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**SERMONS BY**  
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**Volume 7**

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## **ONE GOD AND ONE MEDIATOR**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Croydon Sunday Morning 3rd December, 1865

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim.2:5

We often find in the Scripture, and especially in the New Testament, what I may call concise summaries of divine truth; as, for instance: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." These are so many short summings-up of divine truth. I have thought sometimes, instead of teaching children long catechisms that they cannot understand, if people would make them learn such summaries of truth, these things might be brought, if it were the will of God, to the heart. Not only would it be useful in this point of view, but it would be useful to God's children. Sometimes we have to fall back on first principles. Sometimes we are placed in those circumstances, we have to fall back on the simplest truths of the gospel, such as, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." How sometimes we have to fall on the bosom of these simple declarations.

Again, as we get older in the things of God, we get simpler. Divine Truth is a very simple thing. What the soul in earnest seeks is, the simplicity of truth. When I go to hear a minister, it is

not to hear fine words; I want food for my soul. When I preach myself, I want to break the bread of life, and give the people something to feed upon. All appeals to natural feelings may for the time seem to please, but it all passes away; but that is solid food, which is communicated by the Spirit to the soul through the Word that abides. So a text like this is a concise summary of divine truth; it lays it down as with a ray of light. God enable me to open it up, and bring before you the truth God has been pleased to deposit in it, that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men;" and that this one Mediator between God and men is "the man Christ Jesus."

We may connect our text with that verse I read this morning, in John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Here there is "one God;" that connects it with "the only true God." "Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;" this connects it with "the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

"There is one God." This does not imply that there is one God, to the exclusion of the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence; but it is to direct our minds to the Father, and show us there is no access to the Father but through his dear Son. Until the Lord is pleased to quicken our souls into divine life, we have no true knowledge that there is one God. I look sometimes on the time when the Lord was pleased to quicken my soul, in the early spring of 1827. I remember as distinctly all the events connected with it as if it were yesterday. I think I can find in the work of God in my soul, these four features. First, a great sense of eternal realities in my mind. I had talked of religion, gone to church, and said my prayers, yet never had any sense of eternal realities. But when the Lord, in the midst of deep affliction, laid the weight of eternal realities on my mind, then I felt there was an eternity. The next thing I felt was a great softness of spirit. I shed more tears in those six months than I have ever shed before or since. With that, thirdly, a communication of a spirit of prayer, resting on me night and day. And the fourth thing, a bending the ear to hear truth. I am convinced, whatever a man may know by

hearing, preaching, or reading books, there is no real acquaintance with God, except there be some ray of divine light, when it shines into the mind out of the great and glorious I AM. "In thy light shall we see light." There must be a discovery, by taking away the veil of unbelief, a discovery of his glorious perfections.

"There is one God." We did not know there was one God; we lived, having no hope, and without God in the world, practically atheists. We talked about God, but, as to knowing there was a God in heaven that knew every secret thought, a God glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders, a God that could save and a God that could damn, a God before whom all creation was but a bubble and a breath. As to any saving knowledge of a God, we knew no more of that than the beasts that perish. But when God is pleased to rise in the soul on his own beams, and bring a discovery of his majesty and spotless holiness, and by the communication of divine light and life to the soul to draw forth a godly awe and fear of his great name, this is the beginning of wisdom, this is the implantation of divine life, under the drawing near of the Majesty of heaven. Then we know that there is one God.

"There is one God," and thou art a sinner before him. He searches thy heart. Before him you stand as a guilty criminal; and you must stand, for you cannot get away from him. His eyes follow you wherever you go. Go to the ends of the earth, his eye and hand are there too.

"There is one God," eternal and almighty, whom thou canst not elude, and who will bring thee to stand at his bar. Remember this, it is eternal life. Therefore, not to know the only true God is eternal death. I am not laying down a standard, but there must have come into your mind a discovery of this great God. Paul at Athens found an altar with this inscription, "To the Unknown God." They could not worship an unknown God; so they gave their gods names that they might worship them. How can we love or fear an unknown God? It must be a very uncertain thing to

love or fear what is unknown. We know our friends, we know who and what they are, therefore we can love them. So if we are to worship and fear God, and have an acquaintance with him, it must be in knowing him as he only manifests himself to our souls. Now, perhaps, while all this is going on, we have not any right knowledge of the Mediator between God and men. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Our faith first deals with God as infinite, omniscient, omnipresent. We may go on for a long time, with very dim views of there being a Mediator between God and us, to give us any measure of confidence, or good hope through grace. But when God begins his work he carries it on. He first well drills the soul into a knowledge of himself. I am very fond of what I may call good foundation work. In my time I have been a teacher; my aim was to drill the pupils well into the elements, ground them well into the beginning of things. So in religion. I like a religion in which a man has been well exercised in first principles. To be well exercised about the majesty of God, and the holiness of the God of heaven and earth, that will ballast him. If he is jumping here, and leaping there, before he is led into it by a divine hand, and drilled every step of the way, made to go back sometimes because he has not learned it properly, drilled well in a holy law, in a knowledge of self, the man does not walk safely. But this being well grounded in him, as the Lord leads, he can follow. Some are in tribulation one half hour, in joy the next; then soon ripe, soon rotten, spring up like mushrooms and like mushrooms perish. As of old in the wilderness he drilled them well, so he drills his people well in the first elements now.

After a time we begin to feel there is no approaching this holy God. Perhaps we backslide; fresh guilt falls on the conscience; we find there is no dealing with this holy God. Like the children of Israel, we say, "Let not God speak, lest we die;" his majesty is too great, his law too strict. As we are exercised on these points, the Lord begins to open to us a little about Jesus, speaks to us of his blood and dying love, and brings in some great discovery of his suitability. Every now and then there will beam forth gleams

and glances; clouds, mists and fogs; then the sun breaking in; then clouds again; then a breaking-in. By these breakings-in and glorious visitations we come to see, very dimly at first. I believe the work of grace is very gradual. I have no idea of these things being learned in a day. Doubts and fears, and then sweet teachings, to lead the soul along; then driven back through fear and a storm. But by various ways the suitability and preciousness of Jesus comes. In reading the Scriptures, the line of a hymn, or some good book, there is some breaking-in of divine love. All this seems to endear him, yet perhaps we know very little about him all the time; but he appears so blessed, that all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. The soul leaps up, as it were, directly he comes; yet there is no powerful manifestation. Doubts and fears are still working, and yet good hope springs up. Every mark and testimony of the work is genuine; and yet, measured by some great experience, seems to come very short.

Whether it is so or not, the Lord brings his people to this point, that there must be a Mediator between God and men. Look at the words, "a Mediator." What does that imply? It implies two parties; the word means a middle man, one that stands between two parties. It also implies two parties at variance, and that the Mediator is seeking to reconcile these two parties. Two friends are at variance, and another friend tries to bring them together again; but, in order to do this, he must have some dignity. Say (may it never happen), say that our Queen and the Prince of Wales were to fall out, to use a common expression, and say their variance raised up among the people a great feeling of discontent. Who is to bring them together? A lawyer's clerk? A member of the House of Commons? No; they would not have dignity enough. But perhaps the Prime Minister, or Earl Russell, might have dignity enough. Now, look at this spiritually. Look at God, holy; and man, sunk in sin. Who is to bring these together? What man? What angel? Now, view the beauty and blessedness, and every grace of our gracious Lord, the Son of the Father in truth and love. Who so suitable as the Son of God to mediate, containing in himself all the attributes of God? Let heaven, let earth, let all the realms of space be searched, where can one be found, except God's Son, to mediate between God and guilty

sinner? He must be one whom both parties can trust. Now, God charges his angels with folly; the very heavens are not clean in his sight. He can trust his own Son, for he is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person. He can trust him; with a voice from heaven he proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." How the heart springs up in a moment, "I will hear him." God can trust his Son, put all the matter in his hand, and feel certain he can bring it through. God's Son can be trusted with his Father's honour, but how can we trust him? How are we to know him? O the mystery! Well may the apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh."

We see that the Mediator must partake of our nature; that there was a divine necessity for him to become one of us, that he might do the work he had to do. None of God's attributes were to be sacrificed. They talk of God suspending his law. God might as well suspend himself; ignorant men thus so talk. Heaven and earth must go to rack before that.

But to return to our subject. Who could do this mediatorial work but God's dear Son? How did he do it? By being made flesh, taking the flesh of the children in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Though it was human blood and suffering, and a human body, yet all the value of divinity was stamped on it. Therefore (wonder of wonders!) what blessedness is contained in it, that this Mediator was God and man! So as God-Man Mediator, he stands between us and God. One with man in relationship, and one with God as his Son. So we begin to drink a little at the fountain-head of all happiness, as this is opened up to us. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." You must know him now.

I have been speaking of glimpses and glances, but these will not satisfy, there must be a manifestation of his Person and work. As I lay in my bed one morning in a severe illness, I had a glorious view of the Son of God in his eternal deity, and in his humanity, and his glorious Person, as combining in that Person God and

Man. When we get this, then we see the Mediator in all his blessedness. If I have been able to write on his divinity and humanity, it has been from what the Lord showed me on my bed many years ago. Though we often lose the sight of these things, and get into spots where all seems gone, yet the reality abides, there is one God and one Mediator. God could not deal with us except through a Mediator. "For there shall no man see me and live." We cannot deal with a holy God, but in the face of a Mediator. How beautifully has the apostle opened up this! "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is seeing the Mediator. Here is the beauty and blessedness, that every perfection of God shines forth in the Mediator, the holiness of God, the justice of God, the purity, the majesty, and the glory. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." View, then, these glorious attributes, his unspeakable mercy, love, and pity to the sons of men. God could not reveal them till they came forth through the Mediator, and they all shine forth through him into a sinner's heart, compatible with the justice and goodness of God. O the blessedness of a Mediator between God and men! We have not to deal with an abstract God, but a God gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, in the face of a Mediator. O the blessedness of there being a Mediator through whom every blessing comes and every prayer ascends! O the blessedness of a Mediator always at God's right hand, ever present there, ever living, ever loving, and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him! Who shall describe what the uttermost of some poor soul is? He is able to save to the uttermost, consistent with every perfection of God. O the blessedness of the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus! It is a beautiful subject; I cannot enter into it this morning. The purity of his humanity, yet the tenderness of it; we can only approach him as God- Man. As man he has gone through all the temptations we are going through. As man he bore all the weight of the cross. He knows our frame, he still bears a human heart:

That human heart he still retains,

Though throned in highest bliss. J. Hart.

The humanity of Jesus is raised up beyond all description; not infinite, but raised up into glorious union with his deity. So his deity shines through his humanity; the glorious humanity of Jesus illuminated with all the splendour of deity. Here is the man Christ Jesus; we have not to deal with an abstract God. You may think of the perfections of God till you may almost tear the hair off your head, all for the want of seeing God shine forth through the face of a Mediator. The sun itself we cannot see shining in the middle of the day; we can look at it through a cloud. When we come to a throne of grace, we come through the God-Man. When he is pleased to manifest himself to our souls, it forms the joy of our hearts, the beginning, middle, and end of all vital godliness.

## **THE ONLY SAFE KEEPING**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London on closing his annual visit to the Metropolis, on Tuesday evening. July 13th 1841

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1Peter 1:5

This Epistle of Peter, like all the other epistles of the apostles, is addressed to the quickened family of God. The epistles were written to churches; and though there were in those churches then, just as there are in churches now, wheat and tares, sheep and goats, yet generally speaking, we find the apostles not taking direct notice of the chaff that was mingled with the wheat on the threshing-floor, but addressing them as what they professed to be—the children of the living God. Thus this Epistle of Peter is addressed "to the strangers that were scattered throughout" the countries mentioned, who, he says, were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;" and he thanks God, who according to His abundant mercy, had begotten them and him again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Those, then only, who are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, and who are begotten again to a living hope by a manifestation to their souls of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

The children of God and the mere nominal professors of vital godliness hold the same truths, but they believe them in a different way, and they get at them in a different manner. The

nominal professor receives the doctrines because he sees them in God's Word; the living soul receives them because they are taken out of God's Word by the Holy Ghost, and are revealed with power to his soul. The nominal professor is quite satisfied with a dim, shadowy hope that he is interested in gospel blessings; but the living soul can never be satisfied with anything short of the witness of the Holy Ghost to his soul, that he is a child of God, and therefore is interested in every blessing with which God has blessed His people in Christ. And as they believe them in a different way, so they get at them in a different manner. The family of God get at truth through trouble, distress, affliction, temptation, and tribulation; they arrive at the banquet through sharp pangs of hunger; they arrive at the clothing through being chilled with cold and nakedness; they arrive at the cross after travelling through the pangs of guilt in their conscience; and they arrive at a knowledge of their adoption into the family of God after being exercised with many poignant doubts and fears whether God is their Father at all. Thus the living family and the nominal professor of religion not merely differ in the way whereby they believe the truth; the one believing it spiritually, the other believing it naturally; the one believing it with his heart, the other believing it with his head; the one feeling it in his conscience, the other having it merely floating in his brain; but also they arrive at the experimental knowledge of the truth of God by a totally different road. Thus, however they may seem to resemble one another in the doctrines that they each profess to believe, yet there is an eternal distinction, which the hand of the Holy Ghost has drawn, between the living and the dead in Jerusalem.

The nominal professor is quite satisfied with the doctrine of final perseverance as it is revealed in the Scriptures. He knows nothing experimentally of the dangers and difficulties of the way; he is not exercised in his own soul by any temptations, any distressing doubts, any agonizing fears; and therefore, gliding at ease down the smooth stream, he knows nothings of storms, gusts, winds, and waves, and thinks that this smooth stream will land him safe in the harbour of everlasting peace, when it is only like the river St. Lawrence, which glides the more smoothly the

nearer it approaches the cataracts; the deeper it is, the calmer it flows, until the hapless navigator, once entangled in the rapids, is carried headlong down the falls of Niagara into the foaming abyss below. But all God's people arrive at the doctrine of final perseverance by feeling how necessary and how suitable the truth is to them. And they do not learn it once, and then for ever retain the knowledge of it; but it is a truth which accompanies them throughout all their pilgrimage here below, as being suited to those extremities in which they often feel themselves, and adapted to those temptations and exercises which they have to pass through continually.

What read we in our text? That the elect are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." The word **kept** is a very significant one. It means literally, garrisoned—kept as in a fortress, surrounded by bulwarks. And this is the way in which God keeps His people. They are garrisoned around by all the attributes of God; there is "a wall of fire round about" them, and they are surrounded by every attribute which God has in Himself, and which He has been pleased to reveal, that we may know it, and give Him the glory of it.

Now the very expression, **kept**, implies that they need keeping. A fortress is provided against an enemy. The very circumstance of a fortification being erected shows that there are enemies, who would fain destroy the lives of those persons whom the walls of the fortress are intended to protect. So when we read that the elect are garrisoned by God—shut up (**as it were**) in a strong city, of which God has appointed salvation as the walls and bulwarks, we gather that there are enemies ever on the watch, and that the object and aim of these enemies is to sweep them away from the land of the living. Before, then, a man can know anything experimentally of the sweetness of being kept of the almighty power and faithfulness which are exerted in his behalf he must have some personal acquaintance with those enemies, who are ever upon the alert, if it be possible, to destroy him utterly. This fortress is not like a fortified town where the officers

can strut upon the parade and never see the smoke of an enemy's camp, and where the cannon are never fired but on gala days. This fortress is not like the Tower just below, where the sentinel walks round the battlements, and never sees an enemy to give an alarm. But this garrison, which contains the redeemed, is one in a state of siege, which the enemies are continually seeking to take. the walls of which they are continually endeavouring to batter down the inmates of which they are continually aiming to wound, and. if possible, to destroy.

For instance, there is the world. A man knows not what an enemy the world is, who has not in some measure been separated from it. To a professor of religion, who has the doctrines of grace in his head and is devoid of the feeling power of truth in his soul, the world is no enemy, for he is no enemy to the world. He has no tender conscience that feels how liable he is to be entrapped by the baits and allurements which the world scatters in his path; there is no struggling with him to have communion with the Lord, which, the world intercepts; there is no endeavour to withdraw his spirit from being carried away by the business that he is needfully occupied with; and therefore the nominal professor of religion feels not the world to be his enemy, because the world and he are agreed upon matters. His religion is not a religion that offends the world; and his heart has not been touched by the finger of God. so as to feel the world to be his enemy, because it is the enemy of God. It is the child of God who feels what a heart he has, and how this heart is continually being carried away by the temptations set before him; it is he who has some insight into the character of God as a heart-searching Jehovah, and knows that He abhors evil; it is he who desires to be in reality what he professes to be—a follower of Jesus, and to have the image of God stamped upon his soul and to walk as Jesus walked when here below—it is he, and he only, who really knows that the world is his enemy. And a living soul does feel, and most painfully feel too, that unless he is kept by the power of God through faith, from the baits and allurements of the world, he will surely and inevitably be entangled thereby.

Again, Satan is another enemy, that is continually on the look out, ever watching to entrap or harass the souls of God's family. Sometimes he comes as an "angel of light," casting his magic delusions over the eyes, so that, under the influences of this wonderful magician, we are prompted to "call evil good, and good evil, put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, darkness for light, and light for darkness." Sometimes he comes in all the garb of holiness, endeavouring to draw us away from the righteousness and sanctification of Christ, in order to set up some creature holiness of our own. Sometimes he comes to us with base antinomian injections, as though because the doctrine of election is sure, and because we have some evidence that we are the children of God, sin could not damn us, nor harm us, and secretly suggesting that this gratification is innocent, and that pleasure allowable; and thus, by casting these antinomian principles into our mind, he hides that trap which he is secretly preparing for our unwary feet. Sometimes he will come upon us "as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," opening his mouth of blasphemy, raising up everything which is hateful and dreadful in our carnal mind, even tempting us to "curse God and die." Sometimes in a hidden unperceived manner, he stirs up the base lusts and passions of our carnal mind, tempting us to believe that there is no harm in their gratification, and then, perhaps, turning round upon us as hypocrites. Thus does this crafty and powerful enemy seek sometimes to carry the city by storm, sometimes to take the city by mine—sometimes to creep in under the garb of a friend—sometimes by open violence to break through the gates, if he may by assault or stratagem carry off the soldiers that are under the banners of Immanuel.

It would not so much matter if there were not a worse enemy than these; the enemy within, the traitor within the walls, the renegade, the deserter within the camp. Oh! friends, when we call to mind our slips and our falls, when we look back upon our lives, the many base declensions of our soul from God, the many snares in which we have been entangled, do we not see that our own base heart, our own vile nature, has been a worse enemy than all? Who knows the strength of sin in a man, but he who has

in some measure been carried away by it? Who knows the power of these gusts, except the mariner, who has been well nigh shipwrecked upon the shoals and sand-banks by having his poor shattered bark blown from the right course by them? Who is acquainted with the hidden shoals of this intricate navigation, but he who from time to time has felt the keel of his vessel just graze upon them, and yet by the grace of God has not been shipwrecked? Who can put down the buoys to mark the right channel, but the navigator who, with the lead in his hand, has sounded the reefs and quicksands of his own heart?

Those then that have an experimental acquaintance with these enemies of their salvation, with those external and internal foes that "war against their soul," will be glad when the Lord drops into their hearts some testimony that He is keeping them; they will be glad to feel that hand which has been outstretched on their behalf. They cannot boast with the proud Arminian that they have kept themselves; they cannot sacrifice unto their own net, nor burn incense to their own drag, for they know feelingly and they know bitterly, that when the Lord's arm was not under them but for a single moment, they were not able to stand. When He has left them but for an instant to the lusts of their own vile heart, to the allurements of the world, to the baits of Satan, they were no more able to resist the temptations that beset them, than the babe that is put down by its mother upon the ground, is able to stand alone. Those, then, that are kept, are kept by God. All others, sooner or later, will make shipwreck.

It is something like that allegory which I have read in Addison, "The Vision of Mirza," where he compares life to a bridge of a hundred arches, that extended over a river, and as he watched, he observed a number of travellers passing over this bridge; and ever and anon he saw one drop in through some secret hole, and then before he could pass over another arch another dropped in, until before any passenger came to the end of the bridge, the whole had fallen into the river that flowed beneath. So spiritually, all travellers but those that are kept by God will sooner or later drop through these pitfalls into eternal perdition. Some may

continue for a shorter, and others for a longer time; but all who are not kept by the power of God, all under whom the everlasting arms have not been placed, all who are not wrapped up in the embraces of Jesus, and held firmly by Him, will drop, sooner or later, through these pitfalls into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. But God has covenanted to keep His people; when He gave them to Jesus, He gave them to Him that He might redeem them by His own blood, that none should be lost, and that none should ever pluck them out of His hand. Therefore, the elect are kept by the power of God, and they are sure to be preserved blameless until the day of Christ's appearing.

Mark the way in which God keeps them. They are kept "by the power of God **through faith.**" God does not keep His people, as a mother keeps her child from the fire by putting a tall iron fender round it. God does not preserve His people from falling into the river, by putting up a high balustrade upon the bridge. God does not keep His people from harm, as in lunatic asylums they confine maniacs with chains and fetters and strait-waistcoats. Such is not God's way of keeping His people. God's people are not steam engines, that are worked by mechanical power, and operated upon without any feelings or sensations in their own bosoms. God keeps His people through faith. "Who are kept by the power of God **through faith.**" There is then that grace in the soul, which is made an instrument of their being kept. God does not keep His people from sin, by tying up their legs so that they shall not go into the world, as a mother may tie her child's leg to the table, to keep her truant from running out into the street; but the Lord keeps His people from sin, by implanting that grace in their hearts, which forms a link between Himself and them. He keeps them, by breathing that faith in their souls, whereby in times of trouble and distress and necessity they have recourse to Him. He keeps them, by opening up a channel of communication with Himself, a channel through which grace is bestowed, strength imparted, wisdom given, and love shed abroad; so that God keeps His people from evil, not in a mechanical manner, but He keeps them spiritually and

experimentally by raising up that grace in their souls, whereby they are enabled to take hold of His strength.

One shall say, How does faith act in the matter? What connection is there between being kept from evil and faith as a grace in the soul? The connection is this. Faith is that eye of the soul, which realizes that which God presents to it; faith is that ear of the soul, which hears the instruction that God communicates; and faith is that hand of the soul, which takes hold of those promises that God reveals to it. If you saw a man deaf and blind, walking in a road which ended on a precipice, all your warnings would be thrown away upon him; he could not see the danger, he could not hear your warning voice; before you could save him from the precipice at the end of the road, you must give him an ear to hear your warning, you must give him an eye to see the danger which threatens him. This then is that which faith does. God, when He keeps His people by His mighty power, communicates to them eye-sight, by giving them faith; and imparts to them hearing, by opening their ear, for faith is "the evidence of things not seen," and "how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Faith then acts in this way: our eyes being opened, we see the danger; we see the world presents allurements, baits, and charms, which are suited to our fallen nature; we see Satan stirring up the pride of our heart, infusing his own cursed presumption, entangling us in his own dreadful hypocrisy, hardening us **(or endeavouring to harden us,)** into some measure of his own impenitence, inflating us with some of that arrogance which dwells in him, as "king over all the children of pride." Faith sees, recognises, feels, is alive to these suggestions, that Satan is casting in.

When flattery comes before the heart of a hypocrite, he feeds upon it eagerly; but when flattery comes before the heart of a child of God, he often sees under the flattery the cloven foot. When a gust of presumption comes in the way of a hypocrite, it takes him off his legs, because he has no ballast in self whereby he can stand against it; but when a gust of presumption blows hard against a child of God, he has that inward ballast of

suffering, condemnation, tribulation, and temptation, whereby he is kept from being blown away. When Satan is permitted to open his mouth in the heart of a dead professor, and to blow into it the blasphemy with which he himself is infected, he makes use of that mouth as a vent for his own enmity against God, and he thrusts that soul into the wretched state in which he himself lies; but when he would breathe his own enmity into the heart of a child of God, there is a tender conscience, there is a principle of godly fear, there is a crying unto the Lord, there is a secret abhorrence of soul, whereby his temptations are rejected. And thus Satan. who prevails in a moment over the man destitute of faith, who casts him down and sweeps him into destruction with a breath, when his arts and arms are levelled at a child of God, finds that invincible grace in him, that faith which was received from God, which strengthens him and supports him in the hour of trial, and stands up in the power of God against those onsets which would carry him away, had he had no inward support. So, when our heart rises up with all its base desires, when this filthy puddle is stirred up, and sin is presented as something sweet and delicious and alluring to our carnal appetite, the eye of faith sees the hook concealed beneath this bait; the ear of faith hears the footfall of the enemy behind the bushes, trampling upon the leaves; and the mouth of faith begins to cry to the Lord, that He would deliver the soul from these traps and snares.

Faith is like the modesty of a chaste virgin, that recoils from any look or gesture that would seek to draw her aside into anything improper or unbecoming; for she has a chaste principle in her bosom, which turns away immediately from the least approach to what is immodest; but the street-pacing harlot courts that which the modest woman recoils from. So, a heart which is unrenewed, one which is in all its natural enmity to, and alienation from God, woos sin, lusts after sin, delights in sin, courts, and is ready to embrace the first sin that comes in the way; but in a living soul there is a secret recoil, a holy fear, a godly awe, a crying out to the Lord **(as a damsel against her ravisher,) De 22:27** that He would deliver us from the violence of sin, that He would not suffer us to be overpowered and defiled by it.

Faith also acts in another way. It not merely discovers, being "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord," the baits, the gins, the traps, the pitfalls, that are spread for the feet of the unwary traveller, but faith knows what it is to have recourse to a throne of grace for help, strength and direction; faith knows what it is in some measure to realize the strength of Christ made perfect in weakness, and when it is utterly helpless in self, and cannot resist the temptation, to flee to the Lord and to hide itself in Him. Thus faith has recourse to the Lord in seasons of extremity and distress; and in this way a poor, trembling child of God, who has a spirit of faith and godly fear in his heart, is preserved whilst presumptuous professors are cast away.

Again; it is through the medium of faith, that the Lord communicates all strength to the soul. Have we not found it to be so? When our faith was weak, we were like Samson with his locks cut; we went forth as at other times, and lo! all our strength was gone; we could not stand up against one temptation. But when the Lord was pleased to succour us, to strengthen us with strength in the inner man, and to minister grace out of Christ to our souls, through the medium of that faith which He Himself had kindled, then there was a power, a wisdom, and an ability, communicated to the soul, to stand up against temptation, and not to be overcome and carried away by it.

One shall say, "Do the children of God always stand in these trying seasons? Are they never carried away by any temptation? Oh, if this be the case, I am no child of God at all" says he "for I am continually carried away; if I am not overcome by sin openly and outwardly so as to disgrace my profession, I am often carried away inwardly, and I feel that I have no more power to stand up against the least sin, than I have power to raise the dead." Now faith comes in here also. When you have been thus entangled, are you easy? Do you feel no guilt? Does conscience tell no dreadful tale? Is your mind perfectly calm and unruffled? Is there not inward distress, poignant suffering? Are there not tears rolling down your cheeks, heavings and gaspings of your groaning soul

under a load of self-condemnation and self-abhorrence, on account of your base departures from God? "Yes," say you, "when I have been entangled in sin (**and I confess I have often been entangled in it, base wretch that I am**), I felt that I could not roll it under my tongue like a sweet morsel; I could not act the part of the adulteress that is spoken of in the Proverbs, who eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. Oh, it was a hell to me to have been entangled in sin; it broke my bones, it troubled my spirit, it filled me with self-loathing and self-abhorrence before God." Whence arose those feelings? Was it not through faith that you realised the eye of God in secret upon you? Was it not through faith that you realised the hatred of God against the sin you were entangled in? Was it not by faith that self-loathing and self-abhorrence were kindled in your soul? Was it not through faith that you were enabled to make confession of your sin before God? Was it not through faith that some balmy drops of atoning blood fell upon your conscience? Was it not through faith that you received some testimony that, base as you are, God had not given you over to a reprobate mind, a hardened heart, and a seared conscience? Then you perceive that faith is as necessary to bring back a soul that backslides from God, as to prevent a soul from backsliding from Him; and he knows little of his own heart, little of the temptations of sin, and little of inward slips and falls, who knows not what it is to groan and sigh before God as a base wretch, that has been continually entangled in things hateful to God, and in his right mind hateful to his own soul.

Thus God keeps His people through faith; He does not keep them through presumption, nor does He keep them through vain confidence, nor does He keep them through unbelief, nor does He keep them through doubts and fears, but He keeps them through the exercise of that blessed grace which He Himself has implanted in their soul. And if you and I, brethren, have been kept up to the present day, since the Lord was first pleased to quicken our souls into spiritual life, we can trace up every act whereby we were kept, and every act whereby we were restored when we fell, to the operations of living faith in our souls; and

were it not for the operations of living faith in our souls under the influences of the Holy Spirit, long ago should we of faith made shipwreck.

"But," say some, "I do not understand this sort of keeping; the keeping I want is never to have anything to do with trouble, and exercises, and temptations, and sufferings." Now God never did keep His people so. We read that they shall "glorify Him in the fires;" that He hath "chosen them in the furnace of affliction;" that "when they pass through the waters He will be with them, and through the rivers they shall not overflow them;" that He "brings the third part to pass through the fire," and that "through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom." That man, then, and he only, knows what it is to be kept by the power of God through faith, who in his own self is continually prone to fall, independently of that keeping. He only knows the mercy of being kept, who feels that he falls every moment when the everlasting arms are not sensibly under him. He only knows the mercy of being kept who has been ready to weep tears of blood, because he has inwardly or outwardly fallen. He only knows the happiness, the blessedness, the privilege of being kept, who knows that if God did not hold him in by His powerful hand, he should launch at once into the vilest of sins, and bring disgrace upon his profession altogether. He only knows what it is to be kept who has to cry, and sigh, and groan unto God to preserve him from the base workings of his own heart, from the awful temptations and ensnaring delusions of Satan, and from the baits and allurements that the world is spreading in his path. And none but he can know what it is to be kept by the power of God through faith who is not deeply and inwardly persuaded that were God to leave him for a single moment he should fall out of the arms of God into a never-ending hell.

The children of God, then, receive the keeping of God, not as a dry doctrine, as spoken by the mouth of Peter, but they receive it as a most blessed privilege when God is pleased to indulge them with the sweet persuasion that He has kept them, is keeping them, and will keep them evermore. And oh! friends, what

happiness or pleasure can there be equal to feeling the everlasting arms underneath? Oh, it is not resting on the dry doctrine that God's everlasting arms are underneath His church that will satisfy a living soul, but it is to feel those arms spread underneath us; to lean with all our weight upon those arms, and to find daily that those arms are sufficient to support and hold us up, however weak, and helpless, and feeble we be in ourselves. It is thus that "the lame take the prey;" that the feeble Jacob wrestles and overcomes; and that whilst the youths faint and are weary and the young men utterly fall, those that wait upon the Lord renew their strength, mount up on wings as eagles, run and are not weary, walk and do not faint. God will powerfully convince all His dear family of their weakness and helplessness, that He may teach them sweetly and experimentally that all their strength is in Him, and may thus bring them to know by blessed teaching the sweetness of being kept by feeling that nothing but the hand of God could keep such rebellious wretches as they feel themselves to be.

If I were to go through this chapel and put my hand upon the first person who would fall, I will tell you who the man is: he who thinks he can stand in his own strength. And if I were to go through this chapel and put my hand upon him that is least likely to fall, it would be he who is so deeply sensible of his own weakness, his own helplessness, and his own impotency to keep himself, that he fears he shall fall before this night comes on, and yet is secretly crying and groaning to the Lord that He would not suffer him to be tempted beyond what he is able, but would with the temptation make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it.

Thus, then, all the living family are kept by the power of God. The Lord has enlisted all His attributes in their behalf. If we want a person to be our friend, we want to know what means he has of befriending us. If we are deeply in debt, and he comes forward to be our surety in order that we may not go to gaol, the inquiry will be as to the length of his purse, the amount of his property; and if it is found that he has property far more than would pay our

debts, then his bail is taken. Now the Lord has engaged all His power, whereby to hold up His people from falling; implying these two things, that they need all His power to keep them, and that all His power will be exerted on their behalf. But if the temptations, and dangers, and difficulties that stand in our way to glory, are so great and pressing, that **(so to speak)** it takes all the power of God to keep a man from being overcome by them, what can that man know of being "kept by the power of God," who has never felt himself such a headlong wretch towards evil, that nothing but the arm of God could possibly hold him in? But the case is proportioned to the remedy, and the remedy is proportioned to the case. The weakness of man is so great, that he needs all the power of God to keep him; and the power of God is so great that it is never exerted ineffectually.

Again, we want something more than power, we want **love**. Look at the mother, all whose affections are fixed upon her offspring; she often lacks power to keep them, to preserve them from danger, but does she ever lack love? And if her power were equal to her love, would not her offspring be preserved from every danger? You that are spiritual mothers, and have ungodly children, what would you not, if the love of your bosom could speak, and you were armed with power as well as love, do for the preservation and salvation of the fruit of your womb? But in behalf of the elect love is enlisted, as well as power; for the Lord has loved His elect with an everlasting love, and all the affection of His heart is engaged to keep them as much as His power.

Again, there is the **faithfulness** of God. If a friend has passed his word that he will afford me relief when I go to him, if he has bound himself by a solemn promise that I shall not apply to him in vain, and if I know him to be a man of uprightness and integrity, I am sure that he will not break his word, but that when the time of need comes he will afford that help which he has promised. So the promise-keeping Jehovah has covenanted His everlasting faithfulness to His word, as well as His power and His love; and if it would be a disgrace to a mortal man, to a fallen sinner, who had passed his word, not to adhere to it, will the

faithful truth keeping God ever suffer one of His words to fall to the ground? Has He said, and will He not do it? Has He spoken, and shall it not come to pass? The elect of God, then, are garrisoned by all the power of God, by all the love of God, and by all the faithfulness of God; they are kept in this city which hath walls and bulwarks, fortified by God Himself against every foe.

The elect are kept "unto **salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time**". This may apply to that "salvation" which will be revealed when Christ "comes a second time without sin unto salvation." But I think also it may well be applied to that salvation which is revealed in the soul; as we read a little lower down, "Be sober and hope to the end, for **the grace** that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Now the revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of all things does not bring grace, it brings glory; but the revelation of Jesus Christ in the soul, under the manifestations of His Holy Spirit, does bring grace with it. I think then, without wresting the word, we may say that this "salvation ready to be revealed" is the salvation which is manifested to the soul by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Those who are kept by the power of God through faith are often in their minds troubled and anxious, and fearing whether this salvation will ever reach their souls, whether they may not prove castaways; whether the work upon their heart is genuine, whether they are under divine teachings. But the Lord says they are kept by His power, through faith **unto salvation**, "shut up unto the faith which is to be revealed," kept as in this garrisoned city, until salvation shall come in all its glory, and sweetness, and bliss, and blessedness into their heart, preserved and encompassed by all the attributes of God from making shipwreck of faith, until "they receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

Well then, poor doubting, distressed, fearing, guilty sinner! This promise is for thee. Thy soul is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; thy character and thy name are contained here. And it is a promise suitable to you; yea, it is a promise suitable to us all. Suitable to us when we meet together, suitable to us when absent from each other; suitable to those who stay,

suitable to those who go; suitable for town, suitable for country; suitable for the busy metropolis, suitable for the retired country fields; suitable for a child of God in a state of trial and temptations, and suitable when he enjoys a temporary respite from them; suitable for him at ease, suitable for him in distress; suitable for him at war, suitable for him at peace; suitable for him when the cannons roar and the earth trembles, and suitable for him when he seems to have no enemy near, for the enemy then may be approaching by stratagem. Yea, friends, could you point out a single moment when this promise is not suitable to you, that moment would be the very moment in which the promise would be wanted by you most. Could you ever arrive at such a spot as to say, "Now I want the promise no more," that very feeling would show that you were on the brink of a fall, and therefore never needed the promise so much as then.

It is our mercy, if God has quickened us by the Holy Spirit, and raised us up to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to have an interest in this precious word—"kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." And what better wish can I now leave with you at the close of my present visit, than that you may be "kept by the power of God;" kept from evil that it may not grieve you, kept from the errors of the day, kept from the wiles of Satan, kept from the deceits of your own hearts, kept from the thousand snares, known and unknown, seen and unseen, hidden and discovered, that are spread before your feet? What better wish can I leave behind me or take with me than this, that we may realize in our souls that we are personally and individually interested in these blessed words, in this sacred promise from the mouth of God Himself—"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation?" If really we are interested in these words, the Lord will keep us during the few remaining days or years of our pilgrimage; He will hold us up that we shall not fall, and will present us before His face in glory.

## **The Only Safe Protection, and the Only Sure Refuge**

Preached at Eden St. Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Wednesday Evening, August 21, 1844

"Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." Psalm 17:8

The Scriptures were revealed for the instruction and consolation of the church of God in all time; and therefore, there cannot be any experience in the soul so deep, nor any so high, which may not be traced in them. But all God's people are not led into much of the experience we find recorded there; there are depths into which all do not descend; there are heights to which all do not mount. All the people of God, for instance, cannot adopt such language as we find in some of the Psalms. "Mine iniquities have gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." (38:4-8.) I do not mean to say, they may not have some sensations similar to those here described; but all are not able to declare (at any rate, in some stages of their experience), that they have gone into all the depths of feeling therein expressed. So again: "While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted." (88:15.) "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (42:7.) I do not mean to say, that all the Lord's people do not enter into a measure of the feelings therein set forth; but all the children of God certainly do not go down into the same depths of soul trouble, that we find some of the saints experienced as set forth in the Scripture. And so likewise, we may find heights of joy, praise, and exultation experienced by the Bible saints of old, that do not find a present parallel in the hearts of many of God's people. I do not say, that the time will not come, when they may sink into those depths; or that the period will not arrive when they may rise up to those heights; I merely look at it as a matter of present observation, as an existing fact,

that there are heights and depths of feeling recorded in the Scripture, to which all the children of God do not equally sink, and to which they do not all equally rise.

But there are experiences, or parts of experience, traced out in the Scriptures, which do meet, more or less, with a response in the bosom of every one taught of God:—experience, which being the teaching of the Holy Ghost, is as real, as saving, and as complete as the other; and yet, not equally deep; nor equally high; but more upon a level with the average of God's people, and thus specially adapted (if I may use the expression), to "the middle classes" of God's family. There are many passages of holy writ which drop into the very heart and conscience of all who know something of divine teaching, and yet have not been plunged into the depths, nor raised up into the heights that others of God's saints are experimentally acquainted with. Some parts, for instance, are clothed in the language of prayer; and how these express the feelings of a soul taught of God! How many of the Psalms are almost entirely taken up with breathing out the desires of the Psalmist! What a man of prayer David was! And how the Holy Ghost has seen fit to record in the Scriptures of truth the breathings of his soul, that we might, when we find similar breathings, have a testimony in our conscience that we are under the same teaching; and thus find a parallel in our hearts with what we there read as felt and experienced by one of God's saints. So that all the elect family, so far as they are living under the teachings of the Spirit, can come in, each in their own measure, with the petitions, the breathings, the longings, the sighings, the hungerings, the thirstings of the saints recorded in the Scriptures; though they cannot all mount up, or sink down, into the experience contained in other parts.

For instance, in the text, we have a petition breathed out from the soul of the Psalmist; and this petition divides itself into two branches: one, that the Lord would "*keep*" him; and the other, that the Lord would "*hide*" him. Everyone taught of God to know his own heart, and to feel his own weakness, let him have sunk into the lowest depths of conviction, or mounted up to the

greatest heights of spiritual transport; or let him be weak and feeble, and know but little either of the bright side or of the dark:—all the children of God, I say, who know the weakness of their own heart, and the awful sin that lurks and works there, and who feel that they have no power to keep themselves, can all come and join with one heart and one voice in these words— "Keep me as the apple of the eye." And if they know anything of the experience of being brought into a measure of nearness to God, they can also join in the latter part of the text—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

But you will observe, that the Psalmist not merely breathes forth a desire to be kept, and to be hid, which is the leading branch of each petition, but he also (if I may use the expression) points out to the Lord the way in which he wishes these blessings to be communicated. He does not say simply, "Keep me;" but he adds, "as the apple of the eye;" he does not cry merely, "Hide me," but he also adds, "under the shadow of thy wings;" feeling that it was not enough to be kept, unless he was kept "as the apple of the eye," and not sufficient to be hid, unless he was hid "under the shadow" of the divine "wings."

With God's blessing, then, I shall endeavour this evening to trace out the experience contained in these two petitions; and show, if the Holy Ghost enable me, what it is to be "*kept* as the apple of the eye," and what it is to be "*hid* under the shadow of God's wings."

I.—Now, before a man can sincerely and honestly breathe out this prayer, "Keep me," he must have had a certain divine work wrought in his conscience. There is nothing easier than to take scriptural language into our lips; but whenever God the Spirit makes a man honest, he strips away from him all prayers that do not spring out of a feeling heart. He not only beats out of our hands liturgies, collects, and all formal, man-made prayers; but he also strikes out of our lips the very petitions that we find in the word of God which do not correspond with the feeling of our soul. So that, if our hearts have been touched by God's Spirit, and thus

made honest and sincere before him, we can no more use scriptural prayers, nor join in with the minister when he prays, for if we have not more or less of the feeling which he or they express, than we can use written prayers or dry and dusty forms. If then we would really take into our lips, with scriptural and experimental feelings in our hearts, this petition, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," there must be, as a preliminary to breathing forth this prayer, a certain, special, and particular work of grace wrought in our conscience; or we cannot say, as David does in the first verse of this Psalm, "Give ear unto my prayer, O Lord, *that goeth not out of feigned lips.*"

1. Before then we can rightly breathe forth the prayer, "Keep me," we must have been taught spiritually something of *our own helplessness to keep ourselves*. We shall but mock God, if we ask him to keep us, and yet are not fully persuaded, that without his keeping we shall surely fall. Until, therefore, the Spirit of God has wrought in our conscience an experimental feeling of our complete helplessness, to use this petition, "Keep me," will but "come out of feigned lips."

But how does the Lord, for the most part, show us our helplessness? By allowing us from time to time to come into those circumstances, where we find temptation more than a match for us. The Lord is not the author of sin—God forbid; but he takes care that we shall know by painful experience we have no power to keep ourselves, except he specially interpose by his own miraculous hand. And thus, in his providence, he permits us to come into certain spots and states where we have to learn most keenly our inability to stand for a single hour, unless we are upheld by divine power. That was the way in which God dealt with Job. He had to teach him a certain lesson, his own helplessness; and to show him also the self-righteousness that was working naturally in his proud heart. But O, what a way he took to teach Job this lesson! He permitted all those overwhelming circumstances to come upon him, which not only roused up the peevishness of his heart, of which he before was comparatively ignorant; but he shewed him also how completely

helpless he was to keep himself, and how unable to stand, except the Lord himself supported him by his own power. Now if we know anything of ourselves, we know this, that whenever the Lord has left us for a single moment to our own strength, we were unable to stand; that when any temptation presented itself suitable to our carnal mind, and God withheld his power to keep us, into that very temptation we fell headlong. I do not mean to say, that it was into some gross outward sin. We may learn what sin is, without falling headlong into the pit; we may draw near enough to the edge of the sewer to know its noisome smell, without tumbling into it; we may slip and stagger upon the brink, without falling actually into the filthy pool. But all God's people are made to know their natural proneness to evil; and seeing and feeling how infallibly they must fall, and how they always have fallen, when God did not specially preserve them, they come at length to learn their helplessness, not as a matter of doctrine merely, but as a truth in inward and heartfelt experience. It is thus wrought in them as a divine conviction, that they cannot stand a single day nor a single hour, except the Lord himself miraculously and supernaturally support them. A spiritual knowledge, then, of our complete helplessness is one prerequisite, one needful preliminary, before we can breathe forth the first branch of the petition in the text—"Keep me."

2. Another requisite is, to know *what a dreadful thing it is not to be kept*; and to see and feel the horrible evil of those things from which we desire to be preserved. This is produced by the Lord's raising up his fear in our hearts, and making our conscience tender before him. And when he thus gives us to see the horrible nature of sin, he causes us to groan and sigh, and at times almost bleed under the painful sensations that the guilt of sin produces when it is charged home upon the conscience. Many speak of those who contend for the life and power of God in the soul, both ministers and hearers, as though they were always indulging in, and gloating over corruption; as though all their preaching and conversation, and all they love to hear and speak about, were but the internal workings of evil; and as though they considered him the greatest Christian who knew the most of

nature's depravity. Now I say boldly, that there is no man who knows anything of the evil of sin, who desires to be kept from the power of sin, who groans and sighs under the burden of sin, and who hates sin "with perfect hatred," except him who has that vital experience against which so many darts are thrown. The man who merely has the doctrines floating in his head, has no inward abhorrence of evil; he has no groaning of heart under the power of sin; nor has he any desire (except for the sake of his own reputation) to be kept from falling into it. Those only who, by seeing light in God's light, know the workings of inward corruption, feel what a horrible thing sin is; and they are the only people who desire to be kept from falling into it; for they alone experimentally possess that fear of God working in their hearts which makes them to "hate evil," and which is in them "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." I say, then, it is a libel upon those who preach experimentally, and set forth the work of God the Spirit in the soul, to say that they encourage and indulge sin. If they are taught of God, as they profess to be, they know inwardly and painfully what a horrible thing sin is; they groan and cry, as the greater part of their daily experience, under the weight and burden of sin; and they alone are constantly and continually sighing to the Lord to deliver them from the power and dominion of it, and to purge their consciences from dead works to serve the living God. Nay more, the experimentally taught people of God are the only persons who in any measure are delivered from the power of sin. A man, then, must know what a horrible and hateful thing sin is, before he will cry to the Lord to "keep" him from it.

3. Again. He must also know what it is *to have experienced some putting forth of the Lord's power in his conscience*, upholding him from falling into those sins into which he would have tumbled headlong had not grace interposed. There is a kind of despair which seizes hold of a man's heart who has never been manifestly kept by God. Sin has come before him—he has fallen into it, and has repented of it; sin has come before him again—he has again fallen into it, and again repented of it. This alternate sinning and repenting at last produces a feeling of despair; as we

find the Prophet speaking—"Thou saidst there is no hope; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." (Jer. 2:25.) If a man keeps falling, falling, falling, and never finds the power of the Lord put forth to uphold him, it at last breeds in him a spirit of infidelity as to whether God is really willing to keep him; every such successive fall opens up the way for another; and every repeated instance of the Lord not keeping him makes him doubt whether he has the disposition to preserve him from sin. But on the contrary, wherever the Lord has appeared, in any manifest way, to keep a man when he has been walking upon the very brink and edge of temptation, and some portion of Scripture has been sent home to his conscience, or some special help has come from the Lord in the hour of need, it raises up a sweet hope, and encourages his soul to plead with him that he would keep him more and more; so that he can say with Paul, "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." (Acts 26:22.)

So that these three things at least, not to mention others, must be wrought by a divine power in the conscience, before we can ask the Lord to keep us. We must know our *own helplessness to keep ourselves*; we must feel *the exceeding evil and bitter character of sin*, so as to make us groan and cry from the very bottom of our heart to the Lord to keep us from it; and we must have found, from time to time, that *the Lord has appeared, kept, preserved, and restrained us from falling into sin*, when we should otherwise have rushed headlong into the foulest and basest crimes.

"Keep me." But what did the Psalmist want the Lord *to keep him from*? In breathing forth this desire, he must have seen all the enemies of his soul arrayed against him. He must have viewed the number, craft, and strength of his foes, and felt himself a poor, weak, defenceless, helpless babe before them. It is this feeling of helplessness that makes us cry to the Lord for help. As long as we think we have a grain of strength of our own, as long as we can depend in the least degree upon any supposed wisdom or righteousness in ourselves, we never can, except with "feigned lips," cry, "Keep me." But the more thoroughly and completely we

are emptied of self-confidence, self-dependence, self-wisdom, self-strength, and self-righteousness, the more singly and simply, the more sincerely and ceaselessly, will the prayer be breathed forth—"Keep me."

1. We need to be kept from *the world*; and we never need to be kept from it so much as when we fear it least. We need to be kept from the world daily and hourly; but we shall never ask the Lord to keep us from it till we have felt its *ensnaring spirit*. Now, it is not so much the *society* of the world, as the *spirit* of it, that defiles our conscience. A man may go into the midst of the world, if business or necessity call him, and not be infected or contaminated with it; and at other times he may sit alone in his chimney-corner without speaking a word to a worldly person, and yet find the spirit of the world stealing upon and overpowering his heart. I have known, in times past, what it was to breathe out my soul to the Lord, with earnest desires after him, in the midst of worldly company. Though we would not go needlessly into it (for "who can touch pitch without being defiled?") yet it is not so much the society of the world, when we are thrown necessarily into it, as the spirit of it getting hold of a man's heart, that he has so much reason to dread. For when the spirit of the world gets within us, I am sure it will deaden our conscience, and harden our heart toward the things of eternity; it will make the Bible little else than a book which we have no interest to read; it will shorten all our prayers to God; it will put a damp upon all the pantings, breathings, and longings of our soul heavenward. Therefore, just in proportion as the spirit of the world acts upon and prevails over us, just so much is all spiritual feeling damped in the soul. These two spirits never can both be at the same time predominant; where the Spirit of the Lord reigns and rules, it overcomes the spirit of the world; and where the spirit of the world prevails, it damps, for a time, the actings of the Spirit of God. When we feel, then, what the spirit of the world is; when we awake out of our dream, like Nabal of old from his drunkenness, and the fumes of intoxication have been dispelled, (for sometimes we get so intoxicated with it, and the spirit of the world has such possession of us, that we do not know we are under its

influence,) we then see its mud and mire upon our clothes, and know painfully where we have been wallowing. Perhaps some heavy affliction, or cutting conviction, some moment of solemn meditation, or some awakening feeling created by God himself in our conscience, brings us out of that sad state of intoxication into which we have so heedlessly fallen. We then begin to see what an awful, what a dreadful thing it is to be entangled with the love of the world. We perceive how insensibly its spirit has been creeping upon us; we feel how it has well nigh eaten out the life of God in our souls; what a crust of searedness, so to speak, it has brought over our conscience, and how it has deadened our heart to divine things. And when we get a little delivered from the spirit of the world, when the Lord indulges our souls with some sweet meditation, or some spiritual pantings and sighings after him, how we hate ourselves that we should ever have been so entangled in its spirit, and how we desire that that foul spirit should never regain possession of us!

2. But again. Of all opponents that we have most to fear, and of all enemies whose arts and arms we have most reason to dread, (I believe I shall find an echo in every God-taught bosom here) surely *self* is the greatest foe; and self is never so great a foe, as when it is most concealed. We can guard against the *open* enemy; it is the *secret* foe whose attacks we have most to dread, and against whom we have most reason to guard. We can defend ourselves against the soldier that wears the uniform of the enemy; but it is the traitor in the garrison whose insidious arts are most to be feared. So it is with respect to our own evil heart—that traitor within the camp, that secret renegade within the walls, who is continually plotting how to deliver our heart's garrison into the hands of the enemy.

For instance, this evil heart of ours will sometimes work *in a way of presumption*; lifting us up to vain-confidence, inspiring proud and conceited thoughts of ourselves, damping all that humility, that godly fear, that lowliness of mind, that contrition of spirit which at times we have experienced, and lifting us up into a sort of careless, reckless, Antinomian vain-confidence. We get into

this spirit of vain-confidence sometimes we scarcely know how, but it is very much connected usually with the spirit of the world; and if that spirit is working in a man's heart, if he has some sound and scriptural form of religion, some Calvinistic profession, no ground seems so good for him to take as that of vain-confidence. If he be exercised with doubts, fears, and misgivings, they will damp the spirit of the world within him; but if he take the ground of vain-confidence, he has not a single check. The ground of eternal security in Christ, of the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, of the certainty of the salvation of the elect, and of his own interest in Christ as one of the elect—a man may take all that high position, and have his heart filled with worldliness. But when he comes to be exercised with doubts and fears and sinkings, they and the spirit of the world cannot work together; but the highest fleshly confidence will work well with the spirit of the world. The people of God sometimes begin to feel this spirit creeping over and stealing upon them. They have not had so many trials lately; things in providence have gone well with them; Satan has not thrown so many fiery darts into their minds; they have had a little ease, and have been able to "swallow down their spittle," as we read in Job; there has been a cessation of arms, a short truce with the enemy. Now this is the time for the soul to get lifted up into vain-confidence. But when we awake from the dream, and see how, with this spirit, searedness of conscience came on, and how we no longer discovered the presence of evil in things wherein we saw it plainly before, we begin to feel what a dreadful enemy to our souls this vain-confidence and Antinomian presumption is, and to cry, "Keep me, Lord, from this empty religion." Whatever doubts and fears the soul is exercised with, these are felt to be better than a calm, easy, confident state without the shinings-in of God's countenance;—a state of security not springing from any divine testimony within, but resting upon the bare letter of the word, or standing in mere notions and opinions, quite distinct from the work and witness of God the Spirit in the soul.

Oh! the deceitfulness of our heart! Who can fathom the depths of our native hypocrisy? What language can paint, what tongue can

describe the workings of our base heart, or the treachery of our fallen nature? When a child of God begins to take a solemn review of the past, and sees how in a thousand instances his vile heart has deceived him; how it always has betrayed him whenever he trusted in it, and never did anything else but lie; how desirous he is to be kept from being entangled and overcome by the wickedness and treachery of his depraved nature! We begin at last to look upon our hearts just as a master does upon a servant whom he finds is perpetually telling him lies; he looks upon him as an unprincipled wretch, on whom he cannot place the least dependance, and of whom he will gladly get rid as soon as he possibly can. So when we find our heart has made such strong resolutions of amendment, put such a good face upon matters, and yet, day after day, has been telling us such awful and abominable lies; we begin after a time to look upon it, as the master does upon the dishonest servant, with a feeling that it is only seeking an opportunity to deceive and pillage us, however it may use the language of truth and honesty. And like the master who has discovered that he has been under the power of this lying servant, as we get more and more acquainted with the lies and hypocrisy of our deceitful nature, we are anxious to be kept from the power of it, that this treacherous heart may not have the dominion over us.

Sometimes, on the other hand, we are afraid of *the despair* that springs out of these unbelieving hearts of ours. There are two vast shoals upon one of which many gallant barks make shipwreck—the shoal of presumption, and the shoal of despair. What a course have the vessels of mercy to steer between these rocks and how continually they are edging the very brink of these reefs! What a dexterous steersman it must be to guide them safely!—Aye, none can steer them through but the Lord himself sitting at the helm. How perpetually is the frail vessel nearing the shoal of presumption or of despair! How does a vain-confident spirit one day fill our mind, and the next day a desponding spirit sink our soul! How we are towering one hour on the wings of vain-confidence, and the next hour falling into almost the lowest pit of despondency! Now the soul taught of God dreads as much

to be left to despair, as it dreads to be given up to presumption. It knows there are these two shoals, on which so many noble vessels have struck; and O how it fears lest it should one day or other be wrecked on one of these rocks!

But in fact, if my ability enabled me to enumerate all the evils by which we are surrounded, all the enemies that threaten our soul's peace, all the snares spread for our feet, all the entanglements Satan is laying in the way, all the dangers felt and feared, it would be to occupy the whole evening. I shall therefore pass on to consider the way in which the Psalmist begs the Lord to keep him: "*Keep me as the apple of the eye.*" If I may use the expression—and I do it with all reverence—he directs the Lord *how* to keep him; or rather, he points out to the Lord *the way* in which he wishes to be kept.

But what is meant by the expression—"*the apple of the eye?*" I am not very fond of touching upon what a word is in the original, whether Greek or Hebrew, because it often springs from nothing else but pride and vanity in the speaker; and after all, those who indulge in it most are usually least acquainted with the subject. But I cannot, in this instance, forbear mentioning its original meaning. It is, literally, "*the little man of the eye;*" and there is something very significant in the expression. If you look into the eye of a person speaking to you, you will see your own image reflected in it in miniature; and the Hebrews, from that circumstance, call the seeing part of the eye "the little man" of the eye. "The apple of the eye" then, in the original, means, not the white, but the retina, the seeing part of the eye. The white of the eye is, I understand, nearly insensible to pain. A person was telling me the other day, that on being operated on for cataract, he suffered scarcely any pain when the knife was passed through the white of the eye. But "the little man of the eye," the seeing part of that wonderful organ, we know, is most sensitive. Now David asked the Lord to "keep him as the apple of the eye;" that is, with all that tenderness and care which the Creator has displayed in preserving this most important organ.

In order to illustrate this figure, let me direct your attention to a few particulars connected with the structure of the natural eye; not that I am well acquainted with its anatomy; but I wish to point out how the God of nature has protected this delicate organ, that I may show from it some of his dealings in grace. Look, for instance, at the bony orbit, in which the eye is lodged. If our eye had not been lodged in a deep and bony cavity, how exposed it would have been to every blow! I myself am a standing instance of it. When I was at school, one of my school-fellows threw a clothes-brush at me with great violence, which struck me just in the corner of the eye. Had it not been for this bony arch, which received the stroke, my eye would probably have been destroyed by the violence of the blow. The God of nature, then, has lodged this important and tender organ in this strong and deep bony cavity, in order to preserve it from injury. Here we see something of being "kept as the apple of the eye." Look also at the noble, projecting pent-house over our eye that the God of creation has constructed—how our forehead, with the jutting eyebrow, preserves the eye from injury by a downward blow, and prevents the sweat of our brow, (for "in the sweat of our face" we have to eat our bread,) from running into and annoying it. And look at the thatch, that to serve the same purpose the Lord has set over the eye; and observe the delicate curtain of the eye-lid, that drops over it, to preserve it from dust and other annoyances; which also keeps it moist and sensitive, and wipes away, as if instinctively, any film which might gather over it. How fringed too it is with the eyelash, which breaks the violence of the light, and acts as a net-work against dust and flies! I trust to be excused hinting at these natural things, as in order to catch the beauty of the figure, it is necessary thus to see for a moment how the Lord has protected our natural eye with such a wonderful apparatus. What skill has the Architect of our frame displayed in preserving this tender and important organ.

And observe also how *sensitive* he has made the eye! How immediately the curtain drops when danger threatens! and how, when sleep falls upon us, and we lie at rest upon our pillow, the wise Contriver of our bodies has caused that close-fitting lid to

fold over the eye, that no injury may befall it in the unguarded hours of the night! Now I do not mean to say, that the Psalmist was an anatomist; for my remarks have all been connected with the outward defences of the eye, which are open to any person's observation, and not with the inward structure, which to understand requires dissection; but, no doubt, he had a view of the carefulness and wisdom with which the Maker of the eye had preserved it, that made him breathe forth this petition—"Keep me as the apple of the eye." That is "Lord show to me spiritually the same protection, the same tenderness, the same wisdom which thou hast displayed in preserving my natural eye-sight."

In what sense, then, does the Lord "keep us as the apple of the eye?"

1. Do you not observe how this bony arch that the Lord has made preserves the eye from accidents and blows that might fall upon it? This is an *external* defence. And do we not see how the Lord is perpetually hedging up our way in *providence*, in order to preserve our souls from being entangled in the snares into which we should otherwise fall? The Lord keeps us most wonderfully. Sometimes, when temptation comes, we have not the will; sometimes, when the will comes, we have not the opportunity. The Lord guards us specially by his providence. As in his wisdom he has guarded our eye naturally by this bony orbit, so in his providential care he has kept us from a thousand evils. If all the Lord's people could speak, and tell honestly what they had passed through, how they would trace their preservation even from open sin to some unexpected circumstance in providence! Perhaps, a knock at the door, a child coming into the room, or an unexpected visit from a friend, has broken a snare, into which they would have fallen headlong, had not that circumstance intervened. Just as the Lord in his wisdom has preserved the eye by this bony arch, which you will observe is an *outward* protection, and quite distinct from the *sensitiveness* of that organ, so does he from time to time keep us from falling into sin by his *providential* dealings with us. And it is a mercy to be kept at any rate, and in any way; it is a mercy to be kept from falling,

though it be as a child is kept from falling into the fire by the tall iron fender; it is a mercy to be kept from falling, even though it be as a lunatic by a strait waistcoat, or by the iron bars before his windows. Open sin is so dreadful a thing, that it is a mercy to be kept from it in any way, or by any means, however severe, that the Lord may employ.

2. But what the Psalmist seems chiefly to point to, is *the sensitiveness* of the organ. This is an *internal* defence. How sensitive our eye is! Directly danger threatens it, how immediately the fringed curtain drops over it! And if dust, sand, or any foreign matter get into our eye, how uneasy, how miserable, how troubled we are till it is dislodged! So spiritually. David seems here to refer to the conscience; for as our eye is sensitive naturally, so a conscience made tender by God's Spirit is sensitive spiritually. Does a foreign body—sand, dust, lime—tease and irritate the eye naturally?—He would ask the Lord to keep his conscience so sensitive, that sin, temptation, and evil might distress it, just as much as any foreign body distresses the eye when it flies into it. "Keep me as the apple of the eye:" let my conscience be made and kept as tender, as sensitive, as fearful of the approach of evil, as circumspect, as watchful—and if evil do come, if sin do enter, let it be as distressed, as uneasy, till the guilt of it be removed, as ever "the apple of the eye" is under the intrusion of a foreign substance. In being "kept as the apple of the eye," then, he desires not only to be kept with all the care that God has bestowed upon the eye—not only with all the wisdom that he has displayed in preserving it *externally*—but also with all that wonderful apparatus of internal sensitive tenderness, which he has endowed it with, that it may be "the light of the body."

3. If our natural eye be *darkened* or impaired we stumble. We have lost that which directs our feet; that light which guides us in the road wherein we are to walk. So if our conscience, which is the eye of the soul, becomes hardened, darkened, crusted over, dimmed by cataract, we are unable to walk spiritually in the path pleasing to God; we stumble headlong into sin, mistake the

course, and wander out of the way, just the same as we should if we had lost the important organ of sight naturally. Therefore, when the Psalmist said, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," it is as though he said, "Lord, show forth all that power, all that wisdom, all that tenderness, which thou displayest in keeping my natural organ of sight; for if my soul be darkened, I must go astray."

Now will not this find a responsive echo in our bosom, if our conscience be made tender in God's fear? Shall we go recklessly on, if we know any thing of the prayer, "Keep me as the apple of the eye?" Shall we say "Sin cannot harm us, sin cannot damn us, sin cannot cut us out of the covenant; it does not matter what we do, think, or say, for we belong to 'the election of grace;' there is no harm in this indulgence; there is no evil in that gratification; good men have done this or that?" Will there be in our hearts or lips any such reckless, hardened language, if we know any thing of the meaning of the Psalmist's prayer? Who would expose his natural eye to a blow, when he knows the consequence? Who would wish the providence of God to be removed from keeping this important organ of natural sight? Who would plunge his eye fearlessly and recklessly where angry swords are flashing on every side? Who would open it to the arrow of the archer? Who would expose it to the rifle of the marksman? Who would lay it bare to stones and darts flying around it in all directions? Now if a man, spiritually, see that he is surrounded with instruments of destruction; if he discover that swords are flashing on every side, darts cast in every direction, and snares and temptations are on every hand, any one of which may darken his spiritual sight; if he know and feel these things, can he go on in a daring way of reckless presumption? If he breathe forth the words, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," is it not an appeal to the divine wisdom, the divine care, the divine tenderness, and the earnest desire of his soul that the Lord would exert all that wisdom, care, and tenderness over him? But there is much lodged, far more than I can express, and doubtless far more than I feel, in this prayer, "Keep me as the apple of the eye."

II.—"*Hide me under the shadow of thy wings.*" This is the second branch of the petition that the soul of the Psalmist breathed forth in the words of the text.

He here makes use of another figure. The former plea was to be "*kept*" and he told the Lord how he wished to be kept,—"*as the apple of the eye;*" this petition was, that he might be "*hid,*" and he tells him how he wishes to be hid—"under the shadow of thy wings." As the first was a figure in nature, and referred to the eye; so the second is another figure in nature, and refers to the protection that a bird exercises over her young. The Lord uses the same figure, when he says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, *even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.*" (Matt. 23:37.) We read also (Deut. 32:11) of "the eagle fluttering over her young, and spreading abroad her wings." We have the same figure used here. "*Hide me under the shadow of thy wings.*" The soul is breathing forth in expressive language its desire to be hid under the shadow of God's protecting wing, as a young bird, or the tender chicken, is covered and hid beneath the fostering wings of the mother hen.

But before we enter into the figure, we will look at the expression—"*hide me.*" "Come, my people," we read (Isa. 26:20), "*enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself* for a little moment." There is much contained in the word "*hide.*"

1. It implies, in the first instance, *separation*. If a man be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, it presupposes that the Lord has separated him unto himself, and keeps him distinct from all others as one of his "peculiar people." If we are hidden naturally, it indicates a coming out from other persons; for we cannot be hidden if we are in a crowd. Solitude is a hedge and a bar from the world. "Hide me," then, implies an inward separation of heart and spirit: and this is a feeling which every God-taught soul earnestly desires. How much religious gossip there is, where this inward separation of heart and spirit is never seen! How much so-

called religious conversation, in which the grace of God never manifests itself! And finding, as many of the living family do, what barrenness and death enter their conscience from this idle conversation (of which so many churches, alas, are full), it makes the greater part, or at least the most spiritual part of God's people lead a solitary and separate life. They find that they can no more go into professing company without defilement, hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience, than they can go into the profane world; nay, even less so, because in the world they are more upon their guard. When in the society of worldly people, they watch their lips and guard their words; but with the professed followers of Jesus they give themselves more licence. So that when the Lord's spiritually taught family have felt and groaned under this, it brings their to desire to be "hidden," brought out of the professing world, and kept solitary and separate.

2. But "hide me" has another signification. The wrath of God is coming upon the world. The Son of Man will appear in his glory, and then the vials of divine vengeance will be poured out to the uttermost upon a guilty race. Now "hide me" is the desire of the soul *to be brought under safe protection*; to be delivered from this general approaching ruin, this universal, overwhelming destruction; and to be led into that spiritual knowledge of, and that spiritual communion with, the Lord of life and glory, that the soul shall find a refuge in him till the calamities are overpast.

But there is something more which we must enter into in order to get the full meaning of the expression—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." "*Under the shadow of thy wings!*" What ideas are conveyed by this figure?

1. Is not *protection* one? When the tender brood see danger at hand, and flee for refuge under the wing of the mother, is not *protection* the leading feeling that brings them there? When the bird of prey, the hawk or the kite, is in the sky, and about to pounce upon the brood, does not the mother utter a peculiar cluck, at the sound of which they all run and nestle themselves

under the shadow of her wings, and there are secured? Doubtless the Psalmist had some reference to this. When he said, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings," he saw dangers in prospect, he perceived "the Prince of the power of the air," that bird of prey hovering over him, that unclean vulture, about to pounce upon his soul; and feeling as defenceless from his attacks as the tender chicken from the pounce of the hawk, the desire of his soul was to be brought into safe shelter, under the shadow of God's wings.

2. But it implies also *nearness*. When the tender brood get beneath the maternal wing, what a nearness there is between the mother and her offspring! How near her bosom is to them! and how near are they to her bosom! And no doubt, naturally, there are mutual sweet sensations connected with the nearness of the mother to the offspring, and the nearness of the offspring to the mother. As then the mother naturally feels a delight in having her child near to her breast, as the child clings to that warm shelter that it may be near to the maternal bosom; so the soul, in desiring to be "hidden under the shadow of God's wings," seeks nearness to him, and spiritual access to his presence: not to be at a distance from him, not to be shut out from his overspreading wing, not to be driven into darkness and gloominess as a forlorn outcast; but to be brought nigh unto, and be favoured with sweet communion with the Lord. And every soul taught of God feels that there is no "hiding" short of this; that a man cannot hide himself from the presence of the Lord, though he fly unto the very ends of the earth; that all that man can do will not avail him in the day of wrath; that all his own refuges are refuges of lies; that his own righteousness will leave him unsheltered; that all mere forms, rites, and ceremonies will leave his head bare one day for the thunderbolt of divine vengeance; that there is no effectual protection from the wrath of God, except by being hid in Christ, and thus brought into near and immediate communion and communication with the Lord of life and glory. And as he has seen the tender brood hiding themselves under the maternal wing, so he longs to be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, not merely to escape the coming danger, (that is but a selfish motive which all have,) but to be brought into special nearness that he

may lean on the bosom of his Lord.

3. But there is also another idea connected with the figure; which is that of *fostering*, or what is called "*brooding*." When the tender chicken comes forth from the egg, it would soon perish and die, were it not for the fostering warmth of the mother, as she spreads her wing over it. How the little shrinking ones cower beneath those warm wings!—And as she spreads herself over them, her warmth nurtures them, diffusing itself through their whole system, and insensibly strengthening their weak and tender frame. So spiritually. We have no warmth in ourselves; we may try to rub our evidences together, as Indians get fire by rubbing together sticks; we may obtain sparks but nothing else; a little light but no warmth. Would we be warm—would we feel our souls, our hearts, our spirits, burn with love and affection—we can only get inward and spiritual warmth by coming near its almighty Source! The consumptive patient flies to the warm climates of the South, to get, if he may, a temporary respite from the death that threatens him; he does not turn his prow to the frozen climes of the north; he knows, the farther he goes from the sun, the more does ice hold the earth in perpetual chains: when he seeks for a more genial sky, he goes towards the sun. So the soul never can get warm by leaving the Lord, and plunging into the world; all there is chilliness, iciness, and death. Would we be warm? We can only be so by coming near to the Almighty source of life, light, and heat; by getting nigh unto the Sun of Righteousness, as the chicken creeps under the mother's wing, and draws near her breast. Would the Lord warm our cold hearts? He brings the soul near to himself; and warmth out of his covenant fulness enters into and strengthens the heart.

4. But what an *effectual* protection it is! When the infant brood are hidden beneath the maternal wing, what weapon can strike them? They are safe from every enemy; the arrow must pass through the bosom of the mother to wound them; and until she is slaughtered upon the spot, the chickens under her wing remain in a place of perfect security. So spiritually. If the soul be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, it never can be pierced there;

and as long as the Lord lives, the soul must live, for it lives in nearness to and communion with him.

5. And again, how all the family *are brought into mutual contact*, when the mother hen spreads her wings over them! There is no foreigner, no stranger, no enemy there. She only nurtures her own brood; she has no anxiety or solicitude for the brood of other birds; but all the fondness of her maternal bosom is spent upon her own offspring. So spiritually. When the soul says, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings," it is longing to get into that sweet and blessed spot, where the Lord manifests himself in all the tenderness and affection of his paternal relationship, and gathers together all his children into love and communion with each other. There is no pecking each other with beak and claws when they are all safe under the shadow of his wings.

What a safe and blessed spot this is! "*Under the shadow of thy wings!*" It seems to us at times a mercy to be brought under the shadow of God's ordinances, under the shadow of the experimental preaching of the word. And I dare say, some of you, who are teased and tormented with the cares of the week, are glad sometimes on the Lord's day, to get under the shadow of this little roof, to catch some droppings of the word of life into your hearts. But what is all this compared with getting under the shadow of the Almighty? That is whither Ruth fled; as Boaz said to her, "A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust!" (Ruth 2:2.) And here is safe refuge, here is sure consolation, and every thing that the soul can long for or enjoy. No spot is nearer heaven, and no spot more desirable, than where the Lord "hides us under the shadow of his wings." No evil can hurt us there.

And if we get near the Lord, will there not be some communication of the Lord's presence to our souls? If we touch the marble chimney-piece, is there not a sensation of cold? and if we touch the warm stove is there not a sensation of heat? Whatever we touch, is there not sensation communicated out of it? So, would we get near the Lord?—it is to get warmth from the

Lord. But to go from him, to rush into the world, to run into paths of sin, to flee to formal religion, to bury ourselves in the lusts of our depraved nature—what is this but to dip our hands in ice, and expect to get heat? It is by being "hid under the shadow of God's wings," that we can alone find shelter, protection, and warmth.

How much then is contained in these words! O! I feel to have been merely like a child dipping a cockleshell into the sea, and taking up a few drops. We can but dip, as it were, a cockle-shell into the Scripture, or into any text of Scripture. We cannot exhaust the mine of deep experience contained in any one passage like this. We are like the miner in Cornwall, who may extract a lump or two of tin or copper out of a vein of the mine; but how deep the mine extends itself, beyond the power of his skill or strength to penetrate! So with the Scriptures of truth; there are such veins of experience in them—veins so rich, and that lie so deep, that it requires one well and deeply taught in the things of God to be able to strike a pickaxe even into any part of them.

We have seen then but a little of what is contained in the petition of the Psalmist before us this evening. We have not had all his trials; we therefore cannot enter into the depth of feeling with which he breathed it out. We have not had all his consolation, we have not equally felt the power of divine grace: and therefore we can only glean a little, a feeble measure, just a few hints and scraps, and mere gatherings-up of the rich experience here poured forth. But still those of us who fear God can say, each in our measure, "Keep me as the apple of the eye." If we know any thing of divine teaching, of the evil and misery of sin; and of the sweetness of being kept from its filth, guilt, and power; if we dread to fall before night comes on; if we know that none but Jesus can keep us; if we long to be kept by him, and feel the blessedness of it, surely we can in a measure join in with this simple cry—"*Keep me as the apple of the eye.*"

And if we have ever felt any measure of nearness of access to the Lord, any sweet sensations communicated out of him, any

sympathy from his bosom, any light from his countenance, any love from his heart; we can also breathe out, at times—"*Hide me under the shadow of thy wings.*" This is the only sure keeping, and this is the only safe hiding. And sure I am, that the words of the text (I say nothing of my exposition of them; if not agreeable to God's will and word, let all I have spoken "with stammering lips" this evening be dispersed to the winds of heaven);—but sure am I that the words of the text, which the Holy Ghost has written, will meet with a response in every God taught bosom: "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

And will they, can they be breathed forth in vain? Is not Jesus "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" and will not the Lord, who inspired that prayer in David's bosom, and heard it too, if he has breathed the same into our hearts, hear it also?

I am sure then I cannot leave you with a better prayer than this: "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings." And sure I am, it will be our prayer, and our desire, if we know any thing of divine things by divine teaching. We shall feel that there is no keeping like God's keeping, and no hiding like God's hiding; that all we have done to keep ourselves has only issued in disappointment; and all we have done to hide ourselves has only exposed us more to the thunderbolts of divine vengeance. So that being beaten out of house and home, and driven from every other refuge, we at last come to this safe and simple shelter—"Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

## **OPENING THE MOUTH FOR THE DUMB**

Preached on Wednesday Evening, June 23, 1841, at Artillery Street Chapel, Bishopsgate.

"Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8, 9

There is, I believe, some difference of opinion, as to who this King Lemuel was, to whom the words I have just read were addressed by his mother, together with the remaining portion of the chapter; but the best-founded opinion seems to be, that he was King Solomon, and that he is here called Lemuel, either because it was an endearing appellation wherewith his mother was used to address him—a kind of fondling term, instead of Solomon, or else that it was a name of Solomon, in addition to that whereby he is generally known. For it was the practice amongst the Hebrews to give various names to the same individual. So Jehoiachin is called in Jeremiah, Coniah (Jer. 22:24), and in the same way Solomon himself is, in another part of Scripture, called Jedediah (2 Sam. 12:25); and, therefore, there is reason to believe, that Lemuel here is merely another name for King Solomon.

The meaning of the word Lemuel is literally, "unto God," that is devoted unto God, belonging to God, as the apostle expresses himself when he speaks of Christ in one short word, "God's;" "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23), that is, belonging to God. His mother then addresses to her son King Lemuel that excellent advice which is contained in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs; and, no doubt, the advice which she laid before him admitted a literal, as well as a spiritual interpretation. There appear to be two errors which men fall into; one is setting aside the spiritual meaning of a passage altogether and adopting the literal, and the other is setting aside the literal altogether and adopting only the spiritual. There seems

little doubt, that in Scripture there is a literal interpretation, as well as a spiritual one, and that there always is an analogy—a resemblance between the two interpretations; the spiritual interpretation being based upon the literal, and the literal standing as a foundation, on which the spiritual interpretation rests.

Therefore, in endeavouring to trace out the experimental interpretation of these words, which I shall endeavour to lay before you, I mean not to set aside that literal meaning which doubtless the words were intended to convey. The mother of Lemuel exhorted him strictly and literally, when, as a king he sat in judgment, to "open" his "mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as were appointed to destruction." She inculcated upon him, as the judge of his people, as one that sat in the gates of the city to administer justice—that he should "open his mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." But when we look at the spiritual and experimental meaning of the words, we see that "a greater than Solomon is here," and that Lemuel points at a greater king than ever Solomon was in all his glory. The word signifies as I hinted before, devoted unto God—"God's" in a word. Who can be then more emphatically pointed at than the Lord of life and glory, who is God's Son and God's servant—God's ambassador, who was devoted to Him, and who was consecrated to Him during His pilgrimage here below, and yet is one with Him in essence, and one with Him in glory?

But it may be asked, if Lemuel here signifies the Lord Jesus Christ, whom can we understand by "His mother," and who is she that she should give Him any advice? How is this to be explained consistently with the analogy of faith and the Scriptures of truth? What read we in Song. 3:11 "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith **his mother** crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." There we have a strictly parallel passage, where King Solomon, who doubtless is Jesus **for the whole book of Canticles is taken up with a description of the loves of Jesus and His Church**, is spoken of as having a

mother, and being crowned by her. His mother, then, must represent the Church, seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ derived His human nature from a woman, was "made of a woman," as the Scripture speaks, and thus the Church may be said, in this sense, to be the mother of Christ. We have, then, in the text certain advice which was given to King Lemuel by his mother; and her counsel to him was, "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."

It is, then, in this experimental and spiritual point of view, that I shall, with God's blessing, consider the passage and without making any formal divisions, I shall just speak of the leading points of the text, as they shall present themselves to my mind under the instruction of the blessed Spirit.

1. The first word that seems to strike our attention, is the expression "dumb;" for unless we have some idea who the character is, for whom King Lemuel is to open His mouth, we shall not be able to understand what reasons prompted Him to open His mouth on his behalf. There is a certain character, then, pointed out in these words, and upon him the title "dumb" is written. Who is this character? He is one whom God has quickened into spiritual life, and in whose heart He has planted His fear. He is one whom God has brought to His judgment-seat, and arraigned at His bar. But why should he be dumb? Why, there are several circumstances that will render him dumb; and if he were not dumb, he would not need a Mediator to "open His mouth" in his behalf.

The first thing that makes him dumb, is, a deep conviction and sensation of guilt upon his conscience. We find this naturally amongst men. It is a common saying, "such a person was quite dumb-founded." When an accusation, which is true, is made against a man, and his conscience is not as yet "seared as with a hot iron," that charge will strike him dumb; as Hannah speaks in her song, "the wicked shall be **silent** in darkness" (1 Sam. 2:9). The very force of conscience, when conscience is obliged to fall

under the accusation, renders a man utterly mute. When God, then, by the application of His holy law to a man's conscience, arraigns him at His righteous bar, He strikes him dumb, that is, he has not a word to say why judgment should not take place.

It is a common practice in criminal courts, after all the evidence has been heard, for the judge to say to the prisoner, "what have you to say in your defence that judgment should not pass?" The criminal sometimes endeavours to falter out some excuse, but in many cases he is dumb, he has no word to plead to stay judgment; he has no excuse to bring forward, why the sentence should not drop from the mouth of the judge against him. This is the case always in spiritual criminals, universally so with those who are arraigned by the Holy Ghost at the bar of God. They cannot plead one excuse why judgment should not pass, they cannot offer one pretext why the mouth of the Lord should not pronounce that righteous sentence which they have deserved at His hands. They stand dumb before the Judge of all. And this posture seems to be spoken of in Lam 3:29, where it says, "He putteth his mouth in the dust," as though he had not a word to say. Not chattering or prattling with God, as a man can talk with his fellow; no, nor aping the posture of those who **claim** blessings at God's hands; no, nor rushing daringly and presumptuously "upon the thick bosses of God's buckler" (Job 15:26), without one atom of holy reverence or godly fear; no, nor like Baal's worshippers, of whom we have so many imitators howling and screeching, as if they would alter the mind of God, and wrest the blessing out of His hand, whether He means to bestow it or not. No spiritually-convinced, law-condemned criminal ever came before that God, who is made known in his conscience as "a consuming fire," with bold presumption and familiarity. He stands dumb before Him, as not having an excuse, or a pretext, or a word to say, why judgment should not pass.

But this criminal is not merely dumb before God, but he is also dumb before his fellow-men. You may reasonably suspect the religion of those persons, who have a word for everything and a word for everybody; whose tongue is tipped with the language of

Scripture, and who seem to carry about with them a bag full of texts, and all they have to do is to dip their fingers in, and pull out the first that comes to hand. There seems little knowledge of the writing of God's hand upon the wall, or of the teaching of God's Spirit in the heart, when they are so ready with texts of Scripture, not one of which was ever applied with power to their souls.

But this poor criminal is dumb before his fellow-men—that is to say, he has little to speak about, little to tell of, because he cannot speak of God's goodness to his soul. He has little to boast of, for in himself he is nothing but "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores" (Isa. 1:6); he cannot yet chant the high praises of God, and all he can tell **if he could speak at all** would be a tale of wretchedness, misery, and woe. And, therefore, so far from going amid the busy haunts of men, or thrusting himself amongst every knot of talkative professors, "he sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne the yoke of God upon him" (Lam. 3:28.)

But there is another sense in which this poor guilty criminal is "dumb," and that is, he is not able to pour out the very feelings of his heart into the ears and the bosom of God, whatever be the workings of his soul, and whatever tumultuous thoughts and painful anxieties are passing within. His language is the language of groans and sighs; he has not an elegant assortment of phrases which he has learned from the mouth of others; he cannot go before God in borrowed language, or what he has stolen from the pulpit; he can only go before the Lord with groans and sighs and tears and breathings after the **mercy** which God may be pleased to extend to his guilty soul. He does not seem able, except very rarely, to tell out all the various feelings of his heart, and is often obliged, when he comes to the throne of grace, merely to groan and sigh forth the desires of his soul, because he cannot find access to God, nor language so as to tell freely that which is passing in the secret recesses of his bosom.

2. But we have another character for whom King Lemuel is to "open his mouth," one that is "appointed to destruction." Now, this expression does not mean any of those spoken of in the Epistle of Jude, "who were before of old ordained to this condemnation." The character spoken of in these words, is not one of those whom God has "appointed unto wrath," as a "vessel of wrath;" but it is one who is condemned in his own feelings, one who is "appointed to destruction" in the judgment that he passes upon himself. The Lord of life and glory never opens His mouth for the reprobate. The counsel to Him in the text is to "judge righteously;" and He can only "judge righteously" when justice has been satisfied, when all its imperious demands have been answered, when a payment has been rendered.

He could not plead righteously, if He pleaded the cause of those for whom no satisfaction has been made, and whose debts had not been discharged. Therefore, the term does not signify those whom God has fore-ordained unto wrath, but His elect people, who, by a work of grace upon their hearts, are brought into those feelings, whereby they stand "appointed to destruction"—that is, a sentence of death is written in their conscience, as the apostle speaks, "we had the sentence of death in ourselves" (2 Cor. 1:9). They see no hope of escape "from the wrath to come," they cannot see how their sins can ever be forgiven, since they are so black and aggravated; they know not how God can, consistently with those attributes which He has made manifest in their consciences, ever save them from eternal death; and therefore mercy not having yet visited their souls, the blood of the atonement not having been sprinkled on their consciences, and they not having been brought to know the things of Christ by the Holy Ghost leading them by faith into the satisfaction of Christ, they stand condemned in their own feelings before God, and only a step between them and eternal death.

Now for these characters King Lemuel is to "open His mouth," that is, He is to plead and intercede for them; He is to open His mouth as their Advocate at the bar of God, to stand forth as their Mediator and Intercessor "from the wrath to come." The whole of

Jesus' life upon earth, every branch of His active and passive obedience was an opening His mouth for the dumb, for those who are "appointed to destruction;" and never did He more powerfully and effectually plead, than when His gaping wounds were opened on the cross. And in the courts above, in the prevalence of His intercession, in that incense which He is continually offering by sitting there as the High Priest and Saviour of His chosen, He is opening His mouth, though not in actual words, yet by His presence there, He is opening His mouth to God for the dumb, He is pleading and interceding in the cause of all such as are "appointed to destruction."

But there is another sense of the words, which, I think, is very consistent with Scripture, and the meaning of the passage. The word Lemuel signifies one who is devoted to God; and may not this aptly represent an ambassador of the Most High, one who has been sanctified and set apart, that he should stand forth in His name, one who has been quickened by the Holy Ghost into a knowledge of the "Three-one God," and who has been brought by the Spirit's leadings and operations to stand forth in the name, and give himself up to do the work of God?

In this sense the Church may speak to those among the "kings and priests unto God," to those of her sons who are devoted to the Lord's cause, and to the promotion of His glory upon earth; to them may she also address this language of exhortation, and say to each of them, "Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction." Now the minister of the Spirit opens his mouth for the dumb when he traces out their experience, and thus enters into all the feelings of their troubled hearts; when he is enabled to describe to them the very sensations under which they are labouring, the very pangs of guilt and harassing convictions under which they are suffering, and the whole work of grace upon their souls, in such a way as they are not able to describe it themselves; he opens his mouth, when he unfolds, from some personal experience of it in his own soul, and from the light thrown upon it from the Scriptures, the very spot in which they stand, the very feelings which they are

passing through, and the work of grace which the Holy Ghost is tracing out in their hearts.

And thus many of God's poor "dumb" children, who feel themselves "appointed to destruction," when they have come into a chapel where a minister of truth is speaking in the name of the Lord, have found to their surprise and consolation, that he has a tongue to explain the secret workings of their hearts, that he has an acquaintance with all that is passing in their bosoms, and that he can tell out the secret feelings of their minds, which they are not able to tell out themselves.

And again; this Lemuel, this anointed servant of the Most High, "opens his mouth for the dumb, and for such as are appointed to destruction," when in public prayer, he is able to pour out the very feelings of their hearts to God; when he pleads for them and with them at the throne of grace, and bears them up in his solemn petitions to the throne of the Most High, and thus in his prayers, by expressing the feelings, desires, and breathings of his own soul, is enabled, to their wonder and astonishment, to express the very feelings that they are exercised with, and to lay before God the very sensations and breathing desires of their hearts.

And again; God's Lemuels open their mouths for the dumb, and for such as are "appointed to destruction," when they vindicate their cause, when they stand up as sympathising with "the poor and needy," when they hold up their shield and buckler **so far as they are enabled** to catch the arrows that are shot against the poor, tempted, tried family of God. And thus, in every company and in every place, in every pulpit and on every occasion, are not ashamed when needful to open their mouths, and plead the cause of the dumb, who have not a word to say for themselves, and declare that these are the people of the living God, let presumptuous professors shoot out what arrows they may against them.

3. But we will go on a little further with our text, for we find there another character spoken of, and that is the "poor and needy." A man is not spiritually dumb all his life, nor is he all his days one of those who "are appointed to destruction." This seems to point at the beginning of the work of grace in his heart, as well as peculiar seasons of trial and temptation; but as we go on, we find a character that runs parallel with all the life of a Christian, we find a word that describes what a child of God is in every state and in every stage. In the eighty-sixth Psalm, David speaks "of God having delivered him from the lowest hell." He speaks of the sweet deliverance he had experienced, but he begins the Psalm with saying, "I am poor and needy." And, therefore, whatever deliverance a man may have experienced, let him have been delivered from the "lowest hell," all his life long he will have this experience wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, to be "poor and needy;" and only so far as he is "poor and needy" will he want to know anything experimentally of the riches of Christ, or to taste the consolations which the Spirit of God alone can communicate to his parched and thirsty soul.

How many we find in our day, who are "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," and yet they are always speaking and boasting of the riches of Christ! But what can they know of Christ's riches? His riches are for the "poor and needy," His blood is for the guilty, His righteousness is for the naked, His perfect work and finished salvation for those who continually stand in need of His powerful arm to save them from the "lowest hell." And therefore whatever notions men may have about Christ's riches, Christ's blood, Christ's righteousness, and Christ's glorious salvation, there are none that prize it, that really pant with unutterable longings after it, that really desire to live upon it as the very food of their hearts, that are calling to God for a sweet manifestation of it, that are restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied without the enjoyment of it—there are none that thus breathe and thus feel, except those who are spiritually "poor and needy," who are stripped and emptied and despoiled of everything that the flesh can boast of, and everything that nature can exalt itself with

But these "poor and needy" have "a cause." We often find that the work of grace in a man's soul, and the exercises in a man's heart, are compared in Scripture to an action at law, to some trial which is to take place in a court of judgment. We find this in various parts of the Scripture. "Let my sentence," says David, "come forth from Thy presence," that is, the termination and adjudication of my cause. So we read in Micah, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause," implying that there is a decision to be made, that there is a trial to take place in the court of conscience, and that this trial must be settled by the mouth of the Most High. Now, he who has never had this cause tried in his heart, knows not whether he has been acquitted, or whether he has been condemned. He who has never had a court of trial set up in his bosom, he himself arraigned at that bar, found guilty without a word to say, and then to receive from the mouth of the judge an acquittal, knows nothing at all of what it is to have a manifest testimony from the Lord God Almighty that he is one of His chosen and pardoned ones.

The Church then calls upon King Lemuel, "the King of kings, and Lord of lords," the great High Priest and Mediator of His dear people, to plead the cause of such—that is, when "the books are opened, and the judgment is set," when the "poor and needy" have no counsellor, and have no spiritual coin to purchase the aid of an Advocate, and their own mouths are shut through the weight of guilt and condemnation, then to step forward, and advocate their cause. And how does He plead their cause? By unrolling the book, and showing that under their names the discharge has been written, that blood has been shed for their transgressions, and that their iniquities have been blotted out from the sight of God. He pleads their cause, when, so to speak, He stands forth in their name as having borne their sins "in His own body on the tree," as having gone to the end of the law for righteousness, and brought in an everlasting justification of their persons "from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Thus He pleads their cause.

So, in an inferior sense, those also that stand forth in the name of the Most High, plead the cause of "the poor and needy," when they open up unto them, under the Spirit's teaching, the way of salvation through the satisfaction of the Mediator, when they show that there is a glorious righteousness, which is "unto all and upon all them that believe," and when they declare that God hath put away the sins of His elect by the blood of His dear Son. When they are enabled so to trace out the experience of the soul, under the Spirit's teaching, the Spirit Himself raises up a blessed evidence in the hearts of their poor and needy hearers, that they have passed through the same.

They plead the cause of "the poor and needy" then, by bringing forth those reasons why they should stand acquitted at God's bar. The counsel that stands to plead for the imprisoned debtor, if he can bring forward any evidence that the debt has been paid by another, or the advocate for a criminal at the bar, if he can unroll the king's proclamation of pardon and amnesty, and can prove that his trembling client is included therein, will plead so effectually, that judgment will be stayed, and the prisoner set at liberty. Now, what better cause of acquittal can there be for a poor debtor at God's bar, than to shew that a full satisfaction has been made for his debts, that the demands of justice have been complied with, that blood has been shed, and the sinner been reconciled to God by the perfect work of God's dear Son?

Thus God's servants plead the cause of "the poor and needy;" and when they are enabled to open the roll before the eyes of the prisoner, and show him his name there, and the blessed Spirit seals that testimony in the prisoner's heart and conscience the judge is satisfied, the prisoner is satisfied, and the spectators, that reverence the laws and yet have a spiritual sympathy with the prisoner, are satisfied, and all can unite in ascribing "honour and praise to the Lamb."

4. But we have a solemn hint given, both to Lemuel that intercedes above, though indeed He needs no such counsel, and

to those Lemuels that stand forth in God's name to plead the cause of "the poor and needy" below, which is, to "judge righteously." Let no partiality bias or influence your judgment; let justice have its full sway, as well as mercy; let not the criminal be pardoned, if justice thereby suffer; but let judgment, in every sense, have all that justice claims.

King Lemuel, then, as Intercessor above, would not "judge righteously" if He opened His mouth for those who were fore-ordained to destruction; because justice was never satisfied for them, blood was never shed for them, their sins were never atoned for, righteousness was never brought in to justify them in the sight of God. Therefore, King Lemuel, the great Intercessor above, though He "opens His mouth for the dumb, and pleads the cause of the poor and needy," yet does it with the strictest observance of the laws of justice. If He included in His mediation and intercession any one whom God had not chosen, whose name was not in the covenant, whose sins were not expiated on the cross, He would not "judge righteously;" or on the other hand, if He excluded from His petitions, if He shut out from His mediatorial intercession, at the right hand of God any who were included in the covenant of grace, any for whose sins He died upon the cross, any whose transgressions He had blotted out by His own blood-shedding, if He excluded any whom God had included, then He would not "judge righteously."

But He "judges righteously" when He acts according to the strictest requisitions of justice; and it would be as inconsistent with righteousness to save any through His mediation, who had not been pardoned by His blood, as that any should be lost for want of His mediation, who had been pardoned by His atoning sacrifice. But He "judges righteously;" He weighs the real merits of the case; He acts upon the strictest demands of justice; not justice tempered by mercy, and yet justice kissing mercy—mercy in its fulness and justice in its fulness; mercy not adulterated by justice, nor justice adulterated by mercy; meeting, but not mingling; wedded, but each preserving its distinct identity; flowing in parallel channels, but not intermixing their streams;

each pursuing its own course, and yet running side by side from eternity to eternity.

But we come to the Lemuels on earth—those that stand forth in the name of the Lord to do His work in the sanctuary, they too must "judge righteously," as well as "open their mouths for the dumb." How then are they to "judge righteously?" By weighing up and examining the cases that come before them; by drawing a straight and narrow line between false religion and true religion, between fleshly convictions and spiritual convictions, between the teachings of God and the workings of nature. A minister may have such a compassionate heart naturally, as to be continually binding up wounds, whether those wounds have been inflicted by the Holy Ghost or not; or he may have such misguided and mistaken views of what the real teachings of the Spirit are, that on the other hand, he may make the hearts of those sad whom God has not made sad. We fall into errors on both sides. Some will wound God's dear afflicted ones, will lay grievous burdens upon those who are already sinking under the heavy load of guilt upon their consciences, and put stumbling-blocks in the path of those who are passing through deep exercises. They judge not righteously, they exercise no discernment nor discrimination, nor do they move according to the channel that God has tracked in His Word.

Then there are others who judge not righteously by going to the other extreme, who mistake every trickling tear that falls down the cheek of a hypocrite for the real pangs of godly sorrow, who believe every solemn-looking professor who hang his head like a bulrush, to be "a mourner in Zion," mistaking the mere soft feelings of the natural heart, worked up into something like tenderness under an affecting sermon, for the deep contrition of spirit, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, and of the Holy Ghost alone to produce. But the Church counsels her Lemuels to "judge righteously"—that is, to move in such strict accordance with the work of the Holy Ghost, and so run in the channel which God Himself has traced out in His Word, as not to be turned aside by

natural compassion on the one hand, nor yet to err by harshness of spirit on the other.

Again; these Lemuels are apt to be biassed by very carnal motives. If there be any rich respectable persons in their congregation, they are apt to be drawn aside from judging righteously, that is, they are inclined to allow them to come into the Church with a shallower experience than those who are temporally poor. Or perhaps they will soften down their ministry, lest some wealthy deacon, or some rich supporter of the cause should take offence, and turn his back upon them; and thus they are turned aside from judging righteously, by the base workings of their carnal and covetous heart. Others are kept from judging righteously by the "fear of man that bringeth a snare." They cannot bear the cross which every faithful minister must carry; they cannot endure to be shot at with those bitter arrows which self-righteous and presumptuous professors are continually seeking to wound them with; and, therefore, they so pare down truth, they so round the jutting edge of everything which seems to be offensive, that whilst they maintain the outlines of truth, every salient point, every jutting angle is rounded off like the corner of a street, lest the passer-by should strike his foot against it. And thus they clip and pare down truth to please professors, instead of standing forth fearlessly and faithfully in the naked simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again; wherever there are family connections in the way, there is always a great temptation for the Lemuels not to "judge righteously." If, for instance, his own children begin to be a little serious, he is tempted not to "judge righteously." If he has relations in the flesh, who begin to make a profession of religion, he is tempted not to "judge righteously," but to have his eyes, in some way, blinded by some favourable prejudices, and to seek to thrust those upon the Church, who, were they not akin to him in the flesh, he would never dream of bringing forward at all. And thus biassed by the warm feelings of his natural heart, he is drawn aside from judging righteously.

Again; it continually happens in a Church, that there are those who cannot hear the minister; or those who have taken up a prejudice against him, and who, from various motives, may side with a party **most churches being split into parties** that is unfavourable to him. Now it is very hard for a man thus circumstanced to "judge righteously." He will be strongly tempted to detract from that which is really good in them, and perhaps ascribe to them motives of which they really are not guilty; and whilst he looks at the most favourable side in the case of his supporters, he will look at the most unfavourable side in the case of his opponents. And I do believe, from what I have seen, that many divisions in churches arise from the spirit of the minister; and where they do not spring from him, are much fostered by him in this, that he, instead of seeking to heal breaches, and bring the people of God together, would rather stand as a party-man, and be the head and leader of the strongest side. Now this is not "judging righteously;" he does not stand as he should do, a pastor over the flock, when he would pay his chief attention to some sheep, and neglect or wound others. These are not personal reflections, as I am utterly unacquainted with you as a church. Think not, for a moment, that I am indulging in personalities, for I assure you I know not any individual belonging to this church, nor have I any such information from others. They are mere general observations as they have occurred to my mind, at this present moment, from the text.

Well, here then is the prescribed course, which those servants of God who would desire to walk in the footsteps of their great Master, are called upon to follow, "To open their mouth for the dumb," to "plead the cause of the poor and needy," and yet to "judge righteously," to run in that narrow line, to walk in that difficult path, to steer in that intricate channel, surrounded on every side by rocks and shoals, and out of which they so easily glide to fall upon one sandbank or another.

## THE ORDERING OF THE CAUSE BEFORE THE MERCY-SEAT

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, 29th July, 1866

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Job 23:3, 4

There was a reality in Job's religion. It was not of a flimsy, notional, superficial nature; it was not merely a sound Calvinistic creed, and nothing more; it was not a religion of theory and speculation, nor a well-compacted system of doctrines and duties. There was something deeper, something more divine in Job's religion than any such mere pretence, delusion, imitation, or hypocrisy. And if **our** religion be of the right kind, there will be something deeper in it, something more powerful, spiritual, and supernatural, than notions and doctrines, theories and speculations, however scriptural and correct, merely passing to and fro in our minds. There will be a divine reality in it, if God the Spirit be the Author of it; and there will be no trifling with the solemn things of God, and with our own immortal souls.

But, before we enter into the text, let us look a little at the character of Job, the speaker here. Not that I mean to enter at any length into the spiritual character of Job, for that would take up the whole of the discourse; but just to drop a few hints, so as to throw, if God enable me, some little light upon the words of the text.

Job, then, had been a highly favoured child of God, and had known divine consolation in his soul, previous to this period. Upon that favoured state he looked back with fond regret, when he said "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of

my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." **Job 29:2-4** But those consolations and those sweet visitations Job had lost. And how came he to lose them? The Holy Ghost has, if I may use the expression without irreverence, admitted us behind the scenes to explain this mystery.

In the first and second chapters of Job, we find out how he lost all those precious consolations that his soul had once enjoyed. Up to the time of the circumstances recorded there, he had known but little of his own heart; the awful depth of nature's depravity had not been opened up to him; and he knew little of the temptations of Satan, and of the fiery darts which he throws into the carnal mind. We, therefore, find Satan taunting God respecting him: "Doth Job," he asks, "fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" **Job 1:10** This hedge, set up by the favour of God, kept off the fiery darts which Satan would otherwise have shot into his soul. But when the hedge was removed, we find Job believing that all the dreadful things his soul was exercised with, came from himself; and all the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity that worked in his heart, he, not knowing that Satan was the secret author of them, took as his own. The Lord too having testified, as he thought, his displeasure against him by visiting him with calamities so great, with stroke upon stroke, and blow upon blow, he felt deserted by God and man. Where his religion was, what and where he himself was, and how he stood, he knew not, for "he walked in darkness, and had no light:" all his evidences were obscured and he could not tell what to make of himself. Now it was in this darkness, this horrible darkness, that fell upon him, that he poured forth his soul in the words of the text. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

Job, then, had found the Lord, and Job had lost him too. And you may depend upon it, it is a solemn truth that none but living souls ever find the Lord, and none but living souls ever lose the Lord; that none but those whose hearts God has touched ever

feel the Lord's presence, or ever mourn the Lord's absence; and that none but God's children ever walk in the light of his countenance, or in such thick darkness, as not to see a single evidence, or trace out a solitary waymark.

But the desire of Job's soul was, **to find the Lord**. And if he could but find him, O, then he would pour out his very heart before him, and tell him all that he wanted. I can conceive **bear with me** a conclave of ministers sitting upon Job's case. When a patient is very ill naturally, you know there is often a consultation of physicians; and I can picture to myself a consultation of ministers on Job's case, with the various opinions they would give, and the various remedies they would propose. Here is the poor patient, and he keeps crying out, "O that I knew where I might find him!" The chief Rabbi of the Pharisees would say, "Kneel down Job, and say your prayers; is not that sufficient?" The Puseyite clergyman would urge, "Hear the voice of the only true Church; attend daily upon her admirable Liturgy; come to the altar, and partake of the flesh and blood of the Lord." The Wesleyan minister would cry, "Up and be doing; try your best; exert your free will, and shake off this gloom and despondency." The general Dissenter would advise "cheerful and active piety, to subscribe to Societies, and exert himself in the Lord's cause." And the dry doctrinal Calvinistic minister, with a look of contempt, would say, "Away with your doubts and fears, Job; this living upon frames and feelings, and poring over yourself. Do not gloat over your corruptions; look to Jesus; you are complete in him; why should you fear? you are quite safe." But the sick patient would still groan out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" He would say, "You may all be very wise men, but to me you are 'physicians of no value.' 'Oh that I knew where I might find him!'"

And this will be the feeling of every God-taught soul. Men may say, "Away with your doubts and fears;" but he cannot away with them at the exhortation of letter ministers. They may cut down frames and feelings, and yet the poor soul who has frames and feelings knows that all his religion consists in them. They may tell him to look to Jesus: but, as Bunyan says in his experience, "they

might as well tell him to reach the sun with his finger." After all, the poor soul would still groan out in darkness and sorrow, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "If I could but once find him whom my soul loveth, there would be an end to all my darkness." But it is in the possession of these feelings of light and darkness, life and death, the Lord's presence and the Lord's absence, the finding of Jesus and the losing of Jesus, that "the secret of the Lord" which "is with them that fear him" **Ps 25:14** consists: and those that know these things have the Lord in their hearts and will be with him in glory when the world is in a blaze.

But with God's blessing, we will look a little more closely at the words. We find, **first**, Job breathing out his desire after a certain object which he was earnestly pursuing; and that is couched in the two first clauses of the text—"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" And **then** he tells us what he would do, if the Lord would so favour his soul—"I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

Let us look at these two distinct portions of the subject. This desire of Job to obtain a certain object—and, what he would do, when that object was attained.

I.—The **first** object that he desired was this—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!" But how was it that Job could not find him? Job must have known what it was to find the Lord, or he would not have desired now to find him in his soul's experience. He must have tasted, felt, and known something of the Lord's presence, or he would not so sadly have mourned over the Lord's absence. He must have walked in the light of God's countenance, to make him feel what the darkness was when the Lord forsook him.

(i) This, then, is the grand goal toward which every runner in the heavenly race strains every nerve and sinew: this is the grand object of every quickened soul—to **find the Lord**. The Lord himself creates these desires in the heart; and certifies in every

awakened conscience that the soul must find him by a living faith and by a divine revelation, or eternally and inevitably perish. Now, it is this conviction, thus fastened by God himself upon the conscience, that there is such a reality as finding the Lord, that so winnows out false religion from a man's heart. O what heaps of chaff are there in our hearts when God first takes us in hand! What mistakes, what blunders we make as to what true religion is! And though, wherever the fear of the Lord is, the heart is right in the main, yet we are continually mistaking the way.

But in spite and in the midst of all these blunders and mistakes, there is this conviction created by the power of God in the soul, that it must feel something, know something, enjoy something, and have something let down from heaven; must experience dew, savour, unction, power, love, blood and salvation. Thus when the Lord leads the soul under the law, and reveals his wrath in the covenant of Mount Sinai, what refuge can it find in the works of righteousness? The hailstones come down, the waterflood rises, and these drive the soul out of its refuges of lies. And thus, its own righteousness being beaten to pieces by the sentence of inward condemnation from a fiery law, the soul knows that unless pardon, mercy, and justification are sealed upon the conscience by the power of God the Spirit, it will live and die in its sins.

Wherever this conviction is fastened on the conscience, the soul, sooner or later, must come right; it cannot be deluded long; it cannot hide its head for any length of time in false refuges: it cannot take up with mere empty or insufficient evidences. Being hunted out of false refuges, it is brought to this solemn, deep, and inward conviction, that there is no peace but what the Lord speaks with his own voice to the soul; no pardon but what springs out of his atoning blood sprinkled upon the conscience; and no justification except in the application of Christ's righteousness, received and put on by a living faith. And you may depend upon it, if God the Spirit has wrought that conviction with power in a man's conscience, he never can be fully nor finally deceived; he will never long call evil good, nor good evil; he will

never mistake darkness for light, nor light for darkness; he will never put bitter for sweet, nor sweet for bitter. He cannot be plastered over with untempered mortar; he will not let man or woman sew pillows under his armholes; he cannot be satisfied with the opinions of men, nor daubed over with an empty profession of religion; because he feels that he must have the light, the life, the power, and the witness of God in his conscience. The soul that knows this, knows something of the experience which Job breathed out from his soul—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

But some might say, "Is there not a Bible to read! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not a mercy-seat! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such and such a chapel! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a duty! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a doctrine! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such an ordinance! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a gospel church! Cannot you find him there?" But the poor soul still groans out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" for I have tried all these things; and I cannot find him in these doctrines, duties, privileges, ordinances, in hearing, reading, or in talking. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" though at the very ends of the earth, though through flames of persecution, or through the waters of affliction, though it were inside the walls of a Union Workhouse! "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" says the poor sorrowing, groaning soul. "If I could but find the Lord in my heart and conscience, if I could but taste his blessed presence in my soul, I should want no more, but be certain of going to heaven; glory would be begun, and the first-fruits of heaven be realised."

Now, such a one is perfectly safe, though he has not arrived at the desired enjoyment; the Spirit is secretly guiding him right by stripping him of all lying refuges, pulling the down out of the pillows sewed to the armholes, and digging the trowel into the untempered mortar that so many servants of Satan are plastering souls with. **Eze 13:15,18** The soul is safe that is here; for none

ever breathed out these sighs, groanings and cries into the bosom of the Lord, and said, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" that did not find him sooner or later, and embrace him in the arms of faith and affection as the "altogether lovely."

(ii) But this experience which I have endeavoured to trace out is not exactly that of the text, because Job had known something of the Lord's presence. The secret of the Lord had been upon his tabernacle; the dew of the Lord had rested upon his branch; and by the light of the Lord he had walked through darkness. **Job 29:3,4** But the Lord had withdrawn himself; and a cloud in consequence had come over his soul, through which neither prayer nor faith could pierce. He looked "backward" to see the path in which he had been led, but darkness rested upon it; he could not run back to his past experience, and find the Lord there. He looked "forward," but he could not see any gleam of light there; dark clouds so hovered over his soul that he could not see the face of the Lord. If he looked "to the left hand" to see if he could trace out the Lord's hand in providence, he could not behold him through the cloud of his afflictions; and if he turned "to the right hand" where once he had set up his Ebenezers, they were all effaced. And therefore, not knowing which way to go, backward or forward, to the left hand or to the right, he could only sigh out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" What he wanted was, the sweet presence of the Lord in his soul, access unto him by faith, some testimony from the Lord's lips, some sweet and precious discoveries of the Lord's grace, mercy and peace. And satisfied I am in my conscience, that nothing but what Job wanted can ever satisfy one that fears God.

(iii) But there is another clause of the text in which Job breathes out the fervent desire of his heart—"That I might come even to his seat!" The Lord, we read, "waits to be gracious." There is a mercy-seat where he sits to receive the petitions of his people. This was beautifully prefigured by the mercy-seat in the temple, that golden covering of the ark, where the Shechinah, the glory of God, was manifested, which hid the broken tables of the law, and which once a year, on the day of atonement, was sprinkled

with the blood of the sin-offering. This was typical of the mercy-seat above, where mercy, grace, pardon, peace and salvation shine forth with glory and lustre, far beyond the Shechinah of the Tabernacle, in the Person, love, blood and work of Jesus. It was to this seat that Job desired to come. He wanted to be indulged with nearness to the Lord, with some sense that He was looking upon him, and with some testimony and inward witness that He was listening to and accepting his requests.

What a different thing is this spiritual access from mere wordy prayer! People talk about the **duty** of prayer, and how right it is **and it is right, it is my daily privilege** to bend the knee morning and evening before the Lord. But to bend my knees, and use words, is not necessarily to come near to the mercy-seat. I may bend my knees, and use words, may have my mind engaged in what I am saying, and be free from wandering thoughts. I may tell the Lord what I honestly want; I may confess my sins, and seek for mercy; I may ask for all the blessings that my soul really stands in need of; and yet not come in faith to the mercy-seat, have no sense of access, no enlargement of heart, no melting down of soul, no felt presence of God in my conscience, no sweet testimony that my prayers are heard and answered, no inward witness and token of the indwelling Spirit.

You may depend upon it, a living soul can never be satisfied with mere wordy prayer; I mean by the expression, words and no more. O, true prayer is something deeper than this! it is to have the groans, sighs, pantings, breathings, longings, hungerings and thirstings of a believing heart. Nor do these satisfy a living soul; he is glad to have them, and he is condemned when he has them not. But he can never put hungering instead of eating; nor thirsting instead of drinking; nor running instead of winning the race; nor wrestling instead of gaining the prize. To come in faith to the mercy-seat, to see it sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, to receive atoning blood into the conscience, and to enjoy the sweet witness and testimony of acceptance in the heart—this is what Job

wanted to feel, and nothing but this can really satisfy a heart made honest and tender in God's fear.

How few know what prayer is! How little they know of the secret intercourse that a living soul carries on with the Lord! How few we hear at a prayer-meeting whose prayers drop into our conscience! and, though I am a minister myself, yet, I must say, there are very few men who stand up in the pulpit whose prayers seem indited by the Holy Ghost in their souls. They appear to have no reverence for the great God to whom they draw near; no pantings and longings for his felt presence; no hungerings and thirstings after the dew of his Spirit on their branch: but round and round they travel through their usual form, as though they were speaking to man, and not to the Lord of heaven and earth. But Job did not want any such mere wordy prayer. He knew there was something deeper, something higher, something more real, something more blessed, something more spiritual in coming to the mercy-seat than in any mere words that may come out of the lips; he wanted to be drawn by the Holy Ghost, to feel his power in the heart, to come near to the throne of grace, and there in all filial boldness and sweet confidence, with divine access, to breathe out his wants and petitions.

II.—But we pass on to consider what Job declared he would do, if the Lord would thus indulge him. You see, Job would not have been satisfied with merely drawing near; he wanted to have something done for him and in him. What this was, with God's help, I shall endeavour now to trace out.

(i) The first thing he would do, if the Lord would but indulge him with access to his seat would be this "**I would order my cause before him!**" But did not Job all this time feel pantings and longings after the Lord? Did not his soul groan out its desires through a sense of felt necessity, and was he not really pleading with the Lord all the time? But still he had not a sense of access in his soul; he could not tell the Lord all that was in his heart; he could not **pour out his soul** before the Lord. How much there is in that expression! Shall I use a familiar figure to illustrate it, as

sometimes familiar figures are best adapted to that purpose? Look at a sack of corn: you know, when the mouth of the sack is tied up, there is no pouring out its contents; but let the sack be opened and thrown down, and then its contents are immediately poured out, and the rich grain falls upon the floor. Our hearts are sometimes like the sack with the mouth tied; there are desires, pantings, and longings; there are wants, and these urgently felt; but we cannot give them utterance. As we read, "I opened my mouth and panted." **Ps 119:131**

But the Lord in mercy at times opens the mouth; and then when the mouth is opened, the heart can pour out its desires, just as the rich grain is poured out of a sack when the mouth is untied. But must not the sack be full before the grain is poured out? If there are but a few grains at the bottom, or only half-a-pint of wheat in one corner of the sack, though you open the mouth, there is no pouring out of the rich grain. So with our hearts. If the heart be not full; if there be no vehement desires struggling for utterance, we may open the mouth, but there is no pouring it out in pantings and longings. This is to pour out the soul before the Lord. If you want a scriptural instance of it, read the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, where you will find a gracious woman, Hannah, so agitated, and so discovering the state of her mind by the convulsive movements of her frame, that the High Priest charged her with being drunken; but though her heart was so full that her lips quivered, and her very features betrayed what was passing within, yet she meekly replied to his chiding speech, when he bade her to put away her wine, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but **have poured out my soul before the Lord.**" **1Sa 1:15** That was something like prayer! And we know what a blessed answer the Lord gave her, and how the Holy Ghost has recorded her triumphal song.

If Job, then, were thus enabled by the Holy Ghost to come to the mercy-seat, he says, "**I would order my cause before him!**" The eternal work of the Spirit of God on the heart is sometimes compared in Scripture to a cause, or law-suit. For instance, "Let

**my sentence** come forth from thy presence" **Ps 17:2**; where the Lord is requested, as a judge, to pronounce the decision in his favour. So, "Stir up thyself, and **awake to my judgment even unto my cause**, my God and my Lord." **Ps 35:23** "I know that the Lord will maintain **the cause** of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." **Ps 140:12** So in **Mic 7:9**: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until **he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.**"

The Lord is often spoken of as an Advocate, who pleads the cause of his people; and thus the work of grace in the heart is compared to a cause to be decided, and, the soul hopes, in its favour. Job therefore says, if he were but privileged and enabled to come before the mercy-seat, he would "order his cause" before the Lord; that is, he would spread it out before the divine tribunal in all its bearings. He would tell the Lord that there was a great cause to be tried, a law-suit to be decided, a judgment to be passed; and what he wanted was, to lay before him all that was going on in the court of conscience. He "would order his cause;" he would draw it out, in regular order, like a brief; would spread before the Lord all the pros and cons; would explain it thoroughly, and tell Him all that was for, and all that was against him, and draw it out that the Lord might decide upon it.

Now, you may depend upon it, that when the Lord makes a man honest by His grace, he will have a cause; and when He brings him before His mercy-seat, he will "order that cause before Him." It will not be just a word of confession, and then all passed over; but everything will be raked up from first to last; all the exercises of his mind, all the perplexities of his soul, all the temptations he has been harassed by, all the snares his feet have been caught in;—in short, the whole work of God on his conscience, in all its puzzling points, mysterious turnings, and intricate workings, will the soul order before the Lord, and spread out before His mercy-seat.

If a man is heir to an estate, and yet be kept out of it because he cannot establish a legal title, he will go to a lawyer, and when he

gets his attention, how he will keep dinning into his ears all the particulars of his case; how he will bring out his pedigree, and weary the man by telling him how **this** is in his favour, and **that** is in his favour; and how he fears **this** point may be against him, and **that** may be against him; and how he considers this or that will turn the scale. He will "order his cause," and spread it out in all its intricacies and all its bearings, all its difficulties and niceties, and endeavour to make it out as plain as he can. And why? Because he is deeply interested in it; the point at stake is so valuable, that he wants a decision in his favour to put him in possession of the property.

The man who feels the importance of eternal things will be like the person I have just described as wanting to get the estate. He cannot be satisfied with telling the Lord a few things about his soul; but he will spread out the whole case before the Lord, from the beginning to the end, that all that is for him and all that is against him may be examined and looked at in their various lights, and weighed up in the balances of the sanctuary.

Are there not some here who make a great profession of religion, and perhaps are members of churches, who have never done this in their lives? Are there not those who have never weighed up their religion, never been tried about it, never have had doubts and fears to shake them to the very foundation, never turned the whole work over from first to last, never examined how the Lord dealt with them, when the work began, how it was carried on, where they are now, and what state their souls are in? Are there not some before me at this present moment, confident of their state, who have yet never spent half-an-hour in their lives in looking over their religion, in examining it from the very foundation, and scanning it through with all the anxiety that an heir to an estate examines the documents, and looks over the title-deeds to establish his title.

Why, surely, if your souls are at stake, and you feel the solemn importance of the things of eternity, there will be times and seasons when you will be examining how your souls stand for

another life: you will be looking over all the work of grace from the beginning, at all its weak points and all its strong points. When a general knows the enemy is about to besiege a fortified town, he minutely examines all the works; and as he goes over them he sees there is a weak point here; and a strong point there; here the curtain needs to be defended, there the bastion needs to be fresh armed; he looks over all the fortress, and sees where the enemy can come in, and where he can be kept out. So an honest man before God will look at his religion; here is a weak point in his experience; it had not a striking beginning; here the enemy may come in; he has not been led deeply enough into a knowledge of his own heart. But here is a strong point, a clear manifestation.

Thus he will review his religion as a skilful general looks over a fortress, and examines every weak point, and every strong point, to see how the weak may be strengthened, and the strong be confirmed: for he knows, unless this is done, if the enemy come against him, he will be more than a match for him. When we come to look at religion in this way, and bring it to the test of God's word, what a mere shallow pretence to vital godliness satisfies most ministers, most hearers, and most congregations! How they take up with the flimsiest evidences of the work of grace, not considering their immortal souls are at stake! But that would not do for Job, nor will it do for me; nor will it do for anyone that fears God.

(ii) But there is another clause of the text, in which Job declares what he would do if the Lord would indulge him with access to his presence; "**I would fill my mouth,**" he says, "**with arguments.**" What! could not Job pray without access? No; prayer is a supernatural thing, the gift and work of God the Spirit in the heart. We cannot pray whenever we please; we may use words, may bend our knee, and utter a number of expressions; but we cannot pray spiritually except the Lord the Spirit help our infirmities; for "we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." **Ro 8:26.**

Job, then, says, if the Lord would but enable him to come before his mercy-seat, he would "fill his mouth with arguments." He could not do so till the Lord enabled him. But if he could but find the Lord, if he could but have access to his gracious Majesty; if he could but be indulged with one glimpse of his countenance: if he could but feel the drawing of his Spirit; if he could but know his ear was open; he "would fill his mouth with arguments" to move the divine clemency. What arguments, think you, would he make use of? Let us look at them. When a Counsellor stands up to plead a cause, he must have, you know, some arguments, or it is of no use to take up the time of the Court. So when the soul comes before the Lord, it must make use of some argument to move the bowels of divine compassion.

But what arguments would he make use of? Would he tell the Lord what great things he had done for him; The scores of pounds and shillings he had spent in his cause, the many Societies he subscribed to, the quantity of tracts and Bibles he had dispersed abroad, the number of sermons he had heard, the numerous times he had knelt at the sacrament or sat down to the ordinance, the regularity of his private and family prayer, and the duties civil and religious that he had so faithfully discharged? The Court will not hear such arguments; the King of kings will not listen to such pleas; not one of them is valid in the Court above. None but Jesus' merits and righteousness are pleadable there. If a man comes into that court with his own doings and duties, he will meet with no acceptance; he has not an argument that the Judge will listen to.

When, then, the spiritual petitioner fills his mouth with arguments, there will not be one taken from his own piety, consistency, or sincerity. For, mark you, he goes as a petitioner, not as a claimant. Talk of **claiming** spiritual favours! A condemned felon in Newgate might as well claim a pardon, as a sinner claim God's mercy; a bankrupt lawyer might as well claim to be Lord Chancellor, as a poor insolvent, who has nothing to pay, claim heaven and glory. What can men know of themselves,

and of the God they profess to serve, who set up this presumptuous notion of **claiming** spiritual blessings? What is given to us is given on the footing of mercy, not on the footing of claim. If we claim anything, it is hell and damnation; we can claim nothing else. But as to claiming mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, and glory, a man who knows what he is by divine teaching will never dare to do it before a throne of mercy. I do not say, that good men have never used the term; Hart says,

**"Brethren, by this your claim abide;"**

but he means, not your claim upon God, but your claim against Satan; these are very different things.

But let us look at the arguments that Job's mouth would be filled with. All the arguments he would make use of, may be divided into two classes. One class would be taken from **his own misery**, and the other from **God's mercy**; all spiritual arguments are included under these two heads.

(i) He would tell, then, the Lord what a filthy creature, what a vile sinner, what a base backslider he was; that, in a thousand instances, he had deserved eternal wrath and indignation; that he had never done any one thing spiritually good; that he was a rebel and a wretch, and had done everything to provoke the Majesty of the Most High. This class of arguments is made up of mourning, sighing, groaning, and bemoaning our lost, ruined, and helpless condition. O, these are very prevailing arguments with the divine clemency!

Look at what the Lord himself sets forth in that wonderful chapter, **Eze 16**! What was the moving argument of the Lord to spread his skirt over the child left to perish in the wilderness? Why, the wretched, lost, and ruined condition of that child. There was no eye to pity the perishing outcast; but its helpless state moved the divine clemency. And is not that too a prevailing argument with us? When we see a man clothed in rags, starving with hunger, cold, emaciated by sickness, and misery painted in

all his features—is not that a moving argument to give him relief? A beggar must not come to our house if he wants to get anything, looking hale and hearty, well-clothed and well-fed. Nor must a beggar go before the throne of the Lord well-clothed, well-shod, and his eyes standing out with fatness; he will never so move the bowels of divine clemency. A beggar need not speak; his rags and sores speak for him. Or look at a mother with her infant; the very helplessness of the child is the moving argument for her tender care. The cry of the child is the moving argument for her to give the nutritious breast. The nakedness in which the child comes into the world is the moving argument why the clothes should be got ready, and the child dressed in them. Ye mothers, are not these the arguments that move your tender bosom?

So when a poor soul comes before the Lord, he fills his mouth with similar arguments. His helplessness, sinfulness, wretchedness, misery; his lost, ruined, and desperate condition; his inability to do good, his headlong proneness to evil; his filth, his guilt, his rags;—O what a class of arguments to move the divine clemency with! If enabled to come before the mercy-seat, his mouth will be filled with these arguments. And shall we not tell the Lord what base backslidings we have committed? Shall we not confess what inconsistencies we have fallen into? Shall we not catalogue before him the various slips and falls we have been guilty of? Shall we not tell him that nothing but his mercy can save such hell-deserving wretches?

These are very humbling arguments for a man to fill his mouth with. It is a very humbling place for a sinner to take. I am not surprised we have so many bold claimants. It is much pleasanter to go to a gentleman's front door, and give a double knock as an equal, than tap at the back door as a beggar. To go into a banking house, present a draft, and say, "Pay me that!" is much less humbling than to beg for a halfpenny in the street. That is the very reason why there are so many bold claimants in the visible church. They cannot bear to be humbled under a sense of wretchedness, helplessness, and misery; they cannot endure to be beggars and paupers; so they rush on the bosses of God's

buckler with a presumptuous claim. I am sure of this, if God the Spirit bring such to his mercy-seat, he will effectually cut up their presumption, root and branch, and will bring them as needy petitioners—not to **claim**, but to **beg**—not to rush presumptuously on, but to wait till the Lord bids them approach.

(ii) But there is another class of arguments which the poor soul will make use of; such as are drawn from God's mercy in the face of Jesus Christ. And as the first class of arguments is drawn from creature helplessness, creature ruin, and creature misery; so the second class of arguments is drawn from God's superabounding grace in the Person, face, blood, and work of Jesus. And I may add, that the first class of arguments taken from our misery will have no prevalence in his holy court, unless there was mercy, pardon, and salvation laid up in the Person and work of the Son of God. Our ruin and misery do not of themselves move the divine clemency; but because Jesus has made a way for pardon through his atoning blood, so that it flows freely through him; and God now can be "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" therefore, it is that man's helplessness, ruin, and misery are pleadable in the court of heaven.

One grand argument of this latter class that the soul makes use of, is the **promises** that God has made. Has he not, for instance, promised to hear and answer prayer? Has he not said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?" **Joh 6:37** Has he not said, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price?" **Isa 55:1** Has he not said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" **Mt 11:28** The soul that comes to the mercy-seat employs as arguments these promises in the Word.

He also rakes over **what God has done in times past for him**. Has not the Lord delivered and blessed me? Has not the Lord shewn himself merciful and gracious? Will he not appear again? "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for

evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" **Ps 77:7-9**. So the soul takes occasion from the past to ask for the future; and uses all those arguments that his mouth is filled with, in order to prevail upon divine compassion to bestow mercy, peace, and salvation, and manifest Himself once more.

Sometimes the spiritual petitioner takes occasion **from what God has done for others**. He cannot always trace out clearly the work of grace in himself, but looks at what the Lord has done for others, especially at what he has done for those recorded in the Word. He sees an adulterous and murderous David restored, a bloody Manasseh pardoned, a backsliding Peter reclaimed, and a persecuting Saul called by divine grace. And he sees how in repeated similar instances grace has superabounded over sin. Is there not, too, some brother or sister, some wife or husband, some parent or child, some friend and companion, whose experience is commended to his conscience, to whom the Lord has shown mercy blessed and delivered?

All these are made use of, because his mouth is to be "**filled** with arguments;" yes, with as many as ever it can bring. Will not a pleading soul make use of every argument that it can think of, to move the divine compassion? How piteously will a man in want plead to have his necessities relieved! How he will try to touch the string that most vibrates in our natural heart! How the poor blind beggar in the streets of the metropolis will cry, "Remember the **blind!**" because he knows what a string it touches! Even the imposters, of which this great city is full, use a whining tone to tell their pretended misery, because they know there is something in our heart that vibrates at the accents of woe. So with the spiritual beggar. If the Lord do but give him access to Himself, I know he will fill his mouth with arguments. O what a mercy it is to have a soul panting after the Lord, and not to be satisfied except with the presence of the living God!

What a mercy to lie upon our bed, and instead of having every vile thought working in the mind, every base imagination passing

through our heart, to be crying to the Lord for the sweet manifestations of his mercy and grace! And as we sit at home, what a mercy it is, instead of being full of ill-humour and worldliness, to have the soul sighing and breathing after the Lord that he would appear! I dare say, you gracious fathers and mothers, when all is still, and your children are in bed, and you sit up a little while after them, you know what it is now and then to pant after the Lord's presence and the manifestations and revelations of his goodness in your heart. I know something of this matter. I know it is very sweet, when all is still and quiet, to have the soul going out after the Lord in earnest breathings after his manifested presence, to feel the dew of his favour upon our branch, and enjoy nearness of access and approach unto him. Then is the time when we **fill** our mouth with arguments. Why, sometimes it is as hard to leave off, as at others it is hard to begin. Sometimes the soul can no more help praying, breathing, and panting after the Lord, shall I say half-an-hour, an hour, or two hours together, than at other times, it cannot breathe out a single petition, or feel a single desire after the living God.

Now, was not Job here, the old patriarch, whose experience is recorded for our strength and consolation? Was not Job in the same spot where we often are? Why, if the old patriarch had not known something of access and of pouring out his very soul before the mercy-seat, he would not have wanted to order his cause before the Lord, and fill his mouth with arguments.

Are there not many here this evening, in whose ears I have uttered nothing but enigmas, and who know no more spiritually and experimentally of what I have been speaking than if I had been talking in Arabic or Hebrew? We must get into these spots, into these circumstances, before we can know anything of these things in soul experience. If this aged patriarch had not known what it was to be shut up in his mind, harassed, and distressed, and well-nigh overwhelmed with the attacks of the wicked one, he would not have said, **"Oh that I knew where I might find him; that I might come even to his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments!"** Job

**23:3,4** Has that ever been, is it now, the genuine feeling, the real experience of your soul?

Do look into your heart, you that fear God. Do look for a moment, if you have never looked before, at the work of grace, **and where are you, if you have never looked at it?** and consider if you know any of these matters. Did you ever, in a feeling of darkness, gloom, bondage, and distress of soul cry, **I do not say the words, it is the feelings we want, let the words go,** "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "Lord I do want to find thee; my soul longs after thee; I want a taste of thy blessed presence; I want to embrace thee in the arms of my faith; I want the sweet testimonies of thy gracious lips; 'Oh that I knew where I might find thee!' I would not care what I went through."

If so, then these very things shew that you have the fear of God in your souls, and the teaching of the Spirit in your hearts. You are where Job was; and know ten thousand times more than all the dry Calvinists, and all the presumptuous claimants that swarm in this metropolis. There is more true religion in a poor tried, exercised, tempted soul, who most deeply feels the power of unbelief, and is pressed by mountains of guilt; there is more of vital godliness, more of divine teaching in such a man, than in a whole chapel full of presumptuous claimants, who have never known God or themselves; who have never found God by a discovery of Himself to their consciences, who have never known anything of the horrible depths of nature's evil, nor groaned under the workings of inward corruption.

I say then, if you know something of what Job speaks here, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!"—if that is the desire of your soul, you have Job's affliction in this matter, and you will have Job's deliverance, Job's joy, Job's peace, and Job's salvation. Job's God is your God, and you will be where Job now is, bathing your ransomed soul in all the glory of the Lamb.

It is a mercy to know by heart experience what the Holy Ghost has revealed here; and it is better, if it be the will of God, to be

groaning out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"—it is a thousand times better to be groaning out this in darkness, solitude, heaviness, and misery, through mourning and sorrowing, than to have a name to live while dead, and the form of godliness, while you inwardly and outwardly deny the power of it. For this is divine teaching, this is the work of grace, this is the life of God in the soul, this is the kingdom of God in the heart. And those who know these things by divine teaching will one day mount up and be where Christ is, be with the Lord of life and glory, and enjoy his blessed presence for ever.

There are many persons present who perhaps will not hear my voice again, as this is the last Lord's day that I speak here. I leave this testimony, therefore, to the blessing of God, and may he apply it to your conscience. What you know of this heart-felt experience, and of these dealings of God in your soul, the Lord enable you that fear him to look at and examine; and may he give us sweet testimonies that we do know these things by his divine power. In his hands, then, do I leave it; and God grant, that the "bread cast upon the waters may be found after many days." I have endeavoured to deliver my own conscience, and to speak the truth in all faithfulness as far as I know it, neither seeking to please, nor fearing to offend; but leaving the matter simply in the Lord's hands that he may apply it powerfully, and seal it upon the hearts of his own people, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

King Hezekiah lay diseased,  
With every dangerous symptom seized,  
Beyond the cure of art;  
With languid pulse, and strength  
decayed; With spirits sunk, and soul  
dismayed,  
And ready to depart.

His friends despair; his servants droop;  
The learned leach can give no hope: All  
signs of life are fled!  
When, lo! the seer Isaiah came,

With words to damp the expiring flame,  
And strike the dying dead!

Entering the royal patient's room,  
He thus denounced the dreadful doom:  
Of flattering hopes beware!  
God's messenger, behold, I stand;  
Thus saith the Lord: Thy death's at hand;  
Prepare, O king, prepare!

Where is the man, whom words like these,  
(Though free before from all disease)  
Would not deject to death?  
Favourite of heaven! in thee we see  
The miracles of prayer, in thee  
The omnipotence of faith!

Methinks I hear the hero say;  
And must my life be snatched away,  
Before I'm fit to die?  
Can prayer reverse the stern decree,  
And save a wretch condemned like me?  
It may; at least I'll try.

Ye damps of death, that chill me through,  
God's prophet and prediction too,  
I must withstand you all;  
Both heaven and earth awhile begone:  
I turn me to the Lord alone,  
And face the silent wall.

He said; and weeping, poured a prayer,  
That conquered pain, removed despair,  
With all its heavy load;  
Repelled the force of death's attack,  
Brought the recanting prophet back,  
And turned the mind of God!

## **The Patience and Faith of the Saints**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, June 21, 1868

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12

We have, as I observed this morning, a special blessing pronounced upon "him that readeth, and those that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." (Rev. 1:3.) Now, a book which comes before us with such a recommendation from God, and carries on its very front his own promise that a blessing shall attend the man who hears, and reads, and keeps what is written therein, claims for itself our most earnest and deep attention. If we believe, as we are bound to believe, in the faithfulness of God to his own word of promise, and that the man whom he has pronounced blessed must be blessed, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we cannot doubt that the man is blessed who reads, and hears, and keeps the sayings of this book. And yet, there is not a book in the whole Scriptures which to us appears, when we read its contents, more dark, obscure, and unintelligible; nor is there one which has more puzzled and perplexed learned men and unlearned men; able scholars armed to the teeth with all the apparatus of criticism, and simple people who seek to understand it by the special teaching of the Spirit. How can we reconcile these things? I think we can reconcile them thus. We must draw a distinction between the prophetic part of the book of Revelation and the instructive part. As far as regards the purely prophetic part, that always has been, and probably, at least till fulfilled, will always be a mystery. Commentator after commentator has written upon the subject, and with much self-complacency, and apparently to their own full satisfaction, seem to have established grand points of truth; and thus they come out continually, like Dr. Cumming, with their commentaries and their expositions in neatly printed, nicely bound little volumes, almost like a Christmas Annual, fixing the exact end of the world, and explaining all the minutiae of these

wondrous prophecies. Now I do not condemn those servants of God who, like Mr. Huntington and Dr. Gill, have written in a sober way upon the grand leading points, and traced out the general features of the book of Revelation. It is the attempt minutely to explain and definitely to fix the meaning of each prophetic symbol, and to assign to it its chronological place and order which I censure. For taking the general bulk of commentators on the Revelation, I believe we may say that when we have read and re-read all they have said upon the subject, we feel no satisfaction with their exposition. They give us long explanations of the seven seals, and the seven trumpets, and the sea of glass, and of the great red dragon with its seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon its heads, and fix the dates of all these events. They also explain the mystical number of the beast, and what the mark is that men receive on their foreheads; they bring out their arithmetical tables and calculate what is meant by the number 666, pronounce when Babylon is to fall, and the world to be destroyed, and settle the whole matter to their own satisfaction. But, as I said before, when we have read and re-read and examined all these learned explanations, we are just as we were. We have no clearer ideas who the beast is, nor what the mark is, nor what the number of his name, when he arose, or when he will come to his end. Let me not be misunderstood. No doubt there are certain grand outlines in the seven seals, and the seven trumpets, and that the Romish Church is represented as the woman sitting upon the beast. All this seems pretty clear, and is useful and instructive as a warning that we may not partake of her sins and plagues. It is when we come to fill up those several outlines in a clear and definite manner, so as to fix times and periods, that we seem to sink back into darkness and confusion, especially as many of these assigned dates have been already falsified. Yet does God's word of promise on this account fall to the ground? Is there not a blessing in hearing, and reading, and keeping the sayings of this book? And may we not have all this without being able clearly to understand the minutiae of the Revelation, or exactly interpret the meaning and fix the date of every prophetic symbol? To make this point more clear, I will mention four special blessings, of which we should have been

deprived unless we had been favoured with the book of Revelation.

1. First, the Church would have supposed that by the preaching of the word and the spread of the gospel, the kingdom of God would have been universally set up in the world, and that all men would come in as subjects and servants of Christ without difficulty and opposition. But the book of Revelation prepared her to see that anti-christian powers would arise who would set themselves against the Gospel, and never suffer, if they could help it, the truth to be established in its purity and power.

2. The next great lesson which the church learns from the book of Revelation is to prepare herself for suffering; that she is to endure trials and temptations, with great and hot persecutions; and, therefore, is not to look for a smooth and easy path.

3. The third lesson is to confirm the saints in their obedience, to assure them that God is faithful, that their path is to suffer and to obey, to hold fast what they have received lest any man take their crown, to oppose all anti-christian doctrines, principles, and practices, and maintain the faith of Jesus.

4. And the fourth grand lesson is, that there will be a blessed and glorious end for the persecuted, distressed, and troubled saints of God: that they will stand one day before the throne with palms in their hands, shouting victory, will be called to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and be for ever with the Lord. Thus, from this book, even from the prophetic part, we may learn most salutary lessons of heavenly wisdom, even though its minute details may be very obscure to our minds, and we may find in it much which we cannot understand.

