

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE VOICES OF OUR DAYS.

A New Year's Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 4TH, 1912,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."—
Job xxxii. 7.

IN the discussion between Job and his three friends Elihu was present, but though by far the wisest man he remained quiet. Sometimes, a still tongue proves a wise head. In our text he gives his reason for refraining from speech. He felt inclined to deliver his mind, but being the younger man he modestly said, "These grey-headed men ought to know better than I. Perhaps, if I speak, I shall display my ignorance, and they will say, 'Be silent, boy, and let your fathers teach you.'" Therefore he said to himself, "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

Elihu had, however, been disappointed. His words plainly say that he had heard but little wisdom from the three ancients, and he added, "Great men are not always wise; neither do the aged understand judgment." He was not the only man who has been disappointed when looking to his seniors for wisdom, for it is a sorrowful truth that the lapse of years will not make us wiser apart from the grace of God. Though with the teaching of the Holy Spirit every year's experience will make the Christian riper, yet without that teaching it is possible that each year may make a man, not more ripe, but more rotten. Among all sinners the worst are those who have been longest at the trade; and among saints he is not always the best who has lived long enough to grow cold. We have known some exhibit ripeness of experience in their very youth through divine teaching, and by growing on the sunny side of the wall of fellowship; while others who have been far longer on the tree

are still sour, because they hang out of the blessed sunlight of the divine presence, in the cool shade of worldliness. You cannot measure a man's wisdom by the baldness of his head, or the greyness of his hair; and yet, if the Spirit of God were with us to sanctify each day's experience, it ought to be so. "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

This, then, is our new year's theme,—the teaching of our years as they pass over our heads. What are we learning from them?

I. Our first remark shall be that DAYS HAVE A VOICE. Elihu said, "Days should speak." Every day, as a day, has its own lesson. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." The sun never breaks upon the earth without light of a superior order for those who have intelligence, and especially for those who have the Holy Spirit. For instance, the mere fact of our beginning another day teaches us to adore the mercy which kept us alive when the image of death was on our faces during the night;—an extraordinary mercy indeed, for sleep is near akin to death, and waking is a rehearsal of the resurrection. When the day begins, it tells us that God has already provided us with mercies, for there are our garments ready to put on, and there too is the morning meal. Each day in its freshness seems to hint that the Lord would have us attempt somewhat new for him, or push forward with that which we have already commenced, or draw nearer to him than we have ever been before. The Lord calls us to learn more of him, to become more like him, to drink more fully into his love, and to show forth that love more clearly. Every hour of the day teaches us its own lesson, and till the shadows fall the voices speak to us if we have ears to hear. Night, too, has its teaching. Does it not bid us pray the Lord to draw a curtain over the day, and hide the sin of it, even as he draws the curtain across the sky, and makes it more easy for us to fall asleep? Do we not delight, as we go to our beds, to ask to be unclothed of all our sins, even as we are stripped of our garments, and should we not pray to be prepared to fall asleep, and lie in our last bedchamber, till the everlasting morning breaks upon us, and we put on our glory robes? Did we but exercise sanctified thought, each day would bring its precious dower of wisdom, and make us better acquainted with the Lord.

What a message do our Sabbath days bring to us! To those who toil all the week long, the light of the Lord's day seems fairer and fresher than that of any other day. A person at Newcastle, who had a house to let, took an applicant for it to the top of his house, spoke of the distant prospect, and added, "We can see Durham cathedral on a Sunday." "On Sunday," said the listener, "and pray why not on a Monday?" "Why," said he, "because on the week-days great furnaces and pits are pouring forth their smoke, and we cannot see so far; indeed, we can scarcely see at all; but when the fires are out, our view is wide." Is not this a true symbol of our Sabbath days when we are in the Spirit? The smoke of the world no more beclouds the heavens, and we see almost up to the golden gates. Such days do speak, indeed, and tell us of the rest which

remaineth. They sing in our ears with soft and gentle voice, and tell us that we shall not always need to bow like galley slaves, tugging at the oar of this world's work, but may even now look up to the place where our home awaits us, and the weary are at rest. These peaceful Lord's days call us away to the top of Shenir and Hermon, whence we may view the land of our inheritance. They cry to us, "Come up higher." They beckon us to commune with him "whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." All days speak, but Sabbath days speak best,—they are orators for God! These resurrection days, these days of the Son of man, these have angel voices. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

