

Destruction and Construction

by Joseph Parker

Joseph Parker's sermon highlights the ease of destruction compared to the challenging yet vital process of construction and salvation through Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 27:14, Proverbs 24:16, Isaiah 41:10, Romans 8:28, 2 Peter 3:9

Topics: "Destructive Nature", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

Joseph Parker delivers a sermon emphasizing the ease of destruction, contrasting it with the patience and saving power of Jesus Christ. He highlights the destructive nature of infidelity and the importance of giving time for salvation to work in individuals. Parker urges believers to be patient and persistent in their faith, trusting in the constructive and preserving work of Christianity, which requires time, long-suffering love, and audacious beneficence.

Transcript

THERE IS NOTHING SO EASY AS DESTRUCTION. That is a simple doctrine which is often forgotten. The unbeliever is not in any need of genius. The fool, the withered heart, hath said, "There is no God." I want to smite and humiliate and expel if I can the notion that it requires a very great genius to be an infidel.

Christian ministers and Christian believers labour under a great disadvantage in this matter. They are supposed to be fanatics, wellmeaning but weak; accountable, but wanting in brain force. Infidels are geniuses; to be heterodox is to be popular; to publish a book against Christ is to get a circulation. There is, I repeat as my starting-point, nothing so easy as destruction, what is called iconoclasm, imagebreaking, a man going round the temple with an iron rod in his hand and smiting all images of beauty and purity and dignity. How much genius does it require to break a vase? Look at Nature, and the same lesson is taught us. Any beast can crush a flower: who can put it in joint again? No angel; it takes God to make a flower, it takes God to repair it when it is broken. I am dwelling upon the ease of destruction. It is an offhanded trick. Young men, there is nothing in it. Why are you befooled by it? Why do you allow yourselves to be taken away from the old altar and the old book and the old faith because somebody has said "No"?

Give me an hour to do what I please in before the Royal Academy is opened, and it will never be opened; I could destroy the pictures by the dozen. Am I then great? deserving of popularity? Will you cry out for me, "Let us have freedom of thought, freedom of action"? You will not allow that in the Academy. Show me the President's fairest painting, and with one dash it is out of sight. It took the President long months to make it; he dreamed about it, he conversed with fellowartists respecting it, it grew upon him like a dawn; but as

an iconoclast I went in, and with my pailful of inartistic colour I dashed it out of existence. Am I therefore to be memorialised, and to have my name written on monumental brass, and to be looked upon, if I am arrested, as a martyr and a hero? I think not.

You are building a bridge. I have a proper respect for all bridges; but, after the engineer has said, "It is finished," give me two hours, and I will blow it into atoms. It has taken years to build, it is a monument of engineering skill, the people who have had to do with its construction are justly proud of it; and yet, with an appropriate supply of dynamite, I will rend it in an hour, and the work of which you are so proud shall be a hideous ruin.

Young man, why do you follow so largely and enthusiastically men who have nothing to say to you but words of destruction, men who try to rob you? He who takes from you one tender and inspiring association is a thief. You are not the young man you were before that depletion took place. It was a tender association; some called it superstitious, but no association or uplifting of the soul is superstitious that sends a man back again into the market-place to keep honestly his scales and measures. Our religion might be charged as a religion of fanaticism and superstition, vision and contemplation and cloud-beating, but it sends us back to heal the sick, to nurse childhood, to take the blind pilgrim over the road out of danger's way; and it makes us, when we have spread our banquet, send a portion to him that is hungry. Associations, I care not how far they go upward among clouds and stars, if they send me back again a sturdier citizen, an honester, more chivalrous man, are true; they prove their truth by their moral effect,

Yet, what a great noise a little infidelity makes. One infidel will make more noise than a thousand Christians, and noise is thought to be prosperity and success and the utter uprooting and total routing of the Church. It is always so that the destructive becomes, I will not say more popular, but in the first instance more notorious, than the constructive. Did any of you hear that the Scotch express arrived safely in Edinburgh last night? If it had broken down between London and Edinburgh, the world would have heard of it. "Accident to the Flyman Scotchman. Terrific Panic on the Great Northern. Awful Consternation among the Passengers." They report destructions; who cares to hear that the train got in safely, and everybody went home, and there was rest all round about? So if one little infidel a few inches high should get up in this church and make a noise, we should all hear about it. Do not mistake the importance of the event; it is not without significance; even the noise of an infidel should attract some attention finely adjusted to the occasion. But "Behold he prayeth." Ah, then the whole church should turn round, and with tearful eyes gaze on the beautiful spectacle, and with swelling, ennobled heart should praise God that another soul had been saved.