But I shall now address myself, with God's help and blessing, to the words of our text; and in so doing, I shall endeavour to show you—

1.—*First*, what is the *patience* of the saints.

II .—*Secondly*, what it is to *keep the commandments of God*.

III .—*Thirdly*, what it is to *keep the faith of Jesus*.

I .—I have to show you what is the *patience of the saints*; and in so doing, I have first to explain who the *saints* are, and then what is the meaning of the word *patience*; for unless we get clear ideas into our minds who the saints are and what is meant by their patience, we shall not be able to enter fully into the meaning of the words, or know their blessedness and power.

i. By the *saints*—it is a scriptural expression, however much despised by man, we are to understand the people of God. But why are they called "saints?" They are so called for several reasons.

1. First, they are called saints because they were sanctified *by God the Father*; as we read in Jude: "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father." The proper meaning of the word "sanctified" is, being separated unto holy uses. In this sense, therefore, God is said to have "sanctified the seventh day;" that is, set it apart as a day of rest, that in it he might be honoured and worshipped. In a similar way, he said to Moses, "Sanctify unto me all the first-born." (Exodus 13:2.) And in this sense also he sanctified, or set apart for holy uses, the tabernacle and the altar, Aaron and his sons, the garments that they wore, and all the vessels of the tabernacle of which they made use. This act of God the Father, therefore, in separating a people from all the rest that they might be, as Peter speaks, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," (1 Peter 2:9), is the foundation of all sanctification in time. They were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love," (Eph. 1:4); and thus by union with Christ, and accepted in him, the Beloved, they were ever viewed as holy as being partakers of his holiness. In this sense, therefore, all the family of God, even those who are at present uncalled, are saints, as set apart and sanctified in Christ by the

Father, in his own eternal mind, and their state and standing fixed by sovereign decree. This may seem very hard to believe, and it is, indeed, a doctrine much fought against as very repugnant to the flesh. But only consider what a firm foundation is thus laid for the Church of Christ, and what a security it affords, that the storms and waves of time should never wash her off the Rock, on which she was thus eternally set. See, also, what a blessed source and fountain it opens for all sanctification to flow forth in time, and what a pledge it gives that all the purposes of God to bring unto himself a people perfect in holiness should be accomplished. When, too, we look at the coming in of the fall, with all the horrid depths of sin and evil in which it sank the whole human race, what infinite wisdom, goodness, mercy, and grace do we see in the original sanctification of the church by the will of God, that, like the ark of old, she might ride out the deluge of sin, and be preserved spotless in Christ through it all. What a certainty also it affords that every one thus sanctified must be saved; for how could God cast into hell any one whom he has set apart for such a holy purpose, as the knowledge and enjoyment of himself, and whom he has united to his dear Son to be a member of his mystical body for ever and ever?

2. But they are saints also, as being sanctified *by the blood of Christ*. Let not the expression startle or seem strange to you, for it is the very language of Scripture: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Heb. 13:12.) The highest and greatest benefits and blessings that we can enjoy, flow to us through the blood of Christ. By it we are *redeemed*, according to that immortal song: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." (Rev. 5:9.) By his blood, also, we are said to be *justified*, according to those words: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Rom. 5:9.) And by his blood also, we are said to be *sanctified*, as I have shown from the Scripture. Now this sanctification by the blood of Christ, is the expiation he has made of the guilt of sin, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. He thus sanctified and cleansed his

people from all their sin, by making full atonement for it, and then presented them unto God as washed from all their uncleanness. Thus, the saints are said to have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," that they might appear before God "clothed in whites robes" as a mark and emblem of their sanctity and purity. They thus stand "without fault before the throne;" and Christ presents them to himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish;" even now as holy in him as they will be in the day of his appearing, when they shall stand "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." (Eph. 5:27, Jude 24.)

3. But they are called "saints," also, specially and particularly, as sanctified by *the Holy Ghost*, who, by his sacred work upon their hearts, makes them partakers of that inward holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. By this they are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light: and thus as they are sanctified by the will of God the Father in the original decree (Heb. 10:10), and sanctified by the blood of his dear Son, through the offering of his body, once for all, by which he hath perfected them for ever (Heb. 10:14), so are they inwardly sanctified by the Holy Ghost, in his divine influences and operations, and are thus conformed to the image of Christ. If you, then, are a saint of God, you are so by virtue of the Father's sanctifying decree, by virtue of the blood of the Lamb shed for your sins, and by virtue of a special work of grace upon your heart, whereby the Holy Ghost has made your body his temple. O what privileges are these! To have an interest in God's electing love, in Christ's redeeming blood, and in the Spirit's work and witness! O what blessings are these, and what can earth offer or give to be compared, for a single moment, with them! And surely, if so blessed and favoured, so separated unto God's honour and glory, so redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, and so regenerated, renewed, and made partakers of God's holiness, we shall have some discovery, manifestation, and evidence of it both in our own conscience and in that of others. Such signal benefits, such unspeakable blessings, such displays of sovereign grace and

unutterable love and mercy, cannot lie hid or buried in obscurity. They will, and must be made, more or less, manifest in our hearts, in our lips, and in our lives.

ii. But as this discovery and manifestation of the grace of God forms the prominent feature of my text, I shall not further dwell upon it, but go on to show what is the "*patience*" of the saints. If then we are truly and really, and not in name and profession only, saints; if God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him; if we are sanctified by the blood of the Lamb, as shed for our sins, and regenerated and made new creatures by the work of the Holy Ghost upon our hearts, we shall manifest it by our patience; for our text points expressly to this mark as stamped by the hand of God upon the saints. "Here is the patience of the saints."

The word "patience" in the New Testament has two significations. It means, first, *endurance*; that principle, that gracious principle whereby he that is possessed of it endures to the end, is not overborne by the snares of sin and Satan, so as to sink under them, or perish in unbelief under the wrath of God. Whatever be his difficulties, his foes, or his fears, he endures unto the end and so is saved. But the word also means that Christian grace which is generally understood by the term "patience," as indicating that calm quietness of mind, that long and gentle forbearance, that humble and meek resignation under sorrow and suffering which is opposed to fretfulness, murmuring, peevishness, rebellion, and perverseness. It therefore signifies, as wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God—for there is a spiritual as well as a natural patience—that quiet submission to his will and word which distinguishes or should distinguish those who are under divine teaching and divine operation from the carnal, the worldly, and the ungodly. Hence John, writing under divine inspiration, and holding up the saints of God to view, that men might read their character, puts his hand upon a certain spot to distinguish them from all others. I shall presently show what were the peculiar circumstances of which John spoke; but observe for the present

how he says "Here is the patience of the saints." Can I also say "Here, here is the patience of the saints?" I have a large congregation before me this evening. Do I see saints before me? Am I preaching to saints, and can I say, as I look round upon this assembled body, "Here is the patience of the saints?" Are you, or any of you anxious to know whether you are saints, or have you received from God any evidence that you are? As then I trace out what is the patience of the saints, examine yourself by it whether you are a saint, by finding in yourself the patience of the saints. There is no use thinking or calling yourself a saint of God if you have no real claim to that title; there is no use ranking yourself among the highly favoured children of God, and then when you are weighed in the balance of the sanctuary not to have one real scriptural mark or evidence of belonging to the Lord. Thousands deceive themselves here, having a name to live when they are dead. May it not be so with you!

What is the first instance I shall bring forward of the patience of the saints, as signifying *endurance*?

1. Generally speaking, they have to endure *persecution*. There are few, speaking comparatively, whom the Lord calls by his grace, who have not, often at the outset, to endure persecution. In fact, the Scripture says, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Therefore, if you have never suffered persecution, you have never lived godly. You may have talked godly, but not walked godly; may have had godliness on your lips, but not godliness in your heart and life. Sooner or later, but usually at the outset, we have to endure persecution. But here is the patience of the saints, that they can endure it, and meekly too. For when the Lord in early days, what the Scripture calls "the days of our espousals," makes himself first known to the soul, and reveals a sense of his preciousness, it is a wonderful stay to support the mind under the heaviest persecution. What sacrifice can we not make if the Lord is felt to be on our side? If it be needful to give up what is near and dear to nature for his sake, how freely and willingly is the sacrifice made! And if we be called upon to endure losses, crosses, sharp and heavy persecutions for

his name's sake, how meekly, cheerfully, and happily can we endure them, if we have a sense of the Lord's goodness and mercy felt in our souls. Here is the patience of the saints, to endure meekly the persecutions that spring from a walk and life of godliness.

2. But this is a small part of what the saints have to endure. When the Lord is pleased to call them by his grace, he lays for the most part great loads of *guilt* upon their conscience. He shows them light in his own most glorious light; and by the application of the word with power to their conscience, opens up to them the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of their sins in particular. Now comes "the patience of the saints" to endure these loads of guilt, and not have them removed in a legal way or any other than a gospel way. When men get under convictions of sin, and these convictions are not from grace, they will get rid of them as soon as they can, and any way to get rid of them is gladly embraced. Amusement, the public-house (if in a sphere of life where this is resorted to), reading worldly books, travelling abroad, getting into cheerful company, occupying and entertaining the mind with the various sports of the day,—by these means many seek to extricate themselves from the convictions they feel, and they often succeed. They long to be deceived and they are deceived. Their convictions wear off, and they are twofold more children of Satan than before. But where there is a real work of grace; where the Holy Spirit is writing the law of God upon the mind and setting conviction home upon the breast, there is no getting rid of the burden of sin and guilt; for the saint of God dreads to have his wound healed without the application of balmy blood, his bonds taken off by any hand but that of the Lord, to speak a false peace to his own conscience, or think himself in gospel liberty when his own feelings tell him he is in miserable bondage. He therefore endures; he bears the yoke in his youth; he puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope, and would sooner carry his burden all his days, hoping the Lord will take it off before he die, than cast it off his own shoulders, or let any man take it off for him. He will come with his burden to the house of prayer, and if a word of

encouragement should be spoken to lighten that burden, he can take the comfort of it; but he must be well satisfied, from the power which attends it, that it is from the Lord, before he can feel his load sensibly lightened. He is also made very jealous of every mark and token, every testimony inward or outward in his favour, lest he should be deceived, take up with false comfort, and rest in a confidence which will not support him in a dying hour, or which he cannot plead with the Lord, as coming from his own gracious work in his soul. "Here is the patience of the saints;"—that they both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord; and though this may be long delayed, yea, for years, yet still they obey the admonition of the prophet: "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." How we see this hoping, waiting spirit in David: "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation." And what a solemn charge he gives his soul: "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." Compare this patient spirit of David with the hasty, rash spirit of Saul. Samuel had bidden him tarry seven days until he came to Gilgal; but Saul would not wait the appointed time, and offered the burnt offering. And what was the consequence of his not enduring to wait? That "his kingdom should not continue, for the Lord had sought him a man after his own heart," even David, who would wait, and not be hurried into disobedience by a hasty spirit and an unbelieving heart.

3. But as the Lord's people journey onward along the path of truth and righteousness, they will find many *temptations*. And here they will find a special need of patience, and of that branch of it which is meant by endurance. To such, a special promise is made. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." And why is he blessed? "For when he is tried (or rather, as the word properly means, "approved," as having borne and not been consumed by temptation) he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12.) We see, therefore, that there is a connection between enduring temptation and loving God; and thus, those who love not God, cannot endure temptation. There are many such, and they are described by the Lord as stony ground hearers, in whom the

word, as Luke speaks, "falls upon a rock," and who, "when they hear, receive the word with joy, but having no root, for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:13.)

Now temptations are of two kinds: some are painful to the flesh, which may be called more peculiarly trials, and some are pleasing to it, which may be called more peculiarly temptations, the original word embracing both meanings. Poverty, persecution, contempt, loss of worldly goods, shame for Christ's sake, opposition of friends and relations, self to be denied, a daily cross to be taken up, the old man to be crucified, sin to be resisted even unto blood, the world to be given up, the dictates of conscience closely followed, precepts to be obeyed, and the word of God taken as our guiding rule—these are trials which have to be endured. And to them we may add afflictions of various kinds both in body and soul, in family, in circumstances, painful events in the church and in the world, losses in business, and blows from professed friends or open enemies, with the daily exercises that spring from a wicked heart and an assaulting devil. These and countless other trials the saints have to endure, as we see all through the word of God; and it is their endurance of them which proves them to be saints. James, therefore, says: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." (James 1:2.) Is not this a strange matter of joy? But hear James's own explanation: "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:3, 4.) We thus see that "the trial of faith worketh patience," that is, endurance, the very thing of which we are speaking; and Peter, therefore, says, that "the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth." (1 Pet. 1:7.)

The other class of temptations are those properly called such, such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These are pleasing to the flesh, and are, therefore, more dangerous, because more ensnaring than trials. But some temptations are also distressing to the spirit, such as strong suggestions to infidelity, blasphemy, suicide, and despair, all

which are very grievous to be borne, but which the saint of God has to endure, that his faith may be proved in the furnace, and be "found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

4. Again the patience of the saints is manifested in their continually *waiting upon God*, in never giving up crying unto him, hanging upon him, and pleading his promises before the throne until he appear. "Here is the patience of the saints." Men under natural convictions may seem to pray; they may pour out a prayer when God's chastening is upon them; they may, as the prophet speaks, "howl upon their beds," and appear very anxious and distressed about their souls, and to such a degree that it would look as if there was in them a real work of grace. But let the affliction pass, let the trial be removed, let them be raised up from their sick bed and go again into the world, then they are just what, and just where they were before. It is with them as the word of God speaks: "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:22.) Not so the saint. He endures; he has eternal life in his soul, and what I may call immortal principles, such as the spirit of holiness, of truth, and of love. These immortal principles are planted in his soul by the gift and work of the Holy Ghost, and, therefore, his religion does not die away like that of nature; his convictions do not perish for want of moisture like the stony ground hearers; his prayers are not given up because they do not meet with immediate answers; he does not go into the world because he cannot find the presence and company and love of God as he could wish, shed abroad in his heart. There are certain principles communicated to his soul whereby he is made and manifested a saint; and these principles of truth and holiness, watered continually by the dew of God's grace, keep up the life of God in his soul. Here is the patience of the saints. If you turn away from the truth because the word does not always, nor perhaps often, come with power to your soul; if you neglect reading the Scriptures because you cannot always find in them sweetness and savour; if you withdraw your feet from the house

of prayer because you cannot always get what you want, or forsake the throne because you do not always feel access, you will prove yourself not to be a saint. But here is the patience of the saints, that having divine principles of faith and holiness, having spiritual and eternal life in their soul, they endure all that is laid upon them, live through all their trials, persevere in holding out and holding on; and by this they shew that theirs is not a religion that wears out and comes to nothing, but amidst a thousand difficulties, under the heaviest loads, sharpest trials, and keenest temptations, still lives however low it may sink, and is, from time to time, revived out of its deepest depression. O for a religion that is of God. The stoutest, strongest piece of earthly manufacture will wear out. If your religion has no deeper root than the work of man; has not been breathed into your soul and lodged in your conscience by the mouth of God, and planted in your heart by the hand of God, it will be plucked up; for our Lord said: "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." Here is the patience of the saints—the mark which God has stamped upon them, that they have a religion which can never be destroyed. They belong to a kingdom which cannot be moved; they have principles of eternal life in their breast; subject, indeed, to ebbing and flowing; subject to great darkness of mind and often much coldness and deadness of affection; subject to great and powerful temptations; subject to many severe and cutting trials, but with it all, built upon and consisting of immortal principles. Have you not, sometimes, wondered how the life of God has been maintained in your breast? How low it has sometimes sunk; how it has seemed, at times, to leave you almost without the shadow of a hope. When Satan has hurled in his fiery darts; when you have contracted guilt in your conscience by any act or word of disobedience; when great deadness of spirit and coldness of affection have seemed to freeze up every faculty within, have you not been ready to say? "All my religion is gone; if I ever had any, it is all gone now; I have not a grain left: O where is my religion? It is all gone; trampled under foot by sin and guilt, spoiled by my own disobedient acts or words, shot at by the devil until he has set all my carnal mind on fire; and here I am a dying man without a

grain of true religion, or a spark of real, vital godliness in my breast." Now this is a very low spot to come to; it is a very sad and gloomy place to be in. Yet very many are there; and I believe all are there, sooner or later, at some time of their experience. Now here is the patience of the saints, not to give it up. "It is a hard fight," you will both feel and say; "it is a desperate battle; it is a terrible struggle. Unbelief, infidelity, temptation, Satan's fiery darts, a guilty conscience, all press very hard; they all testify very powerfully against me; but I cannot give it up." Now in thus not being able to give it up, is the patience of the saints. Here they stand when others fall; here they rise when others sink; here conquer when others are defeated; and here they snatch the palm of victory when others perish under the destroyer.

ii. Now it is this endurance of trial and temptation which produces that other branch of patience which I have spoken of as also meant by the term. It is by trials and temptations, and by enduring them, that the grace of *patience*, as implying quiet and calm submission to the will of God, with a humble resignation to his dealings, is wrought out. This is, as it were, the crown of endurance, or, as James speaks, the perfecting of it. "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:4.) The "perfect work of patience," is, to have submission wrought out in the soul through the endurance of trials. We see this very clearly in the case of Job, as explained by James: "Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience (or endurance) of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord" (James 5:11); that is, the end of the Lord in trying him so sharply, and yet that in the midst of all, and at the end of it all, he was "very pitiful and of tender mercy." Now Job at first was not patient, but very peevish and rebellious, for he cursed his day; but at the end he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5, 6.) Then patience had its perfect work; submission was wrought in his soul; and he being proved a saint, as having endured temptation, has been ever since "taken for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

But I said I would make a few remarks upon the peculiar need which the saints had of patience as indicated in the text by the word, "here." It looked forward to the time when the beast was to be manifested, when he would "cause all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads." Now I do not profess to be able to explain what the beast is, or what is his mark; but, as far as I have any insight into the word of prophecy, I believe we have not yet seen the beast, at least, not in his full manifestation. We may have seen his beginning in Papal Rome, but we have not seen his full development. I cannot but think that some infidel power has to arise of a far more dreadful and anti-Christian character than any which has yet appeared, into which Popery may merge, and that when this comes to pass, then will be the time especially for the patience of the saints.

But these points I wish to leave, as I told you before, on account of the great uncertainty which rests at present on these prophetic declarations. When the time of the end comes, both the beast and his mark, and the number of his name, will be so clear that the saints will know who he is, and will show their patience in not receiving his mark, but endure his wrath by keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

II .—I pass on, therefore, to show what it is to *keep the commandments of God*. And may I repeat my words again? Looking around upon this congregation, may I say, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God? If you would see a church and people that keep the commandments of God, you must go to Gower Street?" Could *I* say that? could *you* say that? Might it be written upon a tablet outside and inside the walls of this chapel, "Here is a people that keep the commandments of God?" And yet, if you, as a church and people, do not keep the commandments of God, what right have you to call yourselves children of God? For only they that keep the commandments of God are the children of God. If a man keep not the commandments of God, he does not belong to God; he is not one

of God's saints; he is not one of God's servants. It is a most certain truth that he must keep the commandments of God to be manifested as one of God's saints. But you will say, "I thought we had done with the commandments." So we have, if you use the word "commandments" in the strict sense—the ten commandments—that is, in the letter though not in the spirit; for though we now have a new and better rule, even the precepts of the gospel, it is still true that the law is fulfilled by love, and that the "righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." But, apart from this, are there no other commandments than those which were written by the finger of God on tables of stone? Are there no New Testament commandments? Has God ceased to command? If so, why should John his servant write these words in this blessed Book? "Here are they that keep the commandments of God."

But, perhaps, the matter will be a little clearer, if I show you what are the commandments of God, and what it is to keep them, as God would have them kept.

Let me then show you some of them, for I cannot point out all the commandments of God and how we keep them.

1. One commandment of God was that the Gospel should be preached, according to those words—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This commandment the apostles obeyed when they went forth after the day of Pentecost. They set forth the Son of God in his blood and righteousness, in his death and resurrection; and told the people that faith in him was God's appointed means of receiving the blessings that were in him. This commandment is still kept by the servants of God in preaching the gospel, and kept also by their believing hearers. Now when this word of grace and truth comes with power to our souls; when Jesus is held up before our eyes in his Person, work, blood, righteousness, and what he is as the Son and Christ of God, and we are blessed with a living faith to embrace him as revealed in it, we keep the commandment of God. He says, in a preached gospel, "Believe in my dear Son." When then I believe

in the Son of God, as thus "evidently set forth," to use Paul's strong expression, "crucified among us" (Gal. 3:1), I keep the commandment of God.

2. So when Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," I keep his commandment by coming to him for this blessing, for "his commandments are not grievous," but full of mercy and love.

3. In a similar way, when I repent of my sins and feel godly sorrow for them; when I am favoured with true contrition of heart and brokenness of spirit, and have that godly sorrow which needs not to be repented of, I am keeping the commandment of God, who bids me in his word repent of my sins; for he commanded repentance to be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. When, then, my hard heart is softened and melted; when my eyes give forth their tears; when my bosom vents its sighs and groans; when I bow down before the throne in deep humility under a sense of my vileness, I keep the commandment of God which calls me to repent, and tells me that "He has exalted Jesus with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and forgiveness of sins."

4. So when we love the family of God; when our heart goes forth in tender affection to those in whom we see the image of Jesus, we keep the commandment of God. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." And if you manifest your love by suitable words and works—not loving in lip only, but also in heart and hand—then you keep the commandment of God.

5. When you seek the Lord's face for every blessing, watch his hand in every movement of life, live to his glory, come out of the world, and separate yourself from all evil to be his saint and servant; you keep the commandment of God, for he says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17, 18.) When, then, we come out from the

world, join ourselves to the people of God, and to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, we keep the commandment of God.

6. In the same way, also, when we set his word as the rule of our conduct; desire to know his will and do it; seek to please him and not ourselves or one another, but make his will to be our will, and his word our guide and monitor, then we keep the commandments of God. And if surprised, as all are liable to be, overtaken and entangled, and drawn aside from the path in which only peace is to be found, when we return at the Lord's invitation: "Return, ye children of men; return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings;" we keep the commandment of God, who would have us come back from where we have wandered, who would have us resort to the fountain to be washed and made clean. Then we keep the commandments of God. So that the more we believe in Jesus to the saving of our souls, the more deeply we feel the evil of sin, the more we hope in his mercy, the more we love his name, the more we cleave to him with purpose of heart; the more we forsake the world and the things of the world, and set the will of God as our guide, all the more we keep the commandments of God.

And these, be it observed, are not harsh, rigid commandments, thundered into our ears and conscience by a condemning law. They are sweet commandments; and carry with them their own blessing. Is it a hard command to believe in the Son of God when he gives us faith? Is it a hard commandment to be sorry for our sins, when we feel at what a price we were bought, even by the sufferings, blood-shedding, and death of God's dear Son? Is it a hard thing to come out of the world, God's enemy, and range ourselves on the side of godliness? Is it a hard thing to deny ourselves and crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts, when we know the bitter consequences of gratifying sin and self? Is it a hard thing to love the dear family of God, when they are made to lie close to our heart? You may as well say it is hard to believe an honest man when he tells the truth; it is hard to be sorry for having done wrong; it is hard to love one's wife and children; it is hard to be a faithful friend; it is hard to walk in the

paths of uprightness. Do you find all these things hard? And if you say, "I must lie a little because it is hard to speak the truth; I must sin a little because it is hard to be always walking in morality and rectitude; I must cheat a little, I must flatter a little, I must walk with the world a little, I must go to amusements a little, because it is hard to be deprived of our youthful pleasures and enjoyments;" will this stand with a tender conscience or on a dying pillow? How then will it stand in the eyes of God? Should a man say to God, "Thou hast asked a hard thing of me when thou biddest me to believe in thy dear Son; thou requirest something too hard when thou tellest me to repent of my sins and be sorry for them? Let me find an easier way; let me live in sin and then go to heaven when I die. Let me lie and cheat and flatter and dissemble, and then upon a death-bed have all the consolations of the most highly favoured saints." Will the Lord do all this just to please you? No. Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God; and no other have a name or place in the book of God, so as to warrant us in believing they are the saints of God.

III .—*And the faith of Jesus.* This is the third point which I said I would consider from our text. Let me repeat my words. Can I say, "Here is a people that keep the faith of Jesus? You must go to Gower Street Chapel to find a people that keep the true faith." Does not the colour rise up in your face when I ask this question? And are you not, individually and personally, when you think what is meant by the words, ready to hang down your head with shame and confusion, from a guilty conscience, or at least, in secret, to ask yourselves, "Lord, is it *I*? Do I keep the commandments of God? Do I keep the faith of Jesus?"

Now, to bring this point to bear more closely still upon your conscience and to search and examine your heart, let me endeavour to show you what it is to keep the faith of Jesus. Let me not trifle with immortal souls; let me not deceive you or myself in these solemn matters, for we stand before him whom we cannot deceive, and I hope would not willingly or wilfully mock.

"The faith of Jesus" may mean the faith of which he is the *object*, or the faith of which he is the *author*, and to keep it is, first to possess it, and then to hold it fast. We will take both meanings.

i. Jesus is the *object* of faith. His Person is set before our eyes in the word of truth, and especially in the ministration of the gospel, as the object to which our believing eyes are to look. Now, if we have never seen anything of the Person of Jesus, as revealed in the Scripture, or revealed in our heart from the Scripture, or under a preached gospel, we have no object for our faith to look at. We may have heard of him by the hearing of the ear, but we have never seen him by the eyes of our spiritual understanding, or had any such personal discovery of him as makes him spiritually and experimentally known. The veil is still upon our heart, unbelief still reigns supreme in our mind, and we know nothing as we ought to know, and must know, if we are to be saved. Speculative knowledge, or a mere belief in the letter of the word, will avail us nothing here. But if the veil of darkness, ignorance, and unbelief has been taken off our heart, and we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; if he has been revealed in us and unto us as the Son of God, then our faith has an object to look at, and we have One in whom we can believe, worship, hope in, and love. It is in this way, as the blessed Spirit is pleased to glorify him in us by showing him unto us, that we obtain a living faith in him. This is the faith of God's elect, the special gift and work of God, and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 1:1, Eph. 2:8, Gal. 5:22.) Now, the difficulty is, to keep this faith of Jesus; because, if ever our soul has been blest and favoured with a view of, or a visit from Jesus, we cannot keep the faith which we have received from it by our own unassisted strength. We can no more keep the faith of Jesus, than we could give ourselves the faith of Jesus. "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber or sleep." "I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." "He keepeth the feet of his saints." It is true that we are bidden to hold fast what we have received, keep the faith and so on; but these biddings imply God's enablings, and to be done in his

strength, not our own. He that gave must keep. This, then, is the great difficulty and the chief trial of faith. The Lord, therefore, in his message to one of the churches, commends her for "keeping the word of his patience," and gives her a promise: "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation;" but he adds, as if to stir up her diligence, "Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown." (Rev. 3:10, 11.) To another church he says, "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25); and to another, "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast and repent." (Rev. 3:3.) We see, therefore, that faith is as hard to keep as it is to get; and that the same power which first gave it, must maintain it. Many a young believer thinks that if he were once blessed with a manifestation of Christ, and had a sure evidence of pardoned sin, he would never doubt again. But you, who know what it is to have been so favoured, find that it is very different; and that to keep the faith of Jesus, to believe the Lord is yours, and you are the Lord's in spite of everything that tells you to the contrary—in the midst of unbelief, infidelity, guilt, doubt and fear, a trembling heart, an accusing conscience, an assaulting devil—is as much out of your power, as it was at first to believe in his name. Yet here is not only the trial, but the work of faith with power. In spite of every difficulty to keep the faith of Jesus; never to let go your hold of what God has put into your hand or dropped into your heart, but to keep it as the apple of your eye, will be, more or less, a matter of daily exercise and conflict; for to keep the faith of Jesus, is not to lock it up as if in an iron chest, but to keep it warm and active, living and moving, fighting and wrestling, praying and praising, in a believing heart. To keep the faith of Jesus, is to keep it, so to speak, in the same state as it was when God first lodged it there, that is, alive and living, tender, warm, and affectionate, united with hope and love, and above all things, with a good conscience. Now, if it were so easy to keep the faith of Jesus as some tell us it is, who say, "If once blessed always blessed; no more doubt or fear, darkness, guilt, or bondage, after a full and clear deliverance," how could John say, "Here are they that keep the faith of Jesus?" as if he would point our eyes to special characters; as if he would say, "Let me

show you a sight: come with me in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I will take you, and show you a peculiar people;" and as you look at them I will say to you, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Do you see that poor tried woman? Do you see that poor afflicted man? Could you look into his bosom, you would see great trials there, great difficulties, great perplexities, and a very strong inward conflict between faith and unbelief. But he keeps the faith of Jesus; he will not let him go; he reminds him of his promise; he pleads with him his own word; he says, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Here is one that keeps the faith of Jesus.

But the faith of Jesus often calls upon us to make great sacrifices; to cut off right hands, or pluck out right eyes. Now, who are they that keep the faith of Jesus? You profess to have the faith of Jesus, you desire to keep the faith of Jesus. Are you prepared to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth? If the Lamb lead through fire, will you walk through fire after him? If through flood, will you walk through the flood after him? If he lead you through a path of trial and exercise, will you follow the Lamb, as he goes before you, in it? Or will you say, "Thus far, Lord, and no further; I have followed thee up to this point; I can go no further with thee? I will follow thee if it do not cost me anything; if I have no trials, temptations, or difficulties to endure; if I have no cross to take up, no lust to mortify, no self to deny, I will follow thee. If it do not cost me money, nor cost me character, nor cost me idols, I will follow thee. But the moment it costs me anything, money, or suffering, or the frowns of my relations, family or friends, or to part with cherished idols, I can go no further; I stop then." If such be the secret language of your heart, for you dare not make it the language of your lips, you manifest yourself to be a hypocrite; you prove you are not one of those that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. You are half-hearted: your profession is hollow; your religion is not real; you have only the faith of man's giving; you have not the faith of Jesus. If you have the faith of Jesus, you will never leave him, as he will never leave you; you will never forsake him who will never

forsake you. You will cleave, you will cling, you will hang, you will never let him go; even if he thrust you away, you will fall down at his feet and cleave closer to him. Here are they that keep the faith of Jesus!

2. And as the faith of Jesus signifies the faith of which he is the *object*, so it signifies the faith of which he is the *author*. I might set you a hard task, if I told you to keep this faith in your own strength and power. I set no such task before you. I preach his word and tell you what the people of God are; but I don't tell you the faith for which I am contending is the gift, or work, or maintaining of man. I read in the word, "Christ is the author and finisher of our faith." Now, here is the mercy, that if he has wrought the grace of faith in your soul, he will keep that faith alive in your bosom. This is our comfort; this our encouragement, and this our hope. And will not this make you say? "Lord, I cannot keep faith alive in my own breast; I could not give it myself, and I cannot keep it myself; but if thou hast given me a little faith in thy blessed Majesty, keep that faith alive in my soul. Water it continually with the dew of thy grace; revive and draw it forth with the visitations of thy word and thy presence; smile upon it and make it fruitful in every good word and work.

May I lay my hand upon you and say,—"Here is the patience of the saints; here is he or she that keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?" "O," you say, "Don't put your hand upon me: put your hand upon somebody else. O I wish I were such as you might safely lay your hand upon." "But," says another, "Bring forth your hand and lay it upon me: I have no fear." Then I should fear for you. I am most afraid of those who are never afraid of themselves. But you that have fears, O that a word from my lips would disperse them, and you might find and feel you have a faith of the Lord's own giving—the end of which will be the salvation of your soul.

## **PATIENCE AND HER PERFECT WORK**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, Lord's Day Morning,  
Jan. 9, 1850

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:2-4

A singular race of men lived in the middle ages called Alchemists—a name still retained in the words "chemist" and "chemistry"—who spent their money, broke their spirits, and wasted their lives in a most unwearied search after three things; —First, a medicine that would cure all diseases, which they termed a "panacea;" secondly, a tincture, or, to use their language, an "elixir vitac," that would prolong life to an indefinite period; and thirdly, a powder, styled the "philosopher's stone," which would transmute lead and other base metals into gold. I need not tell you that all their laborious researches, which they pursued for several centuries, were utterly fruitless, and that as far as any satisfactory result was obtained, they might as well have tried to spin ropes out of sand, weave stockings out of gossamer threads, or twist clouds into ladders to reach the moon. Had they even succeeded, the results would have been full of vexation and disappointment. If they could have found a medicine to cure all diseases, would that have staved off old age and its attendant infirmities? If they could have prolonged life to an indefinite period, would not the grave sooner or later have closed over its victim? And if they could have changed tons of lead into gold, either the expense of the process would have swallowed up all the profits, or the abundance obtained by a cheap manufacture would of itself have destroyed its value when made.

But what they could not find in chemistry, is to be found in the gospel. Nature, however tortured in the furnace, or wooed in the

alembic, could work no such miracle as they sought to wrest from her bosom; but grace freely and without constraint has worked and still daily works them. There is a medicine which in the hands of Jehovah-rophi, the great Physician (Ex. 15:26), cures all diseases and dispels all complaints. As David speaks—"Who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3). And what is this "panacea?" The precious blood of Christ, which "cleanseth from all sin." Is not sin a disease? And if this precious blood cleanse from all sin, must it not be a universal medicine, and all the more valuable as curing soul disease, which must be infinitely more deadly and destructive than any bodily malady? Disease struck down the alchemist amidst his extracts and essences, and with all the more deadly stroke from his sacrificing his own health in the vain attempt to cure other's sickness. But our blessed Physician has not only revealed and brought to light an infallible medicine, but himself applies it with his own hands and makes it effectual to a perfect cure. And is there not in the same blessed Jesus the true "elixir vitac," or miraculous tincture of life? What did he say to the woman of Samaria? "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The alchemist only sought to add a few more years to human life; but Jesus gives life for evermore. And is not his grace the true "philosopher's stone," transmuting by miraculous agency leaden afflictions into golden consolations, earthly miseries into heavenly mercies, legal curses into gospel blessings, and vile sinners into precious saints? Thus the delusive dreams of the alchemists have become solid realities, and as far exceeding what they toiled and toiled in vain to find, as eternity excels time, and heaven surpasses earth.

One of these miracles of grace we find in our text—"My brethren," says James, "count it all joy when ye fall into temptations." What a miracle must that be when a man can take into his hands a load of temptations and trials, and, by an act of faith, transmute them into joy! If you could take up a piece of lead, and by putting a powder upon it and holding for a few minutes in a furnace, change it into a solid lump of gold, would that be a greater

miracle than turning light afflictions into an eternal weight of glory? How this is done we shall, I hope, with God's blessing, see from the words of our text, in opening up which I shall direct your minds to four leading features which seem to me stamped upon them:

I.—First, the "divers temptations" into which the people of God "fall."

II.—Secondly, the effect of falling into divers temptations: that it tries faith, and that "the trying of faith worketh patience."

III.—Thirdly, the apostolic counsel, "Let patience have her perfect work," that the saint of God "may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

IV.—Fourthly, the transmuting effect of grace enabling the tried and tempted family of God to "count it all joy" when they fall into divers temptations.

I.—I must, however, with God's blessings, before I plunge into my subject, attempt to explain as plainly and as concisely as I can the precise meaning of several words in our text, that we may have a clearer view of the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in the passage before us.

The word translated "temptations," embraces in the original a wider field of experience than the English term conveys. We must, therefore, enlarge the idea so as to embrace "trials" also; for the original word means not merely "temptations," but includes also what we understand by the term "trials." We must also further enlarge the meaning of the word "divers;" for the term in the original means not only diversified, various, of different kinds, but also many in number. So that we may thus enlarge our text, in perfect consistency with the mind of the Holy Ghost—"Count it all joy when ye fall into many and various trials and temptations." Thus we see that the words in this enlarged sense comprehend all the trials and all the temptations, however

numerous, however diversified, that the saints of God may fall into. Were it otherwise, were the text at all restricted, it would not apply to all the living family of God. Unless, for instance, it comprehended every trial, it might not comprehend your trial; Unless it included every kind of temptation, it might not include your peculiar temptation; and thus you as well as many who are deeply tried and peculiarly tempted, might be shut out of all the benefit and blessing contained in it.

I must also drop a word of explanation on the expression "fall into," for there is something very significant in the idea conveyed by it. The idea is of a sudden fall into an unexpected danger, as, for instance, of a traveller falling into an ambush of highwaymen; for the Lord uses exactly the same word when he speaks in the parable of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and "fell among thieves." (Luke 10:30.) He was journeying onward, as he thought, safely; but all of a sudden, he fell into an ambush of thieves, who surrounded him, stripped him, wounded him, and left him half dead. Or the expression may refer to the idea of a ship steering its onward course with apparent safety, and suddenly striking on a reef of rocks, or caught in a whirlpool, for we have the same exact word used of the ship which conveyed Paul to Italy; "And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground." (Acts 27:41.) Thus the word "fall into" divers temptations has a peculiar significancy, as expressing to the very life the way in which the saints of God often most suddenly and unexpectedly fall into the numerous and various temptation and trials which lie as if in the ambush as so many highwaymen, or lurk unseen as rocks and quicksands in the voyage of life. For you will bear in mind that the saint of God is both a traveller and a voyager. He has a way to tread, a road to travel in—the strait and narrow way, that leads to eternal life; and he has a voyage to make, for: "The Christian navigates a sea, Where various forms of death appear;" and it is "those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in deep waters, who see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." (Ps. 107:23-24.) The road in itself is rough and rugged, and the sea stormy and boisterous; but it is the perils of the way—"The rocks

and quicksands deep. That through the passage lie"—in other words, the trials and temptations spread through the course, which make the journey and the voyage so difficult and so dangerous.

But let us look at some of these dangers and perils, these "divers temptations" of our text;

I. And first let us take a glance at the "divers trials" into which the family of God fall. Well may they be called "divers," or many and various, as we have explained the word, for they spring from such numerous and different sources; but I shall only name four.

1, From above;

2, from beneath;

3, from without; and

4, from within.

1, Some are from above. "The Lord," we are expressly told, "trieth the righteous." "Search me, O God, and know my heart," says the Psalmist; "try me, and know my thoughts." The trial with which God himself tries his people are not only numerous and various, but for the most part of a very painful and perplexing nature, yet all precisely adapted to the nature of the case and exactly suited to the state of the person tried, as being planned by unerring wisdom, and weighed, measured, and timed by infinite love. Thus, as the God of providence, as the Maker of our bodies as well as the Creator of our souls, as the God of our families who gives and takes at will the fruit of the womb, some of his children he tries with poverty, others with sickness, others with taking away the desire of their eyes at a stroke, or cutting off the tender olive plants which have sprung up round about their table and twined round every fibre of their heart. How sudden too, how unexpected the trials! Heavy losses in business, deprivation of a situation, a sweeping away of the little all—the savings of a life—by some fraud or failure, trick or treachery,

riches making themselves wings and flying away, and poverty and want coming in as an armed man to plunder the wreck; how suddenly do such strokes come! Sickness, too, and disease, how swift their attack! We are at present in a very sickly season. Illness surrounds us on every side. New complaints, such as the fearful disease diphtheria, or revived maladies as small pox, are spreading far and wide, and making all tremble for themselves or their families; **Both these diseases were then very prevalent.** and as the saints of God are not exempt from their share in these afflictions, many who fear his great name are either themselves stretched on beds of languishing and pain, or are watching by the side of afflicted relatives and dying children. How suddenly, too, trials of various kind come! In one day Job, "the greatest of all the men of east," lost all the substance which God had given; and the father in the morning of ten living children sat in the evening in his lonely house childless and desolate. How labour pangs fell suddenly on Rachel, and the impatient mother who had cried out "Give me children or else I die," expired under the load of her coveted burden!

But these and all other temporal trials, though at times very severe to the flesh—though they need much grace to endure them with patience and submission—though often aggravated by our own fretfulness, and used as weapons by unbelief and Satan acutely to distress the mind; yet are they of little real moment when compared with spiritual trials which sink deep into a man's very soul. These, then, are the sharpest trials among those which come from above. And amongst them we may place as the keenest of all the hidings of God's face, as a mark of his displeasure. How David, Heman, Jeremiah, Jonah, and other Bible saints mourned and lamented under these hidings of the Lord's countenance—"Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled." (Ps. 30:7.) "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?" (Ps. 88:14.) To a saint of God, who has ever experienced the lifting up of the light of the Lord's countenance, nothing is more painful and trying than the Lord hiding his face; for then all his comfort withers—his very evidence appear gone—the former tokens for good are surrounded with a dark cloud, and

the felt displeasure of the Lord seems more than he can bear. But the blessed Lord himself drank of this bitter cup when he cried out—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And we must suffer with him if we are to be glorified together.

But the Lord also "trieth the righteous" by laying bare, and thus discovering to them the secret iniquities of the heart. It was so with Hezekiah, of whom we read—"Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." (2 Chron. 32:31.) So the Lord, to strip us of our own pride—to crush our vain confidence—to show us that all our strength is weakness, and that grace must freely sanctify as well as fully save, subdue sin as well as pardon it—often leaves us to the discovery of what we are in the Adam-fall. This is "searching Jerusalem with candles" (Zeph. 2:12); for "the spirit of man," that is the new man of grace, "is the candle **or lamp** of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly," or heart. (Prov. 20:27). "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins." (Jer. 17:10.) As, then, "in his light we see light," and "all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light" (Ps. 36:9; Eph. 5:13), sin after sin becomes discovered; and the teaching of the Spirit making the heart soft and the conscience tender, the soul is painfully and acutely tried by seeing and feeling these inward abominations. How markedly we see this in Job! "When he hath tried me," said he, "I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10); but in the furnace what a discovery was made of the corruptions of his heart, which before were to himself unsuspected and unknown! They had not escaped the searching eye of Omniscience; but they had much escaped the eye of the most perfect and upright man, according to God's own testimony, who then dwelt upon the earth. When, however this eminent saint of God was tried by afflictions and desertions, pain of body and agony of mind, then the deep and foul corruptions of his heart become manifest, and the most rebellious and unbecoming expressions found vent through his lips. You may think harshly of Job; but the greatest saint, the most highly favoured Christian put into the same furnace, would behave no better than he. If the Lord lay "his left hand under the

head," the sharpest temporal trials can be patiently, even gladly borne. All afflictions become light if "his right hand embrace" the soul. (Song 2:6.) But if he withdraw his presence, shut out prayer, withhold the light of his countenance, and leave us to the workings of our corrupt heart, what can be the issue but fretfulness and rebellion, murmuring thoughts, unbelief, and self-pity?

2. Other trials of God's saints are from beneath. We cannot explain the deep mystery why the Lord should suffer Satan to retain such power after Jesus bruised his head so effectually upon the cross, after he led captivity captive, and spoiled principalities and powers, casting them down from their seat of eminence, and making a show of them openly. That Satan should still be allowed to exercise such sway in this lower world, and even exercise his power against the saints who are dear to Christ as the apple of his eye, —surely, this is a mystery we cannot now fathom. But we know the fact from the authority of Scripture, the testimony of the saints, and our own personal experience, that the Lord does, for his own wise purposes, permit Satan very much to harass and distress the soul's of God's people. There is also this peculiarity in the temptations of Satan, that as he works by them on our carnal mind, we cannot often distinguish them from the sins of our own heart. We see this in Satan's tempting David to number the people, and as strikingly in the passionate exclamations of Job. These good men did not see the tempter, though his hot breath inflamed their mind. As in a forge or foundry, the blazing coals or molten iron are seen, but not the hidden tube through whose sustained blast "the melting fire burneth;" so many a vile thought, infidel suggestion, or horrible idea blaze up in the heart, blown into a flame through the black tube of the Prince of darkness.

3. Other trials, again, arise from without. There are few saints of God who in their passage through life have not had to suffer much from outward foes. Open persecution assails some; secret slander and misrepresentation attack the character and wound the mind of others. Their best friends, as they once thought

them, have sometimes proved the most cruel enemies. Where they expected nothing but sympathy and kindness, they have met with little but harshness and neglect. How acutely Job felt this when he complained, "To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend." But instead of pity, his "brethren dealt deceitfully as a brook" dried up by the summer sun, to which "the troops of Tema looked" for supply, but it had "vanished what time it had waxed warm" (Job 6:14-20.) David had a Saul, a Doeg, and an Ahithophel; and a greater than David a Judas who kissed but to betray. Micah warns us against our fellow men; "The best of them is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." "Trust ye not in a friend; put ye not confidence in a guide." (Mic. 7:4, 5.) And Jeremiah says—"Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." (Jer. 17:5.) In the face of such testimonies need we wonder that false friends are often greater trials than open foes? "Save me from my friends!" has been the bitter cry from many a heart.

4. But after all, our acutest trials are from within. Many who in the providence of God are comparatively exempt from severe outward trials, suffer an internal martyrdom. A heavy storm may be raging in the air; sleet, and snow, and hail, driven by a keen east wind, may darken the sky; and you in your warm room may see some poor traveller pelted by the pitiless storm. But you, though under shelter, may be racked with bodily pain, or be dying of slow disease, or be inwardly crushed by mental grief and sorrow. What is his trial compared with yours? What are fingers chilled with cold compared to hands burning with fever?

What is a sprinkling of snow on the clothes to a load of ice on the heart; or floods of rain without to a flood of passionate grief within? Thus outward trials are severe to the eye, but inward trials are severe to the heart. Poverty, sickness, bereavements, persecutions, do not crush and break the heart like guilt and remorse, the terrors of the Almighty, and the pangs of hell.

II. But let us now take a glance at the "divers temptations" into which the people of God fall, as distinct from the trials which lie in

their path. There are many saints of God whose life is a series of outward trials; and there are others who know less of external trial, but more of internal temptation. The Lord arranges every lot, for though it seem casually "cast into the lap, yet the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." (Prov. 15:33.) He appoints to every one of his children the peculiar path which he has to tread, and the number and weight of the burdens which he has to carry. Whatever trial, therefore, or temptation comes, it is of the Lord—either indirectly by permission, or directly by visitation. Many appear to pass through life without any deep acquaintance with temptations. Job's friends, though good men, seem to have had little or no experience of them; whilst Job, Heman, Asaph, Jeremiah, and Jonah were distracted by them. The same difference exists now.

Viewing, then, "temptations" as distinct from "trials" we may divide them into two leading branches—temptations which distress, and temptations which allure. The former are the more painful, but the later are the more perilous.

1. You might have walked for some time in the ways of the Lord without any deep experience of the infidelity, blasphemy, rebelliousness, enmity, and horrid wickedness of your fallen nature. This being the case, you were secretly lifted up with pride and self-righteousness. You had not yet had that deep discovery of yourself which was needful to humble you in the dust. You did, it is true, look in some measure to the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation, but not knowing your utter ruin and the desperate wickedness of your heart, you looked with but half a glance; though you took hold of him, it was but with one hand; and though you walked in him, it was but with a limping foot. The reason was that temptation had not yet shorn your locks, bound you with fetters of brass, and put you to grind in the prison house. But you suddenly fell into one of these "divers temptations." I will merely name two as specimens of their nature. Infidelity assailed your mind all in a moment as with a cloud of the thickest, densest darkness. A veil was at once cast over the Scriptures, for you could not even believe them to be

true. Objection after objection started up, and you shuddered with horror lest you should live and die a confirmed infidel. O what a trial was this! I have been here, and know what work it makes. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" We reject the thought with horror, fly back to past experiences, muster up all our evidences, think of the faith and hope of departed saints, cry to God for help to believe; but still the poisoned arrow is rankling in the heart. Or you may have been tempted to open blasphemy—even to that dreadful crime of blaspheming God. Job and Jeremiah were thus tempted, and many a child of God has been pursued night and day with the same horrible temptation. But what an evidence it is of the deep corruption of the human mind and the power of Satan that persons, say tender females, who hedged in by the restraints of society, education, and morality, have never dropped an unbecoming expression from their lips, or scarcely heard one uttered by others, may yet be assailed, when called by grace, by the most horrid temptations to blasphemy, from the very thought of which their natural feelings revolt, and of which they would have deemed themselves utterly incapable. I have known such cases, and therefore name them, that if any here present are passing through this "fiery trail," they may not be utterly cast down as though some strange thing has happened to them. (1 Pet. 4:12.) Many object to such things being even spoken of; but their very mention as experienced by those who fear God has sometimes put the temptation to flight, or abated its power.

But what a proof of the corruption of man—what an evidence of the power of Satan! I have stood by the sea shore and seen it spread out as calm as a mirror; and I have sailed on its bosom when not a breeze ruffled its face. But I have seen it in a storm when its billows rolled in full of foam and fury; and I have sailed over it when wave after wave dashed over the deck. But it was the same sea both in calm and storm. So the mind of man may be as calm as a slumbering sea, or raging as the stormy wave; but it is the same heart still. The breath of temptation, like the ocean wind, makes all the difference between calm, and storm.

But let me ask, do you not fear, reverence, and adore that great and glorious name which Satan has been tempting you to blaspheme? Is not this, then, a proof that from him these suggestions come? Of all Satan's temptations this seems to be the most infernal; of all his threats, this the most deadly. If Satan could but prevail upon you to speak the word, he would triumph over you as a lost soul. Therefore he does all he can to drive you into the very pitfalls of hell. But he shall not succeed, for the "the weapons formed against thee shall not prosper." His is the sin and his shall be the punishment.

2. But there are temptations not so distressing and yet more perilous. These I have just been hinting at are seen; but there are those which are unseen. The enemy can hardly disguise his plotting hand in the former; he spreads the snare, but does not show himself in the latter. In the one he is a lion from the swelling of Jordan, in the other a trailing serpent hidden in the grass. There are temptations so thoroughly adapted to our fallen nature—snares so suited to our lusts, and Satan has such a way of seducing his victim by little and little into the trap until it falls down upon him, that none can escape but by the power of God. I am well convinced that none can deliver the soul from these snares of the fowler, except that the mighty hand which brings up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay! Time, however, will not permit me to enter into all the diversified trials and temptations with which the Lord exercises his saints.

II .—I therefore pass on to show what is the effect of falling into these divers temptations; for that is the source of the joy which we are bidden to count them. There is no profit or pleasure in temptations and trials viewed by themselves, for "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." (Heb. 12:11.) It is the effect they produce by which we are to calculate our gains. And this effect is two-fold as here pointed out by the pen of the Holy Ghost. One is that it tries faith; the other that it works patience.

1. Whenever God communicates faith, he tries it. Why? That it may be proved to be genuine. Look at this in the case of Abraham. Abraham is a pattern to believers; he is therefore called "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11)—his faith being so eminent, and of a character so spiritual and gracious. But see how it was tried. For twenty-five years did the Lord try the faith he had planted in Abraham's bosom. Year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, was the Lord trying Abraham's faith. Sarah's petulance, eager craving for a child, jealousy of Hagar and then oppressing her till she fled out of the house, and their increasing years and delayed prospects, must all have deeply tried the patriarch's faith. But against hope he believed in hope, was "strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform." (Rom. 4:18-21.) Look, too, at David's case. How he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains, and was in continual apprehension of losing his life by the hand of Saul, so that he said, "There is but a step between me and death." View those two eminent saints of God; where their faith was tried to the uttermost! In fact, the stronger your faith is, the greater trials it will have to endure. The reality, the genuineness, as well as the strength of your faith are only to be evidenced by the amount of trial which it will stand. When for instance, you have been walking for some months in a smooth and easy path, and have scarcely experienced any trials for without or within, you have hardly known the strength, or indeed even the reality, of your own faith. You have been induced to take things very much for granted. You have not looked to the Lord as you should look to him; nor trusted to his strength as you should trust to it. You have been secretly leaning upon your own wisdom, resting upon a consistent profession, and mistaking ease in Zion for assurance of faith. But a trial comes. Where is your faith now? It sinks out of sight; you seem to have none; at least, none that you can make use of, or that does you any good. "O," you say, "I thought I could trust the Lord; but how can I trust him now that he does not appear? He hides his face; the heavens are as brass; he shuts out my cry. Why is this trial come upon me? O that I could believe! What shall I do if he do not appear? I am a lost man

without him. O that he would manifest himself in mercy to my soul!" The Lord is now trying your faith—whether you can trust to him in the dark as well as in the light—whether you can look to Jesus at the right hand of the Father with a single eye—whether you can rest the whole weight of your soul upon his blood and righteousness; or whether you want something in yourself to win the favour of God and recommend you to his notice. Thus the Lord tries your faith by putting a strain upon it. It is like the mode in which the strength of cannon is tested; the guns are doubly or trebly charged, and if they do not then burst, they are considered equal to anything that may be afterwards required of them. Or as cables are tried in the Queen's service; they are subjected to a strain very much greater than any they will be called upon to endure in actual use, and if they stand that heavy strain they are deemed fit for sea. In fact, not a sword or musket is entrusted to the soldier which has not been submitted to the most severe trial; or what would be the consequence? They might fail in the day of battle. Thus when the Lord calls a man to be a soldier and puts faith into his hand, he gives him a faith which he himself has tried, according to his own word;— "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." He will not put into the hand of his soldier a sword that will break to pieces when he meets the enemy, or a weapon that shivers in the hand at the first onset, but one with which he shall be able to fight, and wherewith he shall come off more than conqueror; and that is, tried faith, his own gift and work. I extend the word to all your temptations as well as your trials. You will one day see, if not now, how every one has worked to this end; to try your faith, of what sort it is—whether your heart is right with God—whether you are sincere before the heart-searching Jehovah—whether you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a faith of a divine operation, or whether your faith and hope are merely of nature's manufacture, put into your hand by self and Satan, to ruin you under a guise of religion.

II. But the effect of this trial is pointed out by the Holy Ghost; it "worketh patience." By "patience" we are not altogether to understand the word in its usual signification. The word

"patience" in Scripture means rather endurance. It does not so much signify that quietness of soul—that calm and silent, that uncomplaining, unrepining submission to God's will which we understand by the word "patience" as that firm and lasting endurance of all that God may see fit to lay upon us. It is a soldier's virtue rather than a hermit's; a stout man's fortitude under pain rather than a quiet woman's passive submission under suffering. "Ye have heard," says James, "of the patience of Job." Look at the context. "Behold we count them happy which endure." What follows? "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." Now it is just the same word in both expressions in the original, and should therefore have been rendered the "endurance" of Job; for not all his trials and temptations made him give up faith and hope.

1. Faith, then, viewed as the gift of God, and as proved by all the trials and temptations that he sends to exercise it, "worketh" the soldier-like endurance of which our text speaks. For how is a soldier made? Send him to the Crimea or to India; that will make him a soldier. He does not learn the stern duties of his calling by being paraded upon Aldershot heath or by going through his drill upon Southsea common. He must go into actual war; he must hear the cannon roar and see the sabres flash in his face; give and take cut and thrust; lie all night upon the battle-field; rush up the steep breach amidst the groans of the wounded, and press on determined to conquer or die. Alma and Inkerman make the soldier—the experience, not the theory of war. How is the Christian soldier made? By going to chapel —by reading the Bible—by singing hymns—by talking about religion? Just as much as the veteran warrior is made at Aldershot or Southsea. He must go into the battle and fight hand to hand with Satan and the flesh; he must endure cruel wounds given by both outward and inward foes; he must lie upon the cold ground of desolation and desertion; he must rush up the breach when called to storm the castles of sin and evil, and never "yield or quit the field," but press on determined to win the day or die. In these battles of the Lord, in due time he learns how to handle his weapons, —how to call upon God in supplication and prayer, to trust in Jesus Christ

with all his heart, to beat back Satan, to crucify self, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. Religion is not a matter of theory or of doctrine; it is to be in the thick of the battle, fighting with the enemy hand to hand, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder. This actual not sham warfare makes the Christian soldier hardy—strengthens the muscles of his arm—gives him skill to wield his weapons, and power sometimes to put his enemies to flight. Thus it "works endurance," makes him a veteran, so that he is no longer a raw recruit, but one able to fight the Lord's battles and "to endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." What then have been your best friends? Your trials. Where have you learnt your best lessons? In the school of temptation. What has made you look to Jesus? A sense of your sin and misery. Why have you hung upon the word of promise? Because you had nothing else to hang upon. Thus, could you look at the results, you would see this—that trials and temptations produced upon your spirit the two effects of which the text speaks; that they tried your faith, and that sometimes to the uttermost, so that in the trial it seemed as if all your faith were gone; and yet they have wrought patience—they have made you endure. Why have you not long ago given up all religion? Have your trials made you disposed to give it up? They have made you hold all the faster by it. Have your temptations induced you to let it go as a matter of little consequence? Why, you never had more real religion than when you were tried whether you had any; and never held faith with a tighter grasp than when Satan was pulling it all away. The strongest believers are not the men of doctrine, but the men of experience; not the boasters but the fighters; not the parade officers in all the millinery of spotless regimentals, but the tattered, soiled, wounded, half-dead soldiers that give and take no quarter from sin or Satan.

I. But the word has another meaning, one in more strict accordance with the word "patience;" that is submission to God's will. When the Lord puts us in the furnace, we go in kicking and rebelling. Our coward flesh shrinks from the flame. But when we have been some time in the furnace and find that we cannot kick ourselves out, and that our very struggling only makes the coals

burn more fiercely, —at last, by the grace of God working in us, we begin to lie still. It was so with Job. How he fought against God! How his carnal mind was stirred up in self-justification and rebellion till the Lord himself appeared and spoke to his heart from heaven. Then he came to this point—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eyes seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Then the Lord accepted him and delivered him; turned his captivity, pardoned, and blessed him. So with Abraham, when he submitted to sacrifice Isaac, God appeared to deliver him. So with David, when he submitted to the Lord's chastening hand, he brought him back to Jerusalem. But this will be more evident in our next point, to which I now hasten.

III.—"Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." There is a work for patience to perform. Every grace of the Spirit has a certain work to do. As in a large manufactory, every hand knows his place and the work he has to do, so in the wonderful piece of divine machinery—the work of God upon the soul, every grace of the Spirit has its separate work to perform. Faith does not do the work of love, nor hope that of faith, nor love that of patience. Each several grace, like separate wheels in some beautiful machine. has its own place and its own work. Patience then has its work; and what is that? Twofold, according to my explanation of the word.

1. To endure all trials, live through all temptations, bear all crosses, carry all loads, fight all battles, toil through all difficulties, and overcome all enemies.

2. To submit to the will of God—to own that he is Lord and King—to have no will or way of its own, no scheme or plan to please the flesh, avoid the cross, or escape the rod; but to submit simply to God's righteous dealings, both in providence and grace, believing that he doeth all things well, that he is a sovereign "and worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11.) Now until the soul is brought to this point, the work of patience is not perfect; it may be going on, but it is not consummated. You

may be in the furnace of temptation now, passing through the fiery trial. Are you rebellious or submissive? If still rebellious, you must abide in the furnace until you are brought to submission; and not only so, but it must be thorough submission, or else patience has not its perfect work. The dross and slag of rebellion must be scummed off, and the pure metal flow down. It is all of God's grace to feel this for a single moment. But are there not, and have there not been, times and seasons, in your soul, when you could be still and know that he is God? when you could submit to his will, believing that he is too wise to err—too good to be unkind? When this submission is felt, patience has its perfect work. Look at Jesus, our great example; see him in the gloomy garden, with the cross in prospect before him on the coming morn. How he could say—"Not my will, but thine be done!" There was the perfect work of patience in the perfect soul of the Redeemer. Now you and I must have a work in our soul corresponding to this, or else we are not conformed to the suffering image of our crucified Lord. Patience in us must have its perfect work; and God will take care that it shall be so. As in a beautiful piece of machinery, if the engineer see a cog loose or a wheel out of gear, he must adjust the defective part, that it may work easily and properly, and in harmony with the whole machine; so if the God of all our salvation see a particular grace not in operation, or not properly performing its appointed work, he by his Spirit so influences the heart that it is again brought to work as he designed it should do. Measure your faith and patience by this standard; but do not take in conjunction, or confound with them the workings of your carnal mind. Here we often mistake; we may be submissive as regards our spirit—meek and patient, quiet and resigned, in the inward man, yet feel many uprisings and rebellings of the flesh; and thus patience may not seem to have her perfect work. But to look for perfect submission in the flesh, is to look for perfection in the flesh, which was never promised and is never given. Look to what the Spirit is working in you—not to the carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, and therefore knows neither subjection nor submission. Look at that inward principality of which the Prince of peace is Lord and Ruler, and see whether in

the still depths of your soul, and where he lives and reigns, there is submission to the will of God.

But it adds, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The word "perfect" in the Scripture does not mean, as applied to a saint of God, anything approaching to the usual idea of perfection, as implying spotless, sinless holiness, but one who is matured and ripened in the life of God—no longer a child but a grown man. As a tree grown to its full stature is said to have attained perfection; so when the Lord the Spirit has brought forth the work of patience in your soul, as far as regards that work you are perfect, for it is God's work in you; and so far you are "entire," that is, possessing all which that grace gives, and "wanting nothing" which that grace can communicate. To submit wholly to the will of God, and be lost and swallowed up in conformity to it, is the height of Christian perfection here below; and he that has that wants nothing, for he has all things in Christ. What, then, is the greatest height of grace to which the soul can arrive? Where did grace shine forth so conspicuously as in the Lord Jesus Christ? and where did grace manifest itself more than in the gloomy garden and on the suffering cross? Was not the human nature of Jesus more manifestly filled with the Spirit, and did not every grace shine forth in him more conspicuously in Gethsemane and on Calvary than when enraptured upon the Mount of Transfiguration? So there is more manifested grace in the heart of a saint of God who, under trial and temptation, can say, "Thy will be done," and submit himself to the chastening rod of his Heavenly Father, than when he is basking in the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness. How often we are mistaken in this matter—longing for enjoyment, instead of seeing the true grace makes us submit to the will of God, whether in the valley or upon the mount!

IV.—But to come to my last point, which is the grand key of the whole, and on which I need not tarry long, as I have already anticipated it; we are to "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations. I have been setting before you a problem in arithmetic—a sum in compound addition; run it up or down, and

look at the sum total—"Joy." Take all your trials and put them down; next add all the temptations with which your mind has been exercised—make a row of them; now cast them up, and what is the full amount? A word of three letters—a sum more valuable than if it were three figures, and each figure a nine—"Joy." That is the sum total, according to the calculation of the Holy Ghost of all your trials and all your temptations. You are to "count it all joy." What mysterious arithmetic! How unlike the ciphering taught in schools! How different from the sums and problems set on slates and copybooks! How different, too, a result does the Lord the Spirit bring out from your own calculations when you looked at them one by one, without casting up the whole sum! Then "count it all joy" when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that their effect is to wean you from the world—to endear Christ—to render his truth precious, and to make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Are you satisfied with the solution of the problem? Can you write down your own name at the bottom of the sum and say, "it is proved; I carry the proof in my own bosom?"

## **The Peace of God Keeping the Heart and Mind**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 25, 1862

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." Philippians 4:6, 7

Unbelief is the stoutest, strongest limb of the old man of sin, and therefore the direst foe and sorest plague of every child of grace. As by faith we take hold of God's strength, embrace the promises, and fight that good fight in which, however prolonged may be the contest, victory in the end is certain, faith may be called the right arm of the new man of grace. And as unbelief puts far away the evil day, thrusts back the truth of God, and fights that evil fight, of which, though prolonged with most undying obstinacy, the end is certain defeat, unbelief may be called the right arm of the old man of sin. Thus we see how widely these two opposing principles, faith and unbelief, differ from each other; in fact, we may say that they differ in every point of contact or comparison. They differ in their birth and parentage; in their growth and development; in their nurture and education; in their food and appetite; in their dress and appearance; in their ways and habits; and in their final issue and last end. Let me, however, for the sake of clearness and distinctness, illustrate these points of opposition at greater length.

Faith, as the hymn says, "owes its birth to sovereign grace," and is begotten by the same power, and at the same moment, as that whereby and that wherein the Lord the Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual and eternal life. It has indeed a high and heavenly parentage, as deriving its birth and being from the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift. Unbelief, however, is its elder in age, for, as a limb of the old

man of sin, it first sprang into existence on that sad and fatal day when Adam sinned and fell. We can thus trace its lineage back to Adam's loins, and, as a part of our miserable inheritance from him, it lay with us in our mother's womb when we were "in sin and shapen in iniquity." Faith is born, like the babe in nature, weak and feeble, but it early sucks the breasts of consolation, thrives upon the pure milk of the word, and, when it can eat and digest strong meat, grows in some cases so strong as to be able to "thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff;" yea, in one instance, as fully authenticated in an ancient record, was powerful enough to overcome God and to prevail over the strength of Israel. (Gen. 32:28; Hosea 12:3, 4.) Unbelief is born vicious, like one of our English kings, crook-backed Richard, with teeth already in its head; grows up stubborn and obstinate, and, when it comes to mature age, is another Richard in ambition, crime, and cruelty. Faith goes early to school—to the best of all schools, the school of Jesus; is from its tenderest years docile and teachable; loves to sit in the best of all places, at the Redeemer's feet, there meekly and affectionately listening when he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Nor does it leave him for any other teacher, but goes on learning fresh lessons from those lips into which grace was poured, until it is conformed to his suffering image, and then, transformed into sight, rises to see him as he is face to face. Unbelief goes to that large public school of which the prince and god of this world is the head master, where it has for its school-fellows the Lust of the flesh, the Lust of the eye, and the Pride of life; takes its degrees in the infidel university of Darkness; and, fortified by learning and strengthened by the arguments of carnal reasoning, daily becomes more inveterate in obstinacy and enmity against the truth of God, till ultimately it dies in its sins, and often yields up its miserable life in the very jaws of despair. Faith is very choice in its food from its very birth; loves the pure milk of the word, for nothing else in tender years agrees with its delicate constitution; and, when it can eat meat, nothing delights it so much and makes it so fat and flourishing as the flesh and blood of the Lamb. But unbelief, as born with teeth, always chooses the

toughest morsels it can find, though it is never able to digest them, as is plainly evident from its mangy hide and lean and lanky condition. But as an ass loves to browse upon thistles and a vulture seeks after carrion, so unbelief is ever hunting after objections, difficulties, and perplexing questions; is never better pleased than when it can mumble over a hard, dry bone, and when it finds it too strong for its own teeth, to throw it down to break the jaws of others. Faith loves to be clean. Well knowing and deeply feeling nature's filth and pollution, it loves to wash in the fountain open for all sin and all uncleanness; to bathe in the river of regeneration and sanctification; and, when cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, it delights in being dressed in the choice apparel of Christ's righteousness. Unbelief loves to be dirty; neither washes its skin nor clothes; delights, as the swine, to wallow in the mire; and like a beggarly tramp, nothing pleases it better than its own righteousness, which, according to God's testimony, is but "filthy rags." Faith's ways are good ways: she chooses the path of righteousness, and finds no rest for her feet except on the King's highway, the way of holiness; loves the company of God's people, is the enemy of the world, and the friend of God. Unbelief loves to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners and to sit in the seat of the scornful; is the friend of the world and the enemy of God. And as their ways, so their end. The end of faith is the salvation of the soul. The end of unbelief is everlasting damnation; and perishing as it were by its own hands, it often, like Saul of old, falls upon its own sword, and dies under the wrath of the Almighty.

But, you will say, "What has all this to do with the text?" I answer, much every way. Our text, graciously understood and rightly interpreted, is a blow aimed directly at the head of unbelief, and a blessed help and encouragement to faith. Faith finds in it choice picking; unbelief mumbles over it like a dog over a well-gnawed bone, though it is too strong for it to break, and too hard for it to digest. Faith can say, in the language of the text, "Be careful for nothing;" unbelief mutters, "Be careful for everything." Faith says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

Unbelief murmurs, "What can prayer do for me? Can prayer feed a hungry body? Can supplication fill a lean cupboard? Can thanksgiving bring me an increasing business, send me good customers, buy for me cheap, and sell for me dear? Can going on my knees amuse my mind, feed my lusts, or put money into my pocket? No. Give me a good handsome independence, plenty of the world, and health and strength to enjoy it. And as to prayer, if ever I should want it, nothing can be better than the Common Prayer Book, or the old prayers that my mother taught me when I ran by her side as a child." Faith says, "The peace of God passeth all understanding; and O may that peace keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus." Unbelief says, "I know nothing and care to know nothing about the peace of God keeping either heart or mind. I would rather keep my carriage, or keep a good balance at my bankers; or if I cannot fly so high as that, be comfortably kept by a good farm, a good shop, or good wages, hoping after all I may go to heaven just as well as those people who make such a fuss about religion."

But, without further dwelling on these points, I shall, with God's help and blessing, take the side of faith this morning, and aim, if I can, some home thrusts against unbelief; and in this attempt to side with God's friend and thrust at God's foe, I shall endeavour to bring before you three leading points which I seem to see in the text before us.

I .—*First, a gracious caution: "Be careful for nothing."*

II .—*Secondly, a comprehensive precept: "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

III .—*Thirdly, an encouraging promise: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

I .—Let us first consider the gracious caution addressed to the saints of God, "*Be careful for nothing.*"

i. Must we take these words in their full and literal extent? Are we to abandon all thought for the future? Is no provision whatever to be made for one's self or one's family? That would be contrary to common sense; and though the word of God is *above* common sense, it is never *contrary* to it. In fact, what should we do, or what would become of us as men and women in this world if we were to carry out the words of the text as strictly and as literally as the words might be strained to signify? Many of us have our bread to earn, and that by the daily sweat of our brains or our brow. If this direction to be "careful for nothing" were taken to its full extent; if the merchant paid no attention to his books; if the tradesman took no notice of his shop or customers; if the farmer neglected going about his farm, left his ploughing and sowing to manage themselves; or, to take lower ground, if the labourer lay in bed, saying, "Let the morrow take thought for itself, I shall not get up to go to work this morning. Am I not told to be careful for nothing? Why need I then care to finish my job, serve my master, or get bread for my family?" What would be the issue? Why, the merchant would soon be in the *London Gazette*, the tradesman in the County Court, the farmer in the Queen's gaol, and the labourer in the parish Union. We cannot, then, take the words in their full literal extent, so as to exclude all care and all thought for the things of time and sense. Why, in fact, the very food we have eaten this morning; the very clothes we have on; the very place of divine worship in which we have met; the very pulpit in which I stand; and I might add, even the very Bible from which I preach, as a book printed by human hands, are all the fruit of care, industry, and skill, and have all sprung from the exercise of prudential forethought. But not only is it contrary to common sense to bestow no thought or care upon the concerns of this life, but to other parts also of God's word; and we know that precept can never clash with precept, or Scripture contradict Scripture. Do we not read, "Owe no man anything?" (Rom. 13:8.) But how could you fulfil that precept if you did not take care, and very often most anxious care, to make both ends meet? A man might say, as many loose professors have said by deed, if not in word, Be careful for nothing. It does not matter what I spend, what I

beg, or what I borrow, how extravagantly I live, or how deeply I sink in debt. I am careful for nothing; no; not even for the interest of my family, or my own good name, or my character as a Christian. Let me only have plenty to eat and drink, it matters little to me what may be the bills of baker or brewer, the claims of my landlord, or my debt to the grocer. God is able to keep me without my being so anxious not to get into debt, or, if I do, he can soon raise me up a rich friend to pay all my debts for me."

Take another text of similar purport: "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. 5:8.) Then not to use every effort of honest industry to provide for one's own immediate family, and one's own house, is according to the apostle's declaration, to act worse and be worse than a man who denies the faith altogether, and is at open war with God and godliness.

But take another text bearing upon the same point; "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." (2 Cor. 8:21.) But how is a man to do this in this day of eager competition, and at this advanced era of active civilisation and untiring industry, unless he labour, according to the original curse, with the daily sweat dropping off his brow, and take every lawful means, according to his station in life, to make that honourable provision for his family which shall shield them from the keen stings of poverty, and even in the sight of men procure them that general respect which so becomes a profession of religion?

But we are also told to be "not slothful in business." (Rom. 12:12.) The gospel has a purifying influence upon everything which it touches. It thus carries itself into the very domain of business, professional or mechanical, and hallows and sanctifies industry of mind or hand in every station of life.

But as indulgence in slothfulness and carelessness would be utterly to pervert our text, and be not only contrary to common

sense but to the clear precepts of God's word, it is not worth while to spend breath in exposing any further an error like this.

The great error, unhappily, lies on the opposite side. There are many more anxious for everything than those who are careful for nothing in the sense that I have just explained it. For one who perverts the text to the service of sloth, there are ten who break it to the service of carking care and covetous anxiety. Let me, then, endeavour to show you the real meaning of the gracious caution, "Be careful for nothing."

ii. And first let me explain the *literal* meaning of the word. It does not signify, in the original, care and forethought, but a mind, as it were, "cut asunder," or what we call racked and torn with anxious care. Neither, in its primary meaning, then, nor in its spiritual application, does it exclude or forbid necessary care, honest and unceasing industry, or discourage that prudential management of our worldly affairs which is often a merciful gift of God, and on which, as such, his blessing usually rests. Amongst the heavenly graces and divine gifts bestowed upon that "virtuous woman," whose price is far above rubies, is that "she worketh willingly with her hands, looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." (Prov. 31:13, 27.) But all this may be done without being bowed down by anxiety, which after all is but the fruit of unbelief. To be "careful for nothing," spiritually viewed, specially excludes those carking cares, those gnawing anxieties, those constant questionings whether the Lord can provide for the coming morrow, which to many form an unceasing source of that sorrow of the world which worketh death. Could we look into many gracious hearts we should see lying in their bosom many a carking, gnawing, biting, burning care, which, as a smouldering flame, is consuming their very vitals. This is not faith but unbelief; not the warm influence of a holy flame of heavenly love, but a smoke that darkens the mind and spreads a lowering cloud over the new man of grace in the heart. The apostle, then, meeting that unbelieving spirit, that God-dishonouring besetment, says, "Be careful for nothing." Be not ever racked and torn with anxiety how the rent is to be paid; how an expiring bill

is to be met; how the family is to be educated; how the dear children are to be provided for; what will become of them when you die; who then is to take care and charge of the little ones, and be to them a parent and a friend. To be thus racked and torn with unceasing anxiety, just as if there were no God in heaven who had so long fed and clothed you, or that when you died God would die with you—*that* is the biting, gnawing, over-anxious carefulness against which the apostle gives us a gracious caution. And dare we say that it is a needless one? For do we not see how many gracious persons of small incomes and large families, seem often much more tried about the concerns of the perishing body than the interests of the immortal soul?

iii. But let us take higher ground. Let us leave the valley and mount a little up the hill, to get, if we can, a view of Zion's towers and bulwarks, and be thus somewhat raised above the mists and fogs of this lower ground, the swamp, the morass, and the flooded fen, where we have just been lingering among its ageish, shivering inhabitants. Even on the higher ground of the soul's eternal interests, there is often many an unbelieving, God-dishonouring, anxious care against which the Blessed Spirit would drop a salutary caution.

1. Do you not see, for instance, sometimes a *heavy trial in the distance*? Filled with unbelief and fear, you scarcely know how that trial is to be endured when it shall come into closer view, and fall with crushing weight upon you. You see it now only just looming in the far distance. At present, perhaps, it is like the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which the prophet's servant saw from Carmel's woody top. But as you gaze upon it, you see it, in fact or figure, in reality or imagination, spreading itself gradually over the sky, and you scarcely know whether there may not come out of that dark cloud a lightning shaft or a pealing storm of rain and hail which may sweep you off your feet. But are you not making a trial of the trial before it really comes? How do you know whether the clouds may not break and the threatened storm pass away? Or even supposing the storm should come, have you not found support under every past trial? Has not

strength been always given you according to your day? Did any affliction ever overtake you in which the Lord did not give you the needed support? Why, then, anxiously forecast the coming morrow, and sink with doubt and fear in the prospect that when the trial overtakes you, you will not have strength to bear up under the rushing storm? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof!" But take one instance of this as an illustration of my meaning. Many of the dear family of God have looked to a dying bed with much fear and anxiety how their evidences for eternity then might stand the threatened storm; whether the Lord would then shine in beams of mercy upon their soul; would they then leave a blessed testimony behind that the Lord was the strength of their heart and their portion forever; would Jesus be with them in his blood, love, and power, when the cold sweat sat upon their brow and the rattles in their throat sounded the near approach of the grim king of terrors? And yet how many of the dear saints of God who, as the apostle says, "through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage," have made a blessed end when the appointed season to depart came near! When dying time came, dying faith came with it. The Lord was with them when they passed through the gloomy valley of the shadow of death; his rod and staff supported them all the way through it, and they found strength for a dying body to yield up without pain its last breath, and support for a never-dying soul to pass in sweet assurance into the arms of its God.

2. But take another case, that of *temptation*. When temptation begins to work—and temptation often begins by small degrees—many a saint of God has trembled with apprehension what that temptation might prove to be to him when it assumed greater strength. Has not sometimes an infidel temptation darted as it were through your mind like a lightning flash? Or a sensual temptation toward a particular object may have just begun to entangle the roving eye and the wandering heart. A child of God from past bitter experience knows his own weakness, and what he is in the presence of temptation; how unable to stand against it, how soon overmastered by it. If the Lord, then, do not appear with the temptation to make a way to escape, he trembles at the consequences for his soul's security and peace. Our blessed Lord

had an eye to this when he said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22:31.). But even here there may be undue anxiety. As I asked you before as regards trial, have you not found also in the matter of temptation that with the temptation God made a way to escape, so that you were able to bear it? Why, then, forecast temptations to come, trembling beforehand that they may prove your downfall, when you have in your own bosom the proof that you have been supported under temptations past, and have found the Lord faithful to his promise in bringing you safely through them?

3. Or take again such a case as your present *state* and *standing* in divine matters. Many of the Lord's dear family are sorely tried with doubts and fears of their interest in Christ from almost the beginning of their course down to the very end of their days. Either from the weakness of their faith, or from want of clear manifestations and blessed deliverances, it is a fact that many of the Lord's quickened family are pressed down all their days with anxious questionings as to their state and standing before God for eternity. But the Lord would say to them, as a gracious caution against being overborne by these doubts and fears, "Be careful for nothing." It is good to be well and deeply exercised about the important interests of our soul, and never to rest satisfied with anything short of a sweet assurance of our interest in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Son of God. But may I not ask you this question in all faithfulness and in all friendliness, "Do you find any real soul-profit in always questioning the work of grace upon your heart; in ever doubting whether God has done anything for you by his Spirit and grace; in ever yielding to the suggestions of unbelief, and giving way to Satan when he would persuade you you were a hypocrite?" You know how much opposed I am to a dead assurance, and how I am continually insisting upon this point that the Lord alone can speak peace to the soul. But I also say this, that I, for my part, never got anything by doubting; that all that I have got I have got by believing; and that though doubts and fears will continually work in my mind as well as in yours, yet that they are neither fruits of

the Spirit nor have anything to do with the work of faith, the patience of hope, or the labour of love. When, then, Satan would bring against you every evidence to condemn and hide every evidence to acquit, it will be your wisdom if you can speak to him as the three children said of old to the Chaldean King, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods." (Dan. 3:16, 18.) So you, in a sense, may, if the Lord help you, meet Satan even upon this ground, and say, "O king of darkness, I am not careful to answer thee in this matter. I cannot and will not, at thy bidding, give up my hope that the Lord has done something for my soul, and made himself precious to my heart in the past. There let me take my stand. He is able to deliver me from the burning, fiery furnace which you would cast me into. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king over all the children of pride, that I will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. If I must perish, I will perish at the Lord's feet, fighting against thee and thy evil ways to the very last moment of my expiring breath."

II.—But I now pass on from this gracious caution, "Be careful for nothing," which I may say, by the way, has the same meaning as our Lord's direction, "Take no thought" [the word being exactly the same in the original] "for the morrow," to the consideration of the *comprehensive precept*, which seems to meet the case of every child of God: "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

We never can be sufficiently thankful for a throne of grace to which we may freely resort, for a footstool of mercy before which we may, from time to time, reverently present ourselves. The heavenly blessedness, the abundant grace, the rich compassion, the boundless love displayed to the children of men in setting his dear Son on a throne of grace in the courts above, are not sufficiently valued and prized. The very simplicity of the blessing, like the blessings of sun and air in nature, or food and raiment in

providence, makes us almost forget its greatness. Let us, then, cast a glance upward at this throne of grace, that we may take a view of it by faith, before we enter more largely upon the prayer and supplication made before it. God has raised his dear Son from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places that he might be our ever-living Mediator between God and man; that, as the great High Priest over the house of God, he might ever, by the virtue of blood shed here below, perfume the courts of heaven; that he might present the prayers and supplications of his people, together with his own prevailing incense, and thus offer the prayers of all the saints as a spiritual sacrifice upon the golden altar of his own sacred humanity. This intercession of Jesus we should ever bear in mind in approaching the throne of grace, and thus, in drawing near to the footstool of mercy unto the Father, not come in our own strength, wisdom, goodness, or righteousness, but only draw near to the Father through the Son of his love, in whom he is ever well pleased. To believe this, and act upon it, is a most needful and blessed part of our most holy faith and gracious obedience. As, therefore, and experimentally, this spiritual mystery is opened up to a believing heart, it draws forth the secret desires and prayers of the soul; and thus the believing disciple is enabled, from time to time, according to the measure of his faith, and the pouring out upon him of the Spirit of grace and of supplications, to act upon and to fulfil this comprehensive precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." I have said that it is *comprehensive*: let us now, then, look at it in its various bearings, and that will give us the best idea how all-embracing it is.

1. Take the first word, and see how it stretches itself forth over the whole family of God in every state or condition, and seems to embrace, as with loving arms, everything in providence or in grace that can befall the Christian. Look at the words "*In everything*." How large they are! How full they stand! What a warrant they give for a child of God to bring everything before the eyes and ears of his heavenly Father. You will say, "Everything! Why there are so many trifling things, as I consider

them. May I bring trifling things before God as well as important things?" What do you mean by trifling things? Don't you know that the most important events hang upon the most trifling circumstances? Is anything trifling with God which concerns the salvation and sanctification of an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ? With God, nothing is little; with God, nothing is great. With him, the world itself and all the nations that dwell upon the face of it, are but the drop of a bucket and the small dust of the balance. Measured by human eye, this thing is trifling and that thing is important. Measured by the eye of God, all things are alike. He that made the elephant made the mite. He that created leviathan to bask in the sea made the fish in whose mouth Peter found the tribute money. He that created the cedar of Lebanon made the hyssop of the wall. I have found in my own experience some of the most important events of my life to have depended upon the most trifling circumstances. A scarcely perceptible elevation of the soil may, at its first source, divert a brook into a new channel, and thus throw a river into an wholly unexpected course, yet one full of blessing to the land through which it flows. I could, if time or place admitted, show you on what a trifling circumstance my call by grace, and, with it, all its consequences to myself and the Church of God depended. A casual circumstance at Oxford, now nearly thirty-seven years ago, threw the whole current of my heart and soul, my thoughts and life into their present channel. Thus we never can measure a circumstance by its present bearing. Measured by your faith or even by your prevailing unbelief, it may seem of little significance; but if it be of God, it is not insignificant in his eyes, but may have a most important bearing upon your salvation and sanctification. But will this refer to providence as well as to grace? "May I," you ask, "take everything in providence before the Lord, everything as regards my family, everything as regards myself? Have I a warrant to lay everything that concerns me before the all-seeing eye of him who sits at God's right hand, believing he will look upon it with gracious eye?" Yes; just as much as when the ancient prophet, who was stoned between the temple and the altar, said, with expiring breath, "The Lord look upon it and require it" (2 Chron. 24:22); so may you ask the Lord to look

upon every circumstance that lies upon your heart. Did not Hezekiah spread the letter with *all* its contents before the Lord in the temple that he might read the writing? So may not you spread before the Lord every vowel and consonant, so to speak, of the letter of your soul? Yes; there is not a single circumstance which can transpire in providence or in grace, that really concerns the good of your soul which you may not freely and fully take and lay before the eyes of him with whom you have to do. If we consider his majesty and greatness, is it not infinite condescension in the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, to look upon us at all, to listen to us at all, to hear the prayers of any upon this earthly ball? If, then, it be condescension to look upon the greatest, it is but condescension to look upon the least; if it be condescension to hear the most earnest cry, it is but the same condescension to hear the feeblest sigh. Nothing can be insignificant and nothing can be unimportant that concerns the salvation of an immortal soul, glorifies God, or brings a revenue of praise to the Son of his love.

2. But now look at the apostle's expression, "*by prayer and supplication.*" We often find these two words united in Scripture. Take the following instances: "Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and the supplications" (2 Chron. 6:); "I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications." (Dan. 9:3.) So our blessed Lord, as our great exemplar, is said, in the days of his flesh, to have offered up "prayers and supplications" (Heb. 5:7); and, following his holy example, the eleven disciples, after his ascension, all "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:14.) But though thus frequently joined, there is a distinction still to be discerned between them. Prayer comprehends every breathing of the soul, from the feeblest desire, the faintest sigh, and the most tender wish, to the utmost and intensest earnestness, such as Jacob displayed when he wrestled all night with the angel at Peniel. It includes, therefore, all mental prayer and all vocal prayer. Thus, all private prayer, all public prayer, every desire of the heart, all utterance of the mouth, which the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up by his powerful breath in the soul, or to prompt with the tongue, *that*

we may call, in a scriptural sense, "prayer." Supplication seems to imply something more broken and interrupted; something more poured out with groans and tears and agonising cries. The posture of a suppliant is more humble, his wants more urgent, and his requests more fervent than those of a petitioner. Thus, in the passage which I have already quoted, where our blessed Lord is said to have offered up prayers and supplications, we find added, "with strong crying and tears." When he prayed in calm majesty, as in John 17., *that* was prayer; when in the garden, "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly," *that* was supplication. Supplication, therefore, goes beyond prayer, as being more earnest, more agonising, more vehement, more importunate, more breathed out with weeping and groaning. Thus the Lord says of his people, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." To use a figure which I have before employed in one of my sermons, prayer is like a calm, deep river, which flows through a level country to the sea; but supplication resembles a mountain torrent, which rushes impetuously to the same ocean, but is broken with rocks strewed in its bed, which cannot stay, though they may impede, its course. Each is of the Spirit, as the water of river and torrent is the same; and each is suitable to different circumstances of the soul. But whether it be prayer or whether it be supplication, we are bidden here, "In everything by prayer and supplication to let our requests be made known unto God." The blessed Spirit, in his various influences as a Spirit of grace and supplications in the hearts of God's people, to use another figure, may be compared to the wind. Sometimes it blows a scarcely perceptible breeze. The warm and gentle south wind on some days, falls upon our faces as fresh and sweet as if it had just passed over a bank of violets. So prayer sometimes in the soul is a gentle, warm aspiration heavenward, and yet, as being the breath of the Spirit, has in it a sweetness sensibly felt and a power that lifts up the heart into the presence of God. At another time the soul is cast into a very difficult position, lies under the pressure of a heavy affliction, or is assailed by a grievous temptation; then prayer becomes more like the rushing, mighty wind which was heard on the day of Pentecost. If the gentle breeze of which I have just

spoken speeds the ship of the soul gently over the wave, the more powerful breeze which I am now describing more resembles the strong wind that puts every sail of the vessel in motion, and bears her rapidly over the rough sea. But whether gentle breeze or strong gale, do not both bear her on to the same harbour? Sometimes again prayer may be mingled with tears and groans and sighs, just like a stormy day, when wind and rain seem to strive with each other for the mastery. This turns prayer into supplication; for, as I said before, supplication is stronger than prayer, more repeated, broken, continual, earnest, and more poured forth as if the answer must come immediately, or the soul could not live under the agonizing pressure of guilt and temptation. We are not, therefore, to limit prayer and supplication to any one point or to any one degree, any more than we can fix all the family of God to the same spiritual stature, or limit faith in every bosom to the same exact dimensions. In the family of God, we have babes and children, young men and fathers. In faith, we have weak faith, little faith, much faith, strong faith, and overcoming faith. So in prayer, we similarly have weak prayer and strong prayer; prayer mingled with much faith and prayer mingled with little faith; prayer that seems breathed forth out of the heart with a gentle sigh, and prayer earnest, vehement, and importunate, that struggles forth with a labouring groan. We cannot lay down any scale of prayer, any precise standard, any fixed dimensions, as though the operations and influence of the Spirit could be squared by the size of a pocket prayer-book, or made to fit into the Practice of Piety or the New Week's Preparation for the Sacrament. It would be to lay a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, to insist that there must be just that precise measure of the Spirit of prayer and supplications, or that amount of it, or that frequency of it which man in his ignorance or his arrogance would prescribe. God does not tie himself to give his Spirit in equal measure to all; for "there are diversities of operations" (1 Cor. 12:6); and we have "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, according as God deals to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3, 6.) If we then move in the footsteps of God's truth, we must not tie ourselves or others down to any rigid rule, but believe that every

movement of the Spirit of intercession in the soul is prayer and supplication such as the Lord hears and answers.

But though I say this, I cannot help expressing my opinion how lamentably deficient are we here! How, under some temporal trial, you can go to a fellow sinner, and din his ear by telling him what a poor, afflicted creature you are, how sick in body, or how tried in circumstances, until you weary him and yourself with a thrice-told tale of misery and woe; and yet when you get home you have neither heart nor tongue to tell the same tale to God. Then you wonder how it is that day by day you get no good, no relief, no help, no support. Here all of us, I may say, most lamentably fail; for such is the desperate state of man by the fall, so careless is he and so prayerless, that nothing but the continual pouring out of a Spirit of grace and of supplications can move and enable the heart to act upon this comprehensive precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

"But what," it may be objected, "does not God know what we need before we ask him? Is his eye not open upon the hearts of his people to know all they want before they tell him? Where, then, is the use or necessity of spreading our wants before him?" Yes; the Lord knoweth all things; he searcheth all hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Yet still he would have us make our requests known unto him. Nor does he take it very kindly of us, if indeed we are his children, not to tell him all our need. If you had a particular friend, and you had learnt something from another quarter about a peculiar trial that he was suffering under, and he professed to be very intimate with and much attached to you, yet day after day when he came to see you he never told you that trial, or hinted so much as a word about it, should you not think either that he did not much feel the trial, or had not much affection for you, or confidence in you? Similarly, if you are suffering under a spiritual trial or heavy temptation, God knows it, as your friend might know your earthly trial; but if you never tell him the trial or the temptation under which you are suffering, it would seem as if either you did not

very deeply feel it, or that there was not much intimacy, or confidence, or friendly intercourse, or communion between you and the Lord. We are bidden, then, to make our requests known unto God—not as if we believed he did not know them beforehand; but to spread them out before his holy eye, that we may have the privilege of presenting, and *He* the blessedness of granting, the petition desired. Did not the Lord know the blasphemous message of Sennacherib before Hezekiah took it up to the Temple? Did not God hear the words drop from the lips of Sennacherib before the scribe wrote them down? Yet Hezekiah went up unto the house of God, and there spread the blasphemous roll with all its contents before the Lord, that the Lord might look upon it. So the Lord thoroughly sees all that is written upon the scroll of your heart before you unroll it in his presence and spread the whole before his eye. But still he would have you unroll the scroll and make your requests known unto him, because he takes it kindly of his people that they should believe his word and seek his face. It shows that they have confidence in him; it betokens some tender intimacy, some humble and gracious intercourse when they come, in all friendliness and holy boldness, yet with reverential awe and godly fear, to spread their requests before his footstool.

3. But with prayer and supplication is to be joined "*thanksgiving*." If the Lord has ever bestowed upon us any favours in providence, or any blessings in grace—and if he has not, what right have we to believe ourselves his children?—those mercies should not lie buried in forgetfulness. Among the sins ascribed by the apostle to the heathen is that, "when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were *thankful*." (Rom. 1:21.) As believers in Christ, we are bidden "to abound in faith with *thanksgiving*" (Col. 2:7), and "to continue in prayer and watch in the same with *thanksgiving*." (Col. 4:2.) Nay, God says himself to his people, "Offer unto God *thanksgiving*" (Psa. 50:14), and bids us "enter into his gates with *thanksgiving* and into his courts with praise; to be thankful unto him and bless his name." (Psa. 100:4.) Ingratitude between man and man is a grievous though common evil; but what shall we say of ingratitude to God? Is it not a

blessed frame when we can "sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?" (Eph. 5:19, 20.) In fact, thanksgiving, prayer, and supplication must all unite, as in music, to form melodious harmony. The treble of thanksgiving, the tenor of prayer, and the bass of supplication all harmonise together to make up the music of saints, as they harp with their golden harps and sing, as it were, a new song before the throne.

III.—But I must leave this delightful theme to speak a few words upon our third point, *the encouraging promise*: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." O what a promise, how full and how blessed! Let us look at it in detail, for every point and part of it are full of grace and glory.

1. Observe its name. It is called "*the peace of God.*" Why so? Because God is its eternal author. One of his most blessed titles is "the God of peace" (Heb. 13:20); and because he is "the God of peace," his peace may well be called "the peace of God." The Holy Ghost, speaking of the Son of God under the name of the BRANCH, says of him, "he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both," that is, between the Father and the Son. (Zech. 6:13.) In this passage we have a blessed intimation of a plan that was laid in eternity, whereby peace should be proclaimed to guilty man, whereby the weapons of war between God and his people should be laid aside, and peace should flow like a river over elect breasts. But again, our blessed Lord is himself "our peace, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; to make in himself of twain one new man, speaking peace." (Eph. 2:15.) Thus his sacred Person and finished work, his holy blood and obedience have become, as it were, the consecrated channel through which peace flows down into believing hearts. We were by nature "enemies and aliens, far from God by wicked works;" but he came as "the prince of peace" to reconcile us unto God in his own body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and thus came and preached peace to

those which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." (Eph. 2:16, 17.) He made peace by silencing the thunders of a broken law; by poising the scales of offended justice, bringing his own obedience to adjust the balance; by harmonising all the attributes of Jehovah, which, without his intervention would have seemed, as far as our salvation was concerned, to be discordant. The ancient promise was that "he should stand and rule [margin] in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and this man," it adds, "shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land." (Mic. 4:4, 5.) But those blessings we cannot spiritually and experimentally know unless the Spirit of peace reveal them to our heart. Thus God the Father is the Author of peace, God the Son the Procurer of it, and God the Holy Ghost the Revealer of it; for he it is that seals upon the conscience that blood of sprinkling which speaks peace, and sheds abroad that love of God whereby it flows like a river.

2. But this peace of God is said to *pass all understanding*. It certainly passes all the understanding of the *natural* mind; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him;" and among these things is peace, the Lord's own legacy. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." "These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace." This peace from its very nature must pass all the understanding of the unregenerated heart; for how can the natural mind, which is full of unbelief, conceive what it is to have peace with God in believing; to be reconciled to a holy God by the blood of his dear Son; and to walk before him in the light of his countenance, as accepted in the Beloved? But it passes even the understanding of the spiritual mind until made known to it by the power of God. And even then its height, its depth, its length, its breadth, pass all understanding, for its source, stream, and effects are all too hidden, too deep, and too wide to be comprehended by our present limited faculties. Look at its source in the eternal covenant; view the counsel of peace between the Father and the Son. Can human intellect comprehend it? Then view the stream.

See the Son of God coming down from heaven to become man in the womb of the Virgin; view his sufferings in the garden and upon the cross. When you thus take a view by faith of the holy channel through which peace came, must you not say that it passes all understanding? And when we view the effects, may we not say of the blessed fruit of the peace of God, what the apostle says of the love of Christ, "It passeth knowledge?" So this peace of God in its source, stream, and effects passeth all understanding, both of the natural and of the spiritual mind.

3. But though it passeth all understanding, it does not pass by the soul; but *keeps the heart and the mind*. Both want keeping. Your heart wants keeping; for your heart—what is it? All spiritual affections centre there. "My son, give me thine heart," that is, thine affections. If there is no heart with God, there is no love for God. But this heart of ours is a sad wanderer: it is ever doing those two things which the Lord took so ill in the children of Israel, and bade the heavens be astonished at it, yea, be horribly afraid. "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." The heart, therefore, needs to be kept as with a mighty power, yea, by nothing short of the power of God itself. But nothing can keep the heart so well as the peace of God. For the peace of God holds it as in a silken leash, keeps it by the cross and by the sepulchre, links it on to the throne above, and thus holding it firmly in its powerful yet soft grasp, keeps it from wandering after idols. But again, the heart is not only the seat of all the spiritual affections, but the very seat of faith itself; for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." But faith cannot be maintained in living exercise except the heart be kept; for if the heart goes, faith goes with it; and the heart is only well and firmly kept by the peace of God ruling it and reigning in it. The heart is also the seat of hope, because it is with our heart we hope. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God." (Psalm 42:11.) "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.) Then hope in heart must make the heart well. In this sense, we may say that it is with the heart that we hope as well as believe and love. We cannot, then,

either entertain or maintain a good hope through grace, unless the peace of God first enter and then keep the heart hoping to the end, for the grace that is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But what a sure guardian, what a watchful sentinel is the peace of God! "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23.) But the peace of God must keep watch over the heart and its issues, that the life of faith, hope, and love may freely flow through them to the fountain whence they originally cause.

4. But the *mind* is to be kept by the peace of God as well as the heart. The mind here means literally, according to the original, the thoughts, plans, counsels, schemes, and imaginations of the soul. All these need to be carefully watched over and vigilantly kept by that sacred and watchful guardian, Peace. Our *understanding* is to be kept from error, lest we drink down those deadly draughts which are so often presented to the lips of the unwary, and which are sure, if tasted, to mar all real peace. So acid is error, that a drop will curdle the pure milk of the word; for well may we say of all erroneous men, "Their drink is sour." (Hosea 4:18.) Our *thoughts and plans* need to be kept from straying in forbidden pastures; for the carnal mind is ever after sin and sensual gratification. Our *judgment* needs also to be kept firm in God's truth, that "we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ." (Eph. 4:14, 15.) Our *plans and counsels* need also to be kept from ever scheming and plotting things for our own gratification, to feed pride and covetousness, ambition and worldly-mindedness, and be ever entangling themselves in a thousand projects to promote the worship of self.

But what can thus effectually keep heart and mind, as they should be kept in the holy fear of God, in the path of Christian obedience, in the resignation of our will to the will of Jehovah, in abstaining from things that God abhors, and walking in things that God approves? The peace of God which passeth all understanding. The law never kept a single soul in a way of

obedience. It can curse, threaten, and terrify, and thus extort a feigned, unwilling obedience; but it never did produce Christian obedience. But what the law could not do, the peace of God which passeth all understanding can do, and do effectually; for it can make and keep the heart warm in the love of God and active and earnest in the patient obedience of Christ.

5. But observe, that all these rich blessings are only "*through Christ Jesus:*" for he is the channel, the divinely consecrated channel, through which every mercy comes. He is our peace now at God's right hand; he is ever offering before God the merits of his finished work here below, and thus by his ever-prevailing intercession, peace is proclaimed in the courts of heaven. And as thus proclaimed in heaven, it sounds also as with trumpet voice from the realms of bliss here below, for "Peace upon earth" was part of the angelic song sung at the Saviour's birth in lowly Bethlehem. May we ever bear in mind, and above all things may we experimentally enjoy, the blessed truth that all peace is *in* Christ Jesus, all peace *by* Christ Jesus, and all peace *through* Christ Jesus.

Just let me, in conclusion, gather up the threads of my discourse, that I may present it to your eyes, before we part, as a connected whole.

Look at the *caution*, because it is graciously given us as a most needful and holy warning, "*Be careful for nothing,*" in the sense I have explained it. But if you are burdened with every worldly care and your heart is gnawed with every carking anxiety, you will not be able to perform the all-comprehensive *precept* of letting your requests be made known unto God, for in looking to God with one eye you will be looking to yourself and the world with the other; and even upon your knees, the bill to be paid, the rent to be discharged, the cares of the family, the concerns of the household, will all rush in like a flood, and sweep away every vestige of prayer, just as the flood in Norfolk has swept away the banks that kept out the waters of the German ocean.\* As long, then, as you are a prey to these carking cares, you will find it

impossible to perform this all-comprehensive precept. But when faith enables you to lay aside these anxious cares, to trust in the providence of God, and wait upon him for his grace, then you will be able in a measure to act upon the precept, "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And then, and not till then, will you find the peace of God which passeth all understanding. You must get up the bank first to keep out the sea. If there be no bank, or if it be swept away, the German ocean will come in and cover your fertile acres with its slime and ooze. You must set up the bank; and here it is put up for you by the hand of an apostle, "Be careful for nothing." Then prayer and supplication and thanksgiving will be duly rendered. And as your requests are made known to God, he who has given the promise will, in his own time and way, surely accomplish it. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. And if once you get that peace of God into your bosom, it will not be like the German ocean, now rushing over thousands of cultivated acres and swamping them with sand and silt; but it will be like a river flowing into your bosom, and filling it with all joy and peace in believing.

\* The sermon was preached at the time of the inundation in Norfolk.

## Peace, Tribulation, Victory

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening, July 13, 1847

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." John 15:33

There is one feature in the discourses of the Lord with his sorrowing disciples (as recorded John 14-16.) which has struck my mind; and which I may perhaps best characterize by one short sentence—*the entire absence of self*. Let us, for a few moments, consider the circumstances under which these discourses fell from the Lord's lips. It was upon that gloomy night when he himself was to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, upon the very eve of those horrors of soul which he was to endure in the garden of Gethsemane, and immediately preceding those agonies of body and soul combined which he was to suffer on the cross. Should we not have expected that his soul would have been so occupied with what lay before him, that he could have had no thought upon any other subject? But we find the blessed Lord in these discourses with his mourning followers laying aside, as it were, all consideration of *himself*, and of what he was about to endure, and devoting all his thoughts and words—and, I may add, all his heart, to comfort and encourage *them*; as he speaks, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you" (John 14:30); as though he would say, 'Now I devote myself entirely to you; now I lose all thoughts of myself that I may speak all my heart to you! But when this is done, other work lies before me.'

Now, after the Lord had laid before his disciples what he saw fit in his own infinite and all-wise mind as suited to their encouragement and consolation; and not to theirs only, but that of the whole church of God in all future time, he concentrates, so to speak, the whole in the words of our text, as if that were the

substance of all he had said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Three divisions of our text seem to occur to my mind, corresponding with its three clauses; and these we may briefly characterize as *peace*, *tribulation*, and *victory*—peace in Jesus, tribulation in the world, and victory through Jesus over the world.

I.—"*these things* I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." What are "*these things*?" Are they not what he had just laid before them? Every word, then, contained in the preceding chapter, I may say, is comprehended in the expression, "these things." We cannot indeed recapitulate everything which the Lord spake unto them in these three chapters. It would require not one sermon, but a long series of sermons to enter but a little into those holy topics of divine consolation. And yet, we must glance at a few of them; or we cannot enter into the meaning and fulness of our text. We shall, therefore, with God's blessing, endeavour to take a hasty glance at some of those things which the Lord spoke in their ears, that receiving them into their heart, and enjoying the sweet consolations that should distil out of there into their souls, "in him they might have peace." In so doing, I shall not follow the exact order in which the Lord spake them; but take them up as they occur to my mind, yet preserving, as the Lord may enable, some thread of connection.

1. One thing which the Lord laid before them, that "in him they might have peace," was, the doctrine, or truth rather, (I prefer the latter word) of *their union with him*—their eternal, indissoluble union with his divine Person, as set forth in that parable, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." (John 15:5.)

Now out of this eternal union with Christ flows every blessing. Only so far as we have an eternal union with Jesus have we any living union, or any spiritual communion with him. Only so far as we have a standing in Christ from before all worlds have we any interest in, or any title to, his atoning blood, justifying

righteousness, all-sufficient grace, manifested presence, shed abroad love, and communicated favour. We receive nothing, we can receive nothing of a spiritual nature except by virtue of an eternal union with the Lord of life and glory. For as the branches receive their sap out of the stem only by virtue of their union with the stem; so can we receive blessings out of Christ only by virtue of union with Christ.

Now is not this divine truth blessedly adapted to bring peace and comfort into the soul? If we can in any way realize a union with Christ; if we have faith given to us to believe in his name, and through faith to "receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace," and find him from time to time supplying our wants, and communicating his presence, mercy, and love to our souls—it is, it must be, the foundation of all true spiritual peace and comfort.

2. But the Lord also told his beloved disciples that *he had chosen them in himself*. He says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (15:16.) He assures them in these words of their eternal election in him; that he had loved them before all worlds, and had chosen them that they might be partakers of his grace here, and see his glory face to face hereafter. Now when we can believe (God must give us this faith) that we were chosen in Christ before all worlds, what can bring sweeter consolation to the soul? What can distil more solid joy and peace into the heart?

3. Further. He assured them that he would *lay down his life for them*. He says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (15:13, 14.) In these words he assures them that he was about to lay down his precious life for them; that his love for their souls was so great that he did not refuse to shed his own blood, that they might be washed in that holy fountain, and set free from all the guilt, filth, and shame of sin and iniquity.

4. He assured them further, that they were not "*servants*," but "*friends*" (15:15); that the tie betwixt them was no longer, as it

had been, of master and servant; but a far nearer, a far dearer, a far closer, a far more intimate relation—that of *friend*; that, therefore, as a friend opens his heart's counsels to his brother friend, and they are thus knit together by the closest tie and most tender relationship; so to them, as to his friends, he would open the very secrets of his heart. He therefore was to them, not a harsh master exacting obedience as from servants, and marking every transgression to punish it; but a kind and tender-hearted friend, who could bear with their infirmities; yea, a friend who would stick closer than any earthly brother.

5. Again. He tells them that he was "*the Way*" whereby access was to be found to God; "*the Truth*," so that by following him they should be fully secured from all error; "*and the Life*," so that by believing in his name, life might flow into their souls, and revive them in every hour of drooping and bondage. He assured them, too, that there was no other way of access to God, for that no man could come to the Father but by him. (14:6.)

6. He told them also, that he would *not leave them comfortless* (14:18); but that he would send the Comforter, who should comfort, by his holy influences and sacred anointings, their sorrowful and mourning hearts; that this Comforter should lead them into all truth, should take of the things that were his, and reveal them to their souls; should guide them also, and be with them even to the end. (16:13, 14.)

7. He tells them also, that *because he lived, they should live also* (14:19); that they should never be in that drooping state of soul out of which he could not or would not revive them by that life which they lived in him.

8. He assured them further, that he was going before them to *prepare mansions for them*, and would come again and take them unto himself, that where he was they might be also. (14:2, 3.)

These indeed are but a few gleanings of the ample harvest of consolation which is stored up in these blessed chapters. But the Lord, having laid before them these sweet and encouraging

topics, tells them for what purpose he had spoken these things to them—"These things I have spoken unto you, *that in me ye might have peace.*"

But will the mere *speaking* of these things bring peace? How often have we read these chapters, and yet found no peace flowing from them! But when the Lord himself, all whose words are spirit and life (John 6:63)—when the Lord himself is pleased to speak any of these gracious promises with power to the heart, then his words bring with them peace. And what more blessed legacy, what sweeter or more suitable inheritance could the Lord leave behind him for his sorrowing family than *peace*? Peace with God through the great atoning Sacrifice; peace in the court of conscience through the application of the blood of the Lamb; holy calm, divine tranquillity, produced by the blessed Dove brooding with his heavenly wings upon the soul. How far peace surpasses in soul feeling every other blessing! The child of God is not looking for ecstasies, visions, dreams, or wonderful discoveries to the bodily eye or bodily ear. Such things as these, visionaries, enthusiasts, and wild fanatics make their boast in. But to have peace dropped into the soul from the mouth of the Lord; to have peace proclaimed in the conscience by that blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel; to feel that serenity in his soul whereby he can rest upon the bosom of Jesus, and find anxious cares and troubled thoughts all lulled within—can he desire, can he enjoy a more heavenly legacy, a richer portion than this?

But the Lord says, "These things have I spoken unto you, that *in me ye might have peace.*" Here lies the force of the whole. Peace in *self*! That never can be found. Peace in the *world*! That never can be had. Peace in *sin*! God forbid any of his children should dream of peace there for a moment. Peace in the things of *time and sense*! Are they not all polluted—all baubles, toys, passing shadows, smoke out of the chimney, chaff out of the summer threshing floor? Can an exercised soul—one tried, tempted, dejected, cast down with the difficulties of the way—can he find any peace in these things? His carnal mind may, to his shame, for

a while be drawn aside by them; his wicked lusts and passions may be entangled in them; his fallen nature may grovel amidst these poor perishing day-dreams. But peace! there is no peace in these things; for God has said, "There is no peace to the wicked." And so long as our wicked hearts are going out after wicked things, if the conscience is really tender and alive in God's fear, there will be no true, solid peace within.

But how often are the souls of the Lord's people like the troubled sea, which casts up mire and dirt! How often are they far from peace! How many anxious thoughts, painful suspicions, trying doubts and fears, assail and harass their souls! In these temptations do they find peace? Does the Lord mean they should find peace in them? Are not these things intended to be to them what the floating carcasses were to Noah's dove—to drive them back to the ark? The raven, that foul bird of prey, could rest and fatten upon the floating carcasses, and never returned to the ark more; but the pure dove, that clean bird, could find no rest for the sole of her foot, but in, or upon the ark. So while carnal professors can find peace in self, in the things of time and sense, in empty notions, in a graceless profession, in dry doctrines, in a name to live while dead—there is that in the heart of a child of God which, like the dove, can find no solid rest—except in the ark, the Lord Jesus Christ; as he says, "*In me* ye shall have peace."

But what is the import of the words "*in me*?" Do they not point, *first*, to the truth of *eternal union with Christ*? for out of this eternal union flows every blessing in time. Do not the words also point to *faith in Christ*? for it is only by faith in Christ that we can have peace in him; as the Scripture speaks, "peace and joy in believing." But is not the crowning point of "*in me*," and that whence solid peace flows, *communion with Christ*? Not merely eternal union, not merely living union, but divine communion under the sacred influences and operations of the blessed Comforter.

Now the Lord designs that all his dear family should have peace

in him; he therefore drives them out of every refuge of lies that they may find no peace in self. He brings them out of the world, that they may find no peace there. He hunts them out of sin, that they may find no peace there. He sees fit also to exercise their minds, and to try them again and again, that finding no peace in anything else, they may come as poor broken-hearted sinners to the footstool of mercy, look unto Jesus, trust in his name, and find peace in believing.

II .—And therefore it is that *peace* and *tribulation* are so closely connected. "*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*" The Lord knows what our hearts are. He knows what a close affinity there is between our nature and a tempting, alluring world. And he knows that each one carries a little world in his own bosom. He therefore declares, that "in the world we shall have tribulation;" a promise as sure as that "in him we shall have peace." How glad we should be to separate these two things! How pleased we should be to have no tribulation in the world, and yet to have peace in Christ? How our coward flesh shrinks from tribulation! The very thought of it at times makes us tremble. Yet the Lord has so joined together these two things—peace in himself, and tribulation in the world, that they never can be put asunder; and so far from a possibility of their being severed, we may add, they bear to each other the closest and nearest relation.

The Lord, then, has promised, that "in the world we shall have tribulation." But how this staggers a child of God! He can understand, or seem to understand, what it is to have peace in Christ; but that his allotted path should be tribulation in the world, how it seems to cut deep, as it were, into the very fibres of his heart! And yet how needful, how indispensably needful it is, to have tribulation in the world; for how closely bound up our heart is in it. How glued and fettered our carnal heart is to the things of time and sense! What proneness, what daily; hourly proneness there is to go after idols; to amuse our vain mind with passing shows; to take an interest in the veriest trifles which surround us; and thus forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water. What a

veil of enchantment, too, is often over our eyes; and therefore, what a series of troubles—what days, and weeks, and months, and years of trial does it take to convince us that the world is not our home, not our rest, not our enduring habitation. We live in a fallen world; and, therefore, in this fallen world tribulation of some kind or another must be our lot. We are born into a sinful world, and carry about with us a sinful nature, which is intimately and closely connected with the world, and therefore all the evils which are entailed upon a sinful world are entailed upon us by rightful inheritance. The wrath of God rests upon the world, because it lieth in the "Wicked One;" and we therefore, as sojourners in this vale of tears, come under his chastening hand. But the Lord mercifully and graciously makes use of tribulation, in various shapes and forms, to bring us out of the world, that we may not be condemned with it, nor make it our rest and home. Thus he draws us to his blessed feet, that in him we may find that peace which we never have found, which we never can find anywhere else.

But what various sources of tribulation there are! If you and I could lay our hearts bare to each other; if we could compare our various sources of tribulation—how different they might be; yet each has his own suffering path; and each, perhaps, might think his tribulation the hardest to be endured. For instance,

1. *Our very connection with the world* is sure to entail with it tribulation. If a man has a business in the world, the very calling by which he lives will be connected with tribulation. There will be anxious cares, blighted prospects, disappointed hopes, bad debts, and a thousand painful circumstances so connected with the very business that he follows, so intimately blended with the worldly calling whereby he earns his daily bread, that he cannot escape tribulation from the very source of his natural subsistence.

2. How, too, *the closest family ties* prove sources of tribulation! If we have beloved children, they may be taken away, or grow up to grieve us. If we have loving partners, they may be snatched from our fond bosom. Our keenest sorrows may spring from our

dearest and nearest social ties. And from these things there is no escape. No wisdom or contrivance of ours can prevent them. They are so appointed by the Lord, they are so laid in our path, they are so fastened round our neck, they are so a part of our allotted portion, that escape them we cannot.

3. Again. Whilst in the world *we are continually entangled in some evil*. Well nigh every look is a means of conceiving sin in the heart. We can scarcely open our ears without hearing something to defile and pollute the imagination. We can scarcely think without that thought being a sinful one. We can hardly speak without something sinful, worldly, or selfish mingling itself with the speech. And out of these things tribulation comes. The sin of the eye, or the sin of the ear, or the sin of the heart, or the sin of the tongue, each brings tribulation in its train, for with a child of God sorrow ever follows sin, as the shadow follows the sun.

4. Again. If we are faithful followers of the Lamb, *we are sure to suffer persecution*. It may not come in those shapes and forms which prevailed in times of old. The law has extinguished fire and faggot; but "the scourge of the tongue," slander, calumny, detraction, are not silenced; and we may suffer inward martyrdom from the scourge of the tongue, as the blessed martyrs endured outward martyrdom when their backs were scourged with whips, or their bodies burned in the flame.

5. But again; *our very intimate ties with the church of Christ*—if we come out of the world, as we are bound to do, and come into close connection with the family of God—this very uniting ourselves to God's people may be a source of tribulation. If we belong to a church, there may be divisions in it, and those often of a very painful nature. If we have spiritual friends, from them some of our sharpest sorrows may spring. If we have walked in close and intimate union even with the people of God, circumstances may arise to sever us from them, and we may rue the day when we first became acquainted with them.

Thus, on every side, without and within, there are sources of tribulation.

6. Nay, *the very bodies* in which our souls are lodged, what a little thing may make those earthly tabernacles the source of keenest tribulation! One tender fibre of the brain unstrung—what a source of tribulation may that be to a man all his life! How the Lord too has planted the seeds of disease and death in the very tabernacles of clay that we carry about with us! So that, from without and from within, from the church and from the world, from body and from soul, from friend and from foe, from sinner and from saint—from every source and quarter troubles and tribulations are all upon the watch to seize upon the children of God. Thus each has his appointed portion; for the most part as much as he can bear; for the most part enough to make him live a life of sorrow and anxiety—enough for the most part to weigh him heavily down, and to convince him that in the world he never can have, he never will have, anything but tribulation and trial.

But is not all this for wise purposes? Dare we say, dare we even think, that the Lord is unwise or unkind in ordaining these tribulations? Was it not the will of God that his dear Son should endure suffering before us? Did *he* not drink the cup of sorrow to the very dregs? Was he not baptized with a baptism of suffering? And was he not the Forerunner, that in all things he might have the preeminence? If, we then, are to walk in his footsteps, and to be conformed to his image, must we not suffer with him? The word of God declares that we *must* suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. It is therefore necessary, indispensably necessary, that we also should pass through tribulation; for if we are out of the way of tribulation, most certainly we are out of the way altogether.

But what is the effect, the merciful effect, of these troubles? Is there not a voice with them? When the ear is opened, tribulation speaks. Are there not fruits and effects of a most salutary kind that flow out of tribulation? For instance. Is not our heart by nature very much glued to the world? Do we not naturally love

and cleave to it? As we watch the varied movements of our hearts, are they not perpetually going out after something idolatrous—something to gratify and amuse, to interest, occupy, and please our carnal mind? Can we walk the length of the street without the carnal mind going out after some food? It is in order, then, to sever this union, to bring us out of the world, and make us feel it is not our abiding place, and that no happiness is to be found in it, that the Lord sees necessary to lay tribulation upon us; and tribulation of that peculiar nature which will separate us from the world in good earnest. When we are passing through tribulation, what a poor vain thing the world appears to us! We want inward consolation; the world cannot give it. We want balm to our conscience; the world, instead of pouring in that balm, rather tears the lips of the wound asunder. We want an assurance of the love of God to our souls; the world, so far from helping forward that assurance, interposes to shut out the manifested lovingkindness of God. We want sacred, internal peace spoken to our souls by the voice of the blood of sprinkling; the world intrudes betwixt that blood and us. So that we need—aye, and sometimes *feel* that we need, tribulation after tribulation, trial upon trial, affliction upon affliction, stroke upon stroke, grief upon grief, sorrow upon sorrow, to cut asunder that close union which there is betwixt us and the world, and to convince us in our very heart and conscience that there is no rest, no peace, no happiness, no consolation to be found in anything that the world presents.

Now when we are thus exercised with tribulation in various shapes and forms, the Lord is often pleased to lead us into himself, and from time to time to bring us with earnest desires and breathings that he would speak that peace to our souls, which the world can neither give nor take away. We are for instance, made to feel that we live in a dying world. We see men dropping down as it were before our eyes upon every side. We see the scythe of death mowing down thousands and tens of thousands; and we fear, perhaps, lest we carry the seeds of death in our own body. Now under these exercises, we look round. We see nothing in the world that can give us a moment's

peace; all, all is marred, polluted, defiled; nothing there that our eyes see, or that our ears hear, which can bring one moment's solid peace into our hearts. But when we behold, as the Lord is pleased to give us a view by faith, who Jesus is, and what Jesus is, and his words begin to drop with a measure of sweetness and power into the soul, and we can believe what he says to be unalterably true; and as we come to his feet, and cast ourselves before him, if he is but pleased to apply his precious word to our heart, then there is peace—peace in him, though tribulation in the world.

But these two things ever go together. Directly we are out of tribulation, directly affliction is taken off our necks, directly trial and temptation cease—what becomes of us? Away we go into the world. No stone let loose ever rolled more rapidly down a mountain's side, than we run headlong into the world, headlong into evil, headlong into carnality, headlong into security and fleshly ease, when the hand of God, through affliction, trial, or temptation, ceases to hold us back. Such is the bias of our hearts, such the corruption of our fallen nature—sin, dreadful sin—evil, horrid evil, being its very food, its very breath, its very life. Our carnal minds are altogether one mass of sin: the very moment, therefore, that God ceases to restrain us, our carnal mind hurries off into the things of time and sense. There it grovels, there it buries itself, there it seeks to lie down and wallow as the sow in the mire. But this never can be. There is that tenderness of conscience in the child of God, that godly fear of his sacred name, that anxious desire to be right, that trembling fear to be wrong; there is that aching void, that crying and sighing after the living God; and blended with all this, that dissatisfaction with self, that though the carnal mind may for a time be amused and interested, there is that in his bosom which speaks a different language, and tells a different tale. The first breath, therefore, of tribulation—the first angry stroke, the first thread of the scourge, (for "the rod is made for the fool's back,") makes him feel how guilty he has been in lusting after the flesh-pots of Egypt, in plunging his affections into the world, in being so engrossed and taken up with its business and anxieties. He is

thus made to feel what a wretched backslider, what a filthy idolater he has been, in suffering the world to get so fast a hold upon his affections. He comes, therefore, full of guilt and shame, once more to the footstool of mercy, begging the Lord to reveal himself to his soul, to speak peace to his conscience, to seal home his pardoning love and atoning blood, and so give him that peace which passeth all understanding.

Thus we find there is so close, so intimate a relation betwixt tribulation and peace, that they never can be severed or dissociated. I am sure that we should go, I know not where, were it not for tribulation. Some of us would go headlong into the world, and be swallowed up in its cares and anxieties; some would rush headlong into the lusts and pleasures that everywhere surround them; some would be satisfied with an empty, graceless profession, or a form of sound doctrines in the head; some would take the chair of the scorner, and be filled with pride and self-righteousness. But trials, exercises, troubles, sorrows, in a word, "tribulations," in various shapes and of various kinds, drive us home, and bring us, in the hands of the Lord, to that only safe spot—the feet of Jesus, the footstool of mercy, the throne of grace, that we may there find and feel that peace which his blood alone can impart.

But the Lord has said to his disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." It is, then, by believing "these things," by receiving "these things" into our hearts, and feeling the blessed power of "these things" in our soul, that peace is communicated. If I can believe that I am a branch of the living vine; that I am a friend of Jesus; that he shed his precious blood for my redemption; that he has given me his blessed Spirit to guide me into all truth; that because he lives, I shall live also; that he will come and manifest himself unto me; that he is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that through him I find access unto the Father; that he has gone before to prepare a mansion for me, and will come again and receive me unto himself—if I can believe "these things," and feel the sweet fruits of faith flowing forth, must I not, shall I not, find peace in him?

But how often are we in a kind of middle state! No peace in the world, and little peace in Christ! The world a blank, little else but tribulation and sorrow without and within; and yet, through the workings of unbelief and infidelity, through the weakness of our faith, through the carnality of our minds, through the temptations of Satan, through various inward suggestions, through barrenness and darkness of soul, though we come to Jesus, call upon his name, endeavour to believe what he has revealed in his word, yet we do not find that peace which he has promised. But does not the Lord thus teach us that he himself must create peace in our consciences by himself speaking peace to our souls, and mercifully and graciously shedding abroad his love in our hearts? Of one thing I am very sure; if ever I have found one moment's peace, it has been "in him." It may have been very transitory, very fleeting; but while it lasted, it was peace, and that peace was "in him;" not in self, not in sin, not in the world, but "in him"—by union to him, by communion with him, by receiving out of his fulness grace for grace; and through some manifestation of his mercy, goodness, and love.

But when we compare these two things together, how long are the seasons of tribulation! how short are the seasons of peace! How enduring the affliction, how transient the joy! How many rolling waves and billows of tribulation! how few moments of real solid, enduring calm! Yet enough to shew us that peace is to be found nowhere else but in Jesus, enough to give us something of a foretaste of eternal peace, and make us desire to receive it more substantially, more fully, more feelingly, that our hearts may be wholly bathed with it, and our peace, according to his gracious promise, may flow like a river.

III .—But the Lord adds—"Be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world.*" Does not this show that the world is an enemy to the Lord, and to the Lord's people? and never so much an enemy, never to be so much dreaded, as when it comes in the guise of a friend. When it steals upon your heart, engrosses your thoughts; wins your affections, draws away your mind from God—*then* it is to be dreaded. When we can see the world in its true colours;

when we can pass through the world as *in* it, but not *of* it; when we can be sweetly lifting up our hearts to the Lord, meditating upon his word, or sighing and crying unto him—there is little fear then of the world getting the conquest. But, when our eyes begin to drink it in; when our ears begin to listen to its voice; when our hearts become entangled in its fascinations; when our minds get filled with its anxieties; when our affections depart from the Lord, and cleave to the things of time and sense—*then* the world is to be dreaded. When it smites us as an enemy, its blows are not to be feared: it is when it smiles upon us as a friend it is most to be dreaded. But the Lord has said, "I have overcome the world." You may be much entangled in the cares of business; the very vocation, the necessary vocation, whereby you earn your daily bread, may occupy much of your thoughts; but the Lord has said for you, "I have overcome the world." The anxieties of business, the cares of this life, shall not be your master, if you are one of the Lord's; he has overcome the world for you. But you shall have such tribulation in business, such cares and anxieties in the very calling whereby you live, that you shall not idolize it, nor have your affections wholly glued to it. You shall not have a path of prosperity; it would not suit you; you would embrace the world with both arms, and your affections would depart from the living God. Therefore, though the Lord will give you business enough to provide you sufficiently with the bread that perisheth, there shall be mingled with that business so many anxieties and cares, so many distracting thoughts, so many troubles from every quarter, that you shall not idolize it; you shall see it in its true colours, as the means of passing through this life—nothing more; you shall see that you are not to rest in it, and not to worship it, but to use it thankfully for the short time you are in this vale of tears. So, too, with all our domestic ties. We are such sad idolaters, and these very domestic ties so steal upon our hearts, that the Lord may suffer them to be sources of pain and grief that our affections may not be drawn away from him, and altogether fixed upon the things we naturally love. And so with what are called the pleasures of the world—"the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life,"—those things that are continually enticing us and drawing us aside. But the Lord says, "I have overcome the world:" it shall

not overcome you. We may be drawn aside, we may be entangled, we may go out after the most vile and abominable things; but we shall have so many painful feelings, so many cutting convictions, so many distressing sensations, that we shall say with Ephraim, "What have I any more to do with idols?" (Hosea 14:8.) There shall be a coming to the Lord, and a cleaving to him once more with full purpose of heart. We may have to undergo much opposition and persecution, or be under the power of masters and superiors, and dread their frown. Yet the Lord has said, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He has subdued it by his cross. It shall never become the conqueror or master of his disciples.

Do look at these words. Are they not the words of Truth himself? And do we not in some measure find there is a divine reality in them? What has been your path? Has not this been your path, more or less, since the Lord was first pleased to turn your feet into the narrow way? Tribulation in the world; sometimes opposition and persecution from ungodly men; sometimes troubles connected with our various stations in life; sometimes the scourge of the tongue; and much more often the inward sufferings produced by a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The sources of tribulation may have been very various, very different, very multiplied; yet no one child of God here present has been free from tribulation in the world, nor will be free as long as he lives in it.

But let us pass on. Have we found, do we ever find, peace in Jesus? Do we desire to find peace there? Do we look for peace, do we expect to enjoy peace, from any other quarter? Dare we think, for a single moment, of peace in self, peace in the world, or peace in sin? Is our heart so fixed upon Jesus, our eyes so up unto him, the desires of our soul so after the manifestations of his mercy and love, that we are sure there is no peace worth the name except what is found in him? Our seasons of peace may not have been long—they may have been transient, very transient; yet sweet while they lasted, sufficient to shew what true peace is, sufficient to give us longings after a clearer manifestation of it,

and make us desire a fuller enjoyment of it. And yet the Lord winds it all up with the solemn and blessed declaration, that though our appointed path, our allotted path, is one of tribulation in the world, yet he has overcome it; sin shall not be our master, the world shall not be our conqueror, the things of time and sense shall not gain a victory over us. May he give us a sweet assurance that he will fight our battles, and bring us off more than conquerors.

## **A PECULIAR PEOPLE**

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, 11th July, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London.

"A peculiar people." 1Peter 2:9

What an involuntary testimony do ungodly persons often bear to the truth of the Scriptures! What, for instance, is more common in the world, and amongst those who are lying dead in a profession, than language of this kind: What an odd kind of people there are at such a chapel! what particular notions they have! what peculiar sentiments they entertain! There is only a set of peculiar books suited to them, and there are only a few peculiar preachers whom they will hear; and in all their words and actions they manifest an exclusiveness, a bigotry, a narrow-mindedness which is very different from what you witness at other places!

Is not this bearing a testimony to the truth of God's Word? Does not truth unwillingly fall here from the lips of enemies? Has not God Himself said that they are a peculiar people? Then this very peculiarity which is stamped upon them, and which the keen eye of the world discovers, is an evidence that they are those, of whom God has said that they are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. This peculiar people has existed through all ages from the days of the first promise, and will exist until the final consummation of all things.

Abel was one of this peculiar people; and the peculiar blessings that God favoured him with, drew down upon him the wrath of his murderous brother. Noah was one of this peculiar people, whom God directed to build the ark, as typical of Christ Jesus the Lord, in whom His dear people find a refuge from the deluging waves and showers of God's wrath. Lot in Sodom was one of this

peculiar people, who vexed his righteous soul from day to day by witnessing their ungodly deeds. Abraham in the land of the Canaanites, Isaac his son, Jacob his grandson, were the ancestors of a peculiar people, upon whom God had set his own stamp that He had separated them from the nations of the earth, as typical of a people foreordained to eternal glory.

The separation of the Jews, the lineal descendants of Abraham, from all nations, typified the separation of the elect from all the people that dwell upon the face of the earth; and the enmity that was manifested against that peculiar people was but a manifestation of the enmity which exists in the heart against the people of God—the development of that enmity which God said He would Himself put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) When they were in Egypt, their being a peculiar people called forth the enmity of that king that knew not Joseph. After the captivity, when they were dispersed through various lands, they called forth the enmity of Haman. He therefore went to the king his master and said, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries." (Esther 3:8,9)

Here was the discovery of the venom that ever dwells in the heart of the reprobate against the elect; here was the manifestation of that hidden enmity, which exists in the world against the peculiar family of Jehovah. These manifestations, then, of enmity are marks and testimonies, not merely to the truth of revelation, but in favour of those people against whom these envenomed arrows are shot. And depend upon it, friends, if you and I have never been aimed at by the bitter shafts of contempt, if we have never experienced persecution, if our fair fame has never been tarnished by the malicious slander of the world, if we have never been held up to scorn and execration as having such a peculiarity

stamped upon us as the world hates, we carry with us no evidence that we are of the number of that peculiar people whom God has chosen in Christ, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him.

There is a peculiar people, then; and the desire of every heart that God has touched with His finger is sweetly breathed forth in the language of Ruth, when she said, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16) "Yes", says the living soul whom God has quickened into a new and spiritual existence- "yes, they are the people of God; my heart cleaves to them with affection, I desire to be one with them; may my lot and portion be among the living family of God. Though there are in them many things which grieve me, though there are in them many divisions, though there is much lacking in them which I desire to see present, and much present in them which I desire to see absent, yet with all their failings and all their imperfections and all their infirmities, they are the people of the living God. With them I desire to live, and with them I desire to die." Then, friends, if you and I are walking in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, we shall carry about with us some stamp, some evidence, that we belong to this peculiar people; we shall bear with us some marks that God has separated us, by a work of grace upon our souls, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. (Ex. 33:16)

But this people are a peculiar people in several points of view. They are a peculiar people by the original separation of them in the eternal councils of the Three-one God. They were chosen in Christ before all worlds, that they might be a people in whom the Lord Jesus might eternally delight, and in whom He might eternally be glorified. Their fall in their first parent was foreseen and foreprovided for. The Lamb of God was slain, in the mind of God the Father, before the foundation of the world, and they stood eternally one with Christ, justified in His glorious righteousness, holy in His spotless innocency, perfect in His perfection, and comely in His comeliness.

And thus this peculiar people were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, (Eph. 1:3) before time had an existence; before this world had a being; before the all-creative voice of God made the sun and stars shine in the skies; when eternity alone existed, and the Three-one God dwelt alone in sacred communion, without any one object of Their creative hand. This people had a being then in the mind of God; and in virtue of this original being, they are brought forth first in time (each according to the moment that God has foreordained) and then in God's appointed season, are brought forth by the quickening operations of the Holy Ghost into a new and spiritual existence.

But how, as a matter of individual inquiry, shall we know that we belong to this peculiar people? Shall we turn over the leaves of our Bible, and read, (Eph, 1:1 or, Rom. 8:1) and seeing there that God has an elect people, at once conclude that we belong to them? Shall we turn to the first epistle of John, and reading there The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin, therefore conclude that our iniquities are pardoned? Shall we cast our eyes on the text Who is he that condemneth? it is God that justifieth;—and by reading that text of Scripture, without further ado, believe in our own personal justification? No; this may do for a dry professor, for one dead in a form; but it will never do for a living soul, whose conscience God has touched with His own finger. Before he can realize his interest in those blessings, wherewith God has blessed His people before all worlds, he must have a personal manifestation and revelation of those blessings to his own soul, under the operations of the Holy Spirit; and if they are not sealed upon his conscience, and evidenced to his heart, by the witness of the Holy Ghost, he can never be satisfied that he is a sharer in those blessings that are stored up for the elect in Christ Jesus.

But there are certain marks and evidences, which fall short of the manifestation of Christ with power to the soul; there are testimonies which do not amount to a full and complete satisfaction; and when a child of God is in deep poverty and

strong exercises of soul, he will be glad to accept a little token when he cannot get a greater. The beggar in the street will take a copper coin; he does not turn away from that with contempt; his hunger and his poverty make the smallest gift acceptable. A man in good circumstances would turn away from such a pitiful donation, and think it an insult; but he that is deeply sunk in poverty is glad to have anything that may relieve his pressing want. Many times, when the Lord lays poverty as a deep and galling load upon the souls of His dear family, He makes them glad to get hold of those little coins (I mean apparently such, for no coin is little that comes from heaven's mint), which proud professors despise.

We will, then, with God's blessing, endeavour to trace out a few of the peculiar marks that are stamped upon this peculiar people; and if the Lord shall be pleased through my mouth to convey from the courts of heaven one of these coins into your heart, He will lock it up safe in that treasury; He will sometimes bring it out for you to look upon; and thus you will have at times a sweet evidence that you are interested in that love which knows no bounds.

1. The peculiar people, then, have peculiar exercises. No man knows anything of spiritual exercises, except he is a spiritual man. He may have convictions, it is true; he may have passing doubts and fears; he may have some dim and dismal apprehensions of the wrath to come; but as to spiritual exercises, he knows them not, for they are peculiar to spiritually taught people.

But all God's family, each according to their measure, have spiritual exercises. Sometimes, for instance, they are powerfully exercised with unbelief; that is, the unbelief of their hearts so powerfully works in their carnal mind, as to obscure every evidence, hide every testimony, and deface every inscription that the Holy Ghost has engraved upon their souls. But it is not the mere existence of unbelief, that manifests a child of God, for unbelief reigns and rules in the hearts of the reprobate; it is the

exercise of the soul under unbelief, that shows the existence of spiritual life; it is the conflict, the opposition, the struggle, that is carried on in the bosom; for this implies a counteracting principle, the existence of the company of two armies. (Song 6:13)

To be shut up in unbelief is no testimony of being a living soul; but to find in our hearts a counteracting principle which discovers unbelief, which fights against unbelief, which groans under unbelief as a burden, which longs to be delivered from the power of unbelief- here we trace the existence of a living principle, by the opposition which that living principle carries on against the unbelief which rises up in the carnal mind. The grand thing which I want to come at in my own soul, and which I want to come at in yours, is this-the existence of the life of God, and I desire to trace out in your consciences this hidden life, in some of its bearings and its workings. But in order to do that, I must go into those exercises of soul, wherein the life of God is manifested.

If I were to say, "Every one who has unbelief is a child of God," I should build up a false evidence, because there are hundreds and thousands and millions, who have unbelief, who are not children of God; and therefore I must come to the grace of God in the soul, the work of the Spirit in the heart, the existence of a living principle which works and manifests itself under this mass of unbelief that seems to press it down. But, again, I want something more than that. Suppose you were in Derbyshire, and a person were to say to you, "There is a river here, the river Dove, which buries itself in a certain spot close by, and runs underground for a considerable distance." You would say, "I think I can hear it rushing along, but I certainly should prefer ocular evidence; and if I cannot see where the river first buries itself, I should like to see it in some part of its subterraneous course." Now if that person could take you to some deep dell or rocky chasm, where the earth parted, and you, looking down into the deep fissure, saw as well as heard the river rushing along, you would say, "I can believe it now;" and yet all the time this river had been running underground, but when you saw its waters through the chasm in the earth, then you had ocular evidence

that the river was there.

