from me, or from any Christian man, to be guilty of such presumption as to deal out judgment upon our fellow-sinners. I repeat

merely the sentence of a most righteous and most merciful God. He has set before this nation a blessing and a curse. He has limited their national state to one of these two modes of existence. The blessing was possession of the land of their fathers, with peace, plenty, and happiness; but of this we see at present no trace. We must, therefore, conclude that they are now in the other state—that is, that they are under the curse. How fearful that curse is we may see by referring to the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy: “Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”

This is the recorded judgment of God. This is the sentence, not of the Mahomedan or the Christian, but of the Jewish lawgiver, written in Jewish books, and handed down by Jewish hands. Oh how strange is it that Christians should be found professing to believe this record; professing to believe that the whole Jewish nation pines away and withers under such a curse, and yet busying themselves to ameliorate the condition of the Jews; not by averting the wrath of God, but by changing their political position in the lands of their captivity. Oh how inconceivable that the Jews themselves, who glory in their faith in this law of Moses, should ever turn aside to seek worldly honour or distinction, or should ever cease from one continued and universal cry to God, until this curse be removed from themselves and their children. Yet so it is. Those upon whom this curse has pressed so heavily for centuries seem the most insensible to its existence. And this leads us to consider their spiritual misery. Their temporal calamity is unequalled in the history of nations; but it is especially with reference to their spiritual state that we can take up the words of the prophet and say, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”

And here again we can appeal to Moses, in whom they trust. It is not the New Testament only that describes their spiritual destitution. We can neither find nor say anything more awful than has been said by their own lawgiver. He declares, “The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noon-day as the blind gropeth in darkness; and thou shalt not prosper in all thy ways.” What is the meaning of this? Does it signify that the Jewish nation possess the light of truth? Or that they are walking safely in the path that leads to eternal life? Impossible! The very mildest interpretation that can be given of such words is, that they are in grievous error; that their spiritual understanding is as dark as the organ of vision in the blind; and that they are lost in the mazes of falsehood, whilst others are guided by the noonday light of truth. It may be said, that in this respect the state of the Jews is nothing worse than that of millions of the heathen; and in one point of view this is true. The ignorance and blindness of the heathen are judicial as well as in the case of the Jews. “Because they chose not to retain God in their knowledge, he has given them over to a reprobate mind.” Yet still there is a peculiarity of misery in the darkness of the Jews. They bear the lamp of truth in their hands: they hold up the torch of truth to others. But no ray of that blest light illumines their own vision. They stumble and fall; and their fall is the means of preserving others from destruction. They perish for lack of knowledge, and yet they have the treasure in their own keeping. In the midst of plenty, and with the bread of life in their hands, they die of hunger.

And if from the Old we turn to the New Testament, we find the state of this people far more melancholy and more awful than that of the heathen idolater. The heathen are ignorant of Christ; the Jews have rejected him. The heathen know not their Master’s will; the Jews have rebelled against it. The heathen call not on the name of Christ, because it has not been proclaimed to them; the Jews have turned that ever blessed name into an execration. If sin against light and knowledge be worse than sins of error, if wilful rebellion be worse than

mistaken neglect, if fearful blasphemy be more atrocious than simple ignorance, then is the state of the Jews incomparably more awful and more dangerous than that of any heathen nation under heaven.

“Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.” But there is one fact more that distinguishes their calamity from that of all the other sons of men. Their sorrow is unparalleled, but it is also unpitied. Every form of human woe has excited sympathy and found compassion. Not only the sicknesses and infirmities of human nature, but even the evils arising from vice and sin have touched the hearts of the beholders, and called forth the exertions of charity. The prisoner whose crimes have hid him in his dungeon, has been spied out by the eye of pity. The slave who groans at the other side of the mighty ocean, has been heard by the sharp ear of compassion, and has obtained comfort and relief. The brute creation has found its defenders against the cruelty of the wicked. The sorrows of the Jew alone have been passed by unheeded and unpitied. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? That the world should pass by we cannot wonder. That the heathen or the Mahomedan should neglect him can excite no surprise. That the mere self-loving nominal Christian should heed him not is all natural. But that the devoted, compassionate, and zealous follower of the Lord Jesus Christ should pass by the sorrows and danger of the Jews may well excite astonishment.