So there is a common law in operation here. It applies to people, to teachers, to hearers, to religious relationships, and to all the commercial economy of the world, and to everything that touches life at any point. It is the destructive that is reported. Not a soul will hear of this meeting to-night on the other side of the street, but if the roof fell in all the city would talk about nothing else to-morrow. So when men come and destroy, or attempt to destroy, our religious associations and faiths and hopes, let us know that nothing uncommon has happened, because there is much uproar and tumult about it; after all, the case is not serious necessarily. Where one man has gone back, lapsed into apostasy, a dozen hearts may have been quickened, stimulated, and cheered by visitations from the unseen Spirit of the Almighty.

Jesus Christ contrasts Himself with this destroying power. He comes to save. If He comes to save He will want time. Salvation is not to be wrought out in a moment. The development of human history is not an instantaneous act. Christ is building night and day; Christ is advancing "with the process of the suns." Yet

sometimes in the advance there appears to be a singular and discouraging recession. But that recession is but like a refluent wave; it has gone back that it may come forward again with a mightier energy and exceed the line where the last wave fell. If Jesus Christ has come to save, He will require patience. Men may be in a sense saved in a day, but they are not educated, instructed, edified, consolidated in a day. And what rude scholars we are! how inapt, how reluctant of heart, how soon wearied, how disposed to gravitate to the centre of the earth!

But Jesus Christ is patient with us; when the hill is very steep He takes us up in His arms that we may get our breath again. But all this means expenditure of time, thought, care, solicitude; and all this means the exercise of a patience that cannot be fluttered, because it has its centre in eternity. You can make a wax flower to order; you can say, "This flower shall be ready to-morrow at three o'clock." Who can promise to grow one of these sweet bluebells that are on the hillsides, and have it ready this day week? The little thing comes up out of eternity; it is a child of the solar system, it is a blossom upon rocks infinite. You can order a coat to-morrow for your child, but you cannot order a character. Jesus Christ is the Constructor, the Builder-up, and an the line of God's challenges is a line calling us to this view of His character and purpose. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" He is always laying foundations here, is the Constructor, the Creator, the Builder. "Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? And as for thee, man of words and fretful spirit, canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?" This is not the voice of the destroyer, a little god with a great flail smiting and destroying things. He guides, rules, calls forth, keeps in order.

It is a greater miracle to have things preserved than to have them destroyed. We cannot be made to think this; we are curiously disposed to see more in the stroke of anger than in the smile of love. Did the sun rise and set to-day? -to use popular language. To this inquiry you return an instant "Yes." In that circumstance find the true miracle. A universe preserved is a universe created. If we could impart this conviction to the Church, we should have a new state of things. So you see ministers have hard work to do; Christianity is the grandly audacious religion, because it comes not to destroy men's lives but to save them. What other religion soever proposed to save the world, every one in it, and to save the world by a Cross, by the mystery of Crucifixion, by the great mystery of sacrifice and atonement, by the wondrous economy of blood? All this requires time, patience, long-suffering love. O wait for the Lord, yea, wait patiently for Him; when His economy is completed all Heaven will be filled with the music of thankful joy. But Christianity is audacious in its beneficence. Christianity will do nothing perfunctorily; it will make clean, clear, complete, exact, and permanent work along all the line. It does not rough-hew its subjects and allow them to finish; it continues all its operations until the very last is as the strongest, and the least is counted one of the mightiest in the kingdom. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