So it is with faith in our heart. Faith in the soul runs like a hidden river under the superincumbent mass of unbelief. But how am I to know that it is there? I know it sometimes by the strugglings, the upheavings, the attempts of this river to rise to the light of day. But if sometimes there is a chasm made-if rocky unbelief be parted asunder, and I can discern the actings, breathings, and workings of living faith, and it sparkles up as it catches a beam from the Sun- then I have another and a far brighter evidence that I have the faith of God's elect. Thus, in tracing out the work of faith upon the soul, we must not only discover faith in its conflicts, but we must sometimes see faith in its victories. We must see and feel faith, not merely as heaving itself up under the mass of unbelief, but we must sometimes see that blessed grace springing forth into lively exercise, so as to realize the things of God in Christ. The peculiar people have faith; and this faith is sometimes called forth into blessed exercise, and is drawn up by the Spirit of God, so as to rise up to the light of day, and glisten and shine beneath the Sun of Righteousness.

Again; another exercise of the living soul, is its conflict under that carnality, deadness, earthliness, and barrenness, which seem at times to clasp it down to the earth. But am I to say, that carnality, barrenness, coldness, and deadness are evidences? I say not. But the evidence is, when I find something of a different nature working up in them and counteracting them, and manifesting the power and strength of the Spirit's work in the midst of them. If I say, "I am carnal, I am dead, I am cold, I am stupid, I am unfeeling, I am lifeless, therefore I am a child of God," what do I but build up that which is the work of the flesh, and say of it that it is the work of the Spirit? Again; do I say, "I am always spiritual and heavenly minded, I am always enjoying the presence of Christ as my soul-satisfying portion, I am never dead nor stupid nor barren;" durst I say such things (I dare not say them, for I should have a lie in my right hand), it would be distressing the poor, burdened and exercised family, and not casting up the highway in which the redeemed walk.

But the path of the just is one in which spirituality at times breathes forth out of carnality, life at times enjoys blessed deliverance out of death, fruitfulness at times overcomes barrenness, light at times bursts forth out of darkness, mercy at times overcomes guilt, love at times casts out fear, and hope at times repels despondency. Here we come to that which is peculiar to the quickened elect; we touch upon peculiar workings, peculiar traces; here we begin to discern the stamp of the Holy Ghost, as distinct from all the religion of the flesh, and all the delusions and deceits of the wicked one. But those who have no grace are very glad to hide themselves under the wing of a minister; and when they hear him speak of deadness, carnality, barrenness, unbelief, and doubt-"Ah!" say they, "he is tracing out my experience now; oh! I can come in there; there is a little nibble for me". But what is he tracing out? Not the work of God in the soul, not the work of the Spirit upon the conscience; but that carnality, barrenness, and death, which all men have-merely the work of the flesh, and not the work of the Spirit of God.

But God's people have also peculiar exercises under temptations. To have temptations is no mark of being a child of God, because men in the world have temptations. What makes the pick-pocket dip his fingers into the coat of the passer-by? Temptation to theft. What makes the drunkard steal into the gin palace? The love of drink. What brings the felon to the gallows? Temptation to murder.

Therefore the existence of temptation and the power of temptation is no proof of being a child of God; but the proof of being a child of God is what are the feelings and exercises of the soul under temptations, how the living principle is manifested by working against and under temptations. Is there any pain? Does temptation cause distress? Is there a sigh and cry to God for deliverance? Does the renewed spirit groan and heave exceedingly beneath the heavy weight of it? Are there occasional deliverances from it? Is mercy manifested in pardoning the soul that has been entangled in it? Is the grace of God blessedly

glorified in healing the backslidings that temptations have caused? Is there a stretching forth of the arms of faith to embrace the cross of Christ as the only refuge from temptation? Now we come to life. But if you conclude yourself to be a child of God because you are tempted, it is but a deceiving of yourself. It is an awful delusion of the devil to set up temptation as an evidence of grace, without the exercises of the soul under temptation, without the burdens of temptation, without the bitter sighs and cries under temptation, without deliverance out of temptation. To set up temptations in themselves as way-marks is nothing else but to obscure the road which the Holy Ghost has traced out in the Word of God, and which the Holy Ghost traces out in the consciences of the living family.

2. But again, the peculiar people have peculiar deliverances. And after all, friends, say what we may about doubts and fears, and convictions, and distresses, and sore temptations, and painful exercises, I am well convinced that the grand soul-satisfying evidence is deliverance. Does the prisoner, when he is confined in the dark cell, feel an evidence that he shall come abroad by looking at the prison bars? Does the trembling criminal standing upon the gallows, and reaching forth his anxious eyes over the crowd, if he can see the king's messenger riding at full speed with a pardon in his hand, conclude that he shall be respited because he feels the halter pinching his neck? No; it is deliverance which is the testimony; it is the king's pardon which sets him free; it is the unrolling of the document signed by the hand of the sovereign, that detaches the noose from his neck, and sends him forth once more among his fellows as a living man.

And so it is with a child of God that is exercised with distressing fears, that feels the agonizing throes of despair in his soul, that seems suspended over eternity by a hair. He wants deliverance, he wants pardon, he wants a testimony, he wants the manifestation of God's mercy to his soul. "Well," but say some, "if this be the case, if there is no evidence to be traced in doubts and fears, if sin and corruption and temptation are not marks of grace, what in the world makes you and other ministers preach

them? Why do not you leave them all alone, and exalt a glorious Christ? and why not have done with all these temptations and corruptions?" I will tell you why. Suppose that I had lost my way in going to a place which I very anxiously wished to reach, and I inquired of a person whom I can trust which is the road to it. He tells me, and he says, "I will give you a mark to know the road by; it is very hilly, it is very rough, it is very rugged and stony; there are many pits and sloughs in it, and above all the road is very dirty". I listen to his instructions; I thank him for his intelligence, and I start forth. But I come to a road as smooth as a bowling- green; I find not one stone on the road bigger than M'Adam himself would allow; everything is easy to my feet. "Come," say I to myself, "this cannot be the road; I was told the road had stones in it, and hills and pitfalls, and mud and mire- surely I must be out of the road". But if I find at last a road which is very hilly, and very rough and rugged, and I now and then sink up to my shoes in the mud and mire, and everything which I find in the road tallies with the description which my informant has given me, I say, "I am in the road now; it is just as I was told; here I am in the right road".

Well, the Word of God has traced out the road to heaven as a road of this nature, a rough and thorny road, full of difficulties, exercises, straits and temptations; and if you read the Heb 11 eleventh chapter of Hebrews you will have a description of the travellers there-what exercise and temptations they pass through. The, mark this-the mud, the mire, the stones, the hills, the valleys, are not the road, but they lie in the road. Could they be swept away, the road would be the same; but they are there, and we must travel through them. So with the mud and mire of my heart, the unbelief, and pride, and presumption, and hypocrisy of my fallen nature, the sharp arrows that Satan shoots, the temptations that the world spreads, the opposition of professors, the persecution of the world, the doubts and fears of my own mind-if I am to walk in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, I must pass through these.

These are not evidences, but still they are so inseparable from

the road, that though they are not the road itself, they so lie in the road that if I walk in that road I must walk through them. Then that is the reason why those who desire to take the stumbling-blocks out of the way of God's people, and to be sons of consolation to the poor in Zion, talk of doubts, and fears, and exercises, and temptations, and griefs, and sorrows; that they may strengthen the living family who are struggling in this rough and miry road, for a living foot will toil on though in the mud, when a dead carcass would sink in it without a struggle.

For after all, deliverance is the grand evidence. To be sweetly blessed with a view of Jesus; to have the pardon of sin sealed upon the soul; to catch a sight of that glorious robe which covers and shrouds the guilty criminal; to have one's eye open to see Jesus; to look into His bosom; to see His tender heart beating with compassion; and to feel the atoning drops of His blood falling into our conscience, to purge it and to cleanse it from all guilt and sin- that is the evidence, that is the soul-satisfying testimony, and that which brings into the heart the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

None but the elect can ever have this evidence, and I will tell you another thing, none but the elect ever desire to have it. I cannot believe in my conscience that anyone but a vessel of mercy that is quickened by the Holy Ghost ever pants with unutterable pantings after the sweet visitations of the love of God, after the revelation of Christ's presence, and the applications of His atoning blood. I am sure I never dreamt of such things, or cared for such things, and would have derided them as enthusiasm, and trampled them under foot, as nothing but the fanaticism of bigoted minds, until the Lord led me into these feelings, as I trust, by His own powerful and blessed teaching in my soul.

3. But again: this peculiar people will have peculiar marks stamped upon them externally, as well as have peculiar marks internally. They will be separate from the world; they will have no intercourse beyond what business requires with the men of this life, who have no fear of God in their heart, no grace of God in their soul. They will be separated, as God from time to time calls

them, from the dead profession of the day; they will have no real fellowship or communion except with the spiritually taught family; they will bear an honest testimony against error of every shape and form; and they will obey strictly that precept, Come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. (2 Cor. 6:17)

That is what I have been obliged to do from compulsion; not carnal compulsion, but from inward spiritual compulsion. Who has been wrapped up in stronger folds than I? cradled as it were in everything contrary to the truth of God, swathed round with the strongest swaddling bands of prejudice, steeped up to the lips in worldliness, pride, and ignorance; wrapped round with as many grave-clothes of death as an Egyptian mummy, so that nothing but the hand of God could tear away these folds upon folds, and bring me into anything like uprightness and integrity of heart, and separate me from all that I was entangled in, and from all that I was connected with. I know, then, from personal experience, that there is an inward power communicated, whereby we obey the precept, Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and prefer the reproach of Christ to all the riches of Egypt. In my right mind, I would rather have the testimony of God in poverty and obscurity, than have the testimony of man with all that the world can bestow.

Again, in the peculiar people there will be honesty, uprightness, and integrity. I am ashamed to say it (for it is a blot upon the professing Church), but say it I must, that I myself have known much more honesty and worldly integrity, a nicer sense of honour, more uprightness in worldly dealings, stricter punctuality and straightforwardness in all pecuniary matters, in men of the world who make no profession, than in some of those who pride themselves upon being the people of God. But I believe, wherever the grace of God is in a man's heart, it will make him honest, not merely before God, but honest before men. No shuffling, no evasion, no swindling, no cheating, can ever exist in a regenerate heart.

There is honesty, implanted by God Himself, who searches the heart and tries the reins in every conscience which He has made alive by breathing life into it out of Christ's fullness. It is a black mark against you to be a shuffler. Meanness, trickery, and evasion come not from God. He that dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, will communicate to your soul some measure of His own uprightness. Let us have common honesty, friends; let us have integrity. Let not the world say, "These professors of religion will cheat us if they can." Let us have something like honour and something like uprightness, that we may not bear the stigma which the world would be glad to throw upon us.

4. Again: where God Himself has stamped us as His "peculiar people," there will be marks visible to the church of God; there will be a gentleness, a tenderness, a meekness, a contrition, a softness of spirit. There will not be a pouring forth of the venom and enmity of our carnal mind against all that oppose us; there will be no clambering to get to the topmost seat; there will be no elbowing and thrusting persons here and there, that we may be admired and bowed down to; but there will be humility, and a meekness, and a contrition, and a yielding submission and tenderness of spirit, whereby we are willing to be anything so long as we are dear children. And we shall come sometimes to David's spot, when he said he would rather be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Here is the mirror. Look into it. Can you see your features? Say you, "I have no doubt of election?" Probably not. But has God certified you of your own? Say you, "I believe all the doctrines you preach; my father was a Calvinist; I was always brought up to Dissent, and I have received the doctrines of grace from infancy?" Very likely. But did God Himself ever seal and apply these truths with power to your soul? Those that are born of the Spirit, we read, are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:13) Has He stamped His own mark upon your spirit, engraved His own likeness upon

your soul, brought you into any measure of conformity to the Son of His love, and raised up in your heart some resemblance to Himself?

I believe many of God's people, if not most have much ado to make their calling and election sure. (2 Peter 1:10) They are not a people to take things for granted; they cannot sit at ease and say, "I have no doubt that I am a child of God"; they want something powerful, something applied, something spoken by the mouth of God Himself, and short of that they must be exercised with doubts and fears as to their state before Him. Now let conscience speak; let us turn over the leaves of conscience. What says that faithful witness? Has God spoken with power to your soul? Has He pardoned your sins? Has He given you a sweet testimony of your interest in the Son of His love? Say you, "Why, I do not know that I can say all that, I do not know that God has pardoned my sins." Well we will come a little lower then: if you cannot say that, we will take a little lower ground; can you say that you are sighing and groaning and crying at times-not always, but as the Lord works in you, for the sweet manifestations of the love of Jesus to your souls? Here is a door open for you-the door of hope in the valley of Achor. Can you come in here? Well, these are marks of being one of God's peculiar people. But you cannot be satisfied, short of God Himself making it known to you: you want an immediate testimony from His blessed mouth, and nothing but that can satisfy you; and when He sheds abroad His love in your soul, it will give you peace and comfort, and nothing short of that can.

But remember, there is no middle place. How glad thousands would be if there were a place betwixt heaven and hell! O! could they but find purgatory to be true, and have some medium spot! "They are not good enough," say they, "for heaven; but surely they are not bad enough for hell!" O, could they but find some place betwixt the two! But there is none. There is a great gulf fixed (Luke 16:26) between Abraham and Dives: there is no intermediate spot. It is either a peculiar people ordained to eternal glory, or a people foreordained to everlasting perdition; it

is either being interested in the love and blood of the Redeemer, or it is being under the tremendous wrath and curse of God to all eternity; it is either standing complete in Christ, wrapped up in His righteousness and washed in His blood, or it is to howl in torments through endless ages; it is either to be blessedly caught up into the bosom of God, or thrust down into the habitations of the damned.

And therefore, there being such a tremendous gulf betwixt the one and the other, it will make the child of God quake at times, and fear, and tremble to the centre, whether he has an evidence that God is his Father, that Christ is his Elder Brother and that the Holy Ghost is his Teacher. But he will never get any solid satisfaction till God Himself drops a testimony from His own mouth, gives him the spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father, unveils His face in Christ Jesus, and seals blood and love in his conscience. Then he enters into his rest, and feels the peace of God which passeth all understanding, Php 4:7 he is sealed as an heir of God and joint heir with Christ, (Romans 8:17) and when he dies he will for ever be with Him whom his soul loves.

## **A Peculiar People**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, June 24, 1860

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:14

There is a common, and, if true, a very serious objection brought against the distinguishing truths of the gospel—what are commonly called the doctrines of grace; which is, that they naturally and necessarily lead to licentiousness; and that for this reason it is exceedingly dangerous to believe or profess them, and of course, by implication, more dangerous still to preach them. If this objection be well founded, under what an awful responsibility must I lie! for I have believed, professed, and preached these very doctrines for more than thirty years. If, then, these doctrines which I have preached for so long a period naturally and necessarily lead to licentiousness, and are therefore imperilling men's immortal souls, what have I been doing all these years but poisoning the very springs of life? and, as my sermons and writings have obtained a considerable circulation, I have been sending abroad far and wide what can only issue in the ruin of my hearers and readers, and as far as I am personally concerned, to my own disgrace here, and my own destruction hereafter? The Chinese are said to poison the wells at which our troops are likely to drink. But what is their crime compared with mine if they but destroy men's bodies, and I by poisoning the wells of truth destroy men's souls? We must either, then, meet and overthrow this objection, or fall under it and admit it to be true. If we admit it to be true, we must at once give up these doctrines; for all are agreed that a holy God cannot have revealed unholy doctrines; all must acknowledge that no view or sentiment, creed or confession, came from God which naturally and necessarily leads to sin. So that if the objection be true and well sustained that our views and sentiments, our doctrines or

experience lead to sin, and by necessary consequence cannot have been revealed in the inspired Scriptures, our best, and indeed our only safe or honest course will be, as soon as possible, to confess our sin and forsake it; to cast these doctrines which I have preached and you believed so many years to the winds, and publicly acknowledge before the church and the world your sin in ever having believed them, and I especially mine in having for so many years taught and preached them. But through mercy, the objection cannot be sustained; and we will endeavour, with God's blessing, to show that it must fall to the ground if viewed with an enlightened eye and weighed in a spiritual balance.

But the first question to be decided is, Are those doctrines in the word of God, or are they not? Are they, as some assert, doctrines of man's invention, mere perversions of a few isolated passages, or strained interpretations of some metaphorical expressions, contrary to the grand tenor and general drift of the Scriptures, or has the Holy Spirit written them there as with a ray of light, so that he that runs may read them, if he run as those that run for eternal life, if he read them as those read whose eyes are anointed with an unction from above? I believe he has written them so plainly and clearly that the veriest babe in grace may, under the teaching of the blessed Spirit, see them shining as with a heavenly glory through the whole Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Thus, if the doctrines of grace be plainly revealed in the word of God,—and none can deny this who have seen them there written, and felt their power in their heart,—the objection does not fall upon us who believe them or upon me who preach them, but upon God himself who has revealed them. Therefore, objector, answer it to God; it is against God you are fighting—against God you are spitting forth the venom of your enmity. The slaver may reach us, but it is the enmity of your mind against these truths themselves that prompts you to give it vent.

But these doctrines may be abused, and not only may be, but frequently are so. Ungodly men may adopt them as a creed, or even as a mask and a cover for all manner of sin and hypocrisy. This is one way whereby Satan often seeks to bring them into

reproach. When, then, men plainly see that some who profess these doctrines lead very inconsistent lives, instead of attributing the sins which they so plainly observe to the man's own corruption and hypocrisy, they cast the charge of ungodliness upon the doctrines themselves. But this, though common, is very unfair reasoning. The abuse of a thing is no argument against its use. Is not health abused by many to the gratification of their own base lusts? Is not strength abused to deeds of violence? Is not money abused to pride and licentiousness? Is not food abused to gluttony? Is not wine abused to drunkenness? But are not these good in themselves, though man abuses them? Nay, has God given man any good gifts in providence which may not be and are not daily abused? So the doctrines of grace may be and are abused. But because ungodly men may make an ungodly use of that which is in itself pure and holy, that is no objection against the doctrines themselves. I will go a step further and say that there is no holiness without them; that not only do they not lead to licentiousness, but they so lead and are so indispensable to holiness that there can be no real holiness independent of them.

But not to detain you longer upon this introduction to our subject, what says our text in reference to this point? Has that no voice which speaks in favour of my assertion? Does that bear no testimony to their truth? What are the express words of the Holy Ghost by the pen of Paul in the passage before its? Speaking of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, he declares that he "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Who, then, can say that Christ gave himself for us that we might live *in* iniquity, when he came to redeem us *from* it? Who can say that we should not be zealous of good works, when he came to purify unto himself a peculiar people who should be zealous of them? But these things will be more apparent if the Lord enable me to open up the words as I seem in some measure to see a light upon them.

1.—*First*, the *gift* of our Saviour Jesus Christ, "*who gave himself*

*for us."*

II .—*Secondly, the object for which he gave himself, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity."*

III .—*Thirdly, the effect of an experimental knowledge of that redemption, that he thereby purifies unto himself "a peculiar people."*

IV .—*Fourthly, the mark and character of that peculiar people thus purified, that they are "zealous of good works."*

I .—Admire with me how the Holy Spirit, by the pen of Paul, here traces the whole work of redemption and the whole work of purification up to the *gift of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. And do observe what a blessed fulness there is in the expression, he *"gave himself for us."* May we not with all holy reverence lift our eyes up to heaven and look at our most blessed Lord as he stood up in the councils of eternity, and there view by living faith how freely he gave himself for us before the foundation of the world, that in due time he might do the work that the Holy Ghost in our text has declared he came to do? He is thus beautifully represented (Prov. 8) under the name of "Wisdom" as "daily his Father's delight, rejoicing always before him;" and with a prospect of his future work upon earth, as even then "rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth and his delights with the sons of men." But this was "before the mountains were settled; while as yet he had not made the earth nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world." (Prov. 8:25, 20, 30, 31.) We read, therefore, that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4); and the gracious Lord says to the sheep on his right hand, "come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34.) But in viewing these eternal transactions of love and grace, we should at the same time take a glance at what the Church of God was before the Adam-fall. We must view her not as fallen but as unfallen, not as involved in sin and ruin, but as a pure and spotless bride given by the Father to his dear Son to be

his spouse. Of this Eve was a type, who was brought and given to Adam in all her spotless innocency; married to him before, not after the fall. Thus the Lord himself pleads with the Father in that blessed prayer which he offered up shortly before his crucifixion:—"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me;" and again, "I pray not for the world but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." (John 17:6, 10, 11.) That this gift is not to be restricted to the Lord's immediate disciples is plain from his own words afterwards, where he prays for the whole body of his people in similar terms:—"Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with the where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou has given me." (John 17:24.) The Lord tells his heavenly Father that those whom God had given him were first his own. "Thine they were." They were his by creating design, as foreshadowed in the eternal mind before they had birth or being; his as chosen in Christ, their covenant head; his as presented by him unto the Son of his love, to be his spouse, his bride, his inheritance, in whom he should be eternally glorified. As such, then, the mind and will of the Son being one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, he received the church as God's special and peculiar gift. The affections of his heart flowed forth towards her, and she became his in so special a way that he could say of every member of his mystical body, "All mine are thine and thine are mine;" and again, "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." (John 17:23.)

But this bride and spouse of Christ, though thus betrothed to him and made one with him by eternal ties, fell in the Adam-fall from this primeval purity, and of which Eve in her native creation was but an imperfect figure. She thus lost all her original beauty and innocency, and sank at once into the depths of sin, misery, and woe; for the whole of the church being in the loins of Adam, sinned in and with Adam, and was dragged down with and by him into that pit of ruin into which his feet sank. This may seem hard doctrine; but how else can you explain the sin and misery which

there is in the world? Does not the apostle say, "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that [or as we read in the margin "in whom"] all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12); and does he not say, "In Adam all die?" (1 Cor. 15:22.) Then if death passed upon all men through Adam's sin, and all die in him, must not the church have sinned in Adam and died in Adam? But how was she to be brought out of this horrible pit of sin and death, misery and wretchedness, into which she had so awfully fallen? How again was she to be a spotless spouse and fitting bride for the Lord the Lamb? How could she show her face in the courts of heaven after this transgression? How could she appear before the bright and holy angels as the glorious bride of the Son of God, when she had sunk into such depths of sin and death, been covered with all the filth of the Adam-fall, and become polluted to the inmost core by being a participator in his guilt and transgression? For let us not think there is any such thing as a half-way fall, as a little fall. The fall of Adam was to the lowest depth, not indeed of actual crime, but of ruined human nature, for in it he lost the image of God, became the slave of Satan, and dead in trespasses and sins. There was but one way, and that way, when made known to the soul, fills it with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And that way, when it will be made fully manifest at the great day as the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose, will display both to the ransomed millions and the bright angelic hosts such depths of infinite wisdom, grace, and love as will fill heaven itself with holy and eternal amazement. This wondrous way of wisdom and love was that the Son of God should freely give himself out of his Father's bosom, in which he had lain from all eternity, and take our nature into union with his own divine Person, by assuming the flesh and blood of the children. But in so doing, it involved the necessity that he should give himself freely unto all the sufferings and sorrows which were required by infinite justice to work out a sufficient and perfect obedience; that he should therefore endure the penalty the Church had incurred, and by standing in her place as her Surety and Representative might do what she never could have done and bear what she never could have borne. It was in this way, and in this way alone, that he

could reconcile her to God; that washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and sanctified by his Spirit, she might once more lift up her head without external spot or inward blemish, free from sin without and within, in the courts of heavenly bliss.

II .—But we pass on now to show *the object* for which Jesus gave himself, *that he might redeem her from all iniquity*. Could there have been any other way of her redemption but this, we cannot but suppose that God would have discovered and accomplished it. If it had been possible for the church of God to have been redeemed from all iniquity by any other price than the sufferings and bloodshedding of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can hardly for a moment think that God would have given up the Son of his love— not "spared" him, as the apostle speaks. We may, I think, then, lay it down for a certain truth were any other plan feasible, such a plan would have been designed and accomplished. And, conversely, as no other plan was adopted, and no other way revealed but the giving of Christ for us, that in the mind of God this was the only way whereby we could be redeemed from all iniquity.

But let us look for a few moments at the word *redemption*: it is a word of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures, and conveys a meaning of blessed import. It has indeed various significations in the word of truth, but all implying that the person redeemed is sunk into a certain lost and miserable condition; and the central idea round which all the other ideas group themselves is "one made captive in battle." You are aware how in ancient times devastating armies over-ran different lands, the object being not merely plunder, but to carry off captives; and as these captives were not put to death but were made slaves, a state of captivity is the leading idea, and that of servitude springs out of it. Take this idea into spiritual things. Thus it was Sin that devastated Paradise: Sin was the mighty conqueror that broke into the garden of Eden and carried Adam and Eve captive. And when sin had taken our first parents captive, it dragged them into slavery; made them slaves to do the foulest work, and employed them on the basest errands. A slave has no will of his own. His master's will is his will. Whatever work his master bids him do he must do

it. He cannot, as a hired servant, leave his master for a better employer or higher wages. He is a slave for life, ground down with an iron yoke and unable to deliver himself—a slave till death, or till he is in some way set free. So were we not merely made captives in the Adam-fall—not merely taken by the sword and bow of that potent conqueror, Sin—not merely dragged out of a happy, innocent Paradise into all the misery and wretchedness of this thorny, briery world, but made slaves to sin, and, worse than that, to sin's master, Satan, that foul fiend, that accursed spirit, whose enmity against God is so desperate, that if there ever be joy in his heart, it is to have debased the image of God in the soul of man, and still to employ him in doing the foulest errands, until he degrades him more and more fully into his own likeness.

But the idea of redemption includes more than that of captivity and slavery. It includes the idea of *debt* also; for in ancient times, when a man could not pay his debts, as we find in the case of the widow of one of the sons of the prophets in the time of Elisha, the creditor might take him, or if he were dead, his sons to be bondmen. So that in those days if he could not pay in purse he must pay in person; if he could not discharge the debt, he must become the slave of the creditor. But from this he might be redeemed by the payment of the debt. So it is in the things of God. Redemption implies not merely deliverance from a state of captivity and servitude, but also from a state of debt. What debt? The debt we owe to God's justice. Our being entangled in the Adam-fall has not set us free from the law of God; debt is no acquittance. A man cannot, even as regards the laws of his country, by breaking them free himself from them. So as regards the law of God, a man cannot say, "I will break through all laws and trample upon all commandments, and then the law can have no power over me." This would be adding sin to sin, defying God to his face, hurling defiance up to the very gates of heaven. We are still then as sinners amenable to the law; for it has not relaxed any of its stringent demands; it still pronounces and still will execute its awful sentence: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. 3:10.) And as the ancient creditor seized

the debtor who could not pay his debt and carried him to prison; so the law will arrest every one found under it; and if the debt cannot be paid—and how can he pay it?—he will be shut up in hell until he pays the uttermost farthing.

And then there comes the grand climax and the ultimatum of all, which is *death*; for that was the originally threatened penalty. So that viewing men as sunk into a state out of which he has to be redeemed, we may look at him as a captive dragged away from his native land, as Adam was dragged out of Paradise; made the wretched slave of a harsh, impecunious taskmaster, who holds him in bondage and servitude, and keeps him there till death comes to close the scene, which is but the opening gate to the second death, "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

How feeble are all conceptions, how inadequate all words, how meagre all expressions to paint to the life what you and I and every man is as involved in the original transgression, and as having added to original sin the guilt and weight of our own actual crimes! O that a sense and feeling of this might deeply sink into our minds! O that it were written, as with the point of a diamond, upon our hearts! For sure I am that we shall never properly value redeeming love, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and the gift of the Son of God until we have known experimentally the slavery of sin, and groaned as poor captives under the dominion of Satan. Till the iron has entered our very soul; till the fetters have galled our feet and the manacles our wrists, and we can look up to God and point to our bleeding wounds as inflicted by sin, Satan, and the law, we can never truly feel our need of or really value the redemption that has been accomplished by the suffering Son of God. But O, what a blessed change it is when the first ray of mercy breaks in upon the soul, and cheers the poor captive, who, like the prisoners in the dungeons of Naples, or those who have been just set free in Sicily, may have been groaning for years in the low dungeon. Let us compare him for a moment with those victims of tyranny who have been lately liberated. Our very heart bleeds to think of them

as they lay in those miserable holes under the pressure of their irons, half starved, covered with rags, their bodies foul with filth, and half eaten up by vermin. How rejoiced must they have been to hear the prison gates giving way, and to see through the broken doors beams of the light of day shining into their dark cells, and to listen to the voice of their liberators cheering them to wait for a few moments till they should be released. Yet even their state and even their liberation are but faint emblems of the prisoners of hope, of the captives whom Christ's redemption sets free. For, like the poor Sicilian prisoners, we are, as under condemnation and arrest, shut up in our dungeon cells, half starved, covered with filth and loathsome with vermin—the vermin of sin. But O to have the light of day breaking in through the prison doors, and to hear sounds from above of pardon and peace and blessed liberation,—is not this enough to make the poor prisoner's heart leap for joy within him? But was not this the express commission given to the blessed Lord? Was he not specially anointed to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound? (Isai. 61:1.) Yes, it is he who breaks in pieces the gates of brass and cuts asunder the bars of iron. (Isai. 45:2.) But O in what a way! Not by the arm of violence, but by the heart of suffering; not by the hand of strength, but by the hand of weakness nailed to the cross. For our prison is not a prison of stone but of sin; and could, therefore, only be broken up by Jesus being made sin for us who knew no sin. (2 Cor. 5:21.) He, therefore, gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity. Now, in thus redeeming us, in order that that redemption should become effectual, he must either have given a certain price equivalent to the debt, or he must have given himself. Redemption in ancient times could not be accomplished but in one of these two ways: the prisoner must be set free either by full value given for him, or else by the person who came to redeem him taking his place. Thus Judah offered to take the place of Benjamin that he might go free. "Now therefore I pray thee let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondsman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren." (Gen. 44:33.) So the Lord Jesus Christ must either come in his own person and take our place, or else he must pay a

certain value that the prisoner under the law might go free. Blessings be upon his name! A crown of glory adorn his brow! He did both. *First* he paid the *price* in full. God held the law in his rigid fingers, and weighed the curse in one hand and the blood of his own dear Son in the other; for "we are redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." God, the infinitely just and righteous God, held the scales with unerring hands, and when the blood was put into one and our sins into the other, the blood was found to be double for all our sins, according to the testimony of the prophet. "Cry unto her that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." And well might it be double, for it was the blood of the darling Son of God, and thus all the virtue and validity of Godhead was in it. Then the law in a moment gave up its claims; then all the debt was at once discharged, and the millions of sins of millions of sinners were all put away, blotted out, cancelled, removed, cast behind God's back, and drowned in the depths of the sea, as that precious blood fell from the hands and feet and side of Jesus upon Calvary's cruel tree. He thus redeemed us by paying down the full price, as we read—"Ye are bought," that is, redeemed "with a price." (1 Cor. 6:20.) The law could not say "Not yet! not yet! The debt is not paid; the crimes are too great, the sins too black, the iniquity too foul. I want more! It is not enough yet!" But the law said at once "It is enough!" for what could exceed in value the blood of the Son of God, who himself is God? The blood of an angel, could an angel have taken flesh; the blood of a seraph, could a seraph have been incarnate; the blood of an archangel, could an archangel have become man, would not have been enough. The law could have said, "Thou art but a creature, Michael, Raphael, Gabriel: God requires all thine obedience; it is not enough." But who can require that *God* should render obedience? Who can demand that Deity should suffer, bleed, and die? When Deity, then, did suffer, bleed, and die, eternal Justice itself must cry "Enough!" But our Lord paid in *Person* as well as in blood; for we may draw a distinction between the Person of the God-Man and the blood which he shed as such; for he suffered but once on the cross, but was obeying the law in his Person

during the whole time of his sojourn here below; and it was the dignity of his Person that gave efficacy to his atoning blood. He stood, therefore, as it were, between the wrath of God and his people; and it was as if by so doing he said, "Let the law discharge all its curses upon me. Here is my head: let the lightning fall; I bare my brow. Let the wrath of God come upon me, that my sheep may go free." It fell. For in this sense "the Lord bowed the heavens and came down, and it was darkness under his feet. The voice of his thunder was in the heaven, the lightnings lightened the world, the earth trembled and shook;" for we know that as a token of God's displeasure against sin in the Person of Christ, the very sun withdrew its light and the earth shook. But when the blessed Lord had thus endured the wrath of God by suffering in Person, it was enough; and he himself proclaimed with expiring voice, "It is finished." Then, and not till then, he gave up the ghost; God had accepted him and his offering; and, as a proof of his full satisfaction and his holy approbation, he raised him from the dead and seated him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.

Now it may be, and I hope it is so, that some of you have seen and felt yourselves at various times some of the foulest, filthiest, blackest, most polluted wretches that God suffers to crawl upon his earth: for though your lives may have been, and I hope are, free from outward spot, and you are made to walk in the fear of God, yet the shining in of divine teaching has discovered to you the depths of your fallen nature. If this be the case, the word "iniquity" is not too strong an expression for you; for you know it to be true. Your main concern, the spring of your chief anxiety, arises from this—not that the blood of Jesus Christ is not able to cleanse from all iniquity, for you have seen its sufficiency and suitability; but misgivings, doubts, and fears at times work very powerfully in your mind whether your iniquity has been purged by that blood; for it is in your eyes so great, so aggravated, so abounding, so unceasing, that apprehension seizes hold of your mind, and your conscience is painfully exercised clearly and fully to know whether that sin of yours can be, has been put away. You have, therefore, no objection to make against the price not

being sufficient; you have no doubt whether the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. But your doubt is, and will be till God has blessedly satisfied your soul by speaking words of peace and pardon to your conscience, whether you, even you, are washed in that precious blood; whether you are clothed in that justifying righteousness, and whether, when Jesus died upon the cross, he bore your individual sins in his own body upon the tree.

But how comprehensive is the expression "to redeem us from all iniquity;" iniquity in heart, iniquity in lip, iniquity in life. And we may observe that there are five things as regards iniquity from which the blessed Lord came to redeem us; its guilt, its filth, its power, its love, and its practice. By his blood he redeemed us from its guilt; by the washing of regeneration he delivers us from its filth; by the power of his resurrection he liberates us from its dominion; by revealing his beauty he frees us from its love; and by making the conscience tender in his fear he preserves us from its practice.

III .—But we now pass on to consider our third point: *the effect* of the Lord's thus giving himself. It was not only to redeem us from all iniquity, but *to purify unto himself a peculiar people*. Redemption and purification go together. Holy John had a view of the wounded heart of his suffering Lord, and he saw two distinct things issue from that heart when pierced by the Roman spear: one was blood, the other was water. Hart has sweetly explained the connection:—

This fountain so dear he'll freely impart;  
Unlock'd by the spear, it gushed from his  
heart, With blood and with water; the first to  
atone, To cleanse us the latter; the fountain's  
but one.

The blood was shed to atone for sin, and the water gushed from the wounded heart as a fountain of sanctification. Thus purification is connected with redemption, for the same pierced heart that poured forth blood to atone, poured forth water to sanctify. Here, then, we meet triumphantly the objection that the

doctrines of grace lead to licentiousness. What is the leading doctrine of grace? That Jesus died that chosen sinners might live; that he shed his atoning blood for a peculiar people. That is the leading truth of the gospel. Now see how sanctification and purification are connected with redemption; for he redeemed them for the very express purpose that they might be a peculiar people; peculiar in this, that they should be God's people, and as such not only be redeemed by the blood of Christ but sanctified and made holy by his Spirit and grace. Is it not a libel, then, upon our most holy faith, upon the doctrines of grace, to say or even think that the water which issued from the broken heart of Jesus has less power than the blood; that he who gave himself to redeem us from all iniquity should allow us still to lie in our foulest sin: should redeem us from iniquity, and we still be in it; should deliver us from all evil, and we still wallow in it? When the Bastille was taken at the first French revolution, there was found in that terrible prison an old person who had been there forty years, and the man, whose locks were grey with age, could not be induced to leave his cell. He had become so habituated to the dark, that he preferred darkness to light; and he was such a stranger to the unknown world, that his grief was to be forced once more to come abroad into it. So there are many persons in Satan's bastille who would not, if they could, come out of the dark cell, for they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and would sooner grovel there amidst their native filth than be washed from their pollutions. This is just the case with the common tramps, to whom the greatest punishment is the Union bath. Cut off their matted locks, wash their dirty flesh; it is purgatory to them. So there are those who gladly riot in the pollutions of sin, who love the darkness of the cell, and hug themselves in the filth with which they are covered. But the Sicilian prisoners who have been lately liberated were not like these, or the man who had been shut up forty years in the Bastille. They were glad enough to come out into the light of day; to change their prison dress and prison fare, and be restored to light and liberty; for their dark cell had not quenched their love of freedom. So the poor child of God, to whom a thirst for freedom has come, can be satisfied with nothing but the light of day, and

that happy liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. The great mass of men have no desire for freedom. In the southern states of America, there are slaves so contented with their servitude that they would not accept freedom as a gift; nay, they look with the greatest contempt upon the free black man, and hug themselves in their slavery, as glorying in being a wealthy man's property. So the servitude of sin and Satan has so debased in all natural men the love of freedom, that they would sooner be slaves of sin than Christ's free men. As the wretched drunkard would sooner on a summer's eve get into a low pot-house, with a foaming cup and a pipe and the filthy conversation of his boon companions, than walk in the summer fields, inhaling the pure summer air, and recreating himself, as sober people do, in the cool evening breeze; thus sin has so debased the mind of man, so thrust its black brand into his inmost soul, that he is much happier in sin than in holiness. But not so with the saint of God. A new nature, a new spirit has been breathed into his soul, which makes him groan under the slavery of sin and long to be free. Even naturally there is sometimes kindled in the bosom of a slave an inextinguishable desire after freedom. And O, the love of freedom! We in this country are all happily free. Slavery cannot live in England's free air. It is our birthright to be free men. Liberty burns as a pure flame in an Englishman's bosom. We cannot conceive what it is to be a willing slave under a task master, to be satisfied with the food and clothing provided for us, and not have a will of our own. So when the flame of liberty has once been kindled in the bosom of a slave, what then can satisfy him but to be made free? To obtain this, he will break through a thousand obstacles, and run the risk of a thousand dangers, for he feels that he must be free or die. Many a poor slave has chosen death rather than return to servitude. So in grace. The Holy Spirit kindles in the breast of the child of God a love of freedom; makes him groan and sigh under the slavery of sin. He once was sin's willing slave; but he can bear that yoke no longer. He must be free: he longs to inhale the air of freedom; he cannot, will not live as he has done; sin is such a burden to his conscience that he hates both it and himself, loathes his slavery and himself as being a slave. Now this is the first dawn of light

upon his mind, the first kindling of the Spirit of grace in his heart. If he die, he must make the attempt, if he swim rivers, if he scale mountains, if he incur death in the attempt, he can no longer bear the yoke of servitude. Have you not in this manner felt the slavery of sin, and sighed, groaned, and panted to be delivered from it? When you have been entangled in it and made a captive by it, have you not abhorred yourself? How we look back sometimes to our past sins, and hate them and ourselves for them. It is by these inward feelings that we learn the miserable bondage of sin and long for a full deliverance from it. Now Christ came to set you free from all this miserable slavery, to redeem you by his precious blood from this bondage, darkness, doubt and fear, and to purify you to himself, that as washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and sanctified by his Spirit, you might be eternally his. If, then, you have been as I have been describing, wretched and miserable under the burden of sin and longing to be free from it, will you not gladly hail any friendly beam of light that gives you hope of a full and perfect deliverance from your wretched servitude?

1. Now comes then the *purification*. Under the law, persons and things which had become ceremonially defiled, were purified in several ways, and especially four: by blood, by fire, by water, and by oil. First, there was purification by *blood*, as the apostle tells us, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb. 9:22.) And you recollect, I dare say, when the high priest was consecrated to his high office, blood was put upon his ear, his hand, and his right foot, as well as sprinkled upon his garments. (Exod. 29:20, 21.) In the case of the leper also there was blood applied at the time of his cleansing, for by blood applied to him in the same way as to the high priest his leprosy was purged. So it is in grace. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," not merely by virtue of the atonement made by it on the cross, but by virtue of its being sprinkled upon the conscience. It is therefore called "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel;" and the apostle says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot

to God, purge your conscience from dead works." (Heb. 9:14; 12:22.) In this way the blessed Lord purifies not only the persons of his people, but their consciences to serve the living God. Jesus thus purifies by blood. But when the blood of sprinkling comes from his gracious hand, what is the effect? First, it purifies *the eyes of the understanding*. The eyes of the understanding are by nature held in darkness, but when the blood of the covenant touches them, they are enlightened to see the efficacy of that blood, as the scales fell from Paul's eyes when Ananias touched him. And as divine sight comes through the hearing of faith, this was typified by the application of blood to the ear of the leper; for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Next comes the purifying of the *conscience* which is guilty under the load of sin and dead works, from which spring bondage, doubt and fear. Then, with the conscience, there follows next the purifying of the *affections*, which need to be purged from fleshly idols and creature objects, that they may be set upon things above. Upon this follows the purifying of the *lips*, according to the experience of Isaiah, where the seraph flew to take a coal off the brazen altar, and by its application, purged his lips. The live coal was taken from off the brazen altar—a type of Christ's sacrifice. And thus, when there is a blessed discovery to the conscience of Christ's atoning blood, it turns the lips to speak a pure language, no longer a mixture of half Ashdod but the pure language of Canaan—to praise and extol free grace without any dash of legality.

But there is also the purification by *fire*. When spoil was taken in war by the children of Israel, there were according to God's command two ways of purifying it: every thing that could abide the fire was purified by fire, but what could not abide the fire, was to go through the water. (Num. 31:23.) So it is in grace: there is the fire, the furnace that God has appointed in Zion, and in that, all faith and hope and love must be put. In this fire the dross and tin are consumed, and God's work upon the soul is separated from all counterfeit metal. So we read, "When the Lord shall have purged away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof

by the Spirit of judgment, and by the Spirit of burning." (Isai. 4:4.)

But there is also purification by *water*. Thus, the high priest, on the great day of atonement, washed himself in water, both before and after he had taken the blood into the most holy place; and so he that let go the scape-goat, was commanded "to wash his clothes and bathe his flesh in water." (Lev. 16:24, 26.) Thus also when the Levites were taken from among the children of Israel for the service of the sanctuary, God said to Moses, "Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean." (Num. 8:7.) In a similar way, all ceremonial defilements were purified by the water in which the ashes of the red heifer were sprinkled; for we read of it that it was kept for "a water of separation; it is a purification for sin." (Num. 19:9.) All this was typical of the purifying water of the blessed Spirit, whereby the church is cleansed, as the apostle speaks, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26); "and this is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." (Titus 3:6.)

Then again, there is purification by *oil*; for it was by this applied to the ear, the hand, and the foot that both the high priest was consecrated, and the leper purified.

In these four ways, therefore, does the Lord purify unto himself "a peculiar people:" by blood, by fire, by water and by oil—blood to sprinkle the conscience, fire to burn away the dross, water to cleanse the heart, and oil, the unction of the Spirit, to soften and make supple the affections! And all these four go together. None can be dispensed with, for each has its peculiar work and gracious effect.

2. But if the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and thus purify us unto himself, it was for a certain end—that we might be "*a peculiar people*;" "a people that dwelleth alone, and is not numbered with the nations." The word literally means a people for a possession, and

has not the Lord said of them, "This people I have formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise?" (Isai. 43:21.) It is as if he bought them and formed them, that he might look down from heaven his dwelling-place upon his saints on earth, and say "These are my people and I am their God. These are the people for whom I gave myself out of the bosom of my Father, in which I lay from all eternity as his co-equal, co-eternal Son, in blissful communion with himself and the Holy Ghost. And I gave myself for them that they might be eternally mine, to glorify me upon earth, and to be for ever with me in heaven." If, then, the blessed Lord "gave himself that he might redeem us from *all* iniquity," its guilt, its filth, its love, its power, its practice; from all iniquity, without and within, past, present, and to come; from sins of omission and sins of commission; iniquities as high as the loftiest mountains, as deep as the deepest seas; are we not bound by every sweet constraint of dying love to live to his praise? If he came for this express purpose that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and is now looking down from heaven his dwelling-place, having gone back to his Father's bosom, with eyes of pity and affection upon us as "the travail of his soul," and is separating us by his grace from this wicked world and from our no less wicked selves, what a load of obligation lies upon us to live to his glory! Shall his people have been redeemed by such sorrows and such sufferings from all iniquity, and then continue to live in sin? Shall he have suffered such cruel agonies of body and soul, that they might trample upon his wounds, and instead of repaying him with gratitude and obedience, repay him with that which his soul abhors? How can any one who knows anything of the blessedness of atoning blood and redeeming love and the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit continue in sin that grace may abound? Doctrinal professors may do these things, for a mere letter knowledge of the truth brings with it no deliverance from the power of sin; but the living soul, in whom the God of all grace is carrying on his gracious work,—can it trample under foot the cross of the suffering Son of God? It is impossible that a man who knows for himself the redeeming efficacy of Christ's atoning blood, and whose conscience is made tender in the fear of God, can, under the sweet influence of his love, deliberately crucify

him again. Not but what there is a falling under the power of sin and temptation, as David and Peter fell; but there will not be a wilful sinning against him, when the blessed Spirit is bringing near his blood and grace and love. May we never forget that the suffering Son of God gave himself to purify unto himself a peculiar people—a people whose *thoughts* are peculiar, for their thoughts are the thoughts of God, as having the mind of Christ; a people whose *affections* are peculiar, for they are fixed on things above; whose *prayers* are peculiar, for they are wrought in their heart by the Spirit of grace and supplication; whose *sorrows* are peculiar, because they spring from a spiritual source; whose *joys* are peculiar, for they are joys which the stranger intermeddleth not with; whose *hopes* are peculiar, as anchoring within the veil; and whose *expectations* are peculiar, as not expecting to reap a crop of happiness in this marred world, but looking for happiness in the kingdom of rest and peace in the bosom of God. And if they are peculiar in *inwardly*, they should be peculiar *outwardly*. They should make it manifest that they are a peculiar people by walking in the footsteps of the Lord the Lamb, taking up the cross, denying themselves, and living to the honour, praise, and glory of God. What has given so much force to the objection against the doctrine of grace as the ungodly lives of its professors? The strongest argument you can present to the unbelieving world in favour of the doctrines which you profess is a godly life. Let them see by your good works that you *do* adorn the doctrine, that you do bear fruits; and make it manifest by your conduct, in your family, in your business, in the whole of your life and deportment, that your religion bears upon it the stamp of inward and outward holiness. This will be your best answer to the charge that your doctrines lead to licentiousness. Let them all be able to look at you and say, "Here is a man professing these doctrines; yet where shall we find one so distinguished for honesty, integrity, uprightness, liberality, kindness—for everything, in short, that adorns the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

IV .—To come to our last point, you must, if you belong to this peculiar people, "*be zealous of good works;*" not doing them

grudgingly, not eking out a tardy, forced obedience, as though you hated Christ's yoke, and only bore it through a slavish fear of hell; but as full of holy warmth and earnest zeal, mourning that your good works are so few, yet making it manifest that you are zealous of them. But it may well be said, "Where shall we go to find a people like this? Far and near, over hill and dale, sea and river, may we look, and look till our eyes fail, before we shall see a people corresponding to this description." Yet there have been such a people. There were such in the days of the New Testament, and there have been such even in our own land; but in our degenerate times, where are we to "find a peculiar people" zealous of good works as described in the text? Are good works even mentioned or insisted upon in the ministry of the present day, and are they not thought rather to be marks of legality and bondage than of free grace and gospel liberty? You may indeed find one here and there who is not inconsistent, in whom there is no very great blot, who does live a little like a Christian; but to find those who shine as stars in Christ's right hand, cities set on a hill, lights placed upon a candlestick to give light to all in the house, where in these degenerate days will you find them? Yet the power of Christ's grace is the same, his blood the same, his love the same, and he can work in us, as he wrought in days of old, to make us and manifest us a peculiar people, zealous of good works. O that he would do so! It is my desire that he may—that you and I may be a peculiar people, and not be content with a few lazy doings, but be zealous to adorn the doctrines we profess by that godly, holy, and consistent walk which is so desirable for our own peace as well as the glory of God. By so doing, we shall meet the charge brought against us by our enemies in the most satisfactory way, by showing that grace does not lead to sin, but to holiness in heart, in lip, in life.

## The Performer of All Things

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 11, 1847

"I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth." Psa. 57:2, 3

Few days, I think I may say, pass over my head without bringing trials and exercises in their train. Weak health, dejected spirits, opposition from without and from within; and, above all, darkness of mind, strong temptations, snares spread for my feet, a daily sense of backsliding and departing from the living God, a continual conflict with the horrid evils of my desperately wicked and depraved nature; all combine, more or less, to bring a daily exercise into my mind. And yet I would fain hope that these painful things are for my spiritual profit. I would fain hope, that by them the Lord is showing me more and more what I am in myself, and that the things of time and sense are but a shadow which is passing away. I feel too, the spirit of prayer stirred up by them in my bosom, and my heart's affections more drawn up to centre in the Lord himself. And I would fain hope too, that these trials and exercises are not only for my own spiritual profit; but that they are mercifully over-ruled for the good of the people of God among whom I may labour. I am well convinced, both in my judgment and in my conscience, that however my coward flesh may shrink from exercises and trials, an unexercised and untried minister is rather a plague than a profit, a burden more than a benefit to God's tried and tempted family.

But what a mercy it is for us, that when we come to the word of God, we find that the blessed Spirit there sets forth trial, temptation, and exercise as the footsteps of the flock, as the path of the redeemed, as the way in which the Lord leads his beloved church and people.

Above all, what a mercy it is for the church of God, that there is one book especially in the inspired record, I mean the Book of Psalms, that puts forth so minutely, describes so accurately, and traces out so vividly, the exercises, trials, and temptations which the Lord's people have to pass through: so that therein, as the Lord the Spirit enables, they can read their spiritual features, and have from time to time some testimony from God himself, that they are walking in a right way, though it be a rugged way, "to a city of habitation."

The title of our Psalm is worth noticing, as it throws light upon the Psalm itself, and more especially upon the words of our text. "To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, (which in the margin is, "Destroy not; a golden psalm,") when he fled from Saul in the cave." Thus, the Psalm was written under peculiar circumstances. It was when David fled from the face of Saul, and hid himself in a cave from his apprehended wrath. And, under the trials and exercises brought into his mind through the fear of Saul, knowing (or rather fearing) there was but one step between him and death if Saul's angry spear should overtake him, he vented the feelings of his soul in the Psalm before us.

With God's blessing this morning I shall make no regular divisions; but, to borrow a remark once made by a good man, I shall first 'take the text to pieces, and then put it together again.' May the Lord enable me to bring forth the mind and meaning of the Spirit in it, that it may be some spiritual food for those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

I .—"*I will cry unto God Most High.*" Observe (it is worth observing) what a man of prayer David was! There is an expression of the Psalmist which has often struck my mind; he says, "For love they were my enemies, but I give myself unto prayer;" it is, I believe, literally, "I, prayer;" as though he spoke thus, 'I am a man of prayer; I am prayer; prayer is so incorporated into my very being; it is so a part and parcel of my spiritual self, that I and prayer are one.' And what a mercy it would be for you and me, if we had the same spirit of prayer in

us which we find from the Psalms was in David, I mean, as to its intensity, its earnestness, and its frequency. If we have not the same spirit of prayer in our breasts that he had in his, we are dead in a profession altogether. But O that we had—(O that *I* had! let me speak for myself)—that fervent, that earnest, that unwearied, that persevering, that importunate, and I must add that prevailing spirit of prayer which burnt as a holy flame upon the altar of the broken heart of the sweet singer of Israel! O what blessed answers should we then from time to time be favoured with!

But observe this too, (it is worthy of observation,) that if David was highly favoured with the spirit of prayer, and blessedly indulged with answers to his prayers, he was led in a very trying path. He had to pass through deep waters, painful and powerful exercises. And it is in these deep waters, in these powerful exercises, that true prayer flourishes. If you would have a tree to spread its branches abroad, and carry up its boughs high to heaven, you must have a soil proportionably deep. And thus, would we have prayer in our souls spreading far and wide, and lifting itself up high, there must be the deep soil of trial and exercise for it to spread its strong roots in.

But what forced this prayer out of David's bosom? It was being in the cave, where he fled from the face of Saul. It was whilst lodged in that gloomy, desolate, and dark abode that he said, "I will cry unto God Most High." What is indispensable before we can use the same words?

1. Before we are cast into the same mould of Divine experience, we must first have this conviction deeply wrought in and established in our hearts, that *there is a God above*. For our hearts (at least, *my* heart), is so full of infidelity, atheism, and scepticism, that I need divine demonstration to convince me there is a God at all. I think I am not very far from the word of truth, when I say, that we need divine faith to credit the very being of God, for the inspired writer tells us, that "without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must

believe that he is." (Heb. 11:6.)

2. But again. We need also to believe that God has *power to deliver us* out of the evils felt and feared. For, if we doubt about his power, our prayers will fall short; there will be an inherent weakness in them; they will be like an arrow shot from a broken bow, or when the string snaps as the arrow flies forth. So if, when prayer is aimed upward, there is some doubt in our minds, the string of our bow is broken in twain, and the arrow of prayer falls short upon the ground.

3. But again. There must be a persuasion (and this is the hardest part to get) that God has not only the power, but *the will* also. Not merely ability to deliver; but inclination.

Now when we get these three things wrought with divine power in our conscience; 1. that there is a God that hears prayer; 2. that there is a God who is able to save to the uttermost all who call upon his name; and 3. that he has a heart touched by sympathy, compassion, lovingkindness, and tender mercy, and is therefore willing to give everything that our heart is moved to request at his hand—then the arrow of prayer falls not short; it is aimed at a certain mark, and enters into the mark at which it is aimed.

But there is something to notice in the word "*Most High*," which I must also enter into, as I promised to take the text to pieces. "I will cry unto God Most High." It is as though he was surrounded with difficulties; and, like a swimmer attempting to swim through a mighty flood, but fearful lest every wave might drown him in the overwhelming gulph, he casts his eyes upwards "unto God Most High;" as though on him, and him alone, he would fix his look. Thus, we read, "The Lord sitteth upon the waterflood" (Psa. 29:10); He "dwelleth between the cherubims." (Psa. 99:1.) And the prophet Isaiah in vision, saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up"—exalted above all the poor things (I can call them no other) that engross our minds; and "lifted up," that the eyes of waiting sinners might look unto him from "the end of the

earth." (Isa. 6:1.)

But in the word, "Most High," there is also something to my mind very expressive. It is to "God Most High" that prayers go up from broken hearts, in all parts of the world where the Lord has a quickened people. "Unto God Most High" every eye is pointed, every heart is fixed, and every breath of living prayer flows. Jesus sits in glory as "God Most High," hearing the sighs and cries of his broken-hearted family, where they dwell in the utmost corners of the earth and he is not only sitting on high to hear their cries, but also to bestow upon them the blessings which he sees suitable to their case and state.

Now when shall we thus come "unto God Most High?" When we are pleased and satisfied in self? when the world smiles? when all things are easy without and within? when we are in circumstances for which our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness are amply sufficient? We may, under such circumstances, appease our conscience by prayer, or rather its form; but there is no cry "unto God Most High." Before there is a real, spiritual cry raised up, we must be brought to that spot, "Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." (Psa. 142:4.) Here all the saints of old were brought; Job upon his dunghill, Hezekiah upon his bed, Hannah by the temple gate. All were hopeless, helpless, houseless, refugeless, before they cried unto "God Most High." And we must be equally refugeless and houseless before we can utter the same cry, or our prayers find entrance into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

II.—"*Unto God that performeth all things for me.*" Did not David, then, expect to receive something from God? What a mockery to pray unto him, and not want to receive anything from his hand! It is an insult to man to go as though we had some favour to obtain from him; and when our business is asked, not to know the errand for which we came. And in a much higher sense, spiritually, is it an insult and mockery to the Majesty of heaven to go upon the bended knees, with lowly face or uplifted hands, to ask for what we neither know nor care about, or for which we

have no earnest desire, and do not need, deeply need, the blessing for which we pretend (for it is a pretence) to beseech God to bestow.

"Unto God that performeth *all* things for me." If God did not perform something for us; nay more, if God did not perform *all* things for us, it would be a mockery, a delusion to pray to him at all. "The Hope of Israel" would then be to us a dumb idol, like Ashtaroth or Baal, who could not hear the cries of his lancet-cutting worshippers, because he was hunting or asleep, and needed to be awakened. But the God of Israel is not like these dumb idols, these dunghill gods, the work of men's hands, the figments of superstition and ignorance; but the eternal Jehovah, who ever lives to hear and answer the prayers that his people offer up.

"That performeth *all* things for me." What! *all* things? May I, then, go to God, and ask him for *all* things? No; there must be some limitation—God's revealed will. I might ask; for instance, to be perfect in the flesh! Has God promised it? I might ask for the conversion of the whole world! Has God promised that? I might ask for health, for strength, for riches, for prosperity, for freedom from trial and exercise, for a smooth and pleasant path! Has God promised that? No. Though God "performeth all things" for his praying family, it is only those things which he has promised in his inspired record. There is the limit. It is indeed a limit; but how wide, how great, how extensive, I might almost say, how boundless the limit (if not a contradiction in terms) that God has put to what he has promised to give to them that ask him! But this is not all; there is another limit still, and that is, our *present wants*. There are a great many things you may, in words, ask the Lord to give; and yet you may not feel your need of them! Is that honesty? is that sincerity? is that uprightness? is that godly fear? is that the work of the Spirit upon the heart? I say, no.

Then there are two limitations; *first*, what the Lord is pleased especially to lay upon our consciences; and *secondly*, what the Lord has promised in his revealed word to give to those that ask

him. Carry this into your experience. The children of God are all exercised, but differently exercised; and therefore, though they are brought from time to time to cry unto God to "perform all things" for them, they do not all, and at all times, go to a throne of grace with the same or similar petitions; yet all, as the Lord works in their conscience, "cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things" for them. For instance,

1. There may be some here whose chief desire is, that the Lord would manifest *the pardon of sin to their conscience*. Have not these a full warrant to go "unto God most High, unto God that performeth all things" for them with this petition? Is sin their burden? Does guilt lie with weight and power upon their heart? Are the terrors of the Almighty within, and fear, lest death and hell should swallow them up? Has God promised "to pardon the sins of those whom he reserves?" Is forgiveness of sins revealed in the everlasting gospel of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Then are they warranted—nay more, they are enabled—nay more, they are encouraged without and within: without, by God's testimony; within, by the Spirit's intercession—to go with these desires that the Lord would manifest his pardoning love to their souls.

2. Others again may have *backslidden from God*. 'O surely,' replies some one, 'those must be very awful characters!' "Thou art the man!" Hast thou never backslidden from God? The Lord in mercy may have kept thee from backsliding openly, or bringing a reproach upon his cause; but backslidings are not limited to open sins. Are there no heart idolatries? no eye adulteries? no departing from the living God? no hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water? no cleaving to the world? no delighting in the things of time and sense? no hugging in thy bosom that huge, that deformed, that ugly idol, more ugly than the hand of Hindoo ever framed—*thysself*, that monster self—which thou so lovest, admirest, and almost adorest? Feel this, and thou wilt feel soon in thy conscience that thou art a backslider; for self, that ugly monster, will be perpetually drawing away thine eyes and affections from the living God to centre in that worthless and abominable idol. Now, when we feel, deeply

and daily feel, our inward idolatries, backslidings, adulteries, and departings from the living God, has not the Lord given a gracious promise that these backslidings shall be healed? He says, "I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely." (Hosea 14:4.) Does not the Lord give a gracious invitation to his poor, backsliding children? he says, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." (Jer. 3:14.) How the Lord sets forth the espousals of their souls unto himself, though they have departed from him and gone after idols! Now God can "perform all things;" he can heal their backslidings, and love the backslider freely; drop a sense of forgiveness into his conscience, and manifest restoring mercy and love to his soul.

3. There may be others of the Lord's family who are *suffering under powerful temptations*. There is some temptation which has taken you, continually haunting and entangling your thoughts, creeping in upon your affections; and as the crafty spider twines its slimy thread round the fly, so there is some snare twining its slimy thread round your heart. You are as helpless in the temptation as the poor fly is helpless in the web of the cruel spider. But has not the Lord declared, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it?" (1 Cor. 10:13.) If, then, we feel we are in a temptation, and that none but the Lord can deliver us out of the temptation, have we not a warrant to cry unto him? Does not the Lord sometimes—I know from personal experience he does—bring us with sighs, cries, and earnest desires, that he would break the temptation to pieces, and deliver our souls out of the snare of the fowler?

4. But you may feel, deeply feel, *the power of sin*. Who knows it? who knows it? No man can know it, but the man exercised with temptations. *He* knows it; but even he cannot fully know the power of sin. Sin is like a powder magazine; it lies still and harmless till temptation comes; but one electric spark of temptation, if God do not quench the train, will set the whole

magazine on fire; A look, a word, a thought, an injection of Satan—these electric sparks can in a moment kindle all these combustibles into a flame. Thus we find, deeply find, the mighty power of sin, and yet though it makes us groan and sigh and lament before the Lord, we feel we have no power over this monster. But the Lord has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom. 6:14.) And he has said also, "The elder shall serve the younger." (9:12.) These are two certain things that God will perform, and which he does perform for those that come to him for deliverance in good earnest.

5. Or, you may be longing after some sweet *manifestation of your interest in Christ*. This conviction lies very deeply lodged in your soul, that your profession of Christ, however numerous the years may be that are passed away, all avails nothing without an interest in Christ, and a manifestation of that interest to your soul. And this perhaps lies as a canker at the very root of all your fears, gnaws as a worm at the very heart of the bud, as if it would eat up all your hope—because you have not the sweet testimonies of God's mercy to your soul, and that clear sense of your interest in Christ that your heart is longing to enjoy. Doubts, therefore, and fears, and despondency all make such solemn head because you have not that in your bosom which you can hold forth as an answer to the accusations of Satan. Now has not the Lord promised to shed abroad his love in the seeking heart, and reveal his mercy and truth to the waiting soul?

Time will not suffice, and it might not be profitable to run through the various things that a living soul may be exercised with. But this I say, whatever be your peculiar trials, exercises, or sorrows, here is the warrant in God's word, that you should "cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things" for those that are his. Nay, I will add another word; it will not be a matter of choice whether you will go unto God or not; you will go under compulsion, and yet not under compulsion, for you will go under the sweet drawings of the Spirit; you will go under the peculiar power that we feel, but cannot describe, a power that carries and

bears us along to a throne of mercy, and brings us there to pour out our complaints and desires into the ear of God that performeth all things for us.

III.—"*He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up.*" David, I intimated, was at this time lying under a peculiar trial; the Psalm was penned when he fled from Saul, and hid himself in the cave—perhaps hourly expecting that Saul would overtake him and thrust his spear into his heart. Now, under these feelings he cried "unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things" for him, to "send from heaven, and save him from the reproach of him that would swallow him up."

We may not be under precisely similar circumstances, though I believe if we fear God, and are honest and faithful in our day and generation, we shall have those (professor and profane), who will thirst for our life's blood, as Saul for David's. But I say, we may not be under his peculiar trial. I shall waive that therefore, and point out three things, of which we may justly say, that they are such as threaten to swallow up God's children.

1. Look at *the power of sin*. Is not *that* a mighty whirlpool, an all-devouring gulph, that has swallowed up thousands, and sometimes seems as though it would swallow us up too? And is there not "a reproach" in sin? And is it not this reproach brought upon the cause of God by sin that the Lord's people dread as well as sin itself?

2. But again. Is not *Satan* continually on the watch to swallow up God's people? What but body and soul can satiate his infernal maw? But that one, after a profession of many years should be swallowed up by Satan—would not this bring a reproach upon the name and cause of God with which he has been connected?

3. And is not *despair* another vortex, an insatiable whirlpool which has swallowed up thousands? And are there not moments, many moments perhaps with us, when we may fear lest that

whirlpool should swallow us up too? Are you sure that when you come to die you will have a peaceful end? Do not doubt and fear sometimes work in your mind lest at that solemn moment despair might swallow you up? Are you altogether delivered from the fear of death?

Has not *death* swallowed up his thousands? and must not death swallow up you and me? And if we do not die with a sweet testimony in our conscience, and blessed manifestation to the Lord's people around us, will there not be some reproach in it? And is not *hell*, too, an awful whirlpool, that has swallowed up millions? And are there no fears in our minds ever working, when Satan is tempting and harassing us, lest hell should swallow up our guilty souls?

Well, if you are free from these fears, it is your mercy. But then you cannot enter into the experience of David in this Psalm, nor can you say with a feeling heart, "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up." But, on the other hand, if there are these fears working from time to time in your minds, and you tremble lest things should swallow you up, and by swallowing you up cast a reproach on your profession, and perhaps add bitterness to the draught, then you will be able to join earnestly in the words, "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up."

You may observe here that David spoke with some degree of confidence. Perhaps you and I cannot always feel the same confidence. No; we are not blessed with as strong faith as he was; and we are not exercised with as strong trials as he was exercised with. Our blessings and our faith fall short of his blessings and of his faith, because our exercises and trials fall short of his; for these two things will always be proportionate. We may not be able always to believe (though there are times, blessed times, sweet seasons, when faith springs up and actually believes) that the Lord will do this or that; nor speak with the language of confidence. All the Lord's people cannot use these

words of David; nor can any of them at all times: but they all can turn it into the language of prayer, and say, "Send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up."

Look into your conscience; take a review (it will take but a few moments) of the things which the mind is more or less daily exercised with—I mean, spiritual things. Have you feared lest you should be swallowed up by them? 'Yes, yes,' is the reply from some troubled heart, 'I do fear lest the things you have mentioned, or some of them, should swallow me up.' Whence, then, do you expect your relief? where are you looking "to be saved from the reproach of him that would swallow you up?" To self or to God? To man or to your Maker? To the creature or to the Creator? If you are looking to self, you are wrong—altogether wrong; you are deceiving yourself; there is no help there. But if you are looking to God and to him you must look, and you will look too, if he is working with power in your heart—this I well know is the feeling of your soul: 'God must send from heaven a word into my soul,' "to save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up;" for every thing short of what God sends down from heaven, leaves me where it finds me—unsatisfied, dejected, unbelieving. It does not bring me out of that which I am labouring under, but leaves me (vile creature that I am!) a prey to sin, Satan, and self: but one word from the living God dropped into my soul, one smile from his most lovely countenance, sent from heaven with divine power into my heart, will save me, amply save me, eternally save me, "from the reproach of him that would swallow me up!" Are these your feelings? I am sure they are, from my own, if, indeed, I know anything of those exercises that living souls are experimentally acquainted with.

IV.—But what did he expect "*from heaven?*" A vision in the sky? a dream by night? an audible voice? some wonderful appearance? a light beyond the rays of the sun? No; these would not reach his case. *Here* was his malady—at the heart. He wanted something, not addressed to the outward eye, nor audible to the outward ear; but something that would drop into the very depth of his

bosom, and touch the whole inward malady under which he was suffering. Therefore, he adds, "*God shall send forth his mercy and truth;*" not dreams, not visions, not ecstasies, not trances! but "*God shall send forth his mercy.*" And where is God's mercy revealed? Outwardly in the word of God; inwardly in the heart. And it is by sending his mercy into the conscience, shedding abroad his love in the soul, manifesting his pardoning favour within, that God "saves from the reproach of him that would swallow us up." Man may say, 'I do not doubt your religion; surely you have marks and testimonies of being a child of God!' Ministers may come and endeavour to soothe you, and often by their soothing make more mischief than they mend: 'O, no doubt, if you are exercised with those things, you are a child of God;' as though a man could be satisfied with exercises, and because he is hungering and thirsting after the Lord, could be contented with his famine and his drought. No; these things do not touch the secret malady, do not go far enough, nor deep enough, nor come with divine power as from the mouth of the Lord himself. All short of this leaves the poor patient afflicted, desolate, and dejected; and does not remove that under which his soul labours. But mercy, sweet mercy, sent from heaven, and dropped from above into his spirit, applied to his conscience, revealed to his heart, and brought warm into his very soul by the Spirit of God—*that* saves him from the reproach of every enemy that would swallow him up. For if he can lean, confidently lean upon the arms of mercy, what can man do, what can Satan do, what can sin do, what can death do, what can hell itself do to hurt him? If the mercy of God is upon his side, revealed to his heart, and sent from heaven into his soul, who or what shall swallow him up?

But he adds, "*and his truth.*" Not lies, not errors, not falsehoods—these cannot save the soul from the "reproach of him that would swallow it up." Hypocrisies, vanities, delusions, putting pillows under armholes, plastering walls with untempered mortar; canting and whining people into religion—these cannot heal a wounded conscience, nor pour the balm of Gilead into bleeding hearts. Nothing can do this but *truth*, the truth of God, the "truth as it is in Jesus." And mercy and truth are never separated; for

we read, that "mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psa. 85:10.) Wherever God sends forth his mercy, he sends forth his truth; and wherever he sends forth his truth, he sends forth his mercy. And it is God's truth, and God's truth alone, that can make us free; for "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32.)

I have taken my text to pieces, as I promised, so far as the Lord has enabled me. Now let me put it together again, and present it before your minds as one complete whole. It may, with God's blessing, then leave a more distinct and clear impression.

Under what circumstances were these words poured forth? When David was in the cave. You and I may be, spiritually, where David was literally—in a cave—the cave of your own bosom. Aye, we may be in the midst of busy London, in the streets of the city, in bustling Cheapside, and yet be in a cave; a very hermit, surrounded by trade and bustle, or even walking in the very haunts of men. Yes, a man may still have a cave in his bosom, and into that cave he may retreat as the hermit into his hollow cell, the cave of his own thoughts; his own distressed and dejected mind, his own deep and solemn reflections and exercises upon eternal things. We may flee into this cave, the cave of a man's own bosom, as David fled into the cave from Saul. Every outward opposition and internal temptation will be sure to drive a living saint into the cave of his own bosom; and there he will seek to hide himself from the face of man, and commune with his own heart and God upon his bed.

Now when David was in the cave, where you and I may be sometimes, nothing could satisfy him. He might read the Scriptures, but those unapplied could not comfort him. He was compelled, therefore to pour, out his heart "unto God Most High," who he knew was able to deliver him. He was convinced that the Lord, to whom he cried in the lonely cave, could perform all things for him; that there was not a spiritual desire in his bosom, not an exercise under which he laboured, not a sorrow that wrung forth the scalding tears, for which God had not an ear to hear,

and which he was not able to perform for him.

And does not the history of David prove this to be true? Can a single promise be found that God made to him which he did not perform in his own time and way?

But though the anointing oil had touched the brow of David, here he was in the cave, with only a step between him and death, full of anxious care, listening to the footsteps of Saul. Yet still, at the very last point, God performs his word, and shews himself faithful to the promise which he had given him, and sets him upon the royal throne. But, while in the cave, at the gloomiest hour, when all things seemed about to fail, and after being hunted up and down, as he says, "like a partridge upon the mountains;" yet, in his greatest extremity, he cried unto God the strength of his heart, even "unto God that performeth all things for him;" and he felt sweetly persuaded in his own soul that he would save him. He could not tell *when, how, or where*; but he felt assured that God would "send from heaven, and save him from the reproach of him that would swallow him up;" and that the way in which he would accomplish it was by sending forth his "mercy and truth."

Can you find any of these exercises, any of these trials, or any of this confidence going on within? If you can, you have some testimony in the conscience that the Lord is at work with your soul. You may be very low, very dejected, and very cast down; and you will be, more or less, if the Lord is leading you about and dealing with your conscience; but the same "God of all grace" who heard the cry of David, brought him out of the lowly cave, and set him upon the throne of Israel, is able and willing to bring your soul and mine out of the gloomy cave in which we may often dwell, and set us upon a throne of glory. "He lifteth the beggar from the dung-hill, that he may set him among princes, and make him to inherit the throne of glory."

May God, who "performeth all things," in mercy perform this for us!

## **Pilgrims' Hunger and Pilgrims' Food**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 23, 1846

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

The children of Israel had been forty years wandering in the wilderness; and they were now come to the borders of the promised land. The Lord, therefore, commands Moses to set before them promises, and also threatenings; promises to the obedient, and threatenings against the disobedient. Moses from this is divinely led to recapitulate the dealings of the Lord with them during the past forty years, and to encourage them for the future. How applicable is this to the experience of a living soul! During the time that the children of Israel were travelling in the wilderness, there were many perplexing circumstances, the meaning of which they could not then understand. But when forty years had passed over their head, then they were enabled to see clearly the reasons of the many painful trials and perplexing circumstances, which, when they took place, were completely hidden from their eyes. Is not this the case with the Lord's family while travelling through the wilderness below? How many trials and temptations—how many sharp and severe exercises have they to pass through! But while they are in them, how little they know the reason of them! how little do they feel that the hand of God is in them! how little they believe that these things are indeed for their spiritual good! But when in the unction of the Spirit's teaching, by the eye of living faith, they are enabled

afterwards to look back, O what a sweet light is then cast upon those very trials which when they first came so perplexed them! and how they then see that the mysterious and invisible hand of the Lord did indeed guide them step by step in the way that they should go!

The Lord reminds Israel of this. Every step that Israel had travelled in the wilderness was under divine guidance; they never journeyed till the pillar of the cloud moved before them; they never stayed until the same pillar halted. Yet, were you and I to follow in a map the wanderings of the children of Israel, how intricate would that path tracked out on the chart appear! But this was the termination of it all—the goodly land into which the Lord had promised to bring them. And is it not so with the path that the Lord's people have to travel? so intricate, so entangled, such a maze, such a labyrinth! Yet when they lay their heads upon a dying pillow, and the Lord is about to smile them into eternity, they cannot say that the Lord has led them one wrong step; but that "goodness and mercy have followed them all the days of their life; and now they are about to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." May such an end be our happy portion.

In looking at these words, I shall endeavour to point out what the Lord here chiefly, if I may use the expression, puts his finger upon, and desires more particularly to impress upon their minds. These leading points will come out as, with God's blessing, we travel through the text.

I .—The first point which the Lord impresses upon their conscience is, *to remember*. "*Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.*" But some may say, 'How can I remember? I have a treacherous memory; I cannot exactly recollect every circumstance.' No more could they. But is there not a blessed Remembrancer? Is there not a promised Guide and Comforter, of whom the Lord said, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance?" (John 14:26.) And is it not so in soul experience? Why, sometimes the path that we have trodden seems almost

blotted out of our memory; or, if we remember the leading circumstances, all is so dark, that we can make nothing of it. Nay, we can scarcely believe that what we considered Ebenezers were memorials of the Lord's goodness at all. But, on the other hand, are there not times and seasons when the Lord sweetly brings to mind his leadings and dealings with us in providence and grace, and raises up living faith in our heart to believe that he did this and did that? that he appeared on this and that occasion? If I may use a figure, it is something like the country spread before our eyes on a very dark and gloomy day. There the objects are. But the gloom, mist, and clouds that hang upon them hide all or pretty nearly all from our sight. The trees, the church spires, the villages, the towns, the parks, and the rivers that run amongst them, are all there; but the darkness rests upon them, and obscures them from our view. But let us travel the same road on a sun-shiny morn, when the cloudless orb of day casts his beams upon every surrounding object—how visible then is every spot which before was enveloped in darkness! The church spires, the villages, the trees, the parks; how they shine forth! And why? Because they are illuminated by the rays of the sun. And yet they were all there just as much in the cloudy day as they are now in the bright sunshine. Is it not so in Christian experience? Our Ebenezers, our testimonies, our tokens, our evidences—they are the same in the cloudy as in the bright day. When the Sun shines into your soul, then you can see them. But when clouds, darkness, and mists rest upon them, though they are there exactly the same, yet are they hidden from view.

Thus, when the Lord said, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness," he does not enforce it as a legal precept. I look upon Deuteronomy as the gospel of the Pentateuch; it is so full of spiritual blessings. When therefore he says, "Thou shalt remember," it does not come with the peals of Sinai; it does not blaze, as it were, from that burning mount, as a precept to be fulfilled under the penalty of a curse. But "thou shalt remember," when the divine Remembrancer brings it to thy recollection: when that heavenly Teacher shines upon thy path, and brings it to thy

memory. And thus, in true Christian experience, it may be said to a child of God, 'Remember that the Lord appeared for thee on *this* occasion, and that he appeared for thee on *that* occasion; that he met thee in prayer; that he blessed thee in hearing; that he gave thee a visit upon thy bed; that he shone into thy breast in thy chimney corner; that he applied his promises to thy heart; that some sweet passage of his word broke in upon and melted thy soul.'

"Thou shalt remember *all* the way." The dark parts of the path as well as the bright; the crooked paths as well as the straight; the rough passages as well as the smooth; the narrow alleys as well as the broad streets. "Thou shalt remember all the way," from the first to the last, "which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness."

How sweet and refreshing it is to look back upon the way by which we believe the Lord has led us! But how different are our feelings at different times! Sometimes we cannot bear to look back. There are so many things in every man's bosom; there are so many things in every man's life, that sometimes he cannot, he dare not, look back upon the path that he has trodden. Our very experience itself is so much connected with nature's depravity: there are so many things in self to humble us, though there are so many things at the same time in grace to bless us, that there are times and seasons when we cannot look back upon the path we have trodden, and wish it were altogether buried and forgotten. But when the grace of God begins to manifest itself, and we see it superabounding over the abounding of our sin, we can look even at the darkest spots, and see the mercies of God superabounding over them. And thus, when the Lord takes us by the hand, we can walk into those paths where we could not walk by ourselves. It is like a child in this vast metropolis. The tender child is afraid to walk out by itself in the dark alleys and narrow lanes; but let the child have hold of its father's hand, and it treads those dark places courageously and boldly which it would fear to do unaccompanied by such protection. And so, when the Lord has hold of his people's hand, as the angels of Lot's, they

can walk boldly forward, and look boldly backward, because they lean upon an all-gracious as well as almighty hand.

II .—But the Lord tells his people *why* it was he led them these forty years in the wilderness. His grand object was—to *humble them*. If nothing that we have met with in our pilgrimage has humbled us; if our religion instead of laying us low has exalted us high; if instead of breaking us into humility and self-loathing, it has puffed us up with pride and presumption, depend upon it, it bears not the mark and stamp of God. Where shall we go to find the proudest man in England? In the park on a Sunday, rolling in his carriage? or sitting at a gaming-table in one of the **hells [halls?]** of the metropolis? No; but to some chapel: and there you may see him in a man puffed up by the devil as an angel of light, thinking himself something when he is nothing. And where shall we go to find a man that is really humble? Into some convent? within the walls of a Popish chapel? or in the cell of a hermit? We shall not find him there. But if we would find such an one, we must look for him in the man in whose heart the grace of God dwells, who knows something of self by divine teachings. And sure am I if our religion has never humbled us, it has done nothing for us—it has left us where it found us, in nature's pride and nature's ignorance.

But how was it that they were *humbled* by walking forty years in the wilderness? Must there not have taken place many things to humble them? We cannot have the effect without the cause; we cannot have the fruit without the root. If, therefore, they were humbled, there must have been something to humble them. We never really can have the grace of humility unless we have had something of a very powerful and deep nature to work that grace in our soul. We cannot walk in our garden on a summer's eve, and pluck the lowly flower, humility, from the border to stick in our button-hole. It grows indeed in the garden of God's word; but we cannot crop it thence to adorn our souls with. There must be some teachings of God the Spirit in the heart to produce that heavenly grace.

Now, what are the two things—for all the dealings and teachings of God to produce humility may be summed up under two things—what are the two things that produce this gospel grace?

1. One is, a deep discovery of what we are; an opening up of the corruption, weakness, and wickedness of our fallen nature. How? By merely shining into our hearts to discover them? That is not enough. How did the Lord discover and bring to light the corruptions of Israel in the wilderness? Was it not by *circumstances*? Was it not by *events*? And did not circumstances and events make them manifest? For instance, the Lord left them three days without water. What did that produce? Why, it stirred up their rebellion and peevishness. They were quiet enough when they had wells of water to drink at, and the palm trees of Elim over their head. But when they had to go three days without water, then the unbelief and rebellion of their hearts began to work. So it is with the Lord's people. The Lord brings about circumstances and events, and by circumstances and events their corruptions are made manifest. The Israelites were a rebellious people; but their rebellion lay buried until circumstances brought it out. They were an idolatrous people; but their idolatry lay hidden in their bosom until Aaron set up the golden calf. They were a people that longed after Egypt; but it was not manifested till they said, "Let us make to ourselves a captain." They were a gross people; but it was not evidenced until they began to lust after the flesh. Thus it was circumstances and events taking place in the wilderness, that one after another opened up their secret sins, and brought to light their hidden corruptions. Is it not so with you? We do not like to learn humility in this way. We should be glad to learn humility, by its being gently put upon us as a garment, without having to learn it through painful circumstances and distressing events. But the Lord's way of teaching his people humility is, by placing them first in one trying spot, and then in another; by suffering some temptation to arise, some stumbling block to be in their path; some besetting sin to work upon their corrupt affections; some idol to be embraced by their idolatrous heart; something to take place to draw out what was there before, and thus make it as manifest to their sight as before it

was manifest to God's sight. I do not mean to say, that we must fall into sin to learn what sin is; but, as a general rule, we learn humility, not by hearing ministers tell us what wicked creatures we are, nor by merely looking into our bosoms and seeing a whole swarm of evils working there; but from being compelled by painful necessity to believe that we are vile, through circumstances and events time after time bringing to light those hidden evils in our heart, which once we thought ourselves pretty free from.

Now, had Israel been very obedient and submissive in the desert, never bowed down to idols, never lusted after Egypt, they would not have been humbled; but when these wretched evils were brought upon their consciences, they were clothed with humility, because they were thus made to see and feel that indeed they were altogether vile.

2. But there is another way in which humility is taught us, and that is, by having some discovery *of the goodness, mercy, and grace of God in Jesus Christ*. Was it not so with the children of Israel? Was it all wrath towards them? Was it all judgment? Was it all frowns? Was it all threatenings? Was it all stripes? Was there not mercy mingled with the wrath? Were there not smiles blended with the frowns? Were there not the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of their abominable, aggravated sins? Did not the Lord appear for them, by giving them water out of the rock; by causing the manna to fall from heaven; by defeating their enemies whenever they appeared; by giving them a pillar of cloud to guide them by day, and a pillar of fire to light them by night? Were there not thousands of instances in which the Lord's favour, his especial favour, was manifested towards them? And so it is with the Lord's people now. They learn humility, not merely by a discovery of what they are, but also by a discovery of what Jesus is. When they get a glimpse of Jesus, of his love, of his grace, of his blood; and the blessed Spirit bears a secret testimony in their consciences, that all these are for them; these two feelings meeting together in their bosom—their shame and the Lord's goodness—their guilt and his forgiveness—their

wickedness and baseness, and his superabounding mercy; these two feelings meeting together in their bosoms, break them, humble them, and lay them, dissolved in tears of godly sorrow and contrition, at the footstool of mercy. And thus they learn humility, that sweet grace, that blessed fruit of the Spirit in real, vital soul experience.

III .—But there was another lesson which they had to be taught. The Lord had another purpose to make manifest by leading them about those forty years in the wilderness—to *prove them*, and make manifest what they were. Are not the Lord's dealings continually going on to manifest and prove what his people are? Wherever the Lord implants his grace in a sinner's heart, he will manifest it, he will bring it to light; and wherever there is nothing but nature, the form without the power, profession without reality, he will bring that to light too. We read, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." (Mal. 3:3.) The Lord tries the heart and searches the reins; and thus he brings to light and makes manifest the counsels of all hearts. Is a man sincere? Is the grace of God in his heart? Is divine life implanted? Does the fear of the Lord dwell in his bosom? That man shall be proved to be one of the Lord's family. On the other hand, has a man taken up religion? Has he begun with God, instead of God beginning with him? Has he a mere name to live among men, while his soul is dead before God? Is hypocrisy, superstition, and self-righteousness the sum and substance of his religion? It shall be made manifest; it shall be proved. The Lord will place the real child of God in those circumstances which shall manifest him; and he will place the hypocrite in those circumstances which shall manifest him. The Lord's dealings with his people in the wilderness are very much to this purpose and to this end—to prove them, and to know what is in their hearts. Has the Lord implanted life in your soul? Has he touched your conscience with his finger? Has he begun a work of grace upon your heart? If so, in your travels through this wilderness there will be things from time to time to prove the reality of this work upon your soul. You

will have *temptations*. Now, when temptation comes, it will prove whether you have the fear of God in your soul to stand against the temptation, or whether you fall under the temptation; or, if you fall under the temptation, whether you are ever recovered out of it. Or you shall be placed in those *circumstances* of life that shall prove whether the grace of God be in you or not. The Lord shall give you worldly prosperity, and shall open for you doors in providence in all directions. Your heart shall be caught by it, if not one of God's people; you shall be drawn away from the Lord's saints, and it shall be manifested by these things that the root of the matter was never in your heart. But on the other hand, if you are a living soul, the Lord will keep bringing circumstance upon circumstance, event upon event, one thing after another; and all these things, as they come upon you, shall be made to prove whether the fear of God be in your soul or not. Now, if the fear of God be not in a man's heart, he must decline, he must fall away. Satan will be more than a match for every one except God's own family; sin will overcome and destroy every one but those whose sins are pardoned through atoning blood and dying love; and the world, sooner or later, will overcome every one who has not the faith of God's elect, whereby alone the world is overcome. Thus the Lord, in his mysterious dealings (and how mysterious his dealings are!) proves the reality of the work of grace in every heart where that work is begun, and proves the hypocrisy of all who have but a name to live while their soul is dead before God. But more especially, in the case of the Lord's people, are they called upon to look back, and see all the way the Lord has led them these many years in the wilderness, that everything was a means to an end—to prove them, that the Lord might know whether they would keep his commandments or not. Look back. Do you not see, that so many years or months ago, there was a snare spread for you? and do you not see how the Lord delivered you from that snare? By that the Lord proved you, and saw what was in your heart. Look back, and see some strong temptation—temptation to covetousness, to adultery, to fall under the power of some sin. Do you see, or do you not see, how the Lord delivered you from that besetment, and broke to pieces that temptation, which well-nigh had you in its grasp? Or look back,

and see if there was not some sacrifice to be made to pursue the right way of the Lord; by acting up to your profession you must have brought down some persecution upon your head; or greatly have offended some of those to whom you were much beholden; you must have cut off some right hand, plucked out some right eye. Or again, did you, or did you not, overcome that peculiar besetment which conscience at this very moment is speaking of in your bosom? Now, by these things does the Lord continually make manifest what is in your heart. Is sincerity there? It shall be proved and manifested. Is hypocrisy there? It shall be proved and manifested. Is the grace of God there? Circumstances shall bring it to light. Is nothing but delusion, deceit, self-righteousness, and lies there? They shall be all made manifest; they may be cloaked for a time, but they shall all come to light, for the Lord's purpose is to bring all things to light. Thus, when you look back upon the way the Lord has led you these many years in the wilderness, can you not see how circumstance after circumstance, and event after event arose, to prove what was in you; whether godly fear, whether simplicity and sincerity, whether a desire to fear God, whether a dread to offend him, whether the life and power of vital godliness, or whether little else than an empty profession without the life-giving power of God in the soul? What a mercy for you to be able to look back and see how the Lord appeared for you, when without him you must have sunk; when you can feel, to your soul's comfort, that the Lord did uphold you in the trying hour, did appear for you in distressing circumstances, did make bare his right arm when you had no strength of your own, did guide you when you had lost all clue, did bring you safe through all when, without his help, you must have been utterly lost. What a mercy it is to be able, by the actings of living faith (and sure I am, there must be faith in exercise), to look back upon the way, and believe that indeed the grace of God was in your heart, that the Lord proved it, and showed it to be genuine by every circumstance that has taken place.

IV.—*"Whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no;"* which thou lovedst most, God or the world; which thy heart clave

to in earnest, the things of Christ, or the things of time and sense; whether the word of God was thy rule, or of man; whether the fear of God was thy motive, or the good opinion of the creature; whether to serve God in sincerity and godly simplicity, to obey God's precepts, to keep God's word, was the desire of thy heart; or whether a little outside religion, just to please man, was your object, whilst within there was little else but dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

V.—*"And suffered thee to hunger."* What is this? Another memorial of the forty years' pilgrimage. It is true literally of some of the Lord's pilgrims. While the wicked in this world eat their full, so that their eyes stand out with fatness and they have more than heart can wish, how many of the Lord's poor are suffered to hunger, even in a literal sense! But it is true of all spiritually, though not true of all literally, "he suffered them to hunger." What is it to suffer a soul to hunger? Is it not the denial of food to it? It is so literally, is it not? If a man has food denied him, he must hunger. And so it is with God's people. There is in them an appetite after food, a desire after living bread. There is that in their souls which God himself alone can supply. There is a guilty conscience, which nothing but blood can appease; a dark heart, which nothing but light can cure; a dead, unfeeling soul, which nothing but the sweet revivings of the Lord can restore and comfort. There are trials that need deliverances, sorrows that need consolations, castings down that need liftings up, griefs that need the healing balm. Thus there is in their hearts an appetite, a desire, a hungering after living food, such as the Lord himself alone can supply.

But "he suffered them to hunger." How keen must be the feelings of a parent to hear his child cry for bread! And yet the Lord often leaves his children to cry for the bread of heaven, leaves them hungry. When perhaps you could not bear that your child should be hungry half an hour, the Lord allows his people to be hungry for days. Why is this? It is to give them a keener relish for food; to wean their appetite from worldly victuals; to bring them off that gross feeding of which they have contracted a habit, and

make them long after heavenly food. Was it not so with the children of Israel? They came out of Egypt fat and surfeited with Egyptian food, the leeks, the onions, the garlick, and the flesh, when they sat by the flesh-pots. They had then to be cleansed from the gross humours which infected their body. Egyptian air and Egyptian diet had made them so gross, that they needed a course of fasting to remove out of their bodies the corrupt humours. The Lord therefore suffered them to hunger, that there might be a keener appetite for spiritual food; that they might be brought down to the fasting point, a healthy appetite, which nothing could appease or allay but a shower of bread from heaven.

Is it not so with God's people? What gross appetites we have by nature, swallowing sin by mouthfuls! No thirsty horse ever plunged his throat into a bucket of water with more eagerness than we, in times past, have plunged headlong into every sin. Was there not some need to be brought off this gross feeding? How could we relish heavenly manna, the love and blood of Jesus, sweet love visits from his heavenly presence, pure love tokens from his precious hands, without being well purged from this Egyptian food on which we had been nurtured from our very cradle? And therefore the Lord suffers his people to hunger, that they may have an appetite for something more than what nature can give, that they may long for those supplies of heavenly food which the Lord alone can supply.

Is it not this keen hunger which creates an appetite for heavenly food? Surely. But after the Lord has given his people a taste for heavenly food, they still have to hunger, that they may relish it the more. There are times and seasons when, like the children of Israel, after we have tasted manna, we want quails, we long for flesh; and the Lord, perhaps, answers our request, as he did theirs, but sends leanness withal into our souls. The quails came, and fell round about the camp three days' journey; but whilst the meat was in their mouth, the anger of God was manifested, and they loathed the very flesh for which they had so idolatrously longed. Is it not so with you? There is some sin that you are

longing to enjoy, some lust you want to gratify. The Lord may permit you to go great lengths in this matter; but what would be the consequence? Why, no sooner would the meat be in your mouth, than the wrath of God would come into your conscience; and you would loathe the very meat that your wicked heart has been lusting after. Thus we are suffered to hunger, in order that this great Egyptian habit may be purged away, and there may be given a pure appetite for pure food, a heavenly appetite for heavenly provision; that hungering, that thirsting, that inward desire, which nothing but the love and blood of the Lamb can supply.

Now, can you not look upon the path the Lord has led you in the wilderness, and see how you were suffered to hunger? Perhaps you went months without a testimony. You come to hear the word Sunday after Sunday, but nothing for you. You went down upon your knees time after time, but no testimony, no whispers, no smiles. You read chapters, and turn the leaves of the Bible over and over; but nothing for you! nothing for you! nothing to touch your heart, nothing to meet your case, nothing to dissolve, to break, to melt you. So you went on, moping and moaning, and fearing your case was altogether desperate. Is not this suffering you to hunger? Can you not look back and see how, again and again, the Lord thus suffered you to hunger? You could not, as hundreds do, feed upon ashes, satisfy yourselves with forms. Sermons and doctrines did not content you. You must have feeling and power, the smiles of God, and the whispers of his love, or you are not satisfied. And therefore you can see (at least, I can) how good it is that the Lord should sometimes suffer us to hunger. It is a very painful thing; but how sweet it makes food when the food comes! How it weans a man from going after those things which never can profit, which never have profited us.

VI.—*"And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know."* How this follows their suffering from hunger! See the connection. Here are the three steps—first of all, Egyptian food; then, wilderness hunger; then, heavenly manna. Egyptian onions and heavenly manna did not meet together; they

were separated by an interval, and that interval was hunger. Is it not so experimentally? When your heart is going out after idols, when you spiritually are travelling the same path as the children of Israel in the wilderness, lusting in your affections after Egypt, have you any appetite for spiritual food? None, none! The shop, the business, the wife, the husband, the child, the world—these are all you care about. But when the Lord begins to deal with your conscience more powerfully, is not this the effect that, like the prodigal of old, you feel an aching void in the very bottom of your heart, which neither farm, nor shop, nor house, nor business, nor family, nor the things of time and sense, can satisfy? Then, you begin to long after something from God, dropped down from the Lord's own lips into your heart.

"And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know." What is this manna? Is it not the bread from heaven, of which the Lord has given us an explanation in the sixth chapter of John's gospel?—"I am the bread of life." This manna, spiritually, is the flesh and blood of Jesus—embracing him in the arms of living faith, as a crucified Saviour; feeling the application of his atoning blood to the conscience; enjoying the manifestations of his dying love to the heart; and receiving him as a blessed Mediator between God and our souls. And when the Lord is pleased to unfold his glory, to bring a sense of his dying love into our hearts, and give us to look upon him as the crucified Man of Sorrows—this is manna, such as the children of Israel never tasted—this is the bread of life, that fits the soul for heaven, and takes the soul to heaven.

But *who* are to eat this manna? *Who* can come unto a bleeding Jesus? *Who* can look unto a crucified Man of Sorrows? *Who* can feel the application of atoning blood to the conscience? *Who* can feed upon the sufferings of Jesus by living faith? The unexercised, the untried, the unperplexed, the undistressed? They cannot, they cannot. They must have Egyptian diet purged off by painful exercises, by wandering in the wilderness, by sharp temptations, by keen and cutting sorrows, before they have an appetite for heavenly food. But when the Lord is pleased to give them this

appetite, and then begins to drop a little sensation of his goodness, mercy, and love into their soul—this is heavenly manna, which neither they nor their fathers knew.

VII.—And why is all this? The Lord sums it all up in those words—*"That he might make thee know, that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."* What a spiritual light these words cast upon the whole! "Man doth not live by bread alone." There is heavenly food to support his soul, as well as natural food to support his body. If man is supported spiritually by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, if this be the only food the Lord's people enjoy, how little they have! How strong and striking these words are!—"Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Now, if you have no more food than that which proceedeth out of the mouth of God into your heart, how much have you? If you take away all your religion that does not stand in this, into what a small compass is it all crushed up! It takes your religion, which, in your vain thoughts sometimes might almost fill this chapel, and screws it up into a nutshell. If you and I have no more religion than that which comes from what God has spoken into our soul; if that be the bread we are to live upon: if that be the strength of our heart; if that be our living portion and our dying sufficiency;—how it narrows up our religion into so small a compass, that sometimes we seem to require a microscope to see whether we have any or not. But thus we learn this lesson, "that man liveth not by bread alone." He cannot live by doctrines in the head. He cannot live by bodily gestures. He cannot live by rites and forms and ceremonies. He cannot live by anything that springs from the creature. His life is first given by God, and his life is maintained by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. What the Lord teaches, he knows; what the Lord works, he feels; what the Lord gives, he possesses; what the Lord speaks to his heart, he has in his soul, as from the lips of the sovereign Majesty himself.

But into what a narrow spot this brings the living family! In your trials, can you take any comfort (I cannot) except from what the

Lord speaks to your soul? Can you believe anything that the Lord does not bring with power into your heart? Can you take any promise that does not come accompanied by divine unction to your conscience? Can you believe your own interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, except God tell you so with his own mouth? You cannot, you cannot, if the fear of God is in exercise. But how this cuts to pieces all man-made religion! and the sooner and more completely it is cut to pieces, the better. Why need I deceive myself by thinking I have a religion, which will not stand the trying hour, which will not give me comfort on a death-bed, nor land me safe in eternity? Now, the only religion that will give my soul comfort on a death-bed, and that will take my soul into eternity, is what God is pleased to work in my heart with his own almighty hand, the word he is pleased to speak with his own lips to my soul, and the manifestations of his mercy and love which he alone can bring down with convincing power into my heart. But what a narrow path is this! How it cuts up all creature righteousness! How it lays the creature low in the dust of abasement! With all your religion, you have none but what God gives, nor can you procure a grain; for you have to live, not by bread alone, in your natural life, but on every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. How then are you spiritually to live, except from time to time the Lord speak a word to your soul?

Now, this is a mark of the Lord's family. When they come to hear the word, they do not come in a criticising mood, as though they were great people, and would pass some very decisive judgment on those who stand up in the Lord's name. Not but what they will have their discernment, not but what they will have their judgment. But thus—'O that the Lord would speak a word to my soul! O that the Lord would apply his precious truth to my heart! O that the Lord would shine upon me, and give me some testimony that I am safe for eternity!' Why are these prayers going up out of their bosom? Why, as they come to chapel, are they looking down upon the pavement, and their heart going up from time to time that the Lord would bless them? Because they feel that nothing but the Lord's blessing can stand their soul in

any stead; and that nothing but the Lord's own words, proceeding from the Lord's own mouth into their heart, can raise up in their soul that faith, hope, and love, and those sweet testimonies and blessed evidences, which alone can satisfy them.

Now, if you can do with any religion short of this, *I* cannot. I tell you honestly, *I* cannot. I have seen an end of all other. No other will ease a guilty conscience; no other speak peace to a troubled heart; no other banish doubt and fear; no other bless me here, nor take me safe to glory hereafter. But I am sure that that religion which is God's gift and God's work, which stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God—*that* will bless me here, and take me to glory hereafter. I am sure that what God speaks to my soul, will stand when the world is in a blaze. What man may speak, will be driven away by the first gust of wind. The smoke out of the chimney, the chaff out of the threshing-floor, are not more transitory than the mere word of man. So that the Lord's people stand distinguished by this one mark, if they have no more—that they must have those testimonies which the Lord alone can give them, those words which the Lord alone can speak, and those smiles which the Lord alone can bestow. But what a mercy if the Lord has humbled you thus, to raise you up; if the Lord has made you hunger thus, to feed your soul with heavenly manna; if the Lord has raised up this cry and sigh in your heart, that he himself would speak with power to your soul, and you can listen to no other voice but that of the good Shepherd. You have a mark and testimony that the Lord's hand is at work in your soul, and that he is dealing with you as his child.

May this be our religion. I want no more; and I would sooner have none at all, if not this. I would sooner on a Sunday take a walk in the park, or go to Hampton Court, and be a worldly man altogether, than come to chapel, and never feel life and power in my soul. To put on religion, and yet be devoid of that in which the very life of God consists!—O what a wretched state to be in! to be a professor, to go amongst God's people, to hear God's truth, to listen to the most heart-searching appeals, and then to be dead in sin or dead in a profession, and cloak over all your

wickedness with the mask of hypocrisy! I, for my part, would sooner be a worldly man altogether, than have a religion that does not stand in the power of God. Though I may have my doubts and fears (as no doubt you have sometimes) and am often plagued and pestered with sin morning, noon, and night; yet this is my deliberate opinion—I would sooner be a worldly man altogether, making no profession, but living like other men in the world, than have a name to live while dead, the form without the power. Such is the feeling of my heart, and such the verdict of my conscience.

## **PLEASANT PLANTS AND DESPERATE SORROW**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, 23rd December, 1860.

"Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength: therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips:" "In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish; but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." Isaiah 7:10, 11

Ever since the fall, sorrow and disappointment have been the decreed lot of man; for on that sad and evil day when Adam sinned and fell, God cursed the ground for his sake, and declared that in sorrow he should eat of it all the days of his life. Thorns also and thistles—emblems of vexation and disappointment—was it to bring forth to him, and in the sweat of his face he was to eat bread until he returned unto the ground from whence he was taken. "Dust," said God to him, "thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Gen. 3:17-10.)

Sorrow, therefore, and disappointment being, by God's decree, the determined lot of man, no exertion of human skill or subtle contrivance of earthly wisdom can possibly avert them. As, then, a sailor putting out to sea, however softly the wind may blow, feels sure of encountering storms before the end of his voyage, and makes provision accordingly, so it will be our wisdom, however fair may be our present sky, to anticipate stormy winds and rough seas before we reach our destined harbour. But of all sorrows, the most cutting is that which we bring upon ourselves; and of all disappointments, the most keen is that of which we feel ourselves to be the main and miserable authors. There is not a more true nor a more stinging reproof from the mouth of God to one under his chastening hand than this, "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God?" nor a severer sentence against a disobedient child than, "Thine

own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." (Jer. 2:19.)

Let me illustrate this point, for it is one of much importance, by one or two figures. When a ship leaves the harbour on a foreign voyage, it is naturally expected that she will be tossed by wind and wave; and no skill or care of the captain can always preserve her from being cast upon the rocks. But if the captain of a ship, from sheer wilfulness or drunkenness, when he hears the cry "Breakers ahead!" still holds on his course without slackening his sail or shifting his helm, and thus rushes on to destruction, although the eye of pity may drop a tear over the loss of vessel and crew, yet it can scarcely compassionate the case of the author of the calamity as perishing by his own madness and folly. But you will perhaps say, "We do not dispute your figure, but we think that such a fact must be most improbable, if not utterly impossible." I will not admit its improbability, still less its impossibility, for it is what many a drunken captain has done. But were it even so, literally and naturally, it is too possible, may I not say too frequent in grace. Hart, with all his deep experience, never wrote a truer verse than this, in which he expresses, with contrition of heart, his own mad folly in having so acted:

O what a fool have I been made,  
Or rather made myself!  
That mariner's mad part I played  
Who sees yet strikes the shelf.

But take another figure to illustrate the same point, which shall also be borrowed from melancholy facts. Among those who have been condemned in these last few years to penal servitude for life, have been some who occupied at one time respectable if not high positions in society, and as such were intrusted with sums of money to a large amount. Seduced by the love of gain or a passion for pleasure, they were tempted to commit the crime of forgery, or in some way embezzle money entrusted to their

charge. Detection, the almost invariable consequence of crime, followed. They were arrested, tried, and condemned, and are now in penal servitude. Now when clothed in the prison dress, he has none other for his daily and hourly companions but the vilest felons that by their conduct or conversation can disgrace human nature—would not such a man feel this to be the deepest aggravation of his miserable case, that he had brought upon himself that intolerable weight of woe, and that none but himself had been the guilty cause of all his ruin? So in grace: there is no sorrow so keen, no disappointment so cutting, as to reflect that whatever we may suffer under God's chastening strokes, even were he to visit us with his eternal displeasure, we ourselves have been the authors of our own misery.

But you may say, "What has all this to do with the text? I do not see any connection between it and the truth which you have been seeking by your figures to impress upon our minds." Allow me to say that I do. I see a connection between the text and the rueful consequences of our own madness and folly, and that is the reason why I have given you this introduction; for I see in the words before us that in them the Lord sharply reproves his people for "forgetting the God of their salvation and not being mindful of the Rock of their strength." I see also that He tells them the consequences of their forgetfulness, that though they had planted pleasant plants and had set strange slips; that though in the day they had made their plant to grow, and in the morning had made their seed to flourish; yet, instead of reaping as they expected a bountiful crop, they should find the harvest to be "a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow."

I have thus given you a plain sketch, a simple outline, of the meaning of the text, which I shall, with God's help and blessing, now proceed more largely to fill up; and in endeavouring to do so, I shall bring before your notice these four leading features:

**1.—First, our sin in forgetting the God of our salvation, and being unmindful of the Rock of our strength.**

II.—**Secondly**, the **consequence** of this forgetfulness and of this unmindfulness; that in our folly and madness, **we plant pleasant plants and set our garden with strange slips.**

III.—**Thirdly**, that **a temporary success** often attends this planting and setting, "**In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish.**"

IV.—But **fourthly**, what is the **harvest**? A crop or a failure? Alas! Miserably, most miserably of the latter. For it is but "**a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.**"

I.—The Lord in our text speaks to his people: it is to them in fact and for them, speaking generally, that the whole Bible is written. Not but what God does speak in his holy word in many passages to men generally, that he may, clear himself of all injustice, and leave without excuse those who neglect so great a salvation as he has there brought to light. (Heb. 2:3). But viewed as a divine revelation, the Bible is written, for the most part, for the saints of God, for they really are the only persons who can read it with enlightened eyes, believe its promises, obey its precepts, and live under its sanctifying power and influence. Here certainly, whatever other parts he may address generally to the sons of men, he speaks to his people, and this not in love but in displeasure; for he brings against them a heavy charge, of which the import is, that they have "**forgotten the God of their salvation, and not been mindful of the Rock of their strength.**" Let us examine this charge, and weigh well the words of this indictment, for they are addressed to us as much as to Israel of old, and in them, if we have but ears to hear, we may find the Lord speaking to our consciences.

But before I draw the bill of indictment and bring the contents to bear upon your consciences, I must shew you how it is aggravated by the character of Him from whom it comes. Were He only **great** we might tremble at his authority without being smitten into contrition at his mercy; but he is **good** as well as

great; and as this aggravates our offence, so it magnifies his grace. The title which he gives himself, is "the God of our salvation." This part then of God's character I have to unfold; and as he gives a prospective glance to the Son of his love, the Lord Jesus Christ, **for he is spoken of here** as the "Rock of our strength," I must also direct your thoughts to the Lord of life and glory as that Rock on which the church is built. In speaking thus, I speak in the fullest harmony with the oracles of God, for the Bible, first and last, ascribes all salvation to Him, not only in its manifestation in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in its eternal issue in deliverance of all that fear his name from everlasting destruction, but in that original contrivance in which infinite wisdom combined with infinite grace to save millions of sinners through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Thus, because all salvation is in, and from, and of him, he is called here and elsewhere "the God of our salvation;" for He so took the whole of salvation into his own hands that he is the very God of it, as calling it all his own and appropriating to himself its beginning and end, its design and execution, all its grace on earth and all its glory in heaven.

But to establish this more plainly and clearly, I shall endeavour to show that he is "the God of our salvation" in four distinct particulars:

**i** First, he is so as the **eternal designer** and **planner** of it. Thoughts how the church should be saved, occupied the divine mind from all eternity. Not that God knew not what to do; not that he had to take long and laborious counsel with himself before he could originate or fix the plan. I mean not that; but I see that in the Scripture the way of salvation, as originated in the mind of God, is ever spoken of as the highest display of God's wisdom. Thus the Apostle speaks: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:10, 11.) So again, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the

world unto our glory." (1 Cor. 2:7.) And filled, as if fired with a gracious admiration of this infinite wisdom, the same blessed man of God cried out, as in an ecstasy of holy wonder, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." (Rom. 11:33.) The difficulty, so to speak, was to harmonise the jarring claims of justice and mercy. If mercy triumphed, justice must be violated. If sin be not punished, every perfection of God might be violated with impunity. If justice be avenged, what escape is there for the criminal? To harmonise then these jarring claims, that mercy and justice might meet together, and righteousness and peace might kiss each other, was indeed a task beyond the united wisdom of men and angels. But God contrived a way, and in the gift of his dear Son as a sacrifice for sin designed a plan for the salvation of sinners, by which they might be everlastingly saved, and he himself eternally glorified.

**ii** But secondly, not only was this salvation to be devised and its foundations laid deep in the eternal counsels, but it **had to be executed**. An architect may have in his mind a beautiful plan, and with much thought and care may have designed a noble structure: but whilst it is yet in his mind or only on paper, it is a shadow without a substance. It must be executed that it may be seen, erected that it may be admired, constructed that it may be a monument of his ability, as well as a permanent object of beauty and use. So the plan of salvation which had been contrived in the mind of God, had to be executed by the hand of him from whom it originated. Its execution commenced on the day that the Son of his love came into this world and took our nature into union with his own divine Person. And as its execution then commenced, so it was gradually carried on during the time that our blessed Lord sojourned here below, for during that time he was ever doing the will of God. Thus he said "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day" (John 8:4); and again, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work." (John 4:34.) When, then, that blessed God-man went about doing good; when that man of sorrows and acquainted with grief sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane's gloomy garden; when he bare our sins in his own body on the tree; when by his

active and passive obedience he wrought out and brought in a glorious righteousness, then God's eternal plan of salvation was fully executed. Did not the blessed Lord himself attest this with his dying lips, when he cried in a loud voice, that heaven and earth might hear, "It is finished!" As though he should say "The work is done; salvation is accomplished; my people are ransomed; justice is satisfied; every perfection of God glorified, and all his attributes harmonised. It is enough. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Then he bowed his dying head and gave up the ghost, committing his departing spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father.

**iii** But there is, thirdly, **the application** of this great salvation to the heart; for though we may hear of this salvation as being planned in the mind of God, or read in the scriptures what Jesus did and suffered in its execution; yet until that salvation is brought near to our heart, revealed and applied to our conscience, what do we really know of it as designed or executed for us? Are there not thousands who live and die without any personal knowledge of, or saving interest in this great salvation? And will not this be our case also, unless it be brought with a divine power into our soul? As, then, he is the "God of our salvation," the same God who designed it in his own eternal mind, and executed it in the Person and work of his dear Son, reveals it, manifests it, and brings it near to believing hearts, according to his own words, "I bring near my righteousness." And it is the personal experience of this which alone can assure us that we are saved in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation.

**iv** But fourthly, as being the God of our salvation, he has to **maintain** this salvation, as well as to apply it; because we are ever backsliding from it, forgetting it, and becoming unmindful of it. Is not this the very charge that he brings against his people in the words of our text, "Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation?" But because we forget him does he forget us? Does he not rather say, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?"

Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. 49:15); and do we not also read, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him?" (Hos. 14:4.) Where would be the temple of mercy if the same hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel which laid the foundation should not finish it? And where would be the shoutings of eternal joy if he did not bring forth the head stone amidst the universal cry, "Grace, grace unto it?" (Zec. 4:7.)

But before I proceed to the main object of my discourse, I must drop a word upon the title given in our text to the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is here spoken of under the name of "the Rock of our strength." He is often called a "Rock" in Scripture, and we may therefore well ask what ideas does the name thus given to him convey? It conveys several. The leading idea is that of a **fortified** place, for as in Palestine they were much exposed to hostile incursions from the border nations, rocky hills were strongly fortified, and were thus made great use of as places of defence against the enemy. We thus read of the "munitions of rocks?" that is places not merely steep and mountainous, but so artificially fortified and strengthened by walls and bulwarks, that the enemy was not able to carry them, except by siege, which in those days, at least by the border tribes, was but rarely employed. Thus David says, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress." In this sense, then, Christ is "the Rock of our strength," as being the refuge of our soul, in whom we may take shelter from every foe, as the Benjamites in the rock Rimmon (Jud. 20:47): as Samson in the top of the rock Etam **Jud 15:8**: and David in the rock cave of Adullam. But another idea conveyed by the term rock, is that of a solid foundation. Thus, as being the foundation on which God has built his Church, Jesus is indeed "the Rock of ages" that God has laid in Zion, for he is "a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." (Isa. 28:16.) Did not he himself say to Peter "On this rock I will build my Church?" (Matt. 6:18.) And what is this rock but he himself in his glorious Deity, eternal Sonship and suffering humanity?

But it is not my present object so much to dwell upon the points I have just brought before you, as to show you the miserable consequences of **forgetting** "the God of our salvation," and becoming **unmindful** of "the Rock of our strength." This is indeed a heavy charge, but there are few of the family of God to whom it is not, in greater or less measure, applicable.

When the Lord is first graciously pleased to bless the soul with some manifestation of his great salvation, and to reveal, by the unction of his grace and the teaching of his Spirit, the Rock of our strength, then we cleave to him with purpose of heart; we worship him in spirit and in truth. His yoke is then easy and his burden light; and we run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. But after a time, when the Lord begins to withdraw his presence, deadness, coldness, darkness, and a general stupidity and lethargy gradually come over the mind. And if we give way to this spirit of slumber, and we often do give way—for even the wise virgins as well as the foolish slumbered and slept in the absence of the bridegroom—what is the consequence? We forget the God of our salvation, and become unmindful of the Rock of our strength.

II.—But as one sin is almost sure to draw on another, the blessed Spirit in our text has pointed out **the consequence**, the miserable consequence, of this backsliding from the Lord; which I proposed to unfold as the second point of my bill of indictment this morning, and which springs out of the Lord's judicial displeasure for our sad forgetfulness of the God of our salvation. **"Therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shall set it with strange slips."**

The Church is compared in the song of Solomon to a garden: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse." (Song 4:12.) And this garden the Holy Ghost represents in that sacred Book, as planted with trees of the greatest fragrance and beauty, such as "Pomegranates, camphire, spikenard, and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all

the chief spices." The climate of the east is for the most part too dry and scorching for flowers such as deck our English gardens. Trees therefore, such as the vine, the pomegranate, and the citron, and fragrant shrubs, of which we here know little but the names, occupy their place. Spiritually viewed, these are the graces of the Spirit, which not only give forth a fragrant odour to gladden, but food also to feast the heavenly Bridegroom; for he delights in the fruits and graces of his own Spirit. This made the Bride say, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits;" to which he answers, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice." (Song 4:16; 5:1.)

But not only is the Church, viewed generally, a garden in which the Lord takes supreme delight, but each individual soul in which he works by his Holy Spirit may be represented by the same figure; for it is thus that general truths are brought home to particular cases, and what is true of the Church as a whole is true of each member of it as an individual. This seems to be the garden referred to in the text, in which we unhappily too often plant our pleasant plants and set it with strange slips. Now this garden should have nothing in it, as the garden of the Lord, but the graces and fruits of the Spirit. Weeds will spring up; scarce any amount of careful culture can keep them down; for as charlock and thistles will grow in the field, so chick-weed and groundsel will start up in the most carefully cultivated garden. But this is not the charge brought against the Church here. The Lord does not reprove her for neglect of her garden, nor for the weeds that spring up in the borders. This were fault enough, but there is a much greater; that with her own hand she plants pleasant plants in the Lord's borders, and sets strange slips in those beds in which he himself had planted myrrh, and aloes, and all the chief spices. This, of course, has a mystical and spiritual meaning, and what this is I have now, with God's help and blessing, to open; and first I have to consider what are these pleasant plants.

Every man has his **peculiar propensity**, which, even after he is called by the grace of God, still clings closely to him, and as being that in which he naturally takes delight it is to him "a pleasant plant." This delight in what is not of God, this seeking of pleasure and happiness out of him, first broke forth in our nature in Paradise. Tempted by Satan, Eve, our first parent, was taken with the appearance of that tree of good and evil which she was forbidden to touch or taste. For we read that "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat." The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye combined to seduce her from the path of innocency, and not only did she eat herself, but gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat (Gen. 3:6); and thus they plunged themselves and all their future race into sin and woe. Now we have all this propensity. Eve's blood runs in our veins. Our fingers itch to touch what Eve took; and as no tree of good and evil grows up before our eyes, we plant instead thereof our pleasant plants, and by them bring ourselves into misery and trouble. But look at this in a variety of instances.

**i** A person may be called by the grace of God early in life, before the cares and anxieties of this present evil world may have come upon him; and being blessed and favoured with spirituality of mind, his affections may be strongly fixed upon the Lord, and be much set upon things above. He has then no pleasant plants to draw away his heart from heavenly things, and can thus serve the Lord without distraction. But after a time he sees good to change his situation in life, and to take to himself a partner of his sorrows and joys. None can object to this, for marriage is honourable in all. But what is often the result? That the **wife or husband** becomes the pleasant plant; the affections which were once fixed upon the Lord are in a measure withdrawn from him, and rest too much upon the partner of the bosom; and this becomes a snare which entangles the feet and often casts the believer down into carnality and death. But it may please the Lord, after a time, to crown the union with children as a heritage

of the Lord, and then there may arise a succession of pleasant plants.

Now there is no objection to our loving our wives and children, for the Scripture bids husbands love their wives, and wives love their husbands. This is Scriptural precept and Gospel practice; but the Scripture has not bidden us set them as idols in the very bosom where God has erected his throne. If then, these pleasant plants draw away the affections from God, are they not snares and traps? Is it not full of danger to idolise wife and children? How the wives of Solomon drew him into idolatry and befooled the wisest of men! What a snare was Hagar even to Abraham, and Michal all but proved the ruin of David! What a snare too were the sons of Eli to their indulgent Father! And when Jacob set his Joseph, and David his Absalom as pleasant plants in their garden, what trouble and sorrow did they bring upon their heads! It would argue want of common affection if children were not pleasant plants to their parents. At this time of the year especially, do not parents love to see the olive branches round the Christmas table! But though the branches may hang round the table, the roots must not twine round the heart where Jesus should be supreme, lest they hide the beams of the Son of Righteousness, by surrounding his altar with their rank stem and overshadowing leaves.

**ii** But all who fear God have not wives or children, or may love them without idolatry, yet may they have pleasant plants no less dangerous to their soul's profit and peace. There is, for instance, your **business**, your farm, your profession, your daily occupation, and in carrying on this you are and should be diligent. "Not slothful in business" is a Gospel precept; but you may make it a pleasant plant far beyond the requirements of diligence and industry. I well know that in these times it is almost impossible for a man to pay his way who does not throw his whole mind into his business. But the whole mind is one thing and the whole heart another. It is through the avenue of these pursuits that sin comes in, and too often like a flood. You may take so much pleasure in your business or occupation that it may

steal away well nigh every thought from God, and morning, noon, and night your heart may be in it so as to engross your affections, and fill you with darkness, barrenness, and deadness to everything that is spiritual and godly. And if your business increase, if your farm be prosperous, if money come rolling in, how easily you may make of this a Christmas tree! As you hang upon its branches the gains of the year, it may be to you the pleasantest plant that your eyes ever rested upon; and yet it may not be one of God's own planting. We shall see before we have done what may become of this pleasant plant that you have taken such care to plant and water, and which under such care is every day growing in your admiring eyes more and more vigorous and beautiful.

**iii** But all good men are not in business, or even if they are do not make it their idol; yet each may still have his **natural propensity**, which may be to him his pleasant plant. Take the figure naturally, how widely tastes differ even in such a matter as flowers in a garden! To some there is no flower like the rose; others see no beauty but in a geranium, and others say, "Give me the fuchsia." So each may have his pleasant plant to which he gives his chief thoughts and attention. I have my pleasant plant, and perhaps more than one, and you have yours. I believe if God had not called me by his grace, I should have spent my life in study, in reading books, acquiring languages, and devoting my whole mind to various branches of human knowledge, for there is scarcely one to which I have not a strong natural inclination. This was my pleasant plant which I cultivated up to the very time when eternal realities, impressed upon my mind by divine power, turned me from it to fall in love with the Rose of Sharon. But I still find that the pleasant plant, from long cultivation, has struck a deep root into my natural being, and I have carefully to guard against it to this day, or it would soon spread into the borders of my spiritual garden, and fill up those beds which should alone be occupied by the trees of frankincense planted in them by the blessed Spirit. Your pleasant plant may not be my pleasant plant, nor my pleasant plant your pleasant plant. My pleasant plant may look very ill in your eyes, and be considered rather a noxious

weed than a blooming flower: and so your pleasant plant may in my eyes be but a thorn or a thistle, and better rooted up by your own hand than allowed to grow.

But time will not suffice to point out the various pleasant plants, which, when we forget the God of our salvation and become unmindful of the Rock of our strength, we set in our border. They may be innocent in themselves: they might be planted and cultivated in some back border where the sun might never shine upon them, and where we should rarely walk except by constraint. The sin is planting them in the Lord's borders placing them in the beds appropriated to the Owner of the garden. It is the forgetting the God of our salvation, who has done so great things for our souls, and setting up an idol in his place, that makes the sin so grievous. Thus the Lord remonstrates with his people by the prophet Jeremiah, and calls upon the very heavens to be astonished at their sin in this matter. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." There was no sin in having cisterns, but the sin was in forsaking for them the fountain of living waters. Thus, then, whatever we love more than God; whatever be our besetment or propensity, if indulged and delighted in; whatever occupies our mind as an object of eager pursuit; whatever we give our late and early thoughts to; whatever through the day steals in, catches our affections, and draws away our heart from the Lord, so as to love it more than Him who is the altogether lovely—**this** is a pleasant plant that we have planted in God's border, and by doing so have in heart departed from the Lord our God.

But there is worse behind than this, a still more grievous, a still further departure from the Lord; for one sin is almost sure to draw on another, and the farther we go from the Lord, the worse we become. There is "a setting of **strange slips.**" You know that in a garden there are beds open to view, and there are back places out of sight. In the beds and borders open to view, we

have our geraniums, our roses, and our verbenas, with other many-hued flowers to please the eye. But then there are back borders in what we call the kitchen garden, where the cabbages and potatoes grow, besides out-of-the-way places under the hedge, or in the dark shrubbery, where henbane and hemlock, and poisonous weeds may thrive out of sight. So in the garden of the soul, there are the "pleasant plants" open to view, which we are not ashamed that our friends should see, and there are "the strange slips" set in the back borders, which we are glad enough to put out of sight.

But why are these out of sight productions, called "strange?" The word "strange" in Scripture often means what is ungodly, and carries with it the idea of wickedness. The reason why it bears this signification arose from the peculiar position of the children of Israel. They were a nation separated unto the Lord from every other. They were God's peculiar people, consecrated by external covenant, and therefore God said to them, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5, 6.) Therefore, all foreign customs, foreign dresses, and foreign ways were ungodly, as breaking down that peculiar relationship in which they stood as a separate people to God. For this reason, the word "strange" came to signify anything unholy or ungodly. Thus, Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1); that is, fire which had not been kindled by God himself upon the altar. So we read of "strange incense" (Ex. 30:9); of "a strange vine" (Jer. 2:21); of "strange wives" (Ezra 10:2); and of "strange women, whose mouth is a deep pit." (Prov. 22:14.) In this sense, therefore, "strange slips" mean any thing set in the Lord's garden of an ungodly nature—what, in one word, we may term poisonous plants.

But the question arises at once in your mind, "Can any one who really and truly fears God ever set strange slips in his garden?" Let me answer this question by another. Are there no back borders? Are there no hedge-banks or ditches, no secret corners

and low shrubberies out of sight, and yet still a part of the garden? Are there no dark corners, no hidden spots in your heart, in which you have at various times set strange slips; and have set them perhaps by night, as being ashamed of doing so in open day? If you say, "No; my garden may have a few weeds in it; but I have never been so base as to set poisonous plants in the back borders;" either your case is singular, or what is more probable, you have never taken a thorough and complete view of the garden; you have overlooked those hidden spots of your heart that the eye of God scans, or may be so ignorant as not to know a weed from a flower. Does not our text address itself to the people of God? For to whom else is he "the God of their salvation," and to whom else is Jesus "the Rock of their strength?" How, too, can they "forget" him, or be "unmindful" of him who never was in their hearts? Thus we have God's own testimony that even those who fear his great and glorious name, do, when they forget him, plant their pleasant plants and set their strange slips.

And has conscience no voice in your bosom here? Is there no **secret sin** that you want to indulge—no **base lust**: no filthy desire; no vile passion; no craving after iniquity? Are these vile weeds always torn up the moment that they peep out of the soil? To let them grow is the same thing as to set them; for where is the difference between letting a noxious weed grow when it might be pulled up and planting another by its side? Every time, then, that you secretly indulge the movement of any sin, you are setting a strange slip, fostering a poisonous plant in the garden of God.

But again, if free from such sins as these, have you no **self-righteousness** shooting and growing up in your heart: Are there no liftings up of Pharisaic pride? Do you never think, if not say, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou?" Are you never pleased with your prayers and performances; with your good feelings and intentions? Do you never look with complacency upon a consistent life, and not having been entangled like so many

others in slips and falls? What is this but a strange slip, for I am sure that the blessed Spirit never planted it in your heart?

Have you never feelings of **enmity against the saints of God?** Have you no malice, no suspicion, no jealousy, no envy, no unkind thoughts, no vile workings against those whom you can hardly deny to be the children of God, if any strife or division has broken out between you and them; or if they have given you real or supposed cause of offence? Are not these strange slips? And where have you set them? Out of sight; under the hedge behind the shrubbery. You can show your roses, geraniums, and verbenas, and even be pleased that they should be admired; but you won't show the dark hemlock, the stinking henbane, the pricking brier, the stinging nettle, all of which are growing so strongly, and tendered and nurtured so secretly, yet so carefully, in this back-border of yours. But you will say, "I do not cultivate them. I know they are there; but I do not foster them." Why then do you not pull them up; why do you suffer them to grow unchecked? But you must be conscious that often you even do cultivate them by indulging them as much as you dare.

But these strange slips are so many that I cannot enumerate them. I must, therefore, take them as they grow, thick and rank in the border. Have you, then, no pride, no self-exaltation, no presumption, no vain confidence, no unbelief and infidelity, no hardness, carelessness, recklessness, darkness, and deadness of spirit? Have you made your heart wholly clean? Can you stand before God, the holy, heart-searching Jehovah, and say that your hands, eyes, ears, lips, and every member of your body are free from iniquity? These, then, are the strange slips that you have been planting in the back borders. We are all guilty here. I do not stand before you as if I were free from iniquity and sin. I know what my heart is, and I know that I have, when left to myself, been verily guilty in this matter; for I have again and again planted pleasant plants and set strange slips. Such, too, should I plant and set every day of my life, except as kept back and held up by the mighty power of God. Nay, I believe that every man that knows his own heart must with me plead guilty here, for

none are altogether free from these charges: and he that knows most of himself will acknowledge that he thus sins, and that just in proportion as he forgets the God of his salvation and is unmindful of the Rock of his strength.

III .—But it is time to pass on to our next point, which is the **temporary success** which seems to crown this planting and setting. "In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish."

I wish to observe that all the way through the Lord is speaking as if judicially. When, then, he says, "Therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shall set it with strange slips," it is not that he either compels his people to plant or approves of their setting, but denounces against them this as the threatened consequence and punishment of their departing from him. In a similar way, when he says "In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow," he neither compels nor commends such a course, but predicts it as the judicial result. Thus for a time the Lord seemingly winks at all these evils; nay more, he allows them a season of passing prosperity; for having lost the light of his countenance, the planters and setters do not seem to be conscious of the evil of which they are guilty. Their eyes have become so blinded, their hearts so hardened, and their judgment so obscured by forgetting the God of their salvation and being unmindful of the Rock of their strength, that they have lost in good measure that tenderness of conscience which would have shown them the snares in which they were being entangled and the temptations by which they were being overcome.

But such, unhappily, is the power of sin, the strength of temptation, and the subtlety of Satan, that a man may be grievously entangled in many evil courses, or be much given up to carelessness and carnality, and yet scarcely see or feel, from sheer stupor of mind and callousness of conscience, into what a state of backsliding and alienation of heart from God he has fallen. Thus Ephraim is said to have been "broken in judgment"; and "strangers" are declared to "have devoured his strength and

he knew it not; yea, grey hairs were here and there upon him and he knew not." (Hos. 7:9.) This was the reward and the consequence of his backsliding. He had left God, and therefore for a time God left him. When a man falls into this sad state of soul, "in the day he makes his plant to grow, and in the morning he makes his seed to flourish."

Have you not done this? and have you not been very much pleased when you have got your plant to grow? When you have a pleasant wife, or an affectionate husband, healthy and handsome children, a comfortable house, good furniture, with money coming in so as to afford you every comfort and indulgence consistent with your situation in life; when, too, you can look around you and see all these pleasant plants before your eyes, and that you have been successful not only in planting them but in making them to grow, do you not feel very comfortable, and indulge at times in no small amount of self-complacency that such a measure of success and prosperity attend you? If you are in business, are you not very pleased if a growing number of customers come to your shop: and if your business should increase, your profits be augmented, and if day by day you should become better off in worldly circumstances, are you not tempted to increase your establishment, and thus make your pleasant plant to grow larger and larger and look handsomer and handsomer?

As, then, you look sometimes at your prospects, are you not tempted to think and say, "How pleasant everything is around me! What a wonder-working God he is to give me all this prosperity! I wonder there is so much poverty and discontent in the world! Why are not people more industrious and happy?" Or say that you are a farmer, and that circumstances **not this year, I fear, but there are times when they are so** are flourishing and things looking up. Is there not such a thing as standing upon a hill and looking around with complacency, "Here I have a good farm, good land, good crops, a good landlord, and I hope to leave all this to my son by and by?" Or if not in business, you may still look round you and say, "What an excellent wife I have, or good

husband, what a pleasant home, and how much I am generally respected! I have health and strength and every worldly comfort, and how happy and pleasant things seem to be just now!" Now is not this happy, easy life, this health and success, just what your carnal heart loves? Is not this prosperous and comfortable state just the very thing that suits your natural mind?

But this is the very thing upon which God puts his finger, in the text. This is the very carnal ease, to which he is giving you up, that you may one day rue its miserable consequences. This is in the day making your plant to grow; for you keep watering your plant; you want it to grow larger and larger, till it overtop all your neighbour's trees. It is nothing to you, that the fowls of the air rest in its branches, so long as your tree bears more abundant crops of fruit. Do you want your pleasant plant cut down, or even a single branch lopped off? No. You don't want any disappointment, any vexatious law-suit, any secret drain upon your gains, any heavy losses, any short crops, failing business, bad debts, an uncomfortable home, sickly children, an invalid wife, or a dying husband. **That** would be indeed a reverse; **that** would be death to your pleasant plant; **that** would be a worm at the root of your gourd. You want no path of trial and tribulation, but to sit under your spreading fig tree. You want still to enjoy a strong, healthy body, plenty of food and raiment, money at command, everything pleasant at home, everything prosperous in business, and everything successful in life.

And so you keep watering, watering, watering your pleasant plant, and the more you can make it grow, and the more you can bring it up in the sun, and the better and healthier it looks, the more you are pleased. The stronger the root, the longer the stem, the larger the leaves, and the more abundant the fruit, the more you admire the pleasant plant which you have set in your garden. Alas! You little care what becomes of the myrrh and aloes, and all the chief spices which this pleasant plant of yours has so overgrown, so starved, so stunted, and so overshadowed, till all their scent is gone, and they themselves scarcely seen. The Lord seems to let you go on; and you may even so forget the God

of your salvation, and be so unmindful of the Rock of your strength—that smitten Rock who sweat blood and agonised on the cross to save your soul—that you may take all this prosperity as a mark in your favour, and put God's providences in the place of God's graces.

But there is worse even than this, for there is **making your seed to flourish**; for this **seed** is "the strange slips" before spoken of as set by your own hand in the back borders. It is bad enough to be ever watering your pleasant plant and making it grow, but it is far worse to make the "strange slip" to flourish. But even this you do. Let me appeal to your conscience. Have you never nurtured your pride, your self-righteousness, your vain confidence? Have you never swathed and swaddled your bosom idol, as misshapen and ugly a god as ever Hindoo worshipped? Have you never fed your jealousy, your enmity, your suspicion, your revengeful thoughts, your unkind feelings, and the flame that has burnt in your bosom against an enemy, or even against a brother? Have you not nurtured these devilish feelings, and done all that you could to make them flourish, thinking all the time, perhaps, what a wonderful Christian you were, while God looked at all this abomination, and hated what he saw going on?

Have you not built your airy castles, planted visionary paradises, and thought what you would do and how you would act, if ever they were realised? Though you may not have had money or opportunity to build a new house, or even leave your old one; yet you have built a castle every day, though it has been a castle in the air; and though you may not have an inch of ground to call your own, you have had a garden within, which you have planted with all care, and watered morning and evening. O, if a man does but take a faithful view of his own heart, of what is continually passing in his own mind, he will not think this an overdrawn picture! He will not start back with horror from the portrait, and cry out "What base wretch are you describing? Can such a man live and move, and yet have the fear of God in his heart?" If I dip my brush into God's own book and use no other colours than are spread on God's own palette, you must not say I paint man too

black; and if I dip it also into my own heart, I believe that from mine I can pretty well describe yours. Instead of finding fault with my portrait, you had better view it as your own; you had better first look into your own garden and examine the pleasant plants and the strange slips, and then you will be a better judge whether it be wholly a paradise of God's planting, or whether many a rank weed does not grow there which his hand never set in its beds and borders.

IV.—But we now come to our fourth and last point, which is the harvest reaped from all this planting and setting. This of course is the grand, the expected, and long looked-for consummation of the whole. Is not the farmer ever fixing his eye upon his harvest? What else is to pay him for all his cost and trouble? This with him is the crowning of the year. So you all have your harvest. You are not, it is true, all of you farmers; but you have all a harvest in prospect or in possession; for the harvest, in our text, is the success of your pleasant plants, and the crop which you should reap from your strange slips.

The harvest may at present be but in your own brain—merely in that busy, active, speculating imagination of yours which would fain have, not only one harvest in a year, but a harvest every month. You have not been engaged all this time in planting pleasant plants and setting strange slips, without expecting you are to get something from it. And what you are to get from it is to be your "harvest"—a harvest of pleasure, of enjoyment, of delight, of profit, or of something of which you can say, "I shall fill my barns with it; and when I have filled my barns and there bestowed all my fruits and my goods, I shall say to my soul, Take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry."

But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways our ways; he has other thoughts concerning the harvest than what you have been dreaming of, and other intentions respecting it than those which you have been speculating upon, and in prospect almost insured. **"But the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow."**

These words seem this year to have been literally fulfilled. I heard a cry this autumn which I hope I shall never hear again, and that some of you young people may never hear for the whole of your lives; for I heard the farming boys with the last load of corn cry "Harvest home" in the month of November, and this may not occur again for another century. And as to the harvest being "a heap," I saw with my own eyes acres of mown barley lying in the fields in October, that seemed to my unpractised gaze more fit for the dunghill than to be gathered into the rick. So literally and naturally, through the rainy season, the harvest to many a farmer has been but "a heap;" and to those already crushed by preceding bad times and heavy losses, instead of finding in it a means of extrication, it has been but a "day of grief and of desperate sorrow."

But view it spiritually, for I speak to spiritual people, and desire, as a servant of the Lord, to handle the subject with spiritual fingers. Where then is the harvest which you have been expecting to reap from your pleasant plants and strange slips? Has it not been to you spiritually what the harvest has been literally to many a poor farmer this year,—ruined by incessant rains, swept away by floods, or tossed into a heap, and carried away to the dunghill?

Where are your "pleasant plants" that you planted years ago? Where the "strange slips" that you watered and cultivated and took such care of? What has been the harvest? You who married early in life, have things turned out just as you expected? You expected to go down to the grave without trouble in your families, sickness in your houses, affliction in your bodies, poverty in your circumstances, or those deep and heavy trials that have made all your harvest to be "a heap;" a heap of wet straw, instead of ripe and rich and full ears.

O, the wisdom, and may I not add, the goodness and mercy of a wonder-working God, to confound all our prospects, pull down our airy castles, root up our pleasant plants and strange slips,

and with his own fingers throw them into a heap, and make them fit only for the dunghill! How many bosom idols you have indulged; how many sins you have fostered; how much pride you have nursed; how many envious suspicions, cruel jealousies, and bitter feelings have you warmed in your bosom! What care you have taken of your pleasant plants! How you have in winter put a hand-glass over them to keep the frost out, and watered them in summer lest they should die of drought! Nor have you taken less care of your strange slips! How often and how long you have harboured unkindly feelings against some offending brother, and nursed your wrath to keep it warm!

But let us see in what way the harvest is made "a heap." The Lord works in various ways, but they all tend to the same end. Thus He may lay you upon a sick bed, bring trouble and distress into your soul, set before you your grievous backslidings, and lay the guilt of them so upon your conscience as almost to sink you into despair. The day of reckoning is now come, when the Lord brings to light the secret thoughts of the heart, and lays His chastening hand upon the backslider, filling him with his own ways. Where, and what is now your harvest? What has become now of your pleasant plants that you took such delight in, and those strange slips that you cultivated with such care? Why, nothing but a heap.