Yet such is the fact. Missions to the heathen were in full operation for near a century before any attempt was made to preach Christ to the Jews. Missions to the heathen flourish and abound at this present moment. Every denomination of Christians has its society for the conversion of the heathen. Until within a few months ago one society alone cared for the souls of the Jews. The funds of all these societies for the heathen flourish. The Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews is cramped in its labours on every side, and obliged to decline new and promising openings of usefulness, because its funds have been inadequate to its wants. The Christian who actively engages in every other cause is too frequently dead in this. He who is liberal in every other cause is a churl in this. He whose heart bleeds over every other form of want and woe is ice-cold in this; which he nevertheless acknowledges is the worst, the most awful, and the most fatal of all. Men may readily be found who will volunteer a confession of their faith that the Jews are more ignorant, more bigoted, more blinded, more immediately exposed to the wrath of God than any of the heathen; and who yet, with a strange inconsistency, bestow all their care upon those whose state is less dangerous. This is the very worst feature in the Jewish affliction. They seem to be unpitied simply because their sorrow and their danger are unparalleled.

Of course, if God expects nothing from the Christian church, this insensibility is innocent and harmless. But that is the question which the prophet proposes in his appeal, and to which I would, in the second place, direct your attention. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Have you no duty plainly marked out in the word of God? Is there no obligation imperatively resting upon you to preach the Gospel to the Jews? Christ has commanded his church to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. Do you admit your obligation thence ensuing to evangelize the heathen? If so, how can you excuse yourselves for neglecting the Jews? Are they not included in the same command? Are they not creatures as well as the heathen? Are we not authorised in looking for the blessing of Christ as richly in this work as in that among the heathen? How can you explain away this command?

Some think that they need not care for the Jews, nor labour among them, because the Gospel is a Gentile dispensation, and that the Jews are shut out until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

But I have no hesitation in asserting, on the authority of the New Testament, that this is a grievous error and a pernicious falsehood. There is of course an admixture of truth, or it could not stand for a moment and would lose all its plausibility. It is true that the national conversion of all Israel is not to take place until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. But does it thence follow that the Gospel is a Gentile dispensation, and that the preaching to the Jews is at present a hopeless work? By no means. If the New Testament speak truth, the Gospel is as much a Jewish dispensation as was the Law. To them it was promised, to them it was given. By them it was proclaimed to the Gentiles, and theirs it still is. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation; to the Jew first." "To them pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the COVENANTS, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." "Theirs is the olive tree, and they are still the natural branches." For this purpose Christ came into the world, that "he might reconcile both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body by the cross; and through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The mystery of the Gospel is not that the Jews should be excluded, "but that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel."

The Gentiles have not gotten a dispensation exclusively their own and independent on the Jews, but have been permitted to participate in Jewish blessing. The Gospel, therefore, still belongs to the Jews, and all who withhold it from them rob them of their right. The fact that the national conversion of the Jews is still future in no wise alters the case; the universal conversion of the heathen is also still future. The Gospel dispensation is an election dispensation. Universal conversion is nowhere promised to the preaching of the Gospel either among Jews or Gentiles. But an election is promised from both, and to gather in that election is the Christian church's duty; and the church cannot neglect that duty, either among Jews or Gentiles, without being guilty of wilful and deliberate disobedience to her Lord's command.

Others excuse their coldness and neglect of the Jews with the plea that the Jews are so few and the heathen so many--only six millions of Jews, and six hundred millions of heathen—that therefore it is our duty to attend in the first place to the heathen. Now, allowing for a moment that the case of both is the same, and their claims on a par, it will not follow that the performance of one part of our duty will excuse our neglect of another part. "This ought ye to have done, and not left the other undone." The man who attends to the claims of the heathen and neglects the Jew does just enough to condemn himself. He admits the validity and force of the Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature; he will therefore stand without excuse before the judgment-seat of Christ. Better by far that he had been ignorant of the command altogether than that he should confess its obligation and yet refuse obedience.

But the case of the Jews and heathen is not parallel. We have already seen that the state of the Jews is infinitely more dangerous, and that their punishment will be more dreadful than that of the heathen. They require the most careful attention; they appear also as the open enemies and opposers of the Gospel. Judaism is the antagonist principle to Christianity. Its doctrine is, that Jesus, our Saviour and our God, is an impostor. Wheresoever Judaism prevails it teaches direct and systematic opposition to Christ. It is not, like heathenism, a neutral system. It does not pass by the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ in silence. It denies them and attempts to brand his memory with infamy. It teaches Jewish children, bought with the blood of Christ, to blaspheme his name. It circulates books to his dishonour. But now, in this liberal age, it is beginning to appear more openly, and to exhibit itself as a rival system. In a neighbouring country a Jewish lawyer has attempted to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was lawfully put to death. Now this direct opposition calls upon us, in the first place, to defend and vindicate the honour of the Lord

