

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

Tells How to Secure Safety for Our Cities.

Municipal Government from a Moral and Religious Standpoint - Counsel to Those Holding Public Positions.

Dr. Talmage, in the following sermon, discusses from a moral and religious standpoint the welfare of all the towns and cities of our country. His text is Ezekiel xxvii, 3: "O thou that art situate at the entry of the sea!"

This is a part of an impassioned apostrophe to the city of Tyre. It was a beautiful city—a majestic city. At the east end of the Mediterranean it sat with one hand beckoning the inland trade and with the other the commerce of foreign nations. It swung a monstrous boom across its harbor to shut out foreign enemies, and then swung back that boom to let in its friends. The air of the desert was fragrant with the spices brought by caravans to her fairs, and all seas were cleft into foam by the keels of her laden merchantmen. Her markets were rich with horses and mules and camels from Togarmah; with upholstery and ebony and ivory from Dedan; with emeralds and agate and coral from Syria; with wine from Helbon; with finest needlework from Ashur and Chilmad. Talk about the splendid staterooms of your Cunard and Inman and White Star lines of international steamers—why, the benches of the staterooms in those Tyrian ships were all ivory, and instead of our coarse canvas on the mast of the shipping, they had the finest linen, quilted together and wrought with embroideries almost miraculous for beauty. Its columns overshadowed all nations. Distant empires felt its heartbeat. Majestic city, "situate at the entry of the sea."

But where now is the gleam of her towers, the roar of her chariots, the masts of her shipping? Let the fishermen who dry their nets on the place where she once stood, let the sea that rushes upon the barrenness where she once challenged the admiration of all nations, let the barbarians who build their huts on the place where her palaces glittered, answer the question. Blotted out forever! She forgot God, and God forgot her. And while our modern cities admire her glory let them take warning at her awful doom.

Cain was the founder of the first city, and I suppose it took after him in morals. It is a long while before a city can get over the character of those who founded it. Were they criminal exiles, the filth, and the prisons, and the debauchery are the shadows of such founders. New York will not for 200 or 300 years escape from the good influences of its founders, the pious settlers whose prayers went up from the very streets where now banks discount, and brokers shave, and companies declare dividends, and smugglers swear customhouse lies, and above the roar of the drays and the crack of the auctioneers' mallets is heard the ascription: "We worship thee, O thou almighty dollar!" The church that once stood on Wall street still throws its blessing over all the scene of traffic and upon the ships that fold their white wings in the harbor. Originally men gathered in cities from necessity. It was to escape the incendiary's torch or the assassin's dagger. Only the very poor lived in the country, those who had nothing that could be stolen or vagabonds who wanted to be near their place of business, but since civilization and religion have made it safe for men to live almost anywhere men congregate in cities because of the opportunity for rapid gain. Cities are not necessarily evils, as has sometimes been argued. They have been the birthplace of civilization. In them popular liberty has lifted up its voice. Witness Genoa and Pisa and Venice. The entrance of the representatives of the cities in the legislatures of Europe was the deathblow to feudal kingdoms. Cities are the patronizers of art and literature—architecture pointing to its British museum in London, its Royal library in Paris, its vatican in Rome. Cities hold the world's scepter. Africa was Carthage, Greece was Athens, England is London, France is Paris, Italy is Rome and the cities in which God has cast our lot will yet decide the destiny of the American people.

At this season of the year I have thought it might be useful to talk a little while about the moral responsibility resting upon the office bearers in all our cities, a theme as appropriate to those who are governed as to the governors. The moral character of those who rule a city has much to do with the character of the city itself. Men, women and children are all interested in national politics. When the great presidential election comes, every patriot wants to be found at the ballot box. We are all interested in the discussion of national finance, national debt, and we read the laws of congress, and we are wondering who will sit next in the presidential chair. Now, that may be all very well—is very well. But it is high time that we took some of the attention which we have been devoting to national affairs and brought it to the study of municipal government. This it seems to me now is the chief point to be taken. Make the cities right and the nation will be

right. I have noticed that, according to their opportunities, there has really been more corruption in municipal governments in this country than in the state and national legislatures. Now, is there no hope? With the mightiest agent in our hand, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, shall not all our cities be reformed and purified and redeemed? I believe the day will come. I am in full sympathy with those who are opposed to carrying politics into religion, but our cities will never be reformed and purified until we carry religion into politics. I look over our cities and I see that all great interests are to be affected in the future, as they have been affected in the past, by the character of those who in the different departments rule over us, and I propose to classify some of those interests.