Give the Church more time, give ministers more time. An infidel might rush into your family, and in five minutes ask questions which all the philosophers in creation could not answer in five centuries. The minister goes in, asks where the sick one is, walks quietly to the bedside, and prays through tears. Who can measure the issue? The fool came in as upon the wings of a tempest; he went out with a noise destitute of music. The servant of God did not lift up his voice and cry and cause his voice to be heard in the street, but patiently, gently, lovingly, sympathetically, he passed through all the ministry of Christian priesthood, that sweet, gracious gradation of office which is permitted to Christian believers and fellow-pilgrims; and nothing was known of that tender miracle. What a prayer it was! The sick man threw off his sickness as the weird words went up in silence and brought back Divine benedictions as replies. O

ministers of Christ, to whatsoever communion attached, ours is the hard work; but it is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord. If they have refused the Lord, they will refuse the servant. We are to prove the divinity of our vocation by our persistence. The time will come when all the other people will drop away. Time tries all. So long as there is health, prosperity, rioting, and power of imparting joy, you will have round about you all manner of speculators and destroyers, but when the clouds gather, and the winds cool, and the night deepens, you will say, "Where are they?" and echo will answer "Where?" But there will be One left, and when you ask the name of that One who remains, it will be the name of the Son of Man. He may be represented by some poor, humble member of the flock, but Christianity never leaves the soul. Yea, though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; Thy rod and Thy staff shall comfort me.

We have to be upon our guard in one direction, for it is possible for a man to destroy his own life. Nothing is so easy as destruction there as well as elsewhere, and no other destruction is possible, if you will it to be so. No man can hurt you but yourself; you have nothing to do with your reputation, with public criticism; you have nothing to do with traduction and slander. "To thine own self be true," to Christ be true. No man can murder thee; no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. There is only one form of destruction possible, and that is suicide, and suicide is easy. There is but a step between thee and all kinds of death. Do not narrow that passage to one little meaning. There is but a step between thee and social death, moral death, family death, spiritual death -but a step. The road lies along a very high and dangerous precipice - one step, and all is over. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." O Thou God, who dost lay foundations and build universes, Thou who art the Builder, give me the edification of Thy grace lest I stumble and fall and die.

Here again the doctrine holds good. Nothing is so easy as destruction. Here is a man who has been living forty years in the great city, honoured by all, trusted of all. How long would it take that man to destroy his character? One moment, and nothing could redeem it but God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Forty years has this merchantman been in building the tower of a high and honoured reputation; in one action he levels the tower to the dust. He has but to forge a signature, he has but to utter one sentence, and let it be known that he has uttered it, and his prayers are forgotten, his professions are looked upon as unmasked hypocrisies, and the Church cries shame and puts him into the wilderness. When some kind witness comes forward to testify as to his good character, the old judge says he will take note of the suggestion, but he adds that this only aggravates the charge that is brought against the man. We need continual watchfulness. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." O blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. "Call no man happy until he is dead," says the proverb, "for at the last he may perish." Blessed day when I am permitted to put my foot within the door. So near is death, so easy is destruction, so broad the gate that opens upon perdition. Do not despair; let God work His miracles here. You are in process of salvation; that is to say, you are in process of education and edification. Yield to God; have no will but His. The tempter will be hard upon thee, O friend. He does not like to see that tower of a noble life rising course by course in fine, exquisite masonry, as if touched with an angel's finger, and if he can fight thee and win, he will do it. Through much tribulation we must enter the gate. Christ has not chosen the easy work. The thief has come to thieve and to kill and destroy -the easiest of all work, a coward's work. "I am come that they might have life" that is the hard work, the noble work, the blessed work. Ministers, teachers, office-bearers, professing Christians, you are feeding the life of the world; that is the positive. You will often be discouraged and disappointed. When I began my ministry I said, Surely the people will only need to hear that Jesus Christ the Son of God loved them and gave Himself for them, and they will man by man fall down and hail Him Saviour, King. It has not been so. Some of you have outlived

three ministries. You can mention the pastors one by one, and characterise them, and describe them, and eulogise them. But you eluded them all. When they speak of you, your name is as a wound, your memory is a stinging disappointment. Yet even now you may fall down broken-heartedly, you may be found at the Cross, the one way to Heaven, the only way to Heaven, the infinitely secure way to Heaven; and even now you may be, not destroyed, but saved.

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