



SERMON PREACHED BY REV. JOHN BLACK, D.D., AT KILDONAN, SEPTEMBER 30, 1881.

(Scarcely anything written or preached by John Black has been preserved. It is therefore with great pleasure that, through the kindness of Mr. James D. Black, son of Rev. James Black, that we present this sermon, found among his father's papers. The sermon is of greater interest in that it is both an anniversary and a pre-Communion sermon, the last sermon of either type that Dr. John Black was to preach to his congregation.)

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Deuteronomy 8: 2.

Probably some few present have already today called to remembrance that we have reached, and slightly passed, another anniversary of our congregational connection, our first gathering for public worship having taken place in the old manse on the morning of Sabbath, September 28th, 1851. Between that day and this lies the long and eventful period of thirty years. Such a season should not pass unnoticed. Israel in the text is enjoined to remember all the way by which the Lord their God had led them, forty years, in the wilderness. We are ten years short of that yet, and there is little probability of our seeing it in our present connection as pastor and people. It is no small matter, and one of rare occurrence to have spent thirty years in that important relation.

There are many reflections that at such a season suggest themselves. Among the first of these is the one found in the fact that since the commencement of these thirty years great changes have taken place.

Changes have taken place in the world and its affairs which the intelligent among you will think of, but on which we cannot at present dwell. Only this much we may say, that in few countries have the changes been greater than in our own. The transfer of our colony to the great Dominion of Canada, the extension to our people of the political rights of British freemen, the opening up of the country for settlement and the mighty influx of an intelligent and energetic population, the rapid rise of towns in a country where then there was not even a village, and, not least striking, the constant and speedy means of communication now effected, with all parts of the world, by railway and telegraph, and along with these the organization throughout the country of schools and colleges and other valuable institutions.

Such are some of the changes which those of us whose memories go back thirty years can easily recognize, and, I trust, appreciate now, although certain drawbacks have accompanied them.

We should mark the changes in the affairs of the Church as well as those in more secular matters, and with wonder and thankfulness mark our advancement. Thirty years ago today our Church as an organized body may be said to have begun its existence in this then remote, and to the other provinces, foreign land. In these thirty years, from a single minister and a single congregation, with no

out station and no missions, our numbers small and our means of church work limited, we have grown to be, in respect of bounds, the largest Presbytery in the Church, and in respect of members, not the smallest, having a larger number of ministers today than the whole Church had when your pastor joined it some years before. In addition to all this, we have now a prosperous College and efficient missions among the aborigines of the land. We have every reason to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" "Remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee these thirty years in the wilderness."

Yet all is not bright sunshine. To myself and many more it is saddening - heart-rending - to see our congregation breaking up and scattering, making one almost fear that, as we have seen the beginning, so some of us may live to see its close. It is good if, during its existence, it has done something approaching the work the Master meant for it, and if, in sending forth its families and members to the different parts of the country, they may prove a seed and leaven of good, and the means of extending a good, sound, earnest, evangelical Presbyterianism wherever they go.

And there are also other and sadder changes. How many of those who gathered around me with a warm, affectionate welcome thirty years ago now sleep silently around these walls, and how many of younger generations, whom we had learned to love, have followed after them, as we would have said, prematurely; but no, that were wrong. God knows best when his people's work is done and the time to call them home to their reward. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." How many of us also who were then strong and vigorous are now falling into the sere and yellow leaf, and have to confess to ourselves, however unwillingly, the feebleness of advancing age, and to accept the daily warnings that the end is drawing nigh.

To close this part of our address, as another awaits consideration, let us not fail to comply with the injunction of our text, but remember all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us these thirty years in the wilderness.

1. Let us remember it thoughtfully, for it is a very serious matter and will meet us again another day.

2. Let us remember it thankfully, for much good has our Lord God made to pass before us in these thirty years.

3. Let us remember it with deep humiliation, for great and manifold have been our sins and failures in duty in that time.

