

## New Years' Addresses

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The rapid and unceasing flight of time must, in some measure, force itself on the attention of all, but will ever lie with peculiar weight and power on the heart of the living family of God. Even those who live only for time must sometimes feel that the ground on which they stand is gradually crumbling under their feet, and that every advancing wave is sweeping away some fresh portion of the soil. But enjoying no comfort in the prospect of eternity, and thus "having no hope, and without God in the world," they either, like children, play on the sands heedless of the incoming tide, or in reckless hardness sullenly make up their mind to wait for the last plunge, when the dark waters of death must flow forever over their head.

Those, however, who live not for time but for eternity, not to sin and self but to Christ and his glory, whose hearts are made tender in the fear of God, whose conversation is in heaven, and whose affections are set upon things above, while they continually feel the flight of time, yet seem on certain occasions more peculiarly to realize the solemn fact that they are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," runners whose race will soon be run, sojourners whose place will before long know them no more.

Painful breaches made from time to time in their families by the entrance of death into the circle, and the removal of some beloved member; the decease of some esteemed servant of God under whose ministry they may have sat, or whose friendship they may have enjoyed; the recurrence of their own birthday; an attack of severe illness in their own body; a sense of advancing age and of growing infirmities— such and similar occurrences in the experience of us all, serve continually to remind the saints of God that the angel is ever lifting up his hand and warning them, that with them soon it will be time no longer.

Nor do they repel the thought as an unwelcome intruder, or seek to drown the solemn impression thus produced upon their spirit, as if death and eternity were doleful themes which dampen all rising joy; but they seek rather to strengthen the feeling and maintain the solemn recollection, in the hope that solid profit may be communicated to their souls thereby.

At such seasons as these memory with them casts her thoughtful eye back on the irrevocable past; earnest musing meditates upon the vivid present; and anticipation, with mingled feelings of hope and fear, looks forward to the

unknown future. But though the rapid wing of time is ever thus leaving impressions of this nature on believing hearts, yet there is one special season when these impressions make themselves more deeply and distinctly felt. The *commencement of a New Year* is the season to which we thus particularly allude. We seem then to stand as if on a narrow isthmus between two boundless seas—the past and the future.

There is, geographers tell us, one point and one point only on the Andes, that lofty ridge of mountains which, like a huge backbone, runs through both the American continents, whence the eye of the traveler can observe both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. History records the feeling of the Spanish captain who, after days and weeks of incessant toil amid dense woods and steep mountain passes, first gazed upon this wondrous scene, and tells us with what emotions he beheld the Pacific never before seen by European eye. Two oceans far deeper, far broader, far more involving our happiness and peace, than Spanish eye ever saw, or warrior's heart ever felt, meet our view when in musing meditation we look back on our life past, and forward upon our life yet to come. The year just closed is a portion of the one; the year on which we have just entered a part of the other.

Under this feeling, it has been our pleasing, though difficult, task for many years to avail ourselves of the new-born year to address a few words of friendly counsel to our numerous readers. They have been hitherto kind enough to lend a favorable ear to that annual Address in which, not as having dominion over their faith, but as a helper of their joy, we have sought, in the exercise of our Editorial position, to speak to their hearts and consciences.

A. Let us, then, as those who desire to fear God, under a feeling sense of his presence and of his power, once more take our stand upon that isthmus of time of which we have just spoken; and let us first cast our eyes on the year now forever PAST, as that may better prepare our mind to direct its view toward that which is to come. Though it may in some respects be a painful retrospect, for what one period of time, whether short or long, can bear to be closely scanned? Yet let us seek to look back upon it with believing eyes, and in a meditative, prayerful, thankful spirit.

Moses, the man of God, when, after forty years' weary wanderings, he stood upon the edge of the desert, with the Holy Land in view, separated from it but by Jordan's deep and rapid stream, recalled to the minds of the children of Israel the varied transactions of the wilderness before he set before them the blessings of Canaan. "You shall remember," he says, "how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Deut.

8:2, 3.)