In the first place, I remark commercial ethics are always affected by the moral or immoral character of those who have municipal supremacy. Officials that wink at fraud and that have neither censure nor arraignment for glittering dishonesties always weaken the pulse of commercial honor. Every shop, every store, every bazaar, every factory in the cities feels the moral character of the city hall. If in any city there be a dishonest mayoralty, or an unprincipled common council, or a court susceptible to bribes, in that city there will be unlimited license for all kinds of trickery and sin, while, on the other hand, if officials are faithful to their oath of office, if the laws are promptly executed, if there is vigilance in regard to the outranchings of crime, there is the highest protection for all bargain making.

A merchant may stand in his store and say: "Now, I'll have nothing to do with city politics. I will not soil my hands with the slush." Nevertheless the most insignificant trial in the police court will affect that merchant directly or indirectly. What style of clerk issues the writ? What style of constable makes the arrest? What style of attorney issues the plea? What style of judge charges the jury? What style of sheriff executes the sentence? These are questions that strike your counting rooms to the center. You may not throw it off. In the city of New York Christian merchants for a great while said: "We'll have nothing to do with the management of public affairs," and they allowed everything to go at loose ends until there rolled up in that city a debt of nearly \$120,000,000. The municipal government became a hissing and a byword in the whole earth, and then the Christian merchants saw their folly, and they went and took possession of the ballot boxes. I wish all commercial men to understand that they are not independent of the moral character of the men who rule over them, but must be thoroughly, mightily affected by them.

So also of the educational interests of a city. Do you know that there are in this country about 70,000 common schools, and that there are over 8,000,000 pupils, and that the majority of those schools and the majority of those pupils are in our cities? Now this great multitude of children will be affected by the intelligence or ignorance, the virtue or the vice of boards of education and boards of control. There are cities where educational affairs are settled in the low caucus in the abandoned parts of the cities by men full of ignorance and rum. It ought not to be so, but in many cities it is so. I hear the tramp of coming generations. What that great multitude of youth shall be for this world and the next will be affected very much by the character of your public schools. You had better multiply the moral and religious influences about the common schools than to subtract from them. Instead of driving the Bible out, you had better drive the Bible further in. May God defend our glorious common school system and send into rout and confusion all its sworn enemies.

I have also to say that the character of officials in a city affects the domestic circle. In a city where grogshops have their own way and gambling halls are not interfered with, and for fear of losing political influence officials close their eyes to festering abominations—in all those cities the home interests need to make imploration. The family circles of the city must inevitably be affected by the moral character or the immoral character of those who rule over them.

I will go further and say that the religious interests of a city are thus affected. The church to-day has to contend with evils that the civil law ought to smite, and, while I would not have the civil government in any wise relax its energy in the arrest and punishment of crime, I would have a thousandfold more energy put forth in the drying up of the fountains of iniquity. The church of God asks no pecuniary aid from political power, but does ask that in addition to all the evils we must necessarily contend against we shall not have to fight also municipal negligence. Oh, that in all our cities Christian people would rise up, and that they would put their hand on the helm before piratical demagogues have swamped the ship! Instead of giving so much time to national politics, give some of your attention to municipal government.

I demand that the Christian people who have been standing aloof from public affairs come back, and in the might of God try to save our cities. If things are or have been bad, it is because good people have let them be bad.

