

## Obadiah; or, Early Piety Eminent Piety

A Sermon

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'I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.'<sup>1</sup> [Kings 18:12](#).

I SUSPECT that Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow-believer. Elijah was the man of action bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah, and others like him. He says, 'They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.' He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a prophet, was a man of mark; but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like himself: I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds somewhat to undervalue quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages, against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known, and may even shun the least recognition; therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to underestimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness. Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal, and naturally he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary over again, in some respects.

The Lord does not love that his servants, however great they are, should think lightly of their lesser comrades, and it occurs to me that he so arranged matters that Obadiah became important to Elijah when he had to face the wrathful king of Israel. The prophet is bidden to go and show himself to Ahab, and he does so; but he judges it better to begin by showing himself to the governor of his palace, that he may break the news to his master, and prepare him for the interview. Ahab was exasperated by the terrible results of the long drought, and might in his sudden fury attempt to kill the prophet, and so he is to have time for consideration, that he may cool down a little.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah, and bids him go and say to Ahab, 'Behold Elijah.' It may sometimes be the nearest way to our object to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior. He who never feared the face of kings nevertheless found himself using as his helper a far more timid individual. The Lord may put you, my dear brother, who are so eminent, so useful, so brave, perhaps, so severe, into a position in which the humbler and more retiring believer, who has not half the grace, nor half the courage that you have, may, nevertheless, become important to your mission; and when he does this he would have you learn the lesson, and learn it well, that the Lord has a place for all his servants, and that he would not have us despise the least of them, but value them, and cherish the good that is in them. The head must not say to the foot, I have no need of thee. Those members of the mystical body which are weakest are yet necessary to the whole fabric. The Lord does not despise the day of small things, neither will he have his people do so. Elijah must not deal harshly with Obadiah. I would that Obadiah had had more courage: I wish that he had testified for the Lord, his God, as openly as Elijah did; but still every man in his own, order, to his own master every servant must stand or fall. All lights are not moons, some are only stars; and even one star differeth from another star in glory. God hath his praise out of the least known of the holy characters of Scripture; even as the night hath its light out of those glimmering bodies which cannot be discerned as separate stars, but are portions of nebulous masses in which myriads of far-off lights are melted into one.

We learn further from the narrative before us, that God will never leave himself without witnesses in this world. Aye, and he will not leave himself without witnesses in the worst places of the world. What a horrible abode for a true believer Ahab's court must have been! If there had been no sinner there but that woman Jezebel, she was enough to make the palace a sink of iniquity. That strong-minded, proud, Sidonian Queen twisted poor Ahab round her fingers just as she pleased. He might never have been the persecutor he was if his wife had not stirred him up; but she hated the worship of Jehovah intensely, and despised the homeliness of Israel in comparison with the more pompous style of Sidon. Ahab must yield to her imperious demands, for she would brook no contradiction, and when her proud spirit was roused she defied all opposition. Yet in that very court where Jezebel was mistress, the chamberlain was a man who feared God greatly. Never be surprised to meet with a believer anywhere. Grace can live where you would never expect to see it survive for an hour.

Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh, Daniel was a trusted counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus, Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus, and there were saints in Caesar's household. Think of finding diamonds of the first water on such a dunghill as Nero's palace. Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were examples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some light: the darkest

cavern of iniquity has its torch. Be not afraid; you may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium. In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints, and quits the levees of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers.

I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these his special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sons the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted it was a child, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. The Lord hath to-day 'I know not where' some little Luther on his mother's knee, some young Calvin learning in our Sunday-school, some youthful Zwingli singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse; I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way; but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous; and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before; but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men. Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the ark of the Lord; it shall go safely on in God's predestined way. Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries his workmen, but his work lives on. If there be not in the palace a king who honors God, there shall yet be found there a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's prophets, and hide them away till better days shall come. Wherefore be of good courage, and look for happier hours. Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

Concerning Obadiah I wish to speak with you this morning. His piety is the subject of discourse, and we wish to use it for stimulating the zeal of those who teach the young.

I. First, we shall notice that Obadiah possessed EARLY PIETY 'I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.' Oh that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same. Happy are the people who are in such a case!

How Obadiah came to fear the Lord in youth we cannot tell. The instructor by whom he was led to faith in Jehovah is not mentioned. Yet we may reasonably conclude that he had believing parents. Slender as the ground may seem to be, I think it is pretty firm, when I remind you of *his name*. This would very naturally be given him by his father or his mother, and as it signifies 'the servant of Jehovah.' I should think it indicated his parents' piety. In the days when there was persecution everywhere against the faithful, and the name of Jehovah was in contempt because the calves of Bethel and the images of Baal were set up everywhere, I do not think that unbelieving parents would have given to their child the name of 'The servant of Jehovah' if they themselves had not felt a reverence for the Lord.

