



THE  
MEANS

BY WHICH THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH MAY BE

**PROMOTED;**

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, ROCHESTER,  
MAY 11, 1823.

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BY THE REV. F. H. CUMING.

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I was earnestly solicited to permit this discourse to be published, immediately after it had been preached. Being conscious that it contained many imperfections, and that it could not, either from its composition, or from the manner in which the subject is treated, excite much interest, I did not then comply with the request. But the solicitation having been frequently renewed, and some of my brethren in the ministry having expressed an opinion that it might be productive of good to the Church, and that they should like to see it circulated among their own flocks, I have consented to let it go before the public. Of its want of merit, none can be more sensible than the author. It was executed in haste, and has not, owing to his constant engagements, had the benefit of as careful a revision as it ought to have received. It is published, not with any idea that the critic will think it worthy his notice, but with the humble hope that it may advance the interests of the Church. And it is published at this particular season, and respectfully INSCRIBED to the parish of which the author is Rector, as a testimony of his affection to a people who have shown themselves unusually attentive to his comfort and prosperity. God grant them many joyful returns of this season ; a peaceful death ; a happy eternity.

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SERMON.



*"Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes I will now say, peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."*—PSALM cxxii. 7, 8, 9.

THE attachment which David had to the city of Jerusalem, was remarkably strong. He seemed to experience peculiar pleasure in singing her praise. Under some one of the different names, by which she was known, he makes, in many of his psalms, the most honorable mention of her; and of not a few of them she constitutes the only theme. What could have been the reason why she was held in such high estimation by him? Firm, high and extensive were the walls by which she was encompassed; many and magnificent the public works for which she was distinguished. But we do the memory of the royal prophet much injustice, if we suppose that it was on this account he was so much elated with joy when he contemplated her. It was not for her numerous pools and fountains, her splendid palaces, her lofty towers, her busy population, that he bestowed upon her so much attention, and spared neither time nor expense in improving and beautifying her. He prayed that peace and prosperity might ever attend her—he was ever seeking her good, because of the house of the Lord his God which was contained within her walls. Within her walls, three times each year, were all the tribes of Israel assembled to give thanks unto Jehovah for his many mercies; and within her walls they enjoyed more evident tokens of the presence of the Most High, than any where else were granted to them; for there the Shechinah emitted its bright, peculiar, and glorious light. Most heartily, therefore,



did he pray, that, within her walls, peace and prosperity might always be found. With most unwearied exertions did he seek to do her good. Let his conduct be proposed for the imitation of all those who wish well to the house of the Lord which they frequent; who desire to see the Zion, in which they appear before God on earth, lengthening her cords and strengthening her stakes.

In the present discourse, we shall endeavor to show how this object can be effected, and the welfare and increase of the Church, to which you, my brethren, are now giving your support, be promoted.

The idea is too generally indulged, that for advancing the prosperity of the Church, the exertions of the minister alone are sufficient. Much indeed, depends upon his conduct and labors. If he be what he ought to be, and as his engagements require he should be, wholly devoted to his calling; if he discharge his various functions with all the ability which God has given him; if he be decided, but mild—sedate and grave, but not gloomy and austere; if he be cheerful without levity; condescending, but no time-server; if he be, what is expected of him, a living comment on the precepts he inculcates; evincing by his own life and conversation the purity and self-denying nature of the system which he has embraced, and the principles with which he strives to inspire others, the cause of the Redeemer will never suffer in his hands. His public services, his private admonitions, his family visits, his prayers with his people, his attentions to the sick, his instructions to the young, his fearless reproofs of vice, his encouragements to the virtuous and well disposed, will be blessed to the good of the souls of those for whom he must give account. Success, to a greater or less extent, will attend his ministrations. He may be sure, for he has the promise, that the dew of the heavenly grace will be shed upon him. No matter whether his talents be of an inferior order—no matter whether his attainments be limited; mighty through the influence of the Holy Spirit

can he be rendered against the enemies of truth and holiness. Let his heart be right before his God ; and though his speech be weak, and his personal appearance without honor, many a vaunting Goliath of infidelity will be overcome by him ; many a sinful Ahab made to humble himself, and many a proud Felix to tremble before him. But powerful as is the aid with which he may be furnished from above, and numerous as may be the conquests which he may achieve over the opposers of the Gospel, you must bear in mind that he is nothing more than a man like yourselves ; that it is but an individual who is engaged in this great work ; and that it is not merely to him that Christ looks for the enlargement of his flock, the extension of his Church. There are others also, to whom talents, means and opportunities are given, to be employed for this purpose. If we have the disposition, there is not a single person, who attends the Church, that may not advance her interests.