That Christian man who merely goes to the polls and casts his vote does not do his duty. It is not the ballot box that decides the election; it is the political caucus, and if at the primary meetings of the two political parties unfit and bad men are nominated, then the ballot box has nothing to do save to take its choice between two thieves. In our churches, by reformatory organization, in every way let us try to tone up the moral sentiment in these cities. The rulers are those whom the people choose, and depend upon it that in all the cities, as long as pure hearted men stand aloof from politics because they depise hot partisanship, just so long in many of our cities will rum make the nominations, and rum control the ballot box, and rum inaugurate the officials.

I take a step further in this subject and ask all those who believe in the omnipotence of prayer, day by day and every day, present your city officials before God for a blessing. If you live in a city presided over by a mayor, pray for him. The chief magistrate of a city is in a position of great responsibility. Many of the kings and queens and emperors of other days had no such dominion. With the scratch of a pen he may advance a beneficent institution or balk a railway confiscation. By appointments he may bless or curse every hearthstone in the city. If in the Episcopal churches, by the authority of the litany, and in our non-episcopate churches we every Sabbath pray for the president of the United States, why not, then, be just as hearty in our supplications for the chief magistrates of cities, for their guidance, for their health, for their present and their everlasting morality?

But go further, and pray for your common council, if your city has a common council. They hold in their hands a power splendid for good or terrible for evil. They have many temptations. In many of the cities whole boards of common council men have gone down in the maelstrom of political corruption. They could not stand the power of the bribe. Corruption came in and sat beside them, and sat behind them, and sat before them. They recklessly voted away the hard-earned moneys of the people. They were bought out, body, mind and soul, so that at the end of their term of office they had not enough of moral remains left to make a decent funeral. They went into office with the nuzza of the multitude. They came out with the anathema of all decent people. There is not one man out of 100 that can endure the temptations of the common council men in our great cities. If a man in that position have the courage of a Cromwell and the independence of an Andrew Jackson, and the public-spiritedness of a John Frederick Oberlin, and the piety of an Edward Payson, he will have no surplus to throw away. Pray for these men. Every man likes to be prayed for. Do you know how Dr. Norman McLeod became the queen's chaplain? It was by a warm-hearted prayer in the Scotch kirk in behalf of the royal family, one Sabbath when the queen and her son were present incognito.

Yes, go further, my friends, and pray for your police. Their perils and temptations are best known to themselves. They hold the order and peace of your cities in their grasp. But for their intervention you would not be safe for an hour. They must face the storm. They must rush in where it seems to them almost instant death. They must put the hand of arrest on the armed maniac and corner the murderer. They must refuse large rewards for withdrawing complaints. They must unravel intricate plots and trace dark labyrinths of crime and develop suspicions into certainties. They must be cool while others are frantic. They must be vigilant while others are somnolent, impersonating the very villainy they want to seize. In the police forces of our great cities are to-day men of as thorough character as that of the old detective of New York, addressed to whom there came letters from London asking for help ten years after he was dead—letters addressed to "Jacob Hayes, High Constable of New York." Your police need your appreciation, your sympathy, your gratitude, and, above all, your prayers. Yes, I want you to go further and pray every day for prison inspectors and jail keepers, work awful and beneficent. Rough men, cruel men, impatient men, are not fit for these places. They have under their care men who were once as good as you, but they got tripped up. Bad company or strong drink or strange conjunction of circumstances flung them headlong. Go down that prison corridor and ask them how they got in and about their families and what their early prospects in life were, and you will find that they are very much like yourself, except in this, that God kept you while He did not restrain them. Just one false step made the difference between them and you. They want more than prison bars, more than jail fare, more than handcuffs and hoppers, more than a vermin-covered couch to reform them. Pray God day by day that the men who have these unfortunates in charge may be merciful, Christianly strategic and the means of reformation and rescue.

