

# HOME PREACHER, OR CHURCH IN THE HOUSE.

FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE NEW YEAR.

“IN QUIETNESS AND IN CONFIDENCE SHALL BE  
YOUR STRENGTH.” --Isaiah xxx. 15.

THESE words give us a maxim to take with us into the New Year. We find them in that passage of Scripture, a portion of which has been read this morning, appointed for the first Sunday after Christmas. “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” Trust in the Lord amid all changes, keep near to him, realize his presence. All things are changing. The days and the years of our mortal life are hastening to a close, but he in whom we trust is the Ancient of Days, unchangeable to eternity.

Now, the maxim which this passage sets before us will, perhaps, best be understood in its application, if we consider the history with which it is connected. Let us read the whole verse from which it comes -- the 15th verse: “For

thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence be your strength.” The Prophet Isaiah was commissioned to address these words to the people of Judah. Hezekiah was greatly troubled by the danger which threatened them. The host of the Assyrians had come down, and threatened to destroy him. He knew that some ten years before Hoshea, king of Israel, had been destroyed by these same Assyrians, and all his people led captive to the land of the Medes. Hoshea and his people had sought defence by making an alliance with the idolatrous Egyptians; but, as the verses of this chapter remind us, Egypt and people of Hezekiah now seem to have urged him to make the same alliance, an alliance which had proved so fatal to Hoshea and the Israelites; but Isaiah was commissioned to warn him that, if there was such a design, it must be given up. In quietness and in confidence was to be their strength, not in any arm of flesh; and Hezekiah, convinced by the prophet’s warning, went into the house of the Lord, and when the insulting message which was brought from his enemy was laid before him, he spread it before the Lord, and offered that remarkable prayer which we read in the thirty-seventh chapter. And then Isaiah was commissioned to tell him what should be the fate of this great Assyrian host; and a few verses afterwards we read how Isaiah’s prophecy was accomplished, and these men,

who had threatened utterly to destroy God's people, were themselves utterly destroyed by the angel of the Lord. Thus surely was the heart of Hezekiah strengthened, as he was assured that God was ready to watch over and to defend his people from all dangers. By trust in God, and not by the arm of flesh, was he saved.

This is the lesson, my friends, which I would have you take into this new year. In all anxieties, public and private, wait on the Lord. The conviction of his presence and of his readiness to succour, will be our greatest security, and still all anxieties and alarms. But this conviction that God is near, and that he watches over his people, is it indeed a well-grounded, reasonable conviction, whereon men may afford to stake their imagination? -- good, perhaps, for the world's things, and which ever delighted in some communication with the world unseen -- good for times, the thoughts of which naturally embody themselves in old books speaking of these old times -- but unfit, as they say, for the scrutiny of the metaphysical ages which have followed, and still less fit to stand in that age of self-satisfied acquiescence in the positive evidence of things tested by actual experience, in which men would have us believe now that all wisdom lies? Good indeed is this impression of God's nearness, and of his personal interference with the things of the world, and of his readiness to help those who trust in him -- good in the estimate of the childlike spirit! And has

not the Lord said, "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven?" Does not the highest wisdom pronounce, echoing the Lord's words, that the only assured entrance into the highest knowledge of man's destiny and of his duties is through the childlike, teachable spirit? In all departments of human science, do not the wisest tell us that humility goes hand in hand with the highest knowledge? That the truest knowledge is most accessible in all moral matters to the teachable, the pure, the simple! In ages of advanced material civilization, wise men refused not to learn of the simple ages of faith. Not only in moral truth, but in art, in poetry, what wise man doubts but that the most advanced civilization may learn much from the childlike ages of the world -- the ages of faith? And so especially in religion and in morality, no wise man doubts but that we ought to go back to simple times, and that we may gather many lessons from the simple thoughts which recommend themselves to childlike spirits, and in them we have often the truest wisdom. Certainly now, as of old, no wisdom is worthy of the name that does not acknowledge God's presence and his protecting power. All good and wise men live in God's presence, rejoice in that access which is opened up to him through prayer, sanctify the day by the morning and the evening devotions, have a real satisfaction in spreading all their cares before him as Hezekiah spread the letter of his insulting enemy: thus do