We reap what we sow. "If we sow to the flesh, of the flesh we reap corruption." Here is the end of all idols; here is the termination of all prospects of happiness independent of God. Here is the fruit of carnal ease, worldly security, spiritual pride, towering presumption, vain confidence, thinking highly of ourselves, and despising others. Look at that poor backslider, lying upon a sick bed, with the frowns of God in his soul, Jesus absent, Satan present, faith at its lowest ebb, hope scarcely lifting up its head, and love dwindled down to the lowest spark. See how he loathes what he has loved; listen to his almost despairing language of self-condemnation, "O that I had lived more in the fear of God, had walked more circumspectly and uprightly, had watched against bosom sins, mortified my lusts,

crucified the flesh with its affections, not indulged every vain thought, nor nurtured every bad passion. O that I had walked, and spoke, and lived, and acted more as becometh the Gospel, and the profession which I made, and sought more to adorn the doctrine of God in all things."

Is not this now with him "the day of grief and of desperate sorrow?" And so it will be with us, if we have been planting pleasant plants and setting strange slips, and been suffered of God to do so, so as to have walked in a path of ease and carnal security. Then, indeed, shall we see what backsliders we have been, what base wretches, when the harvest lies before our eyes "a heap," only fit for the dunghill, and we mourn before the Lord in "the day of grief and desperate sorrow."

But let me not leave you mourning here. Let me show you mercy and grace mingled with, and shining through all this. Is not God rich in mercy, in bringing all this secret backsliding to light, in making the harvest to be a heap? Is it not still His gracious hand made manifest, in bringing sickness or painful bereavements into your families, visiting you with heavy trials and painful afflictions, and by these timely chastisements, to make you feel, and that deeply, the miserable consequence of not walking more in His fear, and thus make you reap the bitter fruit of backsliding? Is not all this not in wrath, but in mercy? Is it not for the good of your soul, that you may not go on adding sin to sin and iniquity to iniquity, and die at last under the wrath of God? For by these things God brings his erring, backsliding children to their senses; and thus stops them before they have altogether given up God and godliness.

But as He afflicts for their good, and only takes away one harvest to give another, one that shall endure for ever and ever in His eternal kingdom, He will bring in due time a word of consolation to lift up their drooping spirit, and to show them that notwithstanding all their sins, he is still "the God of their salvation," and that Jesus is still "the Rock of their strength." Thus by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of

their spirit. By these mingled dealings of judgment and mercy, the rod and kiss, the frown and smile, we learn to loathe ourselves, so as to remember and be confounded and never open our mouths any more because of our shame when he is pacified towards us for all that we have done, saith the Lord. (Eze. 16:63.)

Thus we learn to hate our own folly and our own sin, and to see and feel more and more the superaboundings of grace over all the aboundings of our iniquity. As, then, we are blessed with a feeling sense of the Lord's goodness and mercy in not dealing with us after our sins nor rewarding us after our iniquities, we shall learn to cleave to Him more closely with purpose of heart. Thus, though there is no excuse for us, for we must still plead guilty, all these varied dealings in the hands of God eventually work for our spiritual good: and the effect ever will be and must be to humble the sinner in the dust, and to crown Jesus Lord of all.

## Plenteous Redemption

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 25, 1847

"Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Psalm 130:7, 8

There is one feature in the experience of David which I never remember to have seen noticed—his sympathy with the suffering church of God as connected with, and flowing out of, his own trials and exercises. I will endeavour to explain my meaning more fully and clearly, and perhaps I cannot better succeed in so doing, than by contrasting our experience in this matter with David's. When we are tried and exercised, it is usually altogether concerning *ourselves*. We do not often look beyond self; we want the remedy to be of a personal nature. I do not mean to say that we are not often exercised about others. That is not my meaning. But at those times and seasons when we are most exercised about ourselves, we are least exercised about others. Self at such times is usually too much absorbed to look beyond its own narrow horizon. But it does not seem to have been so with the Psalmist. Though he was exercised, far more deeply exercised than you or I have been or probably ever shall be, he was not so lost and absorbed in self, as to have no sympathy for the suffering church of God. I will illustrate my meaning by referring to two or three instances.

In Psalm 51, we find David lamenting and bewailing before the Lord his awful transgressions, and crying out, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." (ver. 4.) How piteously he pleads! "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (ver. 7.) But towards the end of the Psalm, he stretches forth his sympathy towards, and desire after the suffering church of God: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build then the walls of Jerusalem." (ver.

18.)

So also, in Psalm 69, he says, "Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (ver. 1, 2.) And yet, though sinking in these deep waters, he does not forget the church of God. "For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah; that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servant shall inherit it; and they that love his name shall dwell therein." (ver. 35, 36.)

So in the Psalm before us. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." (ver. 1, 2.) But, though wading in those depths, and crying for deliverance, still he does not forget the church of God: "Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Three points seem to strike my mind as most prominent in the words before us. *First, a divine exhortation*; "Let Israel hope in the Lord." *Secondly, a spiritual reason*; "For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." And *lastly, a gracious promise*; "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

I .—But what are we to understand by "*Israel?*" In order to lay a solid foundation for a spiritual superstructure; not to stumble at the very threshold, nor slip at the very outset, we must, first, decide who is meant by "Israel." And to settle this point, we must interpret the Old Testament by the New, for in *that* the mind of the Spirit is more clearly revealed. The Apostle Paul tells us then, "They are not *all* Israel which are of Israel;" (Rom. 9:6;) whereby he gives us clearly to understand that the literal Israel was but a type and figure of "the Israel of God," the election of grace, redeemed by precious blood.

But we must go a step farther than this, and show, that by

"Israel" is meant not merely the elect, but the quickened elect. Does not the Apostle say, "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and *upon the Israel of God.*" (Gal. 6:16.) What was this rule? That "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature;*" clearly pointing out that "Israel" is not only the chosen of God, but "a new creature," begotten from on high.

But again. As strongly distinguishing the spiritual from the carnal Israel, he says, Rom. 2:28, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

By "Israel," then, in our text, we are to understand the quickened elect; God's spiritual family, in every state, stage, or circumstance of their experience. Thus it will comprehend every living soul, from the first pang of conviction to the last expiring hallelujah, from the first cry for mercy raised up in a sinner convinced of his sin to the triumph of a saint dying in the full blaze of manifested glory. And thus, of all Israel, in every state and stage of experience, in every circumstance of their spiritual life, we may say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord;" for Israel will ever have to "hope in the Lord." I do not mean to say, that Israel will not be able to rejoice and triumph in the Lord; but as long as Israel is in the body, so long will Israel be exposed to the temptations of the flesh, the assaults of Satan, and the hatred of the world; and therefore till safely folded in the arms of the heavenly Bridegroom will there be a necessity that Israel should "hope in the Lord."

We may look, then, at "Israel" under various circumstances and in different states and stages of the divine life; and of each and of all we may still say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord." For instance,

1. There is, first, *convinced Israel*. When the Lord is pleased for the first time, to shoot from his unerring bow an arrow of

conviction into the conscience, and raises up that cry in the bosom which he has never failed to hear: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "What shall I do to be saved?" 'How can I flee from the wrath to come?'—when thus under conviction, with a feeling sense of utter ruin and misery, crying to the Lord for pity and pardon, there is still a divine exhortation for Israel to "hope in the Lord." It is from the word of the Lord, which is "sharper than any two-edged sword," that this spiritual distress and exercise arise; and the same God that wounds is able and willing to heal; for "He maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands maketh whole." And thus, there is every encouragement for convinced Israel to "hope in the Lord."

2. But there is *seeking Israel*. No sooner does the Lord convince of sin, than he puts a cry and sigh into the soul for his manifested mercy. And hereby the convictions of the Lord's family are distinguished from the convictions of reprobates, that in the heart of the latter there is no cry after mercy. "They cry not when he bindeth them." (Job 36:13.) But when the Lord begins a work of grace upon an elect soul, and convinces it of sin, he plants a cry for mercy; and urges it to seek earnestly, imploringly, and perseveringly until in due time that mercy comes. The Lord will not let begging Israel seek his face in vain. He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." There is, therefore, every encouragement for seeking Israel to "hope in the Lord;" for from the Lord the spirit of seeking comes, and to such the promise is made.

3. Again. There is *longing, hungering, and thirsting Israel*; and Israel in this state is still bidden to "hope in the Lord;" for there are certain blessings which the Lord has to bestow on his hungering and thirsting people. He has said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6.) David also records his experience thus: "As the heart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." (Psa. 42:1, 2.) Whence come these holy pantings, these intense longings? Who created these ardent desires? What has made the

soul thus to hunger and thirst after manifested salvation? After Jesus' atoning blood applied to the conscience, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost? Whence can they, whence do they spring, but from "the Father of lights," the unchanging and unchangeable Jehovah, from "whom cometh every good and every perfect gift." There is, therefore, every encouragement for longing, panting, hungering and thirsting Israel, to hope in the Lord.

4. But there is *believing Israel*. When faith is raised up to believe in the precious name of Jesus; when there is a gracious discovery of his Person, of his atoning blood, of his justifying righteousness, of his dying love, and of his divine suitability to every state and case; and God the Spirit is pleased to draw forth faith to look unto him, lay hold of and clasp him, and bring him in all his beauty, preciousness, and loveliness—then there is a blessed change, and we have believing, loving, and praising Israel. But Israel is not yet safely landed; yet as anchoring within the veil she is encouraged more firmly than before "to hope in the Lord."

5. But Israel is not always here: these are for the most part short seasons. The visits of Jesus are but a "glittering," or "glancing," (as the word means,) "through the lattice;" very transient, yet enough to raise up sweet emotions of love to him who is "altogether lovely." When, therefore, these 'short visits end,' Israel is, in her feelings, *forsaken of the Lord*. She cannot find that access which she once enjoyed; the Lord does not seem to listen to her prayers as he did in former times. There are no sweet love-tokens, no precious promises applied, no blessed visits, no manifestations:—all within is dark, dark, dark as midnight. But is Israel to cast away her confidence because she is forsaken? "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, saith the Lord; but with great mercies will I gather thee." (Isa. 54:7.) "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (49:15.) There have been times and seasons when the Lord blessed Israel with his presence, smiled upon her, applied his promises to her heart, enlarged her soul

with his love, drew forth her affections, fixed them upon himself, and gave her to enjoy some sweet moments of heavenly communion with his gracious Majesty. Israel is not to forget these, nor to cast them behind her back. She is, therefore, still encouraged to "hope in the Lord."

6. But there is also *tempted Israel*. Israel is not always enjoying the manifested love of her covenant Head. She is often tempted, tried, buffeted, plagued, and exercised; and yet, in all her temptations, trials, and exercises, she is still bidden and encouraged to "hope in the Lord" that these temptations shall not swallow her up; that these severe exercises shall not prove her downfall; that these snares shall not fatally, nor fully entangle her feet; that she shall not be overcome by the number of her inward or outward foes, but be victorious over all. And thus tempted Israel is still encouraged to "hope in the Lord."

7. But there is *backsliding Israel*. How many of the Lord's family get entangled in the snares of Satan, in the lusts of their fallen nature, in the things of time and sense, in the cares and anxieties of the world, in the nets and gins that Satan spreads for their feet! How many backslide from the Lord, grow hard and callous, secure and reckless; neglect a throne of mercy; and seem as it were to fall into a state where they can scarcely trace one mark or feature of the divine image in their soul! But backsliding Israel is still encouraged to "hope in the Lord." He will not cast her off. He has said, "return unto me, ye backsliding children; for I am married unto you." The Lord's people may backslide from him; but he will not turn away from them, though they deserve to be banished entirely from his presence. Thus Israel, after her worst state of backsliding, when pierced and wounded by a sense of her guilt and sin, is still encouraged to "hope in the Lord."

Why should Israel, in these various states and circumstances, "hope in the Lord?" Because she is divinely taught to hope nowhere else. The work of the Holy Spirit upon her heart is mainly to bring about two things—a death to self, and a living unto God; a slaying of the creature, in all its shapes and forms,

and a setting up of the blood, obedience, and love of Immanuel. This work takes in Israel in all her states of experience. Look at her in every stage of the divine life; whether when first convinced of sin, or seeking after mercy, or panting after God, or believing in Jesus, or forsaken by him, or tempted by Satan, or backsliding in heart. All the dealings of God with her, in every state and stage of her experience, are to slaughter her, to make her distrust the creature in every shape and form, and bring her out of self, with all its miseries, to look to, hang upon, and "hope in the Lord," with all his mercies. Hereby Israel is distinguished from all the nations that are upon the face of the earth. Hereby "Israel of God," the Spirit-taught Zion, the quickened elect, the living family—are distinguished from all mere dead professors, however high in doctrine, or however low in doctrine. By these two features the living family of God are distinguished from all—that they put no confidence in the flesh, and that all their hope and trust is in the Lord alone. What said David? "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." (Psa. 62:5.) And is not this the state and case of every child of God, so far as the Lord is pleased to lead him into the truth,—to turn away from the creature in all its shapes and forms, and fix the heart and affections where Jesus sits at God's right hand? Thus the divine exhortation is to hope—not in self, wretched, ruined, undone, bankrupt self; not to hope in the law, which can only deal out thunders and lightnings and wither by its consuming flames every one found under that fiery dispensation; not to trust in the creature; for to trust in the creature is to lean upon a bruised reed that runs into our hand, and pierces it; not to trust in man, sinner or saint, because "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." (Jer. 17:5.) But, brought away from self, away from the law, away from the creature, as a poor perishing worm, Israel is enabled by divine teaching and divine testimony to look unto the Lord, wait upon the Lord, hope in the Lord, and cast her burden and care upon him who has said, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psa. 55:22.)

But what is this "*hope*?" There are many "hopes" that the word of God declares to be utterly fallacious. There is "the hope of the hypocrite" that cometh to nought; (Job 27:8.); the hope of the pharisee; the hope of the self-confident professor. There are "hopes" of every name and size, of every stature and dimension; nay, almost as numerous and diversified as the sons of men. And yet, all these "hopes" are but refuges of lies. The true hope is that which cometh down from God into the soul—the "good hope through grace," that springs out of the Spirit's teachings and testimony—that grace of the Spirit which lives together with faith and love. "And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," (1 Cor. 13:13,)—a threefold cord, that cannot be broken.

II.—But we pass on to consider *the spiritual reason* which the Holy Ghost has given by the pen of the Psalmist why Israel is to "hope in the Lord." "*For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.*" Two reasons, then, God the Spirit has given why Israel should "hope in the Lord."

i. One is, that "*with the Lord there is mercy.*" Observe how the text is worded. To my mind there is something very sweet in it. It does not say, "*from the Lord is mercy,*" though from the Lord all mercy comes; though from him, as the Father of lights, every good and perfect gift issues: and what more perfect gift can there be than mercy? Nor does it say, "*in the Lord there is mercy;*" though there is mercy in him, and in no other. But as though it would draw forth the affections of our soul more towards this mercy, it runs thus, "*with the Lord there is mercy.*" As though it would say, 'In his hands, in his bounteous heart, a part of his divine nature, an attribute of his eternal character. It is *with* him, and bestowed upon his Israel, upon those who feel their deep need; yes, so with him, that none need despair who are brought to long after it, and to know that they must perish under the wrath of God without it.' If it ran thus—"*From the Lord there is mercy,*" a poor convinced, and half-despairing soul might argue thus: 'Yes, I know *from* the Lord there is mercy; but how can I expect that mercy to come from the Lord into my soul; for I am

unworthy of the least ray of mercy from him; nothing can come from him but purity and holiness, while I am all guilt, filth, and shame.' Thus it would hardly be sufficient for us. Or if the words ran, "*In* the Lord there is mercy; he might say, 'Yes, I know there is mercy *in* the Lord for the elect; but am I one of the elect?' Doubts, fears, and misgivings might harass his mind whether, though there is mercy *in* the Lord, there were mercy in the Lord *for him*. But by "with" the blessed Spirit takes a wider range, a fuller sweep, and opens the arms of mercy wider than he would have done, had the expression been "from" or "in." Thus there is encouragement for convinced, seeking, longing, forsaken, backsliding Israel to creep within these arms of mercy that fold themselves around her, and gather her into the bosom of Immanuel; for the good Shepherd will "gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isa. 40:11.)

"With the Lord," then, there is mercy." It is a part of his divine character; it is one of his most precious attributes.

But what is "*mercy*?" There are several ideas contained in the expression.

1. First, it intimates *compassion*. We read of the "bowels of the mercy of our God" (Luke 1:78, *marg.*); and this expression implies a flowing forth of compassion and tender-heartedness towards the object of mercy. Let us look at this in the case of the returning prodigal. How when he was coming homeward, all rags and ruin, full of confusion and shame, guilt and distress, the Father's compassion flowed forth, and his bowels yearned over his returning son! This compassion working in his bosom, was a part of the mercy which the Father showed to his returning prodigal.

2. But again. Mercy implies *pardon*; not merely compassion. We may compassionate, and yet not pardon. A judge may compassionate the criminal whom he justly condemns to death, and may mingle tears with the fatal sentence. But mercy in the

mind of God is not merely confined to the flowing forth of compassion and pity. He is a sovereign; and not only can compassionate the trembling culprit, but also, by a free act of his distinguishing favour can freely forgive every transgression that he has committed.

3. But again. Mercy, also, implies that the party to whom the act is manifested, is *a criminal, a transgressor*. Mercy is not for the righteous and holy; but for the guilty sinner, the transgressor, the criminal at God's holy bar. Israel, then, is treated as a criminal, and pardoned as a criminal. Israel does not come to the throne to lay down her merits, and take up God's mercy as a counterbalance for them; but Israel comes as a poor criminal, ruined and undone, sentenced and condemned by God's righteous law. And to none other but criminals, deeply dyed criminals, will the sound of mercy be sweet. But oh, what a sweet sound is there in mercy, when pardoning love reaches the conscience! when the mercy of God is manifested by his blotting out and casting behind his back all Israel's guilt, filth and shame!

Now here is the exhortation, the divine exhortation, "Let Israel hope in the Lord;"—Israel sunk, however low; Israel tempted, however severely; Israel condemning herself, however justly; Israel almost on the brink of despair;—let her still "hope in the Lord." Has she ceased to hope in the creature? Has she ceased to look to an arm of flesh? Does she despair of salvation from any other source or quarter but the blood of the Lamb? Is she crying, sighing, longing, panting, and begging of the Lord to appear in her soul? "Let Israel," then, "hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy." He will not spurn his waiting Israel from his feet; he will not smite her with the lightnings of his wrath; he will show mercy to the poor guilty sinner that comes with dust upon his head, clothed with sackcloth and ashes, mourning and lamenting his vileness before the Lord. There is no wrath in the bosom of the Lord against *him*; there is mercy, pardoning mercy in the bosom of Jehovah for Israel; therefore "let Israel hope in the Lord." If Israel look to herself, she cannot have one grain of hope; if she look to the law she cannot have one ray of

expectation; or if she look to an arm of flesh, none can do her good. But if Israel looks "to the hills from whence cometh her help"—to God the Father, in his electing love—to God the Son, in his redeeming blood—to God the Spirit, in his sanctifying work; if Israel is thus enabled to anchor within the veil, thus to "hope in the Lord," her hope shall not be cut off, shall not be disappointed; it shall not be as "the hope of the hypocrite," a spider's web, that the first gust of eternal displeasure shall for ever sweep away.

ii. But there is another reason—"*And with him is plenteous redemption.*" How this text is perverted! I never heard many sermons from Arminian preachers since I knew anything of divine things; but I doubt not that this passage has been abused by thousands, to prove, or attempt to prove, universal redemption. But how they overlook "Israel" here! If it ran thus—"Let the *world* hope in the Lord;" then there would have been some colouring from plenteous redemption being universal redemption. But when it runs so clearly and is backed up by, "He shall redeem *Israel* from all his iniquities," how limited immediately does the word become! And yet, though limited in extent as regards persons, yet plenteous in itself towards those characters to whom it comes. And I am very sure that nothing but "plenteous" redemption can suit you and me.

But what is "*redemption*?" Does it not signify a buying, a purchase? and if it signify a buying, a purchase, there must be a price laid down. If I go into a shop, and buy an article, of course I lay my money down, and take up the article; otherwise it is not buying, but cheating. So spiritually. Redemption implies an actual price. What is this price? The blood of the Lamb. "Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Pet. 1:18, 19.) *That* was the redemption price; and when we look at it in the Spirit's light, how "plenteous" is that redemption! View it as the blood of the Son of God—the Godhead giving infinite and eternal value and efficacy to it—how precious must that blood be—the blood of God! As the Apostle says, "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his

own blood." (Acts 20:28) Not that God can bleed any more than God can die; but the God-Man, "Immanuel, God with us," bled and died. Oh, how great, how precious, how plenteous then, that redemption must be, that was effected by the blood of Christ! Now, when we look at redemption in this point of view—*first*, at the infinite virtue and efficacy of redemption, seeing it was God who became incarnate, and God-Man, Immanuel, bled and died upon the cross: and, *secondly*, at the demerit of sin, its awful character, its dreadful nature;—when we look at redemption in these two points of view, we see that nothing short of a "plenteous redemption" could suit our souls, or save us from the wrath to come. What am I? what are you? but a desperately wicked wretch—a vile, an awful vile sinner—a monster of iniquity? What then, can save such wretches from the very depths of hell—what can redeem us from the wrath to come, and bathe our souls in the raptures of endless bliss, instead of howling for ever beneath the wrath of God—I say, what can thus take us from the very jaws of hell, and transport us to the gates of heaven but "plenteous redemption?" What but the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin, can deliver my guilty, polluted, justly condemned soul, can snatch it from the jaws of hell, and lift it up to the bosom of God to be with him through the countless ages of eternity? It must be "plenteous redemption" to do this for one sinner—I repeat, for *one* sinner! When we view sin in all its aggravated nature, all its magnitude, all its defilement, all its horrible, most detestable, and abominable character; when we view even the sin of one day, or one hour, as opposed to the infinite purity of the Lord God Almighty; what short of "plenteous redemption" can pluck *one* sinner from the jaws of eternal destruction? But when we include all the elect of God, as numerous as the stars in the winter sky, or the sands upon the seashore, what short of "plenteous redemption" can save the whole election of grace? I cannot call that "plenteous redemption" which meets me half way. It must come into my very conscience, be dropt from the mouth of God into my very heart, and save me body and soul as a lost sinner from the wrath to come, or it cannot be a redemption suited to my aggravated sins, my desperate case. But "with him"—in his bosom, in his heart, in his

hands, in his dying love, in his risen power—in all that he is and all that he has for the church of God—"with him his plenteous redemption;" and therefore, "let Israel hope in the Lord;" because with the Lord is mercy, even for such a wretch as I, and "plenteous redemption" even for one so deeply stained with guilt as thou.

III .—We pass on, as time is waning, to the *gracious promise*; "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." If we were to listen to what people say about Christians and believers, we should think they had no sin about them; that they were so holy, spiritual, and religious that sin and they had for ever parted company; that when they gave themselves to the Lord, they shook hands with sin, and never had to do with it more. Nay, if you would believe some, they had long ago buried sin, and written his funeral epitaph; and you might walk in their beautifully laid out, neatly gravelled and flower-decked cemetery on a summer evening, and see written, 'here lies sin!' Foolish, foolish men! ignorant, ignorant creatures! deceivers! perverters of God's truth! I say feelingly, that we never know anything about sin, nor what sin is, till God is pleased to quicken our souls to fear his great Name. We do not know its hideousness, its mighty power, its subtle insinuations—the iniquity, the horrid iniquity, we carry in our bosom—till God is pleased to plant his precious fear in our hearts.

But look at our text—"He shall redeem Israel from all his *iniquities*." No light word that. Not, 'his little peccadillos,' 'his slight failings,' 'his slender faults;' as though Israel were such a pious, humble, excellent creature, that it was only once or twice throughout the year that he did or thought anything wrong. "His iniquities!"—a strong word that; but no stronger than the case justifies, no stronger than every one taught of God feels he deserves. And "*all* his iniquities." We might have thought, if we talked with some people, that Israel had not above half-a-dozen iniquities. But the word of God says, "*all* his iniquities." Let us look at some of them.

Iniquities of eye—has conscience no voice there? Is no iniquity

ever practiced by your eye? Let conscience speak. Iniquity of *ear*—is there no iniquity that enters into your heart through the ear? You cannot listen to a conversation in the street, without iniquity entering into your heart through what Bunyan calls, "Ear-gate." Iniquity of *lip*—do you always keep your tongue as with a bridle? Do your lips never drop anything unbecoming the gospel? Is there no carnal conversation, no angry word at home, no expression that you would not like the saints of God to hear? What! your lips always kept so strictly, that there is never a single expression dropt from them which you would be ashamed to utter before an assembly of God's people? Iniquity of *thought*—if your eyes, ears, and lips are clean, is there no iniquity of thought? What! in that workshop within no iniquitous suggestions, no evil workings? Oh, how ignorant must we be of ourselves, if we feel that we have no iniquity of thought! Iniquity of *imagination*—does not fancy sometimes bring before you scenes of sensuality in which your carnal heart is vile enough to revel? Iniquity of *memory*—does not memory sometimes bring back sins you formerly committed, and your evil nature is perhaps base enough to desire they had been greater? Iniquity of *feeling*—no enmity against God's people ever working? no pride of heart? no covetousness? no hypocrisy? no self-righteousness? no sensuality? no base thoughts that you cannot disclose even to your bosom friend? Let conscience speak in your bosom. I know what conscience says in mine. I do not stand before you as a holy being. God knows the iniquities I daily, hourly feel working in my carnal mind, oft to my grief and shame.

But here is the blessed promise—a promise only suited to Israel; for all but Israel lose sight of their iniquities, and justify themselves in self-righteousness. None but Israel feel and confess their iniquities; and therefore to Israel is the promise of redemption limited—"He shall redeem *Israel* from all his iniquities." What! *all*? Yes. Not *one* left? No, not a trace, not a shade, not the shadow of a shade; all buried, all gone, all swallowed up, all blotted out, all freely pardoned, all cast behind God's back. If a single spot or wrinkle could be found upon our souls before the Majesty of heaven, it would condemn us for ever

to the lowest hell! therefore the church stands before God, in Christ, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." (Eph. 5:27.) "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." (Sol. Song 4: 7.)

But again. There is the *guilt* of iniquity, that our conscience feels and groans under. There is the *filth* of iniquity, that so defiles us and puts us to shame. There is the *power* of iniquity, the inward working of sin, ever striving for the mastery. But God has said, "He shall redeem (or deliver) Israel from *all* his iniquities"—iniquities of eye, ear, thought, imagination, memory, action, lip, and life—from every iniquity, its guilt, its filth, and its power—he shall redeem and deliver, wash and cleanse his Israel perfectly and completely from all.

Now, is there not every encouragement here for Israel to "hope in the Lord?" 'Yes,' the answer rises, 'every reason; but am I one of this Israel?' Well, can you find some of the features of Israel traced out this morning? I have gone as low as I could, to mark out the very first work of God upon the soul. Surely you can come in here, if God has quickened your soul into spiritual life. Has he convinced you of guilt, and made you cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner?" Has he taught you to seek his face, given you a spirit of prayer, raised up hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, and brought you to beg and cry that he would appear in your soul? These are marks and features of a divine work upon your conscience. You are one of God's Israel if you can find these things in your heart. "Behold," said the Lord, in the early days of Nathanael, whom he had seen under the fig-tree, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47.) There is no guile in a true Israelite, but honesty, integrity, and sincerity.

Now, the Lord will encourage his Israel in every stage and state, in every case and circumstance, to hope in him—to hope in his word (as David says, "I hope in thy word," Psa. 119:81), in his invitations, in his truths, in himself; in *himself*, I repeat, as made manifest in our conscience, as from time to time revealed to our

souls. But why should Israel "hope in the Lord?" On what grounds? What reason is given for it? "With the Lord there is mercy"—mercy to pardon the blackest crimes, to absolve the deepest-dyed transgressor. Nay, more; "and with him is plenteous redemption." A price has been paid; God's justice has been satisfied; the holy law has had all its demands; God's attributes do not clash; "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psa. 85:10.) And thus, "he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities," however numerous, however aggravated, however powerful they may be. How suitable and encouraging, therefore, is this divine exhortation: The Lord drop it, from his own mouth, from time to time, into our hearts!

## **THE POOR RAISED UP OUT OF THE DUST, AND THE BEGGAR LIFTED UP FROM THE DUNGHILL**

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Lord's Day Morning, August 20, 1843.

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them." 1 Samuel 2:8

Most of you are probably familiar, not only with the name of the person who uttered these words, but also with the circumstances under which they were spoken by her. But lest any should not immediately recollect the passage, I will just observe that they are the words of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, and that the circumstances under which they were spoken, were when she brought her infant son, and presented him before the Lord, that he might be his for ever. Her heart, it appears, was then so enlarged, and her soul so comforted and strengthened by beholding her infant son as the manifested answer to her prayers, that she burst forth into that song of thanksgiving of which the text forms a portion.

But before I enter into the experimental meaning of the text, it may be desirable, with God's blessing, to trace out a few leading particulars of Hannah's case.

I believe, that, in Scripture, there are typical characters, as well as what are more properly called "types", or typical things; and Hannah appears to me to have been one of these typical characters. By typical characters, in this sense, I mean, not in the same way as Aaron, or Solomon, were types of Christ, but certain persons whose history and experience are typical or representative of God's dealings with his people, or of characters that should arise in the church. The history of Hannah affords us more than one instance of these typical characters. We read, for

instance, **1Sa 1:1,2** that "Elkanah had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." Elkanah seems to me to typify the Lord Jesus—I think we may fairly assume this without doing violence to the figure; and his two wives seem to represent the church, Peninnah the professing, and Hannah the possessing church. Let us see if the figure will bear us out in this interpretation. Peninnah, in type, represents the professing church. As having a form of godliness, and a name to live, she had a vast superiority outwardly over her rival, for she was fruitful, whilst Hannah was barren. This points out the superiority, in outward fruit, which many professors have over God's spiritually-taught children. But we may observe that in Peninnah's fruitfulness there was nothing manifested of a supernatural character. She had children in the common course of nature, as other married women have them; there was nothing peculiarly providential, nothing eminently striking, nothing miraculous; but all took place in the usual course.

Now this strikingly represents the way in which mere professors of religion bring forth their good works. The fruits they produce are not wrought in them by miracle; they do not spring out of a supernatural operation upon their consciences; but they are brought forth, from time to time, in the mere course of nature, without any galling disappointment on account of previous barrenness, without any earnest cry that the Lord would work powerfully in their soul, without any manifested answer to the prayer that he would make them fruitful in every good word and work. But these good works and religious performances, on which they pride themselves so highly, are brought forth by them in the usual course of nature, by the mere exertion of the creature, utterly independent of any work of the Holy Ghost upon their heart.

But this fruitfulness of Peninnah much galled and pained her barren rival, as the zeal, devotedness, piety and amiability, evident in many professors, often exceedingly gall the children of God. For they are spiritually what Hannah was naturally barren.

Thus they cannot bring forth good works in the usual process of nature. Barrenness, impotency, and helplessness, have so completely paralysed them, that they require a supernatural, and I might say, without going too far, a miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost upon their conscience, just as Hannah required, to speak with all delicacy, a miraculous operation upon her womb to bring forth fruit. They are then exceedingly pained and galled by seeing how fruitful mere professors of religion are, whilst they continue barren and fruitless. Thus fruitful Peninnahs can pray, whilst barren Hannahs cannot put up a single breath of spiritual prayer: the one can always believe, whilst the other cannot raise up a single grain of living faith in their heart; the former can hope, whilst the latter at times are ready to sink down well nigh into despair: the dead can be happy while the living are often overwhelmed in misery; the carnal can read the Bible, chapter after chapter, while the spiritual can scarcely open it at times on account of the temptations which assail them; and the graceless can walk in the path of religion with all the ease and comfort in the world, whilst the gracious, like Asaph, are plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning. As Peninnah, too, taunted her rival with her own fruitfulness and her barrenness, so the mere professors of religion often taunt God's people with their want of good works compared with their own superior and abundant religious performances. They sneer at those who profess spiritual religion as backward where they are forward; that they do not distribute tracts, support missionary societies, unite with other religious bodies, and make zealous efforts to convert the world. They therefore upbraid them, as Peninnah did Hannah, for their barrenness, and charge them with religious indifference, or, what they call, their Antinomian slothfulness; and with an inward satisfaction and wonderful self-complacency, compare their own abundant fruitfulness with their barrenness.

But what was the effect of these taunts, or, rather, what was the effect of the secret pangs produced in Hannah's soul by the sense of her barrenness? It was that she turned away from everything and went with her burden to the Lord. And there is one thing which I would not wish to omit, which is, that even her husband

himself could not comfort her. Elkanah, indeed, said to her, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" Applying the type, Is not the Lord Jesus better to the souls of his people than all the good works in the world, or even than all the testimonies he might give them? Is not the Giver better than the gift? the Husband better than the wedding ring? Aye, indeed, he is; but then for want of the gift they often doubt their interest in the Giver, and the ring being missing, their title to the Bridegroom is called in question. Living souls cannot be satisfied with the bare knowledge that Christ is a Husband to his church, when they come short of a feeling testimony and a blessed witness, in their own consciences, that he is so to them. We cannot, indeed, fully carry the figure out, for Christ can comfort his people with a word, whilst Elkanah, with all his attempts and even double portion of gifts and love could not comfort his wife, because she was lacking in that one point on which she had so set her heart. But what was her resort and refuge? She went where every child of God will go—to the Lord, and she went to him in soul-trouble, as every child of God will sooner or later do.

It is not feeble prayers, customary prayers, what I may call regular prayers, that draw forth the Lord's manifested compassion, and bring down an answer of mercy and peace; but it is when the Spirit intercedes in the soul with groanings which cannot be uttered; when it walks in the steps of its great Covenant Head, of whom we read, that "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly." {Lu 22:44} When the soul cries unto the Lord in the depth of soul trouble; it is then that the most High God bows down his ear and answers. Was it not so with Hannah? No sooner had she "poured out her soul before the Lord," and "spoken to him out of the abundance of her complaint and grief," than, though Eli at first mistook her case, the Lord spake a word by his lips to her soul, which wiped away the tears from her eyes, and sent her home in peace. And when her prayer was manifestly granted, and she came up with the answer in her arms, her infant son, "Samuel," which means "heard of God," when she held him up before the Lord as the answer to her prayer; her soul was melted into thanksgiving, the voice of praise burst forth from her

lips, and the Holy Ghost has recorded her song of triumph for our comfort and instruction.

Of this song of thanksgiving, the text forms a part. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them."

As the passage is rather long, it may be desirable, for the sake of clearness, to break it up into smaller portions; and, though it may not be strictly according to academic rule, or I might say, according to parsonic method, yet, instead of beginning at the beginning, I shall take the liberty of commencing at the end, and looking at the last words of the text first.

1. "The pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them." By these "pillars" I understand the saints of God; for we read immediately after, "He will keep the feet of **his saints**," that word being introduced, I believe, as a key to the foregoing expression, as a clue to the mystery wrapped up in the words—"The pillars of the earth."

1. Two things are said of these saints, first, that they are "pillars of **the earth**," upon which God hath "**set the world**"; and, **secondly**, that they are the Lord's—"The pillars of the earth are **the Lord's**." The world is here represented as standing on pillars, they being its support, just as the pillars of the opposite gallery support it and those who now fill it from falling headlong. Thus the saints are represented as bearing up the earth, as supporting it from falling into ruin, and from being dashed into a thousand shivers by the rod of a justly offended God.

What a wonderful glance does this give us into the mysterious kingdom of grace—that the saints of God should be the temple, and that the world should be but the scaffolding, and that when the temple is completed in all its fair proportions, the scaffolding will be taken down, put into the fire and burnt. Contrast this

Scriptural declaration with the opinion of carnal, unhumbled man. Ask men generally what are the pillars of England. Would not their reply be, "It is our gallant army, our invincible navy, our Houses of Parliament, our noble aristocracy, the middle classes of the land, our ships, trade, and commerce, in a word, the wealth, capital, and property of the country?" Would not that or a similar one be the answer of nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand? But what does God say? That "the pillars of the earth," which keep England, and, with England, the whole inhabited globe from falling into a deserved hell, are not carnal props like these, but God's "saints," the poor despised people of Christ.

O, how revolting is this to nature! O, how humbling is it to the pride of man that some poor old man, or decrepit old woman, just kept from starving, should be one of the pillars which keep this country from falling into ruin! that not the queen, not the ministry, not the Houses of Parliament, not army and navy, hold up this country which we inhabit; but a poor despised set, whom the world would gladly sweep out of its path as the filth and offscouring of all things; that these disturbers, who are scarcely thought fit to live in the same world, to breathe the same air, to walk in the same streets, and to enjoy the same religious and civil privileges, that these despised Antinomians, as they are called, whom everybody well nigh wishes dead, and whom the world, religious and irreligious, would fairly sweep out of existence with a breath, if it had the power—that these alone keep the world and its inhabitants from falling this moment into a never-ending hell! And when the last pillar is removed, that instead of supporting the earth here, it may be "a pillar in the temple of God, to go no more out," the ungodly world will find the truth of this Scripture, that the pillars of the earth are the saints of God, and that upon them hath he set the world, that they might bear it up for a time until God's anger bursts forth upon it.

2. But these pillars are said to be "**the Lord's.**" That is the only reason why the world stands upon them. They are "**the Lord's.**" How much is contained in that expression! It implies that they are the Lord's property, that they are his by gift and purchase, by

whom he will be glorified, and in whom he will eternally take delight.

But the word "pillar" carries us back to their origin. For what is their primitive stock? The Lord says, by the prophet, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." **Isa 51:1** As though he would turn our eyes to our native origin. And what is that? The same quarry out of which the other stones come. If you and I, by God's grace, are "living stones," we come out of the same quarry with the dead, unbelieving, unregenerate world; there is no difference in that respect. Nay, we are perhaps sunk lower in the quarry than some of those in whom God never has and never will put his grace. It is not the upper stratum, what is called "the capstone," of the quarry, which is taken to be hewn into a pillar; they go deep down into the pit to get at the marble which is to be chiselled into the ornamental column. So with God's saints. They do not lie at the top of the quarry; but the Lord has to go down very low, that he may bring up these stones out of the depths of the fall, and lift them, as it were, out of deeper degradation than those which lie nearer the surface.

I remember reading once an expression which a Portland quarryman used when he was asked a question with respect to the hard labour of getting out the stone. He said, "It is enough to heave our hearts out." The stone lay so deep, and required such severe bodily exertion, that the labourer was forced to throw not only all his weight, sinews, and muscles into the work, but his very heart also. So it is with the elect of God. They are sunk so low, in such awful depths of degradation, at such an infinite distance from God, so hidden and buried from everything good and godlike, that, so to speak, it required all the strength and power of Jehovah to lift them out of the pit. In raising them out of the quarry of nature, he spent, as it were, upon them all his heart; for wherein was the heart of God so manifested as in the incarnation of his only begotten Son, and in the work, righteousness, sufferings, blood, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ?

These pillars, then, are in themselves utterly unworthy to occupy a place in the temple above. But God has chosen them in Christ, fixed his love upon them, and for that reason he will have them eternally with him. But these pillars being destined to occupy a glorious place in the temple above, need a great deal of hewing out, a vast deal of chiselling into shape and form. God's people require many severe afflictions, harassing temptations, and many powerful exercises to hew them into anything like shape, to chisel them into any conformity to Christ's image. For they are not like the passive marble under the hands of the sculptor, which will submit without murmuring, and, indeed, without feeling, to have this corner chipped off, and that projecting angle rounded by the chisel; but God's people are living stones, and, therefore, feel every stroke. Instead, therefore, of lying passive, they too often resemble a refractory patient under the surgeon's hands, when he is undergoing some operation, which requires him to lie perfectly still. They writhe so under the keen knife, that they give the operator ten times more trouble than if they were dead bodies, which the anatomist or dissector could cut and hack at pleasure, without any feeling on their part at all.

We are so tender-skinned that we cannot bear a thread of trouble to lie upon us, we shrink from even the touch of the probe. To be hewed then, and squared, and chiselled by the hand of God into such shapes and forms as please him, O, what painful work it is! But could the pillar know, could it tell what the sculptor was doing, would it not see that not a single stroke was made in vain? The sculptor, we know, must not make a single hair's breadth stroke too little or too much in some parts of the marble, or he will spoil the statue. He knows perfectly well where to place the chisel, and in what direction, and with what force to strike it with the mallet. And does not God, who fixes the spiritual pillars each in their destined spot, that they may be "as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace," , {Ps 144:12} know where to inflict the stroke, what carnal projection to chip off, and how to chisel the whole column, from the base to the capital, so

that it shall wear just the very shape and the very same proportion which he designs that it should wear?

If the Lord, then, is at work upon our souls, we have not had, we are not now having, we shall never have, one stroke too much, one stroke too little, one stroke in the wrong direction, but there shall be just sufficient to work in us that which is pleasing in God's sight, and to make us that which he would have us to be. My friends, what a deal of trouble should we be spared if we could only patiently submit to the afflicting stroke, and have no will but his.

These pillars, then, are "the Lord's." And do you not think that he will take good care of them? He will not suffer them, like the pillars of the heathen temples, or the columns and arches of our ancient abbeys, to fall into ruin; but he will preserve them from injury here until he removes them into their eternal abode, which the glory of God shall lighten, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof. This is their future destiny, but its glorious nature is at present hid under an impenetrable veil. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," says John **1Jo 3:2** and, therefore, the Lord, in the text, speaks more of what the saints are **now**, than what they will be hereafter. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory."

II. The same saints, then, who are called "pillars" in the end of the verse, are called "poor" and "beggars" in the beginning. They are the same persons, but different terms are employed to present them to us in different points of view.

1. They are called, then, "**poor.**" But what is it to be poor, and who are they that are designated by that term? By "the poor," literally, we generally understand those who are completely destitute of all that the world esteems to be riches. A poor man, therefore, spiritually, is one made to feel destitute of the true riches, of gospel substance, of the fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit, in a word, of everything which God and his people

consider the only precious and enduring treasure. But into this state of felt destitution and poverty no man can sink by any power or will of nature. This is the Lord's work upon the conscience; as we read in the preceding verse, "The Lord maketh poor." A man may, indeed, try to make himself poor from the force of some convictions in the conscience, as the Papist puts on the hair-shirt; but, I believe, what he throws away with one hand, he will gather up with the other. Poverty naturally is a most painful and trying thing to the flesh; but poverty spiritually is far more trying and painful to the spirit. For natural poverty can last, at the most, but for a few years, but spiritual poverty, if unrelieved, **(though the Lord never leaves it unrelieved)** threatens to be but the commencement of death eternal. So that spiritual poverty, is far more oppressive, trying, and distressing to a man's spirit than natural poverty can be to any man's flesh.

To be poor, then, is to be feelingly destitute of everything spiritually good. The Lord anoints the eyes of his quickened family to see what true religion is. He shews them that true riches, without which all is poverty and want, consist in the manifested favour of God, in the work of the Spirit upon the heart revealing the love and blood of Jesus, in the personal possession of the fruits and graces of the Holy Ghost's inspiring, and in the manifested enjoyment of everything which can make a man holy, blessed, and happy.

Now when a man's eyes are enlightened to see in what true riches consist, the feeling that he wants them, and is in a state of thorough destitution without them, raises up in his conscience the conviction of his own poverty. But why should God's people be the only poor people spiritually? For this reason, because they are the only people who know what true riches are. I have read, in boyish days, a tale of a man who was imposed upon by a magician, to whom he sold his goods, and who, in return, gave him what appeared to be newly coined pieces of gold, which the merchant carefully hoarded in his chest; but, one day, looking into it to take a survey of his treasures, he found in it nothing but stones. The magician had so bewitched his eye-sight that he

mistook rubbish for gold. I have sometimes thought that the Eastern tale would bear a religious application. Satan, that mighty juggler, that wonderful magician, so bewitches the minds of people according to those words, "Who hath bewitched you?" **Ga 3:1** that they mistake shells and stones for precious jewels and coin fresh from the mint; and they hoard up these counterfeits as so much valuable treasure. Thus they accumulate a store of creature faith, and believe it to be the faith of God's elect; they lay up in their chest a large stock of the hypocrite's hope, and think it to be a "good hope through grace;" and they store in their strong box a vast amount of evidences which, when laid in the balance of the sanctuary, are altogether lighter than vanity. But, when in trouble they run to their strong box for evidences of their faith, their hope, their love, and their good deeds, they find nothing but dirt and rubbish in their place. Now God's people cannot be imposed upon fully and finally (**though they may be deceived for a time**) by Satan's jugglery; for they have "an unction from the Holy One," an "anointing which teacheth them of all things, and is truth, and no lie" **1Jo 2:20,27** and in the light and life of this divine teaching they discern the reality from the counterfeit. As, therefore, they cannot, by any exercise of their natural powers, or by any industry of the flesh, obtain the true riches, they feel themselves pressed down into the depths of poverty.

Professors of religion, destitute of the power, have no objection to pilfer. They do not act up to the exposition of the eighth commandment in the Catechism, "To keep my hands from picking and stealing." No; they pick and steal their religion from books, from ministers, or from one another, without any anxious inquiry or painful suspicion whence they obtained their hope of eternal life; whether they got it from God or man, from the work of the Spirit, or the mere excitement of the flesh. But God's honest people cannot act thus. If the Lord himself, by a special work upon their conscience, and by a special manifestation of his mercy, love, and favour, do not pour into their hearts the true riches, they feel themselves totally and thoroughly destitute. They have an inward and deep-wrought conviction that without

Christ they can do nothing; that their souls are by nature as helpless to come forth into the light of God's countenance as the dead body of Lazarus was to come forth from the tomb.

But this very soul-beggary brings them to the spot mentioned in the text, "He raiseth up the poor **out of the dust.**" A sense of their deep spiritual poverty brings them into the dust. I think there is one text of Scripture which throws a peculiar light on the expression. It is in **La 3:29**, "He putteth his mouth **in the dust**, if so be there may be hope." Look at the expression, "He putteth his mouth in the dust." It appears to have been the Jewish custom, in times of great calamity and humiliation, to put dust upon the head. It was so with Job's friends when they saw the calamitous state in which he was: "They sprinkled dust upon their heads." So the messenger who came to announce the taking of the ark had "earth upon his head," as a mark of calamity **1Sa 4:12** and Tamar, when she had been humbled by Amnon, put "ashes on her head." **2Sa 13:19** Thus to put the mouth in the dust is feelingly to sink down into a sense of self-degradation, self-humiliation, and complete prostration of soul before God.

We read of the Pharisee in the temple, that he **stood** praying. His mouth was as high as it could be. And I should not be surprised if the contemplation of his numerous good deeds, and the complacent thought of the tithes he had paid, lifted him up fairly upon his toes, so that he stood about two or three inches higher than when he came into the temple. His mouth was not as low, but as high as it could be. But the mouth of the gospel penitent is "in the dust," that is, it is as low as it can possibly fall. We cannot get lower than the dust. When, then, the mouth is in the dust, it implies the lowest spot of humiliation, degradation, self-aborrence, self-loathing, and prostration before the throne of the Most High that the soul can get into. But it is a sense of poverty that brings a man there. When our Queen steps on board her yacht she has a carpet to walk upon from the shore; her royal feet must not even touch the dust. But what think you of not merely the feet touching it, but the mouth kissing it? O, what a stoop of degradation is that! Not like the woman spoken of, **De**

**28:56** who "would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness;" but to bring the lips so completely into it, and to be so choked with the dust of our corruptions flying all around us, through the blasts of Satan and the temptations of our carnal minds, as not to be able to get our mouth from the ground, nor lift it a single inch above the earth.

That was the spot of the Jewish church, **La 3** when God brought upon her such humbling dispensations. When she could no longer walk she had to kneel; when she knelt she had to fall down on her hands; and when her hands were struck from her; she had to sink lower still, and to fall flat upon her face. Now that is just the precise place to which the Lord brings his people. He finds them standing; he knocks their legs from under them, and brings them to their knees. He then strikes their hands from under them; their knees no longer support them, and they fall prostrate before Him in the dust. Until they get there there is no promise for them.

There are many of God's elect who have never yet lost their fleshly standing; never had the sinews of their self-righteousness cut; never, in the despondency of their sinking minds, either in body or soul, fallen down into the dust before God. But there is no use their talking about "a blessed Jesus" unless they have been there; there is no use their extolling the blood and righteousness of Christ, and heaven and glory, and all such beautiful things. These eternal realities are completely out of place; they have not got them in the right way. Therefore, all the beautiful expressions, and the glowing descriptions of Christ, and of his glorious Person and offices, which many eloquent preachers set before the people, are thrown away upon them. It is like talking Arabic to people who only understand English. They do not understand the language; it is all foreign to them. They may be much pleased with the pronunciation of the foreign tongue, with the melodious sounds of the language of Canaan, but they are as ignorant of its real meaning, of any one testimony of God in their consciences, or of any one ray of Christ's glory in their hearts, as you or I should be of the dialect of the centre of Africa.

Now the process that so cuts up self-righteousness, root and branch, in the soul, is the only process to bring it into the sweet enjoyment of gospel blessings. Many people do so mistake the road. If, this morning, instead of coming to the west, to Eden-street, I had gone to the east, to Zoar Chapel, I should certainly not now have been here. In like manner, a man can never reach heaven unless he travels heavenwards, Zion-wards, in the way that God has marked out for his people to walk in. It is a delusion to think that we are going to heaven unless we know something of divine teaching in the soul.

But if we know anything of divine teaching, we know what it is to be poor and needy, we know what it is, more or less, to have our mouth in the dust. But I said that people mistake the way to heaven. The ordinary way is to set up a ladder to reach from earth to heaven, and progressively clambering up the different rounds, at last to climb up into the abode of God. But that is not the way of God's people. They have to go down, down, down, that they may be raised up. It is not with them first "up, up, up," to scale the battlements of heaven. Every such step upwards in self is in reality only a step downwards; but, on the other hand, every step downwards in self, downwards into the depths of poverty, downwards into felt misery, downwards into soul-trouble and the real groanings of a broken heart—every such step downwards in self is, in fact, a step upwards in Christ. Until we get to the very bottom there is no promise. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust." But how? He does it in a moment. The Lord does not raise up his people round by round, enabling them to clamber and crawl with their hands and feet to him. But, when he lifts up the poor out of the dust, he gives them a smile which reaches, so to speak, to the very bottom of their hearts; and that smile has such a miraculous power, such a drawing efficacy, that it lifts them in a moment out of the dust into the very bosom of God. When, therefore, the Lord raises up the poor out of the dust, he does not lift them up by a gradual process, step by step, as they went down. They were, perhaps, many years going down; but they are raised up in a moment. The God of all grace, by one word, or by one smile, lifts them up in a moment out of the

lowest depths of felt degradation, "sets them among princes, and makes them inherit the throne of glory."

But we pass on to consider another portion of the text, where the saint is compared to a beggar; "and lifteth up the **beggar** from the dunghill." "The beggar," naturally viewed, is in a lower condition than "the poor". It is, as it were, the **ne plus ultra**, the furthest extreme of pauperism. Poverty can go no lower than the condition of a mendicant. There are many "poor" people who have never come down so low as beggary. Yet every child of God must not only go down into soul-poverty, he must sink also into the lowest extreme of it; he must fall into beggary and mendicancy before he can be raised up to inherit the throne of glory. To be a beggar naturally is to gain one's daily bread by hourly petitioning, to have scarcely a rag to call one's own; to possess neither house nor home, neither cupboard nor pantry, but to live day to day on the compassion and bounty of others. Take this idea into spiritual things. A man is not a spiritual beggar who has a single penny of merit locked up at home, who has a single good thing in the strong chest of his own heart.

To be a beggar spiritually he must have nothing that he does not get by petitioning. But how humbling to nature, how crushing to the pride of man, that he cannot do anything by nature spiritually good, that he cannot create his own heart anew, that he cannot save his own soul, that he cannot believe, nor hope, nor love—in a word, that he cannot by any will or power of his own recommend himself to the favor of God! The beggar, you know, has nothing to work with or to trade upon. If he had but a bit of ground given him, he might till and cultivate it; if he had but a little money, he might buy and sell with it. But he has nothing to begin with, no point to start from; for "the destruction of the poor is their poverty." I am speaking, mark you, of a man reduced, say, by illness to beggary, not of street mendicants, who are generally imposters. So with God's people; if they could but work, if they could but cultivate nature's plot, and obtain a spiritual crop; or if they had but a little stock to begin with, which they might put out to interest and receive back with usury, why, then

they would not be beggars. But to have everything so knocked out of their grasp, that they have not a single good thing, which they can call their own, and therefore are compelled to beg, and cry, and petition the Lord for everything spiritual and gracious, how humbling to the pride of man is this! Yet God's people know that they must walk in it.

Did you, did I, ever get anything but by begging? Have not God's ministers to beg for well nigh every sermon, to cry and groan for well nigh every text, for power to be felt in their souls, for thoughts to be inspired, and for words to be dictated? And have not the people of God, the hearers, to beg for every blessing at the footstool of mercy which they hope to receive, for every token for good, for every testimony, for every smile, for every evidence, every witness, that they are the Lord's? Have not God's people, with the utmost importunity, to besiege the throne of grace that they may receive those mercies as a free gift, without which they cannot live contented, nor die happy? If you are not a beggar, if you have a little stock yet in hand, a little field to till and cultivate of your own, you are not fit for the kingdom of God. Every penny of nature's stock must be spent before you can receive out of Christ's fulness grace for grace. Till you are a beggar, you have no manifested interest in gospel blessings.

But, having looked at the character of the spiritual beggar, we will accompany him to the spot where he is said to sit; for the beggar is to be lifted off **"the dunghill."** In this spiritual portrait which the Holy Ghost has given of a saint, how he seems to have heightened the colouring with every stroke of the pencil. He first of all describes him as "poor," and in the "dust." But this is not strong enough; this does not convey a sufficient idea of what a saint is. He takes the pencil again, and, so to speak, gives another touch to heighten it, and to set it before our eyes more clearly and vividly. He brings before us not only a poor man, but a "beggar," a mendicant. But that is not enough; the brush must once more touch the painting in order to heighten the description, and bring forth the character in its true colours; he, therefore, gives us the **"the dunghill"** as the seat on which the beggar sits.

Now could you for a moment figure this in your mind's eye upon canvas; could you depict to yourself a saint of God, as here described, you would see in one corner a representation of a poor man with his mouth in the dust, and a voice would say within you, "That is a saint." But the same voice would also say as to the prophet, "Turn again;" see another sight.

In another corner of the picture you would see a beggar clothed in rags, like Lazarus, with wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores, not sitting in a chair; no, nor even resting on the ground, but lying on a dunghill. What, you may ask, does that mean? Surely it represents the deep corruptions of our heart. But, Hannah! how could you ever drop such a word as that? Talk about the dunghill in polite company! Introduce such a vulgar expression into the word of God! What must our elegant preachers, and our refined ministers in their gowns and gold rings, think of you to talk about a dunghill? And what must those, who are always confident, think of such a corruption preacher as you, Hannah? For surely there is something about corruption here. Hannah, in her song of praise, had not forgotten the dunghill. But some, who profess to have been once grovelling there, have so entirely forgotten it, that they never even speak of dung-gate now; and as to ever casting a glance over their shoulders, or even thinking for a moment of the dunghill, or of those that are on it, that is as much out of their sight as though it had no existence. But Hannah remembered it; and felt as the church expresses herself, "Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall; my soul hath these still in remembrance, and is humbled in me." .{La 3:19,20} I shall not now, however, attempt to lay open the contents of this dunghill, which are better felt than described; though, I believe, I should offend some of your delicate nerves were I to bring forward some of the monsters which I have felt to lurk there, or even hint at some of the sights and smells which have disgusted me to the deepest self-loathing. Nor shall I dwell on what it is to be in it; but content myself with saying that "the dunghill" represents our corrupt nature; and that it must be spiritually opened up in a man's conscience to know what it is. For it is **out of it** that the

beggar is to be lifted to inherit the throne of glory; and if a man has never been **in** it, he cannot be lifted **out** of it.

To be then in the dunghill is to know and feel something of the deep corruptions of our nature. And O, the suffocating sensations which a man has when there. It is no pleasant spot; the stench in the nostrils is so overcoming, the sights presented to the eye are so disgusting that I am sure if a man knows what corruption is, he will never want to be in corruption. It is a libel—I might even use a shorter and more expressive word—but it is a libel upon experimental preachers to say that they gloat over corruption, that they either love it, or love to feel it, or love to speak about it. They know too well the misery of it to love it; they feel too much the suffocating stench of it to be pleased either with it, or their abode in it. But God puts them there for wise purposes—that they may abhor themselves, and love him the more when, from time to time, he lifts them out of it. But you see there is no lifting out till a man gets in. God has for the most part connected his mercies with our miseries, his promises with our necessities; as, therefore, he has suited his displays of mercy and grace to certain spots and places, we must go into those spots and places to realize the promised mercies.

But, I venture to say, that if some of those who are continually aiming their arrows of contempt against those whom they term corruption preachers, were told that, in the filthiest alley in London, in the very dirtiest house in that alley, in the most noisome garret, in that house, and in the foulest corner of that garret, there was a bag of gold, and if they went there they might take it for their pains—I am inclined to think that some who have such nice and delicate feelings that they cannot bear to hear a word about corruption from the pulpit, would not mind grubbing up to their very elbows in this filthy corner if they could only thereby get hold of the bag. Now the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures has suited his promises of mercy and grace to the lowest depths of man's felt filth and misery; it is, therefore, in those spots that grace and mercy are found. But who likes the noisome garret, or who loves its filthy corner? Nobody surely who has any cleanly or

tender feeling. But if he knows that he must go there, that he may find the precious promises of the blessed Bible, and receive the sweet enjoyments of God's favour, he is even reconciled to endure nature's filth and guilt, if the Lord is but pleased there to whisper a sweet testimony that he is eternally, unchangeably His.

The Lord, then, has adapted these promises to a certain state, and he brings his people into that state that he may give them the promises, and make them sweet, savoury, and unctuous. It is out of the dust and out of the dunghill that God lifts his saints, and "sets them among princes"—O, what a change!—"and makes them inherit the throne of glory." What is it but the depth of their degradation that makes their exaltation so great? It is the sin and guilt, felt ruin and misery, that so enhance the blessings when they come down from God. What a change was it for Joseph, to be taken out of the dungeon, where his beard was not shaved, nor his raiment changed, and made second to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt? Did not the dungeon make the honour all the greater? So, spiritually, it is bringing the soul out of the dust, and lifting the beggar out of the dunghill, that makes the promises so precious, it is this which, when he comes to "inherit the throne of glory," makes the change so blessed and so conspicuous.

This, then, is what God has told us about the saints; and happy are we, if we can trace in our hearts anything of God's work as here laid down, if we can discover anything of the teaching of the Spirit in our souls, so as to be either with our mouth in the dust, or on the dunghill, or sitting among the princes of God's people. To have the least spark or particle of divine teaching is an inestimable mercy, and a sure pledge and foretaste of eternal glory.

## THE POOR SET IN SAFETY

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, August 29th, 1841, at Allington, near Devizes.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" Psalm 12:5

The members of the quickened family of God have at all times and in all places closely resembled each other. The features indeed and complexion may somewhat differ in each; but the same family likeness is stamped upon them all. Just the same trials and exercises that the saints have to pass through now, they passed through in times of old; and just the same deliverances that they receive, or are longing to receive now, did they receive, or long to receive, in the ages that are past. It is this similarity of experience, as traced out in the Scriptures, that makes the Word of God to be so rich a breast of consolation to God's poor and needy family.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

God's Word deals with and is addressed to **characters**. The **names** of the elect are in the Lamb's book of life above, but the **characters** of the elect are in the Scriptures of truth below; nor can anyone know his name to be "written in heaven" **Lu 10:20** whose character is not traced out in the book that we have upon earth. With characters then, and not with names, have ministers to deal; and their work is so to trace out the characters of the spiritually taught family as "to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" **2Co 4:2**.

We have two such characters mentioned in the text; one called "**poor**", and said to be **oppressed**, and another called "**needy**",

and said to **sigh**; and the Lord, on account of the oppression of the one, and on account of the sighing of the other, declares that He will arise to do that work for them and in them, which alone can deliver them, and set them in a place of security and safety.

I. The first character then spoken of in the text is "**the poor.**" We are not to suppose that this expression merely points out a few individuals out of God's family—a few poor abject creatures marked out for spiritual adversity, whilst the rest escape free. No; it is a character stamped upon all the quickened children without a single exception. All the saints of God are not poor temporally, but they are all poor spiritually. The Lord implied this when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" **Mt 5:3**, clearly intimating thereby that the kingdom of heaven is theirs, and theirs only.

But what is it which makes a vessel of mercy thus spiritually poor, and brings into the soul a sense of its deep poverty, utter destitution, complete beggary, and thorough bankruptcy? It is the Lord opening the eyes of our spiritual understanding to see what true riches are. If a man's eyes are not in a measure enlightened to see what heavenly riches and vital godliness are, what is the work of the Spirit, and what he himself must personally experience, before he can know Christ, here, and behold Him as He is hereafter; if it is not laid with weight and power on his conscience what he must taste, enjoy, and divinely realise of the kingdom of God in his soul, before he is manifestly an heir of glory, he will never be brought down into the depths of soul poverty.

So that the soul is brought to be spiritually poor by a kind of double process, first, by the taking away of all its fancied riches, and then by the opening up to it with power what **true** riches are. A man is never spiritually poor until he is stripped of all his strength, all his wisdom, all his righteousness, all his hopes, pleas, and vain confidence, and has everything taken from him on which he can look with satisfaction, or rest upon with comfort. But until the Lord stretches forth His hand, and strips us Himself,

we are never brought into the depths of soul poverty. We may fancy that we know a great deal about it; but till the Lord pulls us down from our lofty station, breaks our bank, and lays us in ruins before Him, we know nothing of what it is to be thoroughly poor.

Now the Lord has not chalked out for Himself any particular road by which He shall bring His people to this state. They shall all be brought there, **that** is most certain; every one of the elect shall be made spiritually poor; they shall all stand without a rag to cover them; they shall all feel themselves to be utterly destitute of any one good thing; they shall all be broken down into the depths of soul destitution, so as to feel that they have not a single grain of anything in them by nature that is pure, holy, or acceptable to God. But the Lord has not tracked out a certain path in which every one of the elect shall walk, without deviating from it one hair's breadth. He has prescribed to Himself no one particular mode whereby to bring to pass His own designs; but, in one way or the other, He will take care that all His redeemed family shall be brought into the depths of soul poverty.

Thus some He makes poor by stripping away every false hope; others, by bringing a terrible sentence into their consciences, so as to cut up their self-righteousness; others, by manifesting to them the awful pride, deceit, and hypocrisy of which they have been guilty; others, by holding up before their eyes a long profession of religion without the experience of vital godliness; others, by suffering them to go to the very edge of sin, in order to teach them what desperately wicked hearts they have; others, by allowing them for a time to walk in the base appetites of their fallen nature, that they may know what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God; and others, by leaving them to grapple with powerful temptations, that by learning their weakness and helplessness against them, they may be effectually stripped of all their fancied strength, wisdom, and righteousness.

Spiritual poverty, then, is a miserable feeling of soul emptiness before God, an inward sinking sensation that there is nothing in our hearts spiritually good, nothing which can deliver us from the

justly merited wrath of God, or save us from the nethermost hell. And intimately blended with the poignant feelings of guilt and condemnation, there is a spiritual consciousness that there is such a thing enjoyed by the elect as the Spirit of adoption, that there are such sweet realities as divine manifestations, that the blood of Jesus is sprinkled by the Holy Ghost upon the consciences of the redeemed to cleanse them from all guilt and filth. And thus by comparing its own wants with their helplessness; so that poverty literally opens the door for blessings, and having an inward light wherein the truth of God's Word is seen, and an inward life whereby it is felt, a soul wading in the depths of spiritual poverty, is brought to feel that it must be the manifestation of the light of God's countenance which can alone deliver; that it must be the testimony of God spoken by His own lips to the heart that alone can save; and that the want of this is the want of everything that can manifest it to be a vessel of mercy here, and fit it for, as well as carry it into, eternal glory and bliss hereafter.

To be poor, then, is to have this wretched emptiness of spirit, this nakedness and destitution of soul before God. Nor is it, perhaps, ever more deeply felt than in the lonely watches of the night, when no eye can see, nor ear hear, but the eye and ear of Jehovah; in these solemn moments of deep recollection, when the stillness and darkness around us are but the counterpart to the stillness and darkness of the soul, he that is spiritually poor often feels how empty he is of everything heavenly and divine—a sinking wretch without a grain of godliness—and without drawing too rigid a line of exclusion, we may unhesitatingly say that he who has never thus known what it is to groan before the Lord with breakings-forth of heart as a needy naked wretch, he that has never felt his miserable destitution and emptiness before the eyes of a heart-searching God, has not yet experienced what it is to be spiritually poor.

2. But there is something more to be known than poverty: we read of "the **oppression** of the poor". Now it is poverty which gives room for oppression. It is so literally and temporally. The

rich are not oppressed. Those who have houses and lands, or any other property, are safe from the iron rod of oppression. Their money sets them above its reach. But it is the poor that are oppressed; and the deeper a man's natural poverty is, the more open is he to grinding oppression, and the more helpless and unprotected is he against it. Oppression is the exercise of strength against weakness, the triumph of power over helplessness; so that poverty literally opens the door for oppression.

And as it is literally and naturally, so it is spiritually and supernaturally. Soul poverty opens the door for soul oppression; and no man knows what it is to be spiritually oppressed until he is brought into spiritual poverty. As long as he has any fancied strength, he can resist oppression; as long as he has a stock of imaginary riches, he can keep it at a distance. He is like a rich man naturally, who can laugh at oppression; the length of his purse wards it off; its heavy hand comes not near him; the door has not been thrown open for the grinder to come in upon him. But let this rich man by some sudden reverse sink into the depths of poverty literally, and it opens the door of oppression immediately; and the bowing tradesman who courted him in the days of his prosperity, will be the first to press him down in the days of his adversity.

Thus it is also spiritually. Poverty opens the way for oppression. It was so with Hezekiah. When Hezekiah was laid on his bed of sickness, death stared him in the face, and he expected he should be cut off, and cast into perdition. This opened the door for oppression; says he, "Lord, I am **oppressed**; undertake for me." The cold damps of death stood upon his forehead, and despair pressed upon his soul. All his fleshly religion vanished in a moment; and he had but just faith and strength enough to cry out under the gripe of the oppressor's hand at his throat, "Undertake for me" **Isa 38:14**.

A soul, then, does not know what it is to be burdened, oppressed, and weighed down, till it is brought into spiritual poverty. The

law, for instance, laid on a man's conscience, does not sink him down till it first has made him poor; but when he is brought into the depths of soul poverty, so as not to have a single grain of religion, then, when there is the manifestation of God's wrath in his conscience, as Hart says, "it strikes the dying dead". It is putting a load on him who before was sinking; it is adding oppression to poverty.

So when a man feels that he has not in his heart anything that bears the stamp of vital godliness, **then** to have all his past backslidings laid as an additional load on his conscience, with all the slips and follies that he has been guilty of inwardly and outwardly; **then** to have them all brought up to recollection, and put as a ton-weight upon his sinking soul, it is like a hard-hearted creditor coming with a long bill and a demand of immediate payment upon a poor man who has just turned his pockets out, and not found a penny in them. Poverty and want are bad enough without the old score being brought to view; but oppression is added to poverty when the things that a man has said and done years ago—the sins of childhood, youth, and manhood, transgressions long ago buried in oblivion, are brought to light; and the foolish things, the hypocritical things, the presumptuous things, the daring deceitfulness, the base wantonness of which he has been guilty—are all laid as a heavy load on him who is ready to sink already.

Oppression, then, is a weight and a burden superadded to poverty. It is not the same thing as poverty, but it is an additional affliction to poverty. A man may be poor without being oppressed; but when he is poor and oppressed too, it makes the poverty tenfold greater than before. Thus the Lord, in His dealings with His people in order to bring them down, first strips them and makes them poor; and when He has made them poor, and brought them into the depths of soul destitution, then He causes burdens to lie on them as heavy loads, as though they would sink them into a never-ending hell. But here is the mark of life—the groaning, panting, sighing, and crying of the soul under the burden.

The dead in sin feel nothing; the hypocrites in Zion feel nothing, and those that are at ease in a fleshly religion feel nothing. They may have powerful temptations; they may have alarming fears of going to hell; but as to any heavings up of a quickened conscience under the weight of oppression, as to any pouring out of the heart before God, or any giving vent to the distresses of the soul in sighs and cries unto the Lord to have mercy, to speak peace, and bring in a sweet manifestation of pardon and love, and to keep at this day after day, and night after night, till the Lord appears—these are exercises unknown to the dead, and peculiar to the living family. A man may "cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit" **Isa 65:14**; but as the prophet speaks, "they do not cry unto God **with their heart**, when they howl upon their beds" **Ho 7:14**. But to breathe and pant after the Lord, to groan and sigh because of oppression, to wrestle with the Saviour and give Him no rest until He appears in the soul—this inward work is known only to the elect, and is out of the reach of all who have a name to live while they are dead.

It is the fruit of the pouring out of the Spirit of grace and supplications into their soul; it is the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, helping its infirmities, and making intercession in it with groanings which cannot be uttered.

II. "For the sighing of the **needy**." There seems to be a distinction between the poor and the needy, for we may be sure that the Holy Ghost does not use vain repetitions. The expression "poor" has a **negative** meaning, that is, it implies an **absence** of money, a state of destitution; but the expression "needy" has a **positive** meaning, that is, it implies the **presence** of wants and cravings. A man may in some sense be poor without being needy; but he never can be needy without being poor. For instance, we see sometimes in our villages a poor idiot, clothed in rags; but he knows it not; he has no idea of his state; he has no knowledge of a condition superior to his own, but is content with his poverty. Here, then, is a person who is poor, but not **needy**, because he wants nothing; he has no understanding, no intellect to enter into

the numerous wants and cravings that are felt by his parents after better food, or clothing, or wages.

So a man may be **poor** religiously, and yet not be **needy**; that is to say, he may have his eyes opened to see what true religion is, and to know who are the people that have it; he may be convinced that this person is a man of God, and the other person is a child of God, and yet be sensible in his own soul that he himself has no vital religion. There are such persons, I believe, who are quite convinced that they have no vital religion; and yet have none of the cries and sighs, none of the wants, nor the groans, nor the fervent petitions after mercy, which are in a living soul. Nay, are not the quickened vessels of mercy themselves often in that state when they are poor, but not needy—when they are conscious of their barrenness and emptiness of all good, and yet have neither will nor power to lift up a desire, or put up a cry after a blessing?

1. The **needy**, then, is a character who is not merely poor, empty, and naked before God, but who is feelingly in want of spiritual blessings applied to his soul. Some persons can rest on temptations, and take temptations as evidences. Others can build on doubts and fears, and rest on doubts and fears as evidences. Others can take powerful past convictions, or present convictions, and lean on them as evidences. Others can look to a profession of religion, and take that as an evidence.

But a living soul must have heavenly blessings communicated immediately to his heart and conscience from the mouth of God. He must have deliverance manifested to his soul as a reality; he must have the blood of Jesus sprinkled on his conscience with divine power, to purge it from filth and dead works; he must have his eyes anointed with eye-salve to see Jesus; yea, his soul pants to be led up into sweet communion with Jesus; he wants to be taken spiritually into fellowship with Christ, that he may see Him with the eyes of his soul, that he may look upon Him whom he has pierced, mourn over Him, and for Him, and with Him, and have some sweet, spiritual, and supernatural manifestation of His

dying love to his soul. A nominal Christ will never do for a needy sinner, but it must be the Christ of God made spiritually known by the power of the Holy Ghost, sweetly revealed and coming into his heart with all His blessed efficacy, and shining into his soul like the sun in his strength, beaming forth blessed rays of grace and mercy. Nothing but this will ever satisfy a soul that has life in it.

The distinguishing mark, then, and character of this needy soul is to be full of needs. Day after day he wants divine realities to be revealed to his soul, to hear the sweet voice of mercy speaking into his heart, as from the lips of God Himself, that he is an accepted child, that he may bathe, as it were, in sweet manifestations of the love and mercy of God. In the supply of want he believes the marrow of all true religion and vital godliness to consist. So that he cannot take up with his present state of need for religion. If he is in doubts and fears, or is passing through heavy temptations, and is writing bitter things against himself, he cannot say, "**This** is religion;" but what he wants is something different from what he feels, even the blessed testimonies and manifestations that he is one of the Lord's own dear family: and I am very well assured from soul experience, that nothing but the application of heavenly blessings to the soul can ever satisfy the man who has had life implanted in his heart by the hand of God Himself.

2. We therefore read of this needy person that he **sighs**: "For the oppression of the poor, for the **sighing** of the needy." He is sighing after God; groaning in the depths of his soul after the lifting up of the light of God's countenance; sighing under the weight of unbelief, the burden of infidelity, the power of temptation, the wretchedness of his heart, the carnality of his mind, the barrenness of his frame, his stupidity, his brutality, filth, and corruption. He is sighing to the Lord under the burden of these things lying as a load on his conscience, and begging the Lord that He would only lift up the light of His countenance, that He would only drop one sweet testimony, that He would speak but one word to his soul, to bring with it sweet deliverance, and

lift him out into all the light, and life, and liberty, and peace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

III. But what read we in answer to these cries? "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, **now will I arise**, saith the Lord." What is the meaning of this expression—"Now will I **arise**, saith the Lord?" It implies that the Lord had been sitting still all the time, looking on, and apparently taking no notice. It is **if I may use without irreverence such a comparison** like a parent sitting in the house, and looking through the window at his child, who is engaged about something in the street. He is watching the child with anxious eye, and observing all its movements, but appears as if he were taking no notice of it. But let the father perceive that child in danger; let him see it approaching the brink of a canal or a pond; still more, let him see it falling into it: the parent starts from his seat, rushes from the house, flies to the brink of the canal or the pond, and pulls his child out of the water. But he had been watching it all along, observing it through the window, though apparently taking no notice.

So the Lord says, "**Now will I arise:**" as though He had been sitting still, appearing to take no notice, leaving the poor soul to itself, suffering its enemies to grapple with it and beat it down into the dust, apparently indifferent, though watching it all the time, and only waiting for the proper season to interfere. "**Now will I arise**, saith the Lord." As though the time were now come, the set season to favour Zion; as though the special moment were now arrived for the Lord to interfere; the special crisis when He must come forward to help.

Now, the Lord is watching this moment. He says, "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, **now will I arise**, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." The moment is at last come, the blessed time to favour Zion, the predestinated, the eternally appointed season for the Lord to arise from His seat, to come forward to the help of His poor, needy child.

It is this sitting still of the Lord that so baffles, puzzles, perplexes, and troubles God's dear family, If directly they were poor and oppressed, if directly they were needy and sighed, the Lord would appear, it would not so baffle them, it would not so confound them: but it is this which so perplexes and puzzles the Lord's little ones, that He seems to take no notice of them, and that all their cries and sighs and groans and tears appear to have no more effect than if they were addressed to a dead wall; as though the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth never drank in their cries; as though He were as deaf to them as He is to the howlings of the reprobate, or to the blasphemies of the fallen spirits in hell. It is this hiding Himself behind a thick cloud, this sitting still and taking no notice, nor putting forth His hand to interfere, which so exercises and perplexes God's poor oppressed children.

But He will not be always so. "**Now** will I arise, saith the Lord." A time is fixed when He will "arise" for their help, when He will leave His seat, and come forward to stretch forth His hand, and lift them out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and thus bring them into the light of His countenance, and into the sweet enjoyment of a full, free, and glorious salvation.

IV. "Now will I arise, saith the Lord; **I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.**" This opens up another part of the experience of God's dear children. We have thus far read of their being poor, and of their being oppressed in their poverty; we have found that they are needy too, and have heard their sighs under their necessity; and the Lord has promised to arise. But now there is another window thrown open to cast light into this dark room; another door is opened into this mysterious chamber of inward experience. We read of one "that **puffeth** at him." Thus we find that the character in our text is not merely "poor" and "oppressed," but also "puffed at." Here an enemy, a personal antagonist is pointed out—"from **him** that puffeth at him."

But this description applies to several characters—in fact to every character, be it a sinner, be it a saint, or be it the devil, that puffs at the poor child of God.

1. **Satan** then is one that puffs at the poor child of God, when he is passing through this oppression, and when he is sighing under this deep poverty. And what is contained in the idea of puffing? It implies a breath coming, a blast rushing forth. When the Holy Ghost teaches a vessel of mercy He teaches him by blessed inspiration. He breathes light, and life, and liberty, and peace into his soul. Thus it is also with this counterblast, this opposite work to that of the Holy Ghost. When the devil seeks to work on the carnal mind of a living child, he puffs into him what I may call "a black inspiration." There is a divine inspiration from the Holy Ghost, breathing into the soul the light, life, and love of heaven; and there is a black inspiration from Satan, breathing into the carnal mind the darkness blasphemy, and enmity of hell.

The child of God, then, who is poor and oppressed, needy and sighing, is exposed to these puffs, these blasts from hell, which, as they roll forth into his carnal mind, spread themselves over it, and cover it with darkness and gloom. It is like a thick fog resting on the top of the chalk downs just by; or a dense cloud of smoke issuing forth from a furnace, that wraps up every object from view. Were we in the midst of that thick mist, or that dense smoke, we should see nothing out of it. So when Satan breathes his black inspiration into the carnal mind, this puff from the infernal regions fills it with that enmity, that malice, that blasphemy which Satan himself feels; and he puffs at the poor child of God in order to fill him with confusion **Job 10:15**, darken his evidences, becloud his prospects, and set on fire all the enmity of his fallen nature, that he may be agitated with a measure of that restless misery with which Satan's own devilish nature is tossed continually.

Now the Lord says, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." He shall not always be a poor, wretched, oppressed creature that the devil shall puff at, and fill his carnal mind with

his own infernal wrath and enmity. "I will arise," saith the Lord, "and set him in safety." And how does He set him in safety but by bringing him into His own blessed presence? Satan cannot come in there; he is thrown back; he never can come beyond a certain spot. Wherever the presence of the Lord is manifested, it drives Satan back to hell whence he came; and thus the Lord sets His poor child "in safety from him that puffeth at him," by bringing him into His own presence, filling his soul with life and light and liberty, and thus beating back Satan into his infernal den.

2. But the word goes further than this. **Sinners** also puff at God's children, especially professing sinners; that is, sinners who are dead in a profession. These, who are always at ease in Zion, and are never troubled with inward condemnation or the devil's temptations, when they see a poor child of God in distress of mind, or destitute of that assurance and confidence which they believe themselves to be possessed of, are sure to puff at him. The word "puff" implies contempt. It was a custom among the Jews to puff at a person with their lips, as an expression of contempt, as if he were not worth a puff, or as if he were a breath, and no more. Thus we read **Ps 10:5**, "As for all his enemies, he puffeth at them," that is with contempt. So those who are dead in a profession will sometimes puff at God's people, as though they would say, "All your religion is only a puff of breath." And when they see a poor child of God in distress of soul, then, never having passed through the same experience, they puff at this poor exercised creature as though they would puff him away.

But the Lord says, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." That is, "I will bring him into that blessed spot where all these contemptuous expressions shall fall on him with no more injury than a puff of wind on a man's face. I will set him in safety by giving him such a blessed assurance of his standing in Christ, that all the puffs of his enemies shall not drive him from his hope."

3. But again, **saints** can puff as well as sinners. O the vanity, the pride, the arrogance, the presumption, the hypocrisy, the self-esteem, which are to be found in God's children! Such self-exaltation, and such puffing even against the real family of God! Those who are in bondage will puff at those in liberty, and those in liberty at those in bondage; the strong will blow their suspicions at the weak, and the weak will breathe their doubts against the strong; the deep-experienced will puff at the shallowness of the less deeply taught, and the shallow-experienced will puff at the inconsistencies of the deep-experienced. Pride and ignorance furnish on both sides ample materials for this contest of puffs. Nor can anything stop this windy battle but love and humility.

Now the Lord says, "I will **set him in safety** from him that puffeth at him." It is a remarkable expression. The Lord does not say, "I will deliver him," but "I will put him into a safe spot." Now the very puffing of the saints of God against us, the Lord makes use of to put us into this safe spot. When those who are esteemed children of God puff at others of the living family, and it leads them to heart-searching, soul exercise, and crying to the Lord to make their hearts right before Him; when it brings them to the Lord in real trouble of mind, in true poverty of spirit, and stirs them up to supplicate His mercy and His grace, and that He would lift up the light of His countenance upon them; they are already set in safety. That is a very safe spot to be in—to be sighing and crying unto the Lord, that He would look down on them in mercy. Thus the Lord, when His poor children are puffed at, will often make this very puffing useful to them by causing them to pass through sharp exercises of soul, and in them to cry, "Search me, O Lord, and try me; and see if there be any wicked way in me."

But the word carries with it another sense. There is the puff of **flattery**. A saint, like the man in the fable, can sometimes blow hot as well as cold; and there are those among the living family who can puff up some brethren with the breath of applause, as well as puff at others with the blast of bitterness and contempt.

Nay, they generally go together, for the same spirit that leads a man unduly to condemn some, will lead him unduly to exalt others. Now when one child of God gets his mouth to the ear of another, and begins to puff his flatteries into his mind, it does him ten times more harm than if he puffed his enmity at him. The margin, therefore, reads, from him "that would ensnare him;" and where is there a greater snare than flattery? I have been in both spots, and have had the puff of flattery and the puff of contempt, and can testify from personal experience that the one is far more dangerous than the other. The strongest puffs of bitterness and wrath **and I have had a good share of them from saints, as well as sinners** have done me less injury than the lightest breath of flattery and applause.

But whatever be the puff, the Lord can put us into a safe spot. "I will put him in safety from him that puffeth at him." And the safe spot that He puts him into is, to make these flatteries hateful to his soul; to give him such a sense of his own dreadful filth and folly, as to make him reject these flatteries with hatred, and to cry to the Lord for His sweet and blessed testimonies in his conscience. The Lord positively declares, "I will put him in safety from him that puffeth at him," whatever that puff may be.

But the place of safety is not always the spot where we think safety is. For instance, a mother might see her child walking on the roof of a house. O, if her maternal bosom could speak! If she had the power, she would fly to the top of the house and bring the child to the ground. The ground in that case, not the roof of the house, is the place of safety, and to reach it, the truant urchin must be brought **down**. But, on the other hand, if the child were down in a well, the same fond anxiety and maternal love which would prompt her to fly to the top of the roof, would prompt her to fly down the well and bring the child up in her arms. The ground is still the place of safety, but in this case the child must be brought **up** to it. Apply this spiritually. When one child of God puffs up another with flattery, it is setting him to walk on the roof of a house. It is the spot of danger; and his heavenly Parent removes him to the place of safety, by bringing

him down. Again, when a child of God is puffed at as being a hypocrite, and this breath of suspicion, mingling with his own doubts and fears, sinks him into despondency, the same kind, heavenly Parent lifts him up out of despair, by raising him up with a smile of His countenance.

Expect, friends, to be puffed at; to be puffed at by saints, to be puffed at by sinners, to be puffed at by the devil. Never expect to pass through life, no, not for a week, without being puffed at; some puff of enmity, some puff of contempt, or some puff of flattery. But the Lord says, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." And when the Lord is pleased to indulge us with some testimony that our hearts are right before Him, and to favour us with some discovery of His goodness and mercy—He sets us most effectually in safety from him that puffeth at us.

We see, then, the path which the Lord has traced out for the living soul to walk in. But what a trying, mysterious path it is! What cutting work, for instance, is it to awake at midnight, and feel as if you had not a grain of godliness in your soul; to be oppressed, and have all your sins brought to mind, and laid as a heavy burden on your conscience! Who would walk in this path? I know I would not. What I should like is to sit quietly and prayerfully in my arm-chair, and for the Lord to pour His religion into my soul, just as I pour a tumbler of water down my throat. But the Lord says, "No; it shall come, but it shall come in My channel, not yours. Through much tribulation you shall enter the kingdom." And who would be needy, who would go groaning about the fields from day to day, or about the house, asking the Lord to apply the blood of atonement to his soul?—who wants to walk in that path? Would it not be sweeter, according to our apprehension, to go at once to the Bible, and to get it from the Bible? But to have to get it from the Lord with heart labour, with many groans and sighs, and then, after all our begging, to get scarcely a drop—why, what a strange, mysterious path this is to walk in!

And to be puffed at!—to have the devil puffing his blasphemies into our carnal mind; to have those who are dead in a profession, whom we know to be in the broad way to hell, puffing their contempt at us; and to have even some of the children of God puffing at us too—who would choose to walk in this path? No man in his senses. But God makes His people out of their senses before they can walk in it; I mean to say, out of their senses, not literally, but so far as spiritual things are concerned. And then He arises for their help, and brings them into that blessed spot where alone they find real safety; the path of contrition and humility, the path of living communion with Christ, hid in the hollow of His hand from pride and presumption, from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the arrow that flieth at noonday.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord." Lord, fulfil Thy word. Thou hast said, "Now will I arise." O that this may be the blessed season when Thou wilt arise and set us in safety from all that puff at us!

## **The Possession and Dispossession of the Strong Man Armed**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 9, 1848

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Luke 11:21, 22

God created man in his own image, after his own likeness. And thus when he looked upon the last work of his creating hand, he said of it, it was "very good." But how long did man retain his primitive innocence and purity? Some have said, that before the sun which dawned upon Adam's creation had sunk in the west, the fall of man was completed. But whether so or not (for the Scriptures have not informed us how long Adam stood in his primitive innocency), one thing is certain, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12.) God gave to Adam to keep the citadel which he had committed to his hands; but a woman opened the wicket gate, and let in the fell destroyer of the human race. It is to him that the Lord alludes in the text, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." The "palace" is the human heart; the "strong man armed" is Satan who has taken possession of the citadel.

Two features strike my mind as connected with, and flowing out of the text.

I .—*The possession of the strong man armed, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace."*

II .—*The dispossession of the strong man armed by him that is stronger than he, with all its blessed fruits and consequences: "But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and*

*overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."*

I.—When I look around I sometimes stand amazed at the power that Satan exercises over the human race. The Scripture calls him "the prince of the power of the air;" (Eph. 2:2); and "the god of this world;" (2 Cor. 4:4): implying that he reigns over man with royal authority, and is to the world as its god. On whatever side I cast my eyes I see evidences of the power of Satan. The heathen besotted with their idols; the fanatic Mahometan, the superstitious Papist; and to come nearer home, the grovelling arminian, the self-righteous pharisee, the notional Calvinist, and the dead antinomian—how plainly do I see in them all the marks and evidences of Satan's power! And when I look closer still, at the church of the living God, I see what power Satan has over it; I see him sowing discord and division amongst the people of God; I see him laying snares in every direction to entrap their feet; I see him working upon the besetting sins of their hearts, and throwing many down. So that whether I look at the world, or whether I look at the church, I see on every hand the marked traces of this devastating conqueror; his course is tracked by blood and ruin; he is as mighty to destroy, as the Lord of life and glory is mighty to save. When too I look into my own heart, and see how the citadel is attacked; when I see the snares and temptations that continually beset me; when I look back upon the path I have trodden, see the path I now tread, and look forward to the path before me, I see how Satan can take advantage of all the infirmities and corruptions of my fallen heart, and be indeed a "strong man" in all his ways and movements, and never so strong as when he least discovers his power.

The Lord, then, speaking of Satan holding and keeping possession of the human heart, describes him as the "*strong man.*" And who so strong as he? Man is as a worm before him; none but the almighty God is a match, and more than a match for him.

But it is said of him in the text, that he is "*armed.*" Not only is he strong in himself, but he has also armour of an impenetrable nature; and it is by virtue of this armour that he keeps

possession of the heart.

But what are its separate pieces? Let us look at Satan's inventory. Let us take a walk round the devil's armoury. I believe we shall see as many pieces of armour in it as ever were stored in the Tower of London.

1. *Ignorance* is a main piece of this armour. For what are we by nature but altogether ignorant of God, ignorant of ourselves, ignorant of truth, ignorant of salvation, ignorant of everything which it is for our peace to know? This ignorance Satan deepens, as the word of God describes, by blinding the eyes and hardening the heart—"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4.) Satan blinds the eyes, and fosters the darkness and deep seated ignorance of the human heart. And by this ignorance of God, of his holy law, of his pure character, of his dread perfections, of his eternal wrath and vengeance, does the prince of darkness, brooding with baleful wings over the heart, keep possession of the citadel.

2. *Unbelief* is another piece of Satan's armour; and by this he keeps strong possession of the palace. Unbelief is the very essence of our fallen nature; unbelief doubts every part and portion of God's word; unbelief presents an impenetrable barrier against the entrance of truth; unbelief is the shield which, if grace prevent not, will quench every arrow of conviction.

3. *Impenitency* is another piece of this Satanic armour of proof. The thorough inability of man to feel any sorrow for sin; the obduracy of his mind, which neither the promises of the gospel can soften, nor threatenings terrify; the hardness of heart whereby he stands firm against everything in God's word which has a tendency to melt and overcome, is indeed one of the strongest and stoutest pieces of this infernal armoury. By this obduracy does Satan rule and reign: by this he turns aside every weapon; and this he opposes to every threatening directed

against the ungodly.

4. *Enmity* against God and godliness, that breath of the carnal mind, that essence of man's fallen nature, that noisome savour which steams perpetually from his corrupt heart against divine things—enmity to God and his ways, enmity to Christ and his person, enmity to the truth in all its branches, enmity to that which humbles, breaks down, and lays low—this is another part of Satan's armour whereby he keeps possession of the citadel.

5. *Self-esteem and self-complacency*, is another piece of this armour. Man has such lofty thoughts of himself, indulges in such vanity and self-exaltation, is so unwilling to see himself as God has described him, that he will stoutly deny God's testimony against his state and condition as a fallen creature.

6. *Pride*—the very essence of Satan, the very element in which he lives, that which caused his downfall, and has become his ruling passion—by this piece of armour does Satan also keep possession of the citadel of the human heart. It is he who continually instils vain notions of man's importance, who swells and puffs him up with arrogant opinions of his strength, wisdom, and righteousness. By acting upon this pride that dwells in man's bosom, he teaches him to abhor that humbling gospel which the word of God sets forth.

By these and other pieces of armour, does "the strong man armed" keep possession of the citadel. He is armed at every point; he watches every outlet; wherever he sees a breach likely to be made, there he brings up his armour to maintain safe possession. The "strong man armed" keeps his palace in thousands and millions of the human race; and in this state thousands and millions descend into the chambers of death. There he reigns in all his infernal glory; there he rides triumphant over ruined millions; there he gluts his vengeance by feeding upon the blood and bones of countless myriads of victims; and there he appeases his hellish thirst, his enmity against God, by devouring whole nations at one morsel, and trampling down

millions upon millions in the gulf of eternal woe.

But there is one feature which the Lord describes as distinctly marking the possession that Satan keeps of his palace: "*His goods are in peace.*" But what peace? False peace, miserable peace, a peace that is a prelude to eternal misery. This is the feature which the Lord has selected as characterizing and distinguishing the possession that Satan retains of the citadel of the human heart—"his goods are in peace." No trouble of mind, no exercise of soul, no distress of conscience, no doubt nor fear, no terror nor alarm, no rolling upon the midnight bed, no conviction of sin, no sensations of guilt, no apprehensions of the wrath to come. But all with them is smooth and easy, a flowery meadow; and on they go, dancing down to the very chambers of death.

The Lord then puts his finger upon this mark, specially pointing out, that "his goods are in peace." But what are his goods? The human heart, man's soul, which he retains so firmly in his grasp, by barring out all convictions, by shutting out all light, by deepening the density of man's native darkness, by stopping the ear against all sound of war, by closing the eye against the lightning flashes of God's vengeance, and by buoying up the heart with empty hopes and vain confidence.

By these arts and arms does Satan maintain his prey; and thus this delusive peace, this deceitful calm, is the surest evidence of his still keeping firm possession.

But is he ever to reign? Is he ever thus to glut his hellish appetite with victims? Not in the Lord's own family, those whom he has redeemed by blood. No; there shall be a few berries upon the top of the uppermost bough; there shall be a few whom the Lord has rescued from the jaws of the destroyer; and these comprehend all his blood-bought family, the sheep of his pasture, the flock of his hand, whom the Father gave to him, and for whom he laid down his precious life.

II.—And this leads me to the second branch of our subject, which

is to show the *dispossession of the strong man armed*. "But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." I need scarcely remark, that the "stronger than he" is the Lord of life and glory, the Prince of Peace, God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. But in what sense is he stronger than Satan? None can doubt that God is stronger than the devil. But in what sense is he stronger than he? And how does he conquer him? Is it by coming upon "the strong man armed" in all the majesty of Godhead, displaying the lightning of his vengeance, and withering him into hell? He overcame him not so. He conquered him in weakness; he bruised him upon the cross; he destroyed him by dying. And thus the "seed of the woman"—wonderful mystery of grace and love!—bruised the serpent's head, though the serpent was allowed to bruise his heel.

But though he conquered Satan by the work of redemption upon the cross, though he there triumphed over principalities and powers, and having completely despoiled them, ascended to heaven leading them captive, chained to his chariot wheels, yet it is not to that part of the Lord's work that the text spiritually alludes. It is to the work of grace upon the heart—the incoming of the Lord of life into the soul; for we read, "when a stronger than he shall *come upon him*." Is not Satan firmly entrenched in the human heart? Is not that his palace about which he roams, and in looking at which, like Nebuchadnezzar of old, he takes infernal pleasure? Who then shall conquer this "strong man" in his very abode where he dwells, and where he has entrenched himself so firmly—his palace, up and down which he roams with infernal delight?

The "stronger than he" comes upon him at regeneration; when light and life shine into the heart; when the work of grace is begun by an almighty and invincible power; *then* he comes upon him as in a moment. Light and life suddenly flash into the soul—the harbinger and forerunner of the Son of God, the herald of his appearing. And when light and life come into the soul, it makes Satan quail and tremble. Nothing else can dispossess the "strong

man." Your vows and promises; your resolutions and attempts to make yourselves better; your turning over a new leaf; your renouncing this and that sin; these are but stubble and rotten wood against this leviathan. He laughs at all these attempts to dispossess him. He retains a firm hold till "a stronger than he" comes like a flash of lightning upon him, and overcomes him and binds him in a moment. He is bound when light and life comes into the conscience out of the fulness of the covenant head.

It is thus that Jesus overcomes him; and not only so, but he "taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted." He takes away those several pieces of armour whereby the "strong man armed" kept his palace in such firm security. He takes them away one by one, so that the soul can no longer trust in them. For instance, he removes,

1. *Ignorance*—that piece of armour which Satan once employed to fortify the citadel against all irruptions. When light shines into the conscience, that ignorance, that dense ignorance, is removed by the light of the Lord's teaching. We see a holy God, in the light of divine manifestation. In the light of the Spirit's teaching, we see the breadth and spirituality of God's holy law. In the light of the Spirit's inshinings, we see the gulf of misery to which we are passing. We see the depth of the fall; by his quickening operations upon the conscience we feel the corruptions of our heart, and we flee from the wrath to come. And thus by the inshinings of heavenly teaching—by the light that flows out of his fulness into the dark heart of a sinner, this piece of armour, ignorance, melts away like snow before the summer's sun.

2. He removes *unbelief*, that other piece of armour which Satan was continually raising against every threatened assault. When he saw a sinner first trembling under conviction; when he was afraid the prey was about to elude his grasp; when he saw some movements which, to his keen and subtle eye, seemed like the first workings of grace upon the soul, how he strengthened this weak portion of the fortress! how immediately he held up the shield of unbelief against the threatened assault! Have we not

experimentally found it so? When in times past, you sat under the truth, did the word ever fall with power into the conscience? When you read the experience of good men, did it ever sink into your heart? When we heard threatenings, did they ever alarm? When we heard promises, did they ever melt? No. There might have been some transitory movement; there might have been some excitement of fleshly feeling; there might have been some of Felix's trembling, some of Herod's repentance, some of Ahab's sackcloth and ashes; but no real faith. Satan soon stopped up the crannies; the armour of unbelief was soon brought forth against the threatened assault; and the soul sank down again into all the thoughtlessness and carnality which possessed it before.

But when the work of grace is really begun, the Lord communicates faith to the soul. The word of God then falls with convincing power into the heart; an arrow from God's quiver is shot into the conscience and the soul is brought to tremble at God's word, to dread the Almighty frown, and to believe what God has declared in his unerring word of truth. And thus by the communication of a living principle of faith, the armour of unbelief is taken away. It is broken to pieces by the communication of that faith which springs up under the operations of the blessed Spirit upon the soul.

3. But there was *hardness*, also—obduracy, impenitency, the "heart of stone" which the Scriptures speak of. This was another part of Satan's armour, whereby he kept his palace. Did he see any convictions beginning to arise? Did he watch any tears steal down the cheek? Did his ear catch any sigh or sob springing up out of the heart? Immediately he began to let up on the obduracy and impenitency of the heart; and very soon every tear was dried, every conviction appeased, every rising sigh quenched; and the world, and the things of time and sense, once more regained full possession of the thoughts. But not so when the Lord set his hand to the work; not so when the Spirit of God began to carry on his almighty work with power in the soul. Then the promise was fulfilled, "I will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh." Obduracy, impenitence, and

hardness—those icebergs that freeze up the human heart, as the icy mountains surround the pole—are dissolved under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Impenitence gives way when repentance is given by him who is exalted to bestow this gift. Stubbornness yields before the touch of the Redeemer's hand; and that dreadful obduracy and hardness which once resisted every appeal from the lips of man, gave way immediately under an appeal from the Lord, when he spoke with his own lips, and dropped his own word into the conscience.

4. *Enmity*—that formidable piece of Satan's armour; hatred to God and his Christ, to his Person, his blood, and his truth, hatred to his people—the breath of a sinner's nature—the very element and essence of Satan's being, is also taken away. It is removed by the implantation of the principle of love. Thus the heart is brought to love God by the love of God being shed abroad in the heart; to love Jesus, by some sweet manifestations of his mercy and grace; to love the people of God, because they belong to Christ, and bear his image; and to love the truth, because it maketh them free.

5. He removes also *pride*, that stout piece of armour, that coat of mail, that breastplate, which one [once?] surrounded the heart with so firm a guard. This is taken away when the Lord shows a sinner what he is, when he reveals to him his base original; when he opens up to him the corruptions of his heart; when he takes him down into the depths of the fall. But, above all, when he gives him a discovery of himself in his atoning blood, in the depth of his humiliation, in his agonizing sufferings, in his dying love, and the depths to which he sank to raise him up—pride is then effectually taken away by that deep humility and self-loathing which the Lord thus graciously communicates.

6. *Self-confidence*—that piece of chain-armour which, girding his heart and loins, Satan once employed to lead him blinded and deluded on, fast hurrying him down the road to hell, is also removed, by the Lord showing him what a poor, tempted, tried creature he is; how unable to stand against Satan's snares; how

unable to deliver his own soul; how weak, how unable to stand, except upheld by almighty power, except supported by an omnipotent hand.

Thus the Lord, by his gracious operations upon the sinner's heart, takes away that armour to which the strong man trusted; and, by his blessed teachings and testimonies, makes his people willing in the day of his power. He removes those obstacles which opposed themselves to his entrance, comes and takes possession of the heart, and thus forms himself in the soul, the hope of eternal glory. O what a blessed conquest is this!—not like the conquest of Satan, by violence, but by love! Christ reigns, not by darkness, but by light; he rules, not by enmity, but by love; he sways, not by unbelief, but by faith; he governs every faculty of the soul, as the Prince of Peace, the Lord of life and glory. He thus takes possession of the heart; and comes and enthrones himself in the citadel which Satan once kept possession of, guiding and governing every faculty of the soul to render cheerful obedience to him, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

But we also read, that "*he divideth his spoils.*" There is something, to my mind, very singular and expressive in this. It would seem from these words, that Christ left Satan some, and took the other to himself. It is so. Whilst we are in this vale of tears, whilst struggling with a body of sin and death, we shall still be subject to Satan's interference, we shall still lie exposed to his snares and treachery. But the Lord divides the spoil. What then does he take as his portion? He has a right to all, but some he rejects; it is not worth his having; he will not soil his holy fingers by touching it; and therefore leaves to Satan what he will not take himself as the fruits of his own blood-stained victory.

1. He takes the *understanding*, which before was involved in darkness; and which Satan from time to time effectually blinded. The Lord, in taking his share of the spoils, claims the enlightened understanding; according to those words, "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." (Eph. 1:16.) He casts a holy light into the mind whereby truth is known to be truth, and error

known to be error. He enlightens the understanding to see that he is God as well as man; and not only so, but the glorious God-Man. He enlightens the mind to see each blessed truth as it stands in God's word. He enlightens the understanding to see which are the people of God, and which are not. He enlightens the understanding to see Satan's delusions, temptations, and deceits. And thus a part of the spoils which he takes to himself is the enlightened understanding of a quickened soul.

2. He takes also the *heart*. His own language is, "My son, give me thine heart." (Prov. 23:26.) Here Satan formerly dwelt; this was the citadel, where he lived, and ruled, and reigned; this is his headquarters, where he obtained and maintained full and complete possession. But when he who is stronger than Satan overcame him and deprived him of his armour, he took to himself, as part of his own portion of the spoil, that heart which belongs to him, which is given up to him, in which he works, in which he rules and mysteriously dwells, "the hope of glory."

3. But he takes also the *conscience*—that it may be an ever living witness for himself; that it may be tender in his fear; that it may feel the guilt of committed sin; that it may be sprinkled with atoning blood; that it may speak with his own voice, and bear its testimony against the insidious arts and arms of Satan. He not only takes but keeps possession of the conscience; for though it may be defiled with sin, it never relapses into the hands of Satan; never becomes dead as before; is never seared as with a hot iron; is never bribed or silenced; it tells no lies; but is an honest witness for the Lord against error, against evil, against the workings of sin, against Satan's delusions, snares, and temptations.

4. He takes possession too of the *affections*. They were once under Satan's power; they once flowed out unto the world; they once bowed down before the dunghill gods; they once hewed out to themselves "cisterns, broken cisterns, that held no water." But when the Lord manifests himself with power; when he discovers his grace; when he sheds abroad his love in the heart, he wins

the affections, and takes them as his own; and when he has taken, he keeps firm possession of them.

5. But, above all, he takes *the soul*. It was for that he bled; it was for that he died; it is that which he redeemed, and which he will take to eternal glory.

So that, all the valuable part of man—man's understanding, man's heart, man's conscience, man's affections, and man's soul; all that is precious; all that is valuable, being redeemed by blood, Jesus has as his division of the spoil, which he grasps with a fine hand, and claims as eternally his own.

But what does he leave to Satan? He shall have his share, such as it is. But I must premise it is with certain limits. There is a limit both as to *time* and *power*. It was but for a *time* that Job was so sorely plagued; it was but for a *season* that Peter was so roughly sifted. Satan's *power* was limited when the Lord said to him concerning Job, "Save his life;" and when Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

1. Jesus takes to himself *the soul*; but often allows Satan to work upon *the body*. Was it not so in Job's case? Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." For eighteen years Satan bowed together the body of the woman who had a spirit of infirmity. (Luke 13:11-16.) Does not Satan also often act upon our *nerves*? Does he not often tempt by means of our *senses*? Does he not often work through the medium of the eye, the ear, the tongue, and the other members of our body? But be it ever borne in mind, that Satan can only do this as far as, and only when permitted. He is cast out, and cannot come in again. "Thus far shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

2. He leaves him, to a certain extent, *the imagination and fancy*. How Satan can work upon our imagination! What trouble and alarm he can sometimes bring through that disordered faculty of the soul! What imaginary frights! what wicked scenes! what

revelling enjoyments! what speculative sins can this infernal adversary of our soul bring before us by the medium of our imagination! Who, to his shame be it spoken, has not revelled in fancy in those sins which he has loathed at other times with perfect hatred? Who, though kept by the power of God from falling into actual evil, has not let his fancy run riot into imagery? It is because Satan is allowed to act upon our imagination.

3. He leaves him our *lusts and corruptions*—the old man of sin and death which we carry within us; our daily shame, if not our hourly mourning. Satan is allowed to work upon these, sometimes stirring up our lusts, sometimes working upon our temper, sometimes inflating our pride, sometimes exciting our rebellion, sometimes acting upon our peevishness, and sometimes presenting the golden idol for our covetousness to prostrate itself before. It is his very meat and drink to work in this way upon the lusts and corruptions of our fallen and depraved nature.

But "dust shall be the serpent's meat." Let him have it all; let him fill his infernal maw with it; let him feed upon the sins of God people; let him stir up their lusts—the Lord has allowed him. But it is a mercy that although in dividing the spoil, the Lord allows this greedy dog a share, he keeps a strict watch over him; he is chained to his kennel; he must keep within tether. He may roar, he may rage; he may deceive, he may ensnare. But there is his limit. He cannot destroy. In the division of the spoils, he may, if allowed, glut himself with all this dust; it is the dog's bone; but he will have one day to pay for it; he will have one day to howl in hell for ever in misery and torment; and the aggravation of his misery will be, to see rescued from his grasp the soul and bodies of the redeemed. For the very body that Satan has worked upon, though laid in the dust, shall pass through that change whereby mortality will be swallowed up of life, and corruption put on incorruption, and be raised up a glorious body. And then, rescued from Satan's power, washed from all lust and corruption, all inward depravity, and the weakness and wickedness of our fallen nature, all left in the grave, in which our bones will turn to dust, they will be for ever safe from Satan's power and grasp. Thus

when the Lord raises up the bodies of his saints, in the day of his appearing, there will be in them neither spot, nor blemish, nor any such thing; they will shine before the throne of the Lord God in beauty, majesty, and glory. And then the stronger than the strong man will fully assert his right, chain Satan down to hell with those chains he never can break, and be eternally glorified in them that believe.

Now in this congregation, however diversified their states may be in providence, however one may differ from another in outward circumstances, yet there are really but two classes—those in whom the strong man keeps his palace, and those in whom the strong man has been dispossessed. 'But how are we to know them?' it may be asked. Here is the mark that the Lord himself has given—"his goods are in peace." Is it all peace with you? all ease? all quiet? no convictions? no doubts? no fears? no anxieties? no perplexities? no griefs? no sorrows? no cries? no lamentations? no bewailings? This is a fatal mark; for the Lord, by his own unerring lips, has declared, "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his good are in peace."

But perhaps this may be the language of some here: 'All your words pass me by. I am not going to be burdened by anything you may say.' What is this but a clear indication that the strong man armed is keeping your heart? These arguments that pass through your mind, these thoughts that are revolving in your bosom, are the very pieces of armour that the strong man is now bringing forth to arm your conscience against the attack. And therefore, your very thoughts, which I can read, and the very arguments which I see you are making use of (I well know what they are) are a proof most clear, that "the strong man armed keepeth his palace," for "his goods are in peace." But there are those also, who have had a mighty revolution take place in them. The "stronger than he" has come upon Satan. And what has been the consequence? He has overcome him. He has dispossessed him, which they never could have effected themselves; and he has taken away the armour wherein he trusted. Your ignorance, your unbelief, your impenitence, your enmity, your pride, your

carnality, your worldly-mindedness, your obduracy,—all these pieces of armour have been taken away one by one. The Lord has humbled you, laid you low at his feet, put a sigh and a cry into your heart, and from time to time melted and dissolved your heart by the sweet beams of his dying love. And yet what abounding evil you find in your heart! so much sin working in you, so much pride, so much infidelity, so much self-seeking, so much sensuality! But remember, the Lord divides the spoil, and it is because the Lord divides the spoil, that we feel this evil heart at times working, this unbelief at times rising, this infidelity at times mounting upwards, and all the lusts of our depraved nature manifesting themselves. Upon these Satan works; others he leaves in peace. Not so with those of you who are God's children: he harasses you, he distresses you, he tempts you, he is continually seeking to ensnare you. But the Lord will never let that infernal adversary of your soul's peace ever regain possession of you. Jesus therefore still keeps the *understanding*; that is still firm in God's truth. He still keeps your *heart*; there are times and seasons when you really give it to him. He still keeps the *conscience*; he will not let it be silenced or seared; it still testifies in your bosom for the Lord, and against Satan. He still keeps your *affections*; though to your shame and sorrow, they are often stolen away, yet Jesus renews the tender breathings of your heart. And he keeps the *soul*; he holds it in his hand. Then let Satan have the body; let him work upon that; let him act upon your nerves, inflame your lusts, stir up your corruptions, excite all the passions of your fallen nature. Even here he has his limit. Even here he is under restraint, and cannot go beyond his chain. When your body drops into the grave, you will be raised out of it a glorified body, without one spot, speck, or blemish in it—a fit habitation for the ransomed and glorified soul.

Now what evidence have you on which side of the line you stand? Are you under Satan's power, or under the Lord's power; a subject of the god of this world, or a subject of the only true God; one that belongs to Satan, or one that belongs to Jesus? I have shown you, as far as the Lord has enabled me, from Scripture and from experience, the different distinguishing marks of each. I

must leave the application of it to God the Spirit, who works in his people "to will and to do of his own good pleasure."

## **THE POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT UPON ZION'S OFFSPRING**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 17th, 1858

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Isaiah 44:3-5

The promises of the Gospel are absolute and unconditional. If it were not so, it would cease to be the Gospel, or be so only in name. But you may say, "What, then, are there no conditional promises in the Bible?" Yes; an abundance of them. You will find one chapter (Deuteronomy 28) in which they are scattered in the richest profusion. But you will remark this, that wherever there is a condition, there must also be a penalty; for if there be a reward for obedience, there must be punishment for disobedience. The Law, therefore, which holds out the conditional promise, has attached to it also a curse, that being the penalty of disobedience to its righteous demands. Of this, the chapter to which I have already alluded gives the most pregnant proof; for we read in it, "If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field." (Deut. 28:3) But we also read, "If thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field." (Deut. 28:16) Every Jew that we meet bears, we may almost say, this chapter stamped upon his face, and cries aloud, "Would you know the effect of a conditional promise, look at me. I could not fulfill the condition; therefore I suffer the penalty." But the Gospel has no curse; therefore the Gospel has no condition. The Gospel is a message of mercy from God to men. The literal meaning of the word is

"good news," "gland tidings." To whom? To those who are so deeply sunk in the Adam-fall as to be unable to lift themselves up or out. But it would not be good news if it set man to do what he has no power to perform. Suppose a man were to fall into a deep well, and you took a rope and let it down within five yards of him as he was struggling in the water, and kept calling out to him, "Now, my good man, if you will only climb up those steep and slippery sides for five yards, you may get hold of the rope, and then I will pull you out." Would that be the way to save the man, or to mock him? Or if a person who could not swim had fallen into a river and was drowning, while you kept standing on the bank and calling to him, "If you will only swim a few yards towards me, I will come in and rescue you:" would not that be adding insult to barbarity? Those are two conditional promises, and you see how suitable they are to a drowning, dying man. So if the Lord had attached to the promises of the Gospel a condition of this kind, that he would save us provided we first rendered to him a pure obedience, we being as unable to render him that pure obedience as the man would be to climb up those five slippery yards of the well; God, instead of saving us by the Gospel, would only mock us, and the Gospel would be to us even worse than the Law, as insulting us with the offer of a salvation which it could not give and we could not take. The promises, therefore, of the Gospel are, and must be from its very nature, absolute and unconditional.

But though they are thus necessarily unconditional, they are also descriptive, or what I may perhaps call characteristic: that is, they describe characters, and are addressed to persons in whom there is a certain feeling, or what is termed experience, which, we have reason to believe, God the Spirit has wrought in them. I do not mean to say that all are such, but many of them are. For instance, in the words before us, the Lord gives a promise that he will "pour water." But upon whom? "Upon him that is thirsty." That he will pour "floods." Upon whom? "Upon the dry ground." There we have an absolute promise that the Lord will pour out water; but we have also the distinctive mark given that the water is to be poured out upon him that is thirsty. The Lord declares

unconditionally that he will give "floods;" but, he adds, "upon the dry ground," to show the character of the ground upon which those floods are poured.

Our text, I admit, is somewhat long, but at the same time is so continuous and connected, that if I were to shorten it I should but break it to pieces. I must, therefore, take it as it is; and, in endeavoring, with God's blessing, to open it, I shall direct your minds to these three particulars:—

**I.** First, the promise itself, that God will "pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground;" that he will "pour his Spirit upon thy seed, and his blessing upon thine offspring."

**II.** Secondly, the immediate effects of the Lord's pouring water upon the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground: that "they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses."

**III.** Thirdly, its lasting and more permanent fruits: "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."

**I.** I have just alluded to the distinctive and characteristic nature of many of the promises attached to the Gospel, for all are not of that character, and have in a few words pointed out how this is one of those distinctive characteristic promises. I have, therefore, with God's blessing, now to show the character that is stretched beneath the line of the promise, and upon whom he has declared he will pour water; and this is at once pointed out by the striking expression, "the thirsty."

i. Thirst, as a feeling of the soul, in a spiritual sense, is certainly indicative of divine life. It is as impossible, spiritually viewed, for a man dead in sin to thirst after a living God, as for a corpse in the grave-yard to thirst after a draught of cold water from the well. I know for myself that such a feeling as thirsting after God had not place in my bosom, until the Lord was pleased to quicken

my soul into spiritual life. I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear; I had seen him in creation, in the starry sky, in the roaring sea, in the teeming earth; I had read of him in the Bible; I had learnt his existence by education and tradition; and I had some apprehensions of his holiness in my natural conscience; but as to any spiritual thirsting after him, any earnest desire to fear him, know him, believe in him, or love him,—no such experience or feeling, I can say for myself, ever dwelt in my bosom. I loved the world too dearly to look to him who made it, and myself too warmly and affectionately to seek him who would bid me crucify and mortify it. A man, therefore, I am well convinced, must be made alive unto God by spiritual regeneration, before he can experience any such sensation as is here conveyed by the figure "thirst," or know anything of the Psalmist's feelings when he cried, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." (Ps. 42:1,2)

The word "thirst" conveys to our mind this idea—desire; but a desire of such a kind, that it must be gratified, or life must cease. You may desire many things, but those desires may never be gratified, and yet you not be the worse for their non-gratification. For instance, you may desire a better house, better clothes, better furniture, a larger income: many desires may spring up in your mind after a variety of objects, the withholding of which will not effect life, or health, or happiness. But thirst, I speak now of bodily thirst, is a desire that must be gratified, or death must ensue, as it has ensued to many a shipwrecked sailor, and many a wanderer in the Arabian or African desert, where whole caravans have perished of thirst, and left their bleached bones to proclaim their death and the manner of it. Thus the Holy Ghost, in using the figure "thirst," not merely intends thereby to convey the idea of the newborn soul desiring God, but with such an intense desire that it must have God or die. "Give me Christ or else I die," has been the prayer and cry of many a spiritually stranded sailor on the rocky islet where there was no water; of many a spiritual wanderer "in the great and terrible wilderness, wherein are fiery serpents and scorpions and drought." Now

wherever God has raised up in the soul this spiritual thirst after himself, he certainly will answer that desire, for "the desire of the righteous shall be granted." (Prov. 10:24) His own invitation is, "Ho! every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters;" (Isa. 55:1) and Jesus himself says with his own blessed lips, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." (John 7:37) Nay, he opened his ministry by pronouncing a blessing on such, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6)

ii. But the word "thirsty" in our text does not so much refer to a soul that is thirsty, as land that is thirsty, that being a frequent metaphor to describe a dry, parched soil, as the Psalmist speaks of "a dry and thirsty land where no water is;" (Ps. 63:1) and as Isaiah declares that "the thirsty land shall become springs of water." (Isa. 35:7) The spiritual meaning of both figures is much the same, but the words "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty" seem more applicable to land dry and parched up than to the human body. Nothing can be more simple or expressive than this transference of thirst to the natural soil, for as the human body thirsts after water, so does the dry, parched ground thirst after rain. We know what that land is, and necessarily must be, which the rain rarely visits. There are countries in the globe which scarce ever experience the blessing of rain, or of any substitute by irrigation from rivers; and these are stricken with the curse of continual barrenness, because no showers fall from the skies, and no bounteous Nile, its substitute, spreads itself over their bosom. There are, therefore, doomed to perpetual sterility, as if they ever lie under the wrath of the Almighty. Such by nature is the soul of man. Like those desert tracks to which I have alluded, such as the great Arabian desert, or the vast African Sahara, on which no rain from heaven falls, the soul of man by nature is a barren wilderness; nor can it, except by rain from heaven falling upon it, spiritually produce herb, or fruit, or flower such as God can approve. The saint of God, when taught by the Holy Spirit, is often made to feel that his heart is this barren wilderness. Do what he can, do what he may, he cannot cause any one fruit of the Spirit to spring up in heart, lip, or life. He is therefore obliged

from sheer necessity to look to the Giver of all good, and sometimes earnestly cry to him with groans and tears, that he would pour water upon the thirsty soil and make it fruitful and productive of every good word and work.

The Lord, then, has promised to "pour water upon him that is thirsty." Let us look a little more closely at the promise here given; and as we have examined the word "thirsty," let us now denote a few minutes' attention to the figure of "water,"—an emblem which the Blessed Spirit has so frequently employed in the word of truth, and we may say has in an especial manner consecrated to his own use by designating thereby his own operations. Water, then, is the standing figure throughout the Scripture to represent the operations and the influences of the Holy Spirit, and is most beautifully adapted for that purpose from its peculiar nature and properties. A few of these are worth considering.

1. First, water has a purifying effect. Our bodies, our clothes, our houses, the streets of our town are all purified by the crystal element. Water is indispensable to cleanliness of every kind. Not only every tree, plant, herb, and flower, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall, but even the air itself is washed and purified by the descending showers. The natural creation would, as it were, rot and fester under its own filth, were it not continually bathed by millions of purifying drops from the sky. So in grace. How is the heart of man, rotting and festering as it is by nature and practice in all manner of uncleanness, to be purified from the guilt and filth and love of sin, but by the washing of regeneration, by the pouring out upon it of the Holy Spirit, according to that gracious promise? "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." (Ezek. 36:25) We should ever bear in mind that not only must the soul be washed in the blood of Christ from outward guilt, but must be also sanctified by the washing of regeneration from inward filth; and these two go together, for from the wounded side of Jesus there flowed both blood and water—

"The first to atone,  
To cleanse us the latter;  
The fountain's but one."

2. And how fertilizing is water! What crop can be produced except by the aid of the rain that falls from heaven or of the river that irrigates the land? So in grace. No fertility is there in our heart by nature. We cannot even raise up a spiritual thought, or give birth to a gracious desire. Sterile are the lips to a feeling word, barren the hands to an acceptable action, except as God is pleased to make us partakers of his Spirit and grace, and to work in us both to will and do of his good pleasure. As then the rain fertilizes the otherwise barren soil, so does the Holy Ghost fertilize, so to speak, the dry and arid soil of the heart by communicating to it a principle of fruitfulness. Thus we read of the fruit of the Spirit, such as "love, joy, peace," etc., (Gal. 5:22) and that it is "in all goodness and righteousness and truth;" (Eph. 5:9) clearly showing that without his gracious operations there is neither goodness, truth, and righteousness. So we read, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together." (Isa. 45:8) It is the dropping of the heavens from above, and the pouring down of righteousness from the skies that bring forth salvation in the heart, and make righteousness spring up as a fruitful crop.

3. How softening, too, is water! When the earth is parched by long and continued drought, and the clods of genial rain emulate the very stones for hardness, how the genial rain that falls from the skies penetrates into their iron pores, and with gentle yet with irresistible force softens, crumbles, and breaks them down into a mellow tilth. An unobserved miracle! Every drop doing its work, and millions combining to produce an effect so marvelous! Sweet figure of the softening operations of the blessed Spirit, making the conscience tender, the heart broken, and the spirit contrite.

4. And how refreshing water is! To bathe in the cool stream when

assailed by the dogstar's fervent heat, when nature herself faints and languishes under the rays of the burning sun, how refreshing! How the languid nerves of the wearied artizan become restrung, as the pores of the skin are cleansed from the sweat and dust that have begrimed it! So how refreshing to the soul are manifestations of God's goodness and love, as applied by the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit! "The washing of water by the word" not only washes the soul from the guilt and filth of sin, but refreshes and revives every languishing, fainting grace.

5. And water also, when drunk during severe thirst, when the mouth is parched and the throat husky and dry, how grateful, how delightful the draught! The testimony of all travelers who have explored the deserts of Australia concurs in speaking of the delight with which water is drunk when found. Even our limited experience in this land of cloud and rain, where a dripping sky is continually refilling our brooks and wells, is enough to teach us how sweet a cup of cold water may be—sweeter far than the toper's morning dram or the drunkard's nightly glass. How gratefully it removes all the painful feelings of thirst. The parched mouth, the dry throat, the racking headache, how they are all removed by a draught of water! So it is with the soul. How dry and parched the throat sometimes is in a spiritual sense, and how a draught from Bethlehem's well at once removes those painful feelings under which it has languished!

Water, therefore, we readily perceive, is a most beautiful and expressive figure of the influences and operations of the Holy Ghost upon the soul. And this leads me to think that when the Lord said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," (John 3:5) he did not mean that a man must be born of baptismal water, but of that which water, as a figure, represents. No greater or more delusive figment has been introduced into the Church than what is usually called "baptismal regeneration," the main pillar of which is alleged to be the text which I have just quoted. Let me, then, drip a few words upon the subject. When the Lord speaks of being born of water and of the Spirit, he does not mean thereby

baptismal water, or the literal element of water at all, but the influences of the blessed Spirit as distinguished from his divine Person. The soul at regeneration is born of a spiritual influence, called by Peter "an incorruptible seed," and not only so, but positively and immediately of God the Holy Ghost, as a distinct Person in the Godhead. This influence the Lord calls "water," as he spoke to the woman of Samaria of "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," (John 4:14) and as he cried in the temple, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38) What in the world has literal water to do with a spiritual birth? How can a few drops of water, or a river full, whether the body be sprinkled by it or immersed in it, open a man's eyes, ears, or heart to see, hear, or feel spiritual things? It must at best be a corruptible birth that is produced by a corruptible agency, and can no more save or sanctify the soul, than such a new birth as Nicodemus asked the Lord about if it were in any way possible.

iii. But the Lord adds that he will pour "floods upon the dry ground." How often does the soul, born and taught of God, feel that it is this "dry ground!" It would fain be fruitful in every good word and work; it would be adorned with every grace of the Spirit within, and with every good and godly fruit without. Let no one think that the child of God is careless or indifferent either as to inward or outward fruit. There is nothing too holy, too heavenly, too spiritual, or too gracious which the child of grace would not desire inwardly to experience and outwardly produce. But he feels that he cannot by any exertion of his own produce this fruitfulness after which he sighs. As well might a barren field convert itself into a fruitful garden, without being tilled by human hand or without rain from the sky, as a soul that knows and feels its own barrenness produced by its own exertions a crop of the fruits of righteousness. But the Lord that knows the desire of the heart and its inward mourning over its own barrenness, has given in the text a sweet and gracious promise, "I will pour floods upon the dry ground." A partial shower would not be enough. The dry ground would soon absorb a few drops of summer rain. Floods must come either from the skies, or from the streams of that

river which makes glad the city of God, to produce this mighty change. In the promise, then, that he will pour floods, the Lord has pledged to give enough to soften and mollify the hardest, driest, most hardened heart. Thus, as Job said, "God maketh my heart soft;" (Job 23:16) and the Psalmist, speaking of the earth as the type of the soul, says, "Thou makest it soft with showers." (Ps. 65:10) Till the heart, then, is made soft from above, it remains barren and unfruitful. These "floods" are the promises poured into the soul, the love of God shed abroad in the heart, the manifestations of Christ and of his atoning blood, the inflowings of grace as superabounding over all the abounding of sin, and the flowing of peace as a river into the contrite spirit.

iv. But the Lord, as though he would not leave us at any uncertainty what he means by pouring water and floods, has added, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." The Lord here does not seem to address this promise to godly parents so much as to Zion viewed spiritually as the mother of God's family. Thus we read, "Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all." (Gal. 4:26) And thus God, speaking from heaven to Zion, his earthly abode below, says to her, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed." Zion, the Church, might be looking round and saying, "O where is my spiritual seed? Where are my children? How few in number! Shall I ever be blessed with a more numerous spiritual progeny? As one is taken home, shall I bear another on my knees?" The Lord then to reassure the heart of his Zion that he will not leave her childless, here promises that he will pour his Spirit upon her seed; that there shall rise up children who will call her blessed; that she shall have spiritual sons and daughters, who "shall gather themselves together and come to her." (Isa. 41:18) He thus fulfills his gracious promise: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." (Isa. 54:1) God has always had and ever will have a Church on earth. The promise given to Jesus was, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed;" "he shall see of

the travail of his soul and be satisfied." (Isa. 53:10,11) We sometimes doubt and fear, seeing the low state of the Church and the paucity of real Christians, whether soon the Lord will have any to fear and love his great name. But he is faithful to his promise, and would sooner raise up children unto Abraham of the very stones of the street than "break his covenant or alter the thing that is gone out of his lips. Once has he sworn by his holiness," and he need not repeat the oath, "that he will not lie unto David." (Ps. 89:34,35) When our heads lie in the grave, Jesus will have a seed to serve him, (Ps. 22:30) and Zion shall still be a fruitful mother of children.

v. But what is it "to pour out the Spirit," and what does the Spirit do when he is poured out? The Spirit is "poured out" when he is poured into the soul; this is always followed, as well as known, by certain effects. I will name a few of these.

1. The first is conviction of sin. "When he is come, he will reprove [margin, "convince"] the world of sin." (John 16:8) When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit attended the word with power, the hearers "were pricked to the heart." It was not a gentle prick, as with a point of a pin, but a stabbing to the heart as with a dagger or a piercing as with a sword, as the word means. Indeed, it was "the twoedged sword" in their conscience, of which we read that it "pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow." (Heb. 4:12) Thus was the publican pierced with guilt in the temple; the jailer at Phillippi; and Paul himself when the Law entered his conscience, and for three days, from distress of soul, he neither ate nor drank.

2. He also pours out his Spirit upon Zion's seed as a Spirit of grace and of supplications. This is expressly given, according to his own promise, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplications." (Zech. 12:10) This the Lord always pours out upon the soul when he is pleased to quicken it into spiritual life. When he would give to Ananias the strongest proof of Paul's conversion,

he said, "Behold, he prayeth." I felt and found this in myself as the very first mark and evidence of my soul being made alive unto God, that he poured this Spirit of prayer and supplication upon me. Before this, I said my prayers regularly enough; but I never knew what spiritual prayer meant, nor what it was to pour out my heart before God.

3. But in pouring out the Spirit, the Lord also pours it out upon the soul as a spirit of faith; for faith we are expressly told (Eph. 2:8) is "the gift of God," and is declared by the Holy Ghost to be "a fruit of the Spirit." (Gal. 5:22) The Gospel is only in this way made "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Thus without the Spirit, there is no faith; and without faith, there is no salvation. Without this spirit of faith, we can neither believe nor speak, that is, acceptably to God and to his people, according to the language of the Apostle "we having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." (2 Cor. 4:13) There is a natural faith and a spiritual faith; a faith in the head and a faith in the heart; a faith of tradition, superstition, and will-worship, and a faith that works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, unites to Christ, and the end of which is the salvation of the soul.

4. In pouring out his Spirit upon Zion's seed, the Lord bestows upon it also a good hope through grace; for the Spirit reveals Christ, his love, and grace, and blood, and by thus inwardly manifesting him, raises up a sweet hope in his salvation, "as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil." (Heb. 6:19)

5. But in pouring out of his Spirit, he especially pours into the soul the heavenly gift and divine grace of love, for that is the greatest blessing that he can bestow, being the gift of himself, who is love. All other gifts and graces fall short of this, for we read, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)

But I by no means intend to limit the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit to those which I have already named, for, in pouring out his Spirit upon Zion's seed, he pours out therewith every spiritual blessing that there is in his heart or in his hands to bestow. There is not a single favor in the bosom of God towards his Zion that is not virtually contained in the pouring out of his Spirit upon her. I say virtually, because it is not always actually, or at least in experimental feeling and enjoyment. He adds, therefore—

vi. "And my blessing upon thine offspring;" for most certainly when he pours out his Spirit he pours his blessing also. And how expressive the word "blessing!" When God blesses what favor does he keep back? What good does he not bestow? When he said to Abraham, "In blessing I will bless thee," what more could he say to assure him that he should be blessed with a sense of his presence and love here, and with the eternal enjoyment of himself hereafter? "Let them curse, but bless thou?" (Ps. 109:28) Whatever earthly good you may enjoy, without the blessing of God it will but prove a curse; whatever afflictions fall to your earthly lot, if God bless, they must all eventually be made a blessing. Nor is this blessing niggardly given, for the Lord has here promised that he will pour it out! It shall be given as profusely and as abundantly as the Spirit himself. Nor shall Zion doubt either the blessing itself or the source whence it comes, for it carries its own evidence, shines in the light of its own testimony, and manifests itself by its own effects. And does not the contrast between the dry ground and the promised showers of blessing enhance it all the more? Your very barrenness and sterility make the promise all the more suitable and therefore all the more sweet. If you look into yourself, a barren wilderness meets your view. If you look up, you see the clouds of blessing floating in the pure sky. You see that the Lord has promised to pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. You beg of him to fulfill that promise to your soul. You have no other plea but his own word of promise, no other recommendation but your own miserable barrenness. He enables you to cry to him. He listens to that cry, and in his own time pours water upon your thirsty soul and floods upon your dry and

parched heart. Oh, may a sense of our poverty and destitution be ever a means, in his sacred hand, of leading us to seek that blessing which he alone can bestow!

**II.** But let me now show what are the immediate effects of the Lord's pouring water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground—"They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses."

i. The Lord's people are spoken of here as at once "springing up" under the influence of the water poured and of the floods given. We cannot mistake the spiritual meaning of the figure, as it is so clear and certain. In those burning regions where rains does not fall at all seasons from the skies, as in our dripping clime, the effect of copious showers falling upon the parched vegetation is almost miraculous. A few days completely reverse the scene, and on every side vegetation springs up as if it started with gigantic growth out of the bosom of the heated soil. To this the figure in the text alludes—"They shall spring up," that is Zion's children, "as among the grass," with all that young and active growth which so clearly manifests the power and blessing of God.

But I think we may take the words as chiefly applicable to the springing up of the graces of the Spirit in the heart, which before hung, as it were, their drooping heads, and lay hidden beneath the grass by which they were covered; for you will observe that it does not say that they sprang up "as the grass," but "among the grass." What the grass is I shall presently show.

1. The first grace that springs up is a godly fear of God's great name. This is the first fruit of the grace of God in the soul, and is therefore called "the beginning of wisdom," and "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." Before the Lord was pleased to communicate his grace to your soul, you had no godly, reverential, filial awe and fear of his great and terrible Name. You might have had remorse of conscience, fears of hell, dismal apprehensions of the wrath to come; but you had no holy awe upon your spirit, no realizing, believing, abiding sense of the

power and presence, majesty and greatness, purity and holiness, of the great and glorious self-existing Jehovah, who fills the heaven and earth with his glory. This is a new covenant grace, according to the Lord's own word by the prophet Jeremiah, where he has promised to put his fear in the hearts of those with whom he makes an everlasting covenant. (Jer. 32:40) No sooner, then, does the rain come and the flood is poured forth, than a godly fear of the great name of Jehovah springs up in the heart, as a flower in Spring shoots through the dry tangled grass.

2. By the side of this godly fear, there springs up into active exercise faith, of which I have before spoken as the gift of God. It is true that faith deals at first more with the terrors of the law and the manifestations of God's displeasure against sin, than with the promises and truths of the Gospel; it is true that at first it more regards God as an angry Judge than as a loving Father and eternal Friend; but let us not forget that there is but "one faith;" (Eph. 4:5) and that the difference of feeling does not arise from the difference of faith, but of the objects presented to it. Faith is the eye of the soul; and as it is the same eye which views objects that give pain and objects which produce pleasure, so it is the same faith which believes the law as believes the gospel, which credits the threatenings as well as credits the promises. But this faith often, so to speak, droops and hangs its head amid the grass, for want of those genial showers which alone can make it spring and grow. The Apostle blessed God because the faith of the Thessalonian believers grew exceedingly. (2 Thess. 1:3) But why was it but because "The Gospel came not unto them in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance?" (1 Thess. 1:5) It is impossible for faith to grow unless the Spirit is poured out and the blessing of God given, but then it at once springs up into active and vigorous growth.

3. But there is another grace of which I have before spoken that often lies hidden under the dry and withered grass, which well nigh buries it under its spiry stem. This grace is hope; and a most blessed grace it is, for it has the special privilege of entering within the veil. Earth is too narrow a spot for hope to abide in; it

seeks the skies, and taking firm hold of those divine realities which are within the veil, it patiently expects what it sees not. (Rom. 8:25) It is, therefore, said to save the soul—"we are saved by hope"—which it does by saving it on the one hand from the rocks of presumption, and on the other from the shoals of despair. But here it may be said to spring up as among the grass with the other graces of the Spirit, for as the promises are applied with a divine power, and the truth of God is opened with more and more sweetness and preciousness, and the soul is enabled to realize more fully and clearly its interest in the precious blood of Christ, hope rises higher and higher, and spreads itself into a more vigorous and active growth.

4. Nor must we forget that with faith and hope there springs up also love. As the Lord is pleased to draw near and manifest his beauty and blessedness; as faith gets fuller and clearer glimpses and gleams of the lovely face of Jesus, of his Person, love, blood, and obedience; and as the word of promise drops into the heart with greater power and blessedness, love springs up toward him as so deserving of, and so drawing up to himself every secret and sacred affection of the heart. Whatever knowledge of the truth a man may profess, however clear his views, circumspect his walk, or consistent his life, if he has no love to Christ, he is in a perilous spot. That is a terrible word from the mouth of the Apostle, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema"—that is, accursed. (1 Cor. 16:22) Love also to the saints of God springs up side by side with love to the Lord, for "every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." (1 John 5:1) This is the first mark that the Scripture gives of a spiritual birth, for it declares that "we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14)

5. By the side of filial fear, faith, hope, and love, there springs up also the graces of humility, brokenness of spirit, tenderness of conscience, godly sorrow for sin, self-loathing and self-abhorrence, and a putting of our mouth into the dust. Sin is never seen in so hideous a shape as when viewed in the light of Jesus' sufferings and sorrows in the garden and upon the cross;

and thus, as faith believes in a sorrowing, crucified Saviour, as hope anchors in his bleeding side, and as love flows out toward his suffering Majesty, repentance and godly sorrow melt the sinner's heart into true penitence, and if he could weep himself away in tears of contrition, he would willingly and gladly do so, and never, never sin again against such bleeding, dying love.

6. Patience also springs up to bear the weighty cross and carry it with submission and resignation to the divine will, knowing that his wisdom appoints it, his love accompanies it, and his grace supports under it.

7. There springs up, too, side by side with these more distinct fruits of the Spirit, many gracious desires, heavenly longings, and earnest aspirations toward God of all our mercies. Smitten with a sight and sense of his glory and blessedness the soul ardently desires to know him more and serve him better. What it has in hand is so little compared with what it has in hope; and its enjoyment falls so far short of what it sees in the Lord to be experienced and enjoyed.

8. Many sweet thoughts, heavenly meditations, pleasing prospects, enlarged views of truth, and lifting up the heart in praise for mercies received, spring up also as a part of the crop of righteousness which pushes its way through the thick grass. The truth and power of the Scriptures are peculiarly seen and felt, and the word of God is opened up and made very precious. At this season it is with the soul as in nature. How beautifully in spring, under the influence of the early rains, do the flowers spring up among the grass—the little violet shrouding itself modestly under the leaves, yet giving forth a sweet fragrance; the lily of the valley, in all its virgin purity, drooping its head—emblem of the soul bending in lowly humility under a sense of God's mercy and love; the pale primrose, looking up, with its eye ever fixed upon the sun; and many other a woodland gem, all in their meek and quiet beauty singing their silent hymns to their great Creator's praise. So do the various graces of the Spirit under the showers dropped from heaven spring up as "among the

grass."