Some years ago a city pastor in New York was called to the city prison to attend a funeral. A young woman had committed a crime and was incarcerated, and her mother came to visit her, and died on the visit. The mother, having no home, was buried from her

daughter's prison cell. After the service was over the imprisoned daughter came up to the minister of Christ and said: "Wouldn't you like to see my poor mother?" And while they stood at the coffin the minister of Christ said to that imprisoned soul: "Don't you feel to-day, in the presence of your mother's dead body, as if you ought to make a vow before God that you will do differently and live a better life?" She stood for a few moments, and then the tears rolled down her cheeks, and she pulled from her right hand the worn-out glove that she had put on in honor of the obsequies, and, having bared her right hand, she put it upon the chill brow of her dead mother and said: "By the help of God, I swear I will do differently! God help me!" And she kept her vow. And years after, when she was told of the incident, she said: "When that minister of the Gospel said: 'God bless you and help you to keep the vow that you have made,' I cried out, and I said: 'You bless me! Do you bless me? Why, that's the first kind word I've heard in ten years.' And it thrilled through my soul, and it was the means of my reformation, and ever since, by the grace of God, I've tried to live a Christian life." Oh, yes, there are many amid the criminal classes that may be reformed. Pray for the men who have these unfortunates in charge, and who knows but that when you are leaving this world you may hear the voice of Christ dropping to your dying pillow, saying: "I was sick and in prison and you visited me." Yea, I take the suggestion of the Apostle Paul and ask you to pray for all who are in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceful lives in godliness and honesty.

My word now is to all who may come to hold any public position of trust in any city: You are God's representatives. God, the King and Ruler and Judge, sets you in His place. Oh, be faithful in the discharge of all your duties, so that when all our cities are in ashes and the world itself is a red scroll of flame, you may be in the mercy and grace of Christ rewarded for your faithfulness. It was that feeling which gave such eminent qualifications for office to Neal Dow, mayor of Portland, and to Judge McLean, of Ohio, and to Benjamin F. Butler, attorney-general of New York, and to George Briggs, governor of Massachusetts, and to Theodore Frelinghuysen, senator of the United States, and to William Wilberforce, member of the British parliament. You may make the rewards of eternity the emoluments of your office. What care you for adverse political criticism if you have God on your side? The one, or the two, or the three years of your public trust will pass away, and all the years of your earthly service, and then the tribunal will be lifted before which you and I must appear. May God make you so faithful now that the last scene shall be to your exhilaration and rapture! I wish to exhort all good people, whether they are the governors or the governed, to make one grand effort for the salvation, the purification, the redemption of our American cities. Do you not know that there are multitudes going down to ruin, temporal and eternal, dropping quicker than words drop from my lips? Grogshops swallow them up. Gambling halls devour them. Houses of shame are damning them. Oh, let us toil and pray and preach and vote until all these wrongs are righted! What we do we must do quickly. With our rulers, and on the same platform, we must at last come before the throne of God to answer for what we have done for the bettering of our great towns. Alas, if on that day it be found that your hand has been idle and my pulpit has been silent! O, ye who are pure and honest and Christian, go to work and help to make the cities pure and honest and Christian!

Let it may have been thought that I am addressing only what are called the better classes, my final word is to some dissolute soul to whom these words may come. Though you may be covered with all crimes, though you may be smitten with all leproisies, though you may have gone through the whole catalogue of iniquity and may not have been in church for 20 years, you may have your nature entirely reconstructed, and upon your brow, not with infamous practices and besweated with exhausting indulgences, God will place the flashing coronet of a Saviour's forgiveness. "Oh, no!" you say. "If you knew who I am and where I came from, you wouldn't say that to me. I don't believe the Gospel you are preaching speaks in my case." Yes, it does, my brother. And then, when you tell me that, I think of what St. Teresa said when reduced to utter destitution. She jingled the two pieces of money in her hand and said: "St. Teresa and two pieces of money are nothing, but St. Teresa and two pieces of money and God are all things." And I tell you now that while a sin and a sinner are nothing, a sin and a sinner and an all-forgiving and all-compassionate God are everything.

Who is that that I see coming? I know his step. I know his rags. Who is it? A prodigal. Come, people of God; let us go out and meet him. Get the best robe you can find in all the wardrobe. Let the angels of God fill their chaises and drink to his eternal rescue. Come, people of God; let us go out to meet him. The prodigal is coming home. The dead is alive again, and the lost is found.

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