they feel their spirits best braced for endurance, or for efforts to disentangle themselves from every difficulty. To trust in God as present, and in God as overruling all things--this is the truest wisdom; this is of the very essence of all true religion. Even Deism, if it be worthy of the name -- if it be a real belief in a personal God -- will acknowledge this: all personal religion must have this access to God, must believe in his presence, in his readiness to protect, in his watchful care and as with the personal religion of men, one by one, so with the religion of nations, which, if it be not the mere vain profession of orthodoxy imposed by authority, is the aggregate of the real, vital, religious principle of the many individuals who compose that nation. This is a religious nation, the men and women of which, in their several degrees, acknowledge this presence and protecting power of God, look upon him as ever near, ever ready to support his people. This is the only security, both for individuals and for nations in all times of perplexity and doubt. Let us cast our eyes back even to the scenes which we ourselves remember -- that dark winter of 1854! What was it that saved men from utter despondency, when so many families knew that those who were dearest to them were exposed to the greatest privations in a distant camp? -- what but the assurance that God watched over the soldier in the field as he had watched over him as a little child when gathered round the family hearth in the yet undivided

family. Or that even bitterer trial which the nation knew two years afterwards, when each post was looked for with anxiety, almost with despondency, lest it should bring intelligence of dishonour worse than death for those who were nearest and dearest to so many families, when the horror of impending calamity brooded over those days of the early summer and mocked the brightness of the autumn, and all men were in a suspense, which became almost intolerable: what kept families from fainting under the thought of these calamities, but the knowledge that God was present everywhere to watch over his people, that no one was in any real danger who was under his protection? And in our more common trials, so common in every family, when we hang over the beloved, and a silence more expressive than any words tells us that soothing medicines can do no more, that there is no more help in man; what is it that prevents suspense from becoming despair but the knowledge which we have that in God's hands all is well -- in God's hands all is well for life and for death? In the ordinary distresses to which all of us, the children of humanity, are continually subject, we must be crushed unless we had this trust in God; unless, indeed, we take refuge in dogged insensibility unworthy of men, or cheat the gnawing pain at our hearts by the irritation of some outward distraction of activity. For men, then, one by one, in this world so full of trials, and for nations, which are

composed of men, there is no security, no support in the midst of trial, but this growing conviction that God is present, very near, watching over his people, ready to support them -- a kind and loving friend and father. And if for individuals and nations, still more for churches. God's presence to us Christians is guaranteed in a nearer and dearer form. On this rock of faith, the conviction of God's nearness in Christ, he has built his church. God brought near in Christ's atoning power, in Christ's intercession, in Christ as ruling over his church, seated by the eternal throne, what is this but Christian faith, that rock on which the church of Christ is built? And the gates of hell shall not prevail against the truth and the worship of the gospel in the church of Christ, because we have his assured word, telling us more distinctly than we knew before, of God's nearness -- "Behold, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." This, then, is the lesson which we gather from these simple words addressed to Hezekiah, and which I would have you take into the New Year, in confidence and in quietness, because you rest on God revealed in Jesus Christ, knowing him to be near, knowing him to be watching over you, secure under his protection. These words spoken to Hezekiah remind us of the old scene by the Red Sea. "Stand still!" said Moses, when the chariots and horsemen of Pharaoh and captains over every one of them came in sight, and the people were troubled and cried aloud

-- “Stand still, and see the glory of God! These Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.” So with the Assyrians, who terrified Hezekiah with their insolent message. He thought that they had come to destroy them, as they had destroyed his neighbours in Samaria; but “stand still, and see the glory of God.” These Assyrians whom ye see to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. “And the angel of the Lord went forth and smote them, and before the morning watch they were all dead corpses.” It was indeed the hand of the Lord, and he manifested himself the protector of his people who trusted in him.

And even if the foolish Egyptian legend were true that it was some noxious animal that destroyed their power to fight; even if it were the deadly plague that raged in their camp and slew so many thousands of them, as the host of the Persians found a living grave some few years afterwards; even if any natural cause could be assigned for this destruction of the host (and we dare not pry into the secondary means by which God works), it was his angel, it was his hand, his protecting power. God saved the people who trusted in him, and he slew those who were confident in their own strength, showing to all generations that he was ready to defend those who trusted in him, and that he would overthrow those who trusted in the arm of flesh.



Thus Isaiah's words were proved true within a few days --  
"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

And now let us endeavour to see more distinctly what is that state of mind which Isaiah urged on Hezekiah, and which we urge on you to take with you into this new year. "Herein," says St. John, "is the patience and the faith of the saints," when they were waiting for the great persecution. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace," says Isaiah, "whose mind is stayed on thee." "Wait on the Lord," says David, "and be of good cheer, and he shall strengthen thine heart. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." This patient trusting in God, we say, is the essence of all faith; it was the faith of the old Fathers, and their faith is the same in its essence as ours. Sometimes men find a difficulty in understanding how the faith of the Fathers of the Old Testament can be said to be the same as ours, since they knew nothing plainly of him who is the very centre of our faith. Their faith was the same in its essence, though different in its objects. To the Jews God revealed himself as a watchful, ever kind Father: God reveals himself to us Christians, likewise, as a watchful, ever kind Father, yet brought still nearer to us in Christ. The gospel tells us of God, in what it tells us of Christ's atoning sacrifice. The terrors of a guilty conscience can no longer, by the remembrance of the past, keep men from realizing the

