

The Reformed Church

by J.H. Newman

The sermon highlights the correspondence between the fortunes of the two Churches, the Jewish and Christian, and the need for the Christian Church to return to its original principles of unity and obedience.

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10, Haggai 1:4, Haggai 2:5, Malachi 1:6, Malachi 2:1, Malachi 3:8, Malachi 4:1

Topics: "Church Unity", "Faith Decline"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the parallels between the state of the Jews after the captivity and the current state of Christians, emphasizing the decline in zeal, unity, and obedience in the Church. He draws comparisons between the Jewish polity after restoration and the secularization of the Christian Church, highlighting the challenges of the union of Church and State. Newman reflects on prophetic passages from the Prophets after the Captivity, applying them to the present times to shed light on the Church's struggles and trials. He concludes with texts offering hope to true Christians, reminding them of God's enduring presence and the promise of greater glory for the Church despite the current state of unbelief.

Transcript

SOME remarks may, perhaps, be profitably made on the following well known lines in Herbert's Church Militant, in which the text above quoted is applied to our own period:

The second Temple could not reach the first,

And the late Reformation never durst

Compare with ancient times and purer years,

But in the Jews and us, deserveth tears.

Nay, it shall every year decrease and fade,

Till such a darkness shall the world invade

At CHRIST'S last coming, as His first did find;

Yet must their proportions be assigned

To these diminishings, as is between

The spacious world and Jewry to be seen.

Surely there is a close analogy between the state of the Jews after the captivity, and our own; and, if so, a clear understanding and acknowledgment of it will tend to teach us our own place and suggest to us our prospects.

1. It is scarcely necessary to notice the general correspondence between the fortunes of the two Churches. Both Jews and Christians "left their first love," mixed with the world, were brought under the power of their enemies, went into captivity, and at length, through GOD'S mercy, were brought back again from Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah are the forerunners of our Hookers and Lauds; Sanballat and Geshem of the disturbers of our Israel. Samaria has set up its rival temple among us.

2. The second Temple lacked the peculiar treasures of the Temple of Solomon, the Prince of Peace; such as the Ark, the visible glory of GOD, the tables of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, the manna, the oracle. In like manner the Christian Church was, in the beginning, set up in unity; unity of doctrine, or truth, unity of discipline, or Catholicism, unity of heart, or charity. In spite of the heresies which then disturbed the repose of Christians, consider the evidences which present themselves in ecclesiastical history of their firm endurance of persecution, their tender regard for the members of CHRIST, however widely removed by place and language, their self-denying liberality in supplying their wants, the close correspondence of all parts of the body Catholic, as though it were but one family, their profound reverential spirit towards sacred things, the majesty of their religious services, and the noble strictness of their life and conversation. Here we see the "Rod" of the Priesthood, budding forth with fresh life; the "Manna" of the Christian ordinances uncorrupted; the "Oracle" of Tradition fresh from the breasts of the Apostles; the "Law," written in its purity on "the fleshly tables of the heart;" the "Shechinah," which a multitude of Martyrs, Saints, Confessors, and gifted Teachers, poured throughout the Temple. But where is our Unity now? our ministrations of self-denying love? our prodigality of pious and charitable works? our resolute resistance of evil? We are reformed; we have come out of Babylon, and have rebuilt our Church; but it is Ichabod; "the glory is departed from Israel."

3. The Jewish polity was, on its restoration, so secularized, that the vestiges of a Theocracy scarcely remained in the eyes of any but attentive believers. That it really existed as before, is plain from the prophetic gift possessed by Caiaphas, wicked man as he was. Consider the anomaly of the political relation of the Jews towards the Ptolemies and Seleucidae, their alliance with Rome, their dispersion over the Roman Empire, their disuse of certain of the Mosaic ordinances, the cruelties and blasphemies of Antiochus, the reign of Herod, and his virtual rebuilding of the Temple, a remarkable omen as regards ourselves. Turn to the restored Christian Church, and reflect upon the perplexed questions concerning the union of Church and State, to which the politics of the last three centuries have given rise; the tyrannical encroachments of the civil power at various eras; the profanations at the time of the Great Rebellion; the deliberate impiety of the French Revolution; and the present apparent breaking up of Ecclesiastical Polity every where, the innumerable schisms, the mixture of men of different creeds and sects, and the contempt poured upon any show of Apostolical zeal.

4. Consider the following passages from the Prophets, after the Captivity, and see if they do not apply to present times.

Hagg. i. 4--10. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, thus saith the LORD of Hosts, Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye

eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes," &c.

Mal. i. 6-13. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear? Ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted, and the fruit thereof even His meat, contemptible. Ye say also, Behold what a weariness is it, . . . and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering; should I accept this of your hands, saith the LORD?"

Mal. ii. 1-9. "And now, O ye Priests, this commandment is for you. . . And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that My covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of Hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace, and I gave them to him, for the fear wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My Name. The Law of Truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the Priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they shall seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of Hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the Law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of Hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people." Does not the history of the times of Hoadley and such as he, and our present trials throw light upon the parallel?

Mal. iii. 8-9. "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed Me; but ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation."

5. It is remarkable that, while the reinstated Jewish Church was so deficient in zeal, piety, and consistent obedience, and was punished by failure and disorganization; yet it never fell into those gross and flagrant offences, which were the opprobrium of its earlier period. It was clear of the sin of idolatry.

6. Moreover consider the parties, unknown to the era of the Theocracy, which divided the Church after the captivity; the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the rest; the necessary consequence of a relaxation of the original principle of national union. The case is the same in this day; as if the Church were already dead, new forms of organization, multiplied varieties of life and action, show themselves within her.

7. Lastly. The following texts suggest hope to all true Christians. (Hagg. ii. 5-9.) "According to the word that I covenanted with you, when ye came out of Egypt, so MY SPIRIT REMAINETH AMONG YOU: fear ye not." He will be with us even in this base and grovelling age, as with St. Paul, St. Cyprian, and St. Athanasius.

"Thou wilt; for Thou art Israel's God;

And thine unwearied arm

Is ready yet

with Moses' rod," &c.

"The glory of this latter house SHALL BE GREATER THAN OF THE FORMER, saith the LORD of Hosts."

Strange it now seems before the event, how the Church should close both with glory and yet in unbelief; yet surely, as in the history of Jerusalem, so now both predictions will be at once fulfilled. (Mal. iv. 1, 2.) "

The day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all who do wickedly shall be stubble: but unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings."

And let it be remembered, that when our Lord seems at greatest distance from His Church, then He is even at the doors. Doubtless, when the Angel appeared in the Temple to Zacharias, the news of a miraculous interposition was as great a marvel to the world at large as if it were now noised abroad of one of our own Ministers in the course of his Christian Service.

OXFORD,

The Feast of St. Mark.

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