4. Let us remember it with trust and faith, confident that he who has been with us in the past thirty years will not forsake us in the time to come. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but abideth forever."

5. Let us remember it with strong, yet humble resolve, better to live in the time that remains than in that which is past. Let the prayer of each and all of us be, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom".

And now we turn to another subject, which today also demands our thoughtful and earnest care; for today is not only our anniversary, but our preparation day as well. If today we are to remember all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us during the past thirty years, next Lord's Day we are to remember our Lord's death, according to his dying command, "This do in remembrance of me". A great and most momentous event was that death of his, filled with deep mystery, but gilded over with deep love; and, as for us, our all depends upon it. To us it is the greatest event that ever occurred and we may well remember it.

But you will notice that his words are not, "This do in remembrance of my love", or, "This do in remembrance of my death", but, "This do in remembrance of ME". He would not have us remember even his miracles, his teaching, his love, his death apart from himself. It is "In remembrance of ME", he says. He longs to be believed on by men, to have our heart's love clinging and cleaving to him. He likes to have us thinking of himself, and commending to others, not only his love and grace, but himself; and the sacrament will best answer its purpose if it draws forth our heart's best affections around a loving Saviour. "This do in remembrance of me." So also preaching best answers its purpose when it commends to the faith and love of men this same loving Jesus, and it may be worth while to remind you that my first text, preached in this place thirty years ago, was Ephesians 3:8: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." I think you will bear me witness that that passage has been the key-note of my teaching from that day until now, and I bless God today whose guiding hand has led us all along upon that path, and I pray him to keep me in it now unto the end.

And now be it our endeavour, during these common days, to prepare our hearts to meet with our Lord at his holy table, and to remember him according to his word. Oh, do not think for a moment that you can rush out of the business, or cares, or follies of the world, to the Lord's table, and there become acceptable, tender-hearted and joyful communicants, nor let any one, however near to God he may habitually live, suppose that special preparation is not wanted on his part. All need it - the holiest Christian, even the most careful and devout.

Let us mention some of the means you are to employ for your due preparation.

1. Self-examination. We mention it first because the Apostle mentions it specially. "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." "Examine your own selves, try your own selves, prove your own selves." Make a faithful trial of your own case in the sight of conscience and the sight of God. This is essential, both as a condition and a means. It is essential as a condition because inspired authority makes it so, and you are not to dare to go to the Lord's table without having examined yourself according to the divine command. It is essential as a means, because it is well fitted to bring you into a right state of mind. Let your self-examination be prayerful, careful and candid. Do not cheat yourself, and do not act as some do - go through, indeed, the form of self-examination, but act the same, do, as they had rushed on doing before the examination began. Be honest with yourself. Faithfully try to find out: 1. If you are a Christian; and 2. If you are in a Christian spirit, following no wrong courses, cherishing no wrong tempers or passions, and striving to keep your heart right with God.

2. In order that you may remember Christ aright at his table, remember him before hand in your closet. Read or think over the whole story of his life and death, each little footstep marked with blood from the deep wounds of your suffering, dying Saviour, that your heart may be duly affected with a sense of his love and devotion to your cause and so of all that you are to him.

3. To adopt the language of our text, remember all the way by which he has led you in the matter of your personal salvation. How he awakened you, and enlightened you, and converted you. How he forgave your sins and spoke peace to your troubled hearts. How he gave you new feelings, and new desires, and new hopes, and new aims, and the beginnings of that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. All these are tokens of coming good. Remember all the way he has led you, and all the fears and troubles, all the dangers and sorrows through which he has brought you, and thus you will remember him with a deep and true affection, at his table.

4. Prayer. Without grace all means will be in vain, and grace must be sought in prayer. Thus prepare to meet your God. Thus prepare to remember him and to communicate at his table. Remember his blessed self and all that he has done for you and for your brethren of mankind, and then go forward and participate in his holy ordinance, with reverence, faith, love, and thankfulness. May his heavenly blessing descend like dew upon your souls, and may he be known unto you in the Breaking of Bread. Amen.