Let us then, with God's help and blessing, seek to realize a similar spirit of godly recollection, whereby we shall, with Moses and the children of Israel, look back upon the year now past before we traverse the year still future. The rebellious murmurings of the children of Israel, their idolatries and other grievous sins, were not urged against them by Moses, except to bring before them the Lord's rich, free, and super-abounding grace in overruling their wilderness trials and temptations into a means of making his word precious to their hearts. In the same spirit shall we seek to recall to the minds of our readers the goodness of the Lord during the past year; and if we touch upon its trials and temptations, or bring to remembrance its sins and transgressions, we shall do so only as magnifying the exceeding riches of that grace in which alone we stand, and by which alone we can be saved and sanctified.

1. Mercy must be the first note of our song, yes, the very keynote which regulates the whole theme. "I will sing of mercy and judgment," was David's gracious resolution. (Ps. 101:1.) "Judgment" shall have its place in the song, as bass mingles with treble to produce the sweeter harmony, but mercy shall lead the strain. With this keynote let us, then, commence our theme.

As we look back upon the year now just past, and, according to the frame of our mind, or the strength of our faith, various feelings spring up in our bosom, *thankfulness* is one which has, or at least should have, a foremost place. As viewed by a believing eye, that wondrous faculty which sees a present God in every circumstance of life, what countless mercies have crowned with goodness the year whose birth and burial we have now witnessed! The bountiful hand of a most kind and tender God in providence, as so conspicuous in giving us an almost unparalleled harvest in the year now past demands our first and earliest tribute of thankful praise. What a striking contrast did the past summer and autumn afford to the corresponding seasons of the preceding year— a contrast which made it doubly felt and appreciated. What a succession of bright suns was day after day granted us to mature and ripen the corn, and yet occasionally there fell genial showers to prevent too great a deficiency of needful moisture. How the soil, too, sick and saturated with the unprecedented rains of 1860, seemed to gather, day by day, renewed health and strength under those warm solar rays which brought forth "the precious fruits from the deep that couches beneath," turning in God's mysterious chemistry the very superabundant moisture of one year into a source of fertility for another. How many anxious eyes and trembling hearts were watching at the commencement of the harvest the aspect of the heavens, scanning with doubt and fear the appearance of every passing cloud. In all our long recollection of such seasons, and we have been no unwatchful observer of them for many years, we never remember to have witnessed such a universal feeling of dependence upon the sky, and we hope, in very many instances, on Him who rules the sky, as marked the commencement of last harvest. All seemed to feel that the worth of millions was suspended in the visible

heavens, and that the recurrence of another such a wet and deficient harvest as that of 1860 would fall upon the nation as a public calamity. When, then, day after day, the sun shone bright and fair in the sky, and the grain, rapidly maturing under his warm rays, was cut and gathered in an almost unprecedented condition of dryness, it was as if the nation breathed again, like one who holds his breath in awe and suspense in the sight of some expected disaster, but, recovers respiration when escape is obtained.

Let us hope that the lesson of dependence thus experimentally taught us was not in vain, and that it has been treasured up in many believing hearts. And though men, blinded by the fall, will not see the Lord's hand, yet surely we, as a nation, need to be reminded by these changeful visitations that "the Lord does not leave himself now without witness, in that he still does good and gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." If deficient in quantity, the grain was so excellent in quality that we have abundant reason to say, as we eat our daily bread, "The Lord be praised for the beautiful harvest of 1861."

This was a *general* mercy, but one of so marked and abundant a character that we could not in a review of the year now gone pass it by without notice. One of the worst marks of the fall, and one of the crying sins of the Gentile world was that when they knew God by the things that are made, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." (Rom. 1:20, 21.) Let us not imitate their sin and their folly; but while we believe in and love a God of all grace, let us thankfully adore him as our kind God in providence.