But what may we understand by the expression "grass?" May we not interpret it as emblematic of the flesh, according to the words of the prophet, "All flesh is grass!" (Isa. 40:6) All the pride, pomp, and beauty of the flesh are but as grass, for "all the glory of man is as the flower of grass," (1 Pet. 1:24) which, when cut down by the scythe, soon withers, is gathered into heaps, and swept away out of the field. In this point of view we may consider the children of God to spring up amongst the sons of men as flowers among the grass, bedecking it with beauty—the only beautiful objects among the green blades. O, how blessed it is to see the children of God springing up here and there amongst the grass which everywhere so thickly covers the mead! Have we no such flowers here? Time may have been when you were hidden beneath the grass—when, though a flower in God's sight, your root was in the dust, and you lay undistinguished amidst the thick herbage. But being a flower, one of the Redeemer's own lilies, among whom he feeds (Songs 6:3) when the rain of heaven dropped upon you, you sprang up amid the crowded blades which before hid you from view.

We may view this congregation as a mead of grass; for are there not many here who are yet in the flesh, uncalled, unregenerate? But here and there is there not a flower springing up out of it? Would that I could see the mead well sprinkled with them; and some the Lord may see at present hidden beneath the grass, who will one day raise up their heads more distinctly and visibly out of it.

ii. Though I have hitherto spoken chiefly of the graces of the Spirit, as intended by the expression, "They shall spring up as among the grass," yet I am not insensible that it is susceptible of another interpretation, and that it may mean not so much the graces of the Spirit in the individual believer, as the children of God who spring up, as I have just shown, out of and amidst the surrounding world. But we now come to an expression which seems to point more distinctly to the family of God, for the

promise goes on to say, "as willows by the water courses." The willow, we know, cannot exist without water: it must be near the brook or river, or it withers and dies. Take a young willow and plant it upon a mountain top or in the sandy desert, and it soon droops and perishes. But take the barest twig off the willow, and plant it near a stream, so that the water may reach it, and it will soon shoot downwards and push a vigorous stem upwards. So it is with the child of grace: he must live by the river side; he must dip his roots into that "river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God," and by it he must be continually bathed or he droops and dies. He cannot live in the world, away from Jesus, his word, ordinances, house, people, presence, Spirit, and grace, any more than a willow can live upon the mountain top; he cannot live among carnal men, cut off from union and communion with his great and glorious Head, any more than the willow can thrive and grow in the wilderness. How beautifully is this set forth by the prophet Jeremiah, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." (Jer. 17:7,8) The saints of God, then, grow like "willows by the water courses." The willow is not a tree beautiful to the sight; it does not grow with all the noble grandeur of the oak or tower aloft in stately dignity like the poplar, but is usually low of growth, and is ever bending and weeping over the river, as if to inhale the refreshing moisture which rises in invisible vapor from its bosom. Neither its leaf nor flower possesses striking beauty; and yet the tender branches swaying in the wind have a grace of their own as they bend and droop over the stream. And is it not so with the saints of God? How enduring, too, is the willow. What life in every branch! and even when pollard led or cut down low, still reviving "through the scent of water," (Job 14:9) and shooting out its branches afresh. May we not see in this a fitting emblem of the child of God, and admire how, like the willow, he preserves life and vigor when the nobler trees of the forest are blown down by the storm or are cut down for fuel?

**III.** But we may now proceed to examine, with God's blessing, the permanent results of the Lord's pouring out water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground, the abiding effects of his pouring his Spirit upon Zion's seed, and his blessing upon her offspring: "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Here are four permanent effects, which are spoken of as resulting from the Lord's pouring water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground.

1. The first is the fruit of the lip, as manifested in power given to believe and speak with stronger confidence than before enjoyed. "One shall say, I am the Lord's:" that is, through the blessing of God resting upon the soul, the favored object shall be able, in the language of faith, without presumption and without hypocrisy, to say that he is the Lord's own peculiar property and possession; that he belongs to him by inseparable ties of union and fellowship. But can he speak thus unless the Lord has first assured him by his own lips that he is his? Surely nothing short of the Lord's own testimony in the heart can raise up a faith and a confidence so strong as this. Guilty doubts and fears must be all removed before such believing language can issue from the lips. It is the favored bride's own declaration: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." (Songs 2:16) Nor can any one, without presumption, say, "I am the Lord's" unless the Lord himself has previously spoken to him inwardly with his own blessed voice and whispered "Thou art mine." Yes; it is only then that the soul can echo back his words in the sweet response of faith, and say, "I too am thine." What man can honestly or virtuously say to a woman, "Thou art mine," or what woman can chastely or meekly reply, "I too am thine," unless marriage or betrothal warrant such language? If there be neither of these, the one cannot say to the other without a blush, "Thou art mine:" nor can there come back the responsive echo, "Thou too art mine." So, similarly, there must be a marriage union with, or a betrothal unto Christ before any one can say, in the fear and love of God, "I am the Lord's" And how can this union take place except the Lord betroth us to

himself in "lovingkindness and in mercies," according to his own promise? (Hosea 2:19) Except the Lord be pleased to give this faith, it is but presumption to use the words; but if he bestow that assurance and give that persuasion, it is no longer presumption, but a blessed confidence which he himself sanctions. O, how rich, how great the blessing, when, by the work and witness of the Holy Ghost, the soul can say, in all the meek confidence of living faith and godly fear, "I am the Lord's—his by electing grace—his by sovereign gift—his by redeeming blood—his by dying love—his by regeneration—and his by indwelling possession." For if the Lord's at all, we are his wholly. Just as when a man has a house of his own by purchase or heirship: it is wholly his, from cellar to roof; every stone and every timber; every part of the house, from the foundation to the topmost tile, are all his. So it is with the soul, if it be the Lord's. All that the Lord is, he is to it. When then the soul can say, "I am the Lord's;" it may add, "I have now everything which the Lord can give, for he has given me himself; and in bestowing himself he has bestowed everything belonging to himself. He has given his blood to redeem my soul from the lowest hell; his obedience to justify me from all things from which I could not be justified by the law of Moses; his love to seal my heart for ever to himself; his Spirit to teach, lead, and sanctify me to his own glory, and make me meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He has thus given me everything to lead me safely through life: a promise that he will be with me in death; and a pledge that he will land me happily in eternity." Are not all these rich blessings comprehended in the simple expression, "I am the Lord's?" There may be but few here who can speak thus confidently. The Lord may have begun a good work in their heart; but may not yet have sealed a clear testimony in their breast, enabling them to appropriate these words as their own heartfelt language. And yet you may be the Lord's, though not able to call him yours by that endearing title; you may be the Lord's by quickening grace, without having attained to that degree of faith and grace which may one day be your happy portion. There is a growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; there is a going on from step to step in the divine life; and you may possess faith

without possessing the full assurance of faith. Many a poor doubting soul has thought it never would be able to say, "I am the Lord's," without one wavering doubt. But the time did come when he could say it; and you will have it before you die; nor will you be able to lay your head on a dying pillow in a sweet peace, until you can use the words, "I am the Lord's," so as to be able to close your eyes upon earth, with the sweet confidence of opening them again in heaven, to see the Bridegroom of your soul without a veil between.

2. But the text also adds, "Another shall call himself by the name of Jacob." Jacob was a wrestler, for he wrestled all night with the angel; and by wrestling he obtained the blessing. There seems to be some allusion to this circumstance, for lower down we find the word "Israel" made use of—the name which God himself gave to Jacob when by wrestling he prevailed with Him. So at present you may be a wrestling Jacob, but have not yet come off a prevailing Israel. You may not be without a sense of guilt and bondage at times in your conscience, and may often doubt and fear whether the root of the matter be in you, because you cannot use the language of assurance which we have just been considering. Still you may be a wrestling Jacob. The Lord may have put his Spirit in you to enable you to wrestle with him for the blessing, and yet he may not have given you that appropriating faith whereby you can believe that he is yours, and can call him such. How full was the patriarch Jacob of doubt and fear when his own life, and that of his wife and children, lay in the very hands of the injured Esau! But it was this very fear which made him wrestle all the harder, and more fervently cry out, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Can you not say, "I am seeking for a blessing of this kind with all my heart; I am wrestling with God for it by prayer and supplication, and nothing less can satisfy me?" If this be your experience, you certainly may "call yourself by the name of Jacob."

3. The next effect spoken of is "Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord:" that is, shall set to his seal that God is true. In earthly covenants and leases, and legal deeds of a similar

nature, when a man signs his name and subscribes the document, it is a proof that he has a personal interest in the transaction of which it is a record. There is a similar subscription not with pen and ink, but by a spiritual hand signing and sealing the truth of the Gospel. So when you see and feel what the Gospel is; its suitability, truth, and blessedness, can you not, as it were, subscribe it with hand and heart, and say, "I love this Gospel; I can set to my seal that this is the truth which suits my soul; I want no other Gospel but this by which to live and die? I believe it is of God, for he has made it his own power unto my salvation; and whatever may be said against it, I bind it to my heart as the truth of God, the sweetness and blessedness of which I have felt in my own soul?" This is receiving the love of the truth so as to be saved thereby. But we may attach another meaning to the words. The Lord has given you, it may be, in some time of trial and affliction, a promise, and that promise you see that he is still fulfilling. Now, as the Lord keeps fulfilling this promise, whether it be in Providence or grace, you subscribe with your hand to him, as if you said "I can deliberately write 'Amen' to this promise: I can say the Lord has fulfilled, yes, he is even now fulfilling it." Or take another meaning of the words. You subscribe with your hand to the Lord when your soul feels heartily willing to be his for evermore. As in signing a contract, a man by attaching his signature virtually says thereby, "I agree to the bargain, and I mean as well as I can to carry out its intentions and contents;" so when you spiritually subscribe with your hand to the Lord, it is as though you said thereby "I give myself wholly up to the Lord, for I want none but him. I want the Lord to be my God; for him to be my all in all. I willingly and deliberately subscribe my desire to be wholly and solely his; and O may he ratify my handwriting by putting his own beneath it and attaching to it his own seal, that the deed may stand ratified for ever and ever in the court of heaven."

4. The last effect is—"And shall surname himself by the name of Israel." As Jacob represents a wrestler in the court of grace, so Israel is the emblem of one who has obtained the blessing. When,

therefore, any wrestling Jacob has prevailed with God by strength of arm, he may surname himself by the name of Israel. He can then say—"I have wrestled with God for the promised blessing, and have obtained it. I have cried unto the Lord, and he has heard by cry. I have spread my petition before him, and he has at last granted it." So wrestled and so prevailed Hannah, David, Hezekiah, and many a saint both dead and living.

Now, can you find in your soul any of the experience described this morning? Begin from the beginning; and go thorough the whole, and see whether you can lay your finger upon any one portion as descriptive of anything that you have ever felt or known. Begin with the "dry ground," as descriptive of spiritual thirst; go on to the "water" poured, and the "floods" given; to the springing up "as among the grass, as willows by the water courses." Can you thus go on step by step so as to find some of these effects to have been produced in your soul, until you can ultimately reach the grand point of all, so as to be able to say—"I am the Lord's," and surname yourself by the name of Israel? Thus we have seen, I trust, in our text, the work of grace traced out from beginning to end, and if you can realize some portion of your experience in it, or if you can find anything descriptive of your state and case in what I have laid before you from it, the Lord be praised. He will surely carry on the work thus happily begun; he will not leave it incomplete or unaccomplished, and when you are fully able to say, in the language of sweet assurance, "I am the Lord's" he will ratify it with his own voice from heaven, and say—"Thou art mine, and shalt be mine for ever."

## THE POWER AND THE FORM

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 30, 1846

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:5

Writing to his beloved son, Timothy, Paul in this Epistle tells him that "in the last days perilous times shall come." But why should "the last days" be so particularly "perilous?" He says, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy," and so on. But were men not always thus? Was there ever a time known when men were not "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers?" The root of these evils is so deeply seated in fallen man that these fruits must and do continually appear.

Why, then, should the apostle point out "the last days" as so particularly "perilous," when men always were as he describes them here? The reason is, "Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." It was that which made the last days "perilous;" because men would no longer be such as he describes them in this black catalogue openly and profanely as before, but would be covered over by the mask of profession. It was that which made them **perilous**, that is, dangerous to the people of God, lest they should be ensnared and deceived thereby.

I shall, with God's blessing, for the sake of communicating my thoughts and feelings on these words more clearly and intelligibly, adopt five leading divisions of the subject.

God alone, I well know, can give the blessing. I shall endeavour to shew

I .—What **godliness** is.

II.—What the **power** of godliness is.

III.—What the **form** is.

IV.—What it is to **deny the Power**.

V.—The exhortation, "**from such turn away.**"

I. **Godliness** in the Scriptures of the New Testament seems to have two distinct meanings. Sometimes it means the whole work of grace upon the heart; all that makes and manifests a man to be a child of God; in a word, that which we call 'experimental religion,' with all the fruits accompanying it. For instance, "**godliness** with contentment is great gain" **1Ti 6:6**. "**Godliness** is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" **1Ti 4:8**. "Exercise thyself rather unto **godliness**" **1Ti 4:7**. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" **2Pe 1:3**. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution" **2Ti 3:12**.

But there are other passages in which the word **godliness** seems to have a more limited meaning. For instance, where the apostle exhorts Timothy to pursue after certain Christian graces: "Follow after righteousness, **godliness**, faith, love, patience, meekness" **1Ti 6:11**; there **godliness** does not signify the whole of the experimental religion, but one particular branch of it, namely, **devotedness of heart** to the Lord. So also we find the Apostle Peter saying, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, **godliness**; and to **godliness**, brotherly kindness" **2Pe 1:5-7**. **Godliness** is here spoken of as a distinct fruit of the Spirit's work upon the heart. Used in this sense, I understand it to signify, that devotedness of heart to the Lord which is the effect of divine teaching in the soul.

It may be asked, then, "In what sense do you understand the term **godliness** in the text?" I answer, that by it I understand the whole of the Spirit's work upon the soul, the teachings of God in the heart, all that is generally conveyed by the expression, **experimental religion**, with all the fruits and consequences which flow out of that divine work. Thus **godliness** in this sense has a very comprehensive signification. It embraces the whole of experimental religion; it includes the whole work of grace from first to last, from the first teachings of the Spirit in the heart of the babe, up to the last hallelujahs of the expiring saint. And not only so, but it comprehends all the external fruits and manifestations of the work of grace upon the soul. Thus, in this sense, **godliness** has a very extensive signification; and therefore many spiritual branches will be found to grow out from this deep and broad stem.

1. "Godliness," therefore, will comprehend in the first place, that **divine work**, which is called in the Scriptures **repentance**. What were the chief features of Paul's ministry? He tells us, he preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" **Ac 20:21**. These were the two leading points that he dwelt upon. Wherever, then, there is **godliness** in a man's heart, in other words, wherever there is a work of grace in the soul, there must be repentance.

What is repentance? The conviction of sin produced by the operation of the Spirit upon the conscience, piercing and penetrating the soul with the guilt of transgression, and creating self-loathing and self-abhorrence on account of the manifested evils of our hearts, lips, and lives. Honest confessions of our sins at the footstool of mercy; a broken heart and a contrite spirit; a truly penitent soul, melted, dissolved, and laid low in tears of godly sorrow at the feet of Christ, will ever accompany that repentance unto life which is the gift of Jesus.

2. Again: if "godliness" comprehend the whole work of grace upon the heart, it must also include **faith in Christ**. Whence springs faith in Christ? It is the gift of God; as we read, "For by

grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" **Eph 2:8,9**. But when do we begin to believe in Christ? When is there first any real faith in our heart towards his precious name? When there is some spiritual revelation of him to the soul; when there is some divine discovery of his Person, his blood, his righteousness, his love, his grace, his glory;—when these are brought with a divine testimony by the Spirit's heavenly unction into the heart, then faith springs up. No sooner does Jesus show his lovely face and unfold himself to the soul, than faith springs up to receive, lay hold of, and embrace him, and brings him into the heart in his atoning blood, dying love, and justifying grace.

3. **Love to the brethren** is also another feature of "godliness." For by this "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" **1Jo 3:14**. If there be faith in Christ, there must be love to Christ; one cannot exist without the other. And if there be love to him that begat, there must be love to those that are begotten of him. If then we have seen Christ by the eye of faith, and that sight has drawn forth the affections of our heart towards him, we must love his image wherever seen; and love, pure love, must needs flow forth out of our heart towards that image, however outward circumstances may differ, or whatever there may be unpleasing or uncomely to the natural eye. We love Christ, though we see him beneath a beggar's rags. The features of Christ are ever lovely to those who know Christ, however defaced and degraded they may be in the eyes of the world; and we cannot but love them, wherever we see them visibly manifested in the heart and life of those who are his.

4. If "godliness" signify the Spirit's work upon the soul, it must also comprehend **the spirit of prayer**, which is a main branch of divine teaching. That worshipping, therefore, of God "in spirit and in truth," that flowing forth of desire in the bosom, that wrestling with him at the footstool of mercy, that pleading with him that he would be gracious, that longing, that languishing, that hungering, that thirsting, that breathing of the soul after his blessed presence and manifested power which spring from the

secret operations of the Spirit upon the heart, all are a part of that "godliness" which is "profitable unto all things."

5. It must also comprehend **the fear of the Lord**, which is "the beginning of wisdom." For if "godliness" mean the whole of the Spirit's work upon the heart, it will embrace the beginning, as well as the end; it will include in its capacious arms all the quickened family of God; and therefore it must needs comprehend the first teachings of the Spirit in raising up godly fear, in making the conscience alive and tender, in impressing upon the soul a godly reverence of Jehovah's holy name, and stamping upon the heart a sense of his dread perfections and awful majesty.

6. It will also comprehend **all that springs out of the Spirit's work upon the soul**; self-denial, mortification of sin, crucifixion of the flesh, separating from the world, deadness to the things of time and sense, a life of devotedness to the Son of God. It will further comprehend the fruits of the Spirit's work upon the heart, such as kindness, liberality to the brethren, an open heart and open hand; walking consistently and becomingly with our profession, avoiding the very appearance of evil; giving no room to the adversaries of Christ to bring a reproach upon the cause through us, but living as in the presence of the Lord, and with a sense of his eye being continually upon us.

In a word, as "godliness" embraces the whole of the Spirit's work upon the heart, from his first teachings and quickenings till the soul finally departs in peace, with all the fruits and graces which flow out of it, it must needs be a most comprehensive expression.

II.—But, you will observe, the text speaks of **the power of godliness. Godliness**, and the **power** of it, then, are two distinct things. For instance, the Lord has in mercy quickened your soul, and made Christ precious to your heart; he has in mercy done that for you which will save you with an everlasting salvation. But are you always, are you often under the "power" of this godliness? Must we not confess, if we would speak honestly,

that the seasons and occasions when the power is felt in our hearts are comparatively very rare? If God has indeed implanted the blessed Spirit in your hearts; if your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; if Jesus dwells in you, and is formed in you "the hope of glory," you are never destitute of godliness. But you are often destitute of the "power of godliness." For instance:—

1. Are you not often destitute of the **power to repent**, and confess your sin before God? Does not conscience often bring to view a melancholy retrospect of carnal thoughts, wicked desires, vain imaginations, foolish words, frivolous speeches, and all that catalogue of evils, that huge bill which godly fear sometimes files in the court within, as seen in all our departures from the life of God? But are you able to repent? are you able to feel cut to the very heart? are you able to mourn and sigh because conscience brings against you this long indictment? Can you always feel your soul melted down with sorrow on account of it? Are you always able to feel contrition because you are proud, worldly, covetous, everything that is evil, everything that is hateful in God's sight?

But then, there are times and seasons when the Lord is pleased to work upon the conscience, to move and stir the soul, to touch the heart with his gracious finger—then repentance and godly sorrow flow forth. It is with us as with the rock that Moses struck. There was water in the rock; but it required to be struck with the rod before the waters flowed out. So we may have the grace of repentance in our souls; but it requires the divine hand to strike the rock, to cause the waters of godly sorrow to gush forth.

2. So, with respect to **faith in Jesus**. If the Lord has ever blessed you and me with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we never cease to believe in him. But there is often an apparent suspension of that faith. And it needs the same almighty power which first created it to draw it forth into living act and exercise. He that possesses faith possesses "godliness;" but it is only as faith is drawn out to look to, and live upon the Lord Jesus Christ that we have the "power of godliness."

3. Again, if ever you have **loved Jesus** with a pure affection; if ever you have felt him near, dear, and precious to your soul, that love can never be lost out of your heart. It may lie dormant; it does lie dormant. It may not be sweetly felt in exercise; but there it is. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" **1Co 16:22**. You would be under this curse if the love of the Lord Jesus Christ were to die out of your hearts.

But this love is often sleeping. When the mother sometimes watches over the cradle, and looks upon her sleeping babe with unutterable affection, the infant knows not that the mother is watching its slumbers; but when it awakes, it is able to feel and return its mother's caresses. It is so with the soul sometimes when love in the heart is like a babe slumbering in the cradle. But as the babe opens its eyes, and sees the mother smiling upon it, it returns the smiles, and stretches forth its arms to embrace the bending cheek; so as to feel enmity against them? Nay, perhaps when we face of Jesus stooping to imprint a kiss of love, or drop some sweet word into the heart, and there is a flowing forth toward him of love and affection—this is **the power of love**.

4. Is it not so with **love to the brethren**? Are we not often cold and dead toward them, if not a great deal worse, even so as to feel enmity against them? Nay, perhaps when we have seen them coming down one street, we have turned round the corner of another, to avoid meeting them. Such is the aversion of our carnal mind at times to even the most highly favoured of God's people. But let us be brought into their company; let conversation turn upon spiritual things; let them speak of the feelings of their soul; let them tell out a little of what they have known and felt of divine things; and let us have experienced a measure of the same, at once all coldness, iciness, reserve, suspicion, and enmity flow down like the mountains at the Lord's presence, and love, union, kindness, tenderness, and Christian sympathy are sweetly and blessedly experienced. This is the **power** of Christian **love**.

5. So it is with **prayer**. I know not how it is with you; but I know that real prayer is not at my command. I cannot, God forbid that I should, cease to bend my knee before the throne of the divine Majesty. But can I command spiritual and heavenly desires? Can I create feelings of longings and languishings after his manifested presence? Can I produce a mind fixed upon eternal things? Can I raise up hungering and thirsting after his manifested love? Can I command that faith in Jesus whereby alone I can boldly approach him? Can I give myself feeling access into the presence of the King of kings, and a sweet manifestation in my soul that he is hearing and answering me? Can I open a door of utterance to express my desires, or raise up a sure confidence that the Lord will fulfil them? I cannot.

But there are times and seasons when the Lord the Spirit is pleased to breathe upon the believer's heart. The grace of prayer is no more dead in his soul than the grace of repentance, or the grace of faith, or the grace of love. But lively goings forth, spiritual actings, and pourings out of the soul, often lie dormant in the saint's bosom. But when the Lord is pleased to give us a spirit of prayer; when he is pleased to overshadow us in some measure with his felt presence, and draw the desires of our souls after himself, then to pray is indeed a sweet enjoyment to the soul. And we pray, not because it is our duty, nor because it is our privilege; but because it freely flows forth into the bosom of a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God. This is the **power of prayer**.

6. So with respect to the **different fruits** by which "godliness" is always accompanied. I may go out of the world; I may separate myself from all outward evil; I may not be entangled with the pleasures and amusements which the children of men please their vain minds with; nay more, I may do many things that seem to be the result and fruit of the Spirit's work upon my heart; and yet no divine power, whence alone they rightly spring, may have been communicated to my heart.

But when, on the other hand, by the power of God resting upon me, by applying some portion of his word, as "Come out, and be ye separate," I am enabled to come out of the world; when I am enabled to hate every sin by the workings of a tender conscience; when I am enabled to overcome temptations by the fear of God as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death; when I am enabled thus by God's grace and teaching, and under the special operation of the Spirit of God upon my heart and conscience to walk as becometh the Christian, then I have the **power of godliness.**

Thus there is a distinction ever to be borne in mind between "godliness" and the "power of godliness." You that are born of God, who have the teachings of God in your soul, are never destitute of "godliness." If you were, you would be ungodly characters. But you are often, very often, destitute of "the power of godliness," and of the sweet manifestations, blessed revivings, and precious discoveries of the Spirit.

III .—But there is also such a thing as the **form.** Here we come to the distinction between the people of God and mere empty professors, who have nothing of the life and teaching of God in their souls. You that are the people of God may often write bitter things against yourselves because you do not feel the power of godliness; but that does not prove you not to be godly characters. If ever you have had repentance unto life; if ever you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; if ever you have felt him precious to your soul; if ever you have loved the brethren with a pure heart fervently; if ever you have prayed out of a sincere and spiritually taught heart, you are godly people, though you may not often feel the power of the blessed operations and heavenly communications of the Spirit vitally and divinely within.

But then, there are those who have neither "godliness," nor "the power" of it. They have but the "form." And what is the form? Why, a form is an outside appearance, merely the pretence of the thing without the reality. And this is what makes the last days so "perilous"-that there should be such a wide profession; that there

should be so many who come near the truth, and yet not be partakers of the truth; who approach so near the borders of godliness, who have never been brought over the line of vital godliness. It is because there are so many that have the form without the power, that renders the last days perilous times for God's people, lest they should be entangled in the same snare, and deceived by false pretensions.

If this be the case, then, this form of godliness must come very near to the genuine. It is not perilous to the child of God to see the Papist worshipping a crucifix; or to see the Puseyite, [**A follower of Dr. Pusey, one of the founders of the "Oxford Movement", which was the forerunner of Anglo-Catholicism**] with his two wax candles upon the altar. It is not perilous to the child of God to see thousands crowding into a Wesleyan meeting-house; nor perilous to see hundreds approving a motley mixture of freewill and free grace; nor perilous to hear a man preaching the doctrines of grace, and sneering at the felt experience of them. These various degrees of error and delusion are not dangerous to the people of God, because usually they are not deceived by them. But when two things very nearly resemble each other, **there** lies the peril; lest the poison should be mistaken for the remedy.

Thus peril lies in the wide-spread profession of experimental truth, for it is that alone which deserves the name of "godliness," lest in the wide profession of experimental truth we should deceive ourselves, or others should deceive us, by the form without the power.

It seems to me, that in this day we have a very wide spread of experimental truth. That much-read book that I see upon the table, and its wide extension in all directions, I mean the "Gospel Standard", carries with it a degree of peril lest by its wide diffusion it may raise up a numerous crop of professors who have all the form, and pretension of experimental godliness, yet know nothing of the inward power, teachings, and operations of the Spirit upon the heart. So I have observed of late years a raising

up of little causes of experimental truth, and the opening of pulpits in many parts. I believe when I reach home I shall have occupied twenty-seven pulpits within these thirteen weeks. And this is perilous to the people of God lest they should be entangled by the wide-spread profession of experimental truth and the mere exterior of vital godliness, without the heart-felt possession of spiritual knowledge and enjoyment of it.

Not that I am speaking, God forbid, against the extension of experimental works; not that I am speaking, God forbid, against the opening of fresh places where experimental truth is preached. Nay, I rejoice at it, and would say with Moses, "The Lord God... make them a thousand times as many as they are, and bless them as he hath promised" **De 1:11**. God works by these means. But there is a peril attending them, lest Satan should come in by this door to deceive many to their own downfall, and even entangle God's people in a profession beyond what they know of the vital, experimental power.

But what is the "form?" A form is something that comes very near, and yet is not the thing itself. It is something like what painters call 'a lay figure;' and from which they draw when they have not a living subject to copy. The lay figure represents a man with all the limbs, sinews, and muscles; but life, breath, and motion are wanting. For instance:

1. There is the **form of repentance**. A person may profess to be very sorry for, and to have great conviction of sin, talk about a law-work, and guilt on account of his transgressions; and yet not have that life-giving power of the Spirit upon his soul producing real contrition and true repentance. It may be only the workings of natural conscience, and not that peculiar teaching of God the Spirit in the heart of a sinner whereby he is broken down into godly sorrow and deep penitence of heart before the Lord.

2. So with respect to **faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a natural faith in Christ as well as a spiritual faith. A man may have heard so much about Jesus Christ under ministers who extol him

highly, speak of his Person, proclaim his blood, and dwell upon his justifying righteousness, that he may fancy he has faith in Christ, because he has heard so much of him with the outward ear; and yet be all the time without living, genuine faith. This special gift and work of God upon the soul may be still fatally wanting.

3. So with respect to **love** to the Lord Jesus Christ. There may be a natural love toward him. A man may have heard and read so much of his kindness to sinners, and such glowing descriptions of the beauty of his Person, that he may have fallen in love with him. Just as Roman Catholics have their crucifixes and paintings of Christ, and in admiring their crucifixes and adoring their paintings, feel the workings of fleshly love towards him whom they suppose to be there represented; so a man may have heard so much about the love of Christ, that he may have his fleshly affections roused up, and mistake them for that pure love which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

4. So we may have something that **draws us towards the Lord's people**. We may feel that there is an amiableness about them; we may believe that they are the Lord's living family, and wish to be like them; to talk as they talk, and speak as they speak; and this we may mistake for love to the brethren; whilst all the time our heart may be completely destitute of that true love to the brethren, the fruit and effect of the Spirit's work upon the soul.

5. So with respect to the **gift of prayer**. It may seem to ourselves, and those who hear us, so simple, so fervent, so earnest, so humbly expressed, that surely it must be a spiritual prayer. And yet, we may often mistake a mere natural gift for that special grace of God whereby we are enabled to pour out our heart before him.

6. So we may be able by what we have felt under the convictions of natural conscience to live a **life of separation** from the world, to overcome sin when not very strong, to walk in the

commandments and ordinances of God blameless; and yet be destitute of the vital power of the Spirit's teachings and operations, without which all these things are but as the convulsive twitchings of a dead body under the action of an electric battery. Like Herod, a man may do many things, and yet be absolutely devoid of the vital power of godliness brought into the heart by the Spirit of God.

IV.—'Well,' some may say, 'if this be the case, how may I know that I am not deceived altogether?' 'If a man may go so near, and yet not be a real character, what evidence have I,' says some poor tempted child of God, 'that I am not deceived?' Now what is said of these characters? They **deny the power**. Have you done **that?**

But what is it to "deny the power?" The power may be denied in various ways.

1. It is denied by some **publicly and openly**. There are some preachers professing the doctrines of truth, who cut down all experience, and say, 'it is nothing but frames and feelings.' This is to deny the power of godliness. If we have no frames, if we have no feelings, I am very sure the Spirit of God has not made our bodies his temple. If we have never had frames of sweet meditation, a frame of living faith, a frame of divine love, a frame of spiritual-mindedness, a frame of heavenly affections, I am very sure the Spirit of God has never blessed our soul. Again, if I am without feelings—a feeling of sorrow for sin, a feeling of faith towards Jesus, a feeling of love towards his name, a feeling of love towards the brethren; if we are without these gracious feelings, we are dead as stones as to any possession of the life of God. So that, to cut down experience, and say, 'it is nothing but a parcel of frames and feelings,' is to deny the "power of godliness."

You will observe these men do not deny **godliness**; they dare not do that; but they deny the **power** of it in the heart of a saint, under the operation of the Spirit. Every jeer and sneer, every

taunting speech thrown out against frames and feelings just manifests what a man's heart is; it is opening a door through which you can look indeed into the secrets of his bosom, and there see the serpent coiled up and hissing enmity against God's truth and against his living people.

2. Others deny it by their **life and conversation**. If a man walk in the lusts of the flesh; if he wallow in uncleanness or drunkenness; if he be altogether given up to the power of pride and covetousness, he denies the power of godliness by his **actions** as much as the preceding deny it by their **words**.

Both these characters deny the power of godliness **outwardly** the one in word, the other in deed.

3. Others, having more regard to conscience, cannot go that length of outward enmity; yet they too deny it **inwardly**. For instance, are there not those who secretly think there is no absolute need for the soul to be emptied and stripped, and to have a revelation of Christ; and that they can be saved without such an experience of the bitter and the sweet, the sorrows and the joys that the Lord's people speak of? And are not these secret thoughts much strengthened and fostered by those ministers who profess to preach **Christ** as distinct from, and far superior to **experience**? What more common than such language as this from the pulpit: 'I cannot bear to hear people talk of their castings down and liftings up; they dwell and pore so much upon self; why do they not go out of self, and look to a precious Jesus?'

I want to know if this is not inwardly denying the power? They dare not say there is no such thing; but they speak of looking out of self to Christ, as if there were no inward experience of Christ, no visitations of his presence and love; and as if all religion consisted in a dry, speculative knowledge, without one inward grain of life and feeling. Their talk of looking to Christ is very plausible and subtle; but its real aim and drift is to deny the power of vital godliness in the heart of a saint.

4. But there are others who deny it **virtually** and **actually** by the non-possession of it. For instance, there are many who say they approve of, and that there is nothing like experimental preaching; they will crowd and cram a chapel to hear the experience of God's people traced out; and yet all the while they virtually and actually deny the power of it by the non-possession of it in their hearts. They have imbibed such a knowledge of the plan of experience from constantly hearing it preached, and they are so certain that it is the truth, that they will hear nothing else, and yet the vital power has never reached their conscience.

V.—And this leads me to our last point—"**From such turn away.**" But how do we turn away from them? We turn away from them when we feel no union with them. I have thought sometimes that we may divide the quickened family of God into three classes. There are those whose religion is commended to our judgment; there are those whose religion is commended to our conscience; and there are those whose religion is commended to our judgment, conscience, and affections. Have you not felt in conversing with persons professing godliness that there are some whose religion you receive in your judgment? You dare not say that they have not the fear of God: nor that what they have told you of the dealings of God upon their soul is not genuine. But still what they say does not much enter into your conscience.

Again; there are others who speak of the dealings of God upon their soul so clearly and plainly, so distinctly and undeniably, that what they say is at once commended to our conscience; but still there is something wanted; it does not kindle a secret flame of love within, nor lay hold of our affections. And then there are others whose religion is not merely commended to our judgment and conscience, but to our very heart and soul. These at once leap into our affections; we love them, and cleave to them, and feel a vital union of soul with them.

Now if we can get hold of people in this threefold way, or in any one of them, we are not to "turn away" from them. None of these

deny the power of godliness. If we can receive them into our judgment, it is not so good as receiving them into our conscience; and receiving them into our conscience, is not so good as receiving them into our affections. But if we can get them into our judgment, we must not "turn away" from them. But there are those whom we cannot even get into our judgment; their religion seems to be nothing but deceit and delusion. We cannot trace the hand of God in them; we cannot see any distinct marks of the Spirit upon them. From these we are called upon to "turn away."

But we "turn away" from those who deny the power of godliness in several ways.

1. First, we "turn away" from them as **regards conversation with them**. If people talk to us about religion, and we speak in an approving tone to them, whilst there is something in our heart which does not believe they are vitally partakers of grace, we are but playing the hypocrite; we are sanctioning that which we know in our **conscience** we do not approve of. If therefore any person talk to you about divine things, and you cannot receive him into your judgment: if you drop any word that seems to sanction that man's religion, you are plastering him over with untempered mortar, and sewing pillows under his arm-holes. The word of truth bids you "from such turn away;" that is, have no such conversation with him; give him no false hope; bolster him up with no vain expectations.

2. But secondly, the precept implies that you are to "turn away" from **receiving him as a member of the church**. If a man or woman comes before you wishing to be received into your church: and you cannot in your conscience believe the work of God with all his profession is begun upon him, you are to "turn away" from receiving him.

3. But you are also commanded to "turn away" from those that deny the power of godliness as **regards their company**. Unless you are persuaded in your judgment, or your conscience, or your

affections, that they are living people of God, you are to "turn away" from them so as not to walk with them in seeming fellowship and union. You cannot indeed as the Apostle says **1Co 5:10** go altogether out of the world; nor would we wish to be otherwise than courteous and civil to those who address us in terms of civility and courtesy. But that is another thing from endorsing their religion, and stamping it with our approval, by freely or frequently associating with them. For myself, if I speak a word whereby I express union to those whom I do not receive in my heart, I feel that I am telling God and man a deliberate lie, going against the conviction of my conscience, and doing what I hope God may ever keep me from.

But then, on the other hand, courtesy, kindness and civility are due to all. And if we "turn away" from any because we are not able to take them into our bosom, and cannot, consistently with a good conscience, foster their vain hopes and bolster up their delusive expectations, that is no reason why we should treat them with contempt. The word of truth commands us to "honour all men," and towards the people of God to "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering."

Now, what testimony have we who desire to fear God's name that we have anything more than a "form of godliness?" We have a form; that is very clear. But have we any living testimony in our conscience that we have something more than the form? Have we ever felt the power? We have no testimony that we are possessors of godliness unless we have felt its power.

But there are children of God **there may be some here present this morning** who are now, and have been for weeks, or even months, without the feeling power; and they are perhaps writing bitter things against themselves because they are not under those lively feelings that they once enjoyed. But since you have once felt it, have you ever denied the power, or with all your darkness and deadness, do you deny it now? Is not this rather the feeling of your soul? "O that I were as in months past, as in

the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness" **Job 29:2,3**. Is not this rather the language of your heart, 'O that the Lord would bless me indeed! would revive his work upon my heart, and give me life and power, to enable me to believe in his name! O that he would visit my soul with some discovery of his love, and bring me out of that gloomy and dark state in which I am so sadly sunk!'

These are the feelings of a living soul. But those who have but the "form of godliness," deny all these exercises. They want no revivings; they are sighing after no manifestations; they never plead with the Lord to look down upon them and bless them; they are satisfied with an outside religion; they are contented with the mere form. If they can deceive themselves and one another, it is enough. But the living soul, who has the fear of God alive in his bosom, is not so satisfied; he wants living manifestations of God's presence, sweet communications of God's mercy, and the blessed overshadowings of the Spirit upon his heart. If he has not them, he feels he has nothing.

Thus, while this text cuts to a thousand pieces those who have but the form, it does not wound the poor mourning child of God who is sighing and crying after the power. Every sigh, cry, and groan that he has on account of his dark, dead, gloomy state are so many living evidences of that power. Whence arise your sighs? What makes you mourn upon your bed? Whence spring those breathings in your soul as you sit by your fire-side after the Lord's presence—that he would speak to your soul, and manifest himself to you? Why, they spring from this conviction deeply wrought in your heart, that nothing but the power of God can reach your soul. All short of that is stamped upon your conscience as nothing.

Now these are the people we are to receive to our bosom, those who have **godliness**, and those who have **the power of godliness**. But those that deny it, be it in word, or in deed; be it virtually by their life and conversation, or inwardly and secretly—

from such we are to "turn away." This may bring us a bad name; this may load us with hatred and reproach; this may often prove very cutting to our feelings; but we shall in the end reap the benefit of it, in having the secret testimony of an honest conscience, and the smiles of an approving God.

## POWER GIVEN TO THE FAINT

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 20, 1845.

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40:29-31

In order to understand the mind and meaning of the Holy Spirit in these words, we must take a glimpse at their connection.

We find, in the preceding verses, the Lord addressing himself to his people, and speaking to them as deeply exercised in their souls. But what was the source of their exercises? It was this—that their path was so dark and obscure. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" The path in which the family of God were then walking was exceedingly perplexing. Their "**way**"—**that** is, the path they were taking—the way of the Spirit's teaching in their conscience—the mode of the Lord's dealing with their soul, was so intricate and obscure, that they could not believe it was a right way. The Lord had hidden his face from them, and did not shew them the nature or reason of his dealings with them. Infidelity, seizing hold of this circumstance, worked so powerfully in their hearts, that they burst forth into this cry, "My way is hid from the Lord." Surely he cannot see the way I am taking, or he would have appeared sooner on my behalf. "And my judgment," that is, **my cause**, "is passed over from my God." He neglects to take that notice of me which I seek at his hands; he passes me by as unworthy of his regard; he slights my cause, and rejects my prayer, as though I did not belong to him.

Now, in order to meet these exercises in the hearts of his people—in order to apply a suitable remedy for these workings of unbelief and infidelity—the Lord answers by appealing to their own experience—"Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" However thou mayest faint, however thou mayest be wearied of him—whatever be thy hard thoughts concerning his dealings with thee—dost thou not know, that the everlasting God remains "the same yesterday, today, and for ever"—that he is not a changeable God, tossed to and fro like thyself; but that he "rests in his love," and is ever the same;—that "he fainteth not" under the burdens which thou castest upon him; "neither is weary" of thee, though thou art often weary of him? And, with respect to this intricate path in which thou art walking, he adds, "There is no searching of his understanding." He knoweth what is best for thee; and though thy present path is dark and obscure in thine eyes, it is bright and clear in his.

He would, therefore, urge this upon the conscience of his exercised and complaining child, 'Thy part is to sit still, and wait till the deliverance appear; in due time, I will explain to thee the nature and reason of these mysterious dealings.' He then goes on still further to clear up the point by the words of the text: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

If we look at the text, we shall observe, that there are **two characters** traced out in it. Of these, one is set forth by the expression "**youths**" and "**young men.**" And not only is their character set forth, but also their **destiny** is described that they "shall faint," and "shall utterly fall." And, on the other hand, we have another, a **spiritual** character traced out, as one who "has no might," and yet "waits upon the Lord." And we find **his destiny** also pointed out. For as there is an end reserved for the

one—an utter fall; so there is an end reserved for the other—a **spiritual blessing**.

I shall, then, if God enable me, endeavour this morning to trace out these two distinct **characters**, and shew the allotted **portion** and **end** of each.

We will begin with a **description of the character** pointed out by the expression "youths" and "young men;" and then shew what is **their allotted portion and appointed destiny**.

I .—By the expression "**youths**" and "**young men**" is implied a contrast betwixt the whole-hearted condition of the professing world and the fainting state of God's family. Youth is the season of comeliness, vigour, and strength; and thus, figuratively and typically, the "youths" and "young men" are those professors of religion who have never been weakened and brought down by a work of the Spirit upon their hearts; but who retain all their natural comeliness, activity, and vigour. In the exercise of this activity and strength, these youths run a race, but not the race that God's people run in faith and patience. In a word, the expression "youths" and "young men" describes unburdened professors, who have never had such a work of grace upon their hearts as has laid trouble upon their souls, or wrought penetrating convictions in their conscience. Never having been humbled in their souls, nor exercised in their minds, nor afflicted by a body of sin and death, they retain all their natural vigour. It has never been drawn away from them by the running sores of sin and guilt; they have never been drained nor exhausted of it by lacerating wounds in their conscience; and they thus preserve all that comeliness, youthful vigour, and beauty which have been battered down in the Lord's afflicted family.

Now when the Lord's people, exercised and tried in their souls, compare their deformity, ugliness, and wrinkles, with the comeliness of these unhumiliated professors, it is often to them a bitter contrast. They often see in unexercised professors much more zeal, consistency, earnestness, amiability, activity, and

apparent devotedness, than they can see and feel in their own hearts; and, contrasting their own wrinkled and weather-beaten visages with their smooth and ruddy cheeks, they cry out, "My skin is black upon me; my flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust: my skin is broken and become loathsome" (Job 30:30: 7:5.)

vii. And so with respect to the activity, strength, and vigour of these "youths" and "young men." The Lord's people have often no heart to "run with patience the race that is set before them." Spiritual things, instead of being their solace and delight, are often their burden. The enmity of their carnal mind works up against divine realities; and so far from being active and zealous in them, they are often so burdened in the things of God, that they feel unable to do any one thing which is acceptable in His sight. But these "young men," who have never seen the breadth, nor felt the spirituality of God's law—who have never known their inward corruption, never been plagued with a body of sin and death, never exercised with the perplexities that God's people are tried with—retain all that zeal and comeliness—those fleshly substitutes for vital power and godliness—which the exercised family of God once had, but have long lost.

There are those amongst the Lord's family "whose senses are not as yet exercised to discern both good and evil," and therefore cannot see the difference between pretence and reality, between nature in its highest form and grace in its lowest. When therefore one of these poor, burdened, exercised children of God contrasts his own want of zeal, earnestness, and activity—his darkness of mind, deadness of soul, and coldness of affection—with the earnestness and activity of many a zealous religionist around him, he is almost tempted to think that they are right and he wrong, and that they will stand when he shall fall.

But how different are God's ways from our ways, and God's thoughts from our thoughts! How differently does he view these "youths" and "young men" from the admiration bestowed upon them by the professing world! What hollowness, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy does he see working under all this natural

comeliness, strength, and vigour! How the Lord sees that all this strength is weakness, all this wisdom is folly, all this righteousness is hypocrisy, and all this earnestness and zeal is but fallen nature carrying into religion the same restless activity which cultivates the farm, or manages the shop—a buyer and seller in the temple, and not a spiritual worshipper in the sanctuary!

But what is the **sentence** which the Lord has passed concerning such? A sentence that we see, more or less, fulfilled every day. They shall all "**utterly fall.**" In due time these comely and vigorous "youths," these strong and active "young men" will faint and fall. Though for a time they seem to run well, they never reach the goal. Sin, which for a time was dead in them, begins to revive; temptations that before never beset them, are laid in their paths; snares before hidden, they are now entangled by: their zeal, their earnestness, their activity gradually decline; and thus, long before they come to the end of the race, they faint, and are utterly unable to proceed any further. They give up their religion, often abandon even a profession, go into the world, fall into sin, and "concerning faith make shipwreck."

But even if some of them do not faint by the way, they "shall utterly fall." God never has sanctioned, and never will sanction any religion but his own divine work in the soul. All other wisdom he proves to be folly, all other strength weakness, all other profession but that which springs from his own work in the conscience to be "the spider's web" and "the hypocrite's hope." He has therefore determined, in his own sovereign appointment, that these comely and vigorous "youths" and "young men"—these active professors of religion—these unhumiliated and un-exercised ones, "shall utterly fall;" and if it be not before, a death-bed shall unmask them; or, if they even proceed in confidence through the dark valley **as we read in the Pilgrim's Progress of one that did so**, yet the day of judgment will reveal them. God will discover them by shewing that they have been feeding upon ashes; and that a deceived heart has turned them aside; that

they have had no interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, and no participation in the Spirit's teaching.

How different is the character, and how different is the destiny of the Lord's own family! How determined the Lord is to mortify the pride of man, to subvert all his purposes, and bring about his own counsels of infinite wisdom, in direct opposition to the wisdom of the creature! What would be our judgment? Would it not be this? That these "youths" so comely, vigorous, and strong—so earnest, active, and zealous in religion—would surely be crowned—that these would without doubt receive the prize? And could we believe that the faint and weary, the hopeless and helpless, should receive the blessing? But God, on purpose to disappoint and pour contempt upon all creature wisdom, has determined otherwise. He has decreed that there shall be no wisdom honoured but his own wisdom, no strength crowned but his own strength, no righteousness exalted but his own righteousness, no purpose accomplished but his own eternal sacred purpose. He therefore brings all his people by a secret, mysterious work upon their conscience into that state and case where he alone gets to himself all the glory.

II.—Bearing this in mind, we may be enabled more clearly to see the case and state of the Lord's people, as distinguished from the state and case of unhumiliated and professors. **"He giveth power to the faint."** This, then, is God's description of his people, that they are **"faint."** Until they are faint, there is no promise for them that God will give them power.

But what makes them faint? There are several causes.

1. One cause of their fainting is, **the burdens that are put upon their shoulders.** It is so naturally. If you carry a heavy burden a long way, you are pretty sure to faint before you arrive at your destination. So spiritually. The Lord's people have heavy burdens; sometimes guilt upon the conscience; at others, exercises perplexing them; passions striving for the mastery; an

adulterous eye, and an idolatrous heart. These burdens make them faint and weary in their souls.

But what do we understand by **fainting**? It is a swooning away, so as to lose all knowledge of where we are; a falling down in a state of exhaustion, so as not to be able to move a step further. This is the case with many of God's family. They are often so weary and exhausted with the burdens they have to carry, that they are actually unable, in their own feelings, to move a single step further; they swoon away, so as to lose all consciousness of where they are and what they are.

2. **Grievous wounds** will make a man faint. So spiritually. The wounds of sin, the fiery darts of Satan, the arrows of God in the conscience, make the heart of many of God's children faint within them. They cannot move a step further; their very life-blood is drained away, and they sink down, and are unable to move forward from weakness and exhaustion.

3. **Denial of food** will also produce faintness. Hunger and famine soon exhaust the body. So spiritually. When supplies of grace are withheld—when heavenly manna does not fall—when God does not appear—when his testimonies do not drop into the heart—when love and blood are not applied—when, as the Prophet speaks, there is "a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Am. 8:11, 12). This spiritual destitution makes the Lord's famished people faint and feeble, and their heart to sink and swoon within them.

But how strange it appears, before we are spiritually led into a knowledge of the Lord's wise and gracious dealings, that all this painful work in the conscience should be a needful, an indispensable preparation of heart to receive the gospel in its fulness, sweetness, and power!

What a mysterious way! That God's people should have to be emptied of all **their** strength, that the Lord may communicate **his—that** their very life-blood, their native stock of goodness, excellency, and wisdom, must be drained out of their veins, that the life-blood of Jesus may be poured into them! What a mysterious path! that we are not fit to receive any blessing till thoroughly emptied—that there is no deliverance till shut up in prison—no mercy till brought into misery—no manifested laying of the everlasting arms underneath the soul till it is ready to sink into the awful precipice of perdition! But were it not so, we should want to share the glory with God. It would be partly our strength, and partly God's; partly our own righteousness, and partly Christ's; partly our wisdom, and partly Jehovah's. Therefore, it is absolutely needful, however mysterious, for the glory of God, and the consolation and salvation of his people, that all our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness should be drained away, that the wisdom, strength, and righteousness of Christ should become manifestly ours.

III .—Now, when the soul is brought down to this spot **and it may take years to bring it there; a succession of trials and troubles, difficulty after difficulty, stripe after stripe, blow after blow; many painful dispensations in providence, perplexing paths in grace, burdensome trials of body and soul may all have been needed to bring down the proud, stubborn heart with labour**—but when at length the soul is brought into that state of poverty and destitution so as not to have a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or water out of the pit—then it is fit to receive **power**. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." They are not fit to receive God's strength till they are faint and feeble. Weakness is the only needful qualification; and this sense of weakness is wrought in their heart by the teaching and operation of the blessed Spirit.

But how does the Lord give "power?" The power that God gives is quite distinct from our own. Our power is only another name for weakness; and therefore the sooner we lose it the better. But

God's power is real power. It is not a fiction, like our own; not a delusion and a deceit, like the boasted strength of man; but there is a divine reality in it.

1. But "he giveth power" in various ways. Sometimes he gives power to **persevere**. It is at times with God's people as with Jonah. When Jonah was in the belly of the whale, when the weeds were wrapped about his head, and he was in his own feelings "in the belly of hell," yet he said, "I will look again toward thy holy temple" (John 2:4). He was not then brought out of the belly of the whale; yet in the belly of the whale, and in the very belly of hell, God gave him power to look to his holy temple. If God had not given him power, he would have looked into the very belly of hell in the horrors of despair, instead of looking again to his holy temple in the actings of living faith.

Thus the Lord often gives his people power to take a longing, languishing look at the blood and righteousness of Jesus; to come to the Lord, as "mighty to save," with the same feelings with which Esther went into the presence of the king: "I will go in; and if I perish, I perish." It is with them sometimes as with the four lepers who sat at the entering in of the gate of Samaria: "And they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3, 4). And so the Lord's people are sometimes brought to this state—"If I perish, I will perish at his footstool." If he give no answer of mercy, they will still cling to his feet, and beseech him to look upon, and save them.

Now this is "power," real power. Despair would have laid hold upon their soul, if this secret power had not been given to them. Sometimes we learn this by painful experience. Our trials sometimes stun us, and then there is no power to seek or pray. But when power is given, there is a pleading with the Lord, a going out of the heart's desires after him, and a fulfilment in the

soul of the experience described by the prophet, "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isa. 8:17).

2. He gives **power to believe**; for it is the work of the blessed Spirit to raise up living faith in the heart. He gives **power to hope**; for it is only so far as he communicates power, that we can cast forth this anchor of the soul. He gives **power to love**; for it is only as he gives power, that we feel any measure of affection either to the Lord or to his people. In a word, every spiritual desire, every breath of fervent prayer, every movement of the soul heavenward, every trusting in God's name, relying on his word, and hanging upon his promises, spring out of power communicated by the Lord to the faint and feeble.

3. Sometimes the Lord gives **power by recalling past mercies and former dealings** to the mind; by enabling the soul to look unto him "from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar" (Ps. 42:6); not to give up all its confidence, or cast the things God has done for it behind its back: but to take encouragement from the past to hope for the future. As the Church says, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" (Lam. 3:21). And as she pleads, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon"? 'Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?' (Isa. 51:9, 10). This is putting the Lord in remembrance (Isa. 43:26); and a making use of past favours to plead with him for more.

IV.—But there is another word added, "**And to them that have no might he increaseth strength.**" The Lord's people are often in this state, that they "have no might." All their power seems exhausted, and their strength completely drained away; sin appears to have got the mastery over them; and they feel as if they had neither will nor ability to run the race set before them, or persevere in the way of the Lord. Yet, even then, they have

strength; for it says, "**he increaseth strength.**" It does not say, he gives, bestows, communicates strength; but "he **increaseth strength.**" How can this be? We must have power to feel our weakness, as dear Gadsby used to say, 'We need power to sink.' God must put forth his power to enable us to fall down into nothingness and helplessness. It therefore says, "he **increaseth strength.**" As though it would imply, 'Is not the very power to sink down into creature weakness, helplessness, and nothingness, **strength?**' It is so in God's mysterious dealings. And therefore, "to them that have no might" **in other words, those who are sensible in their own consciences that they have no power at all, who are completely exhausted of nature's strength and wisdom** to these "he increaseth strength."

Now the Lord "increaseth strength" in a very mysterious way. He often drops strength stilly and secretly into the soul. We are not always to expect very great manifestations. This is not the way in which the Lord usually increases strength. His visits to the soul are often better known by their fruits and effects, and by looking back upon them when they are past, than by any immediate impulse. The strength given is more easily felt than the hand seen which communicates it. In this respect it much resembles the new birth, of which the Lord says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth" (John 3:8).

One fruit and effect of divine strength communicated to the soul is, that it is enabled to **persevere in the way of the Lord.** "The righteous shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9). "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 14:8).

Now what has kept us to this day? Some of you here have made a profession ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years. What has kept us? When powerful temptations were spread for our feet, what preserved us from falling headlong into them? When we felt the workings of headstrong lusts, what kept us from being altogether

carried captive by them? When we look at the difficulties of the way, the exercise and the perplexities which our souls have had to grapple with, the persecutions from relations or superiors, the hard blows from sinners and saints that we have had to encounter—what has still kept in us a desire to fear God, and a heart in some measure tender before him? When we view the infidelity, unbelief, carnality, worldly-mindedness, hypocrisy, pride, and presumption of our fallen nature, what has kept us still believing, hoping, loving, longing, and looking to the Lord? When we think of our deadness, coldness, torpidity, rebelliousness, perverseness, love to evil, aversion to good, and all the abounding corruptions of our nature, what has kept us from giving up the very profession of religion, and swimming down the powerful current that has so long and so often threatened to sweep us utterly from the Lord and his people? Is it not the putting forth of the Lord's secret power in our souls? Had we been without the fear of the Lord, in a mere profession, like the "youths" and "young men," we should long ago have fainted, and utterly fallen. Can we not look back, and recall to mind our first religious companions, those with whom we started in the race—those whom we perhaps envied for their greater piety, zeal, holiness, and earnestness, and with which we painfully contrasted our own sluggishness and carnality, admiring them, and condemning ourselves? Where are they all, or the greater part of them? I can say, for my part, I should be very sorry to be in the places where most of them are. Some have embraced soul-destroying errors; others are buried in a worldly system; and others are wrapped up in delusion and fleshly confidence.

Thus, while the "youths" and "young men" fall into the snares of the devil, God, by putting forth his secret power in the hearts of his fainting ones, keeps his fear alive in their souls, holds up their goings in his paths that their footsteps slip not, brings them out of all their temptations and troubles, delivers them from every evil work, and preserves them unto his heavenly kingdom. He drains them of all their strength, that he may communicate his own: and destroys the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent, that he may get all the honour

and glory to his own great name. He thus secures the salvation of his people by his own free grace; and whilst he hides pride from their eyes, he saves them by the only way that is suitable to them, and glorifying to himself.

v.—"**But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.**" This is another mark and feature of the Lord's family. They are not only faint and feeble in themselves, and without might to do anything spiritually good; but they "**wait upon the Lord.**"

What makes them "wait upon the Lord." Their very weakness, their very faintness, their very helplessness—these are so many instrumental causes which, in the hands of the Spirit, make them wait on the Lord. They "wait upon the Lord," therefore, that they may receive out of his fulness those communications of light, life, and grace, which they have not in themselves. And only in proportion as they daily feel faint and weary, are daily sensible of their own weakness and helplessness, do they "wait upon the Lord."

But before they can "wait upon the Lord," they must have an experimental knowledge of him; they must have a view of him by the eyes of their spiritual understanding; feel the goings out of their heart's affections after him: be assured in their conscience that he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto him; and feel a childlike dependence upon him as willing to save.

But the word "**waiting**" implies several things. It implies,

1. That we have faith to wait. Do we not often feel such infidelity working within that we cannot wait upon the Lord? When the spirit of infidelity comes in like a flood, what waiting is there upon God? Does not this subtle spirit effectually baffle all our attempts to wait upon him? Sometimes unbelief works. When we call upon the Lord, he hides his face, and covers his throne with a dark cloud. He does not give us that testimony which our soul is longing to receive; he denies those love-smiles and love-visits

which our souls are panting for. Unbelief immediately works; and we think it is of no use any more to wait at his footstool, or call upon his name. But after a time, faith begins to lift up its head, and then there is a going out of soul to the Lord, a pleading with him, a wrestling at his blessed footstool, a calling upon his holy name, a determination like one of old, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26).

2. But waiting also implies **humility**. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us" (Ps. 123:2). There is humility in the waiting posture of a servant. And thus, true spiritual waiting upon the Lord is not a pressing forward, like a bold presumptuous claimant; is not an entering with sacrilegious haste into God's sanctuary, nor intruding ourselves at his banquet an unbidden guest; but it implies a knocking at the door, a lying at his feet, a coming to his footstool. It is therefore ever accompanied with this feeling in the heart, that we are to be recipients of mercy; that we have no claim—nothing but beggary, poverty, and rags; and that what the Lord gives, he gives freely to his people as weak and worthless.

3. But "waiting" implies, besides, **continuance** and **perseverance**. It is not a mere calling upon the Lord to help, and then immediately leaving off; looking to him for a moment, and then forgetting him utterly; dividing the heart between God and the creature; expecting help one day from God, another day from man. The very word "wait" implies perseverance and fixed determination in the soul, that to him only will we look. The Lord by his mysterious dealings cuts us off from resting upon an arm of flesh. He will not suffer us to lean upon any friend, however near or dear; he will not let us look to any one but himself, for he is a jealous God; and therefore he keeps cutting off link after link, tie after tie, bond after bond; that not having any human comfort, we may seek consolation only in him.

Perseverance implies more or less of a constant waiting upon the Lord. This will therefore go on day after day, week after week, month after month: year after year, the soul will still be waiting upon the Lord. And what for? To receive out of his fulness those communications of grace, mercy, pardon, and peace—those visitations of his Spirit, those refreshments from his presence, those revivings of faith, hope, and love, those manifestations of his favour, the enjoyment of which the soul is looking for.

What a sweet instance we have of this humble spirit in the Syrophenician woman who craved but a few of the crumbs that fell from the children's table! (Mark 7:28) Self-abasement is a sure fruit of the Spirit's teaching in the soul.

Now to such the promise is given: "They that wait upon the Lord **shall renew their strength.**" The "youths" and "young men" never wait upon the Lord. Their proud hearts never were humbled to lie at the footstool of mercy; they were wise in their own conceit, and strong in their own strength; they wanted no divine testimonies, no love-smiles; these in their eyes were nothing but enthusiasm, bigotry, and a wild spirit. Therefore they went on in their own strength, and fell. But the Lord's people, being faint and weary in themselves, and little and lowly in their own eyes, wait upon the Lord; and these, the Lord says, "shall renew their strength;" that is, strength shall be given to them from time to time.

The very expression, "**renew their strength,**" shews there are times and seasons when their strength fails. We cannot walk in the light of past testimonies; we cannot fight fresh battles with old strength; we cannot live this week upon last week's food. No; past deliverances will not do for present trials; past consolations will not help us through present struggles; the Lord therefore empties us from time to time of our nature's strength, and then renews our spiritual. How sweet and precious it is to have our strength renewed; to have fresh grace brought into the heart: to feel the mysterious sensations of renovated life: to feel the everlasting arms supporting the soul, fighting our battles for us,

subduing our enemies, overcoming our lusts, breaking our snares, and delivering us out of our temptations! How very rough and rugged the path may be to get the blessing! But how much sweeter the blessing is when it has come through that path! How very painful and mysterious it is to flesh and blood to have no strength! But how much sweeter it is when divine strength comes into the heart! For divine strength is of another nature from creature strength. It will not mix with it; it is pure and holy, and therefore will not blend with that which is impure and unholy. But those that "wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength." So that, in new battles they shall have new strength to fight; in fresh temptations, fresh power to overcome them; in present exercises, present grace to grapple with them.

VI.—But the text adds, "**They shall mount up with wings as eagles.**" What a contrast! Where have we seen them? Perplexed, distressed, exercised, mourning, and crying. We have seen them so faint and exhausted, that they had no strength to move a step further. We have seen them bowed down with temptations, burdens, trials, perplexities, and difficulties; yet waiting upon the Lord; because they had no other help to go to, no other harbour to anchor in, no other refuge to flee unto. Now—what a contrast! "They shall mount up with wings as eagles"—the strongest, the swiftest, and the highest soaring bird; as though the Lord would take the strongest natural comparison to shew how their souls mount up.

But **how** do they mount up? In **faith**. It is said of the eagle, that he mounts up towards the sun; and that of all birds, he is the only one which can gaze upon the sun with unshrinking eye. So with faith in the soul. The Lord's people alone can look by faith upon the "Sun of righteousness," gaze upon a glorious Immanuel at the right hand of the Father, and see a precious Jesus ever interceding for them, and drawing them near to his bosom. And when this blessed Jesus communicates a measure of his love and blood to their consciences, and raises up and draws forth faith in his name, then the soul begins to mount up with these wings like eagles, soaring higher and higher, till it comes into the presence

of God; mounting up in higher and higher circles of spiritual flight, till it penetrates into the very sanctuary of Jehovah.

Now, has not your soul thus soared sometimes as upon eagle's wings? Have there not been those communications of divine life and light, those mountings of faith, those anchorings of hope, those goings forth of love, whereby your soul was enabled to mount up and find delight in Jesus, and felt his name, love, and blood precious? Have you not mounted up too, not only in the exercise of living faith and hope, but also of heavenly affection? Sometimes we are so fastened down to this earth, this vale of tears, this waste howling wilderness: so chained down to it, that we are like a bird with a broken wing, and cannot mount. We are swallowed up in the world, forgetting God and godliness. But are there not times and seasons when the soul is delivered from these chains and fetters—when earthly cares drop off from the mind—when our wings are new moulted, and fresh pinions as it were given—when the world and its temptations, sin and its snares are left behind, and there is a sweet mounting up in the feelings of heavenly affection? This is to "mount up with wings as eagles;" and the soaring soul never ceases to mount till it comes into the very presence of the Three-One God of Israel.

How different the religion of a living soul is from the religion of a dead professor! The religion of a dead professor begins in self, and ends in self—begins in his own wisdom, and ends in his own folly—begins in his own strength, and ends in his own weakness—begins in his own righteousness, and ends in his own damnation. There is in him never any going out of soul after God, no secret dealings with the Lord, no actings of faith upon the divine perfections. But the child of God, though he is often faint, weary, and exhausted with many difficulties, burdens, and sorrows; yet when the Lord does shew himself, and renews his strength, he soars aloft, and never ceases to mount up on the wings of faith and love till he penetrates into the very sanctuary of the Most High. A living soul can never be satisfied except in living union and communion with the Lord of life and glory. Everything short

of that leaves it empty. All the things of time and sense leave a child of God unsatisfied.

Nothing but vital union and communion with the Lord of life, to feel his presence, taste his love, enjoy his favour, see his glory—nothing but this will ever satisfy the wants of ransomed and regenerated souls. This the Lord indulges his people with. **"They shall renew their strength."** They shall not be always lying groaning on the ground—not always swooning away through the wounds made by sin—not always chained down by the fetters of the world—not always hunted in their souls like a partridge upon the mountains. There shall be a renewal of their strength; and in their renewal, "they shall mount up with wings as eagles."

2. **"They shall run, and not be weary."** (Isa. 40:31.) What is this running? you say. There are three things spoken of in the **text—flying, running and walking;** and each of these things is spoken of as found in God's family. Sometimes they **fly**, when they mount up as upon the wings of eagles; sometimes they **run;** and sometimes they **walk.**

But what is it to **run?** David shall explain it. He says, "I will **run** the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32). Paul shall add his testimony; he says, "Let us **run** with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

**To run** is to move with cheerfulness and activity in the ways of God; not always crippled by a paralytic limb—not always sinking under the burden of a depraved nature—not always swooning away under wounds, weights, and famine. Sometimes the Lord brings a measure of light, life, and love into the soul. There is then a holy activity, a cheerful obedience, a desire to glorify God, a seeking to know his will and do it.

This is not like the running of the "youths" and "young men"—in their own strength. They set out in nature's strength, and drop off in nature's weakness. But the Lord's people, "they that wait upon the Lord," renew their strength—"they run, and are not weary."

For the Lord's power rests on them. They are like Elijah, who girded up his loins, and ran before king Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel (1 Kin. 18:46). There was a divine power communicated to the prophet, so that, though the king rode in his chariot, Elijah outran him. So the Lord's people sometimes have strength given them, whereby they can make sacrifices for the Lord, and do his will with a cheerful heart. And in this running they shall not be weary; so long as the Lord communicates strength and supplies power, they are not weary in well-doing.

3. But there is another word **added**—"**They shall walk, and not faint.**" Now walking is next to running, as running is next to flying. Walking implies a steady, progressive pace. It is not the same as the ardent mounting of the soul upwards, nor the cheerful activity of the soul running forward; but it is a calm, steady progression. The Lord sometimes gives his people a heavenly soaring, sometimes an active running, and sometimes a steady walking. All indeed are equally good: whether they fly, run, or walk, it is all to God's glory, and their own profit. When they fly, they would not run; when they run, they would not walk. They are contented with what they find; for they can only move as he works in them "to will and to do of his own good pleasure."

This walking, then, is a steady progressing in the things of God; a sober persuasion of the truth as it is in Jesus; a calm movement in the ways of the Lord; a living in peace with God, and in peace with his people; a walking in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless; a going onward in that humility, integrity, godly fear, tenderness of conscience—that wariness, circumspectness, and uprightness of heart which become the true believer. Not precipitately running—"he that believeth shall not make haste." Nor is it a lagging behind; but a walking soberly and circumspectly in the things of God and truth. This was the happy state of the primitive church, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

But whilst they are in this vale of tears, we find the Lord's people in various states and cases. Many of their varied states and cases are traced out in that experimental part of God's word, which is connected with the text. For instance, some are saying, "**My judgment is passed over from my God;**" I cannot see where the Lord is leading me; all is perplexing, dark and distressing. Others are **faint, exhausted, and swooning away** through their burdens, difficulties, and perplexities. They cannot move a step further; but still they are in the Lord's path. Others of the Lord's people seem to have "no might:" they cannot even read the Word of God at times; they cannot seek the Lord's face, or call upon the Lord's name; they cannot believe, nor hope, nor love; yet they are in the Lord's ways, and are the Lord's people. Others may be **waiting upon the Lord**, looking to him, pleading with him, wrestling with him, putting their mouth in the dust, and pouring out their hearts before him; yet still in the way of the Lord, and where he would have them to be. Others may be **renewing their strength**; the Lord is giving them power, and their bow abides in strength; they are renewed with grace in their inner man that they may fight the battles of the Lord. These are where he would have them to be. Others perhaps are **mounting up with wings as eagles**; they are full of soaring desires, ravished with sweet and precious manifestations of love and blood. These are still where the Lord would have them to be. Others are **running in the way of the Lord's commandments**; moving actively in the path of cheerful obedience; the whole bent of their will is to glorify God; his will is their will, and they desire to be actively engaged in all that pleases him. Others perhaps are **walking**; not mounting with holy affections; not running cheerfully and eagerly; but walking with God in simple obedience to his word, with a tender conscience, desiring to know his will, and do it. This is still the Lord's teaching; they are still in the Lord's way. How different are all and each of these states from being a "youth" or "young man"—an unburdened, un-humbled, unexercised, unplagued professor!

Then, if we be the Lord's people, whatever be our state and case, it will end well—whether having "no might," or "renewing our

strength"—whether running or walking, it will all end well. All the Lord's people have these varied dealings through the work of the Spirit upon their hearts; for they shall stand in their lot at the end of the days, and see the Lord face to face in glory!

But woe be to us, if we are "youths" and "young men." You may appear very comely; your religion may be dressed out in the newest and neatest garb; you may seem to be going on well in your own esteem and that of others. But, depend upon it, if this comeliness, zeal, and activity come from the flesh, it will end in your utter downfall. You will find a day will come, when you will not be able to proceed, and the end will be ruin and destruction.

Now, this does not cut down activity in the Lord's way. It does not cut down lively frames, panting hearts, zealous motives, a single eye to God's glory. God forbid. But it points out the right way.

We must faint first, and have "no might," and be brought to our wit's ends, and then have the Lord's blessings communicated in the Lord's way. All that comes from nature must die. Nature's strength, wisdom, pride, and power must all vanish away, that the glory of the Lamb may endure for ever.

Therefore, in this way the Lord cuts down with the sword of the Spirit all that is of nature, and builds up all that is of grace. Nay more, he does not put down nature's activity, that the soul may be a sluggard; nor does he put down nature's strength, that the soul may be inactive. On the contrary, he extinguishes the taper, that the soul may enjoy the blazing light of the sun. He exhausts all nature's strength, that he may build up his own strength upon its ruins. He puts down the impostor, and raises up the saint. He puts down hypocrisy, and exalts his own truth. He takes the crown off nature's head, and places it upon his Son's. He thus secures to himself all the glory, and to his people all the good.

Thus, while on the one hand, he tarnishes the pride of nature's glory, he secures that his will shall be done on earth as in

heaven, and gets to himself a revenue of eternal praise. So that, whilst viewed with a spiritual eye, we see how it honours God, we see also how suitable it is to man. And in our right mind, we would rather have burdens, exercises, and temptations, to have God with us, and his glory wrought out through them—rather run in the Lord's strength, than be left to our own strength and righteousness.

Thus, we see the Lord will eventually make it manifest that all is done for the good of the church; and all will end to his glory, who, as Father, Son, and eternal Spirit, is worthy of all honour, praise, and adoration, now and evermore.

## The Power of the Gospel

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day  
Afternoon, October 29, 1854

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Election! what a word is that! How distastefully for the most part it falls upon the ears of men! Why is this, but because it so exalts the sovereignty of God, and so loudly declares the fallen, helpless condition of man? But the Apostle speaks the word out plainly enough. He did not keep this doctrine according to godliness back. In the verse preceding our text we meet with these words: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." It is evident from these words that the Apostle knew that those to whom he was writing were amongst the elect of God. But how came he by this knowledge? When he was caught up into the third heaven, did the angel bring to him the golden book, and, turning over the leaves, did he show him in the Lamb's Book of Life the names of those Thessalonians to whom he wrote this epistle? No; nor did he wish to see it; his soul was too much taken up with viewing the beauties of the Lamb to want to glance into the Book of Life to see whose names were inscribed therein. He did not know it from that source. He tells us from what source he did know it. He knew it, first, from seeing their work of faith, their labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and his Father; and, secondly, because his "gospel came not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." It is in the same way, my friends, that we must come to know our election. It is not by hearing the doctrines in the mere letter, nor by chattering about them with fluent tongue; but by having those blessed communications of the Spirit of God whereby "the gospel comes not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" unto us. In opening up this subject, I shall, from the words before

us, attempt, with God's blessing, to show three things. I.—

*First*, what is the meaning of the words "*our gospel*." II.—

*Secondly*, what it is for the gospel "*to come in word only*."

III.—*Thirdly*, what it is for the gospel "*to come not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*." And if the gospel has so come into your heart, you may thus know your election of God.

I.—"*Our gospel*." By the word "*our*" the Apostle seems to embrace not only his fellow apostles, all of whom preached the same gospel, but all his fellow believers. In those days there were not two gospels. The apostles who were sent forth all preached the same gospel. But the word "*our*" includes not only his fellow apostles, preachers and teachers of God's word, but the converts to whom he preached, and, amongst them, these believing Thessalonians; for that gospel became his and theirs when it was received into their hearts by the application of the Holy Spirit. But what does the word "*gospel*" signify? "Gospel" is a good old Anglo-Saxon word of that pure Anglo-Saxon which forms the bulk of our noble language, and means, literally, "good news," good tidings. But if it be good news, it must be good news of something and to somebody. There must be some good tidings brought, and there must be some person to whom it is communicated. This was the good news or glad tidings which the angel of the Lord brought to the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night, when he said unto them, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10, 11.) And with this was joined the heavenly anthem, when the angelic choir sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14.) In order, then, that the gospel should be glad tidings, there must be a message from God to man—God being the sender and man the hearer; God the giver and man the happy receiver. But this gospel can only be worthy of the name

when it proclaims grace, mercy, pardon, deliverance, and salvation, as free gifts of God's unmerited favour. Otherwise, it would not be a gospel adapted to our wants, to us poor sinners, to us law breakers, to us criminals, to us transgressors, to us arraigned at the bar of justice, to us condemned to die by the unswerving demands of God's holiness. Our gospel will only then be a pure gospel, it will then breathe the very atmosphere of heaven, it will then flow in streams of living water as flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. Then it is not only pure of any taint of human merit and creature attainments, but flows clear as crystal, as John saw in vision in the book of Revelation.

It is therefore not only pure but clear, brightly and beautifully transparent. Not being muddied with any admixture of the creature, the image of God is to be seen in it as it flows onward in streams of crystal transparency. Every perfection of Deity is revealed and reflected by the crystal streams of the gospel.

Again; it must be *free*. To suit our case, it must flow without let or hindrance out of the bosom of God into the hearts of his children, so that it may not be obstructed in its course, but come as freely and fully into their heart as Ezekiel in vision saw the river flow from out of the temple into the desert, and thence into the Dead Sea, healing its salt waters.

This gospel, then, thus pure, clear, and free, is glad tidings as proclaiming pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ, and justification by his obedience to God's holy law. It therefore magnifies the law and makes it honourable; brings glory to God and salvation to the soul. It is a pure revelation of sovereign mercy, love, and grace, whereby each Person in the divine Trinity is exalted and magnified. Now nothing short of this, nothing less than this is *our* gospel, the gospel preached by the apostles and received by the New Testament believers.

If you love a pure, a clear, a free gospel, the gospel of the grace of God, you love it because it is so fully suitable to your wants, so thoroughly adapted to your fallen state, because it not only

speaks of pardon, but *brings* pardon; not only proclaims mercy, but *brings* mercy; not only points out a way of salvation, but *brings* salvation with its soft silvery notes to your heart as a sinner. It thus becomes the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.

i. But this gospel comes to some "*in word only.*" It never reaches their conscience, touches their heart, or has any saving effect upon their souls. It is in itself a good gospel, a pure, a clear, a free gospel; but as regards many of those to whose outward ears it comes, it produces no effect, it bears no fruit. The seed may be good in itself, excellent of its kind, but if cast upon the pavement there it may lie till trodden under foot of man, or picked up by the birds of the air. There is no fault in the gospel, as there is no fault in the seed which is cast abroad by the hands of the sower. The whole difference is in the ground upon which the seed falls. How many there are, indeed, we may say, by far the greater part who sit under the sound of the gospel, to whom it comes in word only.

But you may say, "What a singular thing it is that they should come Lord's day after Lord's day on purpose to hear the gospel, and yet not be saved by it, not be blessed by it, not be wrought upon by it, have no interest in it, but live, die, and be damned under the sound of it." This is indeed a mystery; but it always was so. And we may perhaps explain it thus. There is something in the gospel which seems to commend itself to the natural understanding, a something pleasing in it to the natural minds of some men. For there are in it sparkles of divine glory which seem to shine brightly where prejudice is in some measure removed. But apart from this, various motives work in men's minds. Some, from hearing the gospel often preached, have got a notional acquaintance with it, which leads them boldly to contend for it and it only. Yet, as a revelation of God to their soul, as a manifestation of pardon and peace to their heart, as a life-giving word to save them from eternal misery, they know it not, believe it not, feel it not, and realise it not. Thus the greater number of the hearers of the gospel live and die in their sins, just as much as though they had never heard the way of salvation declared, or

the work of God on the soul experimentally traced out. It is to be feared there are many more hearers than we think to whom the gospel thus comes in word only. It may touch their natural feelings; it may gratify their love of hearing; it may commend itself to their understanding; it may seem to produce some kind of fruit; but with all this it produces no real spiritual effect, no saving efficacy, and with the gospel sounding in their ears they still live and die in their sin. Now this is no fault of the preacher of the gospel nor of the gospel which he preaches. It is in the hearers who are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. If God do not bestow upon them his supernatural grace nor favour them with his blessed Spirit, they may hear the gospel all their days, and yet live and die as devoid of faith in the Lord Jesus, as though they had never heard even of his name.

II.—But we pass on to show what it is for the gospel to come *"not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."* My friends, power belongeth not to man. It is a very solemn assertion but it is a very true one that no man can quicken his own soul. It is a very solemn, we might almost say, a tremendous truth, that the gospel only comes in power to those whom God has chosen unto eternal life, and that a man cannot, by any exertion of his own will or power, quicken his own soul into spiritual life, or communicate to it faith, hope, love, repentance, or any saving grace of the Spirit. For so thoroughly dead is he in sin, and such a poor crawling wretch, and cleaving to his mother earth through the fall, that he cannot raise himself up out of this state to newness of life. But O! in spite of all this, the Lord has a people who are dear to him, and to whom he makes himself dear. These are the elect of God; and where the Lord has a vessel of mercy whom he has thus chosen to eternal life, in due time, and in his own time and way, the gospel will be made to come with power to his heart and conscience.

i. But what is meant by the word *"power?"* It is a term much used in the New Testament. "The kingdom of God," it is declared, "is not in word but in power." What then is power? It is a divine operation; God himself puts forth in the soul. It cannot be

described by words, nor can language explain it. It must be felt to be known and must be realised in a man's own soul before he can have any conception of it. But "Thy people shall be willing," we read, "in the day of thy power;" and when the gospel does come to the soul by the application of the blessed Spirit, and a divine power accompanies it, it is made known by the effects which follow. For instance: here is a poor wretch condemned by the Law; he may perhaps see there is salvation in Christ, and he knows there is salvation in no other. O how he begs, and prays, and petitions God to have mercy on him! Continually is he endeavouring to seek God and ask him to have mercy upon his soul; but he cannot get peace to his conscience; he is still in trouble and distress; bowed down with bondage, guilt, and fear. Now where the Lord is pleased to apply some portion of his blessed word to his soul, or to speak home some particular promise, the power that accompanies this, raises up a special faith whereby that portion of God's holy word which speaks of Christ, or that promise is laid hold of. Here then is power communicated with the gospel whereby he believes in the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures; he could not believe it before. No; he might as well attempt to create a world; but no sooner does he believe what the Holy Ghost now applies by a living faith, than a divine power comes into his soul which takes away his doubts and fears, dispels guilt from his conscience, banishes the mists and fogs that for months have hung over his soul, reveals in him a precious Jesus, makes the promises of God to glitter before his eyes like dew drops in autumn, and gives him an unspeakable nearness to God, such as he never knew till the gospel came with power, and faith was raised up in his soul. This is power. Power then does not consist in noise and bluster, fantastic flights of enthusiastic excitement or any such wild delusions. How was it with the prophet Elijah when the word of the Lord came to him, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire." (1 Kings 19:11, 12.) In

none of these was the Lord; but "after the fire a still small voice." In this still small voice God was, for when the prophet heard the still small voice "he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave," that he might listen to the voice of God. We should have thought there was a power in the earthquake, in the wind, and in the fire; but God was not in them. In all these loud and visible demonstrations the voice of God was not; in them was no power. But when the still small voice began to speak, it came with that divine savour and unction, and was so evidently the voice of God himself, that it touched the prophet's soul, melted his spirit, and faith was raised up to receive with simplicity what God with authority spake.

Now, tell me, has the gospel ever come to you in power? If it has, it has done something for you. Has it ever, then, dispelled your many doubts and fears; has it ever made Jesus precious to your soul; ever brought with it a promise to your heart; ever given you access to the bosom of God; ever communicated that spirit of liberty and love whereby you were enabled to prevail with God, and get a blessing out of his hands and heart? It is useless to talk of power when nothing is done. A man says to an engineer, "I want you to construct me an engine of a hundred horse power." Now, if the engineer make the engine, and upon trial it is found only of ninety horse power, and the work requires a hundred horse power, the engine is so far useless. Now what would his employer say to him but, "What a mistake you have made. I ordered an engine of a hundred horse power; and this is only ninety. It will not do the work I want. Take it away, and get about your business." So in grace. We want a power that can move certain weights; the weight of sin, for instance, off a guilty conscience, fears of death and hell; the strength of unbelief, the workings of carnal enmity, and many trying assaults and temptations of Satan. We have a large amount of work to be done; many hundred-weights to be moved—weights, that if not moved, would sink the soul into endless despair. O! what numerous and heavy weights have we to be lifted off; what huge stones to be rolled away from the sepulchre. The world has to be overcome; lusts and passions to be crucified; the old man of sin

to be mortified; Satan to be defeated and put to flight. But besides all these enemies to be overcome, there is the soul to be saved, heaven to be brought near, hell put out of sight, the law to be forever silenced, death to be robbed of its sting and the grave of its victory, and an eternal crown of glory to be won. O! what a mighty work has to be done in us and for us—a work which no man ever has done or can do for himself. Now if the gospel does not do all this for us, we may say of it what the contractor would say to the engineer, "It will not do for me; it will not perform my work, take it away; bring me something that will do my work, and I will thank you; but do not deceive me in this weighty and important matter; but bring me an engine that will do my work, or keep it to yourself." This is what we may say to a muddled gospel, a Galatian gospel, which is not the gospel, but a muddy medley of law and gospel. Such a half-and-half gospel will not do your work; will not save or bless your soul; therefore, send it about its business. Do not pause one moment, but say to it, "Get away from me; you will not do my work. I will not take you into my heart; you shall not have a footing in my conscience; I will have nothing to do with you, and you shall have nothing to do with me. My sins are too black and grievous, my backslidings are so great, my lusts and passions so powerful, the world so ensnaring, business so captivating, the devil so tempting that I am sometimes almost at my wits' end. Now, as you cannot help me out of these difficulties nor do for me the work which I want to be done, get about your business; it is of no use my standing here and talking any more to you." This is what I advise you to say to all or any muddled mixture of law and gospel which may present itself for your acceptance. Say to it, "I have a conscience to be healed, the law to be satisfied, Moses to be silenced, the thunders of Sinai to be hushed; besides all which, there is a poor soul of mine that wants to be saved with an everlasting salvation; and, as nothing but the gospel can do this for me, it has a place in my heart and conscience, and in it I hope to live and die."

This may explain the reasons why the Lord makes so many of his people to sink so low in their souls, and why Moses peals such terrible thunder-storms in their ears. This may serve to explain

why their sins press them down like so many tons of lead; why they are frequently assailed with such powerful temptations; why they are so often cast into hot furnaces of affliction, and well-nigh drowned in floods of sorrow. All these painful lessons are to teach them that God only of his infinite mercy and grace can save or deliver them; and that the only way whereby he does it is by his precious gospel being made the power of God unto their salvation. When, then, this gospel comes with power to their soul, "Ah!" they cry, "now I have got it." "This is the very thing for me." "Right at last; right at last." "This is the thing I wanted." A pure, a clear, a free, a precious, an everlasting gospel; unfolding the riches of God's mercy, magnifying his grace, satisfying his law, revealing his pardoning love, and bringing a precious Christ with it into the soul. O, may we not say, as Hart speaks on a similar subject?

"Be this religion mine."

To know, feel, and experience this, is for the gospel "to come not in word only, but also in power." You may depend upon it, that those who have ever felt this power in the gospel, will never part with nor turn aside from such a glorious gospel. Nay, it will grow upon them increasingly in love and affection; and the more they feel its power, the more will they love and cleave to it. I cannot, therefore, understand the ease of those persons who, after professing the gospel of free grace for many years, in their declining days turn aside from it to embrace a muddy mixture of law and gospel. Nor, indeed, can I understand how anyone, whether, old or young, who has ever felt the power of the gospel even in a small measure, can forsake it for Arminianism and free will. We may ask with the prophet "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" (Jer. 18:14.) I can understand how one may get entangled with a worldly spirit from too much occupation in business; and how another may be overcome by the temptations of Satan, so as to call everything in question. I can understand, also, how a third may be overcome by the power of sin; but I cannot understand

how a man can turn his back upon the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ after he has ever felt its precious power. It seems to me easier for him to turn his back upon all religion, than leave a free grace gospel for a mixture which, in fact, is neither law nor gospel. I find the gospel more and more precious. The more I see of myself as a poor miserable sinner, the more I see, or want to see, of the beauty and to experience the power of a free grace gospel. It was, doubtless, some feeling of this kind which led the Apostle Paul to denounce such thundering sentences against the Galatian churches, for turning aside from the gospel which he had preached unto them, to embrace what he calls another gospel, but which was not the gospel of Christ.

III .—But the gospel came to them "not only in power, *but in the Holy Ghost.*" This is the third point to which I was to call your attention. The Holy Ghost is the third Person in the Trinity, and it is his peculiar province and divine office to apply the Scriptures to the soul. We see with what power he clothed the apostles when he came down upon them, and what mighty effects he wrought upon the souls of the people under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Ghost will honour nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ. He never preaches anything to the soul but Christ's gospel; nor is he ever made manifest but in and through this everlasting gospel. Men may talk about the Holy Spirit; they may contend for him and for his operations; but that holy and divine Teacher and Comforter never travels out of Christ's gospel; and all which he reveals, manifests, and applies is from and through the gospel. It either flows out of the gospel or is connected with the gospel. His covenant office is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to the soul; not the things of Moses, nor the things of self, but the things of Jesus Christ. When, then, the Scripture comes in power, it comes also in the Holy Ghost; that is in the light, life, liberty, and love of the Holy Ghost. By these divine operations through the Scriptures, he makes a man a spiritual man; communicates his gifts and graces to his soul; and raises up that "new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." He comes as a Spirit of grace and supplication; a Spirit of wisdom and understanding;

a Spirit of the fear of the Lord; a Spirit of faith in Christ Jesus; a Spirit of hope in his mercy; and a Spirit of love towards his name. He comes as a Spirit of repentance and godly sorrow for sin, making the conscience tender and the heart contrite; and meekens and humbles the soul, conforming it to the suffering image of Christ. He comes as a comforter in the Scriptures to bind up broken hearts and wipe tears from the eye; he comes as a Spirit of truth to lead him into all truth, and instruct him in the blessed realities connected with it.

But the Holy Ghost never comes into any poor sinner's soul except through the medium of the gospel of the grace of God. Have you ever considered that point? You are praying perhaps that the Holy Spirit would teach you and be in you a Spirit of revelation, a remembrancer, a comforter, instructor, and teacher. You pray for his gifts and graces; but have you ever viewed these graces in connection with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Now, if you want the Holy Spirit to come into your soul, you must keep firm hold of the gospel, you must not run away from it to the law or to self, but keep firm, fast hold of it so far as you have felt its power and have faith in it. If you are **tired [tried?]**, still hold the gospel; if tempted, still hold the gospel; if Satan gets you into his sieve, still hold the gospel; if in the furnace of affliction, still hold the gospel. If you are called upon to wade through floods of sorrow, still hold fast the gospel. If Satan tell you you have no part or lot in the matter, still hold fast to the gospel. Let not Satan, if ever you have felt the power and preciousness of the gospel, baffle you out of it, or drive you from it, but hold to the gospel for it is your life. If you are a poor, guilty, conscience-stricken backslider, hold the gospel, for in that alone is pardon and healing contained and revealed. If you are tempted with manifold and grievous temptations, still hold the gospel, for through the gospel alone can come any real or lasting deliverance; and it is through the gospel that you may hope the Holy Ghost will speak a delivering word to your soul. If you are burdened with many doubts and fears of your interest in Christ because you cannot believe, or be what you would, still do hold on firm and fast to it, because it is only by the gospel that these

fears can be removed, and a word of peace be spoken to your conscience. If you are wading through deep afflictions, and need a word of consolation, still hold by the gospel; for it is through it that all real comfort is imparted. And may I not ask you whether this is not commended to your conscience as sound doctrine and good experience? If not, tell me what you can substitute for the gospel? What balm is there to be found any where else for bleeding wounds? What pardon for guilty sinners? What peace for rebels? What terms of composition for enemies, but in the gospel of the grace of God? Where else will you find any thing to suit your case if you are a poor, tempted, tried sinner? Will you go to the law which can only curse and condemn you? Will you go to yourself? What is self? It is a heap of ruins. What then can that do for you? And not only a heap of ruins, but all mouldering ruins—ruins of which every brick has in it the rot and all its mortar fallen into dust. So utterly ruined is self that with all your contrivances to get something out of it, it is like making a rope out of sand, or like drawing up water with a bucket with the bottom knocked out. Where then will you go? After all you must come to the gospel if your soul is to be saved and blessed, and if you are to experience the consolations of the Holy Ghost, who alone can bless and comfort you; for that blessed Spirit only comes by and through the gospel into the heart. I want, with God's blessing, to impress this vital truth upon your mind, that you may not be looking away from the gospel; and as Berridge says, "squint and peep another away," but that you may keep your eyes firmly fixed upon the gospel; for if you believe it, it can and will save your soul. Does not the apostle say that it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth? So, then there is neither power or salvation in anything else. Never therefore, expect power, salvation, or comfort but by and through the Holy Ghost preaching the gospel into your heart.

iii. *"And in much assurance."* The word *"assurance,"* here, does not imply that they were necessarily in the enjoyment of an assurance of their personal and individual interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, though I do believe myself that faith always has assurance in it in proportion to its strength. Faith contains

assurance in it, as the flower contains the fruit; and yet, if faith be weak, it does not mount up to the full strength of assurance. But what is assurance? It is really only a large measure of faith, differing from faith not in quality but quantity; not in nature but in degree. Assurance, then, is only faith grown to man's estate, or faith raised up so as to act in a powerful way. It is not, therefore, a gift of the Holy Spirit distinct from faith, but faith drawn out, as it were, and shone upon by the blessed Spirit. It therefore rises and falls, ebbs and flows with faith and the actings of faith. But the "*assurance*" here spoken of is not so much an assurance of interest, as an assurance that the gospel was the gospel of the grace of God. It was therefore, not so much their assurance of their personal interest in the electing love of God, as an assurance that the gospel which Paul preached, and which had come to their souls in power, was the gospel of the grace of God.

Now, have you not sometimes felt this firm and sweet assurance when you could not perhaps feel the certainty of your own salvation? There was something in the gospel as preached in your ears which came with that demonstration and power, that savour and sweetness to your soul, as fully convinced you it was the gospel; and as such, was worthy of all acceptance. Under these feelings you could scarcely forbear, crying out; "This is the gospel; I can live and die by this gospel; I am sure, and more than sure, that this is the gospel. I see a beauty in it; I feel a power in it. I have inward and solemn delight in it; it drops with that savour and sweetness into my soul; it is so commended to my conscience; it so shines into my understanding, that I am sure it is the very gospel of the grace of God; and what I can and do embrace as suitable to all my wants, and glorifying to God." Now, this assurance may not be an assurance of your interest in the gospel, but still it is such an assurance that the gospel preached in your ears is the gospel of the grace of God, that you embrace it with all the faith that is in your heart. The law has no assurance of this kind, except the assurance that all are cursed who live and die under it. Nor has a muddled mixture of law and gospel this assurance. It may terrify and alarm the conscience, as Wesleyans talk of being shaken over hell, and may produce

powerful convictions, and hold the mind in bondage and terror but it does not shine with that beautiful grandeur; it does not warm the soul by its blessed beams nor come with that peculiar demonstration and power which attends the gospel. *That* sometimes carries with it such a blessedness, that it seems so to lift the soul out of itself as to take and carry it gently into the bosom of God. *That* comes with such balmy sweetness into the conscience, and drops with such life and light into the poor benighted spirit, that it dissolves into love every tender affection of the heart. There is something in the gospel which never can be described; it carries with it its own evidence, and shines in the brightness of its own testimony. Wherever this is felt, the gospel has come, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

It is this divine power and heavenly assurance that makes God's people so love the gospel. Men wonder sometimes, and say to one another, "How is it that these people will walk so many miles to Stamford, or Oakham, or elsewhere, year after year, in all weathers, to hear preaching? We wonder why they cannot stay at home, and attend their parish church, or the chapel in the village: but instead of remaining quietly at home, they will trample through mud and mire as if they were mad." Ah! these people do not know the sweetness that there is in the gospel when preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The people of God feel that there is nothing but this which can move the loads of sin under which they groan, take guilt off their conscience, lift up their affections to God, bring sweet and blessed feelings into their soul, and give them an assurance of their salvation. It is this secret power attending the gospel which makes it fall like dew drops of honey from heaven. And wherever this is felt, it gives such a love to the gospel, that a man cannot help going to hear it: nay, he will time after time walk many miles merely with the hope of feeling one soft touch of this heavenly power. He will come Lord's day after Lord's day, for month after month merely to get a honey drop from the mouth of God through the gospel; and if it be given him, it well repays him for all his toils, his sore limbs, weary feet, and aching head. "O!"

says one of these despised ones, "to get a testimony of my interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his dying love and precious blood is well worth going many weary miles for." And if he be sometimes overborne with fatigue through the week's work, and feel almost disposed to stay at home, yet says he, "I must go again, for if the Lord should be pleased this day to give me a little taste of the gospel, and of my interest in it, I shall not mind how tired I am at night." This, then, is the secret why the Lord's people travel so far to hear the gospel; and this will explain why they love the preachers of the gospel, the books that savour of the gospel, the people that know the gospel, and feel sweet union with those who have experienced the power of the gospel. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant," which is the gospel; and because this gospel has come to them "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," they love it, delight in it, and cleave unto it. Now, if you can find anything of this in your soul, you are one of the elect of God. "Knowing, brethren beloved," says the Apostle, "your election of God." This was to him a proof of their election of God, that the gospel had come to them "not in word only, but also in power; and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

If, then, the gospel has come with these three things into your soul, you are the elect of God. God has chosen you in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, he gave you to his dear Son, that he might redeem you from death and hell. You are saved in him with an everlasting salvation. Walk then worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called. Bless and praise the God of all grace for his glorious gospel, and praise that divine power with which his gospel has come into your soul.

## Prayer, and Its Answer

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 26, 1846

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Jeremiah 33:3

These words were spoken by the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah under peculiar circumstances. We read in the first verse of this chapter, "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, *while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison.*" Jeremiah, at this time, then was a close prisoner. But what brought him into prison? The *real* cause of his imprisonment was his *faithfulness*; as we find in the preceding chapter. "Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the King of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it." (32:2, 3.) Jeremiah's faithfulness, in the exercise of his prophetic office, was then the real, substantial cause of his imprisonment. But it would not do to assign *this* as the real cause; they must needs therefore lay hold of a *pretext*; and this pretext was, that Jeremiah was a traitor to Judah and Jerusalem. For when the army of the King of Egypt came up to deliver Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah, going out of the city, was apprehended in the gate of Benjamin, and imprisoned as intending to desert to the Chaldeans. (Jeremiah 37:11-15.)

But what were *the circumstances of the city itself*? Jerusalem at this time was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar. For nearly a year had that mighty conqueror hemmed her in; the sword was made bare against her bosom; famine and pestilence were walking in her streets; and God was about to bring down upon her those judgments which he had so long denounced. It was a time of general mourning; a period of universal sorrow. Deeply was the

heart of the prophet bowed within him; not merely by his own personal calamities, of which he had so very large a share, but also by the dark cloud of destruction which he saw was about to burst forth upon the city of Zion.

It was, then, under this trying state, and amid these perplexing circumstances that the Lord spoke these words to Jeremiah: *"Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."*

Two things strike my mind as particularly worthy of notice in the text.

I .—*The invitation—"Call unto me."*

II .—*The promise connected with the invitation—"And I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."*

I.—It seems to me, that the condition of Judah and Jerusalem at this time is emblematical of the state of God's people before the Lord stretches forth his right arm to deliver them. If you read this chapter attentively, you will find it contains a whole cluster of the richest blessings for God's people. "Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth; and I will cause the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have transgressed against me." (verses 6-8.)

What, then, was the season, and what the opportunity, that the Lord took to give these blessed and unconditional promises? When Judah and Jerusalem were sunk to the very lowest point; when there was no hope, nor help; when Nebuchadnezzar was about to burn the city with fire, and to drag into a miserable captivity those of her children who should escape the sword. At that very gloomy time, at that very hopeless season, God revealed these promises, which he fulfilled in a measure when he

restored Judah from the Babylonish captivity; and which, I believe, he will one day more fully accomplish, when he sets his hand the second time to bring back his own for a time cast-off Israel.

Judah's sunken condition seems, then, emblematical of that of the Lord's people before there is any real deliverance. They have to sink down into similar spots of helplessness and hopelessness, out of which he, and he only can deliver them. And when all that the creature can do is thoroughly exhausted, when the right arm of man's strength is withered, then is the time that the Lord usually appears, and manifests himself as "the God of all grace." Jerusalem must be besieged, and Jeremiah imprisoned, before any promise can come to the one or the other.

But let us, with God's blessing, look a little more closely at the invitation before us; for it is applicable not merely to Jeremiah under his distressed circumstances, but to all the family of God under similar states spiritually. *"Call unto me."*

True prayer is the gift of God. It is one of those "good gifts," and those "perfect gifts," which "come down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) The Lord, therefore, says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." (Zech. 12:10.) And again, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) There is no real, no spiritual, no acceptable prayer to the Lord except that which is created by the operation of God the Spirit upon the heart of a believer. The invitation, therefore, is not addressed to men generally; nay more, it is not addressed to the people of God generally; but it is addressed to the people of God under peculiar circumstances. It belongs to them only so far as they are brought into those trying circumstances and perplexing states into which God is pleased to bring them that he may enable them to cry and sigh unto himself. The gracious

invitation, "Call unto me," is made to that prayer only which enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and brings down in God's own time and way the desired answer.

But it is necessary for several things to be wrought with divine power in the soul before we can spiritually act upon this invitation. The Lord says, "*Call unto me.*" Can I therefore at once call unto him? can I seek his face? can I pray unto him acceptably? I cannot, except he is first pleased himself to work certain things in my soul. What are these things?

1. The *first* is, a deep sense of my sinfulness, guilt, and vileness. There is no real prayer to the Lord except the soul is abased, humbled, and laid low. And what abases, humbles, and lays low? Reading about sin, hearing about sin, talking about sin? No: a spiritual sense of our guilt, our shame, our vileness, our pollution, our unworthiness, divinely wrought in the soul, abases, humbles, and lays low at the footstool of mercy. And I am bold to say, no prayer will rise up with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of hosts, except that which springs out of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, made so by the blessed Spirit of God, discovering to us what we are, and thus humbling us, laying us low in our own eyes, and making us to feel guilty and filthy in our own sight.

2. A sense of our ignorance is another gracious qualification before we can call upon the Lord. As long as we think we can teach ourselves, instruct our own minds, and bring into our own hearts, by dint of creature exertion, the truth of God, we shall never pray sincerely, earnestly, and spiritually for divine teaching. But when we are brought to this point, that we know nothing, absolutely nothing, except what God himself is pleased to teach us by the special operation of the Spirit; when we feel so shut up in blindness, darkness, and folly, that nothing short of God's light, nothing short of divine manifestation, can communicate to our souls that which we want to feel and enjoy,—*then* we begin to pray aright. This knowledge, then, of our own ignorance, blindness, and folly is absolutely necessary to make us cry to the Lord with sincerity and earnestness that he himself

would be pleased to teach us. If I can teach myself the truth as it is in Jesus; if I can bring into my own heart with sweet and unctuous power the word of God's grace; if I can feed upon it, enjoy it, and sit under the shadow of it by my own exertions, it is but awful mockery in me to pretend to go to the throne of grace to ask the Lord to do it for me. But if, on the other hand, I am oppressed by a sense of my ignorance; if this feeling is deeply wrought in my heart, that I know nothing, absolutely nothing, except so far as the Spirit of God is pleased to unfold the truth to my soul, *then* I come to the Lord to ask him to teach me, not because I have read in the Scriptures of such a doctrine as divine teaching; nor because I have heard others ask the Lord to teach them; but because I feel utterly unable without this teaching to bring into my soul those heavenly realities it longs to experience.

3. *A sense of our helplessness, inability, and impotency in divine things* is a third qualification before we can truly and spiritually call upon God. How much there is of false prayer in us! How much there is of formality and self-righteousness even in true Christians! How much bowing of the knee without God's hand bowing down the heart! How many words escape from the lips that have never been indited by the Holy Ghost in the soul! But a sense of our helplessness, insufficiency, and inability must be created by the hand of God in our souls before we can sincerely and spiritually ask him to bless us, manifest himself unto us, shine upon our hearts, and lift up upon us the light of his countenance.

4. *A glimpse of the things which we desire to experience*, is another qualification before we can put in practice this divine invitation. It is not because we read about certain blessings in God's word, that we are enabled to go to a throne of grace, and ask the Lord to confer these blessings upon us. We may do it naturally; but this reading and praying in the letter will not profit; for "the flesh profiteth nothing." But, on the other hand, when the Lord is pleased to shine upon the sacred Scriptures; to give us glimpses in our hearts of the blessings revealed in them; to show us the promises which are all "yea and amen in Christ Jesus;"

and the blessings which are stored up in him for those that fear God—when we enjoy glimpses of these heavenly blessings, *then* we rightly, sincerely, and earnestly call upon God to bestow them upon us.

5. *Faith in the promises*; faith in God who gives them; faith in Jesus in whom they are stored; faith in the blessed Spirit through whom they are communicated;—this precious faith, God's gift and work, is absolutely indispensable before we can call upon God aright. "Let him," says James, "ask in faith, nothing wavering." (1:6.) "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (Heb. 4:20.) If there be no faith in our prayers they are not acceptable to God; they do not enter his ears; they do not bring down the promised blessing. Therefore, before we can call upon the Lord aright, we must have a living faith raised up in our heart, whereby we believe that God hears us, and that he will in his own time and way communicate his blessings to us. It is thus that we find access through the Mediator into God's presence, and plead with him for those blessings which he has to bestow.

6. *Hungering, thirsting, panting, longing, and languishing after those blessings which God has to grant*, is another qualification before we can call upon him to bestow them upon us. Is it not mockery, awful mockery, to go to the Lord in prayer, and to ask him to give us this, and to give us that; to bestow this mercy, to enrich our souls with that blessing; to apply this and that promise; and all the time have no earnest longings, pantings, thirstings, hungerings, and breathings after them? It is awful mockery to ask God for a blessing, and have no desire in the soul after that blessing; to ask him for food, and have no hunger; to beg of him the water of life, and feel no thirst; to request divine clothing, and to know no nakedness; to implore sweet manifestations of his favour and love, and not desire them above thousands of gold and silver. It is but awful mockery, I repeat it, to go with these pretended petitions, and all the while have no earnest, sincere longings or languishings after the blessings which God has to bestow.

7. The last qualification I shall mention is, *patience and perseverance to wait at God's footstool*; as we read, "Be followers of them, who, through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6:12.) We must resemble the woman, of whom the Lord spake in the parable, that though the unjust judge feared not God, nor regarded man, yet he was overcome by her importunity; we must be like the man who was in bed with his children, but was brought out of it by the importunity of his friend to give him all that he needed. So must the Lord's people not only seek, cry, and beg, but also wait and persevere till he arise to satisfy their desires.

If, then, these qualifications are absolutely needful; if there is no right calling upon God except this experience has been wrought in the heart by God the Spirit himself, how much true prayer is there in the world? How much true prayer is there in our hearts? And is not this the reason why there are so few answers? why we pray so much, and get so little? why we have so little prevalency with God? why we seek, and so seldom find? knock at the door, and find it so rarely opened? May not this be the reason, that with all our calling upon God, we lack these needful qualifications? They are indeed God's own gifts, God's own work; but still, if we lack these needful qualifications, prayer is but empty breath, and the words of the lip but idle mockery.

But when the Lord himself would give us a blessing; when it is in his heart to bestow a favour, he raises up these divine qualifications in the soul; he puts us spiritually where Jeremiah was naturally—in the prison; shuts us up, lays burdens upon us, makes our chain heavy, brings upon us troubles, trials, temptations, afflictions, sharp distresses, perhaps outward persecutions; in a word, puts us into those spots and states out of which none but he can deliver. When then, in this state, the divine "Author and Finisher of faith," the bounteous Giver of every good and perfect gift, begins to raise up desires and breathings in the soul; prayer at once springs up out of the heart, and enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; and, in God's

own time and in God's own way, brings down the blessed answer.

And this leads us to the second branch of the subject.

|| .—"Call unto me, and I will answer thee; *and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not.*"

Let us cast a glimpse at the state of Jerusalem at that time. It is, as I before observed, emblematical of the state of God's people before he answers their prayers, and reveals to them the abundance of peace and truth. Was not Jerusalem sinking as low as she could possibly fall? Was not the sword of destruction hanging over her head by a single thread? Was not Nebuchadnezzar about to thrust the edge of his slaughter-weapon into her very bosom? It was so. And did she not justly deserve it? Had not her sins and iniquities drawn down divine indignation? Could she plead innocent? Could she justly say, 'I have not sinned! these things have come upon me unmeritedly?' The carnal and self-righteous might have said so; as we know there were some who uttered that language in her streets, "Yet thou sayest, because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned." (Jer. 2:35.) But the God-fearing people of the city could not say so. When the Lord said, "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?" (Jer. 2:17,) each and all who feared God would answer, 'Yes, yes; we have, we have.' And thus no God-fearing man, who has had a discovery of his own sinfulness, can ever plead innocent. Whatever he suffers, he suffers deservedly; whatever he endures, he has justly merited. This makes him put his mouth in the dust; because he knows that every suffering, yea, hell itself, is his just desert.

In this state, then, when the cloud of destruction was lowering over Jerusalem; when the lightning-flash at times was bursting through the heavens; when the pattering drops, the harbingers and precursors of the coming storm, were falling thick and fast, and it seemed as though Judah and Jerusalem were about to be swept utterly away—*then* God reveals the promise, that "he

would bring her health and cure; would cause her captivity to return, would cleanse her from all her iniquity, and make her a name of joy, and praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth." O how wonderful that God should take that very time and that very occasion to lay open the bounty of his loving bosom, and assure her, that his heart was full of love to her! At the very time that his sword, bathed in vengeance, hung over her to destroy, he tells her there was love in his heart towards her; that his covenant should stand for ever, and the purposes of his heart be fulfilled. Is not this emblematic? Is not this strikingly descriptive of the dealings of God with his people? That he smites with one hand, while he blesses with the other; and that while he holds the sword of chastisement over their head, yet his heart is full of love and mercy? He, therefore, says to Jeremiah, "'Call unto me;" I have blessings to bestow; my heart is full of love to Judah and Jerusalem; I have promises to bestow upon her; I will never leave her, nor forsake her; I will forgive her; I will restore her; she shall be a name and praise to all around her; my covenant with her shall stand for evermore. "Call unto me:" thou hast but to ask, thou hast but to seek, thou hast but to beg, thou hast but to implore; I will shew her mercy, I will make known my love, I will reveal pardon and peace, I will comfort her, I will bless her and do her good.'

How suitable is this for a child of God in a similar state! And to such a soul, he says, "'Call unto me." Thou hast but to plead, but to beg, but to petition; the blessing is in my bosom: thou hast but to draw it forth. My heart is full of love; it only waits for thee to open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it with every good thing. "Call unto me, I will answer thee;" not by the sword, not by judgments, not by pestilence, not by famine. "Call unto me, I will answer thee; and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

But what are these "great and mighty things" which Jeremiah knew not? He could not believe that God had love in his heart towards Jerusalem. But the Lord says, 'Only seek me, only supplicate me; I will shew thee these great and mighty things.'

So he says to his people: 'Though thou art deeply sunk under a sense of thy sinfulness, ignorance, helplessness, yet "Call unto me, I will shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."'

What are some of these "*great and mighty things*" which they know not?

1. One is, *Divine sovereignty*—that God "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and that he will fulfil all his pleasure." The *doctrine* of God's sovereignty is very easily learnt: it may be caught up under one sermon, or by reading half a page of a tract; it may be known in theory in less than half an hour. But have I then learnt it? Have I got it aright? Say, I have read an author, Elisha Coles for instance, who writes admirably on God's sovereignty—can I learn it *thus*? I might walk by the Bank of England, and say, 'What a noble building! what beautiful architecture! its cellars too full of bullion!' But is it all mine because I walk by and look at it? Just as much might I lay hold of divine sovereignty by merely reading a book, or hearing a preacher explain it, as I can lay claim to all the gold in the Bank cellars by walking round it, and admiring it as a beautiful structure. I must learn divine sovereignty in a very different way from merely reading, hearing, or talking about it. I must know and feel it in my heart by a divine power. And how must I learn it there? For the most part, by having this divine sovereignty cross me at every turn. If I lay plans, to have divine sovereignty overthrowing them; if I wish for something very much, to have divine sovereignty thwarting me in it; if I want to be something, to have divine sovereignty in that very thing pulling me down; nay, if I want something really good, to find divine sovereignty bestowing it in a way most painful to my flesh. Thus we learn divine sovereignty where Jeremiah learnt it—in the prison-house, amidst persecutions, through afflictions, in sharp temptations, and having the corruptions of our heart laid bare. Here we learn God will execute his own purposes, let proud nature kick and rebel, pine and fret her utmost.

When, then, you "Call unto the Lord," he begins to show you a little of divine sovereignty; and not merely shows it you, but brings you to submit to it. That is a very hard thing to be brought to—to submit to God's sovereignty when it is thwarting some desired purpose, some deeply-cherished and much-longed-for plan, crossing you at every turn, disappointing the wishes of your heart! Can man, proud, rebellious, independent man, submit to God's sovereignty? Yes! he can, when he is brought down by the Spirit of God, laid low, and made to find and feel that God will execute his own purposes, whether man kick against it or submit. To learn God's sovereignty thus is somewhat different from lying on a sofa on a May morning, and reading Elisha Coles.

2. *The salvation of the soul by the blood and obedience of God's only-begotten Son*, is another of these great and mighty things which God reveals in answer to true prayer. Is that point easily settled? the salvation of our souls? our interest in the love of the Lamb? our election before all time? our redemption by the precious blood of Jesus? our regeneration by the power of the Spirit? and our certain perseverance unto the heavenly kingdom? Is all this easily learnt? If you have learnt it so easily, you will have to go to another school. You have got to learn it again, to know it in a different way. Salvation, as *a doctrine*, may be learnt in a quarter of an hour; salvation, as *a blessing*, may not be learnt in many years. When a vessel of mercy becomes exercised to know whether his name is in the Book of Life; whether the work of the Spirit is begun upon his heart; whether he is one of those for whom the Lamb of God shed his atoning blood; whether he is one of the sons or daughters of the Lord God Almighty; and becomes restless, tried, and exercised upon this point, he will call upon God to make that point clear in his soul. And it will be made manifest in God's own time and way; he will in answer to prayer give clearer or fainter testimonies to the soul's eternal salvation in the blood and righteousness of his dear Son.

3. *The reason of all our trials; the end to be answered by all the providential circumstances through which we pass; the cause of all the afflictions, temptations, and distresses that the soul has*

*had to endure*; is another of those great and mighty things which God makes known in answer to true prayer. Can I often see the reason of them? I cannot. And I must say, if you often or usually can, you are favoured. There are some who, directly a trial comes, say, 'I know why this trial befalls me;' directly an affliction visits them, 'O, I see the reason of this affliction, and I am sure it will be a blessing to my soul.' If you can feel and speak in this way, you have stronger faith than the majority of God's people. The usual operation of affliction on the souls of God's people is this,—they know not why it has come upon them; they see not what profit it is to produce; they cannot believe any blessing is couched beneath it. As we cannot perceive the sun behind the cloud, so they cannot see the Lord's face when he hides himself behind a cloud of afflictions and sorrows. But the Lord says to his afflicted people, "Call unto me; seek my face; lay your petition at my footstool; press earnestly forward with thy request. I will show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." 'Thou knowest not what this trial is for; thou knowest not what is the benefit of these temptations thou art labouring under; thou knowest not what this affliction is to produce; thou knowest not what this reverse in circumstances is to bring about. Thou art therefore tried, perplexed, exercised. But do not go to man; do not look to the creature; seek not to unravel it thyself; "Call unto me; I will show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." I will show thee what this trial is for, what this temptation is to do—to humble thee; this trouble is to wean thee from the world, this affliction to break some snare, this exercise to meeken and soften thy heart, and bring thee to the footstool of mercy. Thou shalt see that there is a blessing lodged beneath this trial and couched in this affliction, which thou wilt have reason to bless God for to the latest day of thy existence.' And I believe (it is not part of my theory, but, through mercy, part of my experience,) that our greatest blessings spring out of our greatest trials; and that those clouds which seem most dark, so dark that we think we never shall see a ray of light upon them, in God's own time and way disperse; light bursts through them;—and we bless God for the very trial, however heavy it may have been at the time, however much we

may have despaired of seeing it made a blessing to our souls.

4. *That all things work together for good to our souls;* that whatever we pass through in providence or in grace, is for our spiritual profit—is another thing that God will show us when we rightly call upon his name. He says, "Call unto me." 'Do not go to the creature that is but a broken reed; do not trust to an arm of flesh—that will fail you when you want it most; come to me, to my bosom—pour out your petition in my ear; seek my face; lay your wants at my footstool. "Call unto me, I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

To believe that all our trials, temptations, and afflictions are working together for our spiritual good—is a great, a mighty thing, which often we know not. 'How can *that* be for my good, and how can *this* be for my good?' Is not our mind often thus perplexed? But the Lord says, "Call unto me, I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not;" amongst them, that "all things are working together for good;" and that spiritual profit will be answered by all and each.

5. *The superaboundings of God's grace over the aboundings of our sin,* is another great and mighty thing that God will shew and make known to those that call upon him. What a blessed truth is this—the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin! yet how painfully learnt. How the soul must grapple hard with sin and temptation! What workings up of the depth of our fallen nature before we can know any thing of the superaboundings of grace over it! But the Lord says, "Call unto me, I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not"—and amongst them, the superaboundings of my mercy and grace over the aboundings of thy iniquity. Have iniquity and sin abounded in us? Have we felt and known it, and been so filled with it, as to have sunk very low at times with a sight and sense of what we have thought, said, or done? Have our backslidings, our vain thoughts, our inward adulteries and idolatries, and the workings of our fallen nature, sometimes made us sink very low, and to feel that sin has indeed abounded in us?

"Call unto me, I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Among them shall be the superaboundings of my grace over the aboundings of thy sin; that though "sin hath reigned unto death, grace shall reign through righteousness unto everlasting life;" that God takes occasion by the very sins of his people to manifest more of his mercy in forgiving them, his love in covering them, and his grace in superabounding over them.

Are not these rich blessings? Time will not suffice to enumerate more, such as the pardon of sin, the sweet enjoyment of God's favour, testimonies of his eternal love, smiles of his loving countenance, the witness of the blessed Spirit, the leadings, guidings, and teachings of that divine Comforter.

These are the "great and mighty things" that God's people are longing from time to time to experience. And is not the Lord from time to time drawing us to his bosom? and raising up sighs and cries in the soul? When the Lord has raised up these inward desires, he answers them, and begins to show the "great and mighty things" which we know not, and to reveal the abundance of peace and truth.

If you have gathered my meaning (however feebly and faintly expressed,) from what I have endeavoured to speak this morning, you will have observed, that there are two leading features in every gracious man's experience; one, a sense of his own sinfulness, ignorance, and helplessness; and the other, a longing and languishing after those blessings which God has to bestow. And these the Lord from time to time opens up to his soul, revealing to his heart, and discovering by the teaching and operations of his blessed Spirit those blessings, favours, and mercies, that he is longing to enjoy. And I believe, if you will look at your experience under the teachings and leadings of God in your soul, you will know something of this. You will find, that your experience may be summed up in these two features. Sometimes you have sunk very low, have been tried in your mind, harassed in your soul, deeply perplexed, every thing making against you

and little for you. But the Lord from time to time has raised up desires, sighs, cries, and groans in your heart, draws you to his footstool of mercy, and there enables you to tell him all that you are and all that you want. And then, there are times and seasons when the Lord graciously and mercifully opens his hand, gives you a testimony, bestows upon you a word, a visit, a whisper, a smile, softens your heart, melts your soul, raises up some evidence, and blesses you more or less with that blessing which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it.

Do you expect to have any other experience all your life long? Do you expect to find the dream of your early youth ever realized? to be better and better, holier and holier, wiser and wiser, stronger and stronger; every day that you live? I never expect to find the fond dream of my early religious youth thus fulfilled. But I believe, so far as God is our teacher, this will be, more or less, our daily experience, so long as we are tenants in this fallen world—a growing sense of our sinfulness, ignorance, helplessness, nothingness, inability, and impotency. At times (for the Lord only at times makes us to feel our complete dependence upon him) we shall cry, sigh, and groan, breathe out our heart, wrestle with the Divine Majesty, and supplicate at his footstool. And then, there will sometimes come a word, a promise, a testimony, a token, a smile, a whisper, a melting, a softening, a breaking down, an encouragement; and this produces a going forward in the strength of the Lord. It is thus, and thus only, that we shall live to praise his name, and crown Jesus Lord of all.

Is not this the way which is most glorifying to God, though so humbling to man? And must not this be a right way? Shall you and I be such sacrilegious wretches, as under the cover of religion to creep into the very sanctuary, and snatch the Redeemer's crown off his head? But to be nothing but what God makes us, know nothing but what God teaches, feel nothing but what God inspires, enjoy nothing but what God communicates—this is to bless him for everything which he freely imparts. And therefore, in order to keep a sinner at the footstool of mercy all his days; to hide pride from man, and abase him in his own eyes;

to break to pieces all his wisdom, strength, and righteousness, God keeps his people ever poor and needy, ever crying, sighing and begging for what he has to bestow. And when he gives it, it is in a gracious, in a sweetly manifestative way, that the creature shall know from whom it comes, and not be able to take to itself an atom of glory. And thus, by these gracious dealings upon the hearts of his people, contrary to flesh and blood, contrary to our fond dream of early days, contrary to all the arguments and reasonings of our reasoning mind, and to the creed of all the world, religious or profane, the Lord carries on his own work in his own way. And thus, when a man is sufficiently humbled to be raised; sufficiently brought down to be made to stand; sufficiently stripped to be clothed; and sufficiently emptied to be richly filled —then, the Lord begins to manifest his favour, grace, and love; and thus he covers the creature with shame, while he crowns himself with glory.

## **PRAYER, AND ITS ANSWER**

Preached on Thursday Evening, June 10th, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Psalm 91:15

It is thought by some to be a great mark of spirituality of mind, and a strong evidence of great attainments in the divine life, to see Christ in every part of Scripture—especially in the Psalms of David. Now there can be no doubt that Christ is sweetly set forth in the Psalms, for we read that He Himself spoke to His disciples of what was "written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Him." Nor can there be any doubt that much of the Psalms is taken up with descriptions of Him—that His experience is very largely set forth in the Psalms, and that His glory and His grace are powerfully manifested therein. But it is a very doubtful point to me, whether it is a decisive evidence of great spirituality, and an undeniable proof of divine teaching, to be able to see Him in the Psalms. For it comes to this question: whence is this sight derived? Is it not possible to see Him with the eye of speculation, or with the eye of imagination? Is it not possible to see Him with the eyes of other men? Is it not possible to be borne on the wings of fancy; and merely in a way of judgment, in a way of doctrinal speculation, in a way of mere exercise of our intellectual faculties, in a way of mere nature and the flesh—is it not possible, aye, is it not a common occurrence, thus to be able to see Christ in this passage and in that, quite independent of any divine unction, whereby the eyes are anointed, quite independent of any sweet manifestation of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost, and quite independent of any spiritual, humbling views of Him, as set forth in the Scriptures—is not this possible? Aye, is it not a common occurrence? And, therefore, before we can positively and decisively say that to see Christ in the Scriptures is a mark of spirituality of mind, a decisive proof of great attainments in the divine life, we must ask and answer these questions—Whence does this sight come? What

feelings does this sight produce? Who gave us these eyes, and whence is it that we have derived these views?

Now, I believe that if the soul is blessedly bedewed with the unction of the Holy Ghost, and in "simplicity and godly sincerity," with a feeling heart, with brokenness, contrition, tenderness, and humility, is led by the Holy Ghost into the Psalms, as setting forth Christ's sufferings, or Christ's experience, or Christ's grace, or Christ's glory, and feels a sweet melting down under that sight, and viewing Christ there set forth is led into any measure of spiritual communion with Him, so as to have some divine acquaintance and some heavenly fellowship with Him, then we have reason to believe that to see Christ in the Psalms and to feel Christ in the Psalms, is of God. But if it is merely an exercise of fancy, merely a sharpening of one's wits, merely a seeing Him with a kind of doctrinal speculation, leading to no fruits within and to no communion with Him as there set forth, but merely floating as a bare speculation in the mind, then of a certainty we may say that it is very possible to have great and enlightened views of Christ as set forth in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, and yet not to have received them with power from God Himself.

Now Satan can make use of truth in the Church of God to introduce his own errors, and often makes use of one truth to subvert another truth. Satan is a cunning artificer—he uses no rotten levers when he wants to overthrow a building; but he will select the strongest and longest and most powerful he can possibly wield. And I have been astonished sometimes to see how Satan, that crafty magician, that wonderful mechanic, can make use of the lever of one truth to overthrow another truth; how he can bring forward doctrine to upset experience, how he can use doctrine to upset practice, and how he can employ one part of God's Word to upset another part of God's Word. That he does so use truth is most clear. This very psalm gives us a certain instance of it. When he would fain that the Lord should cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he brings forward a passage from this psalm as his warrant—he makes use of the very truth of God as a lever whereby to throw down the Son of

God; for he says, quoting Scripture, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Here was Satan making use of a most certain truth, to introduce (if he could do so) presumption into the mind of the blessed Saviour; employing Scripture to lead the blessed Mediator into an act of daring presumption.

But the point to which I was alluding is this—It is most certain that Christ is much spoken of in the Psalms. Now this, which is a certain truth, has got a footing in the Church of God; it has been set forth by able men, and heaven-taught men, and is received as truth in the judgments of many persons. And here comes the subtlety of this "old serpent." He says, "It is Christ in the Psalms." Any deep experience in the Psalms—it is *Christ's* experience. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts"—that is *Christ* speaking. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when the sins of His elect family met upon His head. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when He was suffering under the weight of sin imputed to Him. Now, no doubt there is the experience of Christ thus set forth in the Psalms; but what is the object of this device of Satan? It is by setting forth all this experience as belonging to Christ, secretly to cast out the experience as belonging to God's people; it is by putting it all upon Christ, and saying that the Psalms are full of the experience of Christ, not to exalt Christ, but to cast down experience. The professed object is to glorify the Son of God, and to set forth His sufferings; the secret object is to cast out this experience as a needful thing to be undergone in the souls of God's people, and to blunt the edge of conviction in men's consciences. When they read, for instance, in the Psalms of a certain deep experience that the Psalmist passed through, as "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness"—conscience says, "Did *your* wounds ever stink, and were they ever corrupt because of your foolishness?" "No." "Oh!" says judgment, "but that is *Christ*." So—"Purge me with hyssop, and I

shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Was that ever your prayer?" says conscience—"Was that ever your experience?" asks the inward monitor. "No." "But," says judgment, "that is all *Christ*." And so, by setting forth the experience in the Psalms as belonging to Christ, there is a secret blunting the edge of conviction in men's consciences, and a casting out the experience of the saints as traced out in the Word of God. And so we see what a crafty, subtle serpent this is—to come with such truths, with great and glorious views of the Son of God, and to make use of them as a lever to overthrow the experience of God's saints as there traced out.

Now I believe, as to the Psalms, as written by the Spirit of God, we have three grand interpretations of them—in other words, we have three grand outlines of heavenly teaching. We have, first, the experience of the Psalmist himself. When he said, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness," it was the wounds of the Psalmist that stunk because of his foolishness; it was a personal matter, which was personally felt; it was an inward, individual experience, which was inwardly, individually known; he described with his pen what he felt in his heart—that "*his* wounds stunk and were corrupt because of *his* foolishness." But there is another experience, which is the experience of Christ under the hidings of His Father's countenance—the experience of the Lord Jesus when, in our nature, He bare our "sins in His own body on the tree," and groaned forth the agonies of His soul under the sensations of divine wrath which were manifested in His conscience; that is another great branch of experience set forth in the Psalms. And then there is a third, which is the experience of God's saints now, the experience which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God's people, which tallies and accurately agrees with the experience of the Psalmist, whoever he was—sometimes David, sometimes Asaph, sometimes Ethan, sometimes Heman—and accurately tallies also in its measure with the experience of Christ there set forth. And thus we see what a wonderful book the Scriptures are; that "they are not," as Peter says, "of any private interpretation," to be limited to one interpretation, to be confined to one individual; but they are of

public interpretation, of a public nature, and common to the whole Church of God, as the Spirit of truth leads the people of God into all truth. Now, if we look at this psalm, we have the strongest evidence that it speaks of Jesus. We know that it was quoted by Satan to the Lord of life and glory; and had it not referred to Him, Satan would have needed no other refutation.

This psalm, like some other psalms, seems to be in the form of a dialogue; there appear to be two speakers introduced. The Lord begins: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This seems to be a sentence that comes from the mouth of Jehovah; it was a testimony, a word dropped into the soul of the Psalmist from the mouth of God. The soul of the Psalmist responds; there is an heavenly echo in his bosom to the voice that came from the mouth of God; sweet hope and blessed confidence are raised up by the application of these words to his heart, and he breaks forth—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." And now the Lord takes up the sentence, and goes on to the end of the psalm: "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence; He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler," and so on. And if you bear this in mind, that very often in the Psalms there are what we may call dialogues between two persons—the Lord speaking inwardly to the Psalmist's soul, and the Psalmist speaking to the Lord—if we bear in mind that many of these are heavenly dialogues, sweet and blessed colloquies, it will explain to us why the person is so often changed.

Now, with respect to the words of the text, we find a promise given in them, or rather a *declaration* which is sealed with a *promise*—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

But who is "*he*?" Unless we can settle who "*he*" is, we shall be all abroad; we shall not be able to understand what the declaration is, or to whom the promise is made. And therefore, before we can get into the text, we must endeavour to ascertain who the person

is to whom the declaration is made, and in whose heart the promise is sealed.

This "he" must be the same person who is spoken of throughout the whole psalm; and therefore the first verse will afford us a clue to the point. Generally speaking, through the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, there are clues, there are keys; and if we can only get the key in our hand, it will fit the wards of the lock—it will open up the psalm. And therefore my chief desire in reading a psalm for my own instruction and comfort, or in preaching from it, is to find out the key. If I can discover the clue, it seems to introduce me into the chambers; if I can get hold of the key, it seems to open the recesses, and lay bare the treasures of heavenly truth contained in them.

Then "he" that shall call upon the Lord is the same person that is spoken of in the first verse of this psalm. And this is said of him: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Then every promise that is made in this psalm, and every declaration that is given in this psalm to a certain person, applies to that certain person spoken of in the first verse—the character described by these words, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." Then no man has any right to a single part of this psalm, no man has any interest in a single promise given in this psalm, no man has any divine acquaintance with the blessed mysteries couched in this psalm, whose name is not written in the first verse—whose experience is not such as the Holy Ghost has there traced out.

And who is this man, and what is his experience? It is "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." What is "the secret place of the Most High?" It is the same spot of which Asaph speaks in the seventy-third psalm—"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." It is the spot of which the Lord speaks in Ezekiel—"I will be to them as a little sanctuary in all the countries where they shall come." Then this "secret place" is the secret bosom of God. It is an entrance by faith into Jehovah, who by a spiritual manifestation of Himself

leads the soul into a spiritual acquaintance with Him. "The secret place of the Most High" is that solemn spot where Jehovah meets with the sinner in Christ, and where He opens up to him the riches of His mercy, and leads him into His bosom so as to read the secrets of His loving heart. It is called a "secret place," as corresponding with those words, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." It is called a "secret place," as only known to the persons to whom it is specially communicated. It is called a "secret place," because none can get into it—no, nor desire to get into it—except the Lord Himself, with His own mysterious hand, opens up to them a way into it, sets them down in it, and sweetly blesses them in it. Then to be in "the secret place of the Most High" is to be brought into something like fellowship and acquaintance with God—something like communion, spiritual worship, divine intercourse; so as to know something of Him experimentally, and "run into" Him as "a strong tower," and there feel solemn safety. The "secret place of the Most High," then, is not to be got at by nature and by reason; flesh never entered there. "Flesh and blood" cannot enter the kingdom of God above; and flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God below. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," said Jesus, "that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore, they are "hid from the wise and prudent." It is that "path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." It is a secret hidden from all except those to whom God Himself is pleased by His Spirit specially to reveal it. And when He reveals it, He draws the soul by the powerful attractions of love, "with the cords of love, and the bands of a man," by mysterious attractions into that "secret place;" and then He begins to discover a little of those secrets which are stored up in the Son of God—a few of those secrets which are with those who fear God—a few of those secrets the communication of which makes a man spiritually and eternally wise.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High," is one who more or less, as the Spirit leads him into it, abides there. "Abide in Me, and I in you; if a man abide not in Me, he is cast

forth as a branch and is withered." When a man once gets, therefore, by faith into "the secret place of the Most High," he "abides" in it; not as a matter of constant experience, not that he can always feel sweet communion with God; but still it is his home. We all have our home, our fireside, the place where at night we lay our weary bodies down to rest; and it is our dwelling-place. We are not always there; some of us leave our homes in the morning to go about our business, and come back to our homes at night; but our affections are there, our heart is there, our family is there, and we look for evening-time to go home and rest there. It is our dwelling-house, and yet we are not always in it. So with this "secret place of the Most High; "it is the dwelling-place of the Christian—it is the house, the home where his affections are, where his treasure is, and to which his heart turns—but still he is not always there. He goes in and out, he goes abroad, and often leaves this sweet home. Yet it is his dwelling-place; because it is there, and there alone, he can solidly rest; it is there, and there alone, he can lie down, and feed and take pleasure.

Here is a soul, then, that is brought by faith, under the Spirit's operation, to know "the secret place of the Most High:" that is, to have some spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, to enter by faith into the secrets which Jehovah reveals, and to feel that the manifestation of those secrets to his soul makes his heaven here below, and constitutes the real rest and satisfaction of his heart. And to this character all the promises in the Psalms are made; he is interested in every covenant promise that is there uttered by the mouth of God Himself; and every one of those covenant promises shall be fulfilled in him, and shall be fulfilled for him.

1. But the Lord has attached (I will not call it a condition, as it is a word I abhor)—the Lord has attached a *declaration*, which declaration is linked on with a promise. The Lord has appointed a certain path, wherein the soul is to walk. The walking in that path is a necessary step to obtain the blessing that lies at the end of the path. It is no condition to be performed by the creature; it is nothing that springs out of, or depends upon, human will or

human merit; but it hangs upon the Lord's appointment. God has connected certain promises with certain appointments; he has connected certain deliverances with certain trials; he has connected certain blessings with certain states and positions of soul. Therefore, if we are to get at the blessing, we must get at it through God's appointment. If we are to reach the home, we must travel by that road which leads to it. Therefore, "what God hath joined together, let no man"—and no man ever can—"put asunder." Now the Lord has, in the text, declared a certain path; He has made a positive declaration; and to this positive appointment He has graciously annexed a certain promise: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Then the declaration is as certain as the promise; the one is as much of divine decree as the other; and he that walks not in the path will not have the promise which is connected with that path. In this sense, and in this sense only, can we understand the conditions of Scripture—the *ifs*, God having linked things together, which are both of His sovereign decree, which are both of His eternal appointment, and which the Spirit graciously brings His people into, and blessedly works in their hearts and consciences. Thus, it is no matter of free-will, it is no matter of man's righteousness or man's wisdom, whether we shall "call upon God." It is appointed he should call upon Him. God has said in positive terms (and His "I will" and His "he shall" never can be broken)—"*he shall* call upon Me." It therefore does not rest with the creature whether he will call upon Him or not; it is not a matter poised in the balances of the creature, whether he shall pray or not. God has not left it to man, whether he shall take up prayer or lay aside prayer, but He has made it a part of His own sovereign appointments, of His own eternal decrees, which can no more be frustrated than salvation itself. Therefore, this soul that "dwells in the secret place of the Most High"—"he shall call upon God." It is not left to him, whether he will call or not; but it stands in the way of eternal decree, in a way of sovereign good pleasure. And, therefore, he must call upon God, because God has said that He shall.

But though this stands in the way of eternal decree, though this rests upon the basis of divine sovereignty, God does not work it

in the soul in that manner. He does not come in a dry doctrinal way into a man's conscience, and say—"I have appointed thee to pray, and therefore pray thou must." He does not come with an abstract truth, which is written in a man's judgment, like a rule of arithmetic, for the man to set to work upon the abstract truth as a child at school sets to work upon a sum. The Lord does not work in that manner; but He works by raising up certain feelings, by communicating certain desires, by kindling certain wants, by bringing the soul into certain states, and by pouring out the Spirit of grace and of supplications upon it—all of which tend to that point, to which He is leading the soul, and all which spring out of God's sovereign and eternal appointment.

"He shall call upon Me." *When* shall he call? Why, when the Lord pours out "the Spirit of grace and of supplications," when the Lord lays wants upon his heart, when the Lord brings conviction into his conscience, when the Lord brings trouble into his soul, when the Lord draws forth that "Spirit of grace and of supplications" which He has poured out, when the Lord is graciously pleased to draw forth faith into blessed exercise, and to enable the soul to pour out its desires, and to offer up its fervent breathings at His feet, and to give them out as He gives them in. Then to call upon the Lord is no point of duty which is to be attended to as a duty; it is no point of legal constraint, which must be done because the Word of God speaks of it; but it is a feeling, an experience, an inward work, which springs from the Lord's hand, and which flows in the Lord's own divine channel. Thus when the Lord is pleased to pour out this "Spirit of grace and supplications," we must pray; but we do not pray *because* we must; we pray because we have no better occupation, we have no more earnest desire, we have no more powerful feeling, and we have no more invincible and irresistible constraint. The child of God in trouble *must* groan and sigh; he does not say, "Eight o'clock is come, twelve o'clock is come, six o'clock is come, now I will groan, now I will sigh a little, I will take out my Bible, and begin to groan, and to sigh;" that is nothing but the groan of the hypocrite, it is nothing but the sigh of the self-deceiving professor. The living child of God groans and sighs because it is

the expression of his wants, because it is a language which pours forth the feelings of his heart, because groans and sighs are pressed out of him by the heavy weight upon him. A man lying in the street with a heavy weight upon him will call for help; he does not say, "It is *my duty* to cry to the passers-by for help;" he cries for help because he wants to be delivered. A man with a broken leg does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a surgeon;" he wants him, to set the limb. And a man in a raging disease does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a physician;" he *wants* him, to heal his disease. So, when God the Holy Spirit works in a child of God, he prays, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a burdened heart. He prays, because he cannot but pray; he groans, because he must groan; he sighs, because he must sigh; having an inward weight, an inward burden, an inward experience, in which, and out of which, he is compelled to call upon the Lord. And I never think anything of a man's religion which did not begin in this way. If a man's religion (so-called) began in any other way than by the Lord's bringing him to know himself as a sinner before Him, and except those convictions of sin were accompanied by "the Spirit of grace and supplications," whereby he was enabled to pour out his soul into the bosom of God, and to sigh, and cry, and groan, "being burdened," I never can believe that man's religion began by God's internal teaching. I know mine began so; and I have always stood firm upon this foundation, that a religion that does not begin with the sighs, and groans, and pourings out of the soul to God under the pourings in of the Spirit, is a religion that began in the flesh, and never sprang from the mighty operation of God in the soul.