They would not idly have courted the remarks of their idolatrous neighbors, and the enmity of the great. In a time when names meant something, they would have called him. 'The child of Baal,' or 'The servant of Chemosh,' or some other name expressive of reverence to the popular gods, if the fear of God had not been before their eyes. The selection of such a name betrays to me their earnest desire that their boy might grow up to serve Jehovah, and never bow his knee before the abhorred idols of the Sidonian Queen. Whether this be so or not, it is quite certain that thousands of the most intelligent believers owe their first bent towards godliness to the sweet associations of home. How many of us might well have borne some such a name as that of Obadiah; for no sooner did we see the light than our parents tried to enlighten us with the truth. We were consecrated to the service of God before we knew that there was a God. Many a tear of earnest prayer fell on our infant brow and sealed us for heaven; we were nursed in the atmosphere of devotion; there was scarce a day in which we were not urged to be faithful servants of God, and entreated while we were yet young to seek Jesus and give our hearts to him. Oh, what we owe, many of us, to the providence which gave us such a happy parentage! Blessed be God for his great mercy to the children of his chosen!

If he had no gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a believer in the Lord in those sad days, unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or perhaps good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbor, who dared to gather little children round about him and tell of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their falsehoods. No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth, and it does not matter: does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God. Not unto us be the glory. If souls are saved, God has the honor of it. He knows what instrument he used, and as he knows it, that is enough. The favor of God is fame enough for a believer. All the blasts of fame's brazen trumpet are but so much wasted wind compared with that one sentence from the mouth of God, 'well done, good and faithful servant.' Go on, dear teachers: since you are called to the sacred ministry of instructing the young, do not grow weary of it. Go on, though you may be unknown, for your seed sown in the darkness shall be reaped in the light. You may be teaching an Obadiah, whose name shall be heard in future years; you are providing a father for the church, and a benefactor for the world. Though your name be forgotten, your work shall not be. When that illustrious day shall dawn, compared with which all other days are dim, when the unknown shall be made known to the assembled universe, what you have spoken in darkness shall be declared in the light.

If it was not in this way that Obadiah was brought to fear the Lord in his youth, we may think of methods such as the Lord deviseth for the bringing in of his banished. I have been very pleased lately, when I have been seeing enquirers, to talk with several young persons

who have come out from utterly worldly families. I put to them the question, 'Is your father a member of a Christian church?' The answer has been a shake of the head. 'Does he attend a place of worship?' 'No, sir, I never knew him to go to one.' 'Your mother?' 'Mother does not care about religion.' 'Have you any brother or sister like-minded with yourself?' 'No, sir.' 'Have you any single relative who knows the Lord?' 'No, sir.' 'Were you brought up by anyone who led you to attend the means of grace and urged you to believe on the Lord Jesus?' 'No, sir, and yet from my childhood I have always had a desire to know the Lord.' Is it not remarkable that it should be so? What a wonderful proof of the election of grace! Here is one taken out of a family while all the rest are left; what say you to this? Here is one called in early childhood and prompted by the secret whispers of the Spirit of God to seek after the Lord while all the rest of the family slumber in midnight darkness. If that is your case, dear friend, magnify the sovereignty of God and adore him as long as you live, for 'he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.'

Still, I take it, the major part of those who come to know the Lord in their youth are persons who have had the advantage of godly parents and holy training. Let us persevere in the use of those means which the Lord ordinarily uses, for this is the way of wisdom and duty.

This early piety of Obadiah's *had special marks of genuineness about it*. The way in which he described it is, to my mind, very instructive, 'I thy servant *fear the Lord* from my youth.' I hardly remember in all my life to have heard the piety of children described in ordinary conversation by this term, though it is the common word of the Scriptures. We say, 'The dear child loved God.' We talk of their 'being made so happy,' and so forth, and I do not question the rightness of the language; still, the Holy Spirit speaks of 'the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom;' and David says, 'Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.' Children will get great joy through faith in the Lord Jesus; but that joy, if true, is full of lowly reverence and awe of the Lord. Joy may be the sweet fruit of the Spirit, but it also may be an excitement of the flesh; for you remember that they upon the stony ground, which had not much depth of earth, received the word with joy, and the seed sprang up immediately; but as they had no root, they withered when the sun was risen with burning heat. We cannot consider the exhilaration with which hearts receive the novelty of the gospel to be the very best and surest sign of grace. Again, we are pleased with children when we see in them much knowledge of the things of God, for in any case such knowledge is most desirable; yet it is not conclusive evidence of conversion. Of course that knowledge may be a divine fruit; if they are taught of the Spirit of God it is indeed well with them: but as it is more than possible that we ourselves may know the Scriptures and understand the whole theory of the gospel and yet may not be saved, the like may be true in the case of our youth. The fear of God which is so often neglected is one of the best evidences of sincere piety. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that