While each day speaks, some days have peculiar voices. Days of joy speak, and bid us bless the Lord, and magnify his name. Days of sorrow speak, and cry, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted." Days of communion with God speak, saying, "Abide with me;" and days of lost communion cry in warning, "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?" Days of health say, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;" and days of sickness say, "In the day of adversity consider." Each day, whether bright or dim, clear or cloudy, festive or desolate, has its own tone and modulation, and speaks its own message. Some of these days are great preachers, and from them we have learned more than in months before. Solemn days of decision when sins have been abandoned, joyous days of manifestation when Christ has been precious, triumphant days of victory in which God has been exalted,—these speak indeed, and like prophets claim a hearing in the name of the Lord. Whether common or special, each day is to us a new page of sacred history, a new window into the truth, another halting-place in the march to the celestial city.

Here let us add that *all our days have had a voice to us*. There were youthful days, and we thought they said, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth," and we listened all too eagerly; yet we misunderstood those voices. Had we hearkened to the end of their sermon, we should have heard them say, "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." To some of us, our youthful days were full of blessed teaching, for they called us to seek him early in whom we have rejoiced and found our all in all. Days of middle life have a voice, which we hear as we buckle on our harness for stern fight, and find but little space for rest, and none for self-congratulation. What do these days say to us but "Work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work"? Those grey hairs scattered upon our brows warn us that our sun will not remain at noon for long. I hear a voice which cries to me, "Quick! quick! quick! The night cometh." As to those later days, to which our text more pointedly alludes, they say to you, dear brothers and sisters, who have reached them, "Make sure work for eternity. Hold time loosely. Lay hold on eternal life." The declining strength, the teeth long gone, the limbs trembling, the

eyes needing the optic glass to aid them, the hair snowy with many winters,—all these are messages of which the purport is, "Be ye also ready, for the Bridegroom cometh." Knowing our frailty, each day sounds in my ear the trumpet call, "Boot and saddle. Up and away. Linger no longer. Press on to the battle." One of the loveliest sights in the world is an aged believer waiting for the summons to depart. There is a lovely freshness in the green blade, the bloom upon the ripening corn is also fair to look upon, but best of all we delight in the golden ears drooping down from the very weight of ripeness, expectant of the sickle and the harvest home. We have some among us who are so lovely in their lives and heavenly in their conversation that they seem like shining ones, who have lingered here a little late; they ought to be in heaven, but in mercy to us they tarry here to let us see what the glorified are like. I have heard of stray sunbeams, and these are such. It is well when our old age is such a voice from heaven, but with the unconverted man or woman how different are all things! To them we must tenderly but faithfully give warning. "You *must* soon die. The young *may* die, but you *must*: you know you must. Be wise, therefore, and prepare to meet your God." The eleventh hour with iron tongue calls to you; give heed to it, or you will have to hear it sound your condemnation for ever.

"Hasten, sinner, to be wise,
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Longer wisdom you despise,
Harder is she to be won.

"Hasten mercy to implore,
Stay not for the morrow's sun,
Lest thy season should be o'er
Ere this evening's stage be run.

"Hasten, sinner, to return,
Stay not for the morrow's sun
Lest thy lamp should fail to burn
Ere salvation's work is done.

"Hasten, sinner, to be blest,
Stay not for the morrow's sun,
Lest perdition thee arrest
Ere the morrow is begun."

Our days all have a voice, and those which mark the different stages of our life and the flight of time have voices which demand special attention. Birthdays, as often as they come, have a chiding voice, if we are lingering and loitering; and they have also a voice appealing to us for gratitude for years of mercy past. They have a voice calling to us for more strenuous exertions, and bidding us draw nearer to God than before. There is always a buoyancy and gladness about the first days of the year; they speak of thankfulness, and call us to devote ourselves anew to God, and seek new grace to make the coming year more holy than the past. The dying hours of the last day of the year are well kept as a watch, for by their fewness we see their preciousness. There are also last days to a

life; and it will depend upon what that life is whether they will be rung out with joyous peals or knelled with despair.