Are you her Wardens ? You are then her chief officers. Your very name implies what the Church, in your appointment, designed you should be—her faithful centinels. To you it belongs to guard the sanctuary, to preserve her from all mischief and irreverence ; to see that her worship be conducted decently and in order ; to remind those who occasionally or habitually absent themselves, of their dereliction of duty ; to take care that nothing be wanting which will contribute to the better performance of her various rites, and to show your attachment to her by your constant attendance within her sacred courts. If others leave their seats here unoccupied, never, except in cases of absolute necessity, should yours be seen vacant. By your example and influence, by your prayers, by a uniform and consistent line of conduct, you can be ever seeking her good ; and much, very much would you thus be doing towards promoting her prosperity. Be then consistent—consistency is not bigotry. Be firm—firmness is not obstinacy.

Do you belong to the Vestry of the Church ? You are then the Trustees, and with the Wardens, her temporal

guardians. Her good *you* can seek, her prosperity *you* can essentially advance, by being present at all meetings of the Corporation, and by being punctual in your attendance at the *appointed hour*.

There is sometimes a reluctance to accept of this, or indeed, of any office in the Church, on account of the time which, it is supposed, will be consumed in discharging its duties. Alas! that there should be any who have the good of the Church so little at heart, as to refuse to undertake the management of her secular concerns! But on this point an erroneous impression has been received. It is by no means often that the vestry is convened together; and the business about which they meet to deliberate, when once began to be acted upon, is soon dispatched. That time, and frequently much time too, is consumed, we are fully sensible. But to what is this owing? Not surely because there is much to be done, but to the tardiness with which we get together; to the difficulty with which the collecting a majority is attended. Were all to meet at the same hour; were we punctual at the time specified, it would be found that this would interfere but slightly with our other engagements and demand but little of our attention, while it would leave us the pleasant reflection that we were seeking the good of Zion—were building up the Church of Christ—were advancing the best interests of our “brethren and companions.” Let the gentlemen of the vestry make it a matter of conscience to be present at all its meetings; let them not fail being in season; let them, on these occasions, discuss with earnestness every subject which comes within their proper sphere; let them not think the time thus spent, idly and unprofitably spent; let them also shew that the Church and her institutions they are willing and determined to support, by their uniform attendance upon her services, by their endeavors to have her principles and usages known and understood, and they will constantly be witnessing fresh accessions to her numbers. They will behold prosperity within her walls, and hear her name mentioned



with respect and veneration by those whom she does not rank among her children.—(See note a.)

Are you of the number of those who kneel at the holy altar of the church, and have thus publicly united themselves to her Divine Head? Greatly indeed can *you* benefit her. Her character, if I may so speak, is in your hands. On you the world fastens a most scrutinizing eye. Your conduct is watched by the jealous sectarian; your practice is noted by the evil-minded of every description; your daily walk, your words, as well as your actions, are observed by those who would delight to build themselves up on the ruins of the church. If, then, you are careful that your manner of living correspond with your professions; if you scrupulously avoid doing any thing which can subject you to scandal or reproach; if you endeavour never to “let your good be evil spoken of;” if you are what your obligations bind you to be—what the requisitions of the church expect you are—what the commandments of our Master so solemnly call upon you to be; if you are examples of “whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report,” how completely will you silence gainsayers, put to shame those who suspect the hollowness or selfishness of your pretensions, and win over to your list of “brethren and companions” those, perhaps, who harbour, with respect to you, feelings of envy, hatred and malice! What greater satisfaction can be afforded you, than to be conscious you have been such burning and shining lights in the church—your faith and good works have been so manifest that those who entertained prejudice and ill-will towards your Zion, have, by your unblameableness, and your unostentatious but conspicuous piety, with God’s blessing, been induced to kneel with you, side by side, at the same altar; thus glorifying, in the same way, our Father who is in heaven.

You can also seek the good and promote the prosperity of your church, by always occupying your proper places in the temple. For you to absent yourselves

from the Lord's house, because a dark cloud may appear in the sky, or because you may not be pleased with the style or manner of him who fills the desk;—much more, for you to absent yourselves from the sacred feast which the adorable Redeemer has provided for us, unless the extremest necessity compel you—oh, it looks as if your zeal was not sufficiently ardent, your love too weak, your faith of too doubtful a character. Rest assured, prosperity will never be found within the walls of that temple, in which the communicants are seen habitually, or even occasionally, unless unavoidable circumstances can be pleaded as the excuse, abstaining from the Lord's table, and turning their backs upon the banquet which a Saviour's love has spread for them, and to which they once, with tears of penitence and tears of joy, were seen pressing. What is the plain inference to be drawn from such conduct, but that now it affords you no pleasure to draw nigh to your Friend, Benefactor and Father; or that you are saying, with some of old time, of the observance of the ordinances which the most high God has appointed, *what a weariness is it!* or, that you are insensible to the danger of resisting and quenching that blessed Spirit, by whose influences alone you are rendered meet to be partakers with the saints in light.

