

A WORD IN SEASON ABOUT LENT

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THE following admirable letter to the parishioners and congregation of St. Peter's, Thetford, has been published by the Rector—the Rev. J. P. Watts—in his parochial magazine, *Home Words*. The teaching and counsel contained in the pastoral are so sound and to the point that we reproduce the paper at length, hoping that its large circulation at this season will tend to neutralize the mischievous and superstitious follies which are being propagated by the Ritualistic clergy. Mr. Watts writes:—

My Dear Friends,—It is the solemn responsibility of every true pastor to give plain warnings to his flock if he sees any pitfalls lying in their path, and over which there is any possibility of their stumbling. There is one snare which I am convinced has been deeply laid by the great enemy of souls, and so carefully wrapped up in the garb of truth that many unwary souls are entrapped. This season of the year, before Easter, bears the Ecclesiastical name of Lent, and it is a very common thing to hear in so many Church circles that during this time one ought to practise a more ascetic life, to go through so many more religious ceremonies than is necessary at other seasons, to be more strict in one's religious fervour, to be less attached to the world, to dwell much on the necessity of repentance, to practise many acts of self-denial, to be more regular in our attendance at God's house, to be more systematic in Bible-reading and prayer, and alms-giving. All this is so far right; but the poison which is so often very deftly inserted is that all this is confined to Lent, and that these things may be relaxed after Easter is over. I have before me some rules for the observance of Lent that were actually written in the parish magazine of a town that I know, which make one smile and at the same time feel very sad that the devil's poison had so far infected professing Christians in this age.

If a consecrated life is what God expects of us in Lent, He expects the same none the less, out of Lent. If a worldly atmosphere around one's life is altogether grieving to Him, and harmful to our spiritual welfare in Lent, just the same is true out of Lent. If I need to be reminded in Lent of the condition on which alone I can be a true disciple of Christ, viz., "to deny oneself and take up the cross daily and follow" Him (Luke ix.-23), I cannot find a single word in the Bible to lead me to think for one moment that that condition lasts for but six weeks of the year. If it is wrong to be worldly in life, and to take part in what is acknowledged to belong to the scenes of the world in Lent, I am quite sure that the Word of God equally condemns this at all other times. His commands, "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. xii.-2), and "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii.-15), have no limit of time attached to them. His plain word to every professed Christian is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. vi.-17). If I need an acquaintance with God's Word in Lent, and time for communion with Him in prayer, I need all this the rest of the year equally the same. This is the poison that the devil so stealthily keeps in the background while he presents to us the need of more reality in our Christian life, that in Lent only or mainly need these things to be particularly dwelt upon. We may be extraordinarily religious while Lent lasts, with the full approbation of the devil, so long as we think we can relax the reins on Easter Monday.

It is a common thing to hear about the "solemn Lenten season"; and that what is quite allowable at other times is "harmful" now. But God's Word never talks like this, and that Word alone is our guide as to our daily life and walk. It very plainly says that what is harmful to the soul at any time is harmful always. St. Paul had to mourn over this religion of the flesh in some of his converts in Galatia and Colosse. In no measured terms he denounced these things, and exhorted them to "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again

with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. v.-1). “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. ii.-20-23). And the Lord Jesus himself said about the Pharisees, who were the religionists of His day: “Well did Esaias prophesy of you saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. xv.7-9).

I do earnestly pray that everyone belonging to St. Peter’s congregation and parish may be kept from any false ideas of what God requires of us, and that not only in Lent, but all through the year, we may be ready to say with David’s servants, “Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint” (2 Sam. xv.-15).—Your faithful Friend and Pastor.

J. P. WATTS.