

HAPPY NEW YEAR...

PICK YOUR LOT!



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“But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days,” Daniel 12:13.

Daniel had been receiving partial insight into the future by the visions recorded in previous chapters. He sought for clearer knowledge, and was told that the book of the future was sealed and closed, so that no further enlightenment was possible for him. But duty was clear, whatever might be dark, and there were some things in the future, certain, whatever might be problematic.

So he is bidden back to common paths of life, and is enjoined to pursue his patient course with an eye on the end to which it conducts, and to leave the unknown future to unfold itself as it may. I guess you can see the application.

Anticipations of what may be before us have no doubt, been more or less in the minds of all of us in the last few days. The cast of them will have been very different, according to the age and present circumstances. But bright or dark, hopes or dreads, they reveal nothing. Sometimes we think we see a little way ahead, and then swirling mists hide all.

So I think that the words of this text may help us not only to apprehend the true task of the moment, but to discriminate between the things in the unknown future that are hidden and those that stand clear.

There are three principles in this message:

1. The journey.
2. The pilgrim's resting place.
3. The final home.

“Go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

So let us take up these three principles of life:

1. There is a threadbare metaphor for life. But threadbare as it is, its significance is inexhaustible. But before we deal with it, note that very significant “but” with which this verse begins.

The prophet has been asking for a little more light to shine on the dark unknown that stretches before him. And his request is negated. “But go thou thy way.” Never mind the far off issues, the step before you is clear, and that is all that concerns you. **Plod along the path and leave tomorrow to take care of itself. One day at a time.** There is a piece of plain, practical wisdom, none the less necessary for us to lay to heart because it is so obvious and common place.

And then, if we turn to the emblem with which the continuity of daily life and daily work is set forth here, as the path along which we travel, how much wells up in the shape of suggestion, familiar it may be, but very needful and wholesome for us all to lay to heart. The figure implies perpetual change. The landscape glides past us, and we travel on through it. **How impossible it would be for us older people to go back to the feelings, to the beliefs, to the tone and the temper with which we used to look at life 30 or 40 years ago.**

Strangely and solemnly, like the silent motion of some gliding scene in a theater, bit by bit, inch by inch, change comes over all surroundings, and, saddest of all, in some aspects, over ourselves. “We all are changed by still degrees, all but the basis of the soul.” It is foolish for us ever to forget that we live in a state of things in which constant alternation is the law, as surely as, when the train whizzes through the country, the same landscape never meets the eye twice, as the traveller looks through the windows.

Let us then accept the fact that nothing abides with us and so not be bewildered nor swept away from our moorings, nor led to vain regrets and paralyzing retrospects when the changes that must

come do come, sometimes slowly and imperceptibly, sometimes with stunning suddenness, like a bolt out of the blue.

If life is truly represented under the figure of a journey, nothing is more certain than that we sleep in a fresh hospice every night, and leave behind us every day scenes that we shall never traverse again. **Forgetting those things which are behind. What madness, then, to be putting out eager and desperate hands to clutch what must be left, and so to contradict the very law under which we live.**

Then another of the well-worn common places which are so believed by us all that we never think about them, and therefore need to be urged, as I am trying, poorly enough, to do now, is the common place that springs from this image that life is continuous.

Geologists used to be divided into two schools, one of whom explained everything by invoking great convulsions, the other by appealing to the uniform action of laws. **There are no convulsions in life.** Tomorrow is the child of today, and yesterday was the father of this day. **What we are springs from what we have been, and settles what we shall be.** The road leads some where and we follow it step by step. As the old nursery rhyme has it, "One foot up and one foot down, That's the way to London town."

We make our characters by the continual repetition of small actions. Let no man think of his life as if it were a heap of unconnected points. It is a chain of links that are forged together inseparably. Let no man say, "I do this thing, and there shall be no evil consequences impressed upon my life as results of it." It cannot be. **Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. We shall tomorrow be more of everything that we are today, unless by some strong effort of a change of mind, we break the fatal continuity, and make a new beginning by God's GRACE.** But let us concentrate on this all important truth, which men idly call trifles, that life is one continuous whole, a march towards a definite end.