"He shall call upon Me." *What* shall he call upon God for? "He shall call upon Me" for everything that he wants internally to feel. A child of God can call for nothing else. He cannot direct his prayers according to the rule of another's: he does not pick up a few pretty expressions from a gifted man in the table-pew, and go with these prayers to God. He knows that he has to do with One that searches him through, that he stands before a God that will not be mocked and trifled with; and when he comes before the Lord, he asks Him, with sighs, and cries, and groans, for

those blessings, and those blessings only, which his conscience tells him he wants, and which his soul is hungering and thirsting to enjoy, delivered into his heart from the mouth of God Himself. He calls upon God for the pardon of his sins, he calls upon God for the revelation of Himself, he calls upon God for the manifestation of Christ, he calls upon God for the application of atoning blood, he calls upon God for the revelation of His eternal favour to His soul, he calls upon God sweetly to bring him into an experimental knowledge of the Lord of life and glory, he calls upon God for every blessing that is set before his eyes, and for every blessing that is laid upon his heart, after which he longs and groans and sighs and pants heartily with pantings and groanings unutterable.

II. Now the Lord says, "I will answer." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." I will answer just as much as he shall call; and he shall call just as much as I will answer." They are both linked together, and both stand on the same basis of sovereign appointment and eternal decree.

"I will answer him." *What* will He answer? Why, He will answer those prayers which He Himself has indited. He will answer those wants which He Himself has created. He will answer those hungerings which He Himself has produced. He will answer those thirstings which He Himself has, by His own blessed Spirit, wrought powerfully in the soul.

He does not say *when*; He does not say *how*. He does not say it shall be the next hour, next week, next month, next year. He leaves that with Himself, He keeps that in His own hands. He binds Himself by a naked promise; but He does not tell us how He will bring about that promise. That He keeps in His own bosom. And it is a mercy that He does, because, by keeping it in His own bosom, He leaves to Himself a wonderful way in which to work out the accomplishment of that promise. Keeping the manner and the time in His own breast, He reserves to Himself different paths, in which He leads His children, merely tying Himself down with a naked promise, and not revealing in what way the promise

shall be accomplished. It was so with Abraham; He gave him a naked promise, but the way in which it was to be accomplished He kept in His own breast. And so He has given a naked promise to every child of His that "calls upon Him." He says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" He has tied Himself there, He has bound Himself by His word, which can never be broken, but He has not said *how*, nor has He said *when*.

Now it is this *how* and *when* that so try the child of God, who is calling upon the Lord, and not receiving the answer that he desires to receive at His mouth. If he could only but know the *time* fixed, he could bear with all his trouble patiently; if he could only see the *manner* in which the blessing would come, he thinks he should find some relief from his trial of soul in calling upon God and finding the answer so long delayed. But the answer that God gives, He gives in His own time. And I believe many of the children of God have had to cry to Him for days, and weeks, and months, and years, and the answer has been delayed; and then, when expectation seemed to give up the ghost, when there seemed no longer any prospect that God would fulfil His promise, when the hopes of nature (as in the case of Abraham) were become dead, then the Lord fulfilled His promise, and brought His answer into the soul.

But sometimes the Lord is pleased to answer our prayers more immediately; He brings us into those straits and troubles from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and then will answer our prayer, and fulfil the promise. But perhaps it is in such a way as we least expect, and yet in such a way as most glorifies Him.

Now there is sometimes in men's minds a kind of confusion in this matter. They are in a certain path, from which they want to be extricated; they are under a trial, from which they want to be delivered; they call upon the Lord to deliver them, and they ask for some manifestation of Himself, some going forth of His hand, some application of His promise, some divine leading which they are to follow. But the Lord may be working in a very different way from what they think; and they may really be inattentive to the

internal voice of God in their consciences, because they are expecting the voice to come in some other way. It was just so with myself. When I was in the Establishment, burdened with all the things I had to go through, and troubled and distressed in my mind, I was calling upon the Lord to deliver me, to lead me out, to show me what to do, to make the path plain and clear. Now that was my sincere cry; but I expected some miraculous interposition, to hear some voice, to have some wonderful leading; and in waiting for that I was waiting for what the Lord never meant to bestow. And I was brought at last to this internal conviction: suppose I were guilty of drunkenness, suppose I were living in adultery, suppose I were walking in known sin, should I want a voice from God to say to me, "Leave this drunkenness, come out from this adultery, give up this sin?" should I want some divine manifestation to bring me out of a sin, when my conscience bore its solemn witness against it, and I was condemned under the weight and burden of it? No, the very conviction is the answer of God to the prayer; the very burden which the Lord lays on us is meant to press us out of that in which we are walking. So I reasoned with myself: "If I am living in sin, if it be a sin to be where I am, if I must do things which my conscience tells me are sins, and by which my conscience is burdened as sins, the very conviction, the very distress, the very burden, is the answer. It is the voice of God in the conscience, not the voice of God in the air, not the appearance of God in the sky, but the voice of God in the conscience, and the appearance of God in the heart." And on this simple conviction I was enabled to act, and never to this day have I repented it. I have, therefore, been led to see by experience that we are often expecting signal answers, wonderful answers, mysterious answers, and that the Lord does not mean to give those answers.

The Lord, you see, reserves the way in which He shall give the answer. Are you giving way to some temptation, or under the power of some lust? "Oh!" say you, "I want the Lord to lead me out." Well, is the Lord bearing a solemn witness in your conscience? Is the Lord speaking in that secret court, and manifesting His frown in your soul? *That* is His answer, and He

will not vouchsafe to give you any other. It is to that the soul must look, and he that is enabled to hear this reproof in conscience must take it as the answer of God to those prayers which he is putting up for deliverance from the temptation or the sin under which he is labouring.

So, again, the soul sometimes shall call upon the Lord to show it sweet manifestations of Christ, to lead it blessedly into Christ, to settle it down into the liberty of Christ, to make Christ precious, and lead the soul into blessed communion with Him. Well, these sighs, and groans, and cries, and desires, and breathings of the soul come from God; they are His work in the conscience. Now the Lord says—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." But how will He answer him? Why, perhaps by making his shackles heavier, making his fetters more grievous. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for deliverance, they groaned and sighed, and their prayers reached the ear of the Lord, and their cries moved His heart; but how did He answer? Their burdens were made heavier; they were to make bricks without straw; they were to be put further from deliverance; and every successive plague only seemed to make the king's heart harder, and deliverance more improbable. So perhaps with ourselves. We have been crying to the Lord for years to make Christ precious, to lead us into close communion with Him, to open up the secrets of His bosom, and bathe our souls in that love of His which "passeth knowledge;" and we have found some access to a throne of grace in pouring out those desires. Now, the Lord answers them; but how does He answer them? By bringing us into those spots and those states of experience to which these views of Christ are alone applicable. Our feeling would be to loll upon our sofa or to lean in our armchair, and have Christ come into our hearts without any burdens, or distresses, or griefs, or trials, or temptations, or powerful exercises; we want some sweet manifestation of Christ, but we want it to come through a channel which is not a channel of pain and suffering. Now the Lord says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him"—he shall see Christ, he shall have a sweet view of Christ, he shall have a blessed manifestation of Christ, he

shall be led up into Christ—but how? By being placed by My hand in those spots in which Christ alone is precious, to which Christ alone is adapted, for which Christ alone is suitable, and from which Christ alone delivers. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

Sometimes the soul will pray to have power, inward power, to lay hold of God's promises, and to feel the sweetness of these promises within. We read the Scriptures; we see such and such promises made to the elect. "Oh!" say we to ourselves, "what know I of this promise? Surely I have not felt this promise; surely I have not tasted the sweetness of that promise; oh! that the Lord would teach me the sweetness of this promise! Oh! that the Lord would impart to me the enjoyment of that sweet promise!" And the Lord says, "I will; 'he shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;' you shall have the promise, aye, all the promise; you shall have the sweetness of it, the blessedness of it." But mark! you must be in the path to which that promise is suitable; you must be in the trial to which that promise is adapted; you must be in the exercise out of which that promise delivers; you must be in the difficulty which that promise fits. You must have the mortise for the tenon to go into; you must have the emptiness to be filled out of Christ's fulness; you must have the beggary to be supplied with Christ's riches; you must have the bankruptcy to have a sweet and full discharge.

And the Lord, when He is going to fulfil the promise, does not show His hand and say, "Now I am leading you into the promise, now I am fulfilling to you the prayer; see how My arm is now bare, and how I am guiding and leading you into the promise after which you have been praying." The Lord does not speak thus in conscience, but hides Himself, and darkens the cloud in our souls; we get farther off from the promise than ever—get as it were miles and leagues away from the point we are trying to approach; like the mariner who is driven away by the winds, we are seeking to get into the promise and are blown aside by gusts and winds further from the point at which we are aiming. But the Lord is all the while leading us into it, because He is bringing us

down into the spot to which the promise applies. We say, "Lord, make me rich." He says, "I will; but thou must first be made poor." We say, "Lord, let me have a precious view of Christ." "I will; but you must first have a wretched view of self." "Let me know the riches of Christ's blood." "I will; but you must first know the depth of your guilt," "Let me know what it is to stand complete in Christ's righteousness." "I will; but you must first sink down in self-loathing and self-abhorrence." So that the Lord takes His own path, and chooses His own way, to bring about His own purposes in such a mysterious manner that reason is staggered, nature gives up the ghost, and all the powers of flesh and blood fail; and get to their wits' end; and the Lord brings about the fulfilment of that promise which we have been desiring to get into, and the enjoyment of which we have been longing richly to feel.

So then, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him." The Lord encourages His people to call upon Him for whatsoever they want. Not to go with lip-service; not to go with made-up tales; but the Lord encourages all His blood-bought family whom He has quickened by His Spirit to call upon Him for everything their souls long after; be it deliverance from trouble, be it sweet manifestations of mercy, be it a blessed enjoyment of Christ, be it for a heart enlarged, be it for the liberty of the gospel, be it to stand firm in Jesus, be it to be brought out of any temptation under which they are labouring. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." "Whatsoever thou askest, believing, thou shalt receive." The Lord encourages His people to open their mouth and tell Him what they have need of. "Pour out your heart before Me," says the Lord. Well, the soul is sometimes enabled to do so. Have not you and I, friends, been enabled to pour out our hearts at a throne of grace, and tell the Lord what we really wanted, what we really longed for, and tell Him that nothing but that which He alone could give would satisfy and comfort our souls? There have been such times of access to the throne of grace. And afterwards, perhaps, we have forgotten the things we told Him of; we have been heedless of the prayers we laid at His feet; and though very earnest at the time in seeking after certain

blessings, we left them, as it were, at the Lord's feet, and forgot them all. But the Lord does not forget them—they are treasured up in His heart and memory; and in His own time He brings them to light, and gives the fulfilment of them. But before He does it He will bring us into the spot where we want them again, and then we have to tell Him again, and supplicate Him again, and ask Him again, ashamed of ourselves, perhaps, that we should have asked the Lord for these blessings and been as heedless of them as though we did not care to receive them at His hand; but still, under pressure, under trouble, under soul necessity, under grief, we go and tell Him again. And then the Lord in His own way and time brings about the very thing we desired of Him. Perhaps it is some temptation under which we have been labouring for months; some grievous sin, which is continually put by Satan before our eyes, and into which we are afraid we shall tumble headlong; some cursed bait, which that arch-deceiver knows how to dress up in such pleasing colours that our wretched nature wants to grasp it—only it knows there is a hook concealed; or some internal weight of guilt, under which the soul "groans, being burdened." Here is a painful exercise; and the soul cries to the Lord to be delivered from it. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him." There is no use going with it to a man; there is no use keeping it buried in our breasts. Sometimes we get a sullen fit, and we will not tell the Lord any more what we feel—He has delayed the answer so long; like a sullen child that will not ask his parent for the very bread that he wants to eat; but we must be brought out of this sulky fit. Whatever the Lord means to give, He from time to time enlarges our heart to ask; and keeps us waiting, pleading, sighing, suing, groaning, and begging at His blessed feet, for those things without which we must perish eternally, without which we cannot comfortably live, and without which we cannot happily die. And so it is no matter of choice, it is no matter left to the free-will of man, whether he will pray or not; but it is so laid upon his heart, so brought into his soul, it is so pressed out of him by the heavy loads put upon him, that he is compelled, whether he will or not, to cry to the Lord for those things. He must have them or die. And then, from time to time, in His own time and in His own way, He brings everything to pass

which the soul wants to have brought to pass; opens up ways, brings deliverances, lifts out of trials, removes burdens, makes a way in the deep, which no eye but His could see and no hand but His could open, leads the soul into it, brings the soul through it, and then hides all glory from the creature by making us fall down before His feet and ascribe glory, and honour, and power, and thanksgiving, and salvation unto God and the Lamb.

## A PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Lord's Day Morning,  
September 14th, 1845

"Save, LORD; let the king hear us when we call" Psalm 20:9

When a man is brought to know and feel that he has a soul to be lost or saved, nothing will then be so important in his eyes as to know whether he is a partaker of salvation. Until the Lord is pleased to quicken our souls into spiritual life, and to lay eternal realities with weight and power on our consciences, we have no care, we have no anxiety, as to our state before God; but no sooner does the Lord communicate light and life to our hearts than we begin to feel that we have a soul that must live for ever and ever in a state of torment or in a state of happiness. And when we are brought to feel these things, it will make us desire above all things to know whether indeed salvation ever will reach us. This appears to have been the feeling of the church when she breathed forth this petition "Save, LORD; let the king hear us when we call." The text consists of two clauses:

I. One, *"Save, LORD."*

II. The other, *"Let the king hear us when we call."*

These two clauses I shall endeavour, if God enable, to unfold according to the mind of the Spirit this morning. May the Lord add his blessing.

I. You will observe that the church who offered these prayers knew well in what that salvation consisted. She was not one of those that trusted in chariots and horses, but she looked to the finished work of the Son of God; and uttering this petition, "Save, LORD," what she wanted was the manifestation, the application of that salvation to her soul. This is the grand difference betwixt one who has received the love of the truth, and one who is

wrapped up in Pharisaism and error that he who has received the love of the truth knows that salvation is already accomplished by the Son of God on the cross, and wants the application, the manifestation, of that salvation to his heart with power; whereas, the other, who is wrapped up in self-righteousness, and given over to believe a lie, is looking for salvation as coming out of something to be done by himself [as to believe], something that he is to obtain by an act of his own, or that springs out of the flesh. But whence comes the difference? Why should it be that one is looking for salvation from Christ's finished work, and wanting the powerful application of it to his soul, and the other for salvation from something to be done by himself? From this, that he who has received the love of the truth has been previously emptied and stripped of self-confidence. As Paul says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit" having had a spiritual revelation of God to the soul "and rejoice in Christ Jesus" from receiving him into the heart as a perfect Saviour; "and," as a consequence, "have no confidence in the flesh," seeing that the flesh is utterly sinful, and therefore everything that comes out of it is abominable in the sight of God. That is the reason why the people of God are looking for salvation as a reality to be applied to their consciences, whilst others are looking for it as something to be done by themselves to gain the favour of God. The people of God are more or less convinced by the Spirit that there is no good in themselves, and therefore everything they have good must be a free gift from the super-abounding grace of God.

It may take some time, it may be a process of many years, it may be the result of many painful trials, it may be the fruit of many perplexing anxieties, to bring a man to renounce all confidence in the flesh; but till he is brought to renounce all such freshly dependence, he never can be brought to rely upon the finished work of Christ alone. He is very much where Hart says he himself was. There was a time when he thought he would repent, he would believe, and he would save his own soul; but he found to his bitter sorrow it was no longer with him whether he would repent, but whether God would give him repentance; no longer

whether he would believe, but whether God would be so kind as to give him the precious grant of faith. I believe every child of God is brought there to be so emptied of self, so utterly and thoroughly brought down in his feelings before the footstool of God, as to feel unless the Lord stretch forth his hand to save him he must sink in the deep waters.

The church, then, prays, "Save, LORD." "Do favour me with an application of thy salvation unto my heart. Assure my soul of its interest in the finished work of thy dear Son" This is the language of every soul brought down so as to feel that without an experimental knowledge of the blood and love of Christ, it must sink for ever. But when the church says, "Lord, save." What does it imply? It implies that we are to be saved from something; or else it is no salvation. Salvation is not a mere negative thing; it is an actual rescue, a real deliverance, a true bringing of the soul out of distressing trouble. So that when the church says, "Save," it implies that she wanted to be delivered out of that which would else prove her ruin.

For instance:

1. There is the *guilt* of sin. Now, however painful and distressing it may be, I believe that every soul taught of God must painfully and experimentally know the guilt of sin. There is no feeling so miserable as that of guilt, when it is charged home by God the Spirit upon the conscience. It cuts to pieces all the sinews of merit and creature righteousness; it sinks the soul down below all creature strength and all creature wisdom. It so penetrates into the very chambers of the heart that it does not leave a single corner untouched. Guilt really felt is of an over whelming nature; it must bow down the head, it must break the back, of every one who feels it. But whenever guilt is felt in the conscience, it will make every such guilty sinner cry to the Lord to save him. Save him from the guilt of sin. I believe every one who has felt the guilt of sin by the application of the law to his conscience, knows in time that nothing but the blood of Christ revealed to his soul by the power of God the Spirit, can ever remove it. It may

sometimes seem to wear off, it may be dulled; the intensity of the painful feelings may not be so vivid; but it will come on again. And a little thing may bring it on. A passing thought, a sudden recollection of eternity, hearing the bell toll, or seeing the coffin borne to the grave, the least thing to raise up a thought of death in the mind, will bring back guilt in the conscience. So that, though it does not always lie with power on the conscience, it will come again and again, and bring burdens and trouble, until it is removed by the blood of sprinkling, until the remedy goes into the same depth as the malady, until the virtue and efficacy of the blood of the Son of God are really felt through the power of the Holy Ghost. When, then, the church says, "Save, LORD," she is begging the Lord to give her eyes to see, and a heart to embrace, the propitiation that Jesus has made upon Calvary, so that she might enter into the blessedness of pardon through the blood of the Lamb.

2. But there is not only the guilt, but also the *power* of sin, that every living soul feels. What a powerful thing sin is! It is something like a deep and rapid river, the deeper the stream the more rapid the current. We only know the depth of the stream by being well-nigh drowned in it; and we only know the strength of the current by feeling it carrying us away, in spite of all our strength to swim against it. Sin in the heart is this deep and rapid stream; it is not a babbling brook, but a deep, rapid current. But we do not at first know what a powerful thing it is. We have no more power to stand against it, unless God in mercy strengthen us, than the thistledown can against the wind. As a giant might carry away a child in his arms, or as a lion might seize a lamb out of the fold, or as a tiger might run off with a calf, so we are carried away instantaneously by sin, unless God strengthen us in our souls against it. Who does not feel, that knows anything of the workings of sin in the carnal mind, how the base heart carries us away into sin in a moment, unless God in mercy prevent? Now this is one of the most painful things that a child of God can experience. The guilt and the power of sin work together. Sin first carries us away by its power, and then is felt in its guilt.

Now a child of God who has been carried away by sin, I do not mean open, flagitious, flagrant acts, but the daily workings of his heart, will go to the Lord sometimes with many sighs and tears, earnestly entreating him that he would save him from the power of sin by putting his fear into his heart, by making his conscience tender. And this the Lord answers sometimes by breathing a secret power into the soul, whereby he keeps the feet back from evil; sometimes by breaking down a temptation, so as to make it no longer a temptation; sometimes restraining him by his providence; and sometimes holding him back by his grace.

But when the church said, "Save, LORD," there were many things she wanted to be saved from. For instance, *the power of unbelief*. Does not unbelief often carry us away? Is it not perpetually working in the heart? It is so in mine, to my sorrow. Is it not perpetually teasing, harassing, and bubbling up like a stream? Is it not perpetually drawing us aside, and entangling us in some way or other, seeking to cast us down? Now, what a child of God wants is to be saved from this unbelief. He knows what a hateful thing it is in the sight of God. Therefore, feeling the workings of this unbelief in his carnal mind, he is desirous to be saved from it. And how saved from it? By the Lord's communicating that precious faith which overcomes it.

The church desires also to be saved from *self in all its various forms*, to be saved from rebellion, from murmuring and fretting against the Lord; from her own wisdom; her own strength and righteousness, to be saved from self in all its various shapes and appearances.

Now, wherever the Lord has put this cry into the soul, "Save, LORD," he will hear that cry. How very short the prayer is! And what makes it short? Extremity! We have not time for long prayers when we are in real distress. Was the prayer of Peter when he was sinking in the water very long? "Lord, save me!" comprehended all; and was he not heard? Does not the Lord say we are not heard for our much speaking? These few words of Peter's pierced the ears and entered into the heart of the

Redeemer; he stretched forth his hand, and saved him. The prayer of the thief on the cross was not a long, set prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." But what a prevailing prayer was that! How immediately the expiring Lamb of God said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The publican who went up to the temple pressed with guilt and shame, was not able to lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. Did he go with a long, set prayer? "God be merciful to me a sinner!" comprehended it all. Was not his prayer heard? Do we not read that "this man went down to his house justified?" The righteousness of God was imputed to him, and he went home to his house a pardoned, accepted believer. So the words of the text, "Save, LORD." If a man is really enabled to put up these words from a feeling sense of his need of them, as one sinking without them, perishing unless the prayer is heard and answered, that cry never was, never will be, uttered in vain. "Save, LORD!" "Save me from hell; save me from destruction; save me from being overwhelmed in the bottomless pit; save me from the floods of vengeance about to burst upon a guilty world; save me from the guilt of sin; save me from self in all its shapes and forms; save me by applying to my soul, revealing to my heart and conscience, what the Son of God has done upon Calvary."

II. But we pass on to consider the remaining clause of the text: "*Let the king hear us when we call.*" Observe how the church fixes her eyes upon the King; how she traces the Son of God through all the parts of his mediatorial work. "Let the king hear us when we call." Does not this show the equality of the Son with the Father? In the first clause of the text the church says, "Save, LORD," as though she personally addressed herself to the Father; but in the very same verse she adds, "*Let the king hear us when we call.*" Now this may be a relief to some here present. Have not some of you been perplexed on this point, which Person of the Trinity you, should pray to? Sometimes you have prayed to the Father, and then there has been a secret whisper in your heart that you ought to pray to the Son; and when you have done that, you have felt it wrong that you did not pray to the Holy Ghost; and at last you have been so confused as not to know how to

pray at all. This is one of Satan's devices to entangle you in prayer, to scatter your thoughts, and confuse your mind, by raising up these perplexing suggestions. But you cannot err if you pray to all the Persons of the Trinity as your soul is led. If you are led to pray to the Father, pray to the Father; and if led to pray to the Son, pray to the Son; and if led to pray to the Spirit, pray to the Spirit. We have Scriptural instances for all. Paul prays to the Father, (Eph.1:17), "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." We have Stephen's prayer to the Son: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And we have Paul's prayer to the Spirit: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ " (2 Thess.3:5), where the name Lord, being distinguished from God the Father and Christ, shows that the blessed Spirit is addressed. Thus the church in the first clause of the text prays to the Father, and in the second clause prays to the Son: "Let the king hear us when we call." She addresses the Lord of life and glory sitting as Monarch over the universe, enthroned as King over God's house at the Father's right hand. This implies that the church has given her heart's adoration to him, that she is a loyal subject, that she has renounced obedience to all former sovereigns; as she confesses in another place, "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name" (Isa.26:13).

This is the point, then, that the Lord brings his people to. When he listens to their desire for salvation, when he hears their cry, "Save, LORD!" "I am a perishing sinner at thy feet, and can only be saved by thy blood and righteousness, and by the personal application of it to my soul;" when this prayer is heard, when salvation comes, when the conscience is purged, when sin is pardoned, and the believer is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he looks up to, he worships, he adores the Son of God as his King. We find this intimated in Psalm 45. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;" as though the Spirit said, "Turn thy back upon all thy old

companions, renounce all thy old allegiance." "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: *for he is thy Lord*; and worship thou him." "Thou hast received him as thy Lord; thou art, then, no longer thine own; thou art bought with a price. He is thy Head, thy Husband; he is thy Lord; and worship thou him, adore him, admire him, cleave to him with purpose of heart." So that when the church says, "Let the king hear," it implies that she has believed with her heart in the finished work of Christ; that she has bowed her soul down before the Lord of life and glory, and that she has received him into her soul as the Monarch of her affections.

We see this clearly developed in Thomas. Here was Thomas, as full of infidelity and unbelief as Satan could well fill him. He actually would not believe that Jesus was risen from the dead unless he put his hand into his pierced side. But when the Lord invited him to put his hand into his side, and behold his hands, faith flowed immediately into his conscience, and he fell down before him; light and life took possession of his soul; and his believing heart vented itself in these words: "My Lord and my God." He at that moment received him as his King; he gave him the allegiance of his heart; he owned him as his once crucified, but now risen Lord; and he bowed before him as his eternal and almighty God.

Then when the church says in the text, "Let the king hear us when we call," she speaks of Jesus as her Lord, reigning in her soul, guiding her thoughts, sitting upon her heart as her Monarch and Sovereign, and ruling over her by his own will and Word. But she was in distress and perplexity; there was that in her experience which still made her feel her need, her increasing need of him. Look at her words: "Let the king hear us when we call;" not merely when we pray, when we ask, when we desire, when we want; but the word "call" implies felt necessity, an extremity that required immediate deliverance. Persons do not call, unless they are in some extremity. We call for help, as a drowning person when he falls into the river; we call for deliverance, as a man set upon by robbers, or as a woman

insulted and oppressed, that she may be rescued from her ravisher. Urgent need is therefore implied in the expression, "call." When the church, therefore, says, "Let the king hear us when we call," she means to imply that there are those distresses, those perplexities, which force a cry from her soul. Does not this beat to pieces that vain expectation of our ever arriving at a state that we shall not need the Lord? If the Lord be our Teacher, we shall want him more and more. As we grow weaker and weaker, feebler and feebler; as we get a deeper sight of ourselves, and a higher sight of Jesus, we shall want him more and more every day. Woe be to us, woe be to us, if ever we get to such a state as not to want Christ. Depend upon it, we have got into a land of death, out of the way of the Spirit's work upon our hearts, if we get into such a state as never to want Christ.

"Let the king hear us," the church then says, "when we call." "When our souls are exercised; when we are distressed through the various perplexities that we have to meet with in the way; when we want him to be a present help in time of trouble; let the King then hear us; let our prayers then reach his ears; let our cries then bring down relief from him who is mighty to save." A child of God does not pray for praying's sake; he does not pray, at least when he is under divine teaching, to satisfy conscience, and as a mere matter of form; but, when he is under the power of the spirit of grace and supplications, he prays because he wants a blessing communicated. "Let the king hear us." "let him stretch forth his arm, let him give that blessing which we stand in need of; let him communicate mercy and peace to our souls; let him not turn a deaf ear, but let him listen to our cry." But does not Jesus always hear? Does he not always listen to the cries of his people? He does; but there is often a feeling in our hearts when he does not immediately answer our requests, that he does not hear us. "How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" (Hab.1:2). There the prophet was in a state of darkness, and could not believe the Lord heard his prayer. So the church complains in Lamentations: "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (3:44). The cloud was so dark,

so dense, that her prayer could not pierce through it.

Thus sometimes the fear arises through the delay of the petition. It has been laid at the feet, and presented before the face of the King; but it is long before the answer comes. How many of the Lord's people are tried on this point! They have prayed for years for the manifestation of Christ to their souls, for the pardon of their sins, for the shedding abroad of his love; but it has not yet come down in that sweet power they want to experience. This makes them fear that it never will come again. Guilt in the soul makes us fear that we have sinned so basely against the Lord that he will not hear us. The Lord says, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you " (Isa.59:2). Sometimes such feelings as these work in the mind: "I am such a sinner, so base a wretch; I am so unlike everything that a Christian should be in all I say, think, and do, that the Lord will not hear me." Sometimes through powerful workings of infidelity we may think there is no God to hear. Sometimes we are so full of unbelief as to feel it is of no use praying any longer: "I have prayed so long, and the Lord takes no notice; why should I weary him?" Sometimes we fear that our prayers are a stink in his nostrils, and that we are like those who "eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels."

Under these feelings, therefore, the church says, "Let the king hear us!" "Though our base idols too often steal away our affections; though our traitorous lusts run off with our carnal minds, yet our hearts are still with the King." The citadel still remains secure. Though the soldiers of the enemy are running through the streets of the city, yet the heart, the garrison, the inmost, deepest affections of the soul still remain loyal and obedient to the King of kings, to whom they have sworn allegiance. Therefore she says, "Let the king hear us!" We have indeed treated him basely; we have departed from him; we have sinned against him; we have longed after other kings; our carnal affections have gone out towards other lovers; and we have been the basest of all wretches towards him. Yet we want him still to

rule and reign in our souls. There is some beating of the tender affections of our hearts towards him, and we cannot bear the thought that he should leave us altogether, and never give us a glimpse of his glory and beauty again. The devil has not got possession of the garrison. He has not pulled down the King's throne, and driven allegiance out of the heart. Christ is still our King. Though we confess to our shame and sorrow that there are many traitorous lusts in our hearts, that would, if allowed, sell the garrison into the hands of the enemy, yet it still remains firm to the King. We need him; nobody else can do us any good, all other brooks are dry, and all cisterns broken. The King alone can do us good; he only can save us, bless us, and make us rejoice in his love; shield us in his bosom from our enemies; bestow his loving kindness on our hearts; make us happy here, and take us to endless bliss hereafter. Then "let the king hear us when we call" when ravishers are assaulting us; when these renegades are running through the streets; when these lusts, like so many of his and our enemies, are lively and strong, let him manifest himself; let him scatter our enemies; let him come and take possession of our hearts and affections, and reveal himself as our King and Sovereign.

Now is not this the feeling of a living soul, to be full of shame and sorrow, full of self-condemnation at being such a wretch; and yet it cannot give up Jesus? Though at the ends of the earth, to be longing, looking, languishing after, and desiring him; deserving indeed to be cast into hell, yet coveting a place in heaven; often serving Satan, and yet wanting to lean upon the bosom of the King of kings; often lusting after the devil's delicacies, and yet wanting to be fed with meat from the King's table? "Save, LORD;" for none but thou can save such a wretch. "Let the king hear us when we call " in extremity, in distress, in shame, in sorrow. "Let the king hear us," not slight our petitions; not turn his offended face away, and say, "I will give thee up;" but rather, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together" (Hos.11:8). "I will not give thee up, Ephraim." "Though he is a

rebellious child; though he has proved himself a transgressor from the womb, I cannot give him up, because I have loved him." Therefore, the King having died for his church, and having done such a mighty work for her, he cannot, he will not, give her up, but he will save her with an everlasting salvation, and prove to her that where sin hath abounded, grace doth "much more abound."

## THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

Preached on Wednesday Evening, April 28, 1841, at Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh, that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from evil that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." 1 Chronicles 4:10

I have read that in the sand deserts of Egypt, after the traveller has been passing through barren wilds, with nought but a blazing sun above and scorching sands beneath, he comes sometimes to a green fertile spot, that forms a perfect contrast with the desolate wilderness around, where there are wells of water to refresh his thirst, and palm trees to afford him shade and food. Such it appears was Elim, "where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees," where the children of Israel encamped after wandering in the wilderness for three days without water, **Ex 15:22,27**; and such was also "Tadmor in the wilderness," **2Ch 8:4**, the word signifying a palm tree. There seems something similar to this in the prayer of Jabez recorded in the first book of Chronicles. In reading the first three chapters we had been travelling through a wilderness of names **unprofitable and uninteresting to us, though not so to the children of Israel, on the preservation of whose genealogies the lineage of the high priest, and the descent of Christ from David depended**, when we light all of a sudden on a green spot, which forms a perfect contrast to the long and "endless genealogies" that we have been toiling through. This green spot is the prayer of Jabez; and here, should the Lord the Spirit lead us into the sweet and rich experience of the passage, we may find in it some green pastures to feed in, and some still waters to lay down by. But why should this be such a green spot? Because all the family of God may, more or less distinctly, read their experience in the prayer of Jabez, and see clearly portrayed in it

the desires and breathings of their own souls. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," **Pr 27:19**.

But who was Jabez? We read nothing of him beyond these two features, which the Holy Spirit has stamped his name with: first, that he was "more honourable than his brethren;" secondly, that "his mother called his name Jabez **which means** **sorrowful**", because she bare him with sorrow." As names were generally prophetic in those times, it would seem to imply that he was the sorrowful child of a sorrowful mother. He was certainly cradled in affliction, and as an eminent follower of him who was a Man of sorrows, he doubtless was chosen in the furnace of affliction, and through much tribulation entered the kingdom of heaven. His very petition, "Keep me from evil **that it may not grieve me,**" shows that he knew what grief and trouble of soul were. His first badge, then, was sorrow; and his second was **honour**. "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren." How more honourable? Not so by birth, for, being of the same parents with his brethren, his lineage could not be more honourable than theirs. Nor by filling any eminent post, for he is not mentioned in any other part of Scripture. Nor by talent, or anything else reckoned honourable by man, for "that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God," **Lu 16:15**. His honour was "that which cometh from God only," **Joh 5:44**, and consisted in his being "a vessel made unto honour" in the original election of God, **Ro 9:21**, and in the appointed season sanctified by the Spirit as a vessel unto honour meet for the Master's use, **2Ti 2:21**. For "this honour have all his saints," **Ps 149:9**; and "thus is it done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour," **Es 6:9**; and be assured that the same two marks, **affliction** and **honour**, are stamped upon every living soul, according to the measure of the Spirit's dealings with him.

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel." From this we gather that he had a spiritual, experimental knowledge of the God of Israel. He did not worship "an unknown God," like the Athenians; nor the God of creation, like the Deist; nor the God of his own fancy, like the Pharisee; nor the God of universal love and mercy, like the

Arminian; but "the God of Israel," that is, God in covenant with a peculiar people—Israel being "his inheritance," **Isa 19:25**; the object of his eternal love, **Mal 1:2**; and "his peculiar treasure," **Ps 135:4**. This was the God before whom he bowed down to worship in spirit and in truth, and at whose mercy-seat he poured forth the desire of his soul in the prayer left here upon record.

But how came he to call upon the God of Israel? Before he could call upon him he must know him, and this could only be by some personal manifestation of him. To read of him in the Scriptures—to hear of him from the mouth of others—to have received a traditionary knowledge of him from parents or instructors—to have the natural conscience impressed with a sense of his being and universal presence, all fall very short of a personal, spiritual, supernatural manifestation of him to the soul. When a ray of divine light shines into the heart out of the fulness of the Godhead, then and then only do we know him aright, then and then only can we be said to know him at all. To know him thus, so as to see him in the light of his own countenance, to feel his gracious presence shed abroad, and to be drawn up into some secret and close communion with him, is a part of that eternal life, of which the Lord has said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," **Joh 17:3**. Jabez, then, being brought into this spiritual knowledge of the God of Israel, comes into his gracious presence under the special anointings and teachings of the Holy Ghost, and bowing down with solemn prostration of spirit before the throne of majesty and mercy, pours forth the desires and breathings of his soul in such words as the blessed Spirit indited. Were it not so, this prayer would not have been left recorded in the pages of inspired truth. But if this be the case, then, if we live under the same heavenly teaching, if the same blessed inward Intercessor pray in us, the desire and breathings of our soul will correspond to the desires and breathings of the soul of Jabez. And this prayer seems to have been left upon record as a model, a pattern of spiritual breathings, a cast as it were from the inward mould, a putting into a tangible visible shape that which transpires in the secret chambers of the heart.

We will, then, without any formal divisions, simply endeavour to travel through the petitions offered up in this prayer of Jabez; and may the Lord enable us to see our faces reflected therein, for if our hearts are filled with the same desires, and we pray under the same heavenly operations, the same blessed answer is annexed to our petitions which was annexed to his.

I. What was his first request? "Oh, that thou wouldst bless me indeed!" There are many apparent blessings which are real curses; many apparent curses which are real blessings; and many blessings which are both apparent and real.

1. Thus **health** is apparently one of the greatest natural blessings, but it often proves a real curse. Its strong tendency is to remove far away all thoughts of death and eternity; to make a man more or less satisfied with the things of time and sense; to encourage building up earthly paradises and castles in the air; and to draw comfort and happiness from the creature instead of the Creator. He who lives in the enjoyment of uninterrupted health, through whose arteries the vigorous blood freely courses, has all his passions strong, all his animal spirits high, and this full tide of life brings with it a cheerfulness and happiness, which, unless he be well ballasted and weighted in other ways, makes him satisfied with life from the very hue that it wears. Strong health brings with it strong lasts, and feeds the old man, which is to be mortified and crucified. Thus this great apparent blessing may prove a real curse.

2. So **money**. How often is the poor distressed child of God longing for a large slice of this great apparent blessing, and perhaps envying this or that rich professor! But this is often a real curse. How continually do we see it shut up the heart, stiffen the pride, become a temptation and a snare, and draw aside even God's children into many foolish and hurtful lusts, feeding the love of the world and the desires of the flesh and of the mind. He felt this who asked for neither poverty nor riches, "lest he should become full and **deny** God."

3. So the **good opinion and praise of men**. This is eagerly sought for as a blessing, but often proves a real curse. Even God's children are often much tempted to seek the applause of the creature, and derive comfort and support from the good opinion of others, instead of seeking that testimony, which the Spirit bears in the conscience. But what is that religion worth which is built upon the good opinion of a man that shall die? One puff of the fiery furnace will burn all such props up. And yet we are often galled, fretted, and mortified by the harsh opinions and unkind speeches which are passed upon us and uttered against us.

But there are apparent curses which often are real blessings. A languishing, afflicted state of health, so trying and so painful to the flesh, often proves in God's hands a real blessing. It tends to make the world bitter, pulls down airy visions of happiness sought out of God, brings solemn thoughts into the soul, and weans the heart from idols. Not that **it** can do any one of these things, but the Lord uses it as his instrument. So **poverty** is often made a real blessing to a child of God, by being a means of keeping him dependent upon the God of providence as well as the God of grace, and thus leading him into that close waiting upon the Lord, and crying and sighing to him for deliverance, which none but the poor can know. And when the answer comes, he blesses and praises him with joyful lips, and feels a gratitude and love which is in proportion to his former trials. So **the scourge of the tongue** shall drive a man nearer the Lord; the doubt cast upon his religion shall make him more earnest to make his calling and election sure; and the arrows of slander and calumny shall make him cautious and circumspect. Having all his family against him, perhaps opposing his religion as the source of all their troubles, and he having to stand a poor isolated being in the midst of children and relations—this apparent curse upon his family shall prove a real blessing to a child of God, and lead him from the creature to the Creator, from broken cisterns to the fountain of living waters, and from idols to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus.

But there are blessings which are both apparent and real. When I say apparent, I mean so only to those who have eyes to see them and hearts to desire them. These blessings Jabez desired, "blessings **indeed**:" not apparent blessings and real curses, not apparent curses and real blessings, but blessings stamped as such, and coming down into his soul as manifested blessings from the Lord of life and glory. No other could satisfy his soul. All but blessings indeed left him barren, naked, and empty. Let us look at some of these blessings indeed.

**The fear of the Lord** in the soul is a blessing indeed, as being the beginning of wisdom, and therefore the beginning of all other manifested blessings. But why should Jabez be panting after this blessing? Because he knew and felt that if he were wrong here, he was wrong everywhere. He had, doubtless, felt too that from want of the exercise of this godly fear he had often gone astray. We live in a world where snares of every kind are spread for our feet, and into which we must fall, if left to ourselves. Feeling, then, his own helplessness and headlong proneness to all evil, Jabez was crying out for this as a real manifested blessing.

**Some intimation of God's favour**, some soft and gentle whisper of love, some token for good, some feeling sense of his blessed presence, some solemn dropping down of the dew of mercy, some witness of the Spirit to our spirit that we are born of God, is a blessing indeed. To have peace with God, and feel an inward sense of reconciliation, whereby we are spiritually assured that "fury is not in him," but that he is our Father and our friend, is a blessing indeed. To have our evidences brightened, doubts and fears removed, our hopes strengthened, and our longing expectation of future bliss encouraged and shone upon, is a blessing indeed.

And yet these seem, sweet though they be, all to fall short of that greatest and best of all blessings—a sweet manifestation and revelation of Christ to the soul. Those who are brought into bondage and guilt through the application of the law to their

consciences, as the Holy Spirit leads them out in earnest desires and breathings, feel that the greatest blessing which God can bestow upon them would be to "reveal his Son in them," **Ga 1:16**, and form "Christ in their heart, as the hope of glory," **Col 1:27**. They at times are earnestly longing to feel his blood sprinkled on their conscience, and to have such a manifestation of his glorious and lovely person to their soul, that they may embrace him with every affection of their renewed spirit, cleave to him with purpose of heart, and enjoy him as eternally theirs. It is by these holy and fervent longings of the renewed spirit after Christ, that the living convictions wrought in the souls of the elect by the Holy Spirit, are distinguished from the slavish fears and remorseful convictions that are in the reprobate. This blessed Teacher has in some measure held up Christ before the eyes of their mind, and kindled some degree of affection towards him; and thus they cannot be satisfied with Christ in the Bible, Christ in doctrine and speculation, Christ at a distance, unfelt, unseen, unenjoyed; but are, each according to their measure, at times earnestly suing and begging for him to come into their heart, and take full possession of their soul. Now, in answer to these fervent cries, the Holy Spirit will sometimes bring the blessing just as it were within sight. Like a gallant ship, the soul seems sometimes just about to shoot into harbour, when just as she nears the pier-head, a gust off shore beats her back, and she must again struggle with the winds and waves. But all these disappointments serve only to quicken the desires of the longing spirit, and under these feelings by night and by day, at home and abroad, in the daily business and the solitary walk, there will be the earnest cry of the soul to have this best and greatest of manifested blessings.

But again, where this blessing is delayed, or seemingly denied, there will be such a sinking down of soul into doubt and fear that it will be crying after lower evidences of interest in Christ. Great poverty makes a small coin acceptable where a larger is denied. Thus in deep soul-poverty one word from God, one look, one smile would seem ample. The scales seem at times so evenly poised between life and death that a grain would decide the matter. When all is crooked one word would set matters straight.

But, that such a wretch and filthy monster of iniquity should have a smile from the great and holy Jehovah seems a blessing too great, but would be "a blessing indeed."

Again to rest with confidence upon the Lord, and to believe that however dark matters are, he will appear; to trust when we cannot perceive him, to hope against hope and believe against unbelief, and thus through faith and patience become followers of them who inherit the promises, this is a blessing indeed. So to be weaned from idols, delivered from broken cisterns, separated in spirit and affection from the world, and have our heart fixed on things above, is a blessing indeed.

To feel an appetite after God's word, to receive the truth in the love of it, to have sweet and holy communion with the three-one Jehovah, and to live under the solemn anointings of the blessed Spirit is a blessing indeed. In a word every spiritual blessing that God has blessed his church with in Christ, is such a blessing as Jabez panted after—every blessing that God can give or the soul receive—everything that comes down from heaven and leads to heaven—everything that fits the soul for trials here and bliss hereafter—everything upon which God has put his own stamp and set his own seal, is "a blessing indeed."

II. But we must proceed to the second petition of Jabez: "And enlarge my coast." What **coast** was this? I believe it was the limit of his experience, the line of life drawn out by the Holy Spirit on his heart and conscience. A coast means a boundary line, such as divides one territory from another, or terminates a country, as the **sea coast** is the boundary of our island. Every quickened soul, then, has a coast; that is a territory of inward experience, which is limited and bounded by the line that the Holy Spirit has drawn in his conscience. Some, for instance, have a narrow experience—a slip, as it were, of spiritual territory. They cannot get much beyond doubts and fears, and guilt and convictions, with, at times, earnest desires for mercy and pardon. Others have their coast a little more extended. The blessed Spirit has moved the line a little farther, and taken in a somewhat larger

territory. These are enabled to hope in God's mercy, and anchor in his promises. Others can through faith rest in Christ's blood and righteousness, having received some intimation of favour, but not brought out into the liberty of the gospel. In these the coast has been carried out farther still, and the line embraces a larger space. Others are brought into the light, life, liberty, joy, and peace of the glorious gospel of the Son of God. In these the coast of spiritual experience is still more widely allotted, and they can say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage," **Ps 16:6**. As the Lord divided the tribes, to cast their inheritance by line, **Ps 78:55**, so hath he cast the lot for every vessel of mercy, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line **Isa 34:17**. This is as it were the tether which fastens down every quickened soul to his own appointed portion of inward experience. Within this tether he may walk, feed, and lie down. It is "the food convenient for him," the strip of pasture allotted him. He cannot, he dare not break this tether, which is fastened round a tender conscience, and every stretching forth beyond his measure to boast in another man's line of things, **2Co 10:14,16**, cuts into and galls this tender conscience. He may indeed, and often will, wear this pasture bare by treading so much and so long within the narrow circle, and may reach forth his neck sometimes to nibble a few blades of grass a little beyond his strip, yet will he not break his tether to rush uninvited into the green pastures. A child of God is not like the wild ass, of which we read that "the range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing," **Job 39:8**. A living soul cannot thus "snuff up the wilderness at his pleasure," **Jer 2:24**, "regarding not the crying of the driver;" nor run loose into the field of doctrine, rolling himself amid the thick grass and flowers of promises and gospel truths, and "feeding himself without fear." No; he must have the stake pulled up, and the tether lengthened, and be led by his master into just such a portion as he sees good to give him. Nor, again, will a living soul be satisfied with a narrow, circumscribed experience. Some seem well contented to be as they are, and have no wish to have a better or more enlarged experience than they think they possess. The old strip round which they have walked twenty years till it is threadbare,

amply suffices them. But it is a different thing to break through the tether from presumption, and lie still on the bare ground through sloth. The living soul cannot but earnestly desire to have his coast enlarged. More light, more life, more feeling, more liberty, more knowledge of God in Christ, more faith, hope, and love. To have his narrow, contracted, shut up heart, enlarged in prayer, in meditation, in communion, in affection to the people of God. He is not satisfied with the scanty pasture allotted him, but wants a larger measure of heavenly teaching, to be indulged with more filial confidence in, and access unto God, and to be more delivered from that fear which hath torment. "God shall **enlarge** Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem," **Ge 9:27**. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shall **enlarge** my heart," **Ps 119:32**. This enlargement of their border the Lord had sworn to Israel, and to give them all the land which he had promised unto their fathers, **De 19:8**; and therefore when he had said, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear," he adds, "**enlarge** the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes," **Isa 54:1,2**. Have you any of these fervent desires after light, love, and liberty, that the world, pride, lust, unbelief, covetousness, and carnality may not shut up your heart, but that you may know the love of

Christ that passeth knowledge, so as to be filled with all the fulness of God? These are good desires, and very different from rushing presumptuously forward, and chattering about liberty, whilst you are slaves of corruption. It is one thing to look through the park palings, and another to enjoy the estate; but it is far better to look through the palings with wishful desires, than to break down the fence as a trespasser. To look upon the coffer is not to be put into possession of the writings, but it is better to wait and cry for the key of David, than break it open, and steal the deeds. And he that is kept in that narrow, narrow path between sloth and presumption will be at solemn seasons crying out with Jabez: "Oh, that thou wouldst enlarge my coast!"

III. "And that thine hand might be with me." This is the third petition of this heard and answered prayer. Jabez was not for rushing presumptuously on in his temporal concerns more than in his spiritual. Without some divine leading or intimation of God's will he was afraid to step forward. But why this holy caution and anxious desire for the hand of God to go out before him, and be with him? Because he had proved by painful experience, that where the beginning of a thing is not from God he could not expect the middle to be from God nor the end. What, indeed, we undertake from carnal motives and selfish ends, God may, and doubtless will, overrule to his own glory and our good, but we shall have small comfort from it by the way. Having smarted, then, from his carnality and self-seeking **for by painful experience is this lesson learnt**, Jabez now wanted to see the Lord's hand stretched out to show him the way, and keep him in it.

The burnt child dreads the fire; and thus feeling all to be wrong, and to go wrong where the Lord's hand is not, the living soul fears to be left to itself. It is not the bare, dry, letter truth of God's special providence that will satisfy one jealous over himself with godly jealousy. This will do for a professor; but a living child wants to see and feel a fatherly hand with him and over him, going before him temporally, holding him up spiritually, clearing his path, removing all difficulties, and giving him testimonies that what is done in his fear shall terminate in his approbation. If this hand be with us, all is well; if not with us, or against us, all is ill. Our enemies cannot hurt us if the Lord be on our side; our difficulties, however great, shall not ruin us if his hand be with us; our lusts and temptations shall not prevail, if he stretch forth his hand; and our base and filthy hearts shall not sink us into eternal dismay, if the everlasting arms are underneath. He, then, that can wait and watch the Lord's hand, and only moves when that hand leads forward, will not go astray. But it is the self-loathing and condemnation, the smart and wound of having so rashly and obstinately followed our own ways, that will make us cry feelingly and frequently, "that thine hand may be with me."

IV. The last petition of Jabez is, "And that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." It is indeed a base misrepresentation of the doctrines of grace to say that they lead to licentiousness. However ungodly men abuse and pervert them, such is not their effect or tendency in a living soul. I believe that every child of God will be more or less frequently offering up this prayer of Jabez, "That thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." He is not one of those who say, "never mind; sin cannot damn me, nor cut me out of the covenant;" but having his heart tender before God and his conscience alive in his fear, knowing something of the terrors of the Lord, and something too of his goodness, he desires to be kept from evil as being hateful to God, and grievous to his own soul. Sin indulged had brought pain and grief into his heart, had cut deep wounds in his conscience, and burdened him sore, and remembering the wormwood and the gall, he cried to be kept from it for the future. Shun as you would a pestilence any one who makes light of sin. Be assured such have never seen or known God, nor Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Had they seen light in God's light, had their secret sins been set in the light of his countenance, or had they ever seen by faith a crucified Lord, they would not, they dare not, speak lightly of that which has been so signally stamped with the wrath of the Father, and suffering of the Son. He who has not been brought to abhor himself in dust and ashes has never seen God, and has only heard of him by the hearing of the ear, **Job 42:5,6**. Evil is a grief, a burden to every living soul, and when fallen into, cuts his tender conscience, and wounds his mind. But the expression, "And that thou wouldst keep me from evil," implies that Jabez was a poor burdened sinner who could not keep himself. If he could keep himself, this petition would be an idle mockery. He need not to have fallen outwardly to teach him this. There are inward falls, slips of the tongue, glances of the eye, filthy desires, roving imaginations, covetous projects, proud desires, idolatrous lustings, secret backslidings into carnality and worldliness. Jabez does not pray, keep me from evil that it may not disgrace me or expose me, lest it wound my fair fame or gratify my enemies, but that it may not grieve me—that it may not prove an inward source of trouble, may not intercept

communion, bar access, bring a cloud before the mercy-seat, rankle in me so as to produce guilt and terror, may not bring down heavy chastisements, and make me a limping cripple all my days. He was not one of those who can be very pious openly, and very impious secretly, a whited sepulchre fair without, and within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

"And God granted him that which he requested." That was the best of all. It is not prayer, but **the answer** to prayer that brings the blessing. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth," **Pr 15:23**. And it was Jabez's mercy not merely to pray for spiritual blessings, but to have them richly bestowed. The Lord did bless him indeed, did enlarge his coast, guided him with his hand, and kept him from evil.

In drawing this feeble portrait of Jabez, I have also described, however faintly and imperfectly, the desires and breathings of the people of God. But remember that I have not said that they are always in this state. Had I said so, if I know any of these things by experience, I should have told a lie, and the very worst of all lies a pulpit lie. It is only at certain seasons, rare and solemn moments, under the special visitations and overshadowings of the blessed Spirit, that the people of God thus pour out their hearts before him. There are many times when it seems as if this world could satisfy us, when we build up our earthly paradises, and seek as it were ease and rest here below. But the voice soon comes, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest." As the Holy Spirit brooded over the dark waters of chaos, so will he sometimes brood over the soul, infusing life and feeling, and drawing forth earnest desires such as passed through the soul of Jabez; and then it seems as if nothing would or could satisfy us but a blessed answer. Let me, then, ask you a few questions. Do you know the God of Israel by his own manifestations? Do you call upon him in solemn moments of secret supplication, when every thought lies open to his eye, and your whole soul seems prostrate before him, as if he and you were alone on the earth? Are you seeking real blessings at his hand, blessings indeed! Are you crying to him to enlarge your coast? Or are you well satisfied

with your present attainments, looking down upon others as babes, whilst you know all that is to be known. If you are sitting in the easy chair of the sluggard, or roaming over the mountains of presumption, you want no spiritual enlargement of heart. But if you are a poor burdened cripple, that would fain enjoy light, love, and liberty, I well know you are sometimes pouring out your soul, if not in the words in the meaning of them, "Oh, that thou wouldst enlarge my coast!" Can you rush headlong into every scheme without seeking the Lord's sanction and guiding hand? Then you have not the heart nor cry of Jabez. And can you go to the very borders of evil, or even dally with sin, sheltering yourself under the falls of saints, without any groans for the past or cries for the future? Can you without piercing pangs of conscience indulge bosom sins, and go recklessly on in base lusts? Then you give little evidence that you are under such teachings as Jabez was favoured with.

I know by painful experience what man's best heart is, but I believe I know also something of the desires and breathings of Jabez, to be delivered from the dominion of evil, and if I did not, I should conclude that I was dead in sin. One word more and I have done. If the Lord the Spirit has breathed into our souls the same hungerings and thirstings, longings and desires that he communicated to the soul of Jabez, a similar answer is annexed in the secret counsels of God to them, and when that answer comes with power, it will make us willing to crown Jesus Lord of all.

## The Prayer of Moses

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 4, 1847

"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Psalm 90:15-17

The title of the Psalm is, "The Prayer of Moses, the man of God." The Holy Ghost, therefore, used the pen of Moses to give this inspired production for the benefit of the church of God. But, bear in mind who Moses was. He is called emphatically here "the man of God;" being the man whom God raised up in an especial manner to do his work. He is also called God's "servant," and declared to be "faithful in all his house." (Heb. 3:5.) The Lord especially favoured him, too, by taking him up into the mount, and there communing with him for the space of forty days; so that when he came down from the mount his face shone with such resplendent glory that the children of Israel could not bear to look upon it. But did the work which the Lord gave Moses to do, or did the glorious manifestation of the Lord's presence and power set Moses upon some lofty pinnacle, far out of sight, and far out of the reach of God's family? It did not. He was a man of like infirmities and failings with ourselves. And I say it with all reverence, had Moses by the favour of God manifested to him been set upon some lofty pinnacle, out of reach of the infirmities, sins, and exercises that God's people are tried with, the productions of Moses' pen would have been of little service to them. But we have him here, though so highly favoured, and so blessedly enriched with the lovingkindness and mercy of the Lord, in the same exercised spot that the Lord's family are ever to be found in. "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret

sins in the light of thy countenance." And thus, though he had been so highly favoured, he had not got beyond the reach of God's anger made manifest in his conscience when he sinned, nor beyond the reach of his secret sins being set in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Nor again, had he got beyond a cry after God's manifested mercy. "O satisfy us," he cries from the bottom of his heart (for nothing else can satisfy us), "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." And then follow the words of our text. "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

There are four petitions in the words before us. God grant us to consider them in the light of the Spirit; and the Lord enable me to speak out of the fulness of a feeling, believing heart, what I see and feel in them!

I. The first petition runs thus: *"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."*

What is the Lord's testimony concerning his family? Is it not this? "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." (Zeph. 3:12.) Is it not the Lord's own solemn declaration, that "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" (John 16:33.) Did not the Apostle Paul confirm the souls of the disciples by exhorting them "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God?" (Acts 14:22.) Do we not read also, 2 Timothy 2:12, "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him?" And when John, the beloved disciple, saw a glorious company before the throne, and enquiry was made who they were, was not this the reply, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?" (Rev. 7:14.) If this be the case, then, to be out of

the way of tribulation is to be out of the way altogether. And not to know anything of "the sufferings of Christ" is not to be with him hereafter, and see and partake of his eternal glory. Thus afflictions, tribulations, exercises, trials, and temptations, lie in the path of every child of God. If, then, we have them not, it is a mark against us; but if we have, it is so far a token in our favour.

Now, what is that which I may call the substratum, the foundation of this prayer of Moses? It is, that the Lord would "make them glad according to the days wherein he had afflicted them, and the years wherein they had seen evil." He could ask to be gladdened in no other way. It was only in proportion to "their days of affliction, and their years of evil," he could ask the Lord to gladden their hearts. He could not come to the throne of mercy to ask the Lord to gladden them, except as being partakers of affliction, and being tried with evil. And thus we cannot with any consistency come to a throne of mercy, and ask the Lord to gladden, comfort, cheer, and bless our souls, except we are walking in a similar path. Affliction, then, in its varied shapes and forms, is the very basis upon which all consolation must stand; and an acquaintance with the evil of our hearts by daily exercise, must be the foundation upon which we come, to beg of the Lord that he would speak peace and comfort to our souls. If, then, we come in any other way, surely we cannot come in simplicity and godly sincerity.

There are, then, *days* wherein God sees fit to *afflict* his children; and there are *years* wherein he is pleased to show them *evil*. The Lord enable us to look at some of the afflictions wherewith he chastens his Zion.

1. *Affliction* is the lot of all the children of men; for "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." (Job. 5:7.) But more especially is affliction the lot of God's people. How few of the living family are exempt from *providential* and *temporal* troubles! How many of the Lord's family are afflicted, deeply afflicted, *in body!* How many carry about with them a tottering tabernacle, a poor diseased frame, from which pain and suffering seem

scarcely a day absent! And this they know by painful experience to be a severe trial, a painful, providential affliction. How many of the Lord's people are deeply tried *in circumstances!* God hath chosen the poor of this world to be "rich in faith;" and he hath seen fit, in his infinite wisdom, that by far the greater proportion of his redeemed family should have to wade through many troubles arising from natural poverty and scanty circumstances. How many of the Lord's family are pained and grieved with *domestic trials!* The very natural sources of affection become sources of grief and sorrow. The partner of their bosom, the children upon whom they have fixed their affections, often prove sources of trial to God's family.

But though these are trials (and ever must be trials as God makes them so), yet how little are they in real magnitude compared with *spiritual* sufferings, with those afflictions *in grace* that the Lord sees fit to exercise his people with. For instance,

2. *A sense of guilt*, from sin being laid as a heavy burden upon the conscience—is not this one of the afflictions which the Lord's people are from time to time deeply tried with? What cuts so deeply as guilt? What penetrates and pierces like God's anger felt in the conscience? What burden is more hard to be borne than a sense of God's wrath against transgression, when that wrath is let down into the soul? Is not this one of the afflictions spoken of in the verse preceding our text? "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Whenever God sets our iniquities before himself, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance, it must be a day of affliction to the soul thus deeply exercised.

3. *The hidings and withdrawals of God's gracious countenance;* the soul hanging in doubt and fear; despondency working in the heart; inability to get near the throne of mercy; accusations of conscience; the fiery darts of Satan hurled into the carnal mind—are not all these afflictions which fall to the lot of Zion?

Nothing can cut so deep as *spiritual* affliction. Let us have *temporal* afflictions in all their magnitude; if the Lord is pleased to be with us and manifest his love, supporting us by his presence, and speaking peace to our souls, we can bear them contentedly, if not cheerfully. But when, added to these temporal trials and providential afflictions, there is guilt upon the soul, hidings of God's face, darkness of mind, accusations of conscience, suggestions of Satan, and a thousand desponding feelings passing through the mind—how close it cuts, how it penetrates into the very depths of the heart!

But, besides these "days of affliction," there are "years of evil." "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." Affliction comes by days; evil comes by years. Affliction comes time after time, as God sends it; but there are many of the Lord's people who have had years of profession (and of a gracious profession too), yet who in all these years have seen little else but evil—the evils of their heart brought to light; the workings of their corrupt nature; the pride, presumption, self-righteousness, sensuality, worldly mindedness, and desperate wickedness of their carnal mind made manifest, held up before their eyes, and laid with weight and power upon their consciences.

Thus, when they look back, perhaps through years of evil, how few, how rare, how scantily dispersed are the marks and testimonies of God's love and favour to their souls! But O, how thick, how numerous, yea, how innumerable are the evils, the horrid evils, that are spread through that long course of years! Not perhaps absolute falls; but O, the backslidings of heart, the internal adulteries, idolatries, and departures from the living God! O, the carnality, sensuality, filth, guilt, and pollution of our fallen nature! O, the evils of every shape and name that all come trooping to view when God sets our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance!

But who would think that these things were *needful* to be experienced; that "years of evil" were absolutely necessary to

bring down the heart with labour, and to crush us into that spot where mercy and love are to be manifested? Yet it is the way, let men fight against it as long as they may; it is the way; and thus only so far as we are brought into this spot by "days of affliction, and years wherein we have seen evil"—perhaps little else but evil—can we cry from the bottom of our hearts with simplicity and godly sincerity, "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Observe the word "*according*." It is the key-stone of the text; it is the pivot upon which the petition turns: "Make us glad *according* to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." Have our afflictions been great? Have the years of evil been long? Make us glad in due proportion to the "days of affliction, and to the years of evil!" Days of long, deep, heavy affliction, need gladness in due proportion; and years of evil, deep evil, dreadful evil, mourned over evil, abhorred evil, instrumentally qualify the soul to be made glad in due and equal proportion.

Are you one who knows nothing of inward grief and affliction? Are you one whose years have never been years of evil? The prayer is not for *you*; the petition does not suit your heart, though it may come from your lips. It was not written for *you*. When Moses under divine inspiration took the pen in hand, and traced out in living characters the feelings of his soul, he wrote not this for you. But, on the other hand, if you are one of the Lord's tried, tempted family, who know, painfully know, daily know evil, temporal and spiritual (it is not strictly defined which), yea, long and many "years of evil," it is for *you* that this petition was written.

Does not the prayer fit into the very feelings of your heart? Is it not the very desire that seems most suitable to the exercises of your soul? "*Make us glad*." How is God to make us glad? What read we in the preceding verse? "O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." It is mercy, then, felt in the soul; mercy revealed to the heart and sealed with divine testimony upon the conscience, that can alone make us

glad. Thus we see how spiritual afflictions that cut deep into the heart, and an experience of years of evil, fit and prepare the soul for being gladdened with mercy. Is not mercy for criminals? For none else. Is not mercy for guilty wretches? None else. Is not mercy for those who without mercy must perish under God's manifested wrath? For none others. And none else can be gladdened by mercy, except those who know the weight of spiritual affliction, and have been exercised, deeply exercised, with years of felt evil. Others may be gladdened by the opinions of men; by their wine, corn, and oil being increased; by such toys and baubles as poor, perishing worms delight in. But the tried, exercised family of God, who know what "days of affliction, and years of evil" are, cannot be gladdened except by the manifestations of God's mercy and love to their souls.

The pardoning mercy of God made manifest to them, and his eternal love shed abroad in their heart; the application of some precious promise to their fainting spirit; whispers from God's own mouth; smiles from the Lord's own countenance; teachings and testimonies from the blessed Spirit in the court of conscience; the "fear nots" that the Lord himself alone can speak to the soul; the being embraced in the arms of Jesus, and being satisfied, like Naphtali, with the favour of the Lord—*these* are the things that alone can make a child of God glad. But do see how necessary, how indispensably necessary, "the days of affliction, and years of evil" are to prepare their hearts! Mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, eternal favour—what are all these to a man who knows nothing of the evils of his heart, and never moaned beneath the corruptions of his fallen nature? He may use the words, he may bandy them backwards and forwards, he may see them revealed in God's book; but a vital, internal, and experimental knowledge of them—can he have them? can he desire to have them? He cannot, except in exact proportion to his experience of the "days of affliction, and years of evil."

|| .—"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children." Creature works we here read nothing of. They had been long ago cut to the very ground. And what had been their

death-blow? What had driven the dagger into their very heart? "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These had been their destruction; creature righteousness they had stabbed to the very heart, and let out the life-blood of human merit. There is no petition, then, 'Let *our* works appear!' No. These were buried in the grave of corruption; these were swallowed up and lost in "days of affliction and years of evil." But "Let *thy* work," the finished work of the Son of God; the obedience of Jesus to the law; the atoning blood which he shed upon Calvary's tree; the work which he undertook, went through, and completed—'O,' breathes forth the man of God in earnest cry, (and our hearts if they have been taught by the same Spirit, will unite in the same strain), "Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants." What! can we not see that work in the word of God?—is not *that* sufficient? Can we not hear that work set forth by good men?—is not *that* sufficient? Can we not read it as opened up by the pen of ready writers?—is not *that* sufficient? Yes; for those who have never seen "days of affliction, and years of evil"—amply sufficient: but not for God's exercised children; they have other thoughts and other feelings upon these matters. *They* know what darkness of mind is, the power of unbelief, and creature helplessness; and they know that nothing short of the light of God's countenance, the manifestation of God mercy, and the teaching and witness of God the Spirit, can make the work of Jesus appear in all its beauty, suitability, and glory; and therefore, they can say, "Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants." 'Give me, Lord, a sight by living faith of the atonement of Jesus. "Show me," (the soul would cry, in the language of Moses,) "Show me thy glory;" reveal in my heart the finished work of Jesus; sprinkle my conscience with his atoning blood; discover him to me, and thus give me a sweet manifestation of his Person, love, blood, and complete salvation. Let it, Lord, appear before mine eyes, and in my heart, and seal it with divine power upon my conscience.'

But we may perhaps give another turn to the words. There is not only the work of the Son of God upon the cross, which we cannot see except in the light of God's countenance, except in the manifestation of the Spirit to our soul; but there is the work also

of the Holy Ghost upon the conscience; and that work, though it is an inward work, we can no more see, except as the Lord shows it unto us, than we can see the work of Christ upon the cross. O, the darkness, the thick darkness that often envelopes our mind, when we cannot read one mark of God's dealings upon our soul; as the church complained of old, "We see not our signs." (Ps. 74:9.) Can there be faith? we ask, where we feel perhaps little else but unbelief? Can there be life? when there is such deadness, coldness, and carnality? Can there be hope? when doubts and fears seem to take such strong possession? Can there be the work of God? when there is so much evil, horrid evil, painfully, daily felt? We need, therefore, that God should shine upon his own inward work; for then, and then only, can we see it.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants." 'Lord,' the soul cries, 'make it plain that there is a work going on within: that my soul is taught of thee; that I am a partaker of thy grace; that the blessed Spirit is dealing with my conscience.' Surely we may, without pressing our text too hard, give this turn to it.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and *thy glory unto their children.*" Children were especially included in the old covenant. We have no such special promise in the new; and therefore giving a New Testament turn to these words, we may speak of ourselves rather than of our children: 'Let thy glory appear before our eyes and in our hearts.' And is not this what at times we are earnestly longing to behold? What did the Lord Jesus Christ pray for his disciples? Was it not, that they might behold his glory, and see him as he is? as he says, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24.) And what was it, when he was tabernacling upon the earth, that caught the eyes, and ravished the affections of his beloved disciples? "We behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) And have not our eyes sometimes seen this glory—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? The glory of his Person; the glory of his love! that glory which delights the

eyes, and touches the affections of the soul! But often we cannot see it; it is hidden from our eyes. We often walk in darkness. "We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men." (Isa. 59:10.) Yet we want to see the glory, and to say with David, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen them in the sanctuary." (Ps. 63:1, 2.)

III.—"*Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.*" What is this beauty? "The beauty of the Lord our God." It is, therefore, the beauty of the God-Man; the comeliness, the holiness, the perfection, and glory that ever dwell in the Son of God. Now, "days of affliction, and years of evil" have marred all creature comeliness. There was a time, perhaps, when we could take some pleasure and delight in what we were, or what we vainly fancied we should be. Our own righteousness had a beauty and comeliness to us; and our religion was amiable and pleasing in our own sight. But what has become of it? Marred, marred; effectually marred. By what? "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These have effectually ruined, defaced, and polluted all creature comeliness. In a word, we were once deeply in love with self; but self has been shown to us such a hideous monster, in so vile and despicable a light, that we have fallen out of love with him altogether; and we have seen, at times, such beauty, glory, loveliness, and suitability in the Son of God—that as we have fallen out of love with self, we have fallen in love with him. Thus as all our own beauty and our own comeliness have been marred and defaced, the beauty and comeliness of the Lord have risen in due proportion. So that this has become the desire of our soul, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." 'Let us stand accepted in it; let it be put upon us by the imputation of God himself; let us be clothed with it manifestly before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. Let the beauty of Jesus' atoning blood, the beauty of his perfect righteousness, the beauty of his dying love, the beauty and holiness of his glorious Person be upon us, covering all our filth, guilt, and shame—spreading itself over all

our nakedness, sin, and pollution—that when God looks upon us, he may not see us as we are, marred, defaced, and full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; but may see us standing accepted in the Beloved, with "the beauty of the Lord our God" upon us.' Is there not something very sweet, very expressive, and very suitable in this petition? But what makes it so? I must still come to my old spot, "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These have marred creature comeliness; these have spoiled creature beauty.

Now, feeling your guilt, filth, and shame, nothing can satisfy your longing soul but "the beauty of the Lord our God" being upon and imputed to you; so that he who searcheth Jerusalem as with candles, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire, may not see you standing in filthy, guilty, and polluted self; but may see the beauty of Jesus spread over you; and thus behold you holy in his holiness, beautiful in his beauty, and comely in his comeliness; "accepted in the Beloved." O what a matchless robe is this! It outshines angels': for it is the righteousness of God's only begotten Son! And if we stand with "the beauty of the Lord our God" upon us, we can bid defiance to all law-charges, to all the accusations of a guilty conscience, and to all the darts from hell.

IV.—"*And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*" The work of our hands—that is, what we do in God's name and for God's glory. Not the work of our hands in nature; but the work of our hands in grace. Does not *this* want establishing? See how he doubles the petition, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Are we not sometimes tried and exercised about the work of our hands?—what we have done, or tried to do for God's glory and his great name. How marred it is! Can we preach without sin? Can we hear without sin? Can we pray without sin? Can we meet together without sin? Can we sit down at the table of the Lord without sin? Is not sin deeply engrained in our very constitution? Is not the warp and weft of sin so a part of the web of our fallen nature that we sin with every breath that we draw? And does not this mar the work of

our hands? Does not this at times fill us with anxious questionings whether we have ever done a single thing to the glory of God? Self is so mingled with all we do, that it may well raise up the anxious enquiry whether we have ever done anything really right at all?

If these be our anxious thoughts, we shall want God to "establish the work of our hands upon us," and thus make it plain and clear in our conscience, that what we do we do to his glory. God forbid, we should have any other motive. If we give of our substance what the Lord may enable, may it be for his glory. If we take any movement in divine things, may it be to his glory. If we speak, may it be to his glory. Now when we find sin and self so mingled with all we think, and say, and do, we want, "the work of our hands" established, that the Lord may make it plain and clear in our conscience that our hearts the right before him, and our eye is single to his glory; that what we do for the honour of his name is accepted in his sight.

And is not this connected, too, with the grand basis which I endeavoured in God's strength to lay as the foundation of all these petitions?—"Days of affliction, and years of evil." It is the "days of affliction, and the years of evil," that make us see the imperfections and deficiencies of everything done in the Lord's name so that we want God himself "to establish the work of our hands upon us."

Bear with me for a few moments while we rapidly run through the thread of our text. God in mercy leave some impression of its truth upon our conscience! Look first, then, at the grand foundation of all. See if you are right there. Do not leap over the threshold. See whether this corner-stone be laid in your heart. Have you,—have I, let me ask my soul solemnly—seen "Days of affliction, and years of evil?" And if so, what have been their fruit and effect? We may have seen both, passed through both, and yet have derived no profit from either. It is not the seed committed to the ground that gladdens the heart of the agriculturist; it is the crop which the seed bears; so it is with

respect to affliction; for "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." (Ps. 97:11.) It is not affliction as it is in itself; it is the fruit of the affliction. It is not having seen evil, but it is the effect produced thereby that we have chiefly to look at.

Now, have these "Days of affliction, and years of evil" brought you down, humbled your pride, laid you in the dust, worked in your soul humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity, given you a sight and sense of your real state and condition before God? If they have, well and good; it is your mercy if such have been their result. God keep you and me from being deceived in this matter.

But we will pass on to ask, whether we can say from a feeling heart what God taught Moses here to write, "Make us glad." Does your heart long to be made glad? Then there must be some kind of sorrow; for to give gladness to a heart that is not sorrowful, is a contradiction in terms. Do we want then to be made glad? What can gladden us? Ask your conscience what can gladden it. Money, health, strength, and worldly happiness, gratified prospects, or flourishing children? Can they? can they? Fatal mark; fatal mark, if they can. But are the longings of your anxious bosom, the pantings of your groaning heart after the manifestations of God's mercy and love? And are there times, in the dead seasons of the night, when your soul pants after God, "as the hart panteth after the water-brooks?" If so, nothing can satisfy, nothing can gladden you, but the mercy and love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost. I should write myself dead in sin, had I not such feelings as these.

And do you long for the work of Jesus to appear, and his glory to be felt and seen in your heart? Are you fairly out of conceit with self, but see such beauty and preciousness in the Lord Jesus, that you long to have his beauty spread upon you, that you may shine in his beauty, and not in your own? And are you sometimes exercised as to the work of your hands, feeling yourself to be such a poor, guilty, filthy wretch, that you cannot see one good thought in your heart, nor one good action performed by you? You, then, want the Lord to establish it firmly in your conscience,

that there is a work going on there, which was begun and is being carried on by his own powerful hand.

Have I, then, faintly and feebly traced out some of the workings and experience of your soul? Are they, or are they not, in accordance with God's inspired word? I believe they are. Do you believe so? Upon what does our belief rest? On the inspired word of God. That is true; for "let God be true, and every man a liar." And if, with all simplicity and godly sincerity, as I hope this evening, I have endeavoured to open up the mind and meaning of God the Spirit in the words before us, all the men in the world united together can never overthrow God's truth; that will stand when the world is in a blaze. If the Lord has raised up these things in your heart, let men say what they will; let Satan harass as he may; or your heart at times suggest what it can; the truth of God stands unaltered; and by that truth we stand, or by that truth we fall.

## THE PRAYER OF SOLOMON

Preached at Eden Street Chapel. Hampstead Road. London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 3, 1851

"That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there." 2 Chron. 6:20

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was a type and figure of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thence it derived all its efficacy and all its blessedness. It was a symbolic representation of "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man"—of that perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus, in which dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

When the Lord gave David rest round about from all his enemies, it was in his heart to convert this tabernacle into a permanent structure. He said therefore unto Nathan, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." This intention God did not permit David to fulfil; but promised that he "would set up his seed after him who should build a house for his name." This promise was accomplished in Solomon, who built the temple upon Mount Moriah. The temple thence-forward became what the tabernacle had been. And to signalise this change with his special approbation, God was pleased on the day of its dedication to fill it with his glory, and to consume with fire from heaven the burnt-offering upon the altar as he had done at the consecration of the tabernacle. Upon this solemn day, Solomon, as king of the people, offered a prayer on their behalf to God; a prayer of a very peculiar nature, but full of meaning, significancy, and blessedness.

I shall, with God's blessing, this evening, attempt to take up some of the leading points of this prayer of Solomon.

As the temple was typical and figurative of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, it became the centre of Israel's worship, as well as the place on which the eyes of God rested from the beginning to the end of the year. A striking representation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man! For he is the true temple in whom the fulness of God dwells: to whom the eyes of all Israel look: in whom all true worship centres: for whose name's sake all true prayer is breathed into and out of the heart, and all gracious answers come down.

As, then, we must lose sight of the temple as a material structure, and view in it the Lord Jesus, so similarly we must not carnalise the prayer of Solomon, nor view it as merely supplicating God for temporal blessings. Under that dispensation indeed, temporal blessings and afflictions were a part of the old covenant. But we have now a new and better covenant, which not only promises, but secures spiritual blessings to the chosen remnant. Viewing, then, the prayer of Solomon in a spiritual light, we must consider the petitions, not as temporal, but as spiritual supplications, applicable to the experience, the varied experience, of the family of God.

With these hints, I proceed to the subject before us. **Seven** cases, if I mistake not, does Solomon mention as needing help from the sanctuary.

I.—On **the first** case I shall not at any length dwell; in fact, I cannot dwell long upon any of them, the subject being too spacious. But the first seems chiefly to be addressed to the Lord as a righteous and holy Sovereign: as the God of righteousness and truth. For, be it ever borne in mind, that though he is the God of all grace, of all mercy, and of all pardon, he is also a just and righteous Jehovah—the Judge of all the earth, who must do right. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne, though mercy and truth go before his face.

**"If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before**

**thine altar in this house, then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head, and by justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness."** God is called upon here to pass a righteous decision in matters of difficulty, when appealed to on oath, that a fear of his great name may be inlaid into the hearts of men: that he may not be mocked nor trifled with on the footing of his grace: and that men may not indulge themselves in the persuasion that because he is merciful he has ceased to be just. We must never in viewing one part of God's character lose sight of the other. Justice is not absorbed in mercy, nor mercy lost in justice. God's character is a complete whole: perfect in justice, and perfect in mercy: a God that "pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin, and yet will by no means clear the guilty."

II .—Having laid this broad basis: having set up as it were the throne of God upon his eternal justice and righteousness. Solomon proceeds to those cases, which need the special interpositions of mercy and grace. For the Lord's people are a fallen people: and often by their sins bring themselves into those straits and difficulties from which mercy alone can deliver them.

The first case, then, of mercy that Solomon lays before the Lord with all humility, is, **"If thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee."** How often are we put to the worse before the enemy! Enemies we have; and enemies we ever must have, if we are walking in the path that leads to glory; for, "if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must and shall suffer persecution." But the greatest enemy that we have to cope with, is that enemy **self**. You may have many enemies; few are without; but there is no enemy so subtle, so dangerous, so unwearied, and so ever close at hand as that which you carry in your own bosom. A man may do himself more injury in five minutes than all his enemies put together could do in fifty years. Self, therefore, is and ever must be a man's greatest and worst enemy. And how often are we put to the worse before this enemy! Self gets the better of us. Pride,

covetousness, or fleshly lusts, carnality and worldly-mindedness, unbelief, some indulged evil, or some besetting sin for a time overcomes the soul. We are put to the worse before the enemy.

Solomon has put his hand upon the right spot where he gives **the reason** of our being "put to the worse before the enemy." Were we in our watch-tower, strong in grace and faith, we should prevail. But too often God's people are put to the worse before the enemy "because they have sinned against **thee.**" We need fear no enemy except we first weaken ourselves by sinning against God; and this puts us to the worse before three powerful enemies, **law, conscience,** and **Satan.** But for sin the law would not be our enemy: if the law found nothing to condemn in us, we could never be put to the worse before it. Is not a **guilty conscience,** though in one sense our friend, yet in another an enemy? But what power could a guilty conscience have over us, or how could we ever be put to the worse before this enemy, unless we sinned against God?

And is not **Satan** our enemy? But what advantage we give to Satan by sin! By not taking heed to our ways, by want of watchfulness and prayer, we first get entangled. This displeases the Lord; we become weak by his absence; and when the enemy pushes hard, we are put to the worse before him. Under these circumstances, but for the grace that is in Christ Jesus, the law would condemn to hell, conscience would swallow up in despair, and Satan would yell over the soul with shouts of infernal triumph. Solomon, as a typical mediator, puts up a prayer on behalf of such. He does not speak to encourage any in sin; but he says, "If they return, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication before thee in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers." The Lord will work repentance, contrition, and godly sorrow in the souls of his people; he will make them feel the bitterness of sin and their own folly in transgressing against him. He will put forth his gracious finger to soften their heart, and touch and melt their conscience, and move them "to return" with

weeping and supplications. And when he sees this, he will manifest his pardoning mercy, and shed abroad his love in their heart by the Holy Ghost. But all, be it ever borne in mind, through the Mediator. There is no merit in repentance, no virtue in tears. You might shed an ocean of them, they could not wash one sin away. Your eyes might be a fountain of tears, they would not blot out the sins, the carmine sins, that have defiled your conscience. It must be by "a better sacrifice," the blood of the atonement, the blood of the Lamb of God shed upon the cross, and applied to the soul, that sin is purged away.

III .—But Solomon assumes another case, for we are always sinning—always thinking, desiring, imagining, saying, or doing something evil. **"When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee."** Sin still the cause. Every affliction must be traced up to sin. This is the reason why the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain literal or spiritual. Viewing the state of **the church** generally, may we not fear, greatly fear, that we have much of this in the present day? It is a time of drought: the heavens are much shut up: little dew, little rain falls; the ministry of the word is little, little blest: in this dark and gloomy day, this day of Zion's low condition, few showers fall upon the souls of God's people. But the heaven is often shut up as regards **individuals**. They often complain that they cry, and are not heard; that they come unto God, and find no access: that he covers himself with a cloud that their prayer should not pass through. When the heavens are thus shut up, when there is no passage for prayer, no access to God, no entering in within the veil, no sweet sense of union and communion, it is too often the fruit of their own disobedience and folly. If we walk contrary to the Lord, he will walk contrary to us. We shut up the heaven against ourselves.

But the same heaven that shuts out access from beneath, also shuts out rain and dew from above. What fruitfulness then can there be in the soul? What is the material earth without rain? Let there be a long season of drought, how vegetation suffers! how tree, plant, and flower, especially in hot climates, droop and

wither! Much more so with the soul. If there be no spiritual rain, no dropping down of God's presence and favour, no bedewing showers of his presence and grace, how hard the heart grows! how every grace of the soul seems to droop and wither! The tender bud of hope, the expanding flower of love, the ripening fruit of practice, and the green leaf of profession, all droop and hang as it were only by the stalk, when there is neither rain nor dew. Sin, sin still the reason. If the Lord shut up heaven; if he refuse the rain, and withhold the dew; we are the guilty cause. We must clear the Lord, and not make him a partaker of our sin. This drought of soul, be it in churches, or in individuals, we for the most part procure to ourselves by our own carnality and folly.

But the first step out of this drooping state is to feel, deeply feel the miserable condition we are thus brought into. The worst state to be in is, to be barren, and not feel it; to be dry, drooping, withered, and be careless about it: to have no groans, nor sighs, though the heaven be shut up: to have no longing desires, though dew and rain be withholden. Such a state of soul as this is "nigh unto death." The first step, then, toward recovery is to feel the drought. It is so in creation. How everything which has life feels the suspension of rain and dew! how plant and flower, how all animated nature seems to look up heavenward for the showers of rain to fall! Nay, the very brute earth, the very dull clods seem to thirst for the bottles of heaven. Much more where there is life in the soul, where the grace of God dwells.

The first breaking up, then, of this withered state is, to confess, pray, supplicate, seek, beg, and desire. As Solomon says, "Yet if **they pray** toward this place," that is, the temple, the type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, "and **confess** thy name;" confess thy justice and righteousness in withholding rain; "and **turn** from their sin," renounce their idols, pluck out right eyes, cut off right arms, and turn from their iniquities, loathing and abhorring them because they are hateful in God's sight; "when thou dost afflict them; .... then," when thou hast brought them to this point, and wrought this by thy grace in their soul, "then **hear** thou from heaven." This is a breaking through these iron gates; "and

**forgive** the sin of thy servants," which has brought upon them this shutting up of heaven, which has been the cause of this withholding of rain and dew. "When thou hast taught them the good way," the only way of obedience, "wherein they should walk;" when thou hast wrought in their souls these gracious fruits, then, in thy tender mercy, "send rain upon the land which thou hast given this people for an inheritance;" then, do thou bedew and water their soul, and pour upon them the abundant showers of thy grace.

IV.—But he assumes another case. It is a most comprehensive prayer. How it enters into the varied experience of the family of God! What a divine portraiture of the various cases of their souls, and the state and condition into which they fall! **"If there be dearth in the land,' if there be pestilence,' if there be blasting or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars,' if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there may be."** How comprehensive!

1. **"Dearth** in the land"—a general famine! And is not this true now? What a general famine is there in the land! How little life and feeling is there to be found! How the souls of the Lord's people seem, for the most part, in a deep decline! How they are pining away for the want of spiritual food! There is a "dearth in the land," a grievous famine. "not of bread, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

2. "If there be **pestilence:**" aye, a pestilence worse than cholera—the pestilence of sin, that smites at noonday. And O, how this pestilence is at work in the professing church. assuming every form of disease—leprosy in the head, blotches in the face, wheezing in the lungs, stagnation in the heart, palsy in the arms, tottering in the knees, and debility all over! "The whole head sick, and the whole heart faint!" O sin, horrid sin, what a plague art thou to God's family! What a poison is there in thee! and how this poison runs through every artery and vein, and infects every thread, muscle, and fibre of our being!

3. "If there be **blasting,**" or blight. How the souls of God's people are often as blighted! The cold east wind chills and nips them; and upon this follows blight. It is in grace sometimes as in nature. In early spring we walk in the fields. How beautiful the wheat looks! But alas, before harvest comes, an east wind arises; and upon the wings of the east wind rides the blight: and then where is all the verdure, the beauty that before gladdened the eyes as the precursor of an abundant harvest? Alas, alas, it is blighted. So sometimes the fruit in the garden. How well the blossom looks! what a promise of an abundant crop! But in one night it is blighted: and the fruit that looked early so promising, drops before ripened upon the ground. Is it not so in the professing church? How many young Christians promised well. They came into the church blooming with godly fear, tenderness of conscience, humility, and spiritual-mindedness. But pride and worldliness puffed them up; a nipping east wind in the shape of some powerful temptation fell upon them, and blighted their youthful promise. And what are they now? Like the fruit that hangs upon the tree, withered and blighted, proclaiming its own sad tale.

4. But there is "**mildew**" also: and that comes on more slowly. The blasting or blight may be a sudden stroke, done in a night: some gross sin, some slip or fall may blight a Christian for life: but the **mildew** comes on more gradually. Many are kept from sin outwardly who have the mildew in every leaf: business, business, business occupying the mind, engrossing the heart, filling every thought. O what a mildew is here! A person may say. It is right for me to work for my family: business must be attended to. A man would sink in this day of competition, if he swim not with the foremost, and strike out hands and feet with all his strength.' Well, it may be so: yet the mildew may be in it all. But suppose you are prospering in business, and doubling your capital, or die with a good round sum in the funds, what is that, if there be mildew in your soul? If you have not the blessing of God upon you, nor Christ's grace and presence, you are but a poor mildewed professor, without the life and power of godliness. And

how worldly-mindedness and covetousness grow upon a man! As a man gets into middle life, how family cares grow upon him, and often with them worldly-mindedness! And how this mildew spreads over the soul, and brings as it were a sickly hue upon all his profession! O there is much mildew everywhere! Churches and individuals are mildewed. Who in this day escapes? It is in grace as in nature: a mildew is often general; few escape some touches of it, if they escape the whole.

5. But there are "**locusts**" too. These are greedy creatures; they eat up all, and leave not one green thing behind. And what are vile sins and indulged lusts but locusts that eat up every green thing in the soul? O, how they champ, and champ, and champ away till every leaf falls beneath their greedy jaws! Beware of the "locusts." "The land is as the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness."

6. But there are "**caterpillars**" also. And these you know are on the underside of the leaf. Would we look for them, we must lift the leaf up, and then we shall see the caterpillars feeding out of sight. And O, how many caterpillars may be seen when we lift up the leaf of profession! Here is a fig-tree full of leaves. But lift up the leaves, and look beneath; see the caterpillars crawling amidst the fibres, sucking all their juice. Inward secret sins make sad work with the Christian: the indulgence of any besetment will surely starve his soul.

One has this, the other that temptation: evil temper, pride, unbelief, worldly-mindedness: but of all caterpillars the most frequent and the worst are those sensual desires and carnal appetites which are so deeply interwoven with our animal nature. These are the insatiable caterpillars which feed on the young leaf of profession, and secretly undermine and suck out all its sap: so that the leaf droops and withers, and but for a revival would altogether fall off; the very profession of religion would be abandoned, the very place of worship forsaken, the back turned upon the truth, and the people of God utterly left.

7. **"If their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land."** They may have their cities and strong fortifications: they may fortify themselves with notions, opinions, or doctrines: and yet when their "enemies besiege them," they have no strength to resist.

8. **"Whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be."** Blessed comprehensiveness! **"Whatsoever sore!"** Great, or small; beginning, or going on; deep, or shallow; "whatever sore, or whatever sickness there be;" whatever the complaint; whatever the disease—Solomon, the typical mediator, opens wide his arms, and comprehends them all. But he goes on to say, and blessed are his words, **"Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house."** Solomon comes to experience; he puts his hand upon the right spot. It is **knowing** his **"own sore,"** and his **"own grief."** You may know another man's; that will not profit you. You may read of experience in books, love to hear experimental ministers, and will hear no others; and yet not know your **"own sore,"** your **"own grief."** Like a physician who may know the symptoms of every malady, and yet not have one malady of his own: so you may hear described every symptom of every disease, and yet be untouched by one.

But the man for whom Solomon prays is he that knows and feels, painfully feels, his **"own sore"** and his **"own grief,"** whose heart is indeed a grief to him, whose sins do indeed trouble him. How painful this sore often is! how it runs night and day! how full of ulcerous matter! and how it shrinks from the probe! Most of the Lord's family have a "sore," each some tender spot. something perhaps known to himself and to God alone, the cause of his greatest grief. It may be some secret slip he has made, some sin he has committed, some word he has spoken, or some evil thing he has done. He has been entangled, and entrapped, and cast down: and this is his grief and his sore, which he feels, and that at times deeply before God. For such Solomon prays: he casts his

net upon the right side of the ship: and says. "Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest: for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men." Yes; God alone knows the heart: he knows it completely, and sees to its very bottom.

V.—But Solomon, as a typical mediator, is not content with praying only for Israel: he casts his eye even beyond the domains of Canaan, and looks to the "stranger." "Moreover, concerning **the stranger**, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great Name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched-out arm; if they come and pray in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for." There are those among the family of God whom this description will suit. They are not members of churches; they have not cast their lot among the people of God. And as regards their experience and feelings, they cannot lay claim to the blessings of the gospel; indeed they hardly know whether or not the life of God is begun in their soul. When they hear the family of God speak of the blessings they have felt, the mercies they have received, their tongue is dumb; they have little to speak of; they can only secretly sigh and pray that God would bless them too. And yet they come "from a far country," the country of sin and carnality in which they have dwelt all their life long, and they come for God's "great Name's sake." His "great Name" has attracted their souls, drawn them near to the place where his honour dwelleth: and they have felt "his mighty hand" in convincing them of their sins, and laying them low, and "his stretched-out arm" in taking them out of the world, bringing them to confess their iniquities, and seek and supplicate for mercy.

There may be some here who cannot speak much of the dealings of God with their soul: and yet they cannot say they have no desire Godward, no feeling, no conscience, no prayer, no supplication, no hunger, no thirst after the blessings of God experimentally felt. This they dare not say: but they can say little

more. Now these are "the strangers who come from a far country for God's great Name's sake, and for his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm." that they may receive the mercy revealed in the gospel, that they may in God's time be experimentally blessed with a manifestation of his love. These "come and pray in this house," that is, in the name of, and looking only to the Lord Jesus. There is prayer in their hearts: the Lord has taught them to fear his great Name, and has put into their hearts a cry and a sigh for mercy. Now will the Lord refuse to hear their cry? "Then," prays the king of Israel, "hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for."

The "stranger" calleth upon God for mercy, for a sense of pardon and manifested interest in the Lord Jesus Christ; to have his conscience sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb: and to be enabled to say without a doubt or fear, "The Lord is my God." He comes not in daring presumption; but in humility and brokenness of heart as a "stranger." He lays no claim; he makes no boast: he puts no confidence in the flesh; but comes in his real character as a "stranger," and asks the Lord to bestow upon him this and that mercy, and to give him this and that blessing simply on the ground of his free and sovereign grace. Solomon, as a typical mediator, prays to the Lord that he would do "according to all that the stranger calleth upon him for." And surely he will, he **must** do so for his own Name's sake; for every prayer offered up in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, under the teachings of the Spirit, will surely bring down an answer.

VI.—But Solomon returns to the manifested people of God. He puts up a passing prayer for the stranger; but his heart and eyes are upon the gathered family; and therefore he assumes another case: "**If thy people go out to war against their enemies** by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause." In the first case, he assumes they were "put to the worse" before the

enemy; but he speaks here of a legitimate warfare, as the apostle says, "if a man strive lawfully." There is a lawful warfare, a contending against our spiritual enemies, a conflict, a daily conflict with everything contrary to God and godliness. Now in this warfare we need the Lord's strength to be made perfect in our weakness. Strength in ourselves we have none. Not a single lust can we subdue: not one member of the old man can we put off or mortify: not a single temptation can we deliver ourselves from: not an enemy overcome by our own wisdom or strength. God must, by his Spirit, fight all our battles to bring us off more than conquerors. In this battle look we ever must to our great High Priest. Our eyes must be fixed upon the spiritual temple, and out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus all strength must come, all success flow, all victory proceed.

VII.—But as time is running on, I will come to the last case that Solomon speaks of, which I believe will meet the case of many of the Lord's family. For the beauty of this prayer is, that it takes up well-nigh every case: "If **they sin** against thee **for there is no man which sinneth not** and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near." Here is the case of a poor soul carried away captive by sin. How do you and sin manage matters? Are you free from sin? If you are, Solomon has made a great mistake here; for he says, "There is no man which sinneth not."

If, then, there be no man free from sin, who, who can claim exemption? The fact is this. Men, for the most part, do not know what sin is; they do not see light in God's light; they know not the evil of their hearts: they do not feel what the apostle calls "the sin that dwelleth in them:" they are not alive to its movements and workings in their breast. But every one, without exception, taught of God, knows, and feels too, what sin is: and some feel too, that through sin they are brought into captivity, that their enemies get the better of them, and drag them away into bondage and imprisonment. Let me put to you this case. Do you never sin? I must confess.' you reply, sin I do. Aye, there is

not a day, nor an hour in my life in which I am free from sin. Well, let me put a question upon the back of this. How do you feel now, when sin has entangled and got the better of you? No guilt? no fear? no bondage? no darkness? no captivity? no groan? no sigh? If so, where, where is the life of God in your soul? Where, where is the fear of God in your heart? Where, where any tenderness of conscience? Then, if you sin, and none can claim exemption, you must, more or less, be brought into bondage. The thing is as plain to my mind as that two and two make four. Well, they are carried away captive into a land far off or near.

There are degrees of bondage. Sin sets all who feel it at a distance from God: but some sins set the soul farther from him than others. When thus carried captive, the poor prisoners lose their sweet confidence; they have not the same access to God as before, and they are in their feelings at a great, often a very great distance from God. But are they left there? Has the Lord no longer any regard to them? Does he forget their captivity and imprisonment? "Yet there," Solomon says, "if they **bethink** themselves." God puts the thought into their heart; it is with them as with the prodigal, "they come to themselves:.... they bethink themselves." Sin has rushed in upon them like a flood, it has carried them away, swept them into captivity. Yet, "they bethink themselves:" gracious thoughts spring up in their souls; the Lord touches their hearts with his finger, and "they bethink themselves" of where they are, and where they have been, what they have done, and the condition they have fallen into; and "they return and pray in the land of their captivity," saying, "We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly." Confession, honest, deep confession of their backsliding and sin! And then, flowing out of that, "if they **return** to thee with all their heart and with all their soul." It must be with all the heart, with all the soul: no half measures will do when they are in the land of their captivity, whither they have been carried captives: and "pray toward this land which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name; then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their

supplication, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee"—forgive them all their sins when they return unto the Lord.

Now these are the cases that Solomon, as a typical mediator, has assumed: and they are suitable, most suitable.

But to whom? Not to all, but to those who feel, who are exercised in their souls: who know, as Solomon sweetly speaks, "each his own grief and his own sore." Do you feel it? Is this the experience of your soul? Are these some of the exercises and sorrows and grievings of our heart Godward? Then, what a mercy that there is a mediator like Jesus: that there is a temple in which the fulness of Godhead dwells: that the eyes of God are upon this temple from one end of the year to the other, and that he hears all prayer which is offered up in the name of Jesus, when eye and heart are fixed upon him! However deep, however sorrowful be your case, there is still room for encouragement: there is still ground for hope whilst Jesus lives, and the life of God is in the breast.

The Lord appeared, we read, to Solomon by night, and said unto him, "I have heard thy prayer....Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." It is for Jesus' sake that all prayer is heard, and this is the ground of every gracious answer. The petitions offered by Solomon are for living souls, for those who have some divine feelings in their breast. How deep that feeling is, I will not determine; but there must be some life, some feeling in the soul, in order to have an interest in this comprehensive prayer. God in mercy grant that we may enter into the blessedness, beauty, and suitability of it; that having such a Mediator at God's right hand, such a great High Priest over the house of God, we may be encouraged under every case, in every state, and in every condition, to make our wants and supplications known unto God.

And, be assured, the soul that does this will be heard and answered sooner or later for Christ's sake.

## The Precept and the Promise

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning,  
March 30, 1845

"Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." Proverbs 23:17, 18

The trials and perplexities that a Christian has to encounter in his way to heaven are not at first made known to him. The Lord deals with him as he dealt with the children of Israel when he brought them up out of Egypt. He never said a word to them about the wilderness. This was the message that Moses had to take to them: "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land, flowing with milk and honey." (Exod. 3:7, 8.) In this absolute, unconditional promise of deliverance, we hear not a word about the wilderness that was to intervene between Egypt and Canaan; not a syllable about sojourning there for forty years before they got possession of the promised land. Thus the Lord deals with his people when he delivers them from the house of bondage. He sets before them the promised land as their sure inheritance, and kindles their desires after, and their affections towards it; but conceals from them the difficulties they will have to encounter, and the wilderness to pass through, in order to arrive there. We find a similar spiritual dealing with the soul pointed out in Hosea 2:14, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." The Lord allures her, leads her insensibly on, until at last she finds herself where she little expected to be. We find the Apostle intimating a similar thing in the Lord's dealings with Abraham. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out,

*not knowing whither he went.*" (Heb. 9:8.) When the Lord called, he obeyed that call, not knowing where he was going; but he simply followed as the Lord led, in the obedience of faith. That the Lord thus deals with his people generally, we read: "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." (Isa. 43:16.)

Now, there is great wisdom, as well as great mercy, that the Lord does hide these things from us. Were all the trials and difficulties of the way at first laid open and placed before our eyes, we could not bear it. Like the children of Ephraim, though armed and carrying bows, we should turn back in the day of battle. (Psa. 78:9.) This we find intimated respecting the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt. "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." (Exod. 13:17.) The Lord knew how tender they were; and, therefore, so to speak, was careful not to frighten them, but led them gently on into the wilderness. And thus he hides from his people the trials and difficulties of the way, the enemies they will have to encounter, and the battles they will have to fight; until, in some measure, they are prepared to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

We find, in the text, an exhortation given; and this exhortation accompanied with a promise. Now the exhortations that we meet with in God's word do not usually fall gratingly on the ear; at least they do not on mine. They do not strike the mind as harsh, nor do they stir up the enmity and rebellion of the heart. But exhortations from the mouth of preachers often do grate upon the ear. Why is this? Whence arises the difference in our feelings? One reason is, because, when the precepts in the word of God come to us, they come with sweetness and savour; and thus they subdue and beat down the opposition that is in our hearts to them. Another reason is, because men are very rarely in a condition to enforce precepts. A man must stand pretty clear himself before he can exhort another. It will not do for a proud

man to exhort to humility, nor for a man who is seeking his own to exhort to self-denial. A man must stand almost free from blemish before he can consistently handle the precepts; and, as there are very few who can stand on this ground, exhortation grates upon the ear, and rather stirs up enmity and rebellion, than produces any profitable effect. But it is not so with the precepts in the word of God; I can and do read them with sweetness, and feel at times a power communicated by the precept and through the exhortation, so as to produce a desire of conformity to it.

In the text, then, we find a precept; and this precept connected, as it generally is, with a peculiar state or temptation of soul. What a knowledge God has of the heart of man! as we read of Jesus, "He knew what was in man." (John 2:25.) Here, then, he puts his finger, so to speak, upon a sore place in a man's heart; and what is that? The envy of the carnal mind in God's people against the prosperity of the wicked. "Let not thy heart," he says, "envy sinners." He knew there was this envy in man's heart: Asaph felt it; (Psa. 73;) and his feet well nigh slipped through the temptation. Job experienced it, (21:6-15;) and "trembling took hold of his flesh." And nearly the whole of Psalm 37 is to counsel God's people against it, and support them under it. The Lord, therefore, knowing what was in the heart of his people, thus meets it: "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long:" as though it ran thus—How much better it is to be in the fear of the Lord, than be envying sinners; "for surely there is an end;" all their pride and vanity will come to a fearful issue; but "thine expectation of rest and peace shall not be cut off."

With God's blessing, in considering these words this morning we shall look, *first*, at the precept, "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;" and *afterwards*, at the promise, or rather, the two promises connected with it, "For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off."

I .—The fear of the Lord is the grand distinguishing feature of a

living soul from one dead in sin, as well as a special new covenant blessing. What says the Lord? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." (Jer. 32:40.)

The fear of the Lord, then, is a special new covenant blessing; and it is by its being implanted in a man's soul that he does not depart from God. Many will argue thus—"If a man be an elect vessel of mercy, he is sure to be saved, let him do what he pleases. It does not therefore matter how a man lives, if he be one of the elect." Now, how does God guard against such an awful perversion of his truth? In this way: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." His fear in the heart is the sure fruit of election, and stands on the same ground with it. The first is a part of God's secret, and the second of his revealed will. Does he decree a soul to eternal life? He decrees that that soul shall walk in his fear. Where there is no fear implanted, there is no election manifested. Here we see the indissoluble union between a vessel of mercy and his God. The eternal covenant binds God to him; and divine fear, planted in his heart, binds him to God. What an unspeakable mercy then it is to have the fear of the Lord implanted by his hand in the soul!

Now the Lord, speaking in the text, gives a precept, thus addressing himself individually to his saints. "Be thou (my son, my child), in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Some may say, "How can that be? Are there not many days, at least, are there not many hours in the day, in which there is no sensible fear of the Lord at all, and scarcely one spark of grace in exercise in the soul?" It is so often with me, I confess to my shame. How, then, it may be asked, can such a state be consistent with the precept in the text? I will endeavour to show you. The fear of the Lord, once implanted in a man's heart, is never lost out of it. It may not be in sensible exercise; but once implanted, it can never be eradicated. I may compare it, by way of illustration, to the love that a mother has to her children; she is not always showing her love. What then draws it forth? Circumstances. A fall,

sickness, anything that grieves, harms, or pains the child, draws forth into exercise the maternal love which lay passive in the bosom until drawn forth. The love that a mother has to her child is always in her bosom. She never ceases to love her children; and yet there are hours or days perhaps when this love does not sensibly flow forth. Yet circumstances draw it forth in a moment. Thus with the fear of the Lord in our hearts. There are times when coldness, deadness, fretfulness, and rebellion seem so to prevail that it appears as if there were no fear of the Lord in the heart at all. And yet circumstances will draw it forth in a moment. Let, for instance, some sin be presented before your eyes, sweet and suitable to your carnal mind; or let some snare of Satan be discovered to you, the fear of the Lord will often start up in a moment. Was it not so with Joseph? What were his words when temptation came before him? "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9.) Was it not so with David when he stood over his mortal enemy, Saul, as he lay sleeping in the trench, and Abishai said, "Let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear, even to the earth once?" The fear of the Lord sprang up in David's heart, and he said. "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" (1 Sam. 26:9.) So, when determined to avenge himself on Nabal for his churlish treatment, and Abigail met him by the way, how the fear of the Lord rose up in his soul at her words! "And David said unto Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." (1 Sam. 25:32, 33.) Thus, as the carnal heart lays hold of the bait laid by Satan, the fear of the Lord, which was lying passive in the soul, will often spring up into exercise. This "fountain of life, whereby we depart from the snares of death," gushes forth in living waters to keep the soul back from rushing where the carnal heart would lead. Do not you find it so? There are times in your experience when you seem to have no more godly fear in lively exercise than if eternal things had never rested with power upon your soul; and yet there is a secret check that keeps you from evil. Amidst all your worldliness and

carnality, there is that inward reverence of God; that inward desire to do his will; that inward cleaving to what he commands, and fleeing what he forbids, which not always sensibly, and yet secretly, keeps you from evil. I have found it so, and do more or less daily find it so. But what a blessed thing it is when this precept is carried into daily *sensible* exercise! O what a blessing it would be for the church of God if the precept were carried out in all its branches in the hearts, lips, and lives of God's people! What evils it would stop! what a check it would put upon a man's tongue, upon a man's looks, upon a man's actions! There is no life so desirable as to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and to walk as feeling the eye of God perpetually upon us. How many painful, cutting reflections would it save us! How much would the church of God be spared that strife and contention, that wrath and bitterness by which she is almost torn to pieces! This was the blessed state of the Primitive Church. "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (Acts 9:31.)

What state is more happy and desirable than to feel, as every rebellious thought rises up within, the fear of the Lord immediately springs up to check or subdue it; that as pride, envy, jealousy, evil temper, covetousness, and lustings after forbidden things start up in the mind, there is a sentinel on the watch to sound the alarm, and preserve the heart's garrison from being surprised and captured by the enemy?

But this filial fear of the Lord will be accompanied by every grace and fruit of the Spirit. It is not a solitary grace; no grace is solitary; no grace thrives at the expense of the rest. Like the members of a human body, in its advance from infancy to manhood, all the graces of the spirit grow together in blessed proportion and harmony. It is not like the sucker of a tree which draws away the sap from the stem, so that you must pull up the sucker lest it injure the tree; but it rather resembles the branch of a tree, where root, stem, and boughs so thrive and grow in proportion to each other, that the flourishing of one contributes to

the flourishing of the rest. Thus, when a man is so blessed as to be in the sensible fear of the Lord all the day long, every grace and every fruit of the spirit thrive and flourish at the same time in his soul.

1. *Faith*, for instance, that choice fruit of the Spirit, will abound just as the fear of the Lord abounds. We only fear the Lord just so far as we believe in him; so that, when we are in the fear of the Lord all the day long, we shall be in the faith of the Lord all the day long.

2. We should also have *holy reverence* at the same time in blessed exercise. The Apostle joins together reverence and godly fear, and declares that both are the fruit and effect of grace. "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. 12:28.) This reverence embraces a solemn recollection of God's presence, and a holy tenderness toward his name, his word, his will, his honour and glory.

3. *Heavenly-mindedness*, too, and *spirituality of affection*, would attend upon this godly fear. Were we in the fear of the Lord all the day long, what a delight there would be in reading the Scriptures; how truth after truth, and passage upon passage would come flowing into our heart; what sweet meditation there would be upon the Person, work, love, and blood of Jesus; what a feast we should have on God's word!

4. If, too, we were in the fear of the Lord all the day long, *how many sins would be nipped in the bud!* Our anger against a brother would never issue forth in harsh words and bitter reproaches. Such painful feelings would be confined to our own bosom, and would not be a leaven to ferment in the minds of others. All that train too of evil which has ruined the peace of hundreds of families, springing from the evil busts of our nature, commencing with unchecked desires, proceeding onwards to looks and words, and fulfilled in abominable actions, would not

proceed beyond the nature that engendered it.

5. This, too, would be one of the *sweetest and happiest lives we could live upon earth*. Were the fear of the Lord thus our treasure, pouring its riches into our heart, (Isa. 33:6), there would be strong confidence. (Prov. 14:26.) Our heart would not then so continually condemn us; and this would give us more confidence, as John speaks: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God;" (1 John 3:21); "the secret of the Lord would be more with us;" (Psalm 25:14); "we should sit under his banner with great delight;" (Psalm 60:4; Solomon's Song 2:4); "and we should lack no one good thing." (Psalm 34:9.)

What causes so much grief to a living conscience? Is it not the hardness, coldness, and deadness that lie like an icy crust upon the soul? Our vile thoughts, our carnal speeches, our foolish or inconsistent actions cut us out abundant work for sorrow of heart. It is a trouble to a living soul that he cannot live in the fear of the Lord all the day long but that, when he would do good, evil is present with him. And how, at times, he does plead with the Lord that he might live continually in his fear! It is indeed a sweet life. I cannot live it, though I desire to do so. But I have now and then been in this spot: and I am sure it is a blessed one to be in.

II .—But with this precept is connected the promise, or rather, the two promises, "For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." I will endeavour to show you the connection.

1. The Lord is here addressing himself to a soul labouring under temptation, and passing through peculiar exercises; and this is the exhortation that he gives it: "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;" watching his hand, submitting to his will, committing everything into his care and keeping; not hardening your heart against him, but looking up to him, and worshipping him with godly fear; "for surely there is an end." You may be tempted, exercised, and surrounded with difficulties, and see no outlet; but surely there is an end; and, when the end comes, it

will make all plain and clear. This quiet submission, this watching and waiting, a man can never be brought to unless he has seen an end of all perfection; an end of his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness. To sit still is the hardest thing a man can do. To lie passive at God's footstool when all things seem to be against us; to have a rough path to walk in, to be surrounded with difficulties and yet to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long, watching his hand, desiring to submit to his will, seeking only that wisdom which cometh from above, and trusting that he will make the way straight; not putting our hand to the work, but leaving it all to the Lord—how strange, how mysterious a path! And yet it is the only one that brings solid peace to a Christian; "for surely there is an end." Whatever sorrows and troubles a man may have to wade through, there will surely be an end to them. If we try to get ourselves out of perplexities, we are like a person trying to unravel a tangled skein of silk by pulling it forcibly; the more it is pulled, the more entangled it gets, and the faster the knots become.

So, if we are plunged into any trial, providential or spiritual, and we attempt to extricate ourselves by main force, by kicking and rebelling, we only get more entangled. The Lord, then, to encourage us to wait patiently upon him till he shall appear, says, "Surely there is an end;" there is a day coming to the people of God when tears shall be wiped from all faces, however fast and bitter the tears may flow down now.

So, if there be a powerful temptation that the soul has to grapple with, which seems ready to overwhelm it, "surely there is an end;" there is a deliverance appointed out of the temptation.

So, if there be a burden of guilt and shame from backslidings and inconsistencies, "surely there is an end." The Lord will take the burden off, and relieve the soul by a sweet manifestation of atoning blood and pardoning mercy.

But we may observe a sweet connection between the precept and the promise in the text. It is as though the Lord said, "Be thou,

my son, in the fear of the Lord all the day long." You have your exercises lasting all the day long; your temptations continuing all the day long; your griefs and troubles enduring all the day long. What are you to do? Can you break through them? Alas! to attempt that is like a man trying to rush through a thick thorn hedge; he may try to push through, but he will have to draw back pierced and wounded with the thorns. But be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long; looking up to him, desiring to know his will and do it; not trying to make a way of escape yourself, but simply committing your way unto him, begging of him that he would work in you that which is well pleasing in his sight; "for surely there is an end," and this end will not be hastened by anything we can do. Have you not found in times past that when you have kicked like a wild bull in a net, it brought no deliverance? But, when you lay passive, waiting upon the Lord, he brought about an end? an end so unexpected, so glorious and sweet, that you could only bless the Lord's hand for doing so marvellously. This is the universal testimony of the Scripture that the Lord appears and delivers when there is none shut up or left; and the experience of the saints agrees with the testimony of the written word. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." (Jeremiah 29:11)

But there is another promise connected with the precept: "And thine expectation shall not be cut off."

Now, whenever the Lord enables a soul to fulfil the precept, "to be in his fear all the day long," he usually gives some intimation that he will graciously appear in its behalf; and it is this intimation that raises up the "expectation." I want to show you this more fully. If you are in perplexities, temptations, exercises, or troubles, and you endeavour to cut out a way for yourself, the Lord will not give you any intimation that he will undertake your cause. But if the Lord enable you to be in his fear all the day long, not trying to do anything contrary to his will and word, he will give you an intimation that he will, sooner or later, appear. This is done in various ways. Sometimes by drawing the heart

near to himself in fervent pleading with him. This is "a taking hold of his strength;" and the very power to do so raises up an expectation that he will answer that prayer. Sometimes there is a secret persuasion, though we cannot tell how or whence it arises, that the Lord will one day turn our captivity. Sometimes the Lord applies a promise to the soul that he will, in his own time and way, clear up the difficulties, and cause his light to shine in and through the darkness. It is this intimation that raises up the "expectation" spoken of in the text.

But, we may observe, wherever there is this expectation, there will be many things to try it. This seems intimated in the text, "thine expectation *shall not be cut off.*" The allusion seems to be to a figure that Hezekiah makes use of (Isa. 38:12), "I have cut off like a weaver my life; he will cut me off from the thrum." (*margin*). The "thrum," or thrums, are the threads that fasten the web to the loom; and you know the last thing that a weaver does when he has woven his piece of cloth is to cut it off the thrums. Hezekiah, who had been hanging upon the mercy of God, as the piece of cloth hangs upon the loom, cries out in fear that God would cut him off, as the weaver cuts off his web. This, then, seems to be the allusion in the text, "Thine expectation shall not *be cut off.*" The expectation may be tightly stretched, as the cloth upon the loom; it may have to endure many hard pulls; but it shall not be cut off. "I, the Lord, will not deal with the expecting soul as the weaver with the cloth on the loom. It shall not be disappointed: I will bestow a sweet and precious answer."

I before observed that this expectation is not a presumptuous claim upon the Lord, but a gracious persuasion in the soul, produced by an intimation of future good from the Lord himself. And I will tell you in some measure how you may know whether your have such a gracious expectation, or whether one only which arises from presumption. It is to be known by the effects which it produces. An intimation from God always raises up faith in the promise given; and the effect is to soften and meeken the heart, open the mouth in prayer, and produce a quiet waiting for the Lord to appear. We have this clearly set forth in Lam. 3:55-

57: "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not." So with Hannah. In her case there was first the trouble, then the promise of the Lord by Eli, and then the effect; a quiet expectation, drying up her tears. "So the woman went her way, and did eat, and was no more sad." (1 Sam. 1:18.) Before the intimation comes, we are often stunned by the trial; but hoping it may pass over our heads, we do as people in a thunderstorm, look out to see if there is anywhere a patch of blue sky; and, if we see but a faint streak in the horizon, though it thunder, lighten, and rain heavily, yet we know the storm will soon pass away. So it is with the soul; the storm may still beat; the thunder, lightning, and rain may be pouring forth; yet if there be but an intimation from the Lord that he will appear, it makes the soul watch the blue sky till the Sun of righteousness breaks in through the dark clouds. "Thine expectation," says the Lord, "shall not be cut off;" but it may be tried; and a good deal too.

You will find this was the way in which the Lord dealt with his servants of old. Abraham had a trial when he complained to the Lord. "And Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abraham said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in mine house is mine heir." (Gen. 15:2, 3.) The Lord gave him a promise under this trial. "And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, so shall thy seed be." (Gen. 15:4, 5.) This promise Abraham received in faith, as we read, "And he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6). Here was the expectation. But was it not tried? A long period of twenty-five years between the promise and the fulfilment tried it sorely. But was the expectation *cut off*? Let Sarah answer. "And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children

suck? for I have born him a son in his old age." (Gen. 21:6, 7.) And was it not so with David? Was not his expectation of sitting on the throne of Israel sorely tried? But it was not cut off. Thus the Lord always tries his own work in the soul. He sends his people sharp trials and lays heavy burdens upon them to prove their faith; so that, though their expectation shall never be cut off, yet it shall be sorely tried.

Here we see the wide difference between presumption and faith. Presumption never waits upon the Lord. Presumption never comes with streaming eyes to a throne of grace; presumption is never tried by the devil, nor the unbelief of an evil heart; but stands up boldly and confidently without check or fear. But faith (I say faith, because faith and expectation are closely connected), hangs upon the promises of God in spite of all the difficulties and oppositions which it has to encounter. Presumption storms and blusters; is permitted for some time to hurry boldly on; but one flash hurls it down into despair. Faith waits quietly and patiently, and leaves the Lord to work; and then, when the end comes (and, surely there will be an end), how sweet it is to have put no hand of our own to the work, but to see the Lord's hand doing valiantly! we, as it was said to those of old, standing still! and seeing the salvation of God. Now, this path is one which no fowl knoweth, and the vulture's eye hath not seen—a path peculiar to the elect, and in which none but ransomed and quickened souls can walk. All others are for doing something themselves; avenging their own cause, and fighting their own battles; but "he that believeth shall not make haste." Trying indeed it is to flesh and blood to wait. Even Abraham partly failed here; and, almost questioning the fulfilment of the promise, would fain have a bond-child by fruitful Hagar, rather than wait for the promised son by aged Sarah.

Now, this is a religion that makes no noise in the world. It is not glittering enough for some people's eyes. It has not enough tinsel about it to blaze and shine far and wide. This quiet, gentle, humble, stay-at-home religion has not sufficient show or excitement for most. Something more glittering and visible is

preferred. It was so with the Pharisees of old. They asked of Christ "when the kingdom of God shall come," expecting some outward display, something to attract general observation and admiration. "No," says the Lord, "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (as it is in the margin, "with outward show"), "Neither shall they say, Lo, here, or Lo, there"—looking to see something wonderful in this direction or that. It is not an external thing at all. "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20, 21.) Religion, carried on in the conscience, is despised by most for want of outward show. Carnal nature cannot understand nor approve of a religion so quiet, unobserved, and unobtrusive. This inward work does not suit the carnal tastes of those who wish to appear to be something; and yet, where this secret waiting and looking is carried on in the hearts of God's people, when the end comes, we know how blessed it is not to have rushed heedlessly on, but to have waited patiently. Surely his hand will then appear most conspicuously. This is the religion that I want. I desire no other but "that secret which is with the righteous;" to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long: looking up to him for everything; simply believing that "surely there is an end, and an expectation which shall not be cut off."

## PRECIOUS FAITH, WITH ITS BENEFITS AND BLESSINGS

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, August 10th, 1856, at Gower Street Chapel, London

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." 2 Peter 1:1, 2

If to-morrow morning a letter were brought you by the postman bearing your name and address, you would consider yourself quite warranted to open it, and if that letter contained valuable remittances, clearly intended for you, to appropriate them in the manner pointed out. But, on the other hand, if, accidentally, a letter should be left at your house bearing the name and address of another person, you could not, durst not, break the seal, much less appropriate its contents as rightfully your own.

Now, if this simple, common-sense principle had been adopted in the interpretation of a large part of the New Testament, how much confusion and misunderstanding of its meaning would have been spared. We have before us "Epistles," that is letters, addressed by inspired apostles, some to believing churches, and others to believing individuals; and if addressed to believing churches, and believing individuals, what upon earth has an unbelieving world to do with them? Just as much as the first man I meet with in the street has to do with a letter addressed to me.

To set this in a clearer light, look at the persons to whom the apostle Peter addresses his second epistle. It is true that *names* are not to be found, except in the case of special individuals, such as Timothy and Titus, but we have *characters*. And, therefore, would we know whether we have any interest in this or any other epistle of the New Testament, any right to appropriate to ourselves their rich contents—for they overflow with gospel gold,

every verse is a bank note—we must first have this grand fact established in our conscience, that we are such characters as were those to whom they were originally written. To whom, then, was this letter addressed? When "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ," under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, sat down to write this letter, to whom did he address it? "To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." If, therefore, we have not "obtained like precious faith" with this holy servant and apostle of God, can we for a single moment entertain the thought that any promise or blessing in this epistle belongs to us? But, on the other hand, as in the case of a private letter, if one line of the letter belongs to me then the whole contents are mine; so, if we can only prove that we have obtained like precious faith with the saints and servants of God, then, not only one promise of this blessed epistle, but the whole of its rich and valuable contents belongs to us.

With God's blessing, then, this morning, in attempting to unfold the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in these words, I shall call your attention to four particulars:

- I. *The characters* to whom the epistle is addressed. They are those "*who have obtained like precious faith*" with the apostles and saints of God.
- II. *The channel*, the glorious channel, through which they obtained this precious faith. It is "*through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.*"
- III. *The blessings* which the apostle prays might be granted to those thus highly favoured. "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you.*"
- IV. *The spiritual medium* through which these divine blessings come. "*The knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*"

The Lord so help me to open up the mind and meaning of the

Holy Ghost here, that that blessed Teacher and Comforter of the Church of God may seal it with divine unction and power upon believing hearts.

- i. But first a few words as to the writer, "the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ." What a miracle of grace was that man! View him as the rude fisherman of the Galilean lake, as ignorant of God and godliness as the very fishes he entangled in the meshes of his net; and see how one word of the sovereign Lord of all power and might converted that rude fisherman into a believing disciple of the Lord of life and glory. Pass on and see that believing disciple left in a moment of temptation to deny his Lord and Master, and see how the rough Galilean fisherman seems, for a moment, to resume his pristine nature, and burst out in oaths and cursing. But see that look of tender reproach, and yet affectionate love, from his suffering Lord, which melted and broke that heart into tears, and restored that almost renegade to his place as a disciple; and view what he became afterwards as a blessed apostle to the Church of God. Anything from his pen would deserve our attention: but when we know that the Holy Ghost inspired that pen, though held by the hand of Peter, what he says demands all our faith, and all the attention of our awakened consciences.
- ii. Now let us look to the characters to whom this servant and apostle of Jesus Christ writes. They are *those who have obtained like precious faith with the apostles and saints of God.*

What an eminent grace is the grace of faith! I call it sometimes the Queen of graces; for faith seems to lead the van, though hope and love follow almost side by side. But still, faith, as the Queen, seems to go in the foremost rank, and to claim the most eminent place. Now, what is faith? That is a question of questions, for on it hangs heaven or hell. God Himself has given us a clear definition of it, where He says, "faith is the *substance* of things hoped for." In other words, faith in the soul gives a realisation to the things in which we are brought to hope, takes what to most men are airy shadows, mere words and names, and gives them a substantial existence, a firm abiding place in the

heart and conscience. He calls it also "*the evidence of things not seen.*" That is, faith by believing the testimony of God, is to us an internal eye, whereby we see those things which, to the natural eye, are invisible. Thus adopting the apostle's definition, we may call faith the eye of the soul, as we read, "by faith he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." For it is only by faith that we see either God, or the precious things of God. It is only by faith that we feel their power. It is only by faith that we know they have a real subsistence, or that we ourselves have a substantial interest in them. But this faith is the special gift of God. It is not the exercise of any intellectual faculty. It is not the result of reasoning or argument. Nor does it spring from any historical proof. It is a special gift of God, a grace of the Spirit raised up by the power of God in the soul, and acting upon the truth of God as the blessed Spirit draws it forth. Jesus is the author; Jesus is the finisher of it; and we have no more, and I believe no less faith, than He Himself, by His almighty power, is pleased to grant and to sustain.

But, looking at faith and some of its properties, we may branch out a little in describing how faith acts. There is an expression of the Apostle's that casts a sweet light upon the work of faith, where he says, "Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Here he brings forward a special operation of faith, in that it mixes with the word of truth. And it does it thus. God the Holy Ghost applies God's word to the conscience. He thus raises up the grace of faith; this grace of faith embraces God's testimony, and so intermingles itself with this testimony that it enters into it, appropriates it, and gives it a substantial realisation and personal indwelling. See how this was done in the instance of Abram. God comes to him in the night visions, and says to him, "Fear not, I am Thy shield and exceeding great reward." But Abram, in a fit of unbelief, says, "What wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" The Lord then takes him abroad into the air, shows him the stars of the sky, and tells him, "Such shall thy seed be." Now here was the testimony of God in a

certain promise to Abram's conscience; upon this, faith immediately sprang up in his soul; for we read, "Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." When God spake to his soul, Abram believed it by the operation of God's Spirit on his heart. So it is with every child of God. He believes what God speaks to him, he inwardly, spiritually credits it, because he feels what God the Spirit applies to his soul with power; for the same Spirit that applies God's word to his heart raises up the faith in his soul that mixes with the word applied, and thus gives the word a substantial realisation, a firm abiding place in his conscience.

iii. But faith here is called "precious"; and well it may be called so, for look at the precious exploits that faith performs, and the precious fruits that faith produces.

1. It is called "precious," first, because it is so *rare*. There are very few persons, speaking comparatively, who are possessed of this grace of the Spirit. To be a believer in the Son of God is a rarity indeed. Many profess, but very few possess, the faith of God's elect as a special grant from heaven. This divine grace—faith—is not like a stone in the street that every ragged boy may pick up, and keep or throw away as he likes; but like a jewel in the Queen's crown. Precious stones are valuable, not only for their beauty and intrinsic worth, but on account of their exceeding rarity. Thus faith is called "precious," not only because it is in itself so intrinsically valuable, but because of its comparative scarceness; "for strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;" the reason being that it can only be found by faith.

2. But again, it is called "precious" on account of *the blessings it puts us into possession of*. Why, it saves the soul: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." Must not that faith be precious, the end of which is salvation? If you are delivered from the bottomless pit, and saved into an eternity of bliss; if you are rescued from all the miserable consequences of sin under which thousands will welter throughout a boundless

eternity, and are taken into a heaven of eternal happiness, glory, and immortality—must not that be a precious grace of God, the end of which is this full, free, and glorious salvation?

3. Faith also is "precious" as giving us *union with the Son of God*. It unites us to Him as the branch is united to the vine; and therefore puts us into possession of all the benefits and blessings of the Person and the work of Jesus. Must not that be a precious gift, and eminent grace, that unites us to the Son of God, and puts us into possession of all the benefits and blessings which flow through the consecrated channel of His sufferings, death, and resurrection?

4. Faith also is "precious" as giving communion with *the three Persons* of the sacred *Godhead*. It brings us to the Father to have communion with Him, to the Son to have a lively fellowship with Him, and to the blessed Spirit to have heavenly intercourse with and from Him. The grace that thus introduces us into the very courts of heaven, and gives us communion—holy and sacred communion—with the three Persons of the Triune God, what an eminent grace must that needs be! Well, then, may the Apostle call it "precious."

5. By faith *we overcome the world*; and if the world, our grand enemy, is overcome, must not that be a precious grace which obtains such a victory?

6. By faith, too, *we stand* where thousands and tens of thousands fall; and if by faith we stand, must not that be a precious grace that enables us to stand amid wreck and ruin on every side? By faith *we fight*; and by faith we gain the *victory*; and if faith be the grace that sustains us in the hour of conflict and which eventually brings us off more than conquerors, may it not well be called "precious"?

I have only run through a few Scriptural reasons why faith, above all graces, is worthy of the name that the Apostle has here stamped it by, "precious."

iv. But he says, "*like precious.*" And what a thought it is that if you and I possess one grain of living faith, the same precious grace is in our hearts that was in the hearts of all the saints of God, from Abel, the proto-martyr, in all the saints of the Old Testament, in all the prophets, and martyrs, and servants, and apostles of God, and will subsist in the bosom of every saint down to the remotest period of time. There is but "one faith," as there is "one God, one Lord, and one baptism;" and it is by the possession of this "like precious faith" that all the family of God are knit together into one glorious body, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the risen Head. You, in yourself, may be very poor and needy, for faith gives us to feel our poverty and need; you may think and feel yourself unworthy of the least notice of God's favouring eye; but if the blessed Spirit has raised up one grain of living faith in your soul, you stand on the same holy platform with saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs, and you are as much "accepted in the Beloved," as much loved of God, and as much a member of the mystical body of Christ, as though you were the Apostle Peter, Paul, Enoch, Abel, Isaiah, or any of the prophets.

v. Now, those to whom the Apostle wrote had "*obtained* like precious faith." Not through their own exertions, their own works, their own merit, their own obedience, their own pious dispositions, or religious inclinations; because they had availed themselves of some peculiar advantages that others were deprived of, and had gradually drawn themselves up, by working at the winch, into the possession of this eminent grace. They had "obtained" it, but how?

This brings me to my second point.

II. It was *through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*. You will observe that I adopt here the marginal reading, which is, in fact, the more literal translation. It stands in our Bible, "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" but in the original, as in the margin, it stands thus, "the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." I think the

marginal rendering is by far the more blessed and beautiful, and therefore I adopt it. What a beauty and blessedness there is in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, when viewed by the spiritual eye. Our reasoning minds, it is true, may be deeply stumbled at the doctrine of an incarnate God. My own mind, I know, has sometimes been driven almost to its wits' end by this great mystery of Deity and humanity combined in the Person of Christ; for it so surpasses all human comprehension, and is so removed beyond the grasp of all our reasoning faculties. It is not, indeed, contrary to reason, for there is nothing in it impossible or self-contradictory; but it is beyond and above the reach of human thought and tangible apprehension. But when we are led to consider what would be the most certain and most fearful consequences unless the Lord Jesus Christ were what He declares He is—God as well as man—we are compelled, from the very necessity of the case, to cast ourselves with all the weight of our sins and sorrows upon an incarnate God, as the shipwrecked sailor gladly casts himself upon the rock in the ocean as the only refuge from the devouring sea. Thus as law-wrecked, conscience-condemned, most guilty and miserable sinners, who have feelingly damned ourselves to the lowest hell by our iniquities and crimes, we are compelled to throw ourselves upon the Deity of Christ, because without it we have not the shadow of a hope. When we feel what sinners we are, and have been, look down into the depths of the Fall, and see in some feeble and faint measure what sin is in the sight of a holy and pure God, what can save us from despair unless we see the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ investing His work upon the cross and His obedience with a merit that shall suffice to justify our guilty souls, wash away our aggravated iniquities, blot out our fearful crimes, and make us fit to appear in the presence of a righteous God?

Thus we are sometimes absolutely compelled to throw ourselves on the deity of Christ, as ready to perish, because in such a divine Saviour, in such precious blood, we see a refuge, and we see elsewhere no other. And when we thus flee to Him to hide ourselves in Him, and God the Spirit is pleased to testify to our consciences of His being God as well as man, and raises up and draws forth faith, hope, and love in Him and towards Him as

such, then we see in every act of His holy doing and agonising suffering a divine merit investing the whole of His finished work. We then feel that if the deity of Christ be taken away, the Church of God is lost. Where can you find pardon? where justification? where reconciliation to God? where atoning blood, if there is no Saviour who merited as God and suffered as man? We might as well leap into hell at once with all our sins upon our head, as a sailor might spring over the prow of a burning ship into the boiling waves, to meet death instead of waiting for it, unless we believe by a living faith in the deity of the Son of God. But sometimes we are sweetly led into this glorious truth—not merely driven by sheer necessity, but blessedly drawn into this great mystery of godliness—when Christ is revealed to our souls by the power of God. Then, seeing light in God's light, we view the deity of Christ investing every thought, word, and act of His suffering humanity with unspeakable merit. Then we see how this glorious fact of deity and humanity in the Person of Immanuel satisfies every want, puts away every sin, heals every wound, wipes away every tear, and sweetly brings the soul to repose on the bosom of God. Sometimes, therefore, from necessity, driven by storms of guilt and waves of temptation, and sometimes sweetly drawn by the leadings and teachings of the Holy Ghost, we lay hold of the hope set before us in the essential deity and suffering humanity of the Son of God, knowing that there is a refuge in Him from sin, death, hell, and despair.

Now this it is which makes me love the expression the apostle uses, and which the margin preserves, "the righteousness of our God and Saviour." It is His righteousness as "God," as well as "Saviour." It therefore includes all that He is as God, and all that He did and suffered as man. Every thought He conceived, every word He spoke, every action He performed, were so many deeds of righteousness; His whole course was a course of righteousness. His essential, intrinsic deity implanted as well as stamped merit on every word and work that sprung out of His suffering humanity, and thus wove out a glorious robe of righteousness, which is cast upon the Church of God, clothed in which she stands "accepted in the Beloved," without spot or wrinkle, or any such

thing, before the throne of God. Now it is through this righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ that we have obtained like precious faith with the saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs. It is not our own petty doings, our own peddling contrivances, a few alms deeds, a shilling, a half-crown, or a sovereign dropped on the charity plate, a few pious tears, and a few pious resolutions, as though we would truck, barter, and traffic with God, hoping He will accept all this small change in payment for our sins. Bear with my warmth. For if there be a subject on which I feel holy indignation, it is that man should presume to put his petty doings on the same level with the righteousness of Immanuel, and place his tears and prayers in the same scale with the sufferings and sorrows of God's co-eternal and co-equal Son. But what a blessed truth this is to the heaven-taught soul when realised by a living faith! You are often beset with a host of base lusts and powerful temptations; you see and feel what you are by nature and practice as a son or daughter of Adam; you say, under feelings of deep despondency, how can such a one as I ever have like precious faith with the saints and apostles of God? Yes; if it depended on your doing, you might well sit down in despair, and conclude the case was perfectly hopeless. I repeat it; if this precious faith were to be obtained by anything you may do, or have done, you might well despair of ever having a single grain of it lodged in your bosom; but when you can see the gracious and glorious channel through which this grace is obtained; when you can lift up your believing eyes, and view the heavenly appointed way through which faith comes as the gift of God into the hearts of the election of grace, how it takes your mind away from all petty peddling doings of your own, and leaves you to repose as a poor sinner upon the arms of mercy which are opened wide for such as you. This is a remedy, and an all-sufficient remedy, against self-righteousness and against despair. When you look at Christ and yourself in this light, all pride and self-righteousness are at once beaten down in the heart. We never can exalt the righteousness of our God and Saviour enough when we look upon Him as the divinely-appointed channel through which the mercy of God comes. I do not hold, however, that Christ purchased mercy and grace, or any other

gospel blessings; as though God grudged these gifts, and that they were extorted from Him by the sufferings of His Son. I cannot regard the Father of all mercies and the God of all grace in the light of one who needed Christ to fall upon His knees, and extort these blessings from His unwilling hand; but I can see how sin in the Fall dammed back, so to speak, the love of God; and I can see how the Son of God by suffering, bleeding, and dying, the just for the unjust, atoned for sin, thus removed the barrier, and opened a channel, through His Person and work, whereby the love of God might freely flow into the bosom of the Church. So that, not only without Christ's righteousness there can be no faith, but through it, as an open channel of divine communication, faith, with every other blessing, comes in full accordance with every perfection of Him, who can at the same time be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Sometimes, upon your knees, perhaps, you feel your guilt and unworthiness so keenly that you can hardly dare to lift up your eyes to God. Now, when the soul is in this state of self-abasement, the Lord will often come with some melting sense of His goodness and mercy, or some sweet testimony of interest in His precious blood and obedience. How your mind is filled with wonder, your eyes with tears, and your mouth with praise, and you say, "How canst Thou bless a wretch like me, who has never done anything but sin against Thee, or backslide from Thee!" The Lord replies, "I do not bless thee for what thou art, or hast been; nor do I withhold My blessing for what thou hast been, or hast done; but I bless thee for My dear Son's sake; the blessing that I give thee flows through the Son of My love." When we can see this by the eye of faith, how it puts prevailing petitions in our lips.