But in a review of the year now past, faith bids us call to mind those *special* mercies which peculiarly demand a note of thankful praise. "Whoever offers praise glorifies me." (Ps. 50:23.) "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6.) We lose much of the sweetness of mercies for lack of a believing eye to see them, and of a thankful heart to feel and acknowledge them. Surrounded as we are by mercies, through the power and prevalency of unbelief, we continually lose sight of them, and fixing our eye perhaps on some trial or affliction, murmur amid our favors and rebel amid our blessings. Thus we commit two evils— ingratitude and rebellion, and by the indulgence of this unthankful, murmuring spirit, lose the sweetness of our mercies and add to the weight of our miseries.

But, has faith no eyes to view past favors, or rather the gracious hand which has showered them down upon us during the months gone by? Our *temporal* mercies have been great. It is true that all may not have been unmixed prosperity and success. Providential trials, losses in business, great and unexpected disappointments, serious reverses, lack of employment, and other painful circumstances, have doubtless fallen to the lot of some, if not many of our readers, for the precarious and peculiar state of our foreign relations has much depressed trade, injured profits, and thrown hundreds out of work— and as the

Lord's people, while in the body, are in the world, though not of the world, they necessarily suffer with it.

But if these heavy providential trials have at times severely tried their minds, and deeply depressed their spirits, yet have not these very difficulties made the Lord's providential hand more conspicuous? A course of unchequered prosperity is not the way in which the Lord generally leads his children. Severe and heavy trials much more usually mark their course. But, these very trials only reveal him more plainly as a God in providence. When, then, we call upon our spiritual readers to acknowledge with thankful heart their past temporal mercies, we do not mean that they should do so except in connection with their providential deliverances. To see the kind hand of the Lord in daily giving us food and clothing, house and home, in supplying our temporal needs with necessaries if not with luxuries, enabling us to maintain an honorable position, according to our respective stations, disgracing neither ourselves nor the name we profess to love by running into debt or injuring others by hopeless insolvency, but, amid many difficulties, from which few are free, by prudent economy and needful self-denial, still enabled to fulfill the precept, "Owe no man anything"— is not this a mercy that demands a thankful note of praise?

When we look around and see the misery that men bring upon themselves and their families, and if professors of religion, and especially if ministers, what disgrace upon the cause of God and truth by running into debt and involving others who have confided in them by their recklessness and extravagance, we may well count it a rich mercy if the kind providence of God has hitherto held up our steps, and not put us to an open shame.

But casting our eyes back upon the year now forever past and gone, are there no other mercies which claim a note of thankful praise? It is sweet to see the Lord's kind hand in providence, but sweeter far to view his outstretched hand in grace. Are we then so unwatchful or so unmindful of the Lord's gracious hand in his various dealings with our soul as to view the whole past twelve months as a dead blank in which we have never seen his face, nor heard his voice, nor felt his power? "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness?" (Jer. 2:31.) the Lord tenderly asks. Has he been such to us also for twelve long and weary months? What! No help by the way, no tokens for good, no liftings up of the light of his countenance, no visitations of his presence and power, no breakings in of his goodness for all that long and dreary time— for dreary it must indeed have been for a living soul to have been left and abandoned of the Lord so long!

If not blessed with any peculiar manifestations of the Son of God, with any signal revelations of his Person and work, blood and love, grace and glory, for such special seasons are not of frequent occurrence, have we not still found him the Way, the Truth, and the Life? Have we not from time to time found secret access unto God by him as the Way, the only Way, unto the Father? known him as the Truth, by an experience of his liberating, sanctifying power and influence on our

heart? and felt him to be the Life by the sweet renewings and gracious revivings of his Spirit and grace? If we have indeed a personal and spiritual union with the Son of God, as our living Head, there will be communications out of his fullness, a supplying of all our need, a making of his strength perfect in our weakness, a maintaining of the life that he has given, a drawing forth of faith and hope and love, a support under trials, a deliverance from temptations, a deepening of his fear in the heart, a strengthening of the things which remain that have often seemed ready to die, and that continued work of grace whereby we are enabled to live a life of faith on the Son of God. If we have no such tokens for good, no such testimonies to record, the year has indeed been to us a blank, and we may almost say of it what Job said of the day of his birth— "Let it not be joined unto the days of the year! let it not come into the number of the months." But not to have it is one thing, not to see it is another. "The Christian often cannot see his faith, and yet believes."