If, then, you would see both the altar and the church thronged with pious worshippers; if upon the church, the altar, and yourselves, you would not bring reproach, and weaken the cause which you once solemnly vowed you would, and which on every principle of honor and of gratitude you ought to uphold and exert yourselves to strengthen; if you would not prove the most successful enemies of him who died for you; never, if it be in any way possible to be present, absent yourselves from the Holy Communion. Remember who hath said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of the Father." Remember who hath said, "It is impossible for them who were once en-



lightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, *if they fall away*, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." And remember too, if you sometimes think that your religious feelings are becoming cold, *neglect* of the means of grace will be very far from having the effect to excite them anew. If the flame of your devotion is beginning to subside, judge whether this very neglect be not the principal cause. Seek then, my brethren, the good of the church, by ever duly respecting and venerating this most sacred of all her ordinances.

You, also, to whom the Creator has given the talent by which you are enabled to sing his praise, can very materially further the interests of the church. Praise is the most animating part of our public worship. The songs of Zion, set to proper music, will arrest and keep up the attention of the most thoughtless, extort exclamations of admiration from the most phlegmatic disposition, have a calm and most soothing influence upon the heart surcharged with sorrow, and tranquillize the most troubled conscience. But this exercise is too frequently left to be performed wholly by those who compose the choir.

It should be considered that praise has been rendered a duty obligatory upon us, by the command of God; and in this sacred and enlivening employment, surely every pious mind must delight to assist. It is an employment in which angels and heaven-born seraphs take pleasure to engage. And what reason can be assigned why those who are acquainted with the art, but who cannot be persuaded to sit with the singers, should not lend their voices in assisting to swell their Maker's praise? You certainly do not expect that the efforts of others in this particular, God will pass to your credit, and regard the acts they perform, as performed by you. No satisfactory reason can be assigned for such conduct.

Let not then any individual who frequents the holy temple, to whom his Maker has given the ability, refuse to join in praising the most high God. Let the whole congregation be heard, with one voice, uttering appropriate psalms and hymns to Him who thus permits us to draw near to him, and call him our Father. Were this course adopted, how many would be improving themselves in sacred music, and how much more pleasing and powerful an effect would be produced! How much more of gladness would many experience, when going up to the house of the Lord! How much more would it tend to advance the prosperity of Zion!

Parents, you also may be the instruments of much good to the church. You can show your esteem for her, and the institutions prescribed to her by her glorified Head, by bringing your children to the baptismal font. It is painful to reflect how much this heaven-appointed ordinance is omitted. Could Christ have ordained any thing that was unnecessary, or that had no beneficial tendency? You must acknowledge he could not. How is it, then, that such little deference is paid to his authority, and that men can venture to question the importance of what he has enjoined? It is an alarming symptom—a symptom indicating a lurking spirit of infidelity, when fallible men presume to inquire of the all-wise Director of all things, “What doest thou?” It does not become erring mortals to put their reason into the scale against Infinite wisdom, and to prefer an Abana and Pharpar of their own, to the stream, however small it may be, to which He who does nothing in vain points us.

Where is your love for your offspring, if you will not have them marked as the lambs of the Redeemer, and placed within that fold where they will grow up under his own eye, and be nourished in the wholesome pastures of his own enclosing. Go back to the days of primitive Christianity, the days when flourished a Chrysostom, a Cyprian, an Ignatius, a Polycarp—and whom do you hear saying that the Christian church is of less

extensive charity than the Jewish; that the former excludes from her pale those little innocents whom the latter received? Go back to the days of the Saviour, and when do you hear him telling the Jew, that in the order of things he was about to establish, in the church he was about to organize, the parent and child, who had hitherto always been embraced in the same covenant, were now to be separated? In vain do you seek for any hint of the kind. It was reserved for men of modern days to thrust from the ark those little ones whom God permitted to be carried into it. It was reserved for men of modern days to say, those who were once considered capable of entering into covenant with God, are no longer to be allowed that privilege. It was reserved for men of modern days to exclude from the church of God and its benefits, those who, during a former period of the church, were commanded by God himself to be admitted members of it. It was reserved for men of modern days to exclude from the church on earth those whom the Redeemer has represented as constituting a principal part of the church in heaven.