Therefore we ought to see to it that the direction in which our life runs is one that conscience and God can approve.

And, since the rapidity with which a body falls increases as it falls, the more needful that we give the right direction and impulses to the life. It will be a dreadful thing if our downward course acquires strength as it travels, and being slow at first, gains in celerity, and accrues to itself mass and weight, like an avalanche started from an Alpine summit, which is but one or two bits of snow and ice at first, and falls at last into the ravine, tons of white destruction.

The lives of many of us are like that. Further, the metaphor suggests that **no life takes its fitting course unless there is continuous effort.** There will be crises when we have to run with panting breath and strained muscles. There will be long stretches of level common place where speed is not needed, but pegging away is, and **the one duty is persistent continuousness in a course.** But whether the test of the moment is to "run and not be weary," or to "walk and not faint," crises and common place stretches of land alike require continuous effort, if we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

Mark the emphasis of this verse. "Go thy way till the end." You who are my contemporaries, older men, **do not fancy that in the deepest aspect any life has ever a period in it which a man may take it easy.** You may do that in regard to outward things, and it is the hope and the reward of faithfulness in youth and middle age that, when the grey hairs come to be upon us, we may slack off a little in regard to outward activity. But in regard to all the deepest things of life, no man may ever lessen his diligence until he has attained the goal.

Some time ago, on a stormy October night, many years ago, the "Royal Charter" when down when it was three hours of Liverpool, and the passengers had met in the bar and voted a testimonial to the captain because he had brought them across the ocean in safety. **Until the anchor is down and we are inside the harbor, we may be shipwrecked, if we are careless in our navigation.**

"Go thou thy way till the end." Remember, older people, that until the end is reached you have to use all your power,

and to labor as earnestly and guard yourself as carefully as at any period before. And not only "Till the end," but "Go thou thy way till the end." That is to say, let the thought that the road has a termination be ever present with us all.

Now there is a great deal of the so-called devout contemplation of death which is anything but wholesome. People were never meant to be always looking forward to that close. Men may think of "the end" in a hundred different connections. One man may say "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Another man may say, "I have only a little while to master this science, to make a name for myself, to win wealth. Let me bend all of my efforts in a fierce determination made the fiercer because of the thought of the brevity of life, to win the end."

The mere contemplation of the shortness of our days may be an ally of immortality, of selfishness, of meanness, of earthly ambitions, or it may lay a cooling hand on fevered brows, and lessen the pulsations of hearts that throb for Earth.

But while it is not always wholesome to be thinking about death, it is more unwholesome still never to let the contemplation of that end come into our calculations of the future, and to shape our lives in an obstinate blindness to what is the one certain fact which rises up through the whirling mists of the unknown future, like some black cliff from the clouds that wreath around it.

IS IT NOT STRANGE THAT THE SURE THING IS THE THING THAT WE FORGET MOST OF ALL? It sometimes seems to me as if the sky rained down opiates upon people, as if all mankind were in a conspiracy of lunacy, because they, with one accord, ignore the most prominent and forget the only certain fact about their future, and in all their calculations do not "so number their days," as to apply "their hearts unto wisdom."

"Go thou thy way until the end," and let thy way be marked out with a constant eye towards the end.

2. NOTE, AGAIN, THE RESTING PLACE. "Go thou thy way, for thou shalt rest." Now I suppose, to most careful readers

that clearly is intended as a gracious, and what they call a euphemistic, way of speaking about death. "Thou shalt rest." Well, that is a thought that takes away a great deal of the grimness and the terror with which men generally invest the close. It is a thought, of course, the force of which is very different in different stages and conditions of life.

Young people, eager, perhaps ambitions, full of the consciousness of inward power, happy and in all human probability, with the greater portion of their lives before them in which to do what they desire, the thought of rest comes with a very faint appeal.