worketh in us. When either child or adult has the fear of God before his eyes, this is the finger of God. By this we do not mean the servile fear which worketh dread and bondage, but that holy fear which pays reverence before the majesty of the Most High, and has a high esteem of all things sacred, because God is great, and greatly to be praised. Above all things young people need a dread of doing wrong, tenderness of conscience, and anxiety of spirit to please God. Such a principle is a sure work of grace, and a surer proof of the work of the Holy Ghost than all the joy a child can feel, or all the knowledge it can acquire. I ask all teachers of the young to look well to this. There is a growing flightiness about the religion of the present day which makes me tremble. I cannot endure the religion which swims only in boiling water and breathes only in heated air. To me the whisper of the Spirit has no relationship to a brass band, much less does godliness treat the great God and the Holy Saviour as matters for irreverent clamor. The deep-seated fear of the Lord is what is wanted, whether in old or young: it is better to tremble at the word of the Lord, and to bow before the infinite majesty of divine love, than to shout oneself hoarse. O that we had more of the stern righteousness: of the Puritans, or of the inner feeling of the olden Friends. Men nowadays put on their shoes and stamp and kick, and few seem to feel the power of that command, given of old to Moses, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' The truth of God is not meant to inflate us, but to humble us before the throne. Obadiah had early piety of the right kind.

Beloved, you do not need that I should at this point speak to you at large upon *the advantages of early piety*. I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful, and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men, and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman, and so to have a holy companion in his march towards heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the church and not in the tavern; his helpers in virtue, and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it. The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits, and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature; to form new ones is hard work; but those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse,

'Tis easier work if we begin  
To serve the Lord betimes  
But sinners who grow old in sin  
Are hardened in their crimes.'

I am sure it is so. Moreover, I notice that, very frequently, those who are brought to Christ whilst young grow in grace more rapidly and readily than others do. They have not so much to unlearn, and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the devil are missed by those whom the Lord brings into his church before they have wandered far into the world.

As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown-up man, strikes at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force: the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory, and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister's sermon fails, the child's prayer may gain the victory. Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years; for others seeing the little one saved say to themselves, 'Why should not we also find the Lord?' By a certain secret power it opens closed doors, and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for truth, a child's love has done it. It is still true, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.' Go on, go on, dear teachers, to promote this most precious of all things beneath the sky, true religion in the heart'especially in the heart of the young.

I have taken up, perhaps, too much time upon this early piety, and therefore I will only give you hints, in the next place, as to its results:

II. Youthful piety leads on to PERSEVERING PIETY. Obadiah could say, 'I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.' Time had not changed him: whatever his age may have been, his religion had not decayed. We are all fond of novelty, and I have known some men go wrong as it were for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work; roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious indeed. For the grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threatenings against the saints, is a great marvel, but for the grace of God to preserve a believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, is quite as great a miracle, and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time; he was found to be when old what he was when young.

Nor was he carried away by the fashion of those evil times. To be a servant of Jehovah was thought to be a mean thing, old-fashioned, ignorant; a thing of the past; the worship of Baal was the 'modern thought' of the hour. All the court walked after the God of Sidon, and all the courtiers went in the same way. My lord worshipped Baal, and my lady worshipped Baal, for the queen worshipped Baal; but Obadiah said, 'I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth.' Blessed is the man who cares nothing for the fashion, for it passeth away. If for a while it rageth towards evil, what hath the believing man to do but to abide steadfastly by

the right? Obadiah was not even affected by the absence of the means of grace. The priests and Levites had fled into Judah, and the prophets had been killed or hidden away, and there was no public worship of Jehovah in Israel. The temple was far away at Jerusalem; therefore he had no opportunity of hearing anything that could strengthen him or stimulate him; yet he held on his way. I wonder how long some professors would keep up their profession if there were no places of worship, no Christian associations, no ministrations of the word; but this man's fear of the Lord was so deep that the absence of that which is usually wanted for the sustenance of piety did not cause him to decline. May you and I personally feed upon the Lord Jesus in the secret of our souls, so that we may flourish even though we should be far removed from a profitable ministry. May the Holy Ghost make us steadfast, unmovable evermore.