Let days speak, then, for they have much to say to us.

II. The next thing in our text is, that INCREASING YEARS SHOULD INCREASE OUR WISDOM: "multitude of years should teach wisdom." A man ought not to be at this moment as foolish as he was twelve months ago. He should be at least a little wiser. Christian men ought to learn several things by the lapse of years.

We ought to learn to *trust less to ourselves*. Self-confidence is one of the commonest faults of the young; they judge themselves to be better than their fathers, and capable of great things. Untried strength always appears to be greater than it is. For a man to trust himself in the beginning of his Christian career is very unwise, for Scripture warns him against it; but for him to trust himself after he has been twenty or thirty years a Christian is surely insanity itself,—a sin against common sense. If we have spent only a few years in the Christian life, we ought to have learned, from slips, and follies, and failures, and ignorances, and mistakes, that we are less than nothing. The college of experience has done nothing by way of instructing us if it has not taught us that we are weakness itself. To rest upon yourself, or upon any particular virtue which you possess, or upon any resolution which you have formed, is vanity itself. Brother, has that spider's thread already failed you so many times, and do you still call it a cable? Has reed after reed broken beneath you, and do you still rest on them as though they were bars of iron? Are you an aged Christian, and yet self-confident? Surely this cannot be.

Age should teach every man to *place less and less confidence in his fellow-men*. I do not mean that we are to lose that legitimate confidence which we should place in our fellow-Christians, and in the moral integrity of those we have tried and proved; but I refer to that carnal confidence which makes flesh its arm: this should be cured by age. When we begin the Christian life, we are like feeble plants needing a support. We cling to our minister, and everything he says is gospel; or we follow some superior person, and place our admiring confidence in him. Alas! it often happens that helpers fail; and unless we have in the meantime learned to do without them, the consequences may be very serious. In the course of time, I think most Christians find their idols among men broken before their eyes. They at one time said, "If such a man were to fall, I should think that there was no truth in Christianity;" but they have learned better now. God will not have us make idols of his saints or ministers, and years prove to us that those are cursed who trust in man, but he is blessed that trusteth in the Lord.

We ought to learn, again, that *there is no depending upon appearances*. Have you not found out, as far as you have now gone, that the direst calamity that ever overtook you was your greatest mercy? And have you not found that what you thought would have been a choice blessing would really have been a terrible danger to you if it had been bestowed? You have judged the Lord, according

to your folly, by the outward manifestation of his providence, have you not now learned to believe in his tried fidelity, and to trust him at all times, let him do what he may? In this, age should instruct us. We ought not to be afraid because the day is cloudy, but remember that, if there were no clouds, there would be no rain, and if no rain, no harvests. Surely it is time that we had done judging each inch of time by itself, and began to see things upon a broader scale. We should neither be too much depressed nor too exultant, because of our immediate present condition, if we knew that things are not what they seem.

Years also should teach us *greater reliance upon the divine faithfulness*. It ought every day to be easier for a Christian to trust in God. The young believer is like a young swimmer who, for the first time, feels his feet off the bottom, and scarcely knows what will become of him; but the old swimmer feels like a fish in its native element, and he is not afraid of drowning. The little waves which, in his boyhood, he thought would swamp him, he takes no notice of whatever; and even if huge billows roll, he mounts them like a sea bird. Oh, it is a grand thing to be established in the faith, grounded and settled, so as to be able to say, "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed." So it ought to be with us. "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

And truly, dear friends, we ought to attain a *deeper insight into the things of God* as every year rolls over our heads. The conversation of mature Christians is always very delightful. Young Christians sparkle most, but old Christians are diamonds of the first water. You may get good fruit from a young and earnest Christian, but it lacks the mellowness and full flavour of the ripe believer. I love to talk with aged Christians, even when they are uneducated people. Many holy women may be met with among the poor of the church who know a world of sound divinity; and if you will but listen to them, you will be surprised. They do not deal in theories; they tell you matters of fact. They do not explain points like the schoolmen, but they illustrate by their experience what else seemed dark. They have been instructed by living near to God, by feeding upon truth, by lying in Jesus' bosom like the poor man's ewe lamb, which did eat of his bread and drink of his cup: this makes men wise unto salvation, and, in such cases, years sanctified by grace teach them wisdom.