III. But I pass on to show *the blessings that the apostle prays for*. He says, "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you.*" He desires for them two eminent gospel blessings, one the source and spring, and the other the end and result; one the cause and the other the effect; one that brings the soul near unto God, and the other that keeps it near unto Him. And he prays that these two choice graces might not be given in a common ordinary measure, if I may use the expression, but that they might be "multiplied." God

gives as a prince. I have sometimes thought there is great sweetness in the account of the Queen of Sheba receiving the gifts of Solomon's bounty. We read that "King Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty" (1 Kings 10:13). So it is with the King of kings and Lord of lords, of whom Solomon was but a faint type and figure. He not only gives us what we ask, all our desire, but out of His royal bounty grants what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of men to conceive of His goodness and love. A king cannot give niggardly; it is unbecoming the dignity of his exalted station. Thus, in our petitions before a throne of grace, we should do as the precept invites, "Open thy mouth wide;" and as the prophet bade the king, make our petitions deep and large" (Isa. 7:11, margin).

i. The apostle then prays for those that "had obtained like precious faith," that to them grace and peace might be multiplied. How suitable the petition! And first, as regards "*grace.*" When we see and feel how we need grace every moment in our lives, we at once perceive a beauty in the blessing thus asked for in an abundant, overflowing measure. We cannot walk the length of the street without sin. Our carnal minds, our vain imaginations, are all on the look out for evil. Sin presents itself at every avenue, and lurks like the Arab in the wilderness, or the prowling night thief for every opportunity of open or secret plunder. In fact, in ourselves, in our fallen nature, except as restrained and influenced by grace, we sin with well nigh every breath that we draw. We need, therefore, grace upon grace, or, in the words of the text, grace to be "multiplied" in proportion to our sins. Shall I say in proportion? Nay, if sin abounds, as to our shame and sorrow we know it does, we want grace to much more abound. When the neap tide of sin flows in with the mud and mire, we want the spring tide of grace to flow higher still, to carry out the slime and filth into the depths of the ocean, so that when sought for they may no more be found. Thus we want grace, free grace; grace to-day, grace to-morrow, grace this moment, grace the next, grace all the day long; healing, reviving, restoring, saving,

sanctifying; and all this multiplied by all our wants and woes, sins, slips, and falls, unceasing and aggravated backslidings. We want grace to believe, grace to hope, grace to love, grace to fight, and grace to conquer; grace to stand, grace to live, and grace to die. Every moment of our lives we need keeping, supporting, holding, and withholding grace; for, as a good man has said, "If the Lord leave us for one moment, He leaves us that one moment too long."

ii. But to "grace" the apostle adds "*peace*." Sin breaks our peace, and sets our souls at a distance from God; trials, too, and temptations, sins and sorrows, occur every day to mar our rest; so we want peace to be multiplied as well as grace. Peace like a river, of which the stream is ever flowing; peace like the sea, of which the tides, if they do ebb, yet rise higher than they fall. We want peace, too, to establish our hearts in the truth, and in the love of it, so as to prevent our being carried about with every wind of doctrine. We are often entangled in the wily snares of Satan, and we want peace to be restored to our soul. When it is thus sadly broken, and sin has filled us with guilt and terror, we want peace to come and heal all those wounds, and establish our souls firmly in the gospel of peace. And when we shall be called upon to enter the dark valley of the shadow of death, how then we shall need "peace to be multiplied," that we may fear no evil, but find the comforting staff and supporting rod. Thus we never can have too much grace or too much peace. The more we know of sin, the more shall we want grace, and the more we know of sorrow the more we shall want peace.

IV. But I now come to the fourth and last point—the *blessed medium* through which grace and peace flow, and by which too they are "multiplied." It is "through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." This opens up a vast field, upon which—my time being nearly gone—I can but briefly enter. There is one expression in the prayer of the blessed Redeemer (John 17) which I very much admire, as full of divine blessedness. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." How similar are the words

before us. How the language and spirit of the servant resemble those of the Master! "Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord."

1. The *medium* through which grace and peace come, as well as the *channel* through which they flow, is, first, the *knowledge of God*. Before we can have this saving knowledge of God, we must have a spiritual manifestation of Him to our soul. We can only know Him by His own teaching, only see Him in the light of His own countenance. Otherwise we know Him not to any saving purpose, to any spiritual or sanctifying end. But when He is pleased to manifest Himself to our souls, then we have a living knowledge of Him ("Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace"); so that the more we know of Him by spiritual teaching and divine manifestation, the more will this multiply grace and peace in soul experience. We must know Him as our Father by having the Spirit of adoption breathed into our hearts, and this will produce peace of conscience, a peace that flows from grace. We must know Him as faithful to His promises, and to the Son of His love; and that His word stands as firm as the everlasting hills. This gives a firm foundation for the multiplication of that grace which the promise declares, and of that peace which its fulfilment brings. If we know what He is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, anything of His everlasting love to His people, of His unchanging purposes of grace and mercy to them, and know Him too as our God, Father, and eternal Friend; a knowledge of this unfolds and communicates grace, and the knowledge of this grace brings with it peace.

ii. Again, there is "*the knowledge of Jesus our Lord.*" If we do not know Jesus for ourselves, by some spiritual discovery of His person and work, what testimony have we of an interest in His grace? Because there is no grace except that which flows through Him, for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." This is what we should ever labour after. Our daily, hourly desire and prayer should be to have spiritual discoveries of Christ; to see Him by the eye of faith; to enter into His glorious Person and finished work; to realise His presence, taste His love, and know Him and

the power of His resurrection. This is what Paul so earnestly laboured after (Phil. 3:10); and for the excellency of this knowledge he suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dung that he might win Christ. To know Him as our Surety and Sin-bearer, our Advocate and Intercessor, our Friend, Husband, and Brother; to know our interest in Him, and our union with Him; our place in His heart, our name on His breast, our memorial on the palms of His hands—what can surpass the blessedness of such a knowledge as this? Through this spiritual, experimental knowledge of Him, grace flows. As a watercourse opening upon a river brings down its irrigating stream into the parched meadow, so a knowledge of Christ opens up a channel through which the grace that is in Him flows into the barren, parched soul. Thus, as through grace alone we know Him, so every fresh communication of grace not only makes Him better known, but flows in through that very knowledge. The grace that comes through this knowledge of Him brings also peace; for He is "our peace." He has "broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." He, therefore, came and preached peace "to those which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." His blood speaks peace to a guilty conscience; His voice says peace to the winds and waves of the surging heart; His last legacy was "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you;" His dying promise was, "In Me ye shall have peace;" and, as the Prince of peace at God's right hand, He is able to fill us with "all joy and peace in believing," for His kingdom is "righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And thus, through a knowledge of Him as our Lord, "grace and peace" are both "multiplied."

What I want to impress on your minds is this, that "grace and peace," these two rich gospel blessings, do not spring from anything in self, but are stored up in Christ, and are received out of His fulness. I want to beat down self, whether self in sin, or self in righteousness. Profane self, and professing self, must be alike beaten down, because till they are we cannot see the

righteousness which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. As these are beaten down, faith springs up; a "like precious faith" with the prophets, martyrs, and saints of old. And this precious faith puts us into possession of every gospel blessing. If we have right views of Christ and of His work, and are led by the blessed Spirit, we shall see how suitable these truths are to our necessitous case, and shall bless God for providing a way whereby His grace and peace might be revealed and multiplied to our comfort and His own glory.

## THE PRECIOUS TAKEN FORTH FROM THE VILE

When the following sermon was preached by me I had not the slightest idea that a reporter was present to take down the words as they fell from my lips: nor indeed was I made acquainted with that circumstance until the Ms., some time afterwards, was put into my hands. A hasty glance, however, over its pages at once convinced me that either I had given a most inadequate and imperfect exposition of the text, or that it was a most incomplete record of it; in other words, either that I had preached a very bad sermon, or had fallen into the hands of a bad reporter. I have learnt since I penned this that he took down much of the sermon in the dark. Which of the two was in fault, **and I do not wish to throw the blame wholly off my shoulders on those of the reporter**, I saw in a moment that the sermon could not go forth in the same shape as that in which it thus came before my eyes. Perfectly willing, then, should I have been that, according to Job's wish concerning himself, "it should have been as though it had not been, and have been carried from the womb to the grave," **Job 10:19**,—that grave of oblivion which has swallowed up thousands of far better sermons, but which still is never satisfied, nor ever says, "It is enough." **Pr 30:16** But besides parental affection, which somehow or other makes preachers cleave to their own offspring, and plead for their life when born, though I have had too large a family in the sermon way to hail with pleasure any such increase, two feelings have concurred to make me willing to send forth the following discourse under its present amended shape:

1. That I might not shrink from giving my testimony in favour of the step, which has been taken to dissolve and re-constitute the church at Zoar. With that step I had nothing to do. I was not consulted upon it before it was taken, nor had I at the time any hand in it, directly or indirectly. But when made known to me I approved of it, highly approved of it, and therefore thought it right, when I was asked to preach at Zoar, to give my public testimony in its favour.

2. That my testimony, if of any value, might, with God's help and blessing, a little strengthen the hands of the Zoar friends in their present trying circumstances, by showing them from the word of truth that there must be a taking forth of the precious from the vile, if the servants of God are to be as God's mouth.

I have no doubt that the following pages will be considered by some as very personal. If by "personal" is meant pointed, separating preaching, I admit the truth of the charge, for if I am to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, it will have both point and edge, unless it be a wooden sword—a dagger of lath, more fit for the stage than the pulpit. But if by "personal" be meant an attack upon individuals, I disclaim the charge, and upon this plain and simple ground, that I do not personally know a single individual of those who once were but are now no longer members of the church at Zoar. I have attacked here and elsewhere their error, and justified the step which has issued in their separation; but of the individuals I know nothing, and therefore could not personally attack them. Personality in controversy I abhor. I have had indeed enough of it directed against myself to provoke me to retaliate in its sharpest form; but to make libellous attacks upon opponents under cover of religious controversy is abhorrent to every right feeling in my bosom. I wish to spare no man's error, but I ever desire to spare both his character and person. I could, indeed, in several flagrant cases, easily lay rough hands on both, for some of their deeds, or rather misdeeds, have for some years not been hidden in a corner; but I know that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," and that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

J.C.P. Aug. 5th, 1861

## **THE PRECIOUS TAKEN FORTH FROM THE VILE Part 1**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street. London, on Thursday

Evening, July 18th. 1861.

"If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee: but return not thou unto them." Jeremiah 15:19

Of all the prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah appears to have undergone the largest amount as well as greatest variety of suffering for his Lord's sake. Many circumstances concurred to produce this. First, his lot was cast in **a time of great general suffering**. The Lord was pouring out his wrath upon the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. His sore judgments, long denounced, were now being executed. Sword, pestilence, and famine were stalking through the land; and as these were national judgments, the righteous and the unrighteous, the true prophet and the lying priest, the king on the throne and the captive in the dungeon, alike partook of them.

But he had not only a large measure of personal, individual suffering, but, as deeply **sympathising** with a captive people, a besieged city, and a fallen church, and as identifying himself with the afflictions of Zion, as an eye-witness of the fearful scenes of desolation that were daily spread before his eyes, "for these things he wept; his eye ran down with water, because the Comforter that should relieve his soul was far from him, and his children were desolate because the enemy prevailed." **La 1:16**

Another ingredient in the cup much also embittered his lot—**the persecution** and opposition that he met with in the discharge of his prophetic office. The false prophets of those days always prophesied good and not evil; and thus, by their lies and deceptions, buoyed up the people in a vain security. Their language to the people,—and this they pretended they spoke by the inspiration of God,—was, "Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place." **Jer 14:13** Thus they "prophesied lies in the Lord's name," telling the people, even when surrounded by the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar, that they should not go down to Babylon:

that there was to be no captivity of the nation, no destruction of their city, or desolation of their temple: crying out continually, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these:" as if, because they were the Lord's people in external covenant, he would never punish them for their sins.

And is not this the exact feature of the false prophets of our day, who will not allow that the people of God ever undergo chastisement for their sins and backslidings? who cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace? who neither preach nor practise the precepts of the gospel, but wrap all their ministry up in a system of dry doctrine, and thus deceive the people in the Lord's name, by pretending to be his servants when he has neither taught nor sent them? As Jeremiah, then, was raised up of the Lord for a special purpose, and "set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," as well as "to build, and to plant," **Jer 1:10** he could not but speak all that the Lord put into his mouth. His tidings, therefore, were heavy tidings, for he had to declare to them that they were to go into captivity, even unto Babylon; that their city was to be taken; their temple to be burnt with fire; and the whole land to be made utterly desolate. This unwelcome news, therefore, stirred up the enmity of the princes, the priests, and the whole people of the land, who had been all propped up by the false prophets, to whom they looked as the mouth of God, to believe themselves sure of his protecting hand.

But in addition to these outward troubles, Jeremiah appears to have possessed naturally a **very rebellious spirit**, which, as stirred up by opposition and persecution, often made him very fretful and unbelieving; and this evil appears at times to have gained great power and prevalence over him, for under its sad influence he was even sometimes permitted to use toward the Lord most unbecoming language, as, for instance, in the words immediately preceding our text, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" What rebellious, inconsistent, unbecoming language is this! With the

exceptions of Job and Jonah, there is scarcely any saint of God through the whole Scripture who fell into such rebellious language against the Majesty of heaven. But no doubt this rebellious spirit and murmuring tongue, falling back upon him in guilt and shame, produced a large additional measure of grief and trouble.

But in addition to this he had to endure great depths of **personal affliction**. He was committed into the court of the prison, and had for his subsistence but a piece of bread daily, given him until all the bread in the city was spent. Thence he was cast into the dungeon full of mud and mire; where he was like to die of hunger, for there was no more bread in the city **Jer 37:21 Jer 38:6,9**.

And when we add to this that the **light of God's countenance** was often **withdrawn** from him as a chastisement for his rebellion, we may well see that all this complication of circumstances filled his soul with trouble, and his mind with confusion. If rebellion against the Lord could be ever excusable, it was in the prophet Jeremiah; for we may be well sure that nothing but such a weight of sorrow could have drawn from him the passionate words that I have quoted, "Why is my pain perpetual," &c.

But how does the Lord answer this complaint? What is the solace, which he gives to his mourning prophet? What is the balm of consolation, which he pours into his bleeding wounds? Not what we should expect, and yet, seen in the light of the Spirit, a relief most blessedly adapted to all the circumstances of his case: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." It is as if the Lord said, "Jeremiah, my own prophet, whom I have commissioned to bear my tidings to the nations: thou whom I expressly called by my Spirit and grace to this office, that thou shouldest be as my mouth, did I not set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down every plant and every tree not of my setting, and every building not of my rearing? Why art thou thus filled with rebellion and self-pity at witnessing the

effects of thine own work, which I gave thee to do? Why art thou weeping over the miseries of the people whom I am justly punishing? Why, as a soldier of the truth, art thou shrinking from the field of battle, 'the thunder of the captains, and the shouting?' Or why fearest thou persecution from the enemies of God? Know this, for thy comfort and encouragement, that thy highest office and greatest privilege is to be my mouth. Dream not of worldly comfort: think not of a false and unrighteous peace with the ungodly, or of freedom from their persecution, as if, by some compromise, you might disarm their enmity or win their favour. Banish the thought of such carnal ease, and be satisfied with this one most blessed privilege, that thou art my **mouth**: that I do thee the honour to speak in thee and by thee: that whatsoever thy sufferings are, or shall be, thou still art my faithful servant: that I will still support thee, hold thee up, and bless thee, and make it manifest to thee and to all around thee that I have sent thee, and that my words in thy mouth shall be fulfilled, so that not one jot or tittle of them shall fail." This word from the Lord, as it dropped into the prophet's soul, calmed, no doubt, his rebellious spirit, and brought him to feel, if not to say, "Well, Lord, if I am to be thy mouth, I can bear all that thou mayest be pleased to lay upon me. As thy son and servant, as thy prophet and minister, let me speak thy words, not my own. I want not the smiles of men, I only want thy support, thy power, and thy presence, my God, my Father, and my Friend." Such, I believe, is the spirit and such the feeling of all who are sent to do Jeremiah's work, and through whose lips the God of Jeremiah speaks.

In opening up the words of the text, I shall, therefore, with God's help and blessing, show,

- I. **First**, what is the "**precious**" and what is the "**vile**" mentioned in it;
- II. **Secondly**, how the servant of God is to "**take forth**" the precious from the vile:

III. **Thirdly**, that so far as he does this he is **"as God's mouth;"** and,

IV. **Fourthly**, as, the Lord may enable, I shall drop a few remarks on the word given by the Lord to his prophet by way of **holy caution: "Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them."**

I. Three things at once strike our mind as springing, as it were, out of the very bosom of our text: first, that in the professing church, for it is with that with which we have mainly to do, as Jeremiah had of old, there are things **"precious"** and things **"vile:"** secondly, that these are so mixed together as to require separation: and thirdly, that it is the main office of the servant of God to take forth one from the other. I am called upon. therefore, by the very position which I now occupy as standing up in the Lord's name in your pulpit, to show you what in the light of God's truth, is **"precious"** and what is **"vile,"** that I may do what Jeremiah was told to do, and speak what Jeremiah was told to speak; and thus be to you as God's mouth, speaking with authority and power to your consciences.

What, then, is "the precious" and what is "the vile?" There may be others, but I shall chiefly confine myself to four distinct classes of precious things and vile things. There are, then, precious **characters** and vile **characters;** precious **doctrines** and vile doctrines; precious experience and vile **experience;** and precious **practice** and vile **practice;** and these precious characters and these vile characters, these precious doctrines and these vile doctrines, this precious experience and this vile experience, this precious practice and this vile practice, are so mingled together in the professing church that it needs the hand of the servant of God, as enabled by his Master, to take forth the one from the other, that he may be as God's mouth to God's people.

i. We will, then, first, look at precious **characters** and vile **characters;** and show, from the word of truth, who they are and

what are their distinguishing features. But let us examine, in the light of the Scripture, the meaning of the word, "**precious**," for unless, as seeing light in God's light, we can clearly and plainly determine the meaning of the words, "precious" and "vile," we shall miss our mark at the very outset. What, then, is the literal and, I may add, scriptural meaning of the word, "precious?" First, then, it means something **exceedingly valuable**. Thus we speak of precious stones, such as diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. And this idea we find in the word of God, for there we read of "precious stones," **1Co 3:12**, of "wisdom" being "more precious than rubies," **Pr 3:15** and of "the precious onyx, or the sapphire." **Job 28:16** These gems are called "precious," as containing large value in a small compass, and, as coveted objects of ornament, use, or beauty, worth large sums of money. But there is another idea attached to the word. "precious." as signifying articles exceedingly **scarce, and**, therefore, to be obtained only with great difficulty—for some things are precious, that is, bear a large nominal value on account of their rarity, which are not in themselves intrinsically valuable, such as old books and old china, which are precious in the eyes of connoisseurs, often not from any real value but from their extreme scarceness. Take these two ideas, and apply them to the case before us. There are in the sight of God precious **characters**. But who are they? The elect of God, the church, of which Jesus is the glorious Head: the bride, the spouse of the Lord the Lamb. These are they to whom the Lord speaks, addressing himself to the church of God, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." **Isa 43:4** These are "the precious sons," and we may add, "daughters," of Zion, **La 4:2** of whom the prophet speaks as "comparable to fine gold," and who will one day be gloriously manifested when the Lord makes up his "jewels." **Mal 3:17** These are unspeakably "precious," because, in God's sight, they are immeasurably valuable. But what gives them this value? Nothing in themselves, for they are all sunk in the ruins of the Adam fall, and in their carnal nature full of everything filthy and vile. But as members of the mystical body of Jesus, as chosen from all eternity in the glorious Person of the Son of God, as

washed in the fountain of his most precious blood, and as justified by his perfect obedience, they stand before the throne of God "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." And when in due time they are quickened into divine life by the invincible power of the Holy Ghost, are sanctified by his heavenly grace, and conformed to the suffering image of God's dear Son, they are, so to speak, doubly precious in the sight of God.

But as these glorious truths are so opposed by the pride of man's heart, let us look at them in the light of the Scripture. First, then, view the elect of God as **given** by the Father to the Son in eternity, according to the Lord's own words, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" and again, "And all mine are thine and thine are mine." And do look at that wondrous language which, as it were, opens to us the depths of eternity and of that eternal love wherewith the Father loved the Son and his people in him: "And hast loved them. as thou has loved me." **Joh 17:6,10 Jn 17:23** Must they not be in the eyes of God inconceivably precious if **loved with the same love** as that wherewith the eternal Father ever loved his eternal Son?

But they are precious also in his eyes as **redeemed** by the Son of his love. The Apostle therefore says. "Ye are bought with a price:" **1Co 6:20** and again it is declared, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." **1Pe 1:18,19**

But the real family of God, as compared with the great bulk of the profane and the professing world are very scarce—exceedingly **rare**, and that makes them, in the second sense of the word, "**precious.**" Whatever deceptive speeches false charity may utter, it is most evident from the whole current of God's truth that his people, all through the Scriptures, are spoken of as exceedingly rare. How the Lord, for instance, speaks by this very prophet, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye

can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." **Jer 5:1** So when the prophet Ezekiel saw the six men commissioned to slay utterly old and young, every man having his slaughter weapon in his hand, how few were those that "sighed and cried for all the abominations," and upon whose foreheads the man clothed with linen set his mark! **Eze 9:4-6** And if you answer that those were Old Testament times, what will you say to the words of the blessed Lord himself? "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Popular ministers, large congregations, and a motley mixture of worldly professors may give to the professing church a great appearance of outward prosperity; yet were you to weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary, how many of the precious children of God would you find amongst them? God and man view things and persons with different eyes. Man looketh on, as he only can see, the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. None are more overlooked, or, if known, more despised in our day than those precious characters whom the Lord loves, for few are favoured with spiritual discernment to distinguish between the living family of God and the hypocrites in Zion. The day will indeed come when "the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken:" but until then "the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy and to utter error against the Lord." **Isa 32:3,6**

Let us now, however, look at "**the vile,**" as opposed to the precious: and as we have thus far spoken of precious characters, we will now fix our eyes upon vile characters. But as I showed the literal meaning of the word, "precious," before I traced out its experimental signification, so look with me first at the word, "vile." It means, first, cheap, worthless; an object of no real or intrinsic value. Such, in the sight of God, are all but those who have a personal interest in the Person and work of his dear Son. Whatever may be their rank or station, whatever be their natural abilities or acquired learning, whatever be their moral conduct, religious profession, sect or denomination, whatever others may

think of them, or they may say or think of themselves, they are all worthless and vile in the sight of God who have no standing in the Person or place in the heart of the Son of God. They are, therefore, spoken of as chaff, which "the wind driveth away" **Ps 1:4** and which is burnt "with unquenchable fire." **Mt 3:12** They are also compared to "tares" among the wheat; **Mt 13:25** to "dross," as in the expression, "Thou puttest away the wicked like dross;" **Ps 119:119** and to "reprobate" or "refuse silver;" **Jer 6:30** all which figures point to things worthless in themselves, and yet mingled with what is valuable. Sin having taken full possession of them, and they not being washed from their iniquity in the atoning blood of the Lamb, nor clothed in the spotless righteousness of the Son of God, they are in the sight of him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity," altogether worthless and vile. That the word, "vile," in Scripture has the meaning of worthless and refuse is plain from a remarkable passage in the history of Saul, when, contrary to God's command, he and the people with him spared Agag, and "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good; but every thing that was **vile** and **refuse**, that they destroyed utterly." **1Sa 15:9**

But take another signification of the word, "**vile**," as meaning base and corrupt. This is the most usual sense of the term: for, as the saints of God are "**precious**," not only from their intrinsic value as elect jewels in the mediatorial crown, but as redeemed from all their iniquities by the precious blood of Christ, so the vile are not only cheap and worthless, as having no union with Christ, but are, in the eyes of God, corrupt and impure, as lying naked before him in all their iniquities, and, like the child spoken of by the prophet, polluted in their own blood, and cast out in the open field to the loathing of their persons. **Eze 16:5,6** They are, therefore, "vile" in the sight of God, not only as sunk in the ruins of the Adam fall, but as additionally stained and polluted with thousands of crimes, their throat being an open sepulcher, the poison of asps under their lips, their mouth full of cursing and bitterness, their feet swift to shed blood, and destruction and misery in all their ways. **Ro 3:13-16** And we may observe, in

passing, that as the precious and the vile are mixed together, and the servant of the Lord has "to take forth" one from the other, it is very plain that these vile characters are in the professing church, and therefore, besides the sins of their former profanity, are wrapped up in the additional iniquity of a false, hypocritical profession. Such were the sons of Eli, who, as priests, offered sacrifice at Shiloh, and "made themselves vile," according to God's testimony, by wrapping up their sins under priestly garments. **1Sa 3:13** So Jeremiah had two "baskets of figs" set before him, of which the one were "good, very good," and the others "evil, very evil;" yet both fruit that grew on the same tree. The professing church is full of these "vile figs that cannot be eaten, they are so evil;" **Jer 29:17** and all the servant of God can do is to take forth the precious from the vile, as the good figs are picked out to be eaten, and the vile tossed away into the hog trough.

ii. But there are also precious **doctrines** and vile **doctrines**: and as the precious characters and the vile characters are mingled together, as on a barn floor, in the same heap, lie wheat and chaff, so vile doctrines and precious doctrines may be seemingly so mixed together that it needs the hand of the servant of God to take forth the one from the other. What. Then, are **precious doctrines?** and why are they precious? They are precious as dear to God: and because they have been revealed by the Holy Ghost in the word of truth they are made precious to believing hearts. Among these precious doctrines, and indeed the foundation of them all is the great and glorious doctrine of a Three-One God—a real Trinity of Persons in a Unity of Essence. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not mere characters and offices, or mere names and titles, but express what they are in their eternal being anterior to and independent of any covenant relationship. Thus the Father ever was ever is and ever must be, the eternal Father: the Son ever was, ever is and ever must be the eternal Son: and the Spirit ever was, ever is, and ever must be the eternal Spirit; and yet not Three Eternals but One Eternal: for though they are Three in distinctness of Person, yet are they

One in Unity of Essence: and there can no more be three distinct Eternals than there can be three distinct Gods.

I cannot be silent, standing, as I do here, at such a crisis in the history not only of the well-being but the very being itself of you as a church, on such a foundation truth as this. The true, proper, and eternal Sonship of our glorious Lord has been made very precious to my soul, and if I have found an indescribable blessedness and preciousness in the vital truth that Jesus was from all eternity the Son of God, why should I keep it back because so many preachers and professors have lifted up their heel against it? And am I the only one to whom this blessed truth has been made precious? What a mighty array of men of God, whose writings now live, though they are dead, might be summoned as witnesses of this blessed truth; and some of you can testify that God has himself revealed it to your hearts. Were we, then, silent, would not the very stones be ready to cry out? But as this precious doctrine has been so much opposed, and such awful language held against it by its opponents, I feel I must drop a word, not in a way of controversy, but to relieve the difficulty of any timid, unestablished child of God who may stumble at an objection often brought against the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the blessed Lord. You know that it is brought against us that we thereby hold "a begotten God." Not to speak of the irreverence of such unbecoming language, I will show you the fallacy of that objection. What fundamental truth do we lay down as the basis of all our faith? That there is but one God. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one LORD." **De 6:4** The essential Unity of God is the very basis of revelation itself: so that to depart from it is to deny the foundation of all religion, and to be an avowed infidel. See then, the consequence if we held, as we are charged, the doctrine of a begotten God. If that charge be true, we must hold not a Trinity of Persons in a Unity of Essence, but three distinct Gods: first, a begetting God: secondly, a begotten God; and thirdly, a proceeding God. But such three Gods would not be three distinct Persons, but three distinct Gods, which would at once contradict the very foundation principle of One God, from which we start and upon which we stand. It is,

therefore, a "vile" perversion of our doctrine, and such as only a "vile" person would slander us with, knowing, as he must know, that we firmly hold the doctrine of the Trinity, of which the essential feature is, that whilst there is but one God there are three distinct Persons in one undivided Essence. To say, then, that we hold a begotten God is a vile perversion of that glorious truth which we feel so unspeakably precious.

But besides these foundation doctrines of our most holy faith, there is a whole chain of divine truth, of which every link is "precious" to believing souls. Such, for instance, are the doctrines of "an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure;" of the incarnation of the Son of God by taking upon him a real yet pure humanity in the womb of the Virgin; of the full, perfect, and complete redemption of the church of Christ by the shedding of his precious blood upon the cross; of the free and full justification of their persons by the imputation of his perfect obedience to the law of God; of regeneration of the vessels of mercy in the appointed season by the power of the Holy Ghost; and of their being kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. All these doctrines, with everything good and God-like that springs out of them, are precious to those that believe.

But there are also **"vile" doctrines**, and they are "vile" because opposed to pure and precious truth. They are not only cheap and worthless, mere chaff and dross, but they are "vile" as polluted by the corrupt mind of man which gave them birth. One of these "viles" doctrines is that of **man's righteousness**, as able, wholly or in part, to save his soul, and thus bringing in a way of salvation independent of the blood of the Lamb. However it may be wrapped up by specious arguments and a show of holiness, any such doctrine is "vile," as casting dishonour upon the blood and righteousness of the Son of God, and thus robbing God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost of their equal glory, as planning and accomplishing the scheme of eternal redemption.

But the professing church, by which I mean those who profess the doctrines of grace, with which we have chiefly to do, is full of

"vile" doctrines. That a believer, for instance, **cannot backslide**, is a "vile" doctrine, because contrary both to the express declarations of God's word, and to the daily experience of all his children. It is a "vile" doctrine also from its tendency to harden men in sin, and to make the slips and falls of believers of no consequence: and "vile" because it virtually confounds the very principles of right and wrong, overthrows all godly fear, and encourages a whole tribe of wanton professors to mock a holy, heart-searching God, and trifle with their own immortal souls.

A kindred doctrine, and equally "vile," is, that **God does not chastise his people** for their sins, which is a direct contradiction to the plainest testimonies of God's word, as, for instance, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." **Heb 12:6** How "vile," then, must that doctrine be, which thus sets itself in direct opposition to the plain and positive testimony of God, and encourages vile professors to dally with their sins as not chastised for any of them.

I may also add, if a doctrine be "precious," whatever denies it must be "vile;" and therefore all those views and arguments which have been lately set up, in a whole shower of pamphlets, against the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, must be essentially vile, as contradicting precious truth, and alike dishonouring God the Father by denying that he has a Son, and God the Son by denying that he has a Father, and God the Holy Ghost by denying his testimony to both Father and Son.

iii. But there is also precious experience as there is **vile experience**. All experience wrought in the soul by the power of God is "precious" experience, as being in itself of unspeakable value as the gift of God, and as the pledge, earnest, and foretaste of eternal life. Thus, everything that God is pleased to do in and for a believer: every promise applied with power to his soul: every sweet word of encouragement: every manifestation of Christ and inward revelation of him as the Son of God, are all so many parts and portions of a precious experience: for their sure fruit is to make Jesus precious. And as Jesus is revealed to faith, as hope anchors in him, and love flows forth toward him, every

act of living faith, of hope, and of affection, is precious experience. So also is every feeling of simplicity and godly sincerity: of tenderness of conscience, and filial fear: all meltings into contrition and penitential sorrow for sin: all true self-loathing and self-abhorrence: all crucifixion of the flesh, with its affections and lusts: all putting off of the old man and putting on of the new: all spirituality of mind: all fellowship with the Father and the Son—in a word, all that life of God in the soul by which a living branch is distinguished from a dead and fruitless bough, may be called **precious experience**, as being wrought in the heart by the power of God.

But there is **vile experience**: an experience of corruption but not of salvation and sanctification: of the malady, but not of the remedy: of temptation, but not of deliverance; of slips and falls, but not of any recovery from them; of sinning, but not of repenting; of the evils of the heart, but not of the grace that subdues them; of darkness, coldness, and hardness, but not of light, life, liberty, and love. Such an experience is a vile experience, because cheap and worthless, the mere refuse of a corrupt nature in which and under which there may not be one mark or feature of a work of grace. Possessors and professors of this vile experience will sometimes get together, and turn out their hearts to one another. They will talk of their barrenness, darkness and hardness; and well they may, for they have neither life, nor light, nor grace to make them otherwise. Peter has well described their character as "servants of corruption," for they were never delivered from it by the power of grace; and yet they speak great swelling words of vanity, sporting themselves with their own deceivings, beguiling unstable souls, and speaking evil of the things **(the things of the Spirit)** that they understand not. **2Pe 2:12-19** Of what use or value is a knowledge of sin and corruption without a knowledge of the remedy for them?

What should we think of a surgeon in the London Hospital, close by, uncovering wound after wound, probing and laying open to view all the ulcerous matter, and then neither to swathe, bind, nor cure them? Any rough medical student could tear away the

bandage, lay open the wound, and pass on to another patient. But this is not surgery. This is not the healing hand, the soft bandage, or the soothing balm. So it is in grace. It is true that God the eternal Spirit lays bare the depths of the fall: uncovers the ulcerous wounds that sin has made: strips off the bandages and plaisters wherewith physicians of no value would "heal the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But if he make us feel the deep pollution of our fallen nature, he does not leave us to die in our corruption, still less to mistake the ulcerous sore for the healing plaister: but in due time he brings the balm of a Saviour's love and blood to cure every gaping, bleeding wound. And when the soul enjoys the sweet manifestations of super-abounding grace and of pardoning love, the same heavenly Testifier of Jesus raises up and draws forth a holy fear of sinning against so merciful and gracious a God: and this constraining love of Christ gives power and motive to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, to mortify the whole body of sin, and to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight. This is a **"precious" experience**, for it is fruitful in every good word and work. But an experience of corruption, without a groan under it; of temptation, without any deliverance from it; of sin, without any mortification of it; of the flesh, without any crucifixion to it: of the world, without any deadness to it, is a **"vile" experience**—an experience rather of the pot-house or the brothel than of the love of God and the work of faith with power.

iv. But again. There is **"precious" practice** and **"vile" practice**. Precious practice is that which springs out of a vital, abiding union with Christ as the only true vine, according to the Lord's own words: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me, I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." **Joh 15:4,5** No practice, therefore, can really be called "precious," unless first wrought by the power of God in the heart, and issuing thence in the lip and the life. Thus "the precious sons" and daughters of Zion are

distinguished from the vile professors of the day, not only by the possession of a precious experience, but by the performance of precious practice: and thus they bring forth "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Indeed none but they bring forth good fruit, speak good words, or do good works: for in order "to give goodly words." like Naphtali, the soul must be "satisfied with favour and full with the blessing of the Lord." **Ge 49:21 De 33:23**

So in order to do good works, and thus bring forth good fruit, the tree must be first made good: **Mt 12:33** and this cannot be unless it be a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. **Isa 61:3** The grand mark of the living branches in the vine is that they bear fruit; and "every branch that beareth fruit the Father purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Under, then, his purifying, cleansing hand the branch brings forth increasing fruit to his praise, as the Lord himself speaks: "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." **Joh 15:8** To love God's people, to do what lies in our power for their profit and benefit; to be separate from the world in heart and life; to live, speak, and act in the daily fear of God, desiring to know his will and do it; to watch against besetting sins; to be upon our guard against every temptation; to set a watch over the door of our lips; to be just and honourable in all our dealings; to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world; meekly to bear reproach, shame, and persecution for the Lord's sake: and to walk in the precepts of the gospel in all holy obedience as it becomes our profession—this is "**precious**" **practice**, and without it there is little evidence of the grace of God being in our hearts. But where do you hear these gospel fruits brought forward and insisted upon by the ministers of the letter? When and where do you hear them contending for the fruits of righteousness and a consistent walk and conversation: and that it is vain to talk of believing in Christ unless we walk in Christ's footsteps, are conformed to Christ's image, and imitate Christ's example? Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine—and all as hard and dry as hard hearts and brazen throats can make it, is their constant theme; but like "the troops

of Tema," or "the companies of Sheba," we may look in vain, and wait, and wait long, for any breaking forth of a living experience like a brook in the desert, or any practice hanging upon their bough as a cluster of gospel fruit.

**But what is "vile" practice? We may divide it into practice that is cheap and worthless, and practice that is polluted and corrupt.**

1. There is much practice, which appears to be good, but is cheap and **worthless**, as not springing from grace. Such is all the practice, which does not spring out of a vital union with the Son of God: for if "without him we can do nothing," all practice without him is nothing worth. This cuts off at a stroke all the good works of men profane or professing who have no union with the living vine.

2. But how much practice in our day is **"vile"** in the worst sense of the word. What a vast amount there is of pride, covetousness, cheating, lying, and, it is to be feared, secret drunkenness, amongst those who profess the truth in the letter. The late controversy has disclosed a vast amount of error in the professing churches; and I am strongly of opinion that if our professing Jerusalem were searched as with candles, there would be found as appalling a mass of evil as there is of error. I have thought sometimes of London and its scenes of misery and crime, say at 10 o'clock at night. Could we be, as it were, suspended aloft, and see the whole of this seething, reeking Metropolis spread before our eyes as a panorama underneath—I need not say more; how we should shrink at the sight as we witnessed tens of thousands of crimes, perhaps including murders, passing before our eyes which at present are hidden from view. Now, if in a similar way the vail could be suddenly removed off the churches, what evils should we see committed which now are only viewed by God's omniscient eye.

But apart from these more glaring evils, what a vast amount there is of enmity, violence, slander, and calumny displayed by

those who are deeply sunk in the error which you have had, even in these walls, to combat. Is not this **vile** practice? And has anything more clearly manifested the spirit of the men who hold the error than the weapons which they have made use of to defend it, and to beat down, if possible, both the truth itself and its champions? But there is a mercy in this, for they have been thus more clearly manifested as under the power and influence of the spirit of error, and as defending a bad cause with bad weapons.

II. But to pass on to our second point. What is the main office of the servant of God, as pointed out in our text? He is **to take forth the precious from the vile**. The very form of this expression clearly implies that the precious and the vile are mingled together in such a heap that it needs the power of God, as manifested in the ministry of his servants, to take forth one from the other. And you will observe that the command is not to take forth the vile from the precious, but the precious from the vile. The servant of God, therefore, must needs be blessed with three things to enable him to do this—a discerning eye, a courageous heart, and a strong hand. If he have not a discerning eye, he cannot know the precious from the vile: if he have not a courageous heart, he will falter from the fear of man; and if he have not a strong hand, he will not be able to take forth the one from the other, as they are so closely and firmly blended together. But who is sufficient for these things? None but he whose sufficiency is of God.

But **how** is he to take forth the precious from the vile? Not by the **hand of violence** or persecution, for the tares are to be allowed to grow with the wheat to the harvest; nor in his **own spirit**, for there is such a thing as preaching Christ of contention: **Php 1:16** nor by **carnal argument**, and "enticing words of man's wisdom," for the faith of God's saints is not to "stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." **1Co 2:4,5** But he is to take forth the precious from the vile by the power of God resting upon his testimony. He sees with a discerning eye how they are mingled one with the other, feels at times a holy zeal of heavenly

warmth in his bosom, such as Phinehas felt when he was zealous for God's sake among the children of Israel, **Nu 25:11** and as he is aided by God putting words into his mouth, to show who are precious characters and who are vile characters, what are precious doctrines and what are vile doctrines, what is a precious experience and what is a vile experience, what is precious practice and what is vile practice, he instrumentally and ministerially takes forth the precious from the vile. We are to expect in the professing church of God this apparently strange mixture. It is so as regards **characters**, according to the Apostle's testimony. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth: and some to honour and some to dishonour." **2Ti 2:20** The vessels of gold and silver are "precious" characters, for they are made and used "to honour;" but the vessels of wood and of earth are "vile," for they are made and used "to dishonour." But the Apostle adds, "If a man, therefore, purge himself from these," that is, if he purify himself by a godly separation from these vessels of wood and of earth, "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." **2Ti 2:21** Before, then, a servant of God can take forth "precious" **characters** from "vile" characters, he must be himself separated from them in heart, in spirit, in walk; for only in proportion to his own actual separation from them can he take forth the precious from the vile in his ministry. How can he, at least with any consistency, condemn those with whom he associates? How can he be sanctified and meet for the Master's use, if openly and visibly intermingled with vessels made to dishonour?

In a similar way, before he can take forth "precious" **doctrines** from "vile" doctrines, he must have known and felt the liberating and sanctifying power and influence of truth in his own heart, and also seen the polluting influence of error on the minds of others. Then he can take forth "precious" doctrine from "vile" doctrine with keenness of eye, courage of heart, and strength of hand.

So must he know something in his own soul of the blessedness of a "**precious**" **experience**, and see the awful delusion of a

**"vile" experience**—loving the one as the work of God's grace, and hating the other as a deception of the devil. As, then, he sees and feels this, he can stretch forth his hand and take the "precious" experience of the saints of God from the "vile" experience of the servants of sin and Satan.

Constrained also by the love of Christ, and influenced by godly fear, he will be ever desiring to live to God's praise: and as, from time to time, the **"vile" practices** of ungodly professors are brought before his eyes, he will take forth **"precious" practice** from vile practice by showing that the one is a fruit of the Spirit and the other a fruit of the flesh.

III. Now, so far as he does this, he is **"as God's mouth:"** that is, he speaks not only in the name but in the very power of God: for God speaks through him as if he were his own mouth. "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." **Mic 3:8** Look at your own experience, and see if you have not had some testimony in your own soul of the truth of this. When a servant of God has described God's people, held them up, as it were, before your eyes, as drawn by the finger of God, have you not had some witness in your bosom that it was the truth of God which fell from his lips? While he was discriminating between the **possessor** and the **professor**, and thus was taking forth the precious from the vile, you could read your spiritual features, as a child of God, and could bless him for any marks of his discriminating grace thus experimentally set up. But if he had huddled together saints and sinners, sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, without any separation or discrimination between the precious and the vile, what would his words have been to you but wind and confusion—an empty noise, in which there was no voice from God or testimony to conscience?

So again, when the servant of God is enabled to preach God's truth clearly and experimentally, to open it up and, at the same time, point out the errors by which it is opposed and contradicted—as he thus takes forth "precious" **doctrines** from

"vile" **doctrines**, and the blessed Spirit accompanies his word with power to your soul, you know that God is speaking in him by the same power which has at various times made his truth precious to your soul. So, when he points out error, disentangling it from all its glosses and its interminglings with truth, as dressed up in its garb by erroneous men, it is made clear to you how "vile" it is, as robbing Jesus of his glory, and contradicting that truth of which you have felt the power and blessedness. Thus, as you see the beauty and feel the preciousness of truth in its purity and power, so you see the ugliness and feel the vileness of error.

So as to **experience**. When the servant of God has described what "precious" experience is, and taken it forth from a "vile" experience, you feel a sweet testimony that you are a partaker of grace, and blessed and taught of God. So when you hear a "vile" experience described, such as an experience of corruption without any groaning under it, a knowledge of sin without any deliverance from it, a continual entanglement in snares without their being ever broken, and an indulgence of every vile lust without any repentance for them or forsaking of them, you feel that this "vile" experience is hateful to God and his people, as a delusion of Satan or a mask of hypocrisy. As the precious experience of the saint of God is then taken forth from the vile experience of a hypocrite in Zion, your own spirit bears an inward testimony that God is speaking to you through his servant, for his word comes with power to your soul.

So as the servant of God takes forth the "**precious**" **practice** that springs out of the two-fold constraint of the love of Christ and the fear of God, from the **vile practice** of hardened professors, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and continue in sin that grace may abound, you have the witness in your own conscience that he is speaking for God as his mouth to your soul by way of instruction, encouragement, reproof, or caution; and as his words fall with power into your heart you receive them as if God himself were speaking to you by him.

Now, if a minister cannot or does not thus "take forth the precious from the vile," he cannot be God's mouth. How can he be? Does God mix wheat and tares in the same field? Does he put together sheep and goats into the same fold? It is true that in his providence he permits these things so to be; but it was "an enemy" that sowed the tares in the field. It is Satan who mingles his own seed, the seed of the serpent, with the children of God. Does the Lord approve of vile doctrines? Does he smile upon vile practices? Can, then, a man be a faithful servant of his, whose ministry never winnows the chaff, never separates truth from falsehood, never exposes the delusions of Satan, never denounces practical ungodliness? True it is that such a ministry will fill men's minds with enmity and wrath, and even some of the Lord's people may think it severe and cutting; but sooner or later, as their consciences are more abundantly wrought upon, they will have a testimony that it is God's mouth which speaks with power to their hearts.

We live in a day of little power in the ministry of the word. A spirit of slumber seems poured out upon our Zion. Ministers and congregations, like the wise and foolish virgins, seem generally slumbering: and we now seem to have come to that point where there is little taking forth of the precious from the vile, and therefore but few are as God's mouth.

IV. But we come now to our last point. **"Let them return unto thee: but return not thou unto them."** There will be, there must be, a separating fan where God's truth is faithfully preached. We are warned that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine," that is, salutary teaching, "but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." **2Ti 4:3,4** When, then, the servants of God take forth the precious from the vile, those who are convicted by their ministry, either as vile characters, or as holding vile doctrines, or as deluded by a vile experience, or of being guilty of vile practices, not being able to bear the condemnation of their own conscience, go out one by one, like

the accusers of the woman taken in adultery. Jeremiah saw friends turn into enemies, and one after another drop off; and there might have been a temptation in his mind to go after them, in order to bring them back. But God said to him, "Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them." There was to be no compromise of truth to win any back. If they went they were to go, and he was not to go after them. He was to stand firm if he stood alone. Some of them might return to him as being convinced that he was right and they were wrong. These he might receive, but he was not to deviate one jot from God's truth, or turn one step out of the way to gain their approbation or win their friendship.

So would I say unto this church as re-constituted upon a new basis—the basis of truth, and especially upon that vital, essential, and fundamental truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true, proper, eternal, and only-begotten son of God. Let them, therefore, if the Lord should convince any of their error who are now no longer members of the church, return unto thee, but return not thou unto them. If there has been a pulling down of an old building, in which, through length of years and other circumstances, dry rot had made some of the beams and rafters rotten, to pull it down was far better than to patch it up. Like the leprous house, if the plague were widely spread, and no scraping or plastering could remove the fretting leprosy, the best, the wisest, the only course was "to break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house." **Le 14:44,45** Error must needs be "a fretting leprosy." I rejoice, therefore, that this church has acted as it has done. I am convinced that there was no other way for the maintenance of the truth of God, or for the peace and prosperity of Zoar. I have considered the subject in all its bearings, as far as I could, and I have been brought to the fullest persuasion in my own mind that there was no other course to be taken but to dissolve the old church and to constitute a new one upon the grand foundation principles of our most holy faith. And I hope the Lord will give his testimony to the step so well, so wisely, and so firmly taken, by often visiting you in this place with his gracious power and

manifested presence. This you will value more than the smiles of men, and supported by this, you will fear no frowns of preachers or professors. The Lord make it manifest that though the church be new, it is old Zoar still, and that it still retains those vital truths, older than the everlasting hills, which, as preached here, have been blessed for more than 50 years. I can say no more, and, as called to stand up before you this evening, I could say no less. I trust I have not spoken in my own spirit, with any wrath or any bitterness, but have preached what I believe is God's truth, with, I hope, a single eye to his glory, and your souls' profit. In his hands therefore I leave it, that he may commend it with his own divine power to your hearts and consciences.

## **The Precious Trial of Faith**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, May 28, 1865

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:6, 7

I intend, with God's help and blessing, that my discourse this evening shall form a sequel to my sermon this morning; and I shall therefore endeavour to establish a connection between them, both as regards the text and the subject. You will recollect that this morning I was endeavouring to bring before you "the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." In that discourse I attempted to describe, according to the ability which God gave me, the character of the heirs and legatees of that glorious inheritance. This evening, before I proceed to connect the two subjects, I shall throw in a few additional lines to fill up my sketch; for there is no part of the ministry more important than to describe clearly and correctly the features of living souls, both as a test for them to measure themselves by, and as a means, in preaching to a mixed congregation, of taking forth the precious from the vile. Nor do I think I can adopt a better plan in executing this intention than simply to take up the characters of the persons to whom the apostle addressed the epistle, as described by his own hand, for they, we know, were among the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance. This will surely be more safe and satisfactory than drawing any picture of my own, which might be right or might be wrong. Let us keep close to the word, and then we shall not err in doctrine, experience, or practice.

Cast your eye, then, back on the beginning of the epistle, and read for yourself the characters to whom the apostle addresses it.

1. Their first mark is "*strangers, scattered* throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Scattered strangers, then, is one of the lineaments of the heirs and legatees of this incorruptible, undefiled inheritance. The apostle probably, in using the expression, had especial reference to the believing Jews who were locally scattered among the Gentile nations in these countries, for it is evident, not only from history but from an expression in the Gospel of John, that there were many Jews dispersed among the Gentiles: "The Jews said among themselves, Whither will he go that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (John 7:35.) James, therefore, writing to the believing Jews, addresses his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." (James 1:1.) Of these dispersed Jews many had been converted to the faith of the gospel, and to them, therefore, Peter specially writes. But the Holy Ghost had doubtless in the expression a spiritual reference to the saints of God at all times and in all places, so as to make the words applicable to the people of God to the end of time. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4.) Scattered strangers is then a feature of the heirs of God, not merely locally, but spiritually and experimentally. For you will observe that both words carry with them a spiritual meaning. First, they are "strangers." What makes them so? The grace of God which calls them out of this wretched world. Every man who carries the grace of God in his bosom is necessarily, as regards the world, a stranger in heart as well as in profession and life. As Abraham was a stranger in the land of Canaan; as Joseph was a stranger in the palace of Pharaoh; as Moses was a stranger in the land of Egypt; as Daniel was a stranger in the court of Babylon: so every child of God is separated by grace to be a stranger in this ungodly world. The character given us in the word of Abraham and Sarah, in whose steps we are to walk and to whom we are to look (Rom. 4:12; Isai. 51:2), was this: "They confessed

that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11:13.) And if indeed we are to come out from it and to be separate, the world must be as much a strange place to us as we be strangers in it. In views, in thoughts, in desires, in prospects, in anticipations; in our daily walk and conversation; in mind, in spirit, in judgment, in affection; from its company, its maxims, its fashions, its spirit; in all things, inwardly and outwardly, there must be a thorough separation from the world; and it is this separation which makes us strangers in it. But observe also the word "scattered." Do we not see this as a daily fact? Two or three of these strangers in this village; half a score in that town; a larger number perhaps in this vast metropolis; but all scattered here and there; and scattered, too, not merely locally, bodily, but spiritually and experimentally, as having no union or communion with the world in which they dwell; and scattered, too, as having had so much of their old formal religion scattered and torn to pieces; besides their scattered hopes, scattered joys, scattered prospects, and scattered homes.

2. But take another feature, another lineament of the heir of God, as described by Peter's pen. He is "*elect*, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit." Let us not be afraid of Bible language: Bible language best describes Bible truths. However harshly the word "elect" may sound in the ears of the Pharisee and the self-righteous, it is God's own word to convey God's own truth. May I never be ashamed of God's word! The scattered strangers are then "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." But unto what? To live, as men would libel them, as they list? to walk in all manner of ungodliness and disobedience? God forbid. They are elect unto two things, which are ever closely connected both in doctrine and practice. They are elect, first, unto "obedience." The obedience of what? The obedience of the gospel; obedience to the faith of the gospel; obedience to the precepts of the gospel; obedience to every good word and every good work enjoined by the gospel; obedience to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. God's people are not a lawless race who set at defiance the laws of God and man. They are loyal subjects, peaceful citizens;

and, though dear lovers of civil and religious liberty, they are averse to party strife and political contentions; their chief desire being "to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Tim. 2:2.) They are obedient children, because they carry the yoke of a meek Redeemer upon their neck, and it is this obedience which particularly distinguishes them as the people of God; for others say and do not; or if they practise what they profess it is from wrong principles, wrong motives, or wrong ends. "They are children in whom there is no faith" (Deut. 32:20); and they cannot therefore render "the obedience of faith," for which the gospel is made known. (Rom. 16:26.) This "obedience," therefore, includes obeying the gospel, as the apostle speaks: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." (Rom. 10:16.) To obey the gospel is to believe the gospel, and thus obey the call of the gospel to faith and repentance. God may have refractory children amongst his family, but it will be found in the end that he has no disobedient ones; for he will teach them all sooner or later to render to him the obedience of faith, and from this fertile root every gracious root will spring.

But they are chosen also *"to the blood of sprinkling."* They cannot, therefore, and will not die in their sins as unpardoned sinners, but will receive in and upon their conscience "the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel," that they may join in that glorious song, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." When, then, we preach the doctrine of election, we point out at the same time the two privileges to which the people of God are elect: to obedience and the blood of sprinkling. Are you obedient to the faith of the gospel and to the precepts of the gospel; and what do you know of the blood of sprinkling purging your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Having thus thrown in a few lines to complete my sketch of the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance, I shall now proceed to connect my two discourses of this morning and evening. Let me once more read the words of our text, that you may join with me in understanding and establishing the connection: "Wherein

ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:6, 7.)

Observe with me four prominent features in the words that I have read.

I.—*First, the joy*, or, to use the apostolic expression, the great rejoicing which the heirs and legatees of this inheritance have in the salvation ready to be revealed.

II .—*Secondly, the heaviness of their spirit* "for a season, if need be, through manifold temptations."

III.—*Thirdly, the reason* why this heaviness is made to come upon their spirit through their manifold temptations. It is for the *trial of their faith*, "which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire."

IV .—*Fourthly, the eventual issue* of all their trials, "praise and honour," and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

I.—Now for the connection of our two subjects, morning and evening. The connection is between joy and sorrow: joy in the inheritance, and yet sorrow through the heaviness of spirit whereby their faith is tried before they possess it.

i. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." "Wherein:" there is in the original a little ambiguity here, and doubtless an intentional ambiguity which is well preserved in our translation. "Wherein" may refer to the salvation, or to the Saviour from and through whom the salvation comes. We will take both meanings.

1. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." Take the word "wherein" first as referring to the Saviour, for he in all things must have the pre-eminence, and the Saviour surely must be greater than the salvation. We have three marks given to us in the word of the

true circumcision, of which one is that they "Rejoice in Christ Jesus." "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. 3:3.) The apostle urges upon his believing brethren: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1); and repeats it, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice." (Phil. 4:4.) It is, therefore, an especial mark of the saints of God, that as they are blessed with a living faith in the Lord of life and glory, they rejoice in him. How strong and decided is the language of Peter in the verse following our text: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet. 1:8.) Observe the connection of faith and joy. It is when we believe in him that we rejoice; and if this faith be strong and clear, it is with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But why do they rejoice in him? Because he is the divine Author of all their salvation, for this is "the end of their faith," both in present enjoyment and in future fruition: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:9.) When I say, however, that the saints of God rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will so far qualify my expression as to say that they will sooner or later do so, if they do not so now. The reason of their present want of joy is their want of faith: but as Christ is revealed unto them and is received by faith, and as their faith thus grows and is enlarged they will find that joy will come in proportion to their faith—a holy, heavenly joy, calm and peaceable, if it do not rise to any great height of ecstasy. But I must qualify my expression a little further still: I must say that if they cannot rejoice in Christ, they can rejoice in no one else and in nothing else. You are brought to this point: you have not perhaps the joy, and still less the great joy of which our text speaks. But can you not lay your hand upon your breast, and say you cannot rejoice in anything short of Jesus? that you cannot deliberately take your pleasure make your joy in anything, in any one but Jesus? Has not earth, have not the things of time and sense either become so embittered by sin and sorrow, or have so lost their former charm, that you cannot rejoice in them; or if for a little time you so far forget yourself as to be lost in some joyous dream, when you awake there is

bitterness and remorse? How often it is with the child of grace as the prophet describes: "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh, but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." (Isai. 29:3.) There is, therefore, a measure of joy, a grain of joy, a seed of joy planted in your soul, even if you cannot rejoice in the Lord as you could wish. If you can look up to God who searches the heart, and can appeal to his penetrating eye that if you cannot rejoice, and still less rejoice greatly in Christ, there is none else and nothing else in whom or in which you wish to joy, be not dismayed as if you were totally destitute of one mark of the true circumcision. You may feel perhaps more able to lay hold of the other two marks that you "worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh;" but the third is not even now wanting in you, though it be but small, a very grain of mustard seed, that you "rejoice in Christ Jesus."

ii. But now take the other meaning of the expression "wherein." Understand it as referring to the salvation. Literally, naturally the heir of a large property looks forward with joyous anticipation to the day when it will be his by possession. As he stands upon some lofty hill which commands a view of his father's wide-spread lands, a feeling, perhaps not a very innocent feeling, springs up in his breast, anticipating the day when he will be able to call them all his own. But how much more innocently, how much more happily can the heir of God look forward to the possession of his inheritance beyond the skies. Such was the longing desire of the saints of old. Nor does God reject their desire: "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (Heb. 11:16.) This, then, is one peculiar feature of the heir of heaven, that he has an eye to his inheritance; a longing for the enjoyment of it. Have you not tasted and felt a sweetness at times in the contemplation of this inheritance; at least of the salvation revealed in and by it, which has dropped a holy joy into your bosom to inflame your desires after it; so that you can truly say, if ever you have felt the

movements of joy in your breast, it has been from a sense of your interest in it? There is, therefore, a joy in the salvation as well as in the Saviour. And there are certain blessings in this salvation which make it a well-spring of joy, if we are but privileged to drink at this river of pleasures.

1. *First, its suitability.* Has that never caused any springing up of joy in your soul? Have you never rejoiced in a sense or sight of this glorious truth, that there has been provided a salvation so suitable to your case—so suitable to you, a poor condemned sinner; you, a guilty criminal at God's bar; you, whose conscience has registered and still registers a long, black list of sins and crimes that fill your heart with shame and confusion? The suitability of a salvation flowing through the love and blood of the Lord the Lamb—a salvation all of free grace, a salvation blotting out all sin and reaching down to every want and desire of the soul—as the fulness and greatness and exceeding glory of such a salvation have been opened from time to time to your view and dropped with some measure of life and power into your spirit, has not the thorough suitability of so full and complete a salvation stimulated every desire of your heart, and drawn out your faith upon it and in it as so adapted in every way to your deplorable case?

2. But now take another feature of this salvation which make the hearts of God's people so greatly to rejoice in it: its *fulness*. See how this salvation takes in all your sins; how it embraces you just as you are in all your nakedness, filth, and shame, and gives you a plunge in the fountain opened for all sin and for all uncleanness. See how it is not half a salvation which you are called upon to complete, but a salvation full, yea, full to overflowing with a fulness inconceivable by human heart, unutterable by human tongue: a salvation from all sin, from all the consequences which we have brought upon ourselves through sin open or secret, past or present, from everything we have reason to dread, and everything for which we have reason to blush. Do we not read that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death even so might grace reign through

righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord?" What fulness is here? What glorious high tides of grace rising above and drowning every sin!

3. But now take another feature of this salvation: its *freeness*. Without money and without price, it comes to us as free as the light of the sun, as the rain of heaven, as the rain of the sky, unbought, unpurchased, unearned, undeserved by any words or works of ours; freely given out of the fulness of Christ to the objects of his redeeming blood and love. Do you doubt this? Does not the apostle say, "Being justified *freely* by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus?" The word "freely" means literally as a gift or gratuitously, "all free, gratis." So also runs the invitation, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) Let us never think that God gives his grace grudgingly. Our Lord said to his disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:8.) The ancient promise still stands, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4); and so testifies Jesus now from heaven: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely." Let us not measure the Lord by ourselves; nor shall we do so if we are rightly taught, for "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are *freely* given to us of God." (1 Cor. 2:12.)

4. But take another feature of this salvation: its *certainly*; that in it there is no "if," nor "but," nor "perhaps," nor "peradventure." It is a salvation as certain as God's own eternal throne; for the work is finished, salvation accomplished, sin put away, every attribute of God harmonised and reconciled; and in the bloodshedding, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation stands upon a basis that never can be moved. It is, therefore, called "an everlasting salvation:" "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;" and similarly Jesus is said to have "become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb. 5:9.)

5. But now take another feature, the last that I shall name, the *glorious issue*: that this salvation not only takes you as you are, with all your sins and all your aggravated enormities, plunges you into the fountain opened in the Redeemer's hands and feet and side, and thus washes you from all your iniquity in his atoning blood, and clothes you with a robe of righteousness, but it takes you safe to glory. I showed you this morning from my text how the inheritance was "reserved in heaven" for the heirs of salvation; and that therefore nothing could keep them out of it. When Christ's glory shall be revealed, what amends it will make for all suffering.

Now has your soul never been lifted up with holy the contemplation of a salvation like this? Did your poor tempest-tossed soul ever anchor here? Did any word ever drop as it were from God's own mouth into your heart, and raise up a blessed hope in your bosom, if it went no further than a hope, that you are interested in this great and glorious salvation? Then, there is reason that you should greatly rejoice—"leap for joy," as it means in the original—bless and praise God with heart and tongue, that there is such a salvation, and that you have some testimony of a manifested interest in it.

II .—But I pass on to my second point, which is, the heaviness which rests upon the spirit of the heirs of salvation for a season, *"if need be, through manifold temptations."*

In every gracious bosom there is a mixture of joy and sorrow; and usually, the greater the joy the greater the sorrow; the stronger the faith, the heavier the affliction; the deeper the work, the more painful and the more powerful the manifold temptations which assail it. But there is "a needs be" for these things. They would not have been appointed except through the infinite wisdom and love of God. We could not do without them: they are needful to ballast the vessel that it may sail safely over the sea of time. It is needful that holy joy should be tempered, softened, and balanced with much heaviness, and occasionally many deep

sorrows, that it may be solid and steady. But before I show this more fully in detail, I will drop a few words upon "the manifold temptations" which the saints of God are called upon to pass through, and which often bring them under such heaviness.

i. The word "temptations" embraces trials also; and the word "manifold" implies not only that these trials and temptations are varied in nature, but abundant in number. Take, then, the expression of the apostle to the full stretch of its meaning; it signifies many trials and many temptations, and these of a very varied and multiform character. The word "manifold" is a very good rendering as signifying the multiplicity of these trials and temptations, comparing them, as it were, to a long piece of cloth or a bale of goods packed up in many folds, which become gradually drawn out one after another to their whole length. But the word perhaps signifies not so much numerous folds as a variety of colours, like those of a rainbow, or Joseph's coat, or the varying hues of a pigeon's breast. Thus it embraces all the multiplied and various trials and temptations which at different points, from different quarters, and by different means assail and press upon the heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. I have thought it best to explain the word; for such is the fulness and significance of the word of God, that one expression will sometimes hold in its bosom a depth and copiousness of meaning in order to adapt it to the comfort and instruction of the church of God for all time. The expression, therefore, embraces every *providential* trial that you may be called upon to pass through; for God has so linked things together in the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven, that providential trials often open a way for the display, not only of the mighty power of Jesus as holding the reins of government below, but for a manifestation of the riches of his grace above. Our Lord, therefore, said to his disciples after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"—not only in heaven thence to display the power of his grace, but in earth there to manifest the rule of his providence. "All things are put under his feet;" and "he must reign, until he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25-27.) It may be that at this moment you are under some very heavy

providential trials, and these trials may assail you from such various quarters, and open such doors for present difficulties and future perplexities, that, in the language of our text, you are in heaviness through them. Body, mind, and circumstances; custom, business, trade, and prospects, are all alike depressed either really or apparently so, that like Pharaoh's chariot wheels, you travel heavily through the sands of Providence; and it seems at times as if fairly or foully you would stick fast in these sands, and there live and die without hope or prospect of any deliverance more than Pharaoh and his host. This is your peculiar trial, and one of which you have had a long and deep experience.

2. But now take a trial of a different kind, such as many of the dear saints of God have to drink very deeply of—*affliction of body*. How depressing to the mind, how saddening to the spirit, what heavy loads and burdens, ill health, with all its long train of pain, weakness, weariness, and various expenses lays upon our shoulders. How many of God's choicest saints drag their life heavily on through long days and sleepless nights, crying out with Job, "Wearisome nights are appointed unto me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." (Job 7:3, 4.) What an inlet, too, does bodily weakness often afford to temptation, Satan taking cruel occasion through the weakness of the body and shattered state of the nerves to harass and depress the mind.

3. Or take *family afflictions*, for as the trials in the words of our text are "manifold," the word embraces these quite as much as those which may be of a very different character. Heavy *family* trials! How saddening to the mind, how depressing to the spirit when death enters the house and calls away a beloved member. And are there not family trials which may be said to be worse than death when things transpire in the family, such as misconduct or criminality, against which no precautions can guard, which cover it with inward grief and open shame? But enough of trials so termed.

ii. Take then another view of the subject: look at "temptations," properly so called, by which we usually understand those peculiar snares laid for our feet by sin or Satan, the object of which is to entangle the unwary feet. Our Lord bade his disciples pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13); and especially charged his three disciples in the garden: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41.) By these temptations, as distinct from trials, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah, Heman, Asaph, Peter, and many other saints of God, as recorded in the word, were beset. Nor must we expect to be exempt from them. "Ye are they," said the Lord to his disciples, "which have continued with me in my temptations." (Luke 22:28.) Unbelief, infidelity, suggestions from our cruel, inveterate foe to suicide, blasphemy, or despair, how many are and have been tempted by Satan to these things! Nor have we less powerful temptations from within. The sudden breakings forth of temper; the ebullitions of our carnal mind in peevishness, fretfulness, discontent, and rebellion; the workings of the deep corruption of our fallen nature in its grosser and more sensual lusts and propensities; the unlooked for starting up of dreadful thoughts and imaginations: all these in the hands of Satan, and as usually managed by him to entangle our feet, form a part of the "manifold temptations" of our text, their effect being to produce heaviness of spirit, and by grieving and distressing the mind to press it down into the very dust, as a load and burden upon the shoulders, so as to prevent us moving cheerily and happily forward in the things of God. It will not be denied, I think, by any who have painfully experienced them, that the effects of trials and temptations is to sadden the spirit, depress the mind, and fill the heart with grief and sorrow. And though people, hard, unfeeling, unexercised people for the most part, may tell us that we ought not to give way to trouble, but manfully resist or patiently bear it; those who are in the furnace of affliction will say to such advisers: "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are ye all." (Job 16:2.)

iii. And yet there is a *needs be* for these trials and temptations, or God would not have appointed you to walk in such a path. If

there was nothing before your eyes but the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and you were looking forward to be put into the peaceable possession of it at death, without any intermediate trouble or sorrow, you would not be walking in the path of tribulation through which, and through which alone, it is declared that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. You would not be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, which you must be, if you are to be a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. You would have, therefore, no "fellowship of his sufferings;" no being "made comformable unto his death;" "no bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," nor "being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in your mortal flesh." (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10, 11.) Besides which, you would be no companion for the poor afflicted family of God; you would have few errands to the throne of grace; few openings up of the Scripture to your mind, few applications of the promises to your heart; few discoveries of the pity and compassion of him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and little sympathy with the Man of sorrows. Your smooth, even, easy path would set you far away from the choicest saints of God, and from the best part of living experience. You would stand, as many think they stand, upon some lofty mountain top—far away from all the clouds of the valley, the smoke and mist that darken the lower grounds of the earth. But to stand there is to stand not upon Mount Hermon, but upon Mount Gilboa; not upon the mountain in which is "made a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6); but a dark mountain on which your feet would stumble. (Jer. 13:16.) God deals differently with the heirs of promise, and brings them down from this mountain of pride, if ever they get upon it, into the vale of humility. He sees it needful for them to be in heaviness through manifold temptations. They travel thereby more slowly, but they travel more safely: for if the vale has fewer heights, it has fewer precipices; and mud and mire is more safe walking than amidst rolling stones and beetling rocks. Their path is more dark, and yet gives more occasion for light to be cast upon it. Many crooked things beset them, and yet

these crooked things make a way for God's power to set them straight. Many temptations distress them, but they open a path for God's gracious deliverances. Many foes and fears harass their mind, but they make a way for clearer manifestations of the love, blood, and power of Christ. Thus there is a needs be for these manifold trials and temptations. We pray to be humble, teachable, dependent, to know more of the grace, spirit, and presence of Christ; to have more fellowship and communion with him; to be more conformed to his image and example, walk more in his footsteps, and more to know and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. But we cannot have these desires granted except through trial and affliction; for it is in these trials and afflictions that Christ manifests and makes himself known and precious. If then in the divine wisdom there is a needs be for a path of tribulation, happy are we if we are, through God's teaching, in this path; and highly favoured, indeed, we are, if his grace has put us in it, if his grace is keeping us in it, if his grace is supporting us in it. Be assured also that you have that very trial which is most adapted to your particular case and state; for the "needs be" extends not only to trials generally, but to trials particularly and personally. You think sometimes that you could bear any trial but that which is laid upon you. But depend upon it, God has selected out of the variety of manifold trials and temptations that very trial which shall most suit your state and circumstances. He has, as it were, a boundless treasury of trials, all ready for use; and he has taken out of it that peculiar trial which shall most suit your case. He has selected that yoke which shall fit most closely upon your neck, and fastened that burden upon your shoulders which is most for your good and his glory that you shall carry, even though you bear it down to the gates of death.

iv. But take another word of the apostle to encourage you under your trials and temptations and every depressing weight upon your mind caused by them. They are but "*for a season.*" God in mercy every now and then takes our trials away, or supports us under them. Life is not one continuous scene of trial and affliction. There are merciful intermissions. If our path in

providence is sometimes dark, it is at others so lighted up with blessed gleams of the goodness of God, that we can bless and praise his holy name for the way by which he has led us. If fears heavily prevail, and unbelief be strong, relief comes at various times and in various ways from the pressure of those fears, and faith is strengthened to fight against unbelief, and even gain a victory over it. It is not all sorrow, all depression, all complaint, all sadness and heaviness with the saints of God. Like an April day, there is sun and shower. There are changes and alterations: for those who have no changes fear not God. (Psa. 55:19.) By these things men live; and in all these things is the life of their spirit. But we could not live under constant trials, especially if they were very severe. They would break our spirit; they might even, so to speak, break our brain, shatter our faculties, crush our nerves, drive us into a madhouse. God, therefore, has mercifully arranged, as regards many of the severe trials with which he visits his family, that they should be but for a season. You will bear in mind that there is a distinction between heavy trials and a daily cross. Heavy trials are but for a season; a daily cross is for life. Severe temptations are usually not lasting; tribulation is more or less enduring. But even assume that your heavy trials should last the whole of your life; let you go out of one furnace into another, out of one trial into a second, out of one temptation into a third, and each hotter and heavier than the others. It is, after all, even then, but for a season; there will come an end. There is an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven; and when taken up into the enjoyment of it, there will be an end of all this gloomy scene. Stretch then the cord through the length of life; be like the Lord, a man of affliction all your days; drink the cup of Job; sit with Jeremiah in his low dungeon; say with Heman, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps; thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (Psa. 88:6, 7); and let them last through the whole extent of your life, the end will come, and a joyous end for the heirs of promise. Look your trials then firmly and manfully in the face; and as you look them in the face, raise your eyes a little higher, look at the inscription which the hand of God has traced over

them, and read it as written for you, "*If need be.*" Now say, "If, then, there is a needs be, my soul acknowledges the truth of it. I feel the necessity of these manifold temptations; I bow to the sovereignty of God in sending them; I acknowledge his wisdom in the choice of the trial, and I admire his grace in supporting me under it." But now look at the other part of the inscription which stands side by side with it, written as if in letters of light: "*For a season.*" It will not last long; the cloud will soon be over, the thunderstorm soon pass away. Lightnings may flash, thunders may peal; it is but the harbinger of copious rain. The clouds will clear, the thunders disperse, the lightnings cease to play, the sun will once more shine, and a glorious sunset follow.

III.—Now for our third point, the *reason why* these manifold temptations are sent, with their attendant heaviness: "That *the trial* of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory." Have you a grain of faith in your breast? Look and see; for it is well worth searching after. Can you find any movement of faith in your bosom? If it be a faith worth having, it will be a tried faith. God gives no other. "Buy of me," said the Lord to the Laodicean church, "gold tried in the fire;" that is, a tried faith. And thus these manifold temptations which cast down the souls of God's people into such heaviness are for the trial of their faith.

i. But *how* do they try faith?

1. *First*, they try *its very existence*. Faith sometimes in your breast, at least in mine, sinks to a very low ebb. It hides its face and cannot be seen. We almost doubt and fear whether we ever had a grain of faith of God's gift; for we know well that no other is of any avail. All other has been tried and found wanting; and the only faith we value, the only faith we want, is that faith which is a grace of the Spirit and the gift of God. Now this "faith of God's elect"—therefore, peculiar to them—this living faith is not at every man's beck and call. As it is not given by human power, so it is not drawn out by human exertion, nor does it listen to the

voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. When it withdraws itself, it is like its divine Author: it cannot be seen. "When he hideth his face, who can behold him?" (Job 34:29.) It was a sense of this which made David cry: "Why hidest thou thy face in time of trouble?" (Psa. 10:1) and made the prophet declare: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." (Isa. 45:15.) Now the effect of trials and temptations in the hand of God is to manifest the existence of this living faith; for there is nothing but faith which can support the soul under powerful trials and temptations. Everything else gives way. You see how some through temptations plunge into sin, and others into suicide. They have no faith to keep them either from evil or desperation. But the saint of God, who is blessed with a living faith, has a principle in him of which the existence is manifested by trials and temptations; for they, not indeed in themselves, but instrumentally by the over-ruling power of God, draw out that faith which God has planted in his breast. Take the case of Abraham. Abraham, like ourselves, was not always strong in faith; we know that, on more than one occasion, he manifested great weakness of faith, both in denying Sarah to be his wife in Egypt and at the court of Abimelech, and in the case of taking Hagar to wife. But when God "tempted" Abraham, that is, brought upon him a severe trial, for God did not otherwise tempt him, then faith at once sprang up in his breast; for no sooner did God say to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22:2), than Abraham's faith sprang up to hear God's word, and what God bade, he did. You neither know your faith nor the strength of your faith until the trial comes. But the inward support that you feel under your trial; the cries of God that come out of your heart through your trial, and the shining in of God's face upon your soul through faith to bless you in your trial; these manifest and prove its existence in your bosom. And they draw it forth. As the sun draws up the vapours from the ground, so the Sun of righteousness draws up the faith in our soul which he has given us to hang upon him, to look to him, to trust his word, to cleave to him with purpose of

heart, and embrace him as our only hope and help.

2. Trials also sometimes prove that there is *a depth and a strength* in our faith of which we were not before aware. A trial comes: it would blow us down unless there were something deeply planted by the hand of God in our soul which stands the storm. There is a springing up of the life of God; a hanging upon the promises of God; a reliance upon the word of God; a going forth of the grace of faith, which throws its believing arms round the Lord, and will not let him go until he bless us. Here we prove not only that our faith is God's gift and work, but that there is a root to it, and a strong root too.

3. But again, these temptations and trials are so *many furnaces* which burn up false faith. What a deal of false faith we have had, it may be in days past, how much false zeal, false confidence, vain boasting, and setting that down for living faith which God never really raised up in our heart. The furnace has burnt it up. The trials, the temptations, the difficulties, the perplexities, the doubts, the fears, the suggestions of Satan, have all been so many hot furnaces which have burnt up our dead faith, and left nothing behind but that living faith which is the gift and work of God.

ii. Here, then, is "*the trial of faith;*" and this trial is more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, for it is not so much the faith itself as the trial of it which is precious. Gold perisheth; the flame of the furnace can melt it; and like all other mere instruments of earthly maintenance, it perishes in the using. The gold you have in your pocket today will be gone tomorrow to pay some bill, or meet some expense: it perishes as you spend it; or if hoarded, perishes as to any practical use and enjoyment. Or say that you invest your gold and thus put it out to profitable use, it will perish, as far as you are concerned, when death snaps the thread of life. But the faith of which I have been speaking never perishes like gold. The hottest flame cannot destroy it; nor does it perish by use, for the more it is used the stronger it is; nor does it perish at death, though then it is turned

into sight. It is an imperishable grace; for it is lodged by a divine hand in the new man, and lives because Jesus lives at the right hand of God, as its Author and Finisher: "Because I live ye shall live also." The Lord therefore said to Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). If faith could fail, then all must fail: for the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20); so could the faith fail the life would fail also; and the loss of life would be the loss of the soul. By faith we come to God, by faith we believe his promises, receive his truth, embrace his salvation in and by the Son of his love. By faith we stand, by faith we walk, by faith we fight, by faith we overcome; so that if faith could fail, there would be no standing in the truth, no walking with God, no fighting the good fight, and in the end no victory. We see then how needful it is firmly to maintain and contend for the unfailing, imperishable nature of faith, for so much depends upon it.

The trial, therefore, of faith is "precious," because it stands the hottest furnace, without loss or injury. But it is "precious" in two senses. First, it is precious in the sight of God as being his own especial gift. As a grace of the Holy Spirit, it is of exceeding value in the eyes of its divine Giver. It is precious in its origin, precious in its nature, and precious in its end. As making Christ precious, as giving a manifest interest in his Person and work, as cementing a spiritual union with him, and leading into fellowship and communion with him, it is precious as a means. And when it endures the fiery trial which is sent to try it, it is precious as a proof, for it is then clearly proved to be the work of God, and thus brings more glory to him. But, secondly, it is precious in the eyes of its favoured possessor. Would you part with the faith which God has bestowed upon you for any earthly consideration, especially if it has been well tried, and passed through the trial without loss or injury? Would house or land or any offer that men might make induce you to part with that little grain of faith which God has deposited in your breast? Would you not reject the whole, as our Lord rejected Satan's offer when he said, "All this will I give unto thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me?" "Get

thee behind me, Satan," would be your reply; "I would not part with my faith, small though it be, tried though it be, assaulted though it be, for a thousand worlds; for could I part with my faith, I should part with my hope of eternal life, as well as of all the comfort of my present life, and thus spend the remnant of my days a poor, miserable, despairing outcast from God and man." We rarely know the value of a thing till we have lost it, or are called upon to part with it. You may seem at times to have but little faith, and to hold it with but a slack hand; but put you upon your trial as to losing it, or parting with it, and you soon find how precious it is, and with what a firm, tenacious grasp you hold it. Nay, your very trials are made precious by it; for you can look back upon them and see how through faith they have been made blessings. But it is chiefly when we look to the glorious inheritance to which a living faith will bring us, that we may call it precious by the testimony of God and man.

IV.—This brings us to our last point, *the glorious issue of the whole*. Will not that make ample amends for all? The trial of this faith is to be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

What a glorious day for the saints of God will be the appearing of Jesus Christ, when he shall come and all his saints with him (Zech. 14:5); "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." (2 Thess. 1:10.) But what a solemn day for all others when "he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." To this second coming of the Lord the Scriptures of the New Testament are continually pointing. It was a truth preached by the apostles almost as much as his first coming; and God's people are represented in the epistles as "loving his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8), as "waiting for him from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:10), as "looking for him" (Heb. 9:29), and as solacing and comforting themselves in the prospect. (1 Thess. 4:18.) Nor was this dry, barren, unprofitable doctrine, for the apostle, pointing out its practical influence on the heart, says,

"Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20.) Now at this glorious appearing of the Son of God a second time without sin unto salvation, our faith, if indeed it be the gift and grace of God, and is a faith which has stood every storm, borne every trial, and passed uninjured through every furnace, "will be found unto praise and honour and glory."

And it will be so in two senses. 1. First, it will be found unto the praise of God. You will bless and praise, adore and thank his holy name, that ever he should have had mercy upon your soul; that ever he should have planted his fear in your heart; that ever he should have made you a partaker of the faith of God's elect. O what "praise" will burst from your lips when "Christ, who is our life, shall appear," and ye shall appear with him in glory. Then it is that the heirs of God will be put into possession of the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, which is now reserved in heaven for them. O what praise and blessing will then fall from the lips of the redeemed! And what "honour" will they give unto their God. The honour of salvation will be wholly his. Upon his brow they will gladly fix their crown, and to him will they ascribe all the honour of saving their souls from the depths of hell. God has already crowned his dear Son "with glory and honour." (Heb. 2:9.) The psalmist therefore says, "His glory is great in thy salvation; honour and majesty has thou laid upon him." (Psa. 21:5.) And what is the song of the redeemed but, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power?" (Rev. 4:11.) For glory and honour go together. Our text therefore adds, and "glory." What heavenly glory will surround his Person when he descends from heaven in the full blaze and majesty of his Deity shining through his glorified humanity! What glorious angels will go before him; what glorious saints will follow in his train; and how, in the twinkling of an eye, he will change the living and raise the dead; and, as he conforms them in a moment unto his own glorious body, what glory will shine forth in the souls and bodies of all. O what an issue to the trials, the temptations, the heaviness, and the sorrows of God's saints here below, when "God shall wipe away

all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Well then may we bear all the afflictions of the present life, and, with the apostle, "reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.)

2. Take another sense of the word. God himself shall praise, honour, and glorify his own work upon the soul. Praise shall be given by him to it, honour conferred by him on it, and glory set by him upon it; so that there will be not only praise and honour and glory given unto God by the heirs when they succeed to their glorious inheritance, but praise and honour and glory will be accorded to them by their heavenly Donor. This could not be if they gained the inheritance by their own merits or exertions; but God will praise the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels, Christ will honour his own work on the cross by casting upon it the lustre of his own glory, and the Holy Spirit will glorify that grace in the heart by which he made the heirs meet for their eternal inheritance. And thus the trial of their faith, which is more precious than of gold that perisheth, will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

What can we want more if we have any testimony of being heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance? What more can we desire; I may well add, what more can God give? He has given himself: "I am their inheritance." He has given himself in all his glorious perfections, in all his heavenly blessedness, to be their portion for evermore. The great, and glorious self-existent I AM, in his Trinity of persons and Unity of essence, the very God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has made himself over to them. How beautifully is this unfolded in the prayer of our great High Priest: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" and again, "That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they maybe made perfect in one." (John 17:21-23.) O what a oneness is here set forth between the Father, the Son, and the

Church. In this oneness will consist the blessedness and enjoyment of this inheritance. For as such it must exist to all eternity: no end, loss, or diminution of this union or of this happiness can be sustained through countless ages of endless bliss.

Is not all this fully set forth or implied in the words, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away?" If it be incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, it must be so for ever and ever, or corruption, defilement, and decay could invade and be found in the courts of heaven. Surely it must be for ever and ever, for it is even now reserved in heaven for them, that they may be put into full and eternal possession of all that ever was in the mind of God to conceive, or in the power of the hand of God to accomplish.

If then, this inheritance be reserved for us, shall we not struggle on until put into possession of it? Is there not a glorious crown in view, and shall we not press towards the mark for this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Is it not far better for you to be a poor, despised, afflicted, tempted saint of God, with the faith of God's elect in your heart, and the kingdom of God in your breast, pressing and struggling on through a sea of difficulties to reach the heavenly shore and to take possession of this glorious inheritance, than enjoy all that the world could lay at your feet? O how far richer does such a faith make us than if worlds were ours! Broad lands, ample fields, beautiful gardens, noble houses, and a splendid income, all that money can give or that heart can desire, what are they all compared with this glorious inheritance, and any testimony however feeble, if it be but real, of a manifest interest in it?

## THE PRECIOUS AND THE VILE

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, August 24, 1845

"If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." Jeremiah 15:19

Of all the prophets in the Old Testament none seem to have walked in such a rough and rugged path respecting the ministry as Jeremiah. Four distinct circumstances met in his case, which made the prophetic office peculiarly burdensome to him. One was, **the distresses of the times**. The Lord at that time was bringing judgments, such as sword, pestilence, and famine, upon the house of Judah; and these judgments falling upon the people of God, as well as upon the ungodly, made Jeremiah's lot peculiarly hard. A **second** circumstance was, **the persecutions that he had to endure** because he would not prophesy smooth things and speak peace where there was no peace. A **third** was, that he was left **to know** and **manifest more of the rebellion and peevishness of his depraved nature** than any of the prophets, if perhaps we except Jonah. And a **fourth** was, that **the Lord hid his face from him**, and did not appear for his comfort and deliverance in the way that Jeremiah earnestly longed to enjoy.

These four circumstances, meeting in Jeremiah's case, made his path as the prophet of the Lord so rough and rugged. We find him, therefore, in this chapter giving vent to the passionate rebellion of his heart. He says, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" He pities his mother that ever she gave birth to a child so deeply wading in the waters of strife and contention, and obliged to stand up so boldly in the Lord's name. "I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." He felt it was a painful path to endure almost universal odium, when he knew in his conscience that he

did not deserve it—that he was not one of those wretched usurers who deservedly met with public scorn and hatred, but a friend to Judah and Jerusalem. He therefore pours out his soul to the Lord in these peevish and fretful complaints.

Now the Lord meets the prophet on these points. He says, "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?" that is, Shall this iron-hearted oppression that thou art passing under—shall this iron yoke thou art wearing—shall the bows of iron bent against thee—shall the gates of iron closed before thee—in a word, shall this trouble from without and within, which is to thee as hard and as strong as iron, be stronger than the northern iron and the steel of my covenant purposes, eternal counsels, and immutable decrees? Shall the stronger fall before the weaker? The northern iron being so much stronger and better tempered must break the ordinary metal; and the sharp steel must cut it utterly asunder.

This word from the Lord affords the prophet some little comfort; and therefore he answers, "O Lord God, thou knowest; remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy long-suffering; know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of Hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone, because of thy hand, for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" And then, in a most inexcusable burst of passion, he says, "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar?" **What rash, unbecoming words for a creature of the earth, a worm of the dust, to address to the Almighty!** "and as waters that fail?" Hast thou promised, and wilt thou not perform? Hast thou declared thou wilt appear in my extremity, and shall it not come to pass? Are thy promises like a deceitful brook, dried up by the summer's sun?' **Job 6:15-20** In answer to this passionate cry, passing over with infinite forbearance and longsuffering his unbecoming appeal, the Lord gives him this word to support his fainting spirit: "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and

thou shalt stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."

It is as though the Lord said, 'If thou return from this passionate, rebellious murmuring, from this unbelief and despondency, and yield thyself up into my hands, then will I bring thee again before this people as my honoured prophet, and thou shalt stand before me with acceptance as my ministering servant. And is not this thy highest honour—is not this thy greatest privilege—to be as my mouth? Dost thou want more? Have not I chosen thee for this purpose? Have I not called thee—have I not strengthened thee for the work? Is not **that** sufficient? Will I not stand by thee? Will I not bring thee safe through? Will I not honour my own word by thy lips? And canst thou think, when so honoured as to be my mouth to my people, that I will ever leave thee?' Thus the Lord supports his fainting spirit, and encourages the prophet still to stand up boldly and faithfully in his name, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

Every servant of the Lord has to endure a measure of what Jeremiah went through. He has to endure persecutions, temptations, assaults from Satan, the workings of a rebellious heart, the hidings of the Lord's countenance, and a whole train of trying circumstances. But these very things fit him for the ministry, and without them he would be but a dry breast to the Lord's quickened family.

In considering these words this evening, I shall endeavour to take up the two clauses of the text as they lie before me; first, by shewing the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in the words, "**If thou take forth the precious from the vile;**" and **secondly**, the promise connected with them "**Thou shalt be as my mouth.**"

I.—Ever since the fall of man there has been that which is "vile;" and ever since the first promise there has been that which is "precious" in the world. But let us dive a little deeper into the meaning of the words. I love to penetrate, as the Lord enables,

into the mind of the Spirit. Let us see his mind in these two expressions—"**precious**" and "vile." Whatever comes from the flesh—whatever springs from the Devil—whatever is tainted with the pollutions of this fallen world, is "**vile:**" that is, abject, refuse, contemptible, fit only to be rejected and trampled under foot. Whatever comes from a covenant God, bears his stamp, wears his mark, and shines forth out of his glorious fulness—that is "**precious.**" Therefore, in one word, we may say, everything connected with the flesh and with fallen man is utterly "vile;" and everything that comes from Jesus, and is connected with Jesus, is unutterably and unspeakably "precious."

But, if we look at the words, we shall see, that "the vile" and "the precious" are apparently mingled together. And so they are in this fallen world. "If thou **take forth** the precious from the vile;" this implies that the precious and the vile are so apparently mingled together, so confusedly blended, and so often mistaken one for the other, that it requires divine wisdom and spiritual discernment to see what is vile and what is precious; and that it requires divine power and heavenly teaching to take forth, to separate, to draw out the tangled threads, and clearly distinguish that which is precious from that which is vile.

And if we look a little more closely at the text, we shall see it does not say, 'If thou take forth the vile from the precious,' but the precious from the vile;' implying that the vile abounds in a far greater proportion than the precious. If there were a few grains of gold in a dunghill, you would not say, 'Take the dunghill from the gold;' but you would say, 'Take the gold from the dunghill.' If there were a few grains of wheat in a vast heap of chaff, you would not say, 'Take the chaff from the wheat;' but, 'Take the wheat from the chaff.' So, the very expression, "Take forth the precious from the vile," implies not merely that the vile and the precious are lying together in one heap, but that the proportion of the vile is so great in comparison with the precious, that the precious is to be taken from the vile, and not the vile taken from the precious.

Now, we may observe, in order to clear up the subject, that there are four distinct points of view in which the precious are to be taken forth from the vile by every man of God. There are **precious characters**, and there are **vile characters**. There are **precious doctrines**, and there are **vile doctrines**. There are **precious experiences**, and there are **vile experiences**. And there are **precious practices**, and there are **vile practices**. And all these are so intermingled, apparently so confused and mixed up with one another, that it requires divine illumination and divine power so to take forth the precious from the vile, as to make them manifest to be what God has declared them.

We will take, then, a glance at these four distinct things, in which the precious and the vile are mingled together.

I.—There are **precious characters**, and there are **vile characters**. Who are the precious characters? The children of God. And who are the vile characters? The children of the Devil. With all the various ranks in society, with all the different dispositions of the mind of man, and with all their outward circumstances, there are really but two grand classes—the children of God, and the children of the Wicked One. The saints of God, we read, are precious. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" **La 4:2** These are "precious," because God has made them so. They are jewels that will shine for ever in the Redeemer's mediatorial crown. They are precious, because they have an eternal standing in Christ, because God has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him, and because they are redeemed with his most precious blood "as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" **1Pe 1:19**.

The "vile," on the other hand, are the children of the Wicked One; the tares that grow up with the wheat; the chaff that lies upon the threshing-floor with the pure grain; the dross that is mingled with the gold. And these are vile, because they are left to nature's corruption. They are vile, because they have no standing in the Son of God; not bought by redeeming blood, not justified

by imputed righteousness, not quickened by the Holy Ghost, not brought into a participation of the treasures that are in Christ Jesus. God looks upon them as abject and refuse; and one day he will sweep them out of his presence, just as filth and dust are swept away out of our houses into the streets: "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them" **Jer 6:30**. "And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" **Mal 4:3**.

But these "precious" characters and these "vile" characters are intermingled. In a congregation, there are precious characters; in a congregation, there are vile characters. In a church, however pure, there are sure to be vile characters; and these vile characters are mingled with the precious, and require a discerning eye to see the difference. They are not, therefore, profane, but professing persons. If I walk through the streets, and see a man rolling in drunkenness, I know at once who he is; I am not deceived in him. When I see the men and women of this world flaunting about in pride, dress, and gaiety, I make no mistake; I do not suppose that they profess vital godliness. But when I go among the professing people of the day, then I require a discerning eye, a spirit of judgment to see and find out the difference between the mere professor and the real possessor—betwixt the "vile" hypocrite dressed up with a name to live, and a "precious," honest, God-fearing, spiritually-taught child of God. Now, whatever may be a man's consistency, enlightened judgment, gifts or abilities, if he is devoid of the grace of God, he is "vile;" he is but the chaff mingled with the wheat for a short time on the threshing-floor.

The minister of the Lord sent forth to do God's own work, is then to take forth the precious character from the vile character. But how so? By tracing out the work of grace upon the heart, by shewing the operations of the Holy Ghost in quickening, delivering, reviving, encouraging, and strengthening God's people. He will also shew, in a way not to be mistaken, the other side of the picture, pointing out with all clearness, and holding up

conspicuously the distinction between the life of God in the soul, and all pretension, profession, or hypocrisy that comes short of the inward light and life of God the Spirit in the heart.

II .—Again. There are **precious doctrines** and there are **vile doctrines**. These precious doctrines and these vile doctrines are apparently intermingled; and the office of the man of God, the work of the gospel minister, is to take forth the one from the other; to disentangle and separate them; to hold up what is precious to be received in the love of it, and to hold up what is vile to be rejected and turned away from with abhorrence. Now, every man of God, sent forth to preach God's word, will set forth and hold up the precious doctrines of the gospel of Christ; and every man sent forth to preach God's word will expose and denounce every vile doctrine, however it may wear the appearance of truth, however dressed up with human eloquence, however masked and disguised by the "cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive."

1. The doctrine of the glorious Trinity, Three Persons and One God, a Trinity in Unity, is a "precious" doctrine, and the foundation of all vital godliness.

2. The **eternal Sonship** of the Lord of life and glory—that he is the actual "Son of the Father, in truth and love;" that he is a Son by nature, and ever was a Son—is a "precious" doctrine, precious to the hearts of those who see the lovingkindness of God displayed in sending forth his only begotten Son out of his bosom to bleed and die for poor fallen man.

3. The incarnation of the Son of God, and his taking into union with himself our nature, and yet a holy, a spotless and unsinning nature, is another "precious" doctrine.

4. The personality and operations of God the Spirit, his work upon the soul in all its various branches, his divine teachings, his heavenly leadings, his special operations, his spiritual guidings—every part and every branch of the work of the Holy Ghost as a

distinct Person in the glorious Godhead, equal with the Father and the Son, is a "precious" doctrine.

5. The redemption of God's people with atoning blood, that the Lord Jesus laid down his life for his sheep,—that he made a propitiation for their sins,—that he put away all their iniquities by his own sacrifice,—and that he is the only atonement made for sin—is a "precious" doctrine.

6. The superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of our iniquity; the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life; the sovereignty, freeness, and indefeasibility of grace—is a "precious" doctrine.

7. The sure perseverance of the saints till they reach the eternal mansions prepared for them before all worlds; the certainty of their attaining to their heavenly inheritance, and that they shall stand before the Lord in glory—is a "precious" doctrine.

In a word, all the doctrines of grace that are according to godliness, are precious to the man of God, and precious to the people of God.

But there are **vile doctrines**. There are vile Arian, vile Socinian, and vile Arminian doctrines, that detract from, that sully and tarnish the glory of free grace and the glory of a Three-One God, which elevate the creature instead of debasing, and lower the Saviour instead of exalting him. These are "vile" doctrines.

Everything that exalts the Saviour, and humbles the sinner, is "precious;" everything that puffs up the sinner, and degrades the Saviour, is "vile." Every doctrine fraught with godliness and divine fruits—every doctrine which is according to Scripture, that bears the stamp of God upon it, that is attended with the blessing of the Holy Ghost to the soul, that lays the sinner low, and exalts a precious Jesus in his heart—every such doctrine is precious. And every doctrine that feeds the pride of man, that exalts the creature, that invests him with some fancied natural self-

righteousness, that deceives and deludes him into the belief that he is something in the sight of God which he is not—every such doctrine is "vile." And the man of God will take forth the precious from the vile; he will, as the Lord the Spirit enables him, shew the difference between those precious doctrines that exalt the Saviour, and those vile doctrines that exalt the sinner. He will shew the difference between those precious doctrines that give the glory to God, and those vile doctrines that take the crown from the brow of Immanuel, and place it on fallen man.

III .—Again. There are **precious experiences** and **vile experiences**. Just as the vile **characters** and the precious **characters** meet in the same chapel, and often sit in the same pew; and just as the precious **doctrines** and the vile **doctrines** are often apparently mingled together: so there are precious **experiences** and vile **experiences**. And the man of God is as much to take forth the precious experience from the vile experience, as the precious doctrine from the vile doctrine.

But what is precious experience? Everything that the Holy Spirit does in the soul, everything that springs out of his divine operation in the heart, is a precious experience: and every imitation, every delusion—everything that springs from self and Satan, however it counterfeit the work of God—is "vile." And these two things are to be distinguished; their differences are to be explained, and one is to be taken forth, separated, and discriminated from the other.

1. Now, these "precious" experiences are, first, an experience of our own sinfulness, guilt, misery, helplessness, and ruin. To know this by divine teaching; to feel that we are sinners; to have the corruptions of our heart laid bare; to mourn and sigh on account of indwelling sin; to see the spirituality of the holy law, and behold the inflexible justice of a justly-incensed God; to view his glorious perfections, and feel our heart trembling within us at the sight of his glory., as a holy, just, sin-avenging Jehovah—this is a precious experience.

But then, there are **vile experiences** that counterfeit this. There is the working of a natural conscience, as there is the working of a spiritual conscience. There are convictions, troubles, sinkings, fears, which do not come from God, but spring from the flesh, or from the deceits of Satan as an angel of light.

The man of God is then to take forth the one from the other. He is to describe the difference between the two, to shew their distinct effect, to trace out the workings and to manifest the result of each. If our temptations and fears, our troubles and sorrows, our corruptions and burdens, our trials and perplexities never drive us out of refuges of lies, never lead to Jesus, never issue in gospel deliverance, never bring us to the Redeemer's feet, never make him precious to our souls—they are "vile." The man of God will trace them out; he will look at their result; he will describe their fruit; he will work out, as far as the Lord has taught him, their inward operations, and shew to what end they tend, and what they produce. He will shew, that if these convictions do not lead the soul out of self, do not break to pieces the arm of creature help, do not beat out of lying refuges, do not make the soul honest and sincere, do not bring it with weeping and supplications to the Lord of life and glory, do not soften, do not break down and lay low, do not humble, do not separate from the world, do not empty of self, do not make Jesus precious; if these troubles and exercises begin where they end, and end where they begin—in the flesh, they will be condemned by him as "vile."

2. But **secondly**, every experience of the grace that bringeth salvation, every manifestation of mercy, every shining in of the light of the Lord's countenance, every ray of hope, every sweet sensation of the pardon of sin, every comforting testimony from the Lord's own most blessed lips, is a "precious" experience. But then, there is a "vile" experience that counterfeits it; there is a carnal presumption that mimics living faith. There is a false hope, the hope of the hypocrite, that counterfeits a good hope through grace. There are fleshly affections that counterfeit the love of God shed abroad in the heart. There is a false deliverance that counterfeits the deliverance into the liberty of the gospel. There

are false comforts that counterfeit the consolations of the Spirit. There are false liftings up of fleshly excitement which counterfeit the liftings up of the light of God's countenance.

The man of God will thus also take forth the "precious" from the "vile," and shew the difference betwixt "precious" experiences and "vile" experiences. But how is he to know one from the other? An experience that is "precious" softens; a "vile" experience hardens. A "precious" experience melts, subdues, lays low, overpowers, overcomes, and brings to the feet of Jesus; a "vile" experience emboldens, puffs up, exalts, draws away from vital truth, and leaves the soul upon the wide sea of error. True testimonies make the conscience tender; presumptuous claims only harden and sear it. Real teachings from God bring out of the world; mere counterfeits and imitations of divine teaching take a man more into it. Real experience leads us more into union with the people of God; counterfeit experience takes us from them. Real experience brings us down in humility to lie at the feet of Jesus; counterfeit experience lifts up into presumption to lay claim to his atoning blood, without any manifestation of it to the conscience.

A "precious" experience makes the soul meek, and fills it with unutterable sensations of brokenness, softness, and tenderness; a "vile" experience only leaves it more hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. A "precious" experience is attended with changes, ups and downs, sinkings and risings, ins and outs, withdrawings of the Lord's presence and shinings in of the Lord's countenance; alternate seasons of light and darkness, alternate feelings of life and death, alternate sensations of coldness and warmth, alternate times of breathing forth the heart into his bosom, and alternate times when all is dark, shut up, and contracted. But a "vile" experience knows nothing of changes; it is always at one spot; like ditch water, always remaining at one level; not like a spring to refresh, but like a standing pool,—always stagnant, and often stinking.

Now the man of God is to take forth one from the other; to trace out the work of grace upon the soul, and point out counterfeit imitations. And so to take forth, so to distinguish, and discriminate between them, that every child of God may have a testimony in his conscience that he has felt the operations of God the Spirit, and that the work upon his heart is sound and genuine.

IV.—But again. There are **precious practices** and there are **vile practices**. And these "precious" practices and these "vile" practices are to be separated; the "precious" practice is to be taken forth, and the "vile" practice is to be shewn up in its true colours.

Everything that springs from the flesh is "vile," and everything that springs from the Spirit is "precious." Two persons shall do the same act: it shall be a "precious" act in the one man, it shall be a "vile" act in the other. This evening, two men shall pass the same plate; they shall give exactly the same sum; and yet the gift shall be "precious" in the one, and the very same gift shall be "vile" in the other. Why? Because it springs from different motives. When a man does what he does with a single eye to God's glory—when he is moved by the Spirit—when he is led by gracious feelings, when he is wrought upon by divine motives, what he does is "precious." But when he does the very same thing from carnal motives and fleshly reasons, from the workings of nature in its best and brightest form—that very same act is "vile" in him which is precious in another man.

But these things are often mingled together; and therefore the man of God is sent to distinguish them. There are wolves in sheep's clothing: there are goats that bleat, and sheep that grunt. The swine may be washed, and the dog may leave his vomit; but this does not give either a sheep's heart. A sheep may besmear itself; but that does not give it the heart of a dog. So a minister, who stands up in the Lord's name, is to distinguish betwixt the "precious" and the "vile." He is not to set down all to the Spirit's work that appears at the first blush and merely at the surface to be of his operation: he is to enter, beyond the surface,

into the depth of divine teaching in the soul, and look into the secret chambers where God the Spirit works. And then he will find, that many things are precious which apparently are vile, and many things vile which apparently are precious.

There shall be two men in this congregation; they shall come here regularly; they shall sit upon the same seat, perhaps belong to the same church, believe the same doctrines, profess the same truths; the one, perhaps, may have greater gifts than the other, more able to explain his own mind than the other; and yet the one shall be "precious," and the other "vile." Their appearance is the same, their conduct the same, their consistency the same; yea, the "precious" may not walk so consistently apparently, nor be outwardly so unblemished as the other; yet one shall be really "precious," and the other truly "vile." The man of God is to look at objects in the Spirit's light; he is to trace out the work of God upon the heart, and separate that which is of God from that which is of man. This is the distinction he is to make, this is the line he is to draw. Whatever comes from the flesh—be it in its foulest, or be it in its fairest form—be it in its brightest, or be it in its blackest colours—is vile, abject, to be cast aside, and swept out of God's house. And whatever comes from God—however weak, however feeble, however trembling, however scanty, however little—is to be cherished, because it has come from God. He is not to be deceived by appearances, not to jumble into one vast heap precious characters and vile characters, precious doctrines and vile doctrines, precious experiences and vile experiences, precious practices and vile practices; but he is to take them forth, to separate them, to shew what is precious and what is vile; to lay them clearly down, cast the light of Scripture upon them, and trace them out by what he himself knows of the operations of the Spirit upon his own conscience. If he vitally and experimentally do this, he will be "as God's mouth."

II.—This leads me to the second part of the subject—to be "**as God's mouth.**" What is God's mouth to do? God's mouth speaks to the heart. God's mouth addresses itself to men's conscience. God's mouth does a work for eternity. God's mouth penetrates through the ear into the very depth of the human soul, into which

a heart-searching God alone can look. Now, if a man is enabled, by divine teaching, to take forth the precious from the vile, he is "as God's mouth," because then he speaks to men's consciences. If all be jumbled up together in one huge heap, if no line of distinction be drawn, if no separation be made—if there be no searching, no trying, no weighing up, no speaking to men's hearts and consciences, professor and profane, elect and reprobate, the hypocrite and the genuine child of God, are all mingled together, and the whole work of the Spirit upon the heart is made confused and uncertain. But when a man is enabled to trace out the heavenly teachings and divine operations of God the Spirit upon the heart and conscience, and say, '**This** is of God, and **that** is of nature; **this** springs from divine teaching, and **that** is a counterfeit imitation; **this** is fleshly, and **that** is spiritual; **this** is the work of God, and **that** is the subtilty of the Devil;' when he is thus enabled to disentangle them, to take one from the other, hold them up, explain them, and cast the light of the Spirit upon them, then God's children have a testimony, and will say, 'I have felt **that!**' 'I have known **that!**' '**this** I have experienced!' '**this** has taken place in my heart!' 'I am sure I have felt **this,**' says one; 'I believe I have known that,' says another. When the work of the Spirit is thus cleared up, there is a witness in the hearts of God's people that the minister preaches God's truth.

Now the Lord's people have in their hearts that which is "vile," and that which is "precious." They have a vile nature, and they have a precious nature. They have the workings of flesh in them, and they have the workings of grace. They have a nature that is as corrupt as it can be; and they have a holy and pure nature which cannot sin. But in their feelings these two are often mingled. They have vile desires, and they have precious desires. They have vile workings, and they have precious workings. And these are apparently mingled together, so that they often cannot tell—'Does this come from God, or does this come from the Devil?' 'I have been cast down—whence does that come? From God, or from Satan?' 'I have been raised up—whence does that come? From God, or from the Wicked One?' 'I have been

comforted—whence did that spring? From the excitement of nature, or from the power of grace?' 'I have had sweet discoveries whence came they? From God, or from Satan as an angel of light?'

Thus the child of God will be exercised. He will not consider his experience is genuine as a matter of course. It must be explained and opened up to him. The light of God must shine upon it.

But when a man of God comes forth, and is enabled to take the precious from the vile, shew what is God's work, and what is not God's work, and what is the true teaching of the Spirit—then a child of God has a testimony in his conscience—'this is of God'—'**this** is really genuine'—'**this** will stand in the day of judgment'—'I have a witness in my heart, a testimony in my soul, that I am under divine teaching.' In this way a minister, as he takes forth the precious from the vile, becomes "as God's mouth." What he speaks comes with power. It does not merely fall upon the outward ear; it enters the heart, and does its work upon the conscience; it comes as from God into the hearts of God's people.

But what does God's mouth do? God's mouth does two things. God's mouth depresses, and God's mouth raises. God's mouth convinces, and God's mouth converts. God's mouth pulls down, and God's mouth builds up. God's mouth slaughters, and God's mouth heals. God's mouth brings trouble, and God's mouth brings consolation. And the Lord's people want the Lord alone to speak to their souls. It is not what man can say that comforts their hearts; they must have the Lord's own lips, speaking with the Lord's own power. Every minister taught of God, commissioned by him, equipped by him, and thrust out by him, has this work to do, and to be "as God's mouth" to God's people; that what he speaks may have an effect—some to kill, and some to heal; some to wound, and some to comfort; some to cast down, and some to raise up; some to bring out of nature's righteousness, and some to clothe instrumentally with the glorious robe of Christ's righteousness. But if he be not "as God's mouth," he cannot do this. It will be all confusion: and there will

be no separation, no heart-searching, no shewing things in their true light, no convictions, no consolations, no bindings, no deliverances.

Are these the things you love? When you go to hear, what is the prevailing bent of your heart? For amusement, from tradition, from custom? These are "vile" motives, not "precious" motives; for they do not spring out of the operations of God's Spirit. Do you go for this one purpose—that God may speak to your soul? Do you go with a single eye, looking up to the Lord, that he himself would speak to your heart—whether it be to reprove, or whether it be to comfort—whether it be to cast down, or whether it be to lift up? Do you look up to the Lord of life and glory, that he himself would speak to your heart? Now, if you do, you will want a minister who is "as God's mouth." You will not want his preaching to be all jumble and confusion; you have enough confusion and jumble in your hearts; you will want things disentangled. Sometimes you cannot see who are true **characters**; you will want them held up to your view, that you may see whether you are one. Sometimes in reference to **doctrine**, the mind will be confused; and you will want the truth held up to your view, that you may see which is the doctrine that bears the stamp of God upon it. Sometimes you will feel confused as to your own **experience**: it is not deep enough, or clear enough. It is a weighty matter with you, and you want to have it traced out, weighed up, and cleared up, that you may have a testimony it is the experience of God's saints. Sometimes you are perplexed as to **practice**—'Is this thing to be done, or not to be done? Which is right, and which is wrong? Is it consistent or inconsistent? Is it agreeable to the mind and will of God?' Now, you want a minister who can do this for you; who can shew you who are the people of God, and who are not—what is true in doctrine, and what is false in doctrine—what is sound in experience, and what is delusive—what is true in practice, and what is wrong. If you have eyes to see what is precious, and eyes to see what is vile—if you have hearts to love what is precious, and hearts to hate what is vile—you will want to have the crooked made so straight, the dark made so light, and the perplexed so

plain, that you may see clearly for yourselves where you are and what you are, and thus have a sweet testimony that God is your God.

But where shall we find this ministry? Where shall we look for it? It is a mercy if you have it here. It is a mercy if the Lord sends forth from time to time his servants into this place, to take forth the precious from the vile. And I believe the Lord has a purpose in causing this place to stand for his own glory, that there may be such a ministry among his children, according to men's different abilities, graces, and gifts. The Lord, we would fain hope, has purposed that this place may stand at this end of the town, that the precious might be taken forth from the vile, and thus God's mouth might speak from within these walls to the heart and conscience of God's people. If it were not so, I should have no wish to stand here. I know that unless the Lord has taught and enabled me to take forth the precious from the vile, I have no business in any pulpit. For a man to stand there, to confuse truth and error, to blend together the children of God and the children of the Wicked One, to throw into one vast heap truth and lies, and not to distinguish betwixt the work of God and the work of the flesh—I know this, that God has never sent **him** into the vineyard. And I am sure, if God has not sent him, he will never profit God's people. But those whom the Lord has thus sent, thus equipped, and thus commissioned, he will bless to his people, for they are "as God's mouth." And you that fear God's name will sometimes have a sweet testimony in your consciences, that the mouth of God is speaking through them into your heart. You will have your doubts and fears sometimes removed: you will have your perplexities sometimes cleared up; you will have the secret feelings of your heart traced out; you will have the whole work of the Spirit upon your conscience brought before your eyes; you will have from time to time the secret liftings up of the light of God's countenance upon you, and refreshings from his presence, worth more than a thousand worms. And if you have ever felt the value and tasted the sweetness of these things in your soul, you will cleave to that ministry, and you will cleave to that people, who love these things. You will cleave to the men who, by divine

grace and heavenly teachings, are enabled to set forth these things before God's own tried family; and you will say, 'To know and feel these things is all my salvation, and all my desire; let my lot be cast among this people, and let me enjoy the manifestations of the love and mercy of God to my soul. With this I can live contented, and with this I can die happy.'

Now, have you any testimony in your conscience that such is the ministry in this chapel? Have you ever felt the men of God who have stood up in this place to be the mouth of God to you? Have they ever laid bare the secrets of your hearts? Have they ever traced out the work of grace upon your conscience? Have any consolations been received into your soul from their lips? Then you have a testimony that it is the word of God. And if so, you will, from time to time, prize such a ministry, and cleave to it with purpose of heart.

## **Prevailing Pleas, or the Hope and Saviour of Israel**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 9, 1865

"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name. Leave us not." Jeremiah 14:8, 9

With the exception of the Lamentations, parts of Job, and what are called the penitential Psalms, I scarcely know a more pathetic portion of the Old Testament than the early chapters of the prophet Jeremiah. They contain indeed much solemn warning, wise counsel, keen reproof, stern denunciation of sin addressed by the prophet to Judah and Jerusalem; yet, blended with these sharp rebukes, there is an affectionate spirit of expostulation, couched in language of the tenderest pathos. Dark indeed and gloomy was the cloud which at this period hung over Judah and Jerusalem; and that cloud was not to burst in genial showers, not to fall in drops of fertilising rain, as we have witnessed in the past week, but to burst forth in a very thunderstorm of the wrath and indignation of the Almighty against a guilty nation and a sinful metropolis. In fact, at that period the crimes of Judah and Jerusalem had risen to a fearful height, and both city and state seemed ripe for destruction. Idolatry in one of its worst forms was then prevalent; for Ahaz, through his intimacy with the king of Syria, had introduced a worship of the most licentious character. We read, for instance, in Ezekiel, of women "weeping for Tammuz." Tammuz was a Syrian idol, supposed to represent Adonis the lover of Venus, a heathen deity; and these women sat weeping for the lover of Venus, who had been killed by a wild boar. What think you of Jewish women weeping over a Syrian idol, and that idol representing the lover of the heathen goddess of love? In the words of Milton,

"Thammuz came next behind,  
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured  
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate In  
amorous ditties all a summer's day."

In the temple itself men turned their backs on the sanctuary and worshipped the sun. At a somewhat later period, the women told Jeremiah that when they burnt incense to the queen of heaven—a name for Venus; when they burnt incense to the wanton goddess of love—and of course they practised all her other abominable rites, it was well with them; but when they had forsaken the worship of the queen of love, and ceased to sanction lust in all its abominations, they had wanted all things, and had been consumed by the sword and by the famine. (Jer. 44:18.) How blinded by idolatry, how low and debased as to all moral feeling, must they have been to proclaim thus openly their own shame. We wonder sometimes perhaps at God's stern denunciations of idolatry. But do we sufficiently bear in mind that idol-worship is not only an insult to the Majesty of heaven, but a worship of devils, and, as the apostle speaks, "a fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:20), and that all such worshipers naturally imitate the sins of their idol gods—enmity, lust, and cruelty? Oppression also ruled in all its various forms, as we see in the case of Jeremiah and the persecution to which he was subjected for his faithful warnings and declarations of approaching judgments. But the worst feature of the whole was, that prophets abounded in that day who professed to be sent of God, and yet whose whole object was to counteract the solemn denunciations of the true prophets, and to lull the people into a false security by assuring them that no ill should befall them, and that as they were the people of God all would be well with them and their beloved city. It was this peculiar feature which broke the very heart of Jeremiah. "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness." (Jer. 23:9.) The consequence of this crop of false prophets was, that they strengthened the hands of evil doers so that none returned from his wickedness. Instead of standing on

the Lord's side and testifying against sin, they were by their words and conduct the chief promoters of it. "From the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land." They hardened the people in their sins, for as Jeremiah testified, "They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you." (Jer. 23:17.) There is one verse which I have thought sometimes seems to couch in itself the very summit of abomination: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so." Now what could become of a nation where the prophets, standing up in the name of God, prophesied lies, where the priests made use of these lying prophets to carry out their own designs of covetousness or ambition, and the people were well pleased that the prophets should prophesy lies, and the priests should rule over them by craft and subtlety? Such a nation was only fit to be either swept away, as unfit to exist any longer as the professed people of God whom they thus dishonoured, or be purified by judgments, so as to remove these abominations out of God's sight. God took the latter course by carrying them to Babylon for seventy years' captivity, in which hard school they learnt to renounce their idolatry and to cease from their false prophets, for after their return we hear no more of these prevailing sins. You will find the study of the prophet Jeremiah very profitable, as it throws a wonderful light upon many things in our day, such as a false, hypocritical profession, the deceptiveness of lying prophets, the bewitching snares of idol worship, and the end of all these things in destruction from the presence of God.

But there was doubtless a godly remnant, of whom we read in Ezekiel as the men who "sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the midst of the land." Now it seems to me that Jeremiah in our text personated this godly remnant, and that his words were intended to represent the lamentations and desires of the true people of God in that day. It is not unusual for the prophets thus to personate the godly remnant, and speak as it were for them. We have a signal instance of this in Isaiah 64., where the

prophet speaks in the name of the people: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." (Isa. 64, 7.)

Now it is true that we are not altogether in the same circumstances, and yet in many points we greatly resemble what the people of Judah and Jerusalem then were. We are sunk into a very low state in the things of God. There is very little true religion or vital godliness in our midst. Sin runs down our streets like water, and false prophets abound on every side who cry, Peace, Peace, where there is no peace. The people of God are also for the most part full of complaints of their leanness, darkness, and barrenness. There is but little manifestation of the presence and power of God as in days of old. The Lord seems much to hide himself from his people, and to have greatly withdrawn his gracious presence from them, both publicly and privately. We may thus find in our text, if the Lord enable me to open it up spiritually and experimentally, much that may be suitable not only to present circumstances but to our own particular case.

But by way of casting my thoughts upon those points from the words before us in an orderly form, I shall thus divide our subject:—

I .—*First*, the *titles* under which the prophet addresses the Lord: "O the *hope* of Israel, the Saviour thereof, in time of trouble."

II .—*Secondly*; the *expostulation* which he addresses to the Lord under these titles: "Why shouldest thou be as a *stranger* in the land, and as a *wayfaring* man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man *astonied*, as a mighty man *that cannot save*?"

III .—*Thirdly*; the *plea* on which he grounds his expostulation: "Yet thou, O Lord, art in *the midst of us*, and we are *called by thy name*."

IV .—*Fourthly*, the petition, "Leave us not."

I.—But you may say perhaps, "What bearing has all this upon our case? Doubtless it had a bearing upon the case of old, upon the peculiar state and condition of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem which you have been describing, for neither would Jeremiah, as the prophet of the Lord, have used the words, nor should we find them recorded in the Bible. But those days are gone by and that state of things has passed away. We have amongst us no worshippers of Tammuz, or of the queen of heaven. The text therefore does not apply to modern times and still less to us." I will not dispute the point with you as to particular instances of idolatry; but an idol is an idol, whether worshipped inwardly in heart, or adorned outwardly by the knee. But waiving this, have you thought for a moment what conclusion must follow from such an argument, and that it would set aside a large part of the word of God? If the words of our text have no bearing upon any other case or any other circumstances, except those when it was first delivered, why is it still a part of God's word? why does it stand, and why has it stood imperishable for ages in the inspired page but because it has a bearing upon the Church of God throughout all time? In this sense we may explain the words of the apostle, that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." (2 Pet. 1:20.) The word "private" means that it is not limited to, or exhausted by the peculiar circumstances (as the expression private signifies), under which the prophecy was first delivered, but has a public and more expansive interpretation. We may illustrate this explanation from a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we find the apostle thus speaking: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5.) Now if you observe, he grounds his exhortation to contentment upon a promise. But to whom was that promise

made? To Joshua; as we read, "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." (Josh. 1:5.) He thus expands the promise given to Joshua, enlarges its private interpretation as first spoken to him, and makes it so far public as to embrace all the family of God. If it were not for this enlargement of the Scripture, and its application beyond the circumstances of the time when it was first delivered, the greater part of the word of God would be practically useless. But its grand characteristic is, that it is a "living" word ("the word of God is quick," that is, living "and powerful" (Heb. 4:12); and the reason is, because it is the word of Him who liveth for ever and ever. But has our text no bearing upon our time? Was there ever a day when there was more practical ungodliness in the nation at large? Was there ever a day when there was more false religion rife and rampant on every side? Was there ever a day when vital godliness was lower in the Church? Was there ever a day when the truth of God was either more despised and trampled under foot, or more perverted and abused? I fully grant that good men in all ages have ever made similar complaints; but that very circumstance only proves the truth of what I have advanced as to the bearing which our text has upon all periods. It has then a bearing upon this day, and I trust I shall be able to show that it has also a bearing upon you now before me—a bearing upon your heart, and in some measure a description of the experience of your soul, so far as you are under the teachings of the Holy Ghost. There is no use preaching, as it were, outside the chapel walls, or upon outside matters, entertaining and amusing our hearers with tales and anecdotes, and old wives' fables. The grand point is to get into men's hearts and consciences, to speak to them personally and individually, as God speaks in his word, and thus to bring the very artillery of heaven to bear upon the inmost citadel, the stronghold of the heart, the grand seat of contest between Christ and Satan.

i. The first thing which I proposed to consider was *the titles* under which the prophet here addresses the Lord. These are two: 1, "the *hope* of Israel;" 2, "the *Saviour* thereof in time of trouble."

1. The first title under which the prophet addresses the Lord is,

*"the hope of Israel."*

You will often find in the Scriptures titles ascribed to God as if to meet certain cases, and to be made use of as prevailing pleas. Those titles are not such as we might choose to call God by, which would be but presumption, but such as God called himself by, and which he intended to be descriptive of certain relationships which he bears to his people, or such as are founded on what he has revealed of himself as full of goodness, mercy, and truth. Thus his general distinguishing title all through the Old Testament was "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." This title God most graciously gave to himself as significant of the covenant which he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would be a God to them and to their seed after them through all generations. When, therefore, God spake to Moses at the burning bush, he said to him, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And though he then gave himself, so to speak, a new name, "I AM THAT I AM," yet this was the message which he sent by Moses to the children of Israel: "And God said moreover unto Moses, thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." (Exod. 3:15.) This title gave them, so to speak, a claim upon God, who, as having made a covenant with their fathers, had thus virtually pledged himself to be a God to them at all times and under all circumstances. So sometimes he is called "the God of Israel," that is, of the children of Israel collectively, as being in a peculiar and distinctive form, not only the object of Israel's worship, but as having especially revealed himself to Israel, made himself known to that people alone of all the nations of the earth, and taken them to himself that they might be his peculiar possession and treasure. These were Old Testament titles, and under them he was worshipped by his chosen people of old. But in the New Testament he has taken to himself a new title, for in that he is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," that being his distinctive New Testament title, as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" was

his distinctive Old Testament title.

But some of his titles, both in the Old Testament and New, are taken from those gracious attributes which he has revealed concerning himself. Thus in our text he is called "the hope of Israel," and in the New Testament he is entitled "the God of all grace," to show that all grace flows from him and is given by him. He is called also "the Father of all mercies," as being their original Source, Author, and Giver. He is called also "the God of all comfort," as intimating that all real consolation flows out of his manifested goodness and love. He is called also "the Father of glory," because all glory is in him and comes from him. We see then that these titles are either such as God has given himself, or such as are drawn from his attributes of grace, and sometimes of his holiness, as in the Seraphims' cry: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;" and our Lord's own words in his intercessory prayer: "Holy Father," and "righteous Father." (John 17:11, 25.) But there is this peculiar blessedness in these titles that they give us a foundation on which to stand, and put into our mouth a prevailing plea. Thus sometimes we may address him: "O thou God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, reveal thyself to me as my heavenly Father and eternal Friend;" sometimes, "O thou Father of all mercies, manifest thy mercy to my soul;" or, "O thou God of all comfort, speak a word of comfort to my poor, troubled heart;" or, "O thou Father of glory, reveal thy glory to my longing, waiting eyes."

But in our text God is called "the hope of Israel."

Let us endeavour to discover what this peculiar title unfolds for our comfort and encouragement. And first, in what sense is he the hope of Israel? In this, that all Israel—and by Israel we understand here not Israel after the flesh, but Israel after the Spirit—all Israel hope in him. Every grace of the Spirit must have the Person of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost to be exercised upon and look[ed?] unto. Hope, as a grace of the Spirit, is not a vague, confused, undefined sensation of the mind, flying like a wandering bird hither and thither, without end,

object, or home; but is a special acting of the soul under a divine influence, and is an abiding grace of the Spirit, which has a Person to look to, a Person to anchor in. David therefore said, "Hope thou in God." As if he would say, "Do not hope in thyself or ground thy hope upon anything in the creature, but hope directly and immediately in God himself. In him let thy soul anchor, and in him let thy expectations rest." Now this personal and peculiar hoping in God distinguishes "a good hope through grace" from all the vain hopes and vague expectations of those who know not the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. How many are looking here and there, trying to hope in this or that good work or deed, this or that dim, confused idea of the general goodness and mercy of God, without any experimental knowledge or felt sense of his mercy as a manifested reality, without any true spiritual acquaintance with God, and therefore without any fixed object, or any firm foundation in God as revealing himself in his dear Son. How different from this is the hope spoken of in the Scripture as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil;" and which, as such, has a definite Object and a sure foundation. In our text, therefore, God is called the "hope of Israel," as implying that all Israel, the whole of God's spiritual Israel, take them in all their states, cases, and conditions, are hoping in God. Could you take a survey of the whole of the spiritual Israel, could you view them as a general body with a discriminating eye, you would see that every true Israelite hopes in God; and that not simply as God, but as the God of all grace, the God of all mercy and of all truth, and especially as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this hoping in God, as distinct from all delusive, false hopes, which brings the soul to his feet, gives it special dealings with him on the ground of his promises and testimonies; and by so doing, practically renounces hope in everything else, as springing out of any other source or derived from any other quarter. With all this good hope through grace there may be much darkness of mind, and many tossings to and fro, as may be seen in our text, and yet there is a looking with a single eye to the Lord, and to the Lord alone, as if the soul would cast away every creature dependence, and hang itself wholly and solely upon the God and

Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as its only hope. I especially name this, for if you watch the movements of hope in your own soul, you will find that they always have respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to what you have seen, known, tasted, felt, or experimentally handled in or of him. You cannot, you dare not hope in anything that you find or fancy in yourself, but your hope anchors within the veil, where Christ now is, and takes fast hold of his Person and work. I cannot now enter into the various ways by which that hope is given and sustained; I can only assume that you have been favoured with a "good hope through grace," that it is the anchor of your soul, and that by that hope within the veil you have ridden out many a storm—not casting away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward; but in your lowest spot, in the darkest hour, in the gloomiest season, still retaining the good hope through grace which God has planted in your soul, and riding at anchor, even though the port seem far distant, the wind high, the sea rough, and rocks ahead.

2. The second title by which the Lord is appealed to is as the *Saviour of Israel*. I have already observed that by Israel we must understand not Israel after the flesh but Israel after the spirit, though in a sense God was a preserver of Israel nationally as well as the Saviour of Israel spiritually. In that sense, therefore, he is also said in the New Testament to be "the Saviour of all men," that is, their Preserver literally and naturally, and "especially of those that believe," by taking signal care of their bodies as well as of their souls.

There is no title of our blessed Lord sweeter and more suitable to a believing heart than that of *Saviour*. His very name Jesus signifies a Saviour, as saving his people from their sins. (Mat. 1:21.) In that sense, therefore, he is peculiarly "the Saviour of Israel." But the appeal to him by that title is a renunciation of all salvation but that which he wrought out by his bloodshedding, sacrifice, and death; for this is the distinguishing characteristic of Israel, that it hangs upon the Lord of life and glory, as its only Saviour, and renounces all salvation but his.

But you will observe that he is spoken of in the text as the Saviour of Israel *in time of trouble*. Israel has often to pass through times of sorrow and trouble. Deep temporal and deep spiritual trouble is the allotted portion of many, if not of most of the people of God. But having found that the Lord is a Saviour, and the only Saviour who can support in trouble and deliver out of trouble, there is this conviction deeply implanted and firmly written upon their heart, that he is a Saviour in the time of trouble. It is the purpose of God to hunt us out of all lying refuges, that we may believe in Jesus to the saving of our soul; that we may prove that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him; that we may learn what salvation is, and that we may know it for ourselves as a divine and blessed reality. Thus though he is always a Saviour, yet he is not experimentally a Saviour in times of worldly ease, carnal prosperity, and seasons of carelessness. But in times of trouble, when none can do us any good or stretch forth a healing hand but the Lord alone, then to come to his gracious Majesty and find there and then how he can and does save in trouble and out of trouble,—this is that which endears such a Saviour to believing hearts. And observe the expression, "*time of trouble*," and how it includes not only every trouble which may befall us temporally or spiritually, but clearly intimates that there is not a single season or time when trouble comes that the Lord is not able and willing to save us out of it. How well this corresponds with those gracious words and that sweet promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15.)

II.—But I pass on to consider the *expostulation* of the remnant which Jeremiah here personates: "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" You will observe that this expostulation follows upon his address to the Lord as the "hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble." It is therefore as if he would engage the Lord upon his behalf, win him over, as it were, to his side by appealing to him under those titles; and not only so, but by the strengthening of his own faith to gain some larger

measure of confidence in his own soul, and thus obtain stronger and firmer ground on which he could plant a praying foot and utter praying breath—for these two things are necessary to the power and prevalence of prayer. Having thus then appealed to the Lord, and got, so to speak, a firmer foothold for his own faith, he ventures onward in the language of expostulation. There is much wisdom and grace in this. He does not rush hastily and presumptuously into the presence of God as if he would take heaven by storm, but by appealing to him under those gracious titles by which the Lord had made himself known, he engages the ear of God to listen to his cry, furnishes his own soul with some ground on which he can stand, and having obtained that, he goes on with all reverence and tenderness to expostulate with the sovereign Majesty of heaven.

i. But what is the first expostulation which he lays before his gracious Majesty? "Why shouldest thou be as a *stranger in the land?*" What a tender appeal to "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." What a piteous inquiry! How he would as if ask of the Lord to reveal to him the mystery which had so deeply exercised his mind; that he would condescend to unfold to him the reason of a matter which had so much tried his soul. "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land?" If thou art, as thou art, the hope of Israel; if thou art, as thou art, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why, O why should matters be at this pass, that at this moment of perplexity, in this season of difficulty, in this very time of trouble, thou shouldest be "as a stranger in the land?"

Let me open up the figure. A stranger is one who does not speak our language or understand our customs. We know a foreigner at once by his appearance, his ignorance of our language and customs, and his strange bearing. He has little interest in us or we in him. There is therefore a mutual distance between us. Adopting this figure, and yet using it with all due reverence and humility, the prophet expostulates with the Lord, "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land? We see, we all see, that thou art not as thou once wert, at home with us, one with us,

interested in us, making our affairs thine own. A change has come over thee. Thou passest through our land as a stranger would, scarcely speaking to us, and keeping thyself at a distance from us." Now is not this the very description of a "stranger in the land?" A stranger is one who keeps himself very much to himself. He does not speak our language, and if he can speak it, it is not with the fluency of a native. There is little or no intercourse between us. He does not visit our houses, nor is he upon terms of friendliness or amity with us; for being a stranger, this cuts off friendly and familiar intercourse. Now the prophet asks the Lord why he should be with his people as a stranger in the land; in other words, should hold so little intercourse with them, keep them so much at a distance, carry himself in so isolated a way, discover himself so rarely, and manifest so little friendliness to them. Now apply this to our own case. I hope we are not altogether strangers to God and godliness, and that God is not altogether a stranger to us; that we know what it is to speak to God and sometimes for God to speak to us; and that the language in which we speak to God is not a language unknown to him, and the language in which God speaks to us is not a language unknown to us. And yet with all this, there may have sprung up a strangeness, a distance, an alienation between God and us, that makes him carry himself towards us as if he were a stranger in the land; so that we rarely speak to him and he still more rarely speaks to us. From whatever cause it has arisen, it is painfully evident that there is that coldness, that distance, that want of friendly intercourse and spiritual communion which seems to be intimated by the figure of his being "a stranger in the land." Have you ever known anything of spiritual intimacy with God, sacred fellowship and holy communion with the Lord as sitting upon the mercy-seat? Then you know what it is when he is as a stranger in the land, keeps you at a great distance from him, rarely or never allows you to come into his company, and scarcely ever speaks a word to you from the throne of his grace. This is for God to be as a stranger in the land. And sad it is for any people, sad it is for any church, sad it is for any congregation; and sadder still for any individual soul when "the hope of Israel" is as a stranger in the land. If God be a stranger

here, a stranger to the church, and a stranger to the congregation, it must be mourned and lamented by those who know anything of intimacy and fellowship with him; and if it is not known, lamented, or mourned over, the worse case it is. When people begin to feel the misery of God being a stranger to them and they being strangers to God, and long for reconciliation, intimacy, fellowship, and communion, then we have some marks of the hand of God being at work. But when they are satisfied day after day that God should be a stranger to them and they strangers to God, matters indeed must wear a very sad and gloomy aspect. If God be as much a stranger to you as any foreigner whom you may meet in a railway carriage, who cannot speak your language or you speak his, and therefore no intercourse whatever can take place between you, and you are content it should be so, sad indeed must be your case, and sadder still because you know and feel it not.

ii. But the prophet adds: "And as a *wayfaring man* that turneth aside to tarry for a night." In the East, especially in ancient times, there were not usually inns or other public buildings to entertain travellers as in our more civilized country; and it was therefore the habit of hospitable persons to take strangers in whom they might see in the street, and evidently travellers unacquainted with the place. We see this very clearly in the case of Lot; he would not allow the two angels who came to Sodom to tarry all night in the street. Similarly the old man at Gibeah, when no one would entertain the Levite, who was travelling to the side of Mount Ephraim, would not suffer him to lodge in the street all night, but took him into his own house. (Judges 19.) Thus the wayfaring man in the text represents a traveller who turned aside from the road and took advantage of the hospitality of a friendly host, who kindly offered to receive him into his house and give him a night's lodging. Now there would be some measure of friendly intercourse between these two persons, the host and his guest, but the latter would tarry only for the night. He would not live permanently with his host. Their intimacy could not therefore be very strong or of long duration; sufficient it might be to produce a degree of mutual interest and affection, but not

sufficiently long or intimate to take a very deep and permanent hold on the heart. Under this expressive figure the prophet complains, or rather expostulates with the Lord, why he should be as this wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night? who only speaks a few words now and then, gives a faint smile, and yet, being only a wayfaring man, does not use greater intimacy, as not being on the same footing as a wife, or mother, or child, but keeps up an understood distinction between host and guest, and remembers that he is only there for a night. Thus the Lord sometimes is as a wayfaring man to his people, pays a short visit, and condescends to tarry for a time with them, accepting the entertainment at which he is received. This corresponds to those words: "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.) There is, so to speak, a friendly meal, and a few friendly words between the Lord and his entertainer. But it is soon over; the morning comes and the wayfaring man takes his departure, and it may be weeks or months before he comes again. We often long for him and wonder when we shall see our guest again. "When will the wayfaring man come," we ask, "and turn aside again and tarry with us for another night? How sweet was his company; his words were not many, but they were weighty and powerful. We did not see much of his features, but what we saw was very beautiful and engaging; his voice melodious, and his language friendly, though in a measure distant. O when shall we see our wayfaring guest again? He has left such an impression, such a recollection of his visit behind, that we long once more to see his face and hear his voice." Have not you sometimes entertained a guest, some favoured servant of God perhaps, whose words and conversation left upon your mind an indelible impression, making you long to see him again? Now this describes very nicely the language and feelings of the soul that knows something of the visits of the Lord, of his words dropping like honey and the honeycomb, of the gracious discoveries of his presence, and the drawing near of his word and promise, making it long for his return. But it may be weeks or months before the wayfaring man turns aside again for another night.

iii. But there is something more expressive even than this; for our text seems to rise and its expostulation to increase on us. "Why shouldest thou be *as a man astonied?*" Observe the word: "astonied." It is not "astonished," but "astonied," which is a stronger word, and seems to be the old form of the modern word "stunned." We have in our present English two words: the word "astonished" and the word "stunned." Now "stunned" is a stronger expression than "astonished," for it implies such a degree of astonishment as benumbs a man's faculties. You might be astonished by seeing some accident in the street. But suppose it was your own wife or child upon whom the blow had fallen, you would be more than astonished: you would be stunned. So the Lord is not merely astonished, or rather as a man astonished, but "astonied" or stunned.

But we may well ask, what could embolden the prophet to use language like this? Jeremiah was sometimes led to use stronger, we might almost say more daring language, than any of the other prophets; as for instance, in that remarkable expression, "Why shouldest thou be to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" Scarcely any of the prophets use language of so bold, so daring a character, and yet in his mouth it had a certain characteristic feature: it was pressed out of him by the weight of circumstances. Thus though the language, as of Job's, deserved reproof, yet not being a wilful word against the Lord, but pressed out of his heart by the force of circumstances, it is not to be condemned as it would be in the case of a man who spoke the same words deliberately, and as it were in cold blood. But what spiritual meaning can be gathered up from the expression here made use of, "Why shouldest thou be *as a man astonied?*" Take the word in two senses, first "astonished," then "stunned."