Added to this, there were the difficulties of his position. He was chamberlain of the palace. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage; but there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah. He must have had to walk very delicately, and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person, and was a little afraid even of Elijah, lest he was giving him a commission which would lead to his destruction. He came to be extremely prudent, and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience nor jeopardise his position. It wants an uncommonly wise man to do that, but he who can accomplish it is to be commended. He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and have fled into Judah, where the worship of Jehovah continued; but he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position, and therefore he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory you may as well retire; but he is the brave man who when the bugle sounds retreat does not hear it, who puts his blind eye to the telescope and cannot see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds, and does all the damage he can to the enemy. Obadiah was a man who did in truth 'hold the fort,' for he felt that when all the prophets were doomed by Jezebel it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished so much. I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I should greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place. His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult. The part of Elijah is much safer and grander. The prophet's course was plain enough; he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab; he had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel. How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him



‘My lord Elijah,’ and well he might, for morally he was far his inferior. Yet I must not fall into Ellijah’s vein myself lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that he could manage Ahab’s household with Jezebel in it, and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that *he feared the Lord greatly*.

He persevered, too, notwithstanding his success in life; and that I hold to be much to his credit. There is nothing more perilous to a man than to prosper in this world and become rich and respectable. Of course we desire it, wish for it, strive for it; but how many in winning it have lost all, as to spiritual wealth! The man used to love the people of God, and now he says, ‘they are a vulgar class of persons.’ So long as he could hear the gospel he did not mind the architecture of the house, but now he has grown aesthetic, and must have a spire, gothic architecture, a marble pulpit, priestly millinery, a conservatory in the church, and all sorts of pretty things. As he has filled his pocket he has emptied his brains, and especially emptied his heart. He has got away from truth and principle in proportion as he has made an advance in his estate. This is a mean business, which at one time he would have been the first to condemn. There is no chivalry in such conduct; it is dastardly to the last degree. God save us from it; but a great many people are not saved from it. Their religion is not a matter of principle, but a matter of interest: it is not the pursuit of truth, but a hankering after society, whatever that may mean; it is not their object to glorify God, but to get rich husbands for their girls: it is not conscience that guides them, but the hope of being able to invite Sir John to dinner with them, and of dining at the hall in return. Do not think I am sarcastic: I speak in sober sadness of things which make one feel ashamed. I hear of them daily, though they do not personally affect me, or this church. This is an age of meannesses disguised under the notion of respectability. God send us men of the stuff of John Knox, or, if you prefer it, of the adamant metal of Elijah, and if these should prove too stiff and stern we could even be content with such men as Obadiah. Possibly these last might be harder to produce than Elijahs: with God all things are possible.

III. Obadiah with his early grace and persevering decision became a man of EMINENT PIETY, and this is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab’s court! This is a wonder of grace indeed. This man’s religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elias did, he was not called to such a career; but it dwelt deep within his soul and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him, she looked askance at him, but she could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind. Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked and was still a man. I have noticed that the most yielding husbands like to indulge in some notion that they are not quite governed by their spouses, and it is possible that on this account Ahab retained Obadiah in his position. At any rate, there he was, and he never yielded to

Ahab's sin, nor countenanced his idolatry. Account for it how you may, it is a singular circumstance that in the center of rebellion against God there was one whose devotion to God was intense and distinguished. As it is horrible to find a Judas among the apostles, so it is grand to discover an Obadiah among Ahab's courtiers. What grace must have been at work to maintain such a fire in the midst of the sea, such godliness in the midst of the vilest iniquity!

And his eminent piety was very *practical*; for when Jezebel was slaying the prophets he hid them away from her one hundred of them. I do not know how many servants of the Lord any of you support, but I have not the privilege of knowing any gentleman who sustains a hundred ministers; this man's hospitality was on a grand scale. He fed them with the best he could find for them, and risked his life for them by hiding them away in caves from the search of the queen. He not only used his purse but staked his life when a price was set upon these men's heads. How many among us would place our lives in jeopardy for one of the Lord's servants? At any rate, Obadiah's fear of the Lord brought forth precious fruit, and proved itself to be a powerful principle of action.

His godliness was such, too, that it was recognised by the believers of the day. I feel sure of that, because Obadiah said to Elijah, 'Was it not told my lord how I hid the Lord's prophets?' Now, Elijah was the well-known head and leader of the followers of Jehovah throughout that whole nation, and Obadiah was a little astonished that somebody had not told the great prophet about his deed; so that though his generous act may have been concealed from Jezebel and the Baalites, it was well known among the servants of the living God. He was well reported of among those whose good report is worth having; it was whispered about among them that they had a friend at court, that the chamberlain of the palace was on their side. If anybody could rescue a prophet he could, and therefore the prophets of God felt secure in giving themselves up to his care; they knew that he would not betray them to bloodthirsty Jezebel. Their coming to him and confiding in him shows that his faithfulness was well known and highly esteemed. Thus he was strong enough in grace to be a leader recognized by the godly party.