You may have had all and more than all that we have described as the life of faith, and yet through timidity, unbelief, fear of presumption, a sense of your dreadful sinfulness, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy, may fear to take what really belongs to you. But where or what, are we if we have no spiritual mercies to record? How do we differ from the dead in sin who are without God in the world, or the dead in a profession, who have a form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof?

But we may also have to sing of "judgment" as well as of "mercy," not indeed of judgment as implying the penal wrath, the judicial and implacable indignation of the Almighty, but as a kind and fatherly chastisement for our multiplied sins and transgressions. "Fury is not in me," said the Lord. No— there is no wrath in the bosom of God against his people. They are forever "accepted in the Beloved," and stand in him before the throne of God without spot or wrinkle; but there is displeasure against their sins; and this displeasure, their kind and gracious Father makes them feel when he withdraws from them the light of his countenance, and sends his keen reproofs and sharp rebukes into their conscience. But these very "judgments" help them; (Ps. 119:175,) for they lead to deep searchings of heart; and as the same blessed Spirit who sets home the reproof communicates therewith repentance, they sorrow after a godly manner, and this godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of. (2 Cor. 7:10.)

If, then, our afflictions, crosses, losses, bereavements, family troubles, church trials, and more especially if the rebukes and reproofs of God in our conscience have been a means of humbling our proud hearts, bringing us to honest confession of, and godly sorrow for our sins and backslidings, if they have instrumentally separated us more effectually from the world, its company, its ways, its maxims, and its spirit— if they have, in the good hand of God, stirred up prayer and supplication in our hearts, led us into portions of the word of truth before hidden from view, laid us more feelingly and continually at the footstool of

mercy, given us a deeper insight into the way of salvation, made mercy more dear and grace more sweet, have these trials and afflictions been either unprofitable or unseasonable?

The tree is to be judged by its fruits. The stem may be rough, and crooked— what more so than the vine? and yet what rich clusters may hang upon the bough! Measure your trials and afflictions by this standard— fruit. The true believer longs to bring forth fruit unto God; he mourns under his barrenness, often fearing lest he should eventually prove to be one of these branches which, as not bearing fruit, are to be taken away— and as these fears and feelings work in his breast, the earnest desire of his soul is to be more manifestly, both to himself and others, a fruitful branch in the only true Vine. The sweet psalmist of our Christian Israel has well expressed his desire—

"Smile me into fruit, or chide,  
If no milder means will do."

We are surrounded, we were going to say pestered, by a generation of loose-living professors, both in the pulpit and in the pew, men whose character Jude has written with the point of a diamond, as "feeding themselves without fear, as clouds without water, carried about of winds— trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame," etc. (Jude 12, 13.) Who that views the professing church with an enlightened eye does not see how such characters abound in this day of loud profession? What a separation of spirit, not in pride and pharisaism, not in harsh censure, not in resentment and bitterness, not in wrath and malice, but in the calm depths of a quiet humble mind, does the child of God feel from such wanton professors! Their company is death to his soul; and if his lot be unhappily cast under a light, unprofitable, dead, and barren ministry— the very element of such graceless characters, what darkness, bondage, and misery are communicated to him thereby!

Shall we, then, murmur and rebel under those strokes of kind and fatherly chastisement which, by making our conscience tender and our souls alive unto God, show us the dreadful spots into which men fall who have not the rod of God upon them? How are we, or how are any kept from their presumption and vain confidence, from their evils and their errors, except by the hand of God holding us up and holding us in? Nothing is more dangerous than a profession of the truth without an experience of its power, for nothing more hardens the heart and sears the conscience than a wanton handling of sacred things. Natural men have often a reverence for sacred things, and a conviction that they are too holy for them to touch. By this they are preserved from presumption, if not from unbelief, and their conscience, though dead, is not seared. But when this barrier is broken down, and men without a particle of godly fear or heavenly reverence of the glorious Majesty of God, intrude into his sanctuary, a graceless familiarity with the solemn mysteries of truth is almost sure to harden their conscience and make