1. It seems as if the prophet would represent God as astonished at the desperate case and state in which he finds his people. Not that God is astonished. The prophet does not say so, for there is the qualifying word, "as" "why shouldest thou be *as a man astonied?*" It is as if graphically he would represent God as

himself struck with astonishment at the awful case and state in which he finds his people. Sometimes we are so astonished ourselves at what we are, at what we have been, or at what we are capable of, that we may well think that God must be astonished too. We stand sometimes and look at our heart, and see what a seething, boiling, and bubbling is there; and we look at it, if I may use the expression, with indignant astonishment, as we should look into a pool of filthy black mud, all swarming and alive with every hideous creature. We stand and look at such a sight naturally with a sort of astonishment, at the same time of loathing. So when a man takes a view of his own heart, its awful hypocrisy, its vile rebellion, its dreadful deceitfulness, and its desperate wickedness, of what his heart is capable of plotting and contriving if unrestrained by grace, what it can conceive and imagine, it is as if he stood looking down upon a filthy pit and saw with astonishment, mingled with self-abhorrence, what the human heart is as the fountain of all iniquity. When he sees also who God is, his holiness and purity, and especially what he is as the God of all grace, of all truth, and of all love, what he has done for him and been to him, and then sees what his heart is capable of against a God so pure, a God so good, it is as if he seems horror struck with double astonishment; stunned it may be, not knowing what to do, what to think, or what to say. Have you not sometimes had such a view as I have just described of what you are as a sinner before God? Then you transfer your feelings to God as if he felt as you feel. "Why shouldst thou be as a man astonished?" As if viewing the Lord from yourself, and measuring him by your own feelings, the Lord was so astonished at the horrid wickedness of man, it seemed as if he himself did not know what to do. You will bear in mind that this is the language of strong and intense feeling. But a man must have some knowledge of his own heart to read it in this looking-glass, and to understand such language as this. You that are so exceedingly pious and so extra good, and from whose heart the veil has never been taken away to show you what you are, will perhaps think that I am drawing a caricature of human nature, and painting it as it is in the back slums of St. Giles's, or some court or alley in Whitechapel, the resort of thieves and prostitutes. And yet could

you have the veil taken off your heart, you would see that you were capable—mark my words, *capable*, God forbid that you or I should do the things of which we feel the workings—but that you are capable of doing all that human nature has done, or can do. If you think that human nature is not so bad as I have described it, let me ask you this one question. Why does there surge up every year, month, week, and day, crime after crime of most dreadful description? Unless crime were deeply seated in human nature, why should men poison their wives, mothers strangle their children, London contain a whole army of desperate characters, and that we should hear constantly of the vilest abominations, unless human nature were a seed bed of all these horrid crimes? And how does *our* nature differ from the nature of men justly gibbeted by public fame, or hurled out of life by public execution? It is when we see what we are ourselves that we come to know what human nature is.

2. It was this also which made the prophet say, "Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished," or stunned, that is, at a loss what to do to remedy such a desperate case, or heal a disease so thoroughly inveterate? You must bear strictly in mind, that the prophet does not ascribe to God this deficiency of wisdom, but in the strong feelings of his soul asks him why he should stand aloof just as if he were baffled by the difficulty of the case. We must carefully guard this point lest we tread with unhallowed shoes upon holy ground; and we must carefully bear in mind not only the extremity of the case, but the strong feelings of the prophet himself.

iv. But he adds another expression almost as strong, if not stronger: "*As a mighty man that cannot save?*" He views God as a mighty man, armed with all the strength of a giant, full of power and might, so that nothing could stand in the way of the execution of his purpose; but still the case with which he had to grapple was so deep and so desperate, that it was as if he stood in the midst of his people as a mighty man armed with all power, and yet their peculiar case was beyond the reach of his arm. He thus represents in the strongest possible way that matters had

come to that pass, that not only the wisdom of God seemed to have failed, but even that his power was insufficient to save the people whom he had designed to save. I grant that this language is very strong, but I think not stronger than our own experience warrants. Have you not felt sometimes there was that in your case and in your state so peculiar, that you were the subject of such temptations, had committed such sins inwardly or outwardly, and that your heart was such a compound of villainy and hypocrisy that it seemed to put you out of the reach of ordinary cases; that yours was a case in itself so peculiar and so strange, that it seemed as if it would baffle all the wisdom of God and defeat all the power of God; nay, if you did not know by some sweet experience that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, your case had in it that peculiarity that it seemed to put you out of the pale of God's salvation. Now this seems to be just the spot where the prophet was when he speaks of God as a mighty man that cannot save. A man must get into these spots before he can know them, and be exercised by these feelings and this experience before he can justify the language of the prophet, or in any way adopt it for his own. But if he know these things as personal matters, and they have been wrought, I might say, burnt into his very heart by a living experience of their truth and reality, then, though the language is strong, it will be found not one whit too strong for him to make use of. But are no profitable lessons ever learnt in this painful school, for it is a painful school when once our eyes are opened to see the solemn realities of eternity, and how we stand as affected toward them? Yes; there are two profitable lessons which we are taught in this school. 1. First, we obtain thereby some experimental knowledge of the depth of the fall, of the nature of sin, and of our own sad case as so deeply involved in actual and original transgression. It may seem at times as if our case were desperate; that look where we may, or consider whatever scriptural characters may present themselves to our view, still there is something in our own case different from and worse than any one. But we are thus cut off from all creature help or hope, and at times it may be almost from the very power of grace itself. But 2, secondly, we learn what a wonderful God we have to deal with. We are led to admire

his forbearance and long-suffering to us; whilst every now and then a sense of his goodness softens and melts the heart into repentance and to lie at his feet, bewailing and lamenting our sad state, confessing our sins with all their aggravations, and made truly willing to do anything, bear anything, or be anything if he will but make our heart right and keep it right, and above all things manifest to us a sense of his love and mercy. Surely none so highly prize the grace of God as those who are most led into a knowledge of the fall, and the havoc and ruin which it has made in every one of Adam's race, and the guilt and misery which it has brought into our own hearts.

III.—But to pass on to our third point. Now comes the *plea*: "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us."

What a strange intermixture there is in a believing heart of everything to cast down and yet of everything to encourage. How there is everything on the one side to perplex, to confuse, and put the soul to its wits' end, and yet how on the other there is everything to hold up its head, strengthen its faith, support its hope, and encourage it to hold on to the last gasp. Now this is that very trial of faith which is more precious than of gold that perisheth, for faith is not a dead, sluggish grace, and is never more active than when it is being tried as with fire. In what a commotion is the gold when it is in the crucible; and yet in that commotion what a separation from it of the dross and tin. Thus even in the sharp exercises which I have been describing, wherein the soul was almost brought to say that God himself could scarcely save it, and in the very power of his might looked on as if astonished at the depth and extremity of the case, yet, with all that, faith maintained its own, and, relying upon his word, could still say to him, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of *us*." O what a blessing it would be for this place if we could say, in the same assurance of faith, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of *us*." If God is in the midst of us this morning, your case and state, though you may feel it almost desperate, is not beyond the reach of his favourable eye, his healing hand, and his outstretched arm. The grand thing to be decided is this, Is God in

the midst of us? But how shall we know this? He is in one sense in the midst of us by the preaching of his gospel, by virtue of his ordinances, by our meeting together in his name according to his revealed will, by the solemnity of his manifested presence, by the gathering together of a praying people, members of the church and congregation, and by the promise of his being amongst his assembled worshippers. But he may be all this in our assembly, and yet not be all this to you personally and individually. How then, in the best sense, shall you know this? I will ask you one question, Is God in the midst of your heart? Has he ever come down in power and authority into your soul to take possession of you, so that though you are what you are, yet this you know, or at least in times past have known, that you are his? O what a strange intermixture, that a man should be in his feelings such a desperate wretch, such a vile sinner, and yet retain so firm a hold of God, should not let the Almighty get out of the grasp of his arm, but still hang on, and that to the very end upon God as having done something for his soul. Satan, though the father of lies, spake truth when he said, "All that a man hath will he give for his life." (Job. 2:4.) You cannot give up from what you have felt and experienced, for that is the grand evidence, that you have the life of God in your soul, and compared with that how worthless and valueless all other things seem to be in your eyes, because to give that up is to give up all your hope. Here, then, is the grand mystery, to hang and hold on, to hold out, and not suffer oneself to be cast away, but the more the Lord would seem to put us away, the more to cling to him. Was not this the faith of the Syro-Phenician woman, who, so to speak, would not take "No" for an answer? or, like the faith of Ruth, "Entreat me not to leave thee?" or, like the faith of Hannah when "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore?" Does not this faith resemble that of Heman's, when he cried out, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" and that of Asaph, when his feet were almost gone and his steps had well-nigh slipped? Such a faith is almost like the heartbroken wife, who, when her husband, after long endurance of her trying temper and thoughtless expenditure, says to her, "I cannot, I will not live with you any more: your

temper is so bad, your extravagance so great, that we must separate. I must leave you." But she will not let him go. O how she clings around him. "Don't put me away; do not leave me. I will not be so extravagant; I will be more mild. Don't put me away; I shall die, I shall die, if you put me away, and will not let me live with you any more." The more he puts her away, the more she clings to him, and will not let him go till he relent. So Milton represents Adam overcome by the tears of Eve:—

"Soon his heart relented  
Towards her, his life so late, and sole delight,  
Now at his feet submissive in distress."

Thus in grace; the more the Lord seems to put us away, the more we cling to him. The viler we are, the more we need his grace; and the very magnitude of our sins only makes us hang more upon his atoning blood and cling more closely to his word and promises as suitable to our case. Nor will anything induce us to give up our hope or relinquish our hold of his mercy.

If then the Lord has ever been in our soul to manifest there a sense of his goodness and mercy, we can then make use of this as our plea, "Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us."

But are there no other marks and tokens that he is in our midst? Yes, surely. If he has ever heard your prayer, he is with you; if he has ever given you a promise, he is with you; if he has ever touched your heart with his finger, he is with you; if he has ever favoured you with a smile, he is with you. And though taking the general run of your experience, he may be a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night, or though even, as it may seem, as if he were astonished at what you are—a mighty man that cannot save, still every token for good encourages you to cling, to cleave, to hang round him, to catch hold of his feet, as the Shunammite caught Elisha by the feet, and would not be thrust away; for you cannot but feel that, with all that you are and have been, you dearly love him, and have a good hope, if not a clear testimony, that he loves you. Can you

not sometimes look up to him, may I not say, almost look at him in the face and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee? And though my abominable sins have often made thee a stranger to me, yet in my heart of hearts, in the very depths of my soul, thou knowest that I love thee." I know that I have had such feelings myself as these when my heart has been turned towards his glorious Person and finished work. Here then is the plea: "Thou art in the midst of us." And if you can look at the Lord in the face and appeal to his heart-searching eye that you do love him, depend upon it he loves you, for the word of truth declares, "we love him because he first loved us."

2. "*And we are called by thy name.*" This is the second plea. Why am I called by my name? Because it was my father's name. We all bear the name of our father. So, if we are called by the name of God, it is because God is our Father. His name is called upon us, as the Hebrew expresses it, because, as in nature so in grace, as sons we bear the name of our Father. The tie of father and son is a tie which cannot be broken. No power in earth or heaven could make me not to be my father's son. Change of name would not do it; for the change of name is not the change of nature, nor could it alter a past fact. If then we are called by God's name, he having adopted us into his family, whatever we are, may be, or feel ourselves to be, God is still our Father. And surely, if ever we have felt any measure of the Spirit of adoption, so as to call him Father, he will never deny the title, never cut us off or disinherit us, but still be a Father and a friend in time and to all eternity.

IV .—Now for the last point, the *petition*, "*Leave us not.*"

How much is summed up in those three words; for what would it be for God to leave us? What would become of us? What would be our case, what our state, if he left us and that for ever? We should fall at once into the hands of sin, of Satan, and of the world. We should be abandoned to our own evil hearts, abandoned, utterly abandoned to the unbelief, the infidelity, to all the filth and sensuality of our wicked nature, to fill up the measure of our iniquities, till we sank under his wrath to rise no

more. So was it with Saul when God left him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. He went from worse to worse, till at last he died in misery and despair. Indeed, I may say what and where should we be if God left us for a single hour? However therefore God may seem to bear himself coldly toward us, we cannot endure to think that he should leave us fully and finally, and abandon us to what we are and what we know we should be if left of him. "Leave us not therefore to the just desert of our sins; leave us not to reap the fruit of what we have sown," must ever be our cry. "Still let us cleave to thee, and do thou still cleave to us."

I think we have seen in our text real faith and hope and love at work, and yet its language is such as is only spoken out of the depths of an exercised soul. This subject I have therefore brought this morning before you, in the hope that it may meet some of your cases and reach some of your hearts, as it describes what has been often mine, and thus, by the blessing of God, the bread cast upon the waters may be found unto profit after few or many days.

## **PRIDE**

(J. C. Philpot, excerpted from his "Reviews" 1853) "**I**

**hate pride and arrogance.**" Proverbs 8:13

"**The Lord detests all the proud of heart.** Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." Prov. 16:5

Of all sins **pride** seems most deeply imbedded in the very heart of man. Unbelief, sensuality, covetousness, rebellion, presumption, contempt of God's holy will and word, hatred and enmity against the saints of the Most High, deceit and falsehood, cruelty and wrath, violence and murder—these, and a forest of other sins have indeed struck deep roots into the black and noxious soil of our fallen nature; and, interlacing their lofty stems and gigantic arms, have wholly shut out the light of heaven from man's benighted soul. But these and their associate evils do not seem so thoroughly interwoven into the very constitution of the human heart, nor so to be its very life blood as pride. The lust of the flesh is strong, but there are respites from its workings; unbelief is powerful, but there are times when it seems to lie dormant; covetousness is ensnaring, but there is not always a bargain to be made, or an advantage to be clutched. These sins differ also in strength in different individuals. Some seem not much tempted with the grosser passions of our fallen nature; others are naturally liberal and benevolent, and whatever other idol they may serve, they bend not their knee to the golden calf. Strong natural conscientiousness preserves many from those debasing sins which draw down general reprehension; and a quiet, gentle, peaceable disposition renders others strangers not only to the violent outbreaks, but even to the inward gusts of temper and anger.

But where lust may have no power, covetousness no dominion, and anger no sway—there, down, down in the inmost depths, heaving and boiling like the lava in the crater of a volcano, works

that master sin, **that sin of sins—pride!** As Rome calls herself the Mother and Mistress of all the churches, so is Pride the Mother and Mistress of all the sins; for where she does not conceive them in her ever-teeming womb, she instigates their movements, and compels them to pay tribute to her glory.

The origin of evil is hidden from our eyes. Whence it sprang, and why God allowed it to arise in his fair creation, are mysteries which we cannot fathom; but thus much is revealed, that of this mighty fire which has filled hell with sulphurous flame, and will one day involve earth and its inhabitants in the general conflagration, the first spark was pride!

It is therefore emphatically the devil's own sin; we will not say his darling sin, for it is his torment, the serpent which is always biting him, the fire which is ever consuming him. But it is the sin which hurled him from heaven and transformed him from a bright and holy seraph into a foul and hideous demon. How subtle, then, and potent must that poison be, which could in a moment change an angel into a devil! How black in nature, how concentrated in virulence that venom, one drop of which could utterly deface the image of God in myriads of bright spirits before the throne, and degrade them into monsters of uncleanness and malignity!

Be it, then, borne in mind that the same identical sin which wrought such fearful effects in the courts of heaven was introduced by the Tempter into Paradise. "You shall be as gods," was the lying declaration of the father of lies. When that declaration was believed, and an entrance thus made into Eve's heart, through that gap rushed in pride, lust, and sinful ambition. The fruit of the forbidden tree was "pleasant to the eyes;" there was food for lust. It was a tree "to be desired to make them wise;" there was a bait for pride. "They would be as gods;" there was a temptation to sinful ambition. The woman tempted the man, as the serpent had tempted the woman; and thus, "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12.)

There are sins which men commit that devils cannot. Unbelief, infidelity, and atheism, are not sins of devils; for they believe and tremble, and feel too much of the wrath of God to doubt his threatenings or deny his existence. The love of money is a sin from which they are exempt, for gold and silver are confined to earth, and the men who live on it. The lusts of the flesh in all their bearings, whether gluttony, drunkenness, or sensuality, belong only to those who inhabit tabernacles of clay. But pride, malignity, falsehood, enmity, murder, deceitfulness, and all those sins of which spirits are capable, in these crimes, devils as much exceed men as an angelic nature exceeds in depth, power, and capacity a human one.

The eye of man sees, for the most part, only the grosser offences against morality; it takes little or no cognisance of internal sins. Thus a man may be admired as a pattern of consistency, because free from the outbreaks of fleshly and more human sins, while his heart, as open to God's heart-searching eye, may be full of pride, malignity, enmity, and murder, the sins of devils. Such were the scribes and pharisees of old; models of correctness outwardly, but fiends of malice inwardly. So fearful were these holy beings of outward defilement, that they would not enter into Pilate's judgment-hall, when at the same moment their hearts were plotting the greatest crime that earth ever witnessed—the crucifixion of the Son of God!

All sin must, from its very nature, be unspeakably hateful to the Holy One of Israel. It not only affronts his divine Majesty and is high treason against His authority and glory, but it is abhorrent to His intrinsic purity and holiness. It is, indeed, most difficult for us to gain a spiritual conception of the foul nature of sin as viewed by a Holy Jehovah; but there are, perhaps, times and seasons when, to a certain extent, we may realize a faint idea of it. It is when we are favored with the presence of God, see light in his light, and have the mind of Christ. *Then* how do we feel towards our base backslidings and filthy lusts? With what eyes does the new man of grace then view his sinful yoke-fellow—that base old man, that body of sin and death, that carnal mind in which dwells

no good thing, that heaving reeking mass of all pollution and abomination, which he is compelled to carry about with him while life lasts? He views it, how can he but view it, except with loathing and abhorrence. But what is this, for the most part, short and transient, and, in its very nature, weak abhorrence of evil, compared with the enduring and infinite hatred of God against sin, though it may aid us in obtaining a dim and faint conception of it?

But among all the evils which lie naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, pride seems especially to incur His holy abhorrence; and the outward manifestations of it have perhaps drawn down as much as, or more than, any other sin, his marked thunderbolts. His unalterable determination against it, and his fixed resolve to bring down to the dust every manifestation of it, is no where so pointedly or so fully declared as in that striking portion of Holy Writ which forms the second chapter of the Prophecies of Isaiah. And this is the theme of the whole, "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Isaiah 2:17.)

But, besides these general declarations, the sacred record teems with individual instances of God's anger against this prevailing sin. Pride cost Sennacherib his army and Herod his life; pride opened the earth to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and hung up Absalom in the boughs of an oak; pride filled the breast of Saul with murderous hatred against David, and tore ten tribes at one stroke from the hand of Rehoboam. Pride drove Nebuchadnezzar from the society of his fellow-men, and made him eat grass as oxen, and his body to be wet with the dew of heaven, until his hairs were grown as eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

And as it has cut off the **wicked** from the earth, and left them neither son nor nephew, root nor branch, so it has made sad havoc even among **the family of God**. Pride shut Aaron out of the promised land; and made Miriam a leper white as snow;

pride, working in the heart of David, brought a pestilence which cut off seventy thousand men; pride carried captive to Babylon Hezekiah's treasure and descendants, and cast Jonah into the whale's belly, and, in his feelings, into the very belly of hell. It is the only source of contention; (Prov. 13:10;) the certain forerunner of a fall; (Prov. 16:18;) the instigator of persecution; (Psalm 10:2;) a snare for the feet; (Psalm 59:12;) a chain to compass the whole body; (Psalm 73:6;) the main element of deceitfulness; (Jer. 49:16;) and the grave of all uprightness. (Hab. 2:4.) It is a sin which God especially abhors, (Prov. 8:13, 16:5,) and one of the seven things which he abominates; (Prov. 6:17;) a sin against which he has pronounced a special woe, (Isaiah 28:1) and has determined to stain it, (Isaiah 23:9,) to abase it, (Dan. 4:37,) to mar it, (Jer. 13:9,) to cut it off, (Zech. 9:6) to bring it down, (Isaiah 25:11,) and lay it low (Prov. 29:23.)

Pride was one of the crying sins of Sodom, (Ezek. 16:49), desolated Moab (Isaiah 16:6, 14,) and turned Edom, with Petra, its metropolis, into a land where no man should dwell, and which no man should pass through. (Obadiah 3, 4, 9, 10; Jerem. 49:16-18.)

But pride is not content with her dominion over the children of this world (Job 41:34), her native born subjects and willing slaves, among whom she rules with lordly sway, at once their tormenting mistress and adored sovereign. Not only does she set up her worship in every family of the land, and reigns and rules as much among the low as the high, swelling the bosom of the blind beggar who holds his hat for a half-penny as much as of that high-born dame who, riding by in her carriage, will not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness. Not only does pride subject to her universal influence the world of which Satan is god and prince, but she must needs intrude herself into the Church of Christ, and exalt her throne among the stars of God.

She comes indeed here in borrowed garb, has put off her

glittering ornaments and brave attire, in which she swells and ruffles among the gay flutterers of rank and fashion; and with demure looks, and voice toned down to the right religious key, and a dialect modeled after the language of Canaan, takes her seat among the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, much as Satan stood up among the sons of God. (Job. 1:6.) And as she has put off her apparel, so has she changed her title, assuming that which shall give her the readiest and most unquestioned passport. "Humility" is the name with which she has newly christened herself; and, slipping into the camp by the most lowly portal, she moves onward, aiming at no lower seat than the throne, and no less weapon than the scepter.

Some, however, of Zion's watchmen, and no one more than the writer of the work before us, have lifted up her veil, found out her real character, and, having first branded her on the forehead, "**SPIRITUAL PRIDE**," have labored hard, though hitherto ineffectually, to cast her out of the congregation of the saints. But as all their labors have hitherto been ineffectual, and she still dwells in our midst, it may be well to **describe some of the features of this dangerous intruder.**

**1. Ignorance**, and that worst species of it—ignorance of one's own ignorance—is evidently a main feature in her face. In this point she wonderfully resembles that stolid brother of hers who is so much in every company—worldly pride. We are all ignorant, sadly ignorant of everything that belongs to our peace; but the first step out of ignorance is to be conscious of it. No people are so thoroughly impracticable, so headstrong, so awkward to deal with, so deaf to all reason, so bent on their own will and way, so self-conceited, and so hopelessly disagreeable, as those unhappy people, whether in the world or in the church, who are ignorant of their own ignorance. Touchy, sensitive, quarrelsome, always grumbling and complaining, unable to lead and yet unwilling to follow, finding fault with everything and everybody, tyrannical where possessed of power, though abject enough where any advantage is to be gained, bungling everything they do and yet never learning to do any better, making up in a good opinion of

themselves for the general ill opinion of them by others—such people are the plague of families, workshops, churches, and congregations. When people of this stamp become, as it is called, religious, being all the time really destitute of grace, their pride runs in a new channel, and with a strength in proportion to the narrowness of the banks. In them we see the disease at its height.

But there are many of **the Lord's people** who exhibit strong symptoms of the same evil malady. Yet what can be more opposed to grace or to the spirit and example of Him who said, "Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart?" Where the true light shines into the soul there is a discovery of the greatness and majesty of God, of his holiness, purity, power, and glory; and with this there is a corresponding discovery of our own nothingness, insignificance, sinfulness, and utter worthlessness. This divine light being accompanied by spiritual life, there is raised up a tender conscience as well as an enlightened understanding. Thus is produced self-abasement, which every fresh discovery of the holiness of God and of our own vileness deepens and strengthens. This lays the foundation for true humility; and when God's mercy meets man's misery, and Christ is revealed to the soul, it cannot too much abase itself before his blessed Majesty, nor lie low enough in the dust of self-loathing and self-abhorrence. **Humility is the daughter of grace, as pride is the child of ignorance.**

**2.** Another marked feature in this impostress, is her **self-deceptiveness**. She may not succeed in deceiving others, but she rarely fails in deceiving herself. Thus she usually hides her real character most from those who are under her special influence. They are 'patterns of humility' externally to others—and patterns of humility internally to themselves. Sweet is the incense which regales their nostrils from the admiration of others; but sweeter far is the odor of **their own admiration of themselves**. Other sins are not so self-deceptive, so self-blinding, so self-bewitching. Sensual thoughts, blasphemous or rebellious imaginations, anger, carnality, prayerlessness,

deadness, coldness, unbelief—these and similar sins wound conscience, and are, therefore, at once detected as essentially evil.

But the swellings of spiritual pride, though not hidden from a discerning eye and a tender conscience, are much concealed from those very religious people whose 'amazing humility' and undeviating obedience are ever sending forth a sweet savor to delight their approving nostrils.

**3. The grossness and universality of her appetite** is a no less prominent feature. Other sins feed only on a limited and appropriate diet. Covetousness is confined to the love of money; sensuality, drunkenness, gluttony, to their peculiar gratifications. But **pride is omnivorous!** To her greedy appetite, no food comes amiss. Like the eagle, she can strike down a living prey; or, like the vulture, banquet on putrid carrion. Some are proud of their knowledge, others of their ignorance; some of their consistency, others of their freedom from all tight restraints; some of their gifts, others of their very graces; some of their ready speech, others of their prudent silence; some of their long profession, others of their deep experience; some of their Pharisaic righteousness, others of their Antinomian security.

The minister is proud of his able sermons; the deacon of his wise and prudent government; the church member of his privileges above the rest of the congregation. Some are proud because they attend to the ordinances, others because they are not tied up in the yoke of church discipline; some are proud of the world's contempt, and others of the world's approbation; some are proud of their sophistication and culture, and others of their vulgarity; some of their learning, and not a few of their lack of it; some of their boldness to reprove, and others of their readiness to forgive; some of their amiability, and others of their austerity; some because others think well of them, and others because nobody thinks well of them, **but themselves.**

Thus, as some weeds flourish in every soil, and some animals

feed on every food, so does **pride flourish in every heart**, and feast on every kind of food. When an apostle was caught up into the third heaven, pride assailed him as soon as he came back to earth, so that it was needful for a thorn to be given him to rankle in his flesh for the remainder of his life, in order to let out its venom. Pride would have been too much even for Paul's grace, but for this messenger of Satan daily to buffet him. Pride set the twelve disciples to argue who would be the greatest; and pride widened, if it did not originate, the breach between Paul and Barnabas.

Pride was the pest of the first Christian churches as well as of our own. The pride of gifts was the besetting sin of the Corinthian church; the pride of legal observances the sin of the Galatian church, the pride of vain philosophy of the Colossian church. Timothy was not to allow novices to preach, for pride was their besetment; and he is especially cautioned against those who will not consent to wholesome words as being "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." (1 Tim. 6:4, 5.)

None are exempt from pride's baneful influence. She works in the highest Calvinist as well as in the lowest Arminian; swells the bosom of the poorest, most illiterate dissenting minister, as well as puffs up the lawn sleeves of the most lordly bishop. And, what is far worse, even in those who know, love, and preach the truth, spiritual pride often sets brother against brother, friend against friend, minister against minister. She is full of cruel jealousy and murderous envy, greedily listens to the slanderous tales of whisperers and backbiters, drinks down flattery with insatiable thirst, measures men's grace by the amount of their approbation, and would trample in the mire the most honored of God's servants, that by standing upon them she might raise herself a few inches higher!

The very opposite to charity, pride is not patient, and is never

kind. She always envies, and ever boasts of herself. She is continually puffed up, always behaves herself rudely, is ever self-seeking, is easily provoked, perpetually thinks evil of others, rejoices in the iniquity of others, but never rejoices in the truth. She never bears with others, believes nothing good in a brother, hopes nothing good for others, and endures nothing. She is ever restless and ever miserable, tormenting herself and tormenting others, the bane of churches, the fomentor of strife, and the extinguisher of love.

May it be our wisdom to see, our grace to abhor, and our victory to overcome pride!

**"I hate pride and arrogance."** Proverbs 8:13

**"The Lord detests all the proud of heart.** Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." Prov. 16:5

## **The Profane, Wicked Prince Overturned, and the Rightful King Set Up**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, July 11, 1869

"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Ezekiel 21:27

I shall have to call your attention, for a few moments, to the literal meaning and historical connection of these words; for, as I have explained in a sermon recently published, the spiritual and experimental interpretation of the word of God must always be based upon and coincide with the literal. If, then, we look at the verses which immediately precede our text, we shall find these words: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith the Lord God: Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high." (Ezekiel 21:25, 26.) This prince of Israel, against whom this severe denunciation was launched, that this diadem should be removed and his crown taken off, was king Zedekiah; and you will observe that he is stamped by two expressive marks, "profane," and "wicked." I shall consider the last mark first as requiring less explanation. He is called "a wicked" prince, then, on account of his generally wicked and profligate life, and especially, as we read in the last chapter of the Second of Chronicles, because "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord." But he is also called a "profane" prince; and his profanity consisted mainly in the breaking of a covenant on two distinct occasions—one made with God, and the other made with man in the name of the Lord.

As regards the first, we find it recorded by the prophet Jeremiah (34:7-9), that when the king of Babylon's army had taken all the cities of Judah except Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem, Zedekiah

made a covenant with all the people at Jerusalem, in the name of the Lord, that every man should let his man-servant, and every man his maid-servant, being a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free. But afterwards, when Nebuchadnezzar raised the siege of Jerusalem to fight against Pharaoh Hophra, who had come out of Egypt with a great army to its relief, the princes and the people, believing that all danger was now over, repented of the covenant of reformation which they had made, and caused every man his servant and every man his handmaid, whom they had set at liberty, to return into servitude. (Jer. 34:9-11.) Now, this breach of the covenant with God, which had been solemnly attested and ratified by cutting a calf in twain and passing between the two parts thereof, Zedekiah sanctioned, and, therefore, was a profane prince as breaking his covenant with God.

But he was also "profane" by breaking another covenant made with man in the name of the Lord, for he had made a covenant with the King of Babylon, that he would be faithful to him as his liege Lord, and then had broken that covenant by swearing allegiance to the King of Egypt. In order to understand this point a little more clearly, you must bear in mind that the land of Canaan was at this time a bone of contention between two mighty empires—the mighty empire of Assyria, on the east, and the might empire of Egypt on the south; and that these were contending together to which of them it should permanently belong; for not only was it a very populous and fruitful land, but it lay adjacent to the Mediterranean, that great highway of nations, and to those two wealthy marts of commerce, Tyre and Sidon, and therefore was coveted by these two great empires as a very important possession. Now sometimes the King of Egypt prevailed, and sometimes the King of Assyria; and therefore it was a temptation to the Kings of Judah sometimes to favour one to get rid of the other, and sometimes to favour that empire most which could most powerfully defend them against the other. Zedekiah owed his throne and crown to Nebuchadnezzar; for when the King of Babylon took Jerusalem, he made him King in the room of Jehoiachin, and at the same time exacted from him a solemn oath that he would be true and faithful to him. But seven

years afterwards Zedekiah sent ambassadors into Egypt to make a confederacy with Pharaoh Hophra, and thus broke his oath which he had sworn in the name of the Lord his God unto the King of Babylon. We find, therefore, the Lord thus speaking of him: "But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die." (Ezek. 17:15, 16.) It was then because he had thus broken his covenant on these two distinct occasions that he is called by the Lord a "profane" prince; Now against this profane, wicked prince the Lord utters, in the words which I have already quoted, a very severe denunciation. He declares that "his day was come, when his iniquity should have an end." He had borne with him until he would bear with him no more. He would now, therefore, remove the diadem from off his brow, and take the crown from off his head; which was accomplished, when in the eleventh year of his reign Jerusalem was carried by storm, Zedekiah himself, when he had fled from the city by night, overtaken in the plains of Jericho, and brought before the king, whose covenant he had broken, who slew his sons before his face, put out his eyes, and bound him with chains to carry him to Babylon. Then God abased him that was high. And not only so, but he overturned, overturned, overturned his kingdom itself so thoroughly, by the slaughter of his sons, the destruction of his city, and the 70 years' captivity which ensued, that the kingdom of Judah was utterly put an end to, and there never was afterwards a Jewish king to reign in Jerusalem, until he came whose right it was, and over whose cross, though rejected of men, Pilate wrote, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews;" for this was the King who was to come, to whom the throne by right belonged, and to whom God had promised to give it for an everlasting possession; as the angel said to Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for

ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32, 33.)

I am sorry to have been obliged to take up so much of our time with all this literal explanation; but it is necessary, not only for its own sake, to understand the historical connection of our text, but also that I may build consistently upon it a spiritual and experimental interpretation. With this explanation, then, I now come to our text. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

I think you will see in these words, if, at least, you see with me, three things: —

I .—*First, a triple denunciation:* "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it."

II .—*Secondly, a positive declaration:* "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is."

III .—*Thirdly, a gracious promise:* "And I will give it him."

I.—I have shown you the literal meaning and historical connection of the text; but what you want to know, and what I hope to set before you this morning, is its spiritual and experimental interpretation.

It contains, I said, in the first place, a *denunciation* against a wicked, profane prince, whose diadem is to be removed and crown taken off, and himself to be overturned with a threefold overturning, so that his reign should be put a thorough end to, and his kingdom so destroyed that none should occupy it, until he should come whose right it is. Looking around you, and above all looking into your own heart, can you find any such profane, wicked prince of Israel, who has had a long day of rule and government, and whose iniquity has gone to great lengths, but whose day, the day of his overthrow, is now come, and whose iniquity at last has an end? Is it anybody in this congregation, any

particular person, whose wickedness and profanity I am come here to denounce, any secret hypocrite or loose-living professor whom I am sent to expose? No; none but your own profane, wicked self; for is not this the prince who has for a long series of years put the diadem round his own brow, and bound upon his own head the crown of glory that belongs to the Lord? Surely your own conscience will convince you that you are the man; and you will therefore go with me, as I shall endeavour to show how, in the case of the Lord's people, he will overturn, overturn, overturn the rule and dominion of this profane, wicked prince; and how he will remove the diadem and take off the crown from his most unworthy brow, and abase him that is high, until he has made room in the conscience for him to come whose right it is, that he may fulfil the promise, "I will give it him."

You will observe that the word "overturn" is thrice repeated. Now I do not say that because the words "I will overturn, overturn, overturn," are repeated these three times, it necessarily means that there are three distinct overthrows of self, as symbolised by the profane, wicked prince, though it is somewhat remarkable that literally and historically there were three distinct captures of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and three distinct captivities into Babylon. It may be merely an emphatic form of expression, as "O earth, earth, earth, hear the words of the Lord," and "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," in both of which passages the threefold repetition is merely an emphatic form of language. But as I find it thus thrice repeated, and as there were, as I have hinted, three captures of Jerusalem, and three captivities into Babylon, I shall take it simply as it stands before me, as descriptive of three distinct overthrows of King Self by the power of God; removing the diadem from his brow, and taking the crown off his head.

To do this then more thoroughly and completely, I shall endeavour to trace out the experience of a living soul from the very first commencement of the work of grace; and I hope in doing so, that you who have had some experimental dealings of God upon your soul may be able more or less clearly to find a

witness in your own experience that you have gone through some, if not all, of these three overthrows.

i. I will take, then, a child of God on whom he has fixed his eternal purposes of love and mercy, and commence with him at that period of his life when the Lord is about to begin a work of grace upon his soul. I shall pass by his infancy and childhood, though there doubtless were then marks of his being "preserved in Christ" before called, and sometimes in a very signal way, and come to that special epoch of his life just before the Lord begins to work with power upon his conscience. I do not wish to lay down a certain standard for the Lord to work by, for he is a sovereign, and works all things according to the counsel of his own will; but you will generally find, before he begins to work with power upon a man's conscience, that he deals with him in some conspicuous manner in a way of *providence*. Though providence is not grace, though the leadings and dealings of God with a man as regards the things of this life, are not the same by any means as the leadings and teachings of God in a spiritual and experimental way, yet the one often run into the other. And as the preparation of the heart of man and the answer of the tongue are both of the Lord, so he often prepares the way for spiritual teachings and experimental dealings, by leading his people into a peculiar path in providence.

1. This profane, wicked prince is now then sitting upon his throne, and settling himself, as he thinks, firmly upon it. I call him a "profane, wicked prince," for though he may not be actually wicked in life, or profane in conversation, yet he is both so in the sight of God, and as spiritually viewed. And you will bear in mind that I am not speaking of the man, but of self in the man; for what is self but the very essence of our corrupt nature? Besides which, is it not very wicked in self to set itself up in the heart in the place of God? And is not self "profane" as well as wicked, not merely as full of rebellious and blasphemous thoughts, but as breaking God's covenant in a Holy Law? Has it not often made vows, promises, and resolutions, and broken them all? And what is it now doing but binding the diadem of pride round its brow,

and putting the crown of earthly glory on its head? But God says, in the actings of his providence towards the man who is doing this, "Thy day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Remove the diadem, and take off the crown." Nor is he long in executing his sentence. View then the man in whom this profane, wicked prince still rules, full of youth, health, and good spirits. He means to be very prosperous and very happy; to spend his days in pleasure, and his years in enjoyment. This is his resolution. He is setting before himself a course of prosperity in business, and a life thoroughly immersed in all that nature admires and loves; but with neither of which God has anything to do; for God is not in all his thoughts. But though he has nothing to do with God, and means, if he can help it, to have nothing to do with him, God means to do with him; for he has purposes of mercy and grace towards him. There is One whose right it is to sit upon the throne of his heart, for he has bought him with his blood; and this throne he will not share with the wicked, profane prince. The Lord begins now, therefore, to deal with him in a marked way in providence, to make room, so to speak, for the power of his grace. He was looking forward to success in business, and when he had amassed sufficient to live comfortably without it, he would then retire from it to spend a life of ease and pleasure. But he is unexpectedly cast upon a bed of sickness. While he was promising to himself days of prosperity and years of pleasure, he is, instead of his former health and strength, stretched for months or years upon a bed of pain and languishing; and thus all his worldly expectations of happiness and pleasure, of prosperity and success, are broken and crushed.

2. Or it may be that the Lord sees fit to blight his tenderest affections; to bring upon him some painful, cutting disappointment, which shall strike at the very roots of all earthly happiness; and instead of enjoying the pleasures of life and revelling; as he expected, in an elysium of earthly delight, he has nothing before him but gloom, melancholy, and disappointment.

3. Or it may be he embarks in business, and instead of prospering, getting on in life, and succeeding to almost the extent

of his desires and wishes, a blight comes over the whole scene: nothing goes well with him, and he has little else but a succession of losses and crosses. If he is a farmer, his crops are blighted, his cattle die, prices are low and rents high; and he has nothing but anxiety and disappointment, in spite of all his industry and economy. If he is a tradesman, he finds others succeed in business where he cannot, rival shops opened against him, customers fall off, and he meets with such heavy losses, that he often fears he must put up his shutters.

4. Or if he has a family, he shall have grievous family afflictions; children torn from him in their childhood or youth; or when grown up, turning out extravagant, idle, and profligate; and thus wherever he turns he finds little else but a blank, sorrow, and vexation.

Now all this time, without perhaps his knowing it, God is at work with him. He is breaking down the rule and reign of this wicked, profane prince; for he cannot sit as he used to do comfortably upon his throne. The diadem of pleasure which he had bound round his brow, and the crown of honour which he had set upon his head, become loosened and shaken, and ready to drop off; for with all these earthly disappointments there shall come at times over him an unspeakable feeling of anxiety and gloom; he can scarcely tell why it is, or whence it is, but he goes about sad, moping, and melancholy, and yet scarcely able to explain the reason why it is not with him as it used to be. If he go with his former young companions, he has no pleasure in their company, but is rather saddened by their mirth; if he try to take comfort in the enjoyments of life, and seem for a time to forget his sorrow, he comes home with a burdened conscience. Wherever he goes, and whatever he does, the hand of God seems gone out against him, and he can take happiness in nothing.

Now in all this the Lord is secretly and mysteriously acting in his first overturn; for he is now overturning profane, wicked self; he is taking off the diadem and removing the crown from all carnal expectations of pleasure in the things of time and sense; he is

abasing him who is high, and bringing him down by laying a load upon his back, of which he scarcely himself knows the cause. But though he may not see it himself, others can see it in him and for him, that a very great change has taken place in him, and that he is not the man that he was. If he had been engaged in any wicked way openly or secretly, it is put a stop to; if he has been profane, it has come to an end. A something has been wrought in his conscience which has made it sore and tender, and he can now no longer trifle with God and his own soul. The diadem is removed, the crown is fallen from his head, and profane, wicked self no longer sits undisturbed upon the throne of his heart.

ii. But now comes the second overturn. He begins to see and feel that there is something more to be thought about than business and pleasure. He had not cared to think much about religion, and had perhaps rather scoffed at it and despised it. But now, whether he will or no, religion seems to occupy his constant thoughts, and the solemn matters of eternity rest with great weight and power upon his spirit. This inward change compels an outward one. He breaks off his old habits, leaves his companions, forsakes the haunts of pleasure or gaiety and goes moping and mourning along under a load laid upon his conscience, under the heavy burden of sin and guilt. For the Lord is now at work more clearly and powerfully upon his conscience. He is convincing him of sin, bringing to light his iniquity, setting his secret sins in the light of his countenance, bringing him to judgment, arraying his transgressions before his eyes, and sending the curses and sentence of a holy law into his conscience. But what is the effect of all this? He sets to work. He will be very religious, and he sets the law before his eyes, and feels resolved that he will fulfil it to the utmost. He will not slack his hand night or day, but will try to do his duty to God and man, whatever it cost him. He will read the Scriptures, go to a place of worship, will in every way endeavour to please God by obeying his commands; he will watch his looks, his words, his thoughts, his actions; and will endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to please and serve God.

But the Lord is faithful to his word. He has said "I will overturn,

overturn, overturn." This building, therefore, shall not stand, this tower of Babel shall not reach to heaven, this legal righteousness which he is seeking to erect and stand upon for eternity shall not endure the lightning of God's wrath and the terror of his frown.

1. The first thing that God does, then, is to overturn his *righteousness*, for this is the grand point of controversy between God and man, as we see in the case of Job, and in those of whom Paul says, "that they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." There must, therefore, be an overturning of this *righteousness*, a taking away of its diadem, a removing of its crown, an abasing of it as being high. And this is done by that work of the Holy Spirit in the heart which brings to light every secret sin, and passes a sentence of condemnation upon every iniquity as it is brought into judgment.

2. "Well," but the man says, "I will try again. I cannot get on as I could wish, that I well know; for I find sin mixed with all I do; but I will try again if I cannot do it better next time. Surely I am not altogether without some strength to obey; I am not altogether, as I have heard ministers represent—thoroughly helpless and hopeless." So he tries his own strength again to see what he can do by praying more heartily, reading the Scriptures more intently, watching his eyes, and ears, and tongue, and feet, and hands more narrowly. But as he is now a very diligent and attentive hearer of the word, he is told again and again from the pulpit that he must believe in Christ—that there is no other way of salvation but through him. This is perhaps a new sound to him; but it is commended to his conscience as true and scriptural, and therefore he tries with all his might to believe. But he finds he can no more believe in the Son of God than he can create a world. And he also finds that as he cannot believe, so he cannot repent; for he can no more cause a godly tear to flow down his cheeks than he can create a new sun and plant him in the sky. But this brings with it an increasing burden, for he begins to find that he can no more take away the burden of guilt from his

conscience than he could remove a mountain; and can no more take despondency and despair out of his heart than he could cause the sun to move from its place. Thus, as by the condemnation of a holy law there was an overturning of his righteousness, so here there is an overturning of his *strength*. This is removing the diadem and taking the crown off all creature power and ability, shearing off its locks and making the once great giant to grind, as a forlorn captive; in the prison house.

3. And now comes the overturning of his *wisdom*. The Scriptures seem all darkness to him, and he himself, like poor Job, "full of confusion." If he read he cannot understand the meaning of the word of God; if he hear he cannot get any comfort from the preaching, or reconcile it with his own experience; if he meet with the family of God there seems nothing communicated by their conversation to cast a light upon his path, or encourage him to believe that God is dealing with his soul. Thus all his wisdom fails as well as his righteousness and strength. Here is the overturn. Here is removing the diadem, and taking off the crown, abasing him that is high, and bringing him down into the dust. You will observe that hitherto I have been assuming that the man is not under the sound of truth, and that this has much increased his perplexity and confusion. I shall now, then, show how he is brought to know the truth and to make a profession of it. The Lord, then, after a time shall be pleased to bring him under the sound of truth—a preached gospel, or cause some book to fall into his hands which shews the way of salvation as spiritually and experimentally made known, or lead him into the company of his people, who speak a new language. Now as he has passed through many sharp and severe exercises, and has lost his strength, and wisdom, and righteousness in this overturning of profane and wicked self, he begins to have an ear to hear God's truth. It falls very sweetly upon his ears, that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin; that his righteousness freely and perfectly justifies; that salvation is all of sovereign grace; that where God has begun a good work he certainly will carry it on; and that whom he loveth, he loveth to the end. And as those glad tidings are thus sounded in his ears, they will sometimes make sweet

melody in his heart; he receives them as from the mouth of God; and he feels that there is it peculiar and divine blessedness in the sacred truth of God. Now, as faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God, he finds a secret faith drawn out to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as his only hope; and as by the actings of faith upon him, hope is thus raised up and strengthened to anchor within the veil, so every now and then as the Lord is presented to his view as the sole object of his faith and hope, he gets glimpses and glances of his lovely face; and every look of his love strengthens him to embrace the Son of God in faith and affection as the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. Christ being thus revealed to his heart, he gets a manifested union with him, and being thus in Christ, becomes a new creature, comes into a new world, has new thoughts and feelings, desires and affections, so that with him old things are now passed away, behold, all things are become new.

As thus brought out into the light, life, and liberty of the gospel, he thinks that all his troubles are now come to an end, and that he shall spend his days in prosperity and his years in pleasure. But those, though they are his thoughts, are not the Lord's thoughts; and therefore there is in store another overturn; for as the Lord overturned his *profane* self, and overturned his *righteous* self, so now he has to overturn his *holy*, or rather his *presumptuous* self.

iii. Let me explain myself here, lest any mistake my meaning, or think I am speaking a word against that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. As distinct from this, there is a fleshly holiness which we usually strive to attain unto after we have obtained some knowledge of salvation, had been blessed with a living faith in Christ. It is this false, this fleshly holiness which has to be overturned; for the man of whom I am speaking does not yet see what a poor, needy creature he is. He is not yet fully and thoroughly stripped and emptied of all his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness; and though under the law he lost a great deal of all these, yet he has been secretly gathering them up afresh under the gospel, and under the idea of evangelical holiness, has

been secretly seeking to establish his own righteousness. At least he has not yet been made to see and feel that Jesus must be all in all *in* him as well as all and all *to* him. Thence comes the necessity of the third overturn, which is to lay him low in the dust of self-abasement by opening up the dark and dismal scene within, when the Lord the Spirit brings to light the secret iniquities of his fallen nature, when God allows Satan to tempt him or assail him with his fiery darts, and set on fire all the combustible material he carries with him. As these things are brought to light; as sin and Satan rage within; as his own heart, like the troubled sea, casts up mire and dirt; as the Lord hides his face and leaves him to grapple with his foes and fears, he is overturning him for the third time. He is removing the diadem of profession which he had secretly bound round his brow, he is taking away the crown of glorying in himself with which he had crowned himself, as thinking he had got to the consummation of all that was to be known, felt, and believed.

But what an overturn is this, that all his religion should be thrown into confusion, and that he should be plunged once more into the dust of self-abasement, by being thus stripped of almost everything that before he had enjoyed. Is not this an overturn indeed, and in a sense almost greater than the two preceding? But depend upon it that the Lord will go on overturning, overturning, overturning this profane and wicked prince until he has accomplished the threefold overthrow of self; until he has made us to see and feel that in spite of all we may have experienced in times past; in spite of all the visitations of Jesus to the soul; in spite of all the manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love; in spite of all the dealings of the Spirit of God with our conscience, if left to ourselves, we are just as empty, just as weak, just as helpless, just as sinful as before. And what do we learn from all this? That nothing but sovereign grace can save our soul; nothing but manifested mercy can give us any hope; nothing but blood applied to the conscience can take away our guilt or ease our burden; and nothing but love shed abroad in the heart can be a sweet balm and cordial against all the ills of life. You may perhaps think yourself cruelly and severely dealt with in

all this, but listen to the words: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown," and see whether you cannot approve of that sentence being executed, even though it may so sharply try, or so deeply cut you. What, shall this profane, wicked prince, wretched self, be idolised and set up in any shape on the throne of the heart? Shall this covenant breaker, this profane wretch who has broken both law and gospel, this monster self, bind the diadem round its brow and put the crown upon its head which belongs to Jesus alone, that it may be exalted, esteemed, admired, adored instead of him, that you may worship your own religion, and fall in love with your own knowledge, attainments, gifts, and experience? "No," says the Lord; "I will never suffer it. Remove the diadem and take off the crown." If you think of crowning king self, whether worldly self or religious self, profane self or professing self; if ever you attempt to put the diadem round your own brow and the crown of self-exaltation upon your own head, hear what God speaks to you with his withering voice: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. No creature shall stand boasting and exulting in vain-confidence before the eyes of my terrible Majesty. I will never give my glory to another. No man shall rejoice in his own wisdom, strength, or righteousness;" for, "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23, 24.)

II.—But when the Lord has done this work of overturning the profane and wicked prince, and abasing him that is high, room is made for the *positive declaration* which I said I should bring before you in the second place: It shall be no more until he come *whose right it is.*"

This was fulfilled literally. There never was a king of Judah after Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon. There were indeed governors sent from Babylon after the captivity was over, and a remnant returned to their own land, such as Nehemiah, who is

called the Tirshatha (or "governor," margin, Nehem. 7:65); and then afterwards the high priests, or the Maccabean princes exercised authority; but the Jewish nation never had afterwards a king of the family of David to reign over them, nor any one in authority who bore that title; so that literally and truly there never was a king of Judah who sat upon the throne at Jerusalem, between Zedekiah being taken to Babylon and the Lord Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.

But I have to apply this spiritually and experimentally. When the Lord the Spirit had taken the diadem off self, and removed its crown, he never afterwards lets any one sit upon the throne of the affections but Jesus, for he has said, "It shall be no more until he comes whose right it is." And is there any one else who has a right to us? Consider first, that as the Son of God, he is heir of all things, and that besides this original right, now as exalted to the right hand of God, all things are put under his feet as Mediator. Thus, both from original right and meritorious gift, he can lay claim to his people both in body and soul, to all they are in providence and to all they are in grace. He can say, "This body of thine is mine, for I have taken thy nature unto union with my divine Person; this soul of thine is mine, for I have redeemed it by my precious blood; this property of thine is mine, for power being given to me over all things both in heaven and earth, I gave it thee, and I can take it from thee; this family of thine is mine, for all that thou hast belongs to me. I have a right to it all, for I am not only heir of all things, but my people have been bought by me that they might be eternally mine." Thus, as the Apostle says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." Christ has laid down his life for his sheep, and by purchasing them, has made them his own, as well as by the original donation of the Father: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." If, then, Jesus has this right to us both by gift and purchase, self has no right to reign over us; sin has no right to have dominion in us; the world has no right to rule in our affections; pride has no right to lord it over our hearts; and self-righteousness has no right to establish itself in our conscience. The right was taken away from them all when the Lord Jesus

Christ came to buy us with his blood, and when he came in power to our soul to make himself known by his grace. If, therefore, in defiance of his revealed will and word, we choose to gratify our pride and self-righteousness, carnality and worldly-mindedness, and thus take the crown off him to where it belongs and set it upon our own head, we shall have again to come under the sentence, "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will abase him that is high, and exalt him that is low. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it until he come again whose right it is;" for he says: "I have bought this people with my precious blood. They are mine body and soul. I am training them for heaven, making them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and conforming them to my image, that they may reign with me in glory." And shall self, upstart self, stand in the way of all these wise and gracious purposes, and say, "I will put the diadem of glory round my own brow; I will set the crown of honour upon my own head?" "No," says the Lord, "I will not suffer that. Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it again and again, until he come once more whose right it is."

And what he says he does. It is not with him a mere word, but, as I have called it, a *positive declaration*. If this, then, be so, I may well ask, how does it work for and in us, and what is its fruit and effect? When we begin to find the diadem taken away and the crown removed, and self, that was high, abased, then comes the fulfilment of the word: "Exalt him that is low," for this runs side by side with "Abase him that is high." When, then, we catch a glimpse by faith of the glorious Person of the Son of God, or get a gleam by divine teaching of his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and that it is his most blessed right to be all in all to us, and all in all in us, and all in all for us; when too we can see by faith that this dear Son of God came down from heaven to earth to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; that he shed his precious blood to redeem us from a burning hell, and wrought out a righteousness in which we could stand fully and freely justified, and is now risen from the dead, and gone up on high, to be our Intercessor with the Father, able to save to the uttermost

all that come unto God by him, can we not then say, "Has not he a right to be all in all to me? Shall any one else take his place in my affections? Shall any rival stand between me and Jesus? Shall I allow self in any form, profane or professing, to interfere with the claims of his gracious Majesty, and shall I set up my miserable doings, my miserable righteousness, my miserable strength, and my miserable holiness in competition with the Son of God and what he has done and suffered to save my soul from the pit of hell? Perish the thought!" It is in this way that we not only see but acknowledge that he has a right to us; and how glad we are that he should come and claim his right, and say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and wedded thee to myself in an everlasting covenant; I loved thee when thou wast in thy blood, cast out in the open field in the day that thou wast born. And now I come and claim thee to be mine." Just as a man who is engaged to a young woman may whisper in her ear, "We have been long engaged. We have pledged to each other our mutual troth. We have mutually promised to live together through life. Now I am come to claim your promise and to take possession of you as my bride." Will this be an unwelcome word? Will it not rather fall like sweet music upon her ear? Will it not draw forth all the love of her heart, and will she, can she say? "Nay! Wait a more convenient time. It will do quite as well next year." She can have no love for him if such be her answer. And even if, like the bride in the Canticles, her love may seem for a while to sleep (Song 5:2), may he not press his right as well as his love? If he has plighted his troth, and she has plighted hers, has he not a right to her? So when the Lord comes into the soul in any manifestation of his mercy and love, has he not a right as its rightful Lord, as well as his love, as its espoused husband? And the soul under the sweet influences of his grace, will acknowledge both his right and his love, and say to him, "Thou art my Lord; thou art my husband; thou hast a right to me, and I acknowledge thy claim; and I acknowledge it gladly; for it is a claim not only of right, but of love."

Now, as long as this goes on happily and comfortably between the Lord and the soul, there is no contention between them. But

alas! these seasons rarely last long; for there is that in our hearts which is ever prompting us to depart from him. It is with us as he said of old: "My people are bent upon backsliding." This backsliding heart of ours is ever wandering after its idols, and is too prone to the commission of those two evils of which the Lord complains. "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13.) But he is a jealous God. He will not allow us to serve him partially; he will not take half a heart. Therefore, when we begin again to set up self in any shape or form, anything contrary to his grace or glory, which we always do when we depart from him, then comes again the withering sentence: "Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, until he come whose right it is. All your schemes of earthly joy; all your plans of fancied happiness; all expectations based upon self, whether worldly or religious; all you think, say, or do that is not consistent with the reign of my grace in your heart, I will overturn it all, that he may come whose right it is."

Now, under those overturnings, and especially as being so continually repeated, the soul often sinks very low, for they bring our backslidings to remembrance, and the Lord seems to say by them: "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" There is nothing so cutting as the remembrance of backsliding against a good and holy God. There is nothing so wounding to a tender conscience as having sinned against manifested mercy and revealed salvation. It seems almost like doing despite to the Spirit of grace; almost like trampling under foot the blood of the covenant whereby we were sanctified, and treating our best friend worse than his very enemies treated him. And as these things are brought to mind, and laid upon the conscience with weight and power, they will sometimes sink us very low into despondency and gloom, so as almost to take away our very hope.

But the Lord is very merciful and compassionate to those who fear his name. He regards the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their cry. He listens to the sighs and confessions of the

penitent heart and broken, contrite spirit; and thus, though he will ever abase him that is high, he will exalt him that is low. He will never give up his rightful claim to his people. If he has bought us with his precious blood, he will never suffer that purchase to be annulled by the malice of Satan or by the wickedness of our own nature. How striking are those words, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." And again, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." And shall we not answer, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God? Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." (Jer. 3:23.)

III.—And this leads us to our last point—the *gracious promise*: "And I will give it him."

Our Lord was, literally and truly, the King of the Jews, for he was lineally descended from David, according to the genealogies given in the Gospels. Therefore, when Pilate said, "Art thou a King?" he replied, "Thou sayest;" that is, according to the Hebrew idiom, "sayest rightly that I am a King. To this end was I born." Though he added, "My kingdom is not of this world." This claim Pilate acknowledged, by setting over his head: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Nor would he alter it at the instigation of the chief priests, but answered, "What I have written I have written," as if God meant it to stand. Thus this title stood, and being written in Hebrew and Greek, and Latin, it asserted his dominion as King, not only of the Jews, but of all the world. Of this kingdom Daniel spoke in vision. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And these was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Dan. 7:13, 14.) Into the nature of this kingdom I shall not enter. Time will decide

whether that prophecy will be literally fulfilled, or whether it is to be explained only spiritually. Sufficient for us for the present, it is, that he reigns now in glory at the right hand of the Father, and that, in this sense, according to the parable, he is gone "to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." (Luke 19:12.) This kingdom the Father has given him, and in giving him the kingdom, he gave with it all the persons of his people into his hand, that he might say, at the last day, "Of those whom thou hast given me I have lost none." There will not be wanting at the last day any one of those whom the Father gave to him in the eternal covenant. There will not be any left behind for want of his power to save, or for the want of his grace to superabound over the superaboundings of sin. They will all stand in their white robes, with palms in their hands, singing for ever and ever the praises of the Lamb. But if sin and self, the world or Satan, could pluck any vessel of mercy out of the Lord's hand, how could he say to the Father at the last day, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me: Of those whom thou gavest me have I lost none!" Whatever doubts, therefore, or fears, gloom, or despondency may, from time to time, possess the mind of his tried, exercised children; whatever snares sin or Satan may lay for their feet; however low they may sink in their feelings, yea, like Jonah, even into the very belly of hell; yet of all which God gave him, he will lose none. Not a hair of their head shall perish. Every member of his mystical body shall be presented complete with their glorious Head. How clear, how full, how absolute the promise of the Father, "I will give it him." If, then, the Father has given you to Jesus, put you into his Almighty hands, that he might redeem you with his precious blood, sanctify you by his Spirit and grace, conform you to his image, make you to walk in his footsteps, and bring you at last to heavenly glory, he will never forsake or forget either his own covenant, or the sacred work upon your heart which he has begun.

But that we may gather up the comfort of it, not rest in the mere doctrine, but taste, handle, and realise its blessedness and its power, how important it is for you to be able to trace out, with more or less clearness and distinctness, God's dealings with your

soul, that you may have good ground to believe that he has wrought a saving work upon your heart.

Let me ask you, then, if, as I was this morning tracing out these three overturnings, you could find some solemn echo in your own bosom to show that you have experienced some, if not all, these things for yourselves? Could you look back, for instance, and see how the Lord overturned, it may have been years ago, all your prospects of happiness, disappointed all your expectations, brought a blight and gloom over everything in which you anticipated pleasure, and laid upon you sadness and sorrow? Can you next call to mind the time when you began to think in earnest about religion; when the things of God, and eternal realities, first pressed with great weight and power upon your mind; how you searched the Scriptures, got by yourself into secret places, sought the Lord with many tears, poured out your heart before him, wrestled earnestly with him, confessing your sins, and seeking mercy at his hand? Can you see how, in one way or other, the Lord overturned all your righteousness, wisdom, and strength? And then, can you look back to some memorable time when, under the preached word, or upon your knees, or in reading the Scriptures, or a book written by a gracious man, there shone a ray of divine light into your soul, in which the glory of the Son of God was seen, in which his grace was felt, in which his power was manifested, his blood revealed, and his love in some measure shed abroad in your heart? Or if you cannot say altogether as much as this, can you recollect how hope first sprang up in your soul, as your faith was drawn out to embrace the Son of God, and what tender, warm feelings of affection flowed out as his mercy flowed in? Can you also recollect how spiritually minded you were at that time, and how your heart was set on heavenly things, so that earth seemed to lose all its charms, and heaven to be seen in all its glory, as the only thing worth desiring? Can you not also trace how a cloud seemed to come over all this work; how sin was brought to light, your iniquities stirred up to their lowest depth, Satan let loose upon you, the evils of your heart to work up with renewed strength, so that it seemed as if all you had experienced were a

delusion, and you could scarcely entertain a hope in God's mercy? But then you would see how from time to time the Lord revived his work upon your soul; gave you a promise, a whisper, a testimony; broke in upon you under the ministry of the word, or upon your knees, or through conversation with some of his people, and made you once more believe, rejoice, hope, and love.

Now, if you have experienced, in some measure, what I have thus laid down, you will be able also to trace out how through it all there has been a constant overturning, a constant removing of the diadem and taking off the crown, and a constant abasing of him that is high. Directly self began to spring up to some height of strength, wisdom, or righteousness; directly the world began to open up its alluring charms; directly pride began to work in your carnal mind; then once more came the sentence: "Overturn, overturn, overturn it. Remove the diadem and take off the crown. I will abase him that is high." But again, when you got into a low spot, finding no place low enough for your feet, no self-abasement too great under a sight and sense of your dreadful sins and backslidings, no corner too humble for you to crawl into and lie before God, then you began to find that he whose right it is came once more, and said, "This soul is mine, bought with my precious blood, clothed in my glorious righteousness, taught by my Holy Spirit, taken possession of by my love and grace; shall this redeemed and regenerated soul perish under its own deceivings? Shall sin have dominion over it? Shall Satan lay snares to entangle it, and carry it away to perdition? No; the kingdom has been given to me of my Father, and I will maintain it in the heart of all my redeemed."

The grand thing, therefore, for you and me is to have some evidence that we have a true work of grace begun upon our heart; that we have the fear of God in our conscience; that we have the life of God in our soul; that we do know something of divine things by divine teaching, and have some experience of the truth of God in our own bosom. And if we have that, then whatever difficulties or trials we may have to go through; however often the Lord may overturn, overturn, overturn us,

remove the diadem and take off the crown, he will never take away himself; he will never remove the diadem from his own brow, or take the crown of glory from his own head, which he would do if he allowed sin and Satan to reign and rule in his people. He has bound the diadem round his own brow, and put the crown upon his own head; and if sin, Satan, or the world could steal a sheep out of his fold, or pluck a vessel of mercy out of his hand, it would be as if he stretched forth his hand to pluck the diadem of glory from off the Redeemer's brow, and strike the crown of honour from off the head of the King of kings and Lord of lords. As, therefore, he will not suffer self to wear the diadem, nor man to bear the crown, so he will be equally jealous of his own honour and glory. He will no more suffer the diadem to be taken off his brow, and the crown of glory swept from his brow, than he will suffer the creature to adorn itself with either. This is our security. If we had to bind the diadem of grace round our own brow, and set the crown of glory upon our own head, we should fail in every attempt. But when we see the diadem of grace and glory bound round the Redeemer's brow, then we are willing it should be so, that God may have all the praise, and all the honour, and all the glory of our salvation; and we can feelingly say, "He has a right to it. I am not my own. I am bought with a price. All I have is his. O that he would take care of me: take care of my body, take care of my soul; hold me fast and firm in his blessed hands; keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me; work in me all the good pleasure of his will and the work of faith with power, and save me in himself with an everlasting salvation."

How sounds your heart with this? Do these words make any sweet melody in your soul? Is there that faith in the Son of God, that hope in his mercy, and love to his name, that you desire nothing so much as his presence and his love shed abroad in your heart? Do you constantly apply to his atoning blood for pardon? Do you continually seek shelter beneath his righteousness to justify? Do you again and again cast your weary soul upon him that is able to save to the uttermost? Do you hang upon him, twine round him, and cleave to him with purpose of heart; and

even, if he seem to thrust you away, do you press more firmly on, because without him you feel you must for ever perish?

Now look at these things; examine them in the light of Scripture and your experience; and see what testimony you have in your own conscience that the Lord has wrought that in your soul which shall be for your eternal salvation. For these are not matters to be trifled with; they are not things to be heard in a passing visit, and then utterly forgotten; they are not like the autumnal leaf blown away by the first wind; not mere vain trifles, to pass away with the day and not affect our souls for all eternity. These are weighty matters, for they affect our soul's eternal interest; and it is with us whether heaven or hell be our destined end—whether to be tormented with devils for ever and ever in an abyss of eternal woe, or to mount up to a throne of glory, to see our blessed Lord face to face as he is, and rejoice with saints for ever and ever in the realms of eternal bliss.

## Profit and Penury

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 8, 1844

"In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury," Prov. 14:23

In the day that Adam disobeyed the commandment given him, and fell from that righteousness and innocency in which he was created, the Lord said to him, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." It was no longer to yield its fruits as it would have yielded them, had man continued in a state of innocency, without toil and labour on his part. But, as a fallen sinner, he was doomed to eat his bread in sorrow, and in the sweat of his face, until he returned to the dust out of which he was taken. Thorns only and thistles would the earth now bring forth, instead of those fruits which otherwise it would spontaneously have borne. But this very curse, in the providence of God, has proved to be a blessing. There could be no greater ruin of man, viewed naturally, than to remove from his shoulders labour and toil, and to give him a life of sloth and inaction. The very labour to which he is doomed to earn his daily bread is a spur to all the faculties of his nature; and thus every natural comfort that we possess, and all the progress of arts and civilization, spring from this very curse which God has imposed. Man, having to earn his bread by his daily labour, has been stimulated by his very wants to produce and carry out those inventions which have removed us from a level with the brutes. For of all the human inhabitants of the earth, none are more debased, none more deeply sunk in barbarism, licentiousness, and crime than those in the warmer parts of the world, where, with little toil and labour, the earth brings forth produce enough to maintain man just above starvation.

Solomon, doubtless, had some reference to this natural fact, when he wrote the words of the text; for his Proverbs are not merely most inestimable lessons of divine truth, but also contain admirable instruction in natural things. Being the wisest of men,

he saw the profit arising from the daily and incessant labour that man's hands have to perform; and, in the text, contrasts the profit which springs out of this labour with the penury or poverty that ever attends the idle talk of the lips.

This, then, is the meaning of the text, taken in a moral and literal point of view; and I have explained it as such, in order to lay a solid foundation on which to build up a spiritual superstructure; for it must be ever borne in mind that, in the allegorical parts of Scripture, the spiritual interpretation always rests upon, and coincides with, the literal interpretation. If we let this rule go, we shall fall into a thousand absurdities, and totally err from the mind of the Holy Ghost.

Solomon, then, views two persons; the one, a hard working industrious man, who from his labour derived profit, God blessing the work of his hands, whereby to support himself and his family. And then, standing by his side, he observes a lazy, slothful fellow, who can do nothing but talk; who is always boasting of the wonderful exploits he means to perform; but never takes the spade or hoe in his hand to cultivate the ground, according to his original doom, but looks on and prates, whilst the other works. With a glimpse of his penetrating eye, the wisest of men saw the end of each—that whilst the one found profit in his labour, the other was justly doomed to a life of penury.

This is the literal interpretation, the natural connection of the two clauses of the text. But we may be sure that the Holy Ghost meant something deeper than this—something more than a lesson in political economy. As then, there is a natural connection between the two clauses, so, if God enable me to bring it out, we shall find a spiritual connection too; and see that it is a truth in grace, as well as in providence, that "in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

Let us, then, with God's blessing, this evening look a little at what spiritual labour is, and what profit there is in it; and at the same time shew that empty talk without this labour only tends to

beggary and starvation.

When the Lord begins a work of grace in a man's heart, then labour commences in his soul; his life of ease is at an end, and spiritual toil begins, to continue all his days.

1. What, then, is the first labour, for the most part, that God sets a quickened soul to do? or rather, what is the first labour that such an one is engaged in? *It is to labour under the law*; and in this labour there is profit; for the Holy Ghost, by Solomon, declares, that "in all labour there is profit." Now, what is it to labour under the law? Before a man can be exercised with this labour, he must know something, by a divine discovery to his conscience, of the purity and spirituality of that holy law which God has given as the ministration of condemnation and death. And no sooner does the soul begin to see and feel the purity and spirituality of the commandment, than labour to fulfil it begins. But to fulfil the law is an impossible task for a fallen sinner, whose whole nature is depraved, enmity against God, and alienation from him; so that the more the purity and spirituality of the law are seen and felt in the light and life of the Spirit, the more impossible does the soul find it to perform that which God has commanded. This, however, is not soon nor easily learnt; and the Lord sees fit, for the most part, that his people should toil, and that sometimes very hard, under the law, that solid profit may come out of that labour wherewith they are exercised. But, it may be asked, what profit is there in this labour? Much, we answer, every way; but chiefly two-fold; *first*, that by this labour is gained a knowledge of the purity, spirituality, justice, and holiness of God's character; and *secondly*, a knowledge of ourselves, as fallen sinners before him. But the profit, generally speaking, bears a proportion to the labour; the more labour the greater the profit; the less labour the less profit. Thus, the more the soul labours under the law in order to fulfil its demands, the more it feels of the burden and bondage of the law; and the more it seeks to bring forth a righteousness to satisfy its requirements, the more profit there is in it; because a deeper knowledge is thereby gained of the holy character of God, and of the

spirituality of that commandment, which can only curse and condemn the soul under it. And is not this a most profitable and indispensable lesson to learn—the purity and unbending justice of God's character, his unspeakable holiness, his indignation and anger against sin? Unless these lessons are written more or less powerfully on a man's conscience, there is no depth of hypocrisy into which he may not sink, no height of presumption into which he may not rise. But if this schoolmaster has brought the disciple low under the rod, it will do much to keep under and subdue that cursed hypocrisy of which the heart is full, and lay an effectual blow at the root of that presumption which Satan is always endeavouring to breathe into the soul.

But in that labour, as I have hinted, we get another branch of profit. The soul thus learns *its complete helplessness and thorough impotency toward every thing spiritually good*. For until a man learns something of the purity and spirituality of God's character, as revealed in the holy law, he will never know his own sinfulness, ruin, and helplessness. How do we learn our own helplessness naturally? By having a task set us which we cannot perform. How many a man boasts of his abilities to do this and that! Put him to it; let him try his power; his failure will convince him of his inability better than argument. Was it not so with the children of Israel all through their history? Did they not learn their helplessness by their burdens and oppressions? So when the Lord says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself," (Luke 10:27,) he sets us an impossible task; but we learn our helplessness by the very attempts made to fulfil it. Being, however, beat in all its attempts to bring forth that righteousness, and being defeated in all its exertions; trying to climb up this hill of sand, and perpetually slipping back, the soul learns, as it can learn in no other way, its total helplessness toward anything spiritually good. There is profit in *that*; for who wants help from without till he has no help from within? who wants the strength of God till he knows the weakness of the creature?

In this labour too, the soul learns *its thorough depravity*, complete ruin, and utter wreck. Is there no profit here? Let unwounded professors talk as they please, not to know our own corruption is to know nothing. This is the grand, the indispensable preparation of heart to receive mercy and truth; this lies at the threshold of the strait gate. To cast this aside is to put ourselves out of the pale of all the promises, and to proclaim with a loud voice, "The gospel is not for me; for Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I do not yet know that I am one." For want of this ballast, how many gallant ships have made shipwreck, and been tossed upon the shoals of presumption or despair! For without a deep experience, by the Spirit's inward teaching, of the depravity and corruption of their fallen nature, how many have drunk into every error and heresy of the day, despised the Spirit's work upon the heart, and were at last landed in open profanity! So that, in this labour, though painful, there is profit; and the profit is this—that the soul becomes thereby established in the knowledge of its own complete ruin, guilt, and depravity. And this is an effectual cure to all self-righteous notions, presumptuous confidence, and all letter religion, however high or however low, and opens up a way for the soul to receive all the consolations of the gospel.

"The talk of the lips," in this, as in other instances, "tendeth only to penury." A man may talk of his own corruption and depravity from a natural acquaintance with it, and be convinced of his being a sinner by falling headlong time after time into sin. But there is no labour here, no groans and sighs, no guilt of conscience, no distress of mind, no crying to the Lord for deliverance. It is but mere talk; and emptiness and starvation will be the result of such idle chatter. Unless a man has passed through the labour of guilt in his soul, and learnt he is a sinner by the Spirit's work upon his conscience, all the notions he may lay hold of in his judgment, and the talk he may get upon his tongue, will leave him at last destitute of those riches that are communicated to the poor and needy out of Christ's fulness.

2. But again; there is a labour to *make our calling and election*

*sure*; and we are exhorted to give all diligence for this purpose; for "if we do these things, we shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:10.) It is surprising how some people can lay hold of the doctrine of election with the greatest ease imaginable. Some book falls in their way which treats upon it; O, they can see it before they have read it half through. Or perhaps they hear some minister prove it by the Scriptures from the pulpit; before they leave the chapel they are thoroughly satisfied that it is true, and spring up at one leap from the lowest depths of Arminianism to the loftiest heights of Calvinism. Such abortive births do not produce full grown men; such mushroom growth does not raise an oak or a cedar; such Jehu driving is not the chariots of Amminadib. To learn election right is to have it ratified and sealed by the Spirit of God upon our conscience. For the exhortation is not to make the doctrine sure; that is sure enough; but to make *your own* election sure; that is, to make it sure in your conscience, and to come to a settlement and establishment in your own heart by divine teaching and revelation, not of the truth merely of the doctrine of election (that is supposed to be known) but of the truth of your own election, the blessed reality of your own soul being included in that everlasting covenant of mercy and grace. And the Apostle bids us give "*all* diligence" to it. It is not a thing to be had in a day; to be done lightly, hastily, and smoothly; but we are to give "all diligence," as though it required very much diligence to make this calling and election sure. This, then, is a labour which God has seen fit his people should be exercised with. And if we had not had a good deal of labour to make our calling and election sure, the knowledge and belief of our calling and election stand on a very slippery foundation. First, we have to make our calling sure; and there is often much labour in that. We have to go to the first spot where God began with our souls; to the first feeling Godward that we were exercised with. We have to look at the effects and fruit of God's touching our conscience with his finger; to bring our experience to the Scriptures, and see whether it will stand according to the word of truth; and to cry to a heart-searching God that we may not be deceived in this important matter. We have to be exercised with doubts and fears whether this calling was certain, clear and distinct; whether some corrupt

motive did not lie at the root of our profession; whether we were not talked into it by man; and whether we did not begin with God before he began with us. I believe that many of God's children have to labour (and you know labour is no pleasant work) perhaps for years under doubts and fears, and experience trouble and distress because they cannot make their calling sure, nor be perfectly certain that they have been called by the Lord himself effectually unto life and salvation. We may well be exercised upon this matter, for what a solemn word is that, "Many are called (that is, outwardly) but few chosen!" And who that knows the deceitfulness of the heart has not reason to fear lest it deceive him?

But "in all labour," says our text, "there is profit." And O, what profit there is in being well-exercised about our calling! How satisfied most professors are with theirs! A church has taken them into membership! what else can be wanted? they think. A minister shakes them by the hand, and calls them "brother" or "sister;" what other evidence, think they, can be needed? They have had something or other under a sermon that has left a little impression upon their minds; what else can be wanted? they think, to make their calling sure? They are sound Calvinists, and have their minds sometimes lifted up by hearing a minister cut down doubts and fears and corruption-preaching; and tell the people that nothing is so easy as the full assurance of faith, and that they have all a right to it. Depend upon it if a man can take up with every shallow evidence as to his calling; if he be not at times exercised about the matter, at least, until he is well-established in his soul as to the certainty of it,—depend upon it, his calling, or rather the evidence of it, rests upon a very sandy foundation. The devil has not tried him very sorely, nor a vile heart of unbelief much harassed him, nor the corruptions of his fallen nature much battered down his evidences. To rest upon a shallow foundation for eternal life, and never be exercised about it, clearly proves that the calling was of nature, not of grace; and that such an one is in the ranks of that band of traitors, of whom it is said, that "a deceived heart has turned them aside." But when we feel the workings of a vile heart of unbelief that calls

everything in question, are plagued with a thousand doubts and fears, are harassed with a thousand suspicions, tormented with a thousand fiery darts of blasphemy and obscenity, and find infidelity doubting every thing, from the being of God down to his testimony in our conscience; to have all that the Lord has done sifted backwards and forwards in the heart, and all that has been going on from first to last to be tried as by fire, I warrant you, there will be some labour here. But "in all labour there is profit." And shall this be without? How it cuts up false evidences! How it throws down rotten props! How it winnows away the chaff and dust of natural religion. And O, when the Lord does reveal himself, when he does apply his atoning blood, and does speak home to the conscience, what a profit is there in the labour that the soul has gone through, in order to make its calling and election sure! Where do we find, generally speaking, most life in the soul? Who are the best hearers in a congregation? Who are the most humble, God-fearing, and consistent members in a church? Is it not those who are exercised in their souls, labouring under and burdened with a vile heart of unbelief to make their calling and election sure? And who can sleep under a heart searching sermon, and parry, with a smile of contempt, every arrow aimed at graceless professors? Who are first to swim in the troubled sea of politics, are most a prey to pride and covetousness, and sooner or later bring a reproach on the cause of truth? Is it not those who have never doubted their religion, have had no labour nor soul trouble, and have never been exercised in their conscience whether God the Spirit has been at work in their hearts or not? "In all labour," (and therefore in this labour) "there is profit." And the soul that has passed through this labour, and has reaped the profit, would not, when the profit comes, have been without the labour for any consideration. How often has the poor labourer in the field had to toil among the heavy clods! What work has he had to plough, sow, and harrow the land; and how, at this season of the year especially, when he has had to ply the sickle, and gather in the harvest, has the sweat run down his face! But how sweet is the bread when it is put upon the table, and he can sit down and eat the fruit of his toils! And so spiritually; when a man by exercise has laboured

hard in his soul to make his calling and election sure; and when the Lord drops some precious testimony into his conscience, how sweet is the bread that comes out of this previous labour, how precious the comfort that comes out of this foregoing toil!

But "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What praters, what gossips, what idle chatterers there are in the visible church of God, who are always talking, talking, talking about religion, and know nothing secretly of groaning and crying unto the Lord! Bunyan has drawn their character with a masterly hand under the name of "Talkative" in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Who so forward as these to discuss the most knotty point of doctrine; and who so backward to call upon the Lord in secret? Who so forward with their tongue; and who so backward with their heart and hand? Who so much for the mere talk of the lip; and who so ignorant of the hard labour and severe exercises of a troubled and tried soul? Who so ready to condemn others? who so slow to condemn themselves? Who so nimble with the letter of Scripture; who so ignorant of the power? With them it is all talk, talk, that tends only to penury! They will never profit your souls, children of God. Talkative associates will never be your help and comfort, if you are labouring under heavy loads. It is the meek, quiet, humble, broken-hearted, exercised family of God, who have not often a word to say, and can only speak as they feel some little power moving in their heart, that will be your choice associates. Take Solomon's advice, ye that fear God, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." (Prov. 14:7.)

3. Again. There is *labouring under temptation*. If it is true that in all labour there is profit, then there will be profit in this labour also. The inspired word of truth says, by the Apostle, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2, 3.) The Lord sees fit that his children should be exercised with temptation. God himself does not tempt them, for, "he cannot tempt any man" (James 1:13); but he suffers them to be tempted. He deals with them as with Job of old. Satan, we

read, said to the Lord, "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side." (Job 1:10.) God had set a hedge around his servant, and Satan could not shoot through it. But God could, without being the author of sin, remove the hedge. He might and could withdraw his restraining power over the prince of darkness; and when he withdrew this restraining power, then Satan could tempt him, but only by the permission of God. So the Lord sees fit that his people should have to labour under temptation. And O, what severe temptations many of God's children have to conflict with! Sometimes they have to labour under the temptation, that there is no God; at other times, all kinds of infidel thoughts and suspicions as to the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures, fill and distress their mind. The most subtle arguments, and the most daring reasonings work up in their hearts, to which they can give no satisfactory answer; such as, "What is the soul? How can we be certain that it is immortal, or subsists at all after death? How can we be sure that Christ is God as well as man? What if all religion be a delusion, and the Bible itself the invention of men?" A thousand other suspicions rush through the mind at times and seasons, which I need not infuse into yours who know them not. "O," cry some, "you ought not to have such wicked thoughts. You to call yourself a believer, and ever to have such doubts as those!" Can you keep them out of your mind? I cannot out of mine. They rush in at the door and window, and fly about in one's soul without asking leave to come or go. Many of God's people, I believe, have to labour under these sharp and powerful temptations, till they sometimes think they are little better than infidels.

"And can there be profit in this hard labour?" says the soul. Yes, great profit. How so? Because when the Lord does convince us (as he does at times) of his own being, of his own presence, of the truth of his own word, by bringing home that truth with power to the conscience, then we become established in the knowledge of, and faith in, the being of God, and the truth of his word, as we get established in no other way.

There are two seasons when we cannot doubt the being of God, and the truth and inspiration of his word; and I will tell you when they are. *One* is, when we have sinned, and guilt falls upon the conscience—then we know painfully there is a God, that his holy eye has seen the sin which we have committed, and that his word, which condemns us, is inspired by the Holy Ghost. The sighs, groans, and cries that come out of a guilty conscience carry with them their own attestation, not only that there is a God, but also of this, "Thou God seest me!" *Another* season when we cannot doubt either the being of God, or the truth and inspiration of his word, is when the Lord makes his truth precious to our souls; when his word drops like dew into our heart, and it becomes to us "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." Then we become as certain, as we are of our own existence, not only that there is a God, but, that he has revealed his grace, mercy, and truth in the Scriptures; for our souls have felt the sweetness, power, and comfort stored up in them. Now we should not have got this profit unless we had passed through the previous labour. There are many who believe because they never doubted. But what a sorry faith is this! The best way to believe is, *after* we have doubted, by the power of God removing those doubts through the communication of a living faith. O how strong faith is when it comes after doubt! But to believe *before* you doubt, and because you never doubt, O what a sorry faith is that! And how one gust of temptation will blow that faith into a thousand shivers! There are some who say, "they have never had a doubt these twenty years." Is the devil dead? Is an unbelieving heart no longer in their body? Are they soldiers of Jesus Christ, and never had during twenty years campaign a fiery dart from hell? Twenty years without the furnace and fiery trial! Neither God nor Satan leave the elect alone so long.

So other temptations that work up in the heart, as the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity of the carnal mind against a holy God,—what hard labour is this! "O," says one, "you should never touch upon these subjects; you should exalt a glorious Christ, and leave all these corruptions alone." But how can we know anything of the power and presence of God in the soul, unless we know

something of these corruptions, and of the Lord's mercifully subduing them? Can we know the reality and power of God's grace in our hearts, unless we feel there is that which grace subdues, as well as pardons? A minister of Christ, I grant, is not to preach corruption—what I may perhaps be allowed to call "naked corruption"—corruption apart from the grace that fights against and subdues it. He will not, if rightly taught, so describe all the various workings of corruption as to infuse temptation into the mind of others, or speak of sin in a light trifling spirit and presumptuous manner. But I will tell you what he will do, if God has sent him—he will describe the struggles of grace against corruption, and of corruption against grace; he will shew the strength of besetting sin, when the enemy comes in like a flood, and the power of God in keeping the soul from falling; he will dissect and anatomize the human heart, and trace out its subtleties and deceits; and he will speak a word in season to the weary by declaring how he himself has been tempted and delivered. If he never do this, he will not fulfil his commission, "to take forth the precious from the vile."

But what profit do we get from feeling the enmity and rebellion of our fallen nature? We become satisfied of this truth, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" we see and feel into what an awful depth of corruption we are sunk; we learn to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes; and we rejoice that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin. Thus in this "labour there is profit;" but "the talk of the lips only tendeth to penury." How many ministers are always as they say, exalting Christ, and preaching the offices of Christ? But it is to be feared that, with most of them, it is but the talk of the lips that tendeth only to penury. They preach Christ out of the Bible, as the Mahometans preach Mahomet out of the Koran. They have no spiritual faith in him, nor experimental knowledge of him. There are certain truths in the Bible, and these they set forth with skill and eloquence; but they have never had them sealed upon their conscience by the Holy Ghost. They cannot describe the operations of the Spirit on the soul; nor trace out, from their own experience, a work of grace; nor enter into the various exercises that God's people are

tried with. This talk of the lips about "the offices of Christ" that does not spring from a heartfelt experience, and is not accompanied by the power of the Spirit, tendeth only to penury, and is nothing but starvation to the souls of God's people. There is no solid food brought forth, no spiritual profit communicated, no dew and savour. Their pulpit eloquence is but rant and empty noise; and God's poor and needy children who have had all this talk of the lips sounding in their ears, come away without one crumb of the bread of life.

4. *To labour, too, under a vile heart of unbelief;* to feel how impossible it is to bring forth a single act of faith; to find, that do what we will, there is an evil heart of unbelief counteracting all we do—in this labour there is profit. How am I to know what faith is? I will tell you, at least if I know anything about it in my own experience. We learn it *first*, by knowing our own unbelief, by feeling the workings of a doubting, fearing, distrusting heart. This effectually beats to pieces false faith; it dashes to shivers vain-confidence and daring presumption. But we learn what faith is, *secondly*, by the enjoyment of it. Shall I use a familiar figure to explain my meaning? for sometimes these illustrations throw a light upon the subject. Picture to yourself a starving beggar standing at the window of an eating-house; he sees and smells the savoury, smoking meet on the counter. How does he know it is so good and savoury? A man in a fever would not think it so. Do not his fainting body and sinking stomach, do not the feelings of starvation that he experiences, all tell him, by the longings and hungerings of his keen appetite, what good food it is? But should some kind passerby purchase and give him an ample slice from the smoking joint, he would know then how savoury it was by the enjoyment of it, as he knew it before by the want of it. And is it not so with most other things?—with sickness and health, toil and rest, pain and ease, cold and warmth, misery and happiness? Are not all learnt from their opposites as well as from themselves? So spiritually; we know what faith is by the want of it, being exercised with an unbelieving heart, and not being able, in our feelings, to muster up one grain or find a single particle of it. But when faith comes, and the Lord draws it forth into blessed

exercise, to embrace the Person and work of Christ, and lay hold of God's promises—*then* we know what faith is by the enjoyment of it, as we knew it before by the absence and want of it. In this labour, then, there is profit.

5. So with *the temptation to throw away all our religion*, and profess the truth no more. I dare say some here have been tempted to give it all up, and not go on a single day longer with it, thinking themselves hypocrites, altogether destitute of the root of the matter, deceiving themselves and deceiving others. In this labour (and what labour sometimes this is!) there is profit. For how honest it makes a man! how eager such an one is to have a minister trace out the real work of God upon the heart! how he wants all his evidences brought to light! how he opens his bosom to every arrow that may be shot from the pulpit! how he groans and secretly cries to the Lord that he would speak to his soul, and give him some evidence of sonship. In all this labour what profit there is, when the soul gets the blessing that comes from it! The heaving of an anxious bosom, the various exercises of the mind, how sweet they make the blessing when the blessing comes!

Neither body nor soul can do without exercise. Thus, we find the Apostle speaking to Timothy, "*Exercise* thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Tim. 4:7.) And of himself he said, "Herein do I *exercise* myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts 24:16.) He was not for letting Timothy take things for granted, and sleep satisfied in a profession of truth, without a real work on the conscience. Speaking of affliction, he says, in another place, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness *unto them which are exercised thereby.*" (Heb. 12:11.) You see it is the exercise, the toil, the labour, the tossing up and down that does the good; and out of these the spiritual profit springs. It is not to fold one's arms, like the fool of whom Solomon speaks (Eccles. 4:5), and says, "I am satisfied with my religion; I want no more of these exercises; I have got beyond all experience; and now live above the reach of doubt, guilt, and fear." This

smooth road to heaven is no more than what Lord Chesterfield said, when he retired from public life, that "he should sleep in his carriage the rest of the way," not knowing that way would end in a precipice. The end of the profane nobleman, and of the professing Calvinist, may be more similar than many dream of.

6. The Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. 1:3,) speaks of their "work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope." This is a short summary of spiritual labour. For these are the three chief Christian graces,—*faith, hope, and love*. But are these slothful, indolent, inactive graces? Are they not all connected by the Apostle with some labour to be done or endured? Has not faith "a work?" And what is work but labour? Is there not "the patience of hope?" And what is patience but endurance? And is not endurance labour? And has not love "a labour?" *That* is said too expressly to be denied.

"If then, we have faith, there will be a work for faith to do. If we have hope, there will be a patience for hope to endure. If we have love, there will be a labour for love to perform. For instance,

There is, "*the work of faith*." Wherever there is faith in the soul, there will be many conflicts and trials, as well as sharp and severe exercises attending it, in order to try it; we therefore read, "That *the trial of your faith* being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire." (1 Pet. 1:7.) So the Lord said to the Laodicean church, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." (Rev. 3:18.) And the Apostle says, "After that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Pet. 5:10.) A dead faith has no trials, labours, exercises, temptations, or conflicts. But where there is a living faith in the conscience, it will have to labour; as Hart says,

"It lives and labours under load;  
Though damped it never dies."

This labour of faith is a very different thing from the legal

workings of a self-righteous heart, trying to please God by internal or external acts of natural obedience. The work of faith with power is begun and carried on by God himself, and is altogether spiritual and supernatural. This is its main work—to believe on the Son of God, and receive, embrace, and submit to the truth as it is in Jesus. As the Lord said to the Jews when they asked him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) But O, what opposition there is to this work of faith! How unbelief will work up against every act of faith in the soul! What difficulties, impediments, obstacles, and afflictions lie in a man's path when he sets out in faith! There is sin perpetually working, there is the devil tempting or harassing him: sometimes the world snaring or persecuting him; and often his own heart deceiving and entangling him. If faith be a living grace brought forth by the operation of God the Spirit in the conscience, it will not lie dead, like a stone upon the road. No; faith has to labour under these exercises and in these conflicts, that it may embrace the truth of God in spite of them. But our text still holds good. In this "work of faith" there is profit; because the more faith is exercised, the stronger it becomes. If I may use a familiar figure, it is like the blacksmith's arm. What brings up the muscles so strongly, and give his arm the vigour it possesses? The labour of the sledge-hammer. And what the labour of the sledge-hammer is to the arm of the smith, so is spiritual labour to faith. It becomes stronger by its exercises. If I were to tie up my arm or my leg, as we read is sometimes done by the Hindoo Pilgrims, it would soon shrink and wither, and I should become a cripple. So were faith to have no conflicts, labours, or exercises, it would become weak and flaccid, its sinews would shrink, and it would fade away out of the heart. Not that faith can strengthen itself. I mean not that. But the Lord mercifully strengthening it, and supplying it out of Christ's fulness to fight; the more difficulties, exercises and trials it has to conflict with, the more it becomes invigorated instead of weakened. So that the very things that seemed as if they would destroy it, are overruled to strengthen it. You that fear the Lord, have you not found it so? You have had

illness perhaps to bear, or depths of poverty to wade in, heavy afflictions in your family, and much darkness and distress of soul. You thought that these weights and burdens would crush your faith. Did you find it so? Was not your faith stronger then under these trials than it is now? Was it not strengthened in proportion to the loads it had to carry? Like the children of Israel, the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew. But if you are at ease in Zion, with no difficulties, no personal or family troubles, no spiritual exercises, no tempting world, no plaguing devil, you may fancy how wonderfully strong your faith is, yet it is but as the dream of some invalid lying on his bed, and in his sleep fancying he is hard at work, when, awake, the poor creature could scarcely rise without fainting. You are in a dream, my friend, when you think how strong your faith is, and what feats it can accomplish. Were it brought into actual labour, it could not stand a single hour.

So with *hope*. Some may say, "What a good hope I have! How strong it stands! What a blessed anchorage I enjoy! Neither wind nor wave can remove it!" A trim wherry is very well suited to row up and down the Thames; but it will not do to go to sea with. To cross the Atlantic Ocean would make sad work even with some of the pretty river-built yachts. So an unexercised professor may say, "How strong my hope is! I lie at anchor waiting my dismissal; my soul is established in the doctrines of grace and I am confident of going to heaven." Let some storm come to try the cable; it will be a mercy if it do not go down at once into the deep waters. Hope has "patience" for its labour. But what can we know of patience before the trial comes? As Berridge says,—

"I fancied patience would be brought  
Before my trouble rose."

How patient the husband is when the wife is all smiles! How patient the wife is when the husband is good-tempered, and doing all he can to please! But let some family broil arise; patience is often sadly wanted then. And so spiritually, we may well be patient when we have no trouble; we may well have a

good hope when no storm is trying how the anchorage holds. But where is our patience when trouble comes? If we have hope, we shall have "the patience of hope;" and the "patience of hope," will be in proportion to the troubles that beset us. And thus, when hope patiently rides out the storm, the cable proves to be good, and the anchor to hold fast.

And so with the "*labour of love*;" there is profit in that, but "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What is more disgusting than to hear a dead professor for ever talking about "his dear Jesus, his precious Christ;" and when called upon to make any sacrifice for his "precious Jesus," there is no man so unwilling to take up the cross! How many are canting, "Brother this, and Sister that;" but let the brother or sister get into adversity, is the pocket opened? is the heart enlarged? is any love shewn by action? But the talk of the lips, "my brother, my sister, my God, and my Jesus," only tendeth to penury. Where there is real love, such as God sheds abroad in the heart, there will be the "labour of love;" and it is in this labour of love that there is the profit. If you love the Lord, you will have a thousand risings of enmity against him, a thousand suspicions whether he love you, a thousand blasphemous darts shot through your carnal mind against his glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness, and the more you love him, the more your love will be tried. You know that jealousy is always a close attendant upon love. The Scripture connects them closely: "Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." (Song Sol. 8:6.) But dead love has no jealousy. He that talks of love and does not feel it, is never jealous whether the Lord love him; never jealous when he sees the smiles and kisses of the Lord given to a more favoured object. Oh no! dead love has no labour, because it has no jealousy. But living love has a labour. The mother that loves her child—what labour attends her love! If the mother do not love her son, he may grow up a thief or a drunkard; the mother does not care what he is. But if there be love in her bosom, then she will have trials and sorrows that loveless mothers feel not at all. If the husband love the wife, or

the wife the husband, how jealous each will feel should any mark of affection or tenderness be shewn to another! But dead love, Gallio-like, careth for none of these things. Wherever, then, there is love, there will be labour attending it; and it is only in this labour that there is profit. Dead love has neither hopes nor fears, neither work nor wages. But living love has an inward labour to obtain some smiles from the Beloved, some glance of his countenance, some token of his dying love making the heart glad.

But "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." And if any one thing more beggars the soul than another, it is the mere talk of the lips. Few things bring more barrenness into the soul of a child of God than to hear an empty professor prate out his fulsome chatterings to the Lord; no inward grace, no power, no dew attend it; it only robs and plunders him of all that he most prizes.

The Lord, then, has appointed, that "in all labour there should be profit." And if we are to enjoy the profit we must endure the labour. In the margin of 2 Tim. 2:6, we read, "The husbandman labouring first, must be a partaker of the fruits;" that is, he must labour first, and then sit down to partake of the fruit of his labours. There is nothing valuable without labour. The sermon is worth nothing, if it has not come out of the labour of a minister's heart; if he has not laboured in soul for the things brought forth, it will never profit God's people. And you that pray at the prayer-meetings, your prayers are only empty talk, and brings penury into the souls of God's children, unless your heart has secretly laboured for the petitions which you utter. Without this labour, you will go through your round like a horse in a mill, in an ever recurring circle; so that the friends will know how you will begin, when you are in the middle, and where you will leave off. Such talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. And so in spiritual conversation, so called; the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury, if what is spoken is not brought forth from labour in the heart. All your unravelling of knotty texts, and discussion of doctrines in the mere letter, only tend to penury; there is no real profit nor food in them to a gracious soul. But "in all labour there is profit." The more the heart is exercised, and the more it

labours in the good things that God bestows, the more profit there will be to our own souls, and to the souls of others; and the more praise, glory, and honour there will be to the Lord.

Our religion, then, if it be the religion of the Holy Ghost, will be of this nature. There will be labour in it. And when the Lord out of this labour, out of this ploughing, sowing, harrowing, and reaping, brings forth a blessed harvest, we shall enter into the meaning of those words of the Psalmist, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psa. 126:5, 6.)

## **PROFITABLE TEACHING AND SURE GUIDANCE**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day morning, October 31, 1858

"Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." Isaiah 48:17

The word of truth is full of the most precious promises, which whether viewed individually or taken collectively are worth thousands of gold and silver; not that I wish to despise or deprecate God's gifts; for it often happens, that the man that despises them most with his lips, is seen to seek after them the more greedily with his hands; but the Lord gives bountifully, be it little or much. If He has given little—"Godliness with contentment is great gain." If much, let those who possess it remember that they are stewards not proprietors.

But however we may value the supply of our earthly wants, yet, what are these compared to the riches of God's grace, and what is stored up in these promises, of which the apostle Peter says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:4.) Now all these promises stand upon an immutable foundation; because they stand not only on the fixed purposes of God; but they stand also upon the solemn decrees of God, they stand upon the everlasting covenant "ordered in all things sure and steadfast," ratified in Christ, lodged in Him; and He applies these promises to the soul, being as we are told, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not men. (Heb. 8:2.)

Now these promises are only precious to those who believe. We must be taught of the Holy Spirit to feel our need of these promises, we must be brought into the various situations to

which these promises apply, we must be poor and needy and destitute, and brought to thorough beggary and bankruptcy, to complete insolvency, before these promises can drop into our souls in their full value. But the same thing that lays low, raises up; the same thing that wounds, heals. And when the Lord has seen good to bring down in His providence or grace, then He is pleased in His own time and way to lift and raise up; and this He does by the application of His precious promises, which are then more valued than thousands of gold and silver.

We have a very blessed promise in the words before us—"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, 'I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.'"

In opening up these words I shall with God's blessing:

I.—First, speak a little upon the character of the Speaker, who says of Himself that He is Israel's **"Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."**

II.—Secondly, on the blessed statement or declaration which He makes, **"I am the Lord thy God."**

III.—Thirdly, of the special office which He holds as the Lord God of Israel, that **He teaches her** and that to profit. And:

IV.—Fourthly, what sure and heavenly guidance He affords, **"Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."**

I. How personal and individual the Lord is, **"Thy Redeemer"**—**"Thy God"**—"Teach **thee** to profit, which leadeth **thee** by the way that **thou** shouldest go." As though the Lord singled out an individual, a favoured individual, and speaking to him from His own courts of bliss, He addressed these words to his soul, as though there were no other upon earth to whom He spoke them. And that is the beauty and blessedness of an appropriating faith, that by virtue of an appropriating faith the soul is as much

interested in the love, blood and grace of God, as though it was the only one in earth or heaven which enjoyed that favour. **"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."** The Lord speaks here, and shall we not pay attention?

How does the Lord open that sublime prophecy in Isa. 1? "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;" and why? "for **the Lord hath spoken.**" Well may the heavens give ear, and well may the earth attend; for the Lord hath spoken. When our excellent Queen sits annually upon her throne in Parliament, how every sentence that she utters is paid attention to, and how her speech is reported word by word, and sent from place to place to the ends of the earth; because she speaks as a queen with power; for, "Where the word of a king is there is power." If then the Lord of heaven and earth, the King of kings, speak, are not His words to be attended to? If we listen to the words of an earthly monarch, shall we not listen to Him that sits as the King of kings on his exalted throne surveying and governing all things? What strong unbelief it is that makes us inattentive to the words of Him who speaks from the courts of heavenly bliss!

And what does He say? **"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."** Surely, if we are under any feeling sense of what we are as sold into captivity, if we are under any feeling sense of the greatness of redeeming love, if we know anything of the power and efficacy of atoning blood, anything of the sufferings and sorrows of an incarnate God, surely we should open our ears and hear what the Redeemer says, when He speaks to us under this endearing relationship. But if there are any here who have felt no need of a Redeemer, have never groaned in captivity and bondage, then they can know nothing of redeeming love; but poor guilty sinners who know what it is to have sold themselves, and that without money, these prize the words of redeeming love; because they are so suitable to them in their sorrow and misery. But why should the Lord speak of Himself here as Israel's Redeemer? Let us examine the words more closely; for we may gather up something that may profit our souls. Now sin, horrible sin, dreadful and damnable sin—I can

give it no other word, for I feel it to be both these—now this dreadful and damnable sin of ours, is the cause of all our misery. We inherited it not only from our first parents, but we have sinned ever since we came into being; yea, we were conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, and so ever since we came forth into this world until the present time we have sinned in every thought, word and deed. Now when the Lord the Spirit begins His gracious work upon a sinner's heart and conscience, one of the first things He makes him to feel is that he is a captive to sin. He feels in a position from which he cannot extricate himself. As the Church of England well speaks in one of her collects, "We are tied and bound with the chain of our sins." Sin has cast around him a chain, from which he cannot extricate himself, and under the sense of sin he feels bound in captivity and bondage. How he hails the first gleam of light that shows him the way of escape out of his dungeon! Suppose you were travelling in a foreign land, and were arrested by one of its despots, and thrown into a deep vault by the side of some flowing river, how you would hail the first gleam of light that shone into this dungeon to give you hope that you would get your liberty again! So it is with a poor sinner. With the first tidings of redeeming mercy and of dying love, such rays and beams break in upon his mind that seem to dispel his captivity. What a sweet influence it is to him! How it breaks up those chains and bonds in which he is held so firmly and fast by the sense of sin which lies upon his conscience as a heavy load!

Many of the dear lambs of God are under legal taskmasters, in dead congregations, under a legal ministry, and they are mourning over their bondage, captivity, and death, because they never hear the sound of the gospel. There they are shut up in captivity; for the glad tidings of grace have never reached their ears, nor have the beams of salvation shone into their hearts. But when the Lord is pleased to bring salvation to their ears by the blood and obedience of the Lord the Lamb, and faith is raised up in their hearts to believe the message that the Holy Ghost brings them, they become manifestly "new creatures," Christ is made precious to them, and formed in their heart the hope of glory. And then He becomes their Redeemer, to redeem them from the

hand of the enemy, from the hand of him who is stronger than they, from the grasp of Satan, the curse of the law and the dreadful condemnation of a guilty conscience; from the torturing doubts and fears instilled by the father of lies, and from the gloomy bondage that sin and guilt bring over the soul. But when the warm rays of salvation by grace appear on the horizon, how blessed are these beams! They raise up hope in the saint's heart, because they open up to him the way of escape and the truths of salvation. He sees that his sins may be or are pardoned, by which he can escape the damnation of hell, and be with Jesus, and dwell with Him in the courts of bliss for evermore. Then He is a **"Redeemer,"** and He is also **"The Holy One of Israel."**

How **holy** is the Lord! because He is the **holy** Son of God. He is the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father in truth and love, and as such He is holy; for the seraphim and cherubim in the temple cry out before Him day and night without ceasing, **"Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth!"** **Holy** is the Father!

**Holy** is the Son! and **Holy** is the Holy Ghost! So that as the Son of God, the second person in the glorious Trinity, He is the **"Holy One,"** and as man, as wearing a **holy** humanity, He is the **"Holy One of Israel."** All His thoughts when upon earth were perfectly **holy**, all His words were **holy**, all His sighs, groans, tears, sorrows, and griefs were **holy**, His sufferings unto death were all holy and His blood and obedience were **holy** and thus he is the **"Holy One of Israel"** in whom a Holy God can take pleasure. Now this is the Jesus to whom the eyes of our faith must look. Here is an encouragement for a storm-tossed soul, and here is salvation for a poor guilty sinner, a precious Saviour for those that feel their need of a Redeemer,—**"The Holy One of Israel."**

Now to whom do you look when your soul is exercised with various storms and guilt and fears—when your sins rise up to view like so many gaunt specters—when darkness and distress fill your mind, and you seem as if you must sink for ever? Do you look and cry to Him who is ready to save you? Does He ever stretch forth His hands towards you? Then you know him to be a

**"Redeemer"—"The Holy One of Israel."** If you fix your eyes upon Him you are fixing your eyes upon Him who is ready to save, and if your eyes are fixed upon Him, you approve of Him whom God approves of. You receive Him whom God receives and the eyes of God look upon you with the same love and approbation that they look upon the **"Holy One of Israel."**  
**"Look unto him and be ye saved all the ends of the earth."**

II.—Now I pass on to our second point—the blessed declaration which this "Holy One of Israel" has given in the words, **"I am the Lord thy God."** Oh, what words are these, **"I am the Lord thy God."** Now how can He be this? How can He say, **"I Myself,"** looking to His poor Israel below, **"I am the Lord thy God?"** How became He the Lord their God? He became so by virtue of an everlasting covenant ordered in all things sure and steadfast; that is the foundation of the whole, the everlasting covenant wherein and whereby God the Father gave to Him the innumerable multitude who should be saved by His blood and obedience, and who should be members of His mystical body, that He might have a people in whom He could be glorified as the Lord most blessed, which subject He opens up in John 17 John's Gospel, chapter 17, where He says, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." And behold now He stands high up in the courts of heaven and says, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me."

Now here are the children which God gave Him in eternity to be His children, His pride, His jewels, His sheep, His pleasure, His delight, the members of His mystical body, that He should in them take an eternal delight, and in them be eternally glorified. Now the question is whether you or I have an interest in these

precious realities? You approve of them as they drop from my lips. You cannot doubt what I say, nor disbelieve it; because it is commended to your consciences; still the question may arise and should arise—"Am I a partaker in these divine realities? Am I one of God's chosen ones? Did He elect me to eternal life? Was my name written down in the lamb's book? Was I, poor miserable I, given to Jesus in this heavenly council, in this divine engagement, in this everlasting covenant?"

Now in order to know this we must look a little to the dealings of this most blessed Jesus. Let us take a supposition. Here is a woman married many years ago to her husband; but she may get into a certain state of mind, and the question may arise whether this man whom she calls her husband is really her husband! It may be a temptation, a dream, a mental infirmity, or a suggestion of Satan that has overtaken her; and she will begin to enquire about when they were married, who performed the ceremony, and how things were, and she will look back and see that it is either a suggestion of Satan, a temptation, or a delusion that has taken hold of her, and when she can look back to the time when and the place where she was married, and recollect all the circumstances of that day when they became one, then this infirmity of mind, this wonderful dream or mental delusion is all dispersed, and it is proved beyond dispute that he is her husband and that she is his wife. So in grace, either from the weakness of your faith, the accusations of a guilty conscience, or from gloomy feelings within, you may doubt or question whether the marriage ceremony ever took place between your soul and Christ, whether He ever gave and put upon your finger the ring of wedded love, and called you by His name. You have to look back, and see if you can again recall the circumstances when the blessed majesty of heaven sealed His love upon your conscience, put the ring of eternal union upon your finger, and bestowed upon you a sense of His love to enable you to call Him yours. Then if the Lord has ever bestowed a look of love upon you, He says, "I am the Lord thy God." He has taken possession of you, made you to know it; and sealed His love upon your heart, or if you cannot go so far as this as to say when you were one by a holy tie, yet are you

engaged with Him? Have you renounced all other suitors and given your virgin heart and the affections of your spiritual mind to Jesus, that He may be yours, and has He on His side so far bespoken you as to have given you sometimes a smile, sometimes a touch with His gracious hand, or sent a sweet promise into your soul with power?

If you cannot say with appropriating faith, "My beloved is mine," yet you are in love with Him; He has wooed you, and you want no other lover; He has engaged your affections and given you that discovery of Himself that has made you love Him with a pure heart fervently. If you can get no further than this it is a mercy; for He is a Redeemer as well as the Lord God. If you feel a poor wretched sinner who cannot do anything to deliver your own soul and yet you are seeking help from the sanctuary, the happy day shall come when you the prisoner shall go free. When in darkness shew yourself men. Perhaps a great majority of the saints of God have had to be in the prison house a long time before taken out into the glorious liberty of the people of God, into the sweet enjoyment of the gospel day; yet they all got their freedom in His own good time.

III .—But I pass on to what the Lord says of those whom He claims as His, that he **teacheth them to profit.** "Which **teacheth thee to profit.**" That is the first mark of our being the Lord's, that He becomes our teacher. We may have learned much from men, much from books, and the Bible itself may have instructed us in many things. You have heard me for twenty years, and surely have collected something, something has been stored up, in mind or memory, if not in heart and conscience. Thus you may have got a good acquaintance with the theory of experience, or you may have got hold of a sound doctrine, and yet not have felt anything of the power of divine teaching and the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart and conscience. Therefore, do not mistake a well-instructed head for a gracious heart, nor do you mistake a sound creed and consistent theory with a work of power and me living work of grace upon the conscience.

I fear many live and die under the awful mistake of believing that because they have a consistent theory of experience, because they profess to hear certain ministers and read certain books, and sit in a certain seat for years, they are thereby saints of God, when there may not be one grain of saving grace in their heart; but this is a mark of the Lord being the soul's Redeemer that the soul owns God as its teacher "which teacheth to profit." Now if you don't know this you are a poor, dark, ignorant wretch with all your learning; it may be that you can prattle very well about religion, but have you seen yourself a poor benighted wretch, so that there seems at times not a single ray of light in your soul? Do you know anything of darkness and clouds, of ignorance besetting your mind? It may be that you are now in the midst of darkness, darkness which may be felt, Egyptian darkness; then you are not under God's teaching; it has yet to come, light has not yet broken into your soul to show that darkness.

I cannot do with such very wise people, they know too much for me to instruct them; but when I see and come in conversation with a poor soul that begins to see and feel its ignorance, darkness and inability to do anything of itself; I can trace in it a desire, though feeble and faint, to get at a little heavenly teaching, and feel after faith, love, the fear of God, and His work upon the soul, then that comes which breaks up all that might hinder a union, and we see eye to eye in the things of God. If I had a child to teach I should first begin to inquire what he knew, and perhaps I should find that he knew very little; then I must begin at the beginning, commencing with the foundation. It is like an architect coming to look at a house whose walls begin to bulge, and the slates on the roof of which seem as if they would break in. The owner may say, "Let us see whether we cannot patch it up a little," but the more the architect looks the worse he finds it to be; instead of being built of good sound rock, it is built perhaps of nothing but mud, and the timber is wretched deal, and everything else is put together in the same way, so that what with bad materials, bad treatment, and long service, he is afraid to touch it, for fear the whole should tumble upon him; thus he

has to lay the foundation, and get up the building from the bottom.

So in grace, the Lord begins at the beginning, the plans and resolutions being laid out, and He will not take to building at first with His jewels and precious stones, but being a master workman, He makes thorough work of it, and He will teach you first lessons with His own finger upon the heart. He will teach you out of the law, "Blessed is the man that continueth in all things written in this book to do them," and "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things to do them." He will teach you what a sinner you are! What a wicked heart you have! What the law is! How particular the commandment is! What a terrible curse is attached to it, and what Mount Sinai is, till you shall see the flashes of God's anger, and He will make you feel time after time in your soul, what a sinner you are, until you begin to think there never was such a wretch on God's earth before, you verily believe there never could have been a heart so full of sins, of bruises, and putrifying sores, and there never was a man or woman with a heart like yours, so filthy and polluted is it, and so full of base desires. Here is a little of the breaking in of the truth of God upon your heart, giving you to see light in God's light.

Now you begin to know a little for yourself, and you feel your way towards more knowledge, more teaching, more light, and power, and to have the truth of God opened up. You have now new views of the truth of God, and you think "What high doctrines these hold! but after all, these are the men, these are the people, these are the sermons, these are the very things that suit my naked, guilty, filthy, distressed soul, these point my poor sinful heart to the Redeemer, and these bring before my eyes the way by which my guilt and filth may be purged and washed away." Now the Lord is teaching you this out of His word; for what a light does He cast upon His sacred truth! what light upon the Scriptures at times! a whole text is so full of light and sweetness, that it is like the honeycomb that cannot hold the honey, it is so full of it. So a text is sometimes so full of honey it cannot hold it, it drops through, as David says of his cup, "My cup runneth over," it runs

over with sweetness; so He teaches you out of the word, then afflictions "make us see what else would 'scape our sight." You have seen your poor tabernacle perhaps consuming away under disease, with a prospect of speedy dissolution before you. All these things try your mind, they make you conscious of what you never knew before, they open up the realities of eternal things, and lay eternal things with weight upon your conscience, and you can see things as they are.

**"Which teacheth thee to profit."** There is a beauty here, it is all to **profit**. Why does the tradesman stand up early and late behind his counter? Why does the mechanic stick to his bench, and the labourer knock his feet against the clods? It is for profit. For who would stand behind the counter, and what labourer or mechanic would perform those things that bring toil to the mind, and fatigue to the body, except for profit? It is profit that puts the plough upon the field, and sows the grains of seed in broad furrows, profit is the great wheel that puts and keeps everything in motion.

**"Which teacheth thee to profit."** No other teaching is profitable. When a person examines his books at the end of the year, and "nil" is the sum total, so a person may sit under sermons, prate and prattle about religion; but what has he got, if he has got nothing of the Lord's teachings? He cannot say he has got anything; but if he has got that which shall save him from death and the law and take him to eternal bliss; and when he can look over the teachings of God, and see heaven as the balance, eternal righteousness in the kingdom of God as his enduring portion, oh! what millions are these to his account—what treasures? You may have had to walk in paths of great gloom and distress, dismay, doubt and fear; family afflictions, personal afflictions, painful bereavements, and trying temptations, may have crowded round you. But look at both sides, cast up the sum total, the creditor and the debtor side, and oh! if you can see eternal life and a kingdom of endless glory to be yours for ever at the great day! oh! what profit the Lord has given you by the teaching he has bestowed upon you! All other teaching is utterly

unprofitable, it never does the soul any good; but is ever a prey to sin and Satan, and it lives under the eternal wrath of God and displeasure of the Almighty. What have I learned to profit? What have you learned to profit? If we have learned to fear God, that is profit; to believe in Jesus, that is profit; if we have had a testimony of our interest in and a blessed manifestation of dying love, and felt a sweet evidence that when He comes we shall be with Him in glory; these are things learned to profit.

IV.—But I pass on to my last point, upon which I must be brief. What sure and heavenly guidance He affords. **"Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."** Now there is a way we should go, and a way we should not go. Our evil nature is always bent on going the way we should not go, the way of the world, of sin, of self-righteousness, the way of carnality and death, that is the way we should not go; of self-indulgence, earthly delights, and sinful gratifications, in which the men of this world specially delight. This is the broad way that leads to eternal destruction, in which the multitude walk that walk toward evil, that thou shouldest not go and will not go. There is a curse in that way.

See well to it then that thy feet are in the way that thou shouldest go, and what is this way? The way of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way of faith, of hope, the way of obedience to His will and word, the way of holiness in which the redeemed alone walk, the way of truth, righteousness, and self-denial, the way of bringing forth fruit pleasing and acceptable to God, the way in which the holy prophets walked, the way in which the martyrs, apostles, and saints of God have all travelled. Now this is a way of tribulation, temptation, and affliction, it is a straight and narrow path, but the only one that leads to life, and the Lord will lead His saints and bring them to the end of it, which is salvation to the soul; and in this they will glory; and never cease to praise the Lord, their Redeemer, Teacher, and Guide, throughout the ages of eternity.

## **THE PROMISE OF GOD TO HIS AFFLICTED CHURCH**

Preached at Zion Baptist Chapel, Bedworth, April 30th, 1850

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones" Isaiah 54:11,12

There is a promise made in the text to a certain personage. It will be desirable to ascertain who this is. We will look first at the internal evidence: it is to the things that are said about her, and the character given her: and if we look at the internal evidence of this chapter, we must come to the conclusion that the person addressed is the church of the living God, for of no other personage is either the description or the promise true, except of the church of the living God. But besides this internal evidence, which is indisputable, we have also the advantage of having certain texts in this chapter quoted in the New Testament, with express reference to the church of the living God, so as not only to give us internal evidence, but also additional proof. For instance, we find the apostle Paul quoting the first verse in this chapter in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, at the 27th verse, "For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband." Now to what does the apostle apply this quotation? He applies it to the heavenly Jerusalem. He says in the preceding verses, "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." Then this clause of the verse evidently connects "Jerusalem which is above" with the personage to whom the promises are made in Isaiah, "For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not;" and so on.

Thus it is evident this Jerusalem which is above is the church of the living God, from an expression of the apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, in the twelfth chapter, where he says, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched .... but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." There we have the connection, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, with the heavenly Jerusalem, implying that it is one and the same. But in another verse, we find this prophecy also quoted by the Lord Jesus Christ, where he says, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Here our Lord quotes this very verse, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." Who are the children, but the children of Zion, the children, the church of the living God?

Thus we not only from internal evidence, but also from expressions quoted in the New Testament, have fixed in a positive and definite manner, that the church of God is addressed in this chapter. All that is said of her, is said to the church of the living God. All the promises in this chapter are made to the church of God.

If we look at our text, we may observe two leading features therein: I. First, the description which God here himself gives of his suffering church. He addresses her as a sufferer. He says to her, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." This seems to be the first leading feature of the words before us, namely, the description of the church of God as a suffering church.

II. The second leading feature is the promise that God makes to her, that he will lay her stones with fair colours, and her foundations with sapphires: "Behold, I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

In this way, I hope, with God's blessing, to consider the words this evening, attempting, as the Lord shall enable me, first to point out the character of the church of God here described by the pen of inspiration, as afflicted, tossed with the tempest, and not comforted. Then pass on to consider the promises, the sweet and glorious promises made to her by the mouth of God.

I. First, the description of the suffering church of God. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." See how our Lord addresses his church here below, how he describes her in her true character, how he tells her from his personal knowledge of her, what she is, how this corresponds for the most part with the feelings of God's people concerning themselves, with the state, case, character and condition in which they find themselves to be. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted."

Let us look at these three distinct epithets, these three descriptions of the suffering church of God.

i. The first mark that God gives of her, is, that she is afflicted. "*O thou afflicted.*" Now this is her promised lot here below; her Lord was afflicted before her, and the promise is, that we are to be glorified with him, if we suffer with him. The promise is, that we are to be conformed to his likeness, his image; and if we are to be conformed to his likeness, his image in glory above, we must be conformed to his suffering image on earth below. As the Head, so the members; as the Bride-groom, so the bride; as the Shepherd, so the sheep. He was a man of sufferings, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and his people in their measure must have the same. The Lord has appointed it should be so. He hath chosen his Zion in the furnace of affliction. There is no escape. And if a man thinks he has escaped, his lot is that of a bastard at least. There is nothing manifest of his being in the bond of the covenant. But the afflictions the Lord sends on Zion are of varied kinds. The Lord sees necessary to send afflictions suitable to the case, state and condition of each. What might be an affliction to one might not be so to another. Each must carry

his own affliction. Each must bear his own load, and each endure his own appointed lot. So a wise God sees exactly what affliction to lay on each and all, when it shall come, where it shall come, whence it shall come, and how it shall come; how it shall work, and what it shall work; how long it shall endure; when it shall be put on and when taken off. In these matters the Lord acts as a sovereign. As we did not choose of what parents we should be born, nor our situation in life, neither had we any choice of our stature, complexion, and so no choice as into what family we should come. The Lord appointed all our afflictions for us, and when he puts them on, no human arm can take them off. He knows our constitution and besetments, our characteristics and the minutest things relating to our situation in life. The Lord knows all our concerns; he sees exactly what we are by nature and by grace; therefore he lays on each individual the very affliction he sees that individual needs; no greater, no less: exactly the very affliction which shall bring about the very appointed purpose intended by God to be brought about, which shall be for the soul's good and God's own glory.

In just glancing at these afflictions of the Lord's people, perhaps we may divide them into two great branches: afflictions temporal or providential, and afflictions spiritual. Now all the Lord's people have more or less a share of these afflictions. For instance, bodily afflictions; very few of the Lord's people seems to escape these. How profitable they are often made. A sickly tabernacle, a poor weak, nervous, debilitating fame, the Lord sees fit to send on many of his people. Very few that I am acquainted with, enjoy what may be called a sound state of health. There may be some that do, but for the most part, the best are those who are most exercised. The most savoury are those who feel most the infirmities of this poor diseased tabernacle we carry about with us. Others of the Lord's people, the Lord sees fit to exercise with providential afflictions. Many of the Lord's people have to wade as it were up to the very neck in poverty, and find it a hard matter even to get the bread that perisheth. Others of the Lord's people are tried with family afflictions, sickness in their families, children taken away, the husband taken, or the wife taken from the fond

affectionate embrace of the husband. Or if children grow up, they grow up only to be a plague and a torment to their parents. How many of the Lord's people have waded through these family afflictions and troubles.

But if there are any exempt from providential afflictions, none are from spiritual trouble. We may safely say, if any of the Lord's people go through any long period of their lives without temporal troubles, they shall never go any long period without spiritual trouble. "O thou afflicted." They are afflicted when the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart; afflicted when convictions begin; the burden of guilt on the conscience; many doubts and fears as to their state before God; many painful trials and exercise as to what the result will be; how it will prove on a death bed? Whether they will prove to be vessels of honour or vessels of wrath. These afflictions none are exempt from, though some may wade in these troubles more deeply than others.

Afflicted most of the Lord's people are, sooner or later, Satan laying some trap or snare for their feet, with which they get entangled, to their shame and sorrow. Again, the working of the corrupt passions of their fallen nature, Satan shooting his arrows of obscenity, blasphemy or infidelity into their carnal mind, stirring up the rebellion of their heart against God and godliness. These are felt to be afflictions, because where the conscience is tender in the fear of God; where there is a holy reverence of his great name; where there is a desire to please him, and a fear to offend him; where there is a solemn impression of his dread majesty; where there is an inward knowledge that he is a heartsearching God; that he sees into every corner of the heart: then to be the possessor of these hateful, filthy, obscene, infidel, rebellious, blasphemous thoughts, without any power to control or remove them that they seem to run into the heart, as troops into cities where there is neither gates nor walls, this is indeed an affliction. Oh, when the soul really has the good fear of God, and knows how hateful these things are in his holy and pure eyes, that he would not have a single thought dishonouring to his glorious majesty, yet feels how these things come and go, that he

has no control over them; how his poor soul is afflicted, tortured, grieved, harassed and distressed.

And added to all this, the Lord's people are afflicted with a body of sin and death, a vile heart, a corrupt nature, with a mind that is always, except kept by the mighty power of God, prone to backsliding, going out after the evils of this life; a heart going out after wickedness. When the conscience is made tender, the fear of God really at work, the soul having a sense of God's holiness, purity, majesty, and greatness, when there has been some sweet touches of his love, some manifestations of his mercy, loving-kindness and tender favour; then to feel we have such a heart, that still looks at and cleaves to earthly things, things that are too base to mention, for this heart to go out after evil, a heart that goes out after things that are God-dishonouring, to have a heart prone to indulge in these things, is heart breaking and soul-afflicting. It is indeed grievous when the poor soul has to grapple with this vile heart, continually backsliding from God, departing from him, going after the things conscience condemns, and which the soul knows God hates with perfect hatred, this is indeed affliction.

What is bodily affliction to this? We may have bodily affliction, and yet be sweetly blessed in soul. Bodily affliction is nothing, when the Lord's presence is enjoyed. When the Lord is pleased to bless us in our soul, if in sickness, what is it? The sickness is made endurable. I would rather be sick and afflicted, with the Lord's presence and blessing, than be well and in a state of health, without it. I remember on my birthday, many years ago, being ill and on a sick bed, but so filled with the Lord's presence and blessing, that it was the happiest birthday of my life. So as to sickness and bodily affliction they are nothing, when we have the Lord's blessing on the soul.

Again, temporal trials, what are all the reproaches of the world compared with the favour of God? A man may have only a crust of bread and a drop of water, yet with the blessing of God in his soul, enjoy a feast indeed. A man may have the deepest family

trials, may lose his wife, or the wife a husband, a mother her child, and a child her parent; yet the Lord may make up this trouble by his presence and blessing as some good man once said upon losing a child, that he could lose a child every day of his life, if the Lord so blessed his soul under it, as he had under the loss of that one. Thus temporal afflictions become light when supported by the blessing of God. Not so with spiritual afflictions: when the soul is filled with temptations, the assaults of the devil, the fiery darts of Satan, his innate wickedness, Oh, the sorrow and grief produced thereby seems to shut out the sweet presence of God, and set the soul far from his blessing.

Thus put all temporal afflictions together, they are but as a drop in a bucket, compared with spiritual afflictions, spiritual sorrows, spiritual exercises and spiritual griefs. What are all the afflictions of body, of circumstances and of the family, put them all together, compared with spiritual; they seem as a drop in a bucket, or as the dust in a balance. Now the Lord knows his people are afflicted, "O thou afflicted." Thus he addresses his Zion, he sympathizes with her, in all her affliction he was afflicted; he knows every pang of her heart, and feels every groan of her soul; he has passed through all these things before; there can be no temptation with which she may be tempted, that he was not tempted with before; she can have no sorrow, suffering or trial, that he has not experienced to the utmost; we only drink a few drops of the bitter cup of suffering, he drank it to the very dregs; he says, "O thou afflicted." ii. He tells her she is afflicted, he sympathizes with her, that she may be conformed to his image, he lays his everlasting arms closer, underneath and round about her; but he also adds, "*Tossed with tempest.*" This is an illusion to the figure of a ship at sea; there is something suitable in the comparison. If we look at a ship at sea, we know she has left one port, and is on her way to another; but before she reaches the destined harbour, a great tempest often lies upon her. Is not this very descriptive of the state of a quickened soul? The soul made alive to God has left one harbour, the harbour of the world, the dead sea, the harbour in which gallant ships ride; she has left that dead sea, that dead harbour, and is

bound for another, the haven of eternal rest, the harbour of eternal peace and joy. But before she gets there a great tempest lies on her, contrary winds stop her passage, she is unable to make head against them, therefore she is tossed with tempest; not only does the wind blow right in her teeth, but winds and waves start up, and toss her to and fro, so that she reels and staggers like a drunken man, and is at her wits' end. Does not this describe the state and case of a poor soul tossed with tempest? The heavenly country is often not in sight, mists and fogs are raised over the heavenly harbour, which lies across the dead sea. While on their passage tempests fall on them, contrary winds blow, waves rise, and they are tossed up and down on the stormy billows. They cannot turn the ship back; they have no wish to go back, knowing death and condemnation are there. Their desire is to go forward but still the wind is so contrary, the tempest so strong, the waves and billows so boisterous, it would seem as though they made no way at all.

How descriptive this of a poor soul tossed with tempest. Are not you sometimes tossed up and down on these waves and billows, scarcely knowing where you are, or what you are? You are not in the world, you have no rest there, you are not satisfied in your former state, you have left your dead, lifeless, careless, godless profession, and are endeavouring to pass on; yet the future seems obscured in mist, the heavenly harbour is not in sight; you are tossed up and down in your soul with doubts, fears, misgivings, exercises and temptations. Every thing seems opposed to you; every thing seems done with such struggling, such opposition, such continual struggling of soul against every thing you desire to have. If you seek the Lord in secret prayer, opposition; if you try to read the Word of God, opposition; if you try to groan out the distress you feel in your soul, opposition; if you try to hear the Word, opposition. Some storms, some gusts, contrary winds, some waves, some billows, tossing you up and down. If you try to do something you really ought to do, or which you know is desirable should be done, opposition.

Now this is being tossed with tempest; you think you will never

reach the shore; that your poor soul will never be saved; such opposition, such conflict, so many struggles, such hard work, such a rough passage, such contrary breezes, such roaring waves and billows, your own heart harassing you; there you lie, tossed up and down in a sea of doubts, corruptions, temptations and oppositions. Why, is not this Zion's case?

"O Zion, afflicted with wave upon wave,  
Whom no man can comfort, whom no man can save."

Was not this the case of old? One said "all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Psa.42:7) Was not the case and complaint of Jonah in the whale's belly? When he said, "Out of the belly of hell cried I ... The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever." (Chap.2:2-6) The saints of old have travelled this path before you. If you are tossed with tempest like Paul's ship, which was tossed up and down the Adriatic, so that "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared," (Acts 27:20) you are only where Zion is; you are only pursuing the voyage in which Zion is embarked; you are only partakers of the afflictions that belong to the suffering church of Jesus Christ; only having fellowship with the saints of old, the noble army of martyrs. Were you not tossed with the tempest, it would be against you. If all was calm, nothing but fair winds for the soul, the wind always in one direction, no tides against you, no billows and waves tossing you up and down, then your case would be doubtful. But if tossed with the tempest, exercised and afflicted, this is not against you; this work belongs to Zion; you are sailing with her on board of that ship which is bound for the heavenly country. When the disciples were tossed at sea, the Lord was with them in the boat. The saints who have gone to heaven crossed this rough sea. Do you think that the saints with Jesus in glory always had a smooth sea? Always fair winds? Always calm, like steam boat sailing? No, they had their trials; many of them had to wade through seas of trouble, through the crimson waves of martyrdom, before they reached

the heavenly country. Are we to be fair weather mariners? Stay at home voyagers? Chimney corner sailors? Like persons who go upon pleasure excursions sailing in a yacht? Or are we to be embarked with Zion? If so, we shall be tossed with tempest, and only brought by the Lord's power and wisdom safe to land.

iii. *"And not comforted."* Here is the third mark. People say, what a comfortable thing religion is; I feel so comfortable; I have been so comfortable ever since I embraced religion. This is not God's religion. There are comforts in God's religion. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed" (2 Cor.4:8). We are perplexed with difficulties, as the apostle Paul says, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor.1:4-5). God's religion is not an easy slip shod, fair weather comfortable religion. The religion that is always easy and comfortable is wrong; it is Satan's religion. To be always comfortable, always pleased, always easy, and always pleasant; finding no inward struggles, no opposition from the devil and the world, is when the heart is like the place of a strong man, whose goods are in peace. This is not the warfare of a Christian; he has to fight. The Christian has a race to run. The Word of God speaking of the course of a Christian employs various figures, such as a struggle, a warfare, a conflict and opposition.

"And not comforted." This is Zion's peculiar spot, Zion's peculiar mark, to take comfort only from God himself. Other people can take comfort anywhere. "Surely," they say, "all is right as the minister thinks well of me." The minister thinks well of the people; and the people are quite satisfied and think well of the minister, without any of these inward struggles. Then I can say, they are only double-dyed hypocrites; nothing but pharisees. Though they think very high of what their minister says; that he is very much in their favour; he is not so severe as some. Therefore in this sort of comfortable religion they take things for granted; because they think well of themselves, they think God

does. But this is not the God of Zion, Zion's king. None but God can make Zion feel her guilt; and none but he can take away Zion's sins. None but God can deliver from temptation; none but God can deliver Zion out of her trials; and none but the Spirit of God can bring her out of the trouble under which she labours; therefore, she is not comforted. Zion's religion is not this comfortable, easy, slip-shod religion. Her religion is in exercises, trials, sorrows and conflicts. This is Zion's peculiar mark: except when the Lord comforts her, she will not be comforted. But when God comforts her, then she is comforted indeed. Now, how do matters stand with your soul? Can you take comfort from any thing? Are you very easy, or very difficult to be comforted? Are you very nice, very choice in your food? That in eating it must be Zion's dainties? That you cannot but feed only upon nice things? Every thing you have must be applied by God himself? Brought into your soul? Made over to you as a special gift? Brought warm into your heart from the very mouth of God himself? And if you take comfort in any thing short of what God brings, if you belong to him, depend upon it, you will be brought off all this comfortable religion; because God brings all his people off this luke-warm, slip-shod, every-day comfortable religion. He unsettles them, that he himself may establish them; he brings them off this easy religion, that he himself may comfort them with his own consolations and when he does this it will be to some purpose.

Now do your trials correspond to this description? Looking at your daily walk, at what you have passed through, do you find these three things descriptive of the state of your soul? Say you, I am afflicted; if not in body as some, in my family as others, or in circumstances as many, yet I have a daily cross, a daily burden, a daily affliction. It is my dreadful heart, my carnal mind, my corrupt nature; sin dwelleth in me; my unbelief, my infidelity, my worldly mindedness, my backsliding, my deceptive, adulterous, idolatrous heart: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. My inward diabolism, with which I am filled, daily makes me deeply groan, draws forth many a sigh, and makes me mourn before God, that I have such a wicked hard heart. My sins,

my backslidings afflict me, and deeply grieve me. Then this is a mark in your favour; it is some blessed testimony that you belong to Zion. If the fear of God is in your heart; if your conscience is tender; the Lord himself is at work in your soul; your case is that of a child of God generally; and each one may take it home to himself, if his case answers to the description I have given. For if you can say, I am tossed with tempest; what a tempest there is in my heart, what doubts, what fears, what misgivings, what exercises and temptations, what tossings up and down I feel going on; if this is your case, then you are tossed with tempest. Say you, I do not know how it is; I find other people get their comfort so easy; I cannot. They seem so satisfied with their religion; I am not satisfied with mine. They can hear well so often; I cannot. It makes me sigh and mourn, when I think how some seem filled with Christ, that every thing they say is from God. If a text of Scripture occurs to their mind, they take it for granted it is applied by God to their soul. I cannot do this. I want something strong and powerful something that God himself must speak to my soul. If it is not in that way, I have nothing, say you; all my religion for a time seems to be gone; I cannot find a grain; it seems all swept away; sin, the devil and self seem not to have left a grain. Here I am, say you, sometimes standing before the God of heaven and earth, before a holy heart-searching God, and can scarcely feel a single grain of religion in me, so crossed, empty, needy and naked, as though I had never felt any thing spiritual, never seen Jesus, never felt his presence, never known his love, never tasted his blood and righteousness. I seem so empty and destitute, as though I had never heard of him, as though my soul never had any desire towards God. I seem nothing less than a hypocrite and a deceiver. This is indeed not being comforted.

So these three marks seem to be found some way or other. I seem as if I could say with an honest conscience, whatever my religion be, I can say this of myself, that I feel these things. I can say from my soul, I feel and know whatever I be, whatever I have, or am, I know something of this inward work, you have been describing in my soul. Then if the Lord speaks to you, never

mind what other people think, or what you think about yourself. Whatever other people think about your disease will not alter God's thoughts; his thoughts are not man's. If God thinks well of you, it is no matter how bad you think of yourself, or what others think of you; depend upon it, neither they nor you, think as bad as you may, will ever think half so bad of you as you really are.

II. I pass on to consider the promises made to these people. The Lord comes down to Zion; he is very tender of her; he loved her from eternity; he knows all her sorrows, her sufferings, and her exercises; he does not cut her off. He neither casts her down, nor tramples her as mire in the streets; he is very pitiful; his heart is full of compassion; he stoops to hear her whom men reject. What does he say to her? He makes very sweet promises. What are they? "Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

Now the Lord seems here to compare Zion to a building, which we know is a frequent figure in the word of God. Zion is compared to a building, "The Lord shall build up Zion" (Psa.102:16). Zion is compared to a temple; she is also called a spiritual house, a palace for the King of kings. Thus the Lord speaks of her here under the figure of a building, saying what he will do for her under this figure. He says he will build her up of the choicest materials; there shall be nothing common about her; and what he does for her will be of a most precious character. Here you see the emptiness of the creature, and the fulness of God. What the Lord does, he does in a manner worthy of himself. Though he brings his Zion down, it is for the purpose of raising her up; though he fills her with affliction, confusion and sorrow, it is for the express purpose of establishing her in beauty and glory. It is wonderful to see how the Lord depresses Zion, then raises her up; how he brings her to the lowest ebb, that he may have all the glory in establishing her in peace and righteousness, proving the truth of what one says, "God is in the midst of her" (Psa.46:5). She shall never have common fare; no, says the Lord, she shall have the choicest dainties; she shall not be built

with common stones; no, says the Lord, there shall not be a common thing about her, but all uncommon; nothing contemptible or vile, but all precious and rare. "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

Let us look at these promises each in its order, and see whether there is not in them something spiritual, heavenly and suitable.

i. The first promise is, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours." This may be a general description, preceding a particular one. The Lord may say generally, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours," before he goes on to specify the way. These words allude to a custom in ancient buildings, and in some of which whose ruins have been uncovered in this country, old Roman pavements have been found. The ancients used to have tessellated pavement, which were in mosaic, that is, a number of beautiful stones of different colours set in mortar, so beautifully contrasted, as to form a picture. Thus when the Lord speaks of laying her stones with fair colours, there may be an allusion to this kind of pavement. Lately, in the ruins of Nineveh, some of these beautiful bits of granite have been found. At least, this was known in the time of the Jews, who used this granite for pavement; it was very beautiful. Thus Zion is not to be built with common materials, but inlaid with beautiful tessellated work,

ii. "And lay thy foundations with sapphires." Now the very foundation shall not be of common materials. You know usually the worst and roughest stones are put into the foundation. But not so in Zion, her very foundation is sapphires, precious stones. What is Zion's foundation? Is it not Christ? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.3:11). When Christ is made known to the soul, when he is brought with divine power in the heart; is this not laying the foundation with sapphires? What a beautiful representation is this of Christ, a sapphire, a precious stone of a