Jesus Christ, and to endeavour to put a stop to this blasphemy. This can only be done by the preaching of the Gospel, and the bringing of the Jews to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Zeal for the honour of the Lord Jesus would lead us then to direct our first endeavours to the Jewish people. But the plain declarations of the word of God shew us the fallacy of estimating the relative importance of the Jews and Gentiles by their numbers. Granted that there are 600 millions of heathen. Yet these millions cannot be converted until after the conversion of the Jews. The prophet, in a passage which St. Paul expounds of the future conversion of the Jews, tells us that "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, until the Lord arise upon Zion, and his glory be seen upon her, and that then the Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising." The Psalmist tells us, in nearly the same words, that "The Lord shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion; and so the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory." The Apostle informs us that the receiving of the Jews shall be the means of giving spiritual life to the world. "For," says he, "if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" It is altogether therefore beside the purpose to speak of the numerical superiority of the Gentiles. The Jews, though few in number comparatively, are the chosen instruments to effect the conversion of the world.

But there is one claim which the Jews have peculiarly upon the first attention of the Christian church, and that is that of all those who are ignorant of the way of salvation they are nearest to us. They are not like the heathen, separated from us by thousands of miles; on the contrary, they live in the midst of us. The providence of God has brought them to our very doors, and especially committed them to our care. It would seem as if God intended to try the sincerity of that missionary zeal which now forms the boast of the church; for certain it is that the zeal which has reference only to those at a distance, and neglects those at home, is very questionable. The love of souls which feels only for the spiritual misery of the heathen whom it has never seen, but can look with indifference on the unbelief and danger of the Jews whom it has daily before its eyes, is plainly fictitious. It is not the work of the Spirit of God. That love, which is poured into the heart from on high, is not indeed confined within narrow dimensions. On the contrary, it extends over the whole surface of the globe and includes every child of man within its compass. But its first influences are bestowed on those whom God's providence has made the especial objects of its care. This is the principle laid down by St. John, when he says, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen;" and which we may equally apply to the case of the Jews, and say, "He that loveth not the Jews, whom he hath seen, how shall he love the heathen, whom he hath not seen."

Here is the test of the church's missionary zeal, and of our own love to the perishing souls of the heathen. We may estimate its reality by the intensity of our feeling when we behold an unbelieving Jew, and by the magnitude of our efforts to save him from destruction. If we feel little and do less for the Jew, we may safely conclude that our liberality and our exertions in behalf of the heathen, however brilliant, are not of that character which is pleasing in the sight of God. I beg, however, not to be misunderstood. I do not mean in any way to insinuate that the church has done, or is doing, too much for the conversion of the heathen. On the contrary, it is my firm conviction that she has never done enough; that she has never even come near that line of duty marked out by the Saviour. The church of Christ is essentially a missionary institution. But I do mean to assert that however strong and manifold the claims of the heathen, the claims of the Jews are more urgent still, and that on this simple ground--that God has taken them in the arms of his providence, and carried them to our very doors, and thus commended them in an

especial manner to our mercy and our care.

But I might also ask, is it nothing to you that you are indebted to the Jews for all you possess? Is it nothing to you that God has promised an especial blessing to those who bless Israel? Is it nothing to you that God has denounced the most fearful curses on those who have oppressed Israel? Edom and Moab, Egypt and Babylon, perished because of their violence against the people of God; and think you that professing Christendom will escape? Upon every country of Europe there rests a mighty load of guilt, not only for neglecting the Jews, but for persecuting and oppressing them. And who can tell whether "the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion, have not already commenced?" Certain it is, that it will come and will not tarry; and this church and nation must also have its share of retribution, unless, by timely repentance and compensation for the past, it avert the wrath of God.

Consider then, my brethren, the prophet's appeal, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Ascertain your duty to the Jews by the light of Scripture. If Scripture tells you that the conversion of the Jews is no concern of yours, then have nothing to do with it. Continue to pass by the perishing Jews, as the priest and Levite passed by the wounded man. But if Scripture command, and the example of the Lord and his apostles plainly point out, that your duty is that of the good Samaritan, then arise, and by the help of God endeavour to fulfil it. When the providence of God brings you into communication with a Jew, point him to the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world; and shew him, by your kindness, your meekness, and your sympathy, that the religion of Christ is a religion of love—not of hatred as he supposes it to be.

Believe me, my brethren, the great obstacle in the way of Jewish conversion is not the prejudice nor the obstinacy of the Jewish people, but the past oppression and the present apathy of the Christian church. Jews have learned from history to regard Christians as their natural enemies. Oh, let us endeavour to convince them that we are their friends and their brethren. Let us do all that we can ourselves to promote their temporal and eternal welfare; and let us pray to the God of their fathers that he would give them repentance and remission of sins, and put it into the hearts of His church to look with compassion upon their misery, and vigorously to employ the means which He has appointed for their conversion and restoration to his favour.