He himself evidently knew Elijah, and did not disdain at once to pay him the utmost reverence. The prophet of God, who was at that moment hated of all men because of the judgment which had been indicted by his means, and was the special object of the king's pursuit, was honored by this gracious man. Early piety is likely to become eminent piety; the man who is likely to fear God greatly is the man who serves God early. You know the old proverb, 'He that would thrive must rise at five.' It is as applicable to religion as to anything else. He that would thrive with God must be with God early in his days. He who would make great progress in the heavenward race must not lose a moment. Let me urge young people to think of this, and give their hearts to God even now.

Sunday-school teachers, you may be training to-day the men who will keep the truth alive in this land in years to come, the men who will take care of God's servants and be their best allies, the men and women who will win souls to Christ. Go you on with your holy work. You do not know whom you have about you. You might well imitate the tutor who took his hat off to the boys in his school because he did not know what they would turn out to be. Think very highly of your class: you cannot tell who may be there, but assuredly you may have among them these who shall be pillars in the house of God in years to come.

IV. Obadiah's early religion became COMFORTABLE PIETY to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger he pleaded his long service of God, saying, 'I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth'; just as David, when he grew old, said, 'O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works; now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not.' It will be a great comfort to you, young people, when you grow old to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not trust in it, you will not think that there is any merit in it, but you will bless God for it. A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows grey. A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had living in the family an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child, and had lived to bring up your children, would you turn her into the street when she was past her work? No; you will do your best for her; if it is in your power you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and he will never turn off his old servants. I sometimes cry'

'Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,  
But train me for thy will;  
For even I, in fields so broad,  
Some duties may fulfill;  
And I will ask for no reward,  
Except to serve thee still.'

I anticipate the time when I shall not be able to do all I do now. You and I may look forward a little to the nearing period when we shall pass from middle life to declining years, and we may be assured that our Lord will take care of us to the last. Let us do our diligence to serve him while we have health and strength, and we may be sure that he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love. It is not the way of him. 'Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end.' That was said of his Son, and it may be said of the Father also. Oh, believe me, there is no better crutch on which an old man can lean than the fact of God's love to him when he was young. You cannot have a better outlook to your window when your eyes begin to fail than to remember how you went after the Lord in the days of your youth, and devoted your vigor to his service.

Dear young people, if any of you are living in sin I do pray you to recollect that if you are seeking the pleasures of this world to-day you will have to pay for it by-and-by. Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee therein; but for all this the Lord will bring thee into judgment. If thy childhood be vanity, and thy youth be wickedness, thy after-days will be sorrow. Oh, that thou wouldest be wise and offer to Christ thy flower in its bud with all its beauty upon it. Thou canst not be too soon holy, for thou canst not be too soon happy. A truly merry life must begin in the great Father's house.

And you, teachers, go on teaching the young the ways of God. In these days the State is giving them secular instruction all the day long, six days in the week; and religious teaching is greatly needed to balance it, or we shall soon become a nation of infidels. Secular teaching is all very well and good; we never stand in the way of any sort of light: but teaching that has not religion blended with it will simply help men to be bigger rascals than they would be without it. A rogue with a jemmy is bad enough, but a rogue with a pen and a set of cooked accounts robs a hundred for the other's one. Under our present plans children will grow up with greater capacity for mischief, unless the fear of the Lord is set before them, and they are taught in the Scriptures and the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Instead of relaxing Sabbath-school efforts, we shall be wise to increase them greatly.

As to you that have grown old in sin, I cannot talk to you about early piety; but there is a passage of Scripture which ought to give you great hope. Remember how the householder went out at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and at last at the eleventh hour, and found some still standing in the market-place idle. It was late, was it not? Very late. But, blessed be God, it was not too late. They had but one hour left, but the master said, 'Go, work in my vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give thee.' Now you eleventh-hour people, you people of sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty'I would go on to one hundred if I thought you were here of that age'you still may come and enlist in the service of the gracious Lord, who will give you your penny at the close of the day even as he will give to the rest of the laborers. The Lord bring you to his feet by faith in Christ. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON'1 Kings, 18:1-16; [Psalm 71](#).

HYMNS FROM 'OUR OWN HYMN BOOK'145, 1015, 693.