them twofold more the children of the devil than they were before. The Lord has pointed this clearly out in the parable of the man out of whom the unclean spirit had "gone out,"— gone out, not cast out, departed for a season under the influence of a profession, but not turned out by the mighty power of God. Being thus at liberty to go and come, he returns to spy out the state of his former mansion— and he finds it "empty" of grace, but "swept" by the brush of profession, and "garnished" with the letter of truth. This is just the place for Satan and his crew, and thus exulting over his suitable home, "he goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than himself,"— for they are religious devils, whereas he is but an unclean or profane spirit, "and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Matt. 12:43-45.)

B. But let us now look a little FORWARD. The year is before us. We have seen its beginning; the Lord knows whether we shall see its ending. Will it not then be our wisdom and mercy to live in it as if it were to be our last? Our Lord tells us what is the posture, the only safe and happy posture of his people— "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him." (Luke 12:35, 36.) But though this posture can neither be obtained nor maintained except by special grace, yet the Lord does bless those means of his own appointment which he has afforded us; and most certain it is that without the use of these means the life of God cannot be sustained in health and vigor. Let us glance at some of them.

1. A spirit of prayer is most certainly one of the most gracious means which the Lord employs in maintaining divine life in the soul. A spirit of prayer is something very different from a custom of prayer, a form of prayer, or even a gift of prayer. These are merely the fleshly imitations of the interceding breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the saints of God— and, therefore, may and do exist without it. But that secret lifting up of the heart unto the Lord, that panting after him as the deer pants after the water-brooks, that pouring out of the soul before him, that sighing and groaning for a word of his grace, a look of his eye, a touch of his hand, a smile of his face, that sweet communion and heavenly communion with him on the mercy-seat which marks the Spirit's inward intercession— all this cannot be counterfeited. Such a close, private, inward, experimental work and walk is out of the reach and out of the taste of the most gifted professor. But in this path the Holy Spirit leads the living family of God, and as they walk in it under his teachings and anointings, they feel its sweetness and blessedness.

2. Having the eyes and heart much in the word of truth is another blessed means of maintaining the life of God in the soul. O what treasures of mercy and grace are lodged in the Scriptures; what a mine of heavenly instruction; what a store of precious promises, encouraging invitations, glorious truths, holy precepts, tender admonitions, wise counsels, and living directions! What a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path! But O how little we know, understand, believe, realize, feel, and enjoy of the word of life. For many years have we read, studied, meditated,



and sought by faith to enter into the treasures of truth contained in the inspired word; but O how little do we understand it! how less do we believe and enjoy the heavenly mysteries, the treasures of grace and truth revealed in it! Yet only as our heart is brought not only unto, but into the word of life, and only as faith feeds on the heavenly food there lodged by the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, can we be made fruitful in any good word or work. We should seek, by the help and blessing of God, to drink more into the spirit of truth, to enter more deeply and vitally into the mind of Christ, to read the word more under that same inspiration whereby it was written, to submit our heart more to its instruction, that it may drop like the rain and distill like the dew into the inmost depths of our soul, and thus, as it were, fertilize the roots of our faith, and hope, and love.

3. Separation from the world, and everything worldly, and that not in a monkish, austere, pharisaic spirit, but from the constraining influence of that love to the Lord which draws up the heart and affections unto him away from earthly things, is a gracious, we might almost say an indispensable means of maintaining the life of God in the believer's breast. Nothing more deadens the soul to every gracious and heavenly feeling than drinking into the spirit of the world. As long as *that* is kept out, mere external contact with the world, as, for instance, in the calls of necessary and lawful business, does not injure. The world without and the world within are like two streams of different magnitude which run side by side. Keep them apart, and the smaller stream will not overflow its banks; but let the larger stream get an entrance into the smaller, in other words, let the world without rush into the world within, who shall tell the width of that flood or the havoc that it may make of the crops?