presence and the protection of God: for God in Christ has revealed himself as a Father near to sinners, reconciled to them through the atoning blood of Christ. And then Christ reveals God to us by his intercession, showing that our poor prayers and our weakness cannot bar our access to our loving Father; for he who died for us is making intercession for us, and bringing us nearer to our Father in heaven: and Christ revealed as ruling over us, prevents the majesty of the eternal throne, the clouds, and the darkness, and the lightning, from driving us away from the eternal Father's presence. These do not appal us when we understand that the elder brother of our race is by the eternal throne, that he who knows in his own experience what is man's weakness and his want, who was tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin, is ordained to be the Ruler and the Judge of men.

Our faith, then, though its objects are new, and God is brought far nearer to us than he was to the ancient Fathers, is still the same in essence as theirs; God to them, as to us, was the refuge in anxieties. To him they were to open all griefs and all difficulties, and the words of our text set before us in their case the very essence of that same faith and trust in a loving God, which keeps us under all anxieties and troubles and trials. Now, no thoughtful man will begin the new year without anxiety; the experience at once of our prosperity and of our past trials will make us anxious: the

remembrance of our prosperity, lest the time for which it is to last may be hastening to a close, and a few weeks or months may see the end of it; the remembrance of past trials, when we reflect how suddenly and unexpectedly they have come upon us, and therefore how unexpectedly they may return. The year that is gone, its memories, both of joy and of sorrow, must make us anxious, then, for the year which is to come. We ask ourselves, as the year closes, what growth of grace there has been, what strength of Christian character formed through the months that are past, what shortcomings, what fallings away; and both our having been enabled to stand hitherto, and our having fallen, may well make us anxious for the time to come. The motto is, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Be on your guard, be ready for alarm. Soldiers, entering a dangerous country where are many secret enemies watching to attack you, bear with you the church's watchword, "Watch and pray" For us, one by one, what dangers may be in store we know not, either for the body's health or the soul's. All may seem peaceful, or the observant and anxious eye may descry already some symptoms of the coming storm; but whether our hearts speak to us of peace or of alarm, it is well to watch, and he only watches well whose heart is stayed on God in Christ, and who, in the quietness and confidence of Christian faith, looks ever to God as a present Father, ready to protect and

to hear when he pours forth his cares. Good men are of good heart in entering upon new difficulties. They think how God has dealt kindly with them in the time past; the bitterness which would be a poison to the spirit, from the memory of past sins, is done away through the thought of the atoning blood of Christ; and the faithful Christian, looking calmly on the past, anxiously, but yet trustfully, to the future, knows that, as he has been sustained in past trials, so his gracious God and Father will sustain him in the trials of the unknown months that lie before him. A good man does not fear even the last great trial; he knows that the same kind Saviour who has been with him in lesser trials will be with him in the great change and trial of death; and therefore, whether the months of the year on which he is entering are charged with the message of his death or no, he is calm, because he can trust Him who is, in the Lord Jesus Christ, an assured protector and friend.

This, then, is the frame of mind in which Christians enter upon new year -- not recklessly, not plunging rashly into great changes, not silencing their natural anxiety with the light laughter which speaks of shallow feelings and of thoughtless ends, but calmly reviewing the past and looking thoughtfully into the future, and yet trusting the Lord, who is an ever-present friend. And those Christians can enter upon these changes even with rejoicing. The Christian church teaches us to close the year with rejoicing --

rejoicing because Christ has been born, knowing that the birth of Christ assures for Christ's people the near protecting power of God as friend and saviour in every time of change. The New Year, then, my friends, is naturally a time for calm and thoughtful rejoicing; but for whom? For those only who can enter on it confident in the strength of him who is proved in Christ to be an ever-present friend. No cold, worldly schemer, no scoffing infidel, no heartless debauchee, no thoughtless child of senseless pleasure, none but those who are growing quietly year by year in the faith of Christ and in the strength of Christian principle, dare enter joyfully on these unknown months; but for them the peace of God in Christ keeps their hearts and minds free from all alarm. The faithful Jews, my friends, were wont to take comfort in every time of distress by looking back on the way in which God had dealt with their fathers in past times. "Remember," they said to one another, "his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth, O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen; he hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." They looked back on God's dealings with them in the past history of their nation, and took comfort for the time to come. And so we, also, one by one, may have comfort for the future, by thinking how God has dealt with us in our separate souls.

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