Let it not be said of you, my brethren, that you have a higher regard for those novel opinions upon religious subjects, of which the world is now full, than you have for those *old ways* in which martyrs have trod, which apostles have described, which the blessed Saviour has appointed. Seek the good of the church by presenting not only yourselves, but like Stephanus, of whom St. Paul makes mention, your households, at the baptismal font. Refuse not, delay not, to let those be partakers of God's covenanted mercies of whom, God's beloved Son has said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Surely, if "it be not the will of our Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish," you will not pretend to assert that they ought not to be made members of that family of which Christ is both the Saviour and head. (*See note b.*)

You can also promote the prosperity of the church, by instructing your children in the nature of its services,



and teaching them to make those responses by which the service is so much enlivened. Say not this is merely a *habit* to which they will become accustomed, and that it will do them no good. From a habit it may become a principle by which their whole life will be regulated. Does not the Psalmist call upon "young men and maidens, old men and children," to praise the Lord? We trust their little voices will be heard in heaven, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and ascribing blessing and honor and power and glory unto Him that was slain and has redeemed us unto God. Why then should they not be permitted, on earth, to invoke the grace, and thank the goodness, and praise the mercy, of Him who hath loved them and gave himself for them?

Lastly, Each individual of the congregation may promote the prosperity of the church. You can do it by invariably frequenting her courts; by being present not merely a *part* of the Lord's day, but both morning and evening; by being present not merely on the *Lord's day*, but on all other days when her doors are opened for public worship; by being present not only when your pastor is to officiate, but when his place is supplied by another clergyman, or even by a lay-reader. This is an age when men wish great latitude to be allowed them in religious matters. It is an age too when caprice and feeling too often prevail over good sense and consistency of conduct. This is strikingly evident from the treatment to which those who minister in holy things are sometimes exposed. They exchange with their brethren, and not unfrequently have to preach to empty pews. A stranger appears in the pulpit, and because his manner may not be pleasant, or because his style is open to criticism, or because his talents may be underrated, you forsake the church to which you belong, and, silently indeed, but most uncourtously, tell him you would rather he would remain in his own parish. Brethren, I speak I trust to my friends, and therefore I speak the more plainly. Clergymen

have sensibility as well as other men, and you wound it most severely by such keen, though they be silent re-proofs.

What though he who comes before you be in your estimation of inferior abilities? He offers the same devotions that the most learned and popular would offer. He has perhaps kept his lamp burning till midnight, that he might produce something to edify and interest you; and you reward his toil, his study, his well-meant intentions, by a refusal to listen to him. Make this case your own, and ask yourselves whether, if the stranger were your relative or particular friend, you would thus treat him, or should be pleased to see others thus treat him. But the effect of such unkindness extends also to your pastor. He in the end becomes the sufferer by it. Often it would both suit his convenience and benefit his health to have an interchange of services with some of his brethren. But how can he with decency make the proposition to any one to whom such marked disrespect has been shown?—Such conduct is, moreover, a reflection upon yourselves. It betrays a want of consistency of character and stability of mind. It looks too much as if your attachment was not to the church, and its principles, and its evangelical liturgy, but to your minister personally. Believe it, much rather would your minister that you left your places here vacant when he, and not when a stranger officiates for you.

Each member of the congregation may promote the prosperity of the Church, by zealously co-operating with their minister; by sanctioning by their adoption of them, and by using their influence to have general attention paid to those plans of instruction and spiritual improvement which he may propose to them. In the whole range of his labors; of all the care which comes upon him; of the many privations to which he must submit; of the mortifications which he must experience; nothing affects him more sensibly, nothing has a tendency more to paralyze his exertions and tempt him to

intermit his zeal, than that want of union of effort, that want of hearty concurrence, and of a willingness to become fellow-workers with him, which it not unfrequently happens, he beholds in those whom he is endeavoring to prepare for Heaven. It is when such cases occur, that he is inclined to think he has not the affections of his people; that his day of usefulness, among them, has gone by; that they are not tender of his feelings; that they have not the good of the Church at heart. Want of proper books and other uncontrollable causes have compelled him, who now addresses you, to suspend those instructions which, almost from the commencement of his labors among you, he has been giving. They are about to be resumed. May he hope to see you generally giving your attention to them, and all other means he shall take to further your growth in grace, and increase your knowledge of our holy and apostolic Church. Rest assured you will thus be seeking and advancing her good.