I shall have to speak long if I have to show in what respects Christians ought to grow wiser. They ought to grow wiser with regard to themselves,—to be more watchful against their besetting sins, more intent in that particular department of service for which they find themselves most qualified. They ought to be wiser towards Satan, more aware of his devices, and of the times when he is likely to assail them. They ought to learn how to work better with others; to manage more easily people with queer tempers; to get on better with those who are under them, or with them, or above them. They should be learning how to deal with trembling

sinners, with hard hearts, and with tender consciences; with backsliders, with mourners, and the like. In fact, in all things every year we ought to be more fully equipped; and, under the blessing of God's Spirit, years should teach us wisdom.

Brethren, we ought to learn, if we remember who it is that has been teaching us, if we are Christians. It is the Holy Ghost himself. If your boy goes to a school two or three years, and does not make progress, you do not feel satisfied with the master. Now, you cannot, in this case, blame the Teacher; then let the pupil take much blame to himself. "Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom," since the Holy Ghost dwells in us who are converted to God. Let us remember how sweetly he has taught us by means of the choicest mercies. They used to teach their children the alphabet, in the olden times, by giving them A B C on pieces of gingerbread; and when the boy knew his letter, he ate the gingerbread for a reward. That is very like the way in which we have been taught doctrine; it has been sweet to us, and we have learnt it by feasting upon it. I know it has been so with me. The mercy of God has been a divine instructor to my soul. "Thy gentleness," says one of old, "hath made me great." With such sweet teaching, kind teaching, loving teaching, forbearing teaching, we ought to have learned something in all these years.

And then, sometimes, how sharply the Holy Ghost has taught us. I have heard say that boys do not learn so well now, because the rod is so little used. I should not wonder; but in God's school the rod has never been put aside. Some of us do not go long without a stroke or two; and if you have been very much tried and troubled, and yet have not learned, my dear brother, my dear sister, what can be done with you? What! with all this smarting, with all this sickness, with all these losses and crosses, and yet no profiting? O vine, with all this pruning, are there so few clusters? O land, with all this ploughing and harrowing, is there so slender a harvest? Let us mourn before God that it should be so.

And let us remember, again, how much teaching we have had from the ministry, under the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. I should not wonder if some Christians do not profit, because their Sabbaths are very dreadful days to them. All the week they are hard at work, and on Sunday there is nothing to feed upon in what they hear, and they come home from public worship dissatisfied and troubled. Now, if your souls have been fed,—if you have often said, "Surely God was in this place, and I knew it," and you have gone home with your souls fed with the finest of the wheat, should there not be some wisdom to show for it? Consider the position which some of you occupy as teachers of others, as heads of families and instructors. If you do not learn, how are you to teach? And if there is no learning with you, you cannot wonder if your scholars make no progress under your instructions. With God as our Teacher, if we do not learn, we cannot blame others if they do not learn from us who are but men and women. May God grant that, instead of wasting time in frivolities, or "killing time" as the

worldling calls it, we may seek to increase in the knowledge of God and in likeness to Jesus, so that every day we may be better heirs of heaven!

“So let our lips and lives express
The holy gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divin.

“Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honours of our Saviour God,
When his salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin.”

