

**A SET OF HOLIDAY
SERMONS**

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A Set of Holiday Sermons by Various

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Sermon for New Year's Eve

RABBI STEPHEN S. WISE.

When hearts are truly moved and souls deeply stirred, speech falls but heavily from human lips. Thus tonight with the great past behind us slowly retreating and a greater future before us swiftly approaching, it becomes impossible to frame into words our reflections on what has been or pour our hope into speech touching what may and shall be. Ours is not the leisure required to voice the thousand thoughts and memories that crowd our poor, wearied brain, nor yet the mood calmly to survey the contents of the passing year or forecast the tale to be told by the year to come. The remembrance of great joys or great sorrows, quick to summon tears of bitterness or evoke the smile of sweet pleasure, forbids a reposeful review of the myriad events which together make up life; while, on the other hand, our dread uncertainty as to what aspects of life the future may unfold for us, silences the accents of prophecy. Thus wavering as it were between the silence which is naturally begotten of an earnest retrospect of life, and the desire to give full and fitting expression to all the hopes and plans which the outlook into an unknown future invites, an old-time, most familiar and touchingly simple greeting recurs to us,—“A happy, happy New Year to you all.” In the very simplicity and naturalness of this wish lies its fullness of charm as well as wealth of meaning. Even as in the hour of parting our lips shape themselves of necessity only into “Good-by” and “God Bless You,” or as the music of “welcome home” alone swells the air in the moment of home-coming and re-union, so the multitude and the infinite variety of our wishes and yearnings resolve themselves into the unspeakably sweet and simple terms, “A happy New Year be thine.”

Marvel and mystery lie hidden in this holiday greeting. A marvel of human, God-like sympathy when addressed compassionately to those whom the mere sound of the word "happiness" seems bent upon cruelly mocking, those whose hearts' love and human happiness are buried in some fresh-made grave,—the grave of some thrice-loved one, parent, child, spouse, brother with whom happiness, to be happiness, must needs have been shared. A marvel of vain, blind hope to such as, resting in the fancied security of unending bliss, are forgetful of the coming hour of trial when their happiness shall pass away as if it had not been. A marvel of solemn exhortation to us all, commanding us to remember that, unless our wishes are to be but empty falsehood and poor formality, we must strive to rejoice and enrich and beautify the oftentimes sad and dreary lives of one another with that happiness the quintessence of which is to be found in the fragrance of friendship and the perfume of sweet brotherly helpfulness. A mystery of glad promise, too; for the magic of the term "happiness" loosens the pinions of the many unvoiced prayers and unuttered aspirations which are buried in the deepest recesses of our heart of hearts. A marvel of divine warning and correction, above all; for He in whose benign and Fatherly presence we give tongue to our wishes for abiding blessedness with the freedom and confidence of children, whispers into our ears His own wish that we may grow in strength of purpose, prosper in grace of spirit and shine forth in ever-highted beauty of character.

Granted all this, namely, that the burden of our message be true respecting the generality of men, I take it that here as everywhere are gathered hosts of the heart-sick and soul-weary, who take leave of the speeding year with nothing of regret, who look forward to the incoming twelvemonth without aught of hopefulness. Saddened by sorrow, embittered by disappointment, grieved by misfortune, these tell us that our march from year to year is futile and profitless. With much show of wisdom and more of pathetic helplessness, these prophets of evil point out to us the vanity of time's flight, that all men are but as wanderers along the desert-sands, leaving behind them, at best, foot-prints which the faintest wind will dislodge or the earliest storm blot

out from sight forever. And, at last, as if to adduce an unanswerable argument, these, the believers in the final triumph of void and darkness, think to prove the aimless destiny of man by comparing his course in life to the ship which sails across the seas and leaves no trace or memory of its passage. But is this similtude just and can we carry this analogy to its logical end? Is it indeed true that the bark of a human life sails tracklessly across the ocean of time? Let us see! Lately, I was hastening homeward from across the sea. In a certain sense it was true enough that the vast ship which bore us ploughed its mighty way through the watery waste, leaving no mark or record of its passing. In very truth it might be said that ours was a pathless, trackless flight; for how soon are the seething, foaming billows in the wake of a boat swallowed up in the stillness of the emerald deep! Trackless was our voyage, but not aimless. Trackless it may be, viewing merely the manner of our going from place to place. Was that voyage aimless or even pathless, however, which brought us safely to our appointed goal, distant by thousands of miles from our starting-point? was that journey aimless which from far, far away winged us unto the embrace of loved ones, eagerly awaiting our return after weeks or months or years of separation? Was that sailing aimless which carried numbers of young people from the stifing breath of their native lands to the invigorating atmosphere of our free country, which transplanted hundreds of gifted, ambitious youths from places where energy and aspiration were foredoomed to failure, to our own country, which rewards talent, honors enterprise and crowns industry? Look to the sea and you will find no sign or reminder that this noble bark was ever piloted from shore to shore. The record must be sought and will be found in the hearts of the reunited, in the boundless hopes of those to whom America spells opportunity for the gaining of great riches, or honorable fame, or high place.

This be our answer to the downcast, to whom the new year tokens new weariness, who harp everlastingly upon man's pathless, profitless and purposeless stay upon earth. Shall we not rather hold steadfastly to the belief that entering upon the New Year to-night is like unto embarking