Each member of the congregation may also promote the prosperity of the Church, by joining heartily in her various services, and audibly making the responses. How can it be seen that our worship is what we know it is, a *social* worship, and that by means of it, not only the minister, but the people are enabled to pray, if the minister's voice alone be heard? This social character of the Liturgy is one of its peculiar excellencies. The life, the beauty, the order, the solemnity of the service, do not, and cannot appear, if, in performing your different parts, your voices are not heard, or heard not above a whisper; if you feel ashamed or think it too old fashioned to add your loud and hearty *Amen* to the prayers. Jerome informs us, that the *Amen* was pealed forth, in his day, like a clap of thunder. You certainly approve of each petition. Why then should you refuse to signify your assent by your *Amen*. Let all the people say *Amen*, was an injunction of God to his servant Moses. The Liturgy is arranged with so much order and propriety; its language is so truly devotional; it breathes such a truly evangelical spirit, that it requires only to



be properly performed, to cause it to be admired. He who has never been accustomed to it, entering a Church, where the whole multitude, as one man, were heard confessing their sins, imploring pardon and magnifying the great name of God, and all speaking the same words, could not but be impressed with awe and admiration. He could not but be inclined to think that if a social worship was performed, and the unity of the spirit preserved any where on earth, it was here. You would soon hear his voice mingling with yours, and the same prayers and anthems warming his heart which have trembled on the tongues of confessors and martyrs.

My brethren, I have done. I have addressed you, not because I have any reason to complain of your want of attention to me ; for no people, in proportion to their means, could have done more for their clergyman than you have done for me. I have addressed you, not because I have any reason to complain of your attendance, generally, at Church. The congregation, considering its age, and the circumstances which have followed its organization, is far more numerous and respectable than the most sanguine among us expected to see for many years yet to come.

I have addressed you, because I think we can all be striving more constantly, more faithfully, more zealously, than we ever yet have done, to promote the prosperity of the Church. I have endeavored to do nothing more than to give you, in a very plain way, some very plain advice. If it be received with the spirit which dictates it, I am confident I shall not experience the disappointment and mortification of knowing that it has been wholly disregarded. But be it received as it may—that minister, wardens, vestry, communicants, parents, singers, and all the members of the congregation may ever do their duty, be consistent with themselves, seek the good of the Church, be examples of a godly life, and be prepared for admission into the Church triumphant, ever has, and by the grace of God, ever shall be my fervent, unceasing prayer.

Note a, referred to, page 7.

THE duties of Wardens and Vestrymen are thus more particularly defined in an early number of the Churchman's Magazine, published in New-Haven :

"The duties of Wardens are,

1. To provide for the church a Prayer-Book and Bible of suitable size, at the expense of the parish.
2. To make the usual collections in the church.
3. To provide, at the expense of the parish, fine white bread and good wholesome wine for the Lord's supper.
4. To provide a book of records, in which to enter, in the absence of a Rector, the names of persons baptized, married, or buried, with the date.
5. To present to the Bishop, or the chairman of the standing committee, every Priest and Deacon who has voluntarily relinquished his sacerdotal office, and uses the employments belonging to laymen.
6. To take care that the church be kept clean, and in good repair; and to preserve order during divine service.
7. To see that persons resort to church.
8. To prevent idle persons remaining in the church-yard, or about the doors of the church, during divine service.
9. To give an account to the corporation of the church, if it has no treasurer, at the expiration of each year, of all monies received and expended.

The duty of Vestrymen, or Trustees, is to transact all the temporal business of the church; to collect the money stipulated to be paid to the minister; and at the expiration of the year, if there be a deficiency, to give information thereof to the congregation, and if necessary to enforce the payment."

Note b, page 11.

As it is sometimes asserted that the Episcopal Church attaches too much consequence to baptism, and gives of it a definition which scripture will not warrant, I trust I shall be excused for letting the sentiments of other denominations, upon this subject, be known.

The office used by the Lutherans is, almost, word for word the same as that prescribed by our own church.

In the form of discipline of the Methodist Church, baptism is said to *seal* an interest in the blessings and grace of the new covenant.

The Catechism of the Dutch Reformed Church asserts, that "by this divine pledge and sign we are *spiritually* cleansed from our sins, as *really*, as we are externally washed with water.

Calvin in his Catechism says, that forgiveness of sins and *newness* of life are *certainly* received by us in baptism.

The Larger Catechism of the Presbyterian Church, thus answers the question, "What is baptism? Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and a *seal* of ingrafting into himself; of remission of sin by his blood, and *regeneration by his spirit*."

The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, contains the following plain and strong language: "By the right use of this ordinance, [baptism,] the grace promised is not only offered, but *really* exhibited and *conferred* by the Holy Ghost.— (See Confession of Faith, Chap. 28, Sec. 6.)