III. My last word shall be a short one, and it is this; according to my text, **THOSE WHO HAVE WISDOM SHOULD COMMUNICATE IT TO OTHERS.**

“I said, Days should speak,—not be silent, “and multitude of years should teach wisdom;” that is to say, those who have days and multitude of years should try to teach the younger folks what they know. Now, it is a fault with some of our brethren that they do not teach us young people enough. They are too quiet. I should not like them to die and go to heaven without having told us all they know; and yet, when a venerable saint is buried who has been very reticent in speech, and has never used his pen, what a mint of teaching is buried with him! It always seems to me to be a pity that anything should be lost through the hand of death; it should rather be a gain. There are some of us who have told people all we know, and we are always repeating it, so that, if we die, no secrets will sink into oblivion; but there are others of the opposite sort, a great deal goes into them, and there must be a deal of wisdom in them, for none ever comes out. Doubtless many believers have been walking with God and enjoying the means of grace for so long a time that they are quite able to teach others, but they are of small service to us because they are so retiring. I never like to see a Christian like an old-fashioned money-box, into which you put the money, but from which you cannot get it out again unless you break the box. It ought not to be so. Does not our Saviour tell us that the well of water in us is to become rivers of water streaming out from us? As we receive we should give. The more we learn, the more we should teach; and if God teaches us, it is because he expects us to instruct others.

Now, brethren, I presume to speak to those who are older than I am. Try and teach somebody, dear brethren; ask yourselves how did you learn what you know? You were taught. Return the blessing by teaching somebody else. You were taught. Did your mother teach you? Are you a mother yourself? Then teach your own children. Did you learn from your father? Then, father, be not ungenerous to your family. Hand on the inheritance; what your father gave you, pass on to your sons, that they may teach the same to their heirs. Or did you learn from a Sunday-school teacher? Be a Sunday-school teacher yourself, and teach the rising generation. Remember that, according as you have ability, you are a debtor to the Church of God, by whose means you received the truth; and to

the Church of God pay back, in the shape of instrumentality, the teaching which you have received by teaching those around you.

Note, next, that you are bound to do it, for without this the truth cannot be propagated in the land. There is not a tree that stands at this moment leafless and bare in the winter's blast but has within itself preparation for casting its seed into the earth next year. Take off a bud, and you will find concealed within it the flower and everything preparatory for the creation of another tree like itself when the fulness of time shall come. The violet and the foxglove in the bank are waiting for the time to cast seed abroad, that the species may be continued on the face of the earth, each after its kind. In like fashion should each believer, by making known the truth of God, secure a succession of the faithful among men. Are those of ripe years among us attending to this as they should?

Again, remember that the devil is always teaching, and his servants are always busy. When the sons of Belial invent some new blasphemy, their lips ache to tell it. Let but a loose song be sung in any music hall in London, and before many hours it will have a thousand voices occupied with it. The devil has his missionaries ready to teach iniquity wherever they go, and they neither lack for zeal nor courage; and shall Satan have such busy servants, and Christ's cause languish for want of agents? God forbid! If you have learned a great truth, go and tell it. If you have found out something that is fresh to you, concerning the Lord and his love, do not wait till the morning light, but tell it at once. If you have found the Saviour, tell about him; tell about him; tell about him with all your might whenever you have opportunity, and spread abroad the gladsome news of his salvation. Remember that, to tell to others what you have known is often the very best way of deepening and increasing your own knowledge. Holy occupation is one of the most important things for our spiritual health. If you see a church sinking low, the last persons to leave that church are the Sunday-school teachers, and others, who are practically occupied with serving God; and the first to go are those fluffy professors who are neither use nor ornament, but cling to a church like dust to your coat. Very largely will you find that, in proportion as you serve Christ, Christ will serve you; therefore seek you to feed his lambs, and he will feed you.

At the beginning of this year I would urge each one of you to say, "Cannot I make this year better than the last? Can I not pray more, believe more, love more, work more, give more, and be more like Christ?" Was last year an improvement upon the previous one? Whether it was so or not, let this year be an advance upon last year. It ought to be, for it is a year which lieth somewhat nearer heaven than its predecessors. If you have lived up till now without a Saviour, end that dangerous state. Listen to the gospel message "Believe and live." Ere New Year's Day is over look unto Jesus Christ, and be saved. He will have glory, and you shall have happiness, and thus shall you begin aright another year of our Lord, and his Holy Spirit will make it to you a year of grace.