Some constitutions are so tender that every cold blast is sufficient to produce inflammation; and others are so susceptible of disease that they fall sick under the slightest taint of every epidemic disorder. Such sickly constitutions must watch against the east wind, and not expose themselves to the air of the marshy fen. But just such cold-catching, feverish invalids are we all in soul, whatever be the vigor and health of the body. Let us then be afraid of the very breath of the world lest it chill the heart, or inflame the carnal mind; let us dread exposure to its infectious influence lest it call forth into active energy our latent disease. And above all, let us dread the influence of worldly professors. The openly profane cannot do us much harm. The foul-mouthed swearer, the staggering drunkard, the loud brawler, are not likely to do us any injury. We can give them what the sailor calls "a wide berth," as he does to a known rock when he approaches the place as marked on the chart. Nor are we likely to suffer injury from the moral Churchman, or the zealous Arminian, or the political Dissenter. They and we are far enough apart.

But the professor of the same truths which we hold dear, who sits perhaps under the same or a similar ministry, whom we cannot altogether reject and yet cannot receive, who, like Bunyan's Talkative, is swift to speak on every occasion, and on no occasion at all, that he may have the pleasure of hearing the music of his own

tongue, but who the more we are in his company the more he robs us of every tender, humble, gracious, and spiritual feeling— he, he is the robber, not indeed the highwayman who knocks us down with his bludgeon, but the pickpocket who steals our purse as he sits in the same carriage by our side.

4. To cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart under all cases and circumstances, under all trials and temptations, under all difficulties and perplexities, amid a whole storm of objections and suggestions from the carnal mind, the sore thrustings of our pitiless and unwearied adversary, and every obstacle from without or within that may obstruct our path— this, too, is indispensable to the life of faith. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force." It is not folding the hands and crying, "Peace, peace," that will take us to heaven; no, nor a sound creed, a form of godliness, or a name to live. This is not running the race set before us, or fighting the good fight of faith, or wrestling with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Sometimes we are tempted to presume and sometimes tempted to despair. The only cure for both these diseases of the soul is to cleave to the Person and work, blood, love, and grace of the Lord Jesus, so far as he has been revealed to our soul and according to the measure of faith which is given unto us. To hang upon him at every step is the only way to be brought through.

5. The last gracious means which we shall name, as it is time to come to a conclusion, is to live, walk, and act in the daily fear of God. This is, indeed, a most blessed fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. Only, then, as this fountain of life springs up in the soul, watering and thus making the conscience tender, the heart fruitful, the affections heavenly, and the spirit soft and contrite, can the power of grace be maintained in the breast. This heavenly grace of godly fear, the believer's treasure, the beginning and the end of wisdom, makes and keeps the eye watchful, the ear attentive, the smell quick and sagacious, the tongue savory, the arm strong, the hand open, and the foot cautious; and thus amid thousands of snares and temptations he walks forward to a heavenly kingdom with his eyes right on, and his eyelids straight before him.

Dear friends, friends of Jesus, partakers of his grace, and heirs of his glory, there is a divine reality in the things of God and the kingdom of heaven. We have not followed cunningly devised fables in leaving all things for Jesus' sake— name, fame, prospects in life, worldly joys, earthly hopes, and carnal pleasures. In choosing, with Moses, through the power of God's grace, rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, we have not made a choice which will end in disappointment.

Mat the Lord give us to realize during the coming year more of his love; and may his rich, free, sovereign, distinguishing, and super-abounding grace manifest itself in a godly walk, a holy life, and a conversation becoming the gospel, that we may adorn the doctrine we profess, and compel our very enemies to hold their mouths for shame when they would gladly find occasion of reproach in us. Under

every trial may we find heavenly support, out of every temptation a gracious deliverance; and should the sentence even be "This year you shall die," may we feel the everlasting arms underneath on the bed of death, leave behind us a sweet testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord, and be borne aloft to join that happy and glorious company who with tongues of ceaseless praise forever adore the Lamb.

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