Yet I do not suppose that there is any one of us who has not some burden that is hard to carry, or who has not learned what weariness means. But to older people, who have tasted disappointments, who have known the pressure of grinding toil for a great many years, whose hearts have been gnawed by harassments and anxieties of different kinds, whose lives are apparently drawing nearer their end than the present moment is to their beginning, the thought "Thou shalt rest" comes with a very different appeal from that which it makes to these others.

"There remaineth a rest for the people of God." And "I have had trouble enough for one," says our modern poet, and therein he echoes the deepest thoughts of most of this congregation. That rest is the cessation of toil, but the continuance of activity, the cessation of toil, and anxiety, and harassment, and care. And so the darkness is made beautiful when we think that God draws the curtain, as a careful mother does in her child's chamber, that the light may not disturb the slumberer.

But for believers that final cessation of earthly work has a double character. "Thou shalt rest" was said to this man of God, Daniel. But what of people whom death takes away from the only sort of work that they are fit to do? It will be no rest to long for the occupation which you never can have any more. And if you have been living for this wretched present to be condemned, to have nothing to do any more in it and with it will be torture, and not repose. Ask yourself how you would like to be taken out of your shop, or

your mill, or your study, or your laboratory, or your counting house, and never be allowed to go into it again.

Some of you know how wearisome a holiday is when you cannot get to your daily work. **You will get a very long holiday after you are dead.** And if the hungering after the withdrawn occupation persists, there will be very little pleasure in rest.

There is only one way in which we can make that inevitable end a blessing, and turn death into the opening of the gate of our resting place, and that is by settling our heart's desire and our spirit's trust on Jesus Christ, who is the Lord both of the dead and of the living. If we do that, even that last enemy will come to us as Christ's representative, with Christ's own Words upon his lips, "Come unto Me, ye that are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

3. THAT LEADS TO THE LAST THOUGHT, THE HOME.

"Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of days." "Stand," that is Daniel's way of preaching, what he has been preaching in several other parts of his book, the doctrine of resurrection. "Thou shalt stand in thy lot." That is a reference to the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, where each man got his own portion, and sat under his own vine and fig tree.

So there emerges from these symbolic words thoughts upon which, at this stage of this verse we can barely touch. First comes the thought, that, however sweet and blessed that reposeful state may be, **humanity has not attained its perfection until once again the perfected spirit is mated with, and enclosed within, its congenial servant, a perfect body.** "Corporeality of the end of man." **Body, soul and spirit partake of the redemption of God.**

But then apart from that, on which this verse touches one or two more thoughts. **God is the true inheritance.** Each man has his own portion of the common possession, or, to put it into plainer words, **in that perfect land each individual has precisely so**

much of God as he is capable of possessing. "Thou shalt stand in thy lot." And what determines the lot is how we wend our way till that other end, the end of life.

"The end of the days" is a period far beyond the end of the life of Daniel. And as the course that terminated in repose has been, so the possession of "the portion of the inheritance of the saints in light," shall be. For which that course has made men meet. **Destiny is character worked out.** A MAN WILL BE WHERE HE IS FIT FOR, AND HAVE WHAT HE IS FIT FOR. Time is the lackey of eternity. His life here settles how much of God a man shall be able to hold, when "he stands in his lot at the end of the days." And his allotted portion, as it stretches around him, will be but the issue and the outcome of his life here on Earth.

Therefore, as Christians, there is tremendous importance placed and attached to every and each fugitive moment. Therefore **each act that we do is weighted with eternal consequences.** **If we will put our trust in Him, in whom also we obtain the inheritance, and will travel on life's common way in cheerful fellowship, we may front all the uncertainties of the unknown future, sure of two things: That we shall rest. And that we shall stand in our lot.** We shall all go where we have fitted ourselves to possess, and be what we have made ourselves. To the Christian the word comes, "Thou shalt stand in thy lot."

The other word that was spoken about one sinner, will be fulfilled in all whose lives have been unfitting them for heaven. "Judas, by transgression fell, that he might to his own place." He, too, stands in his lot.

Which lot do you want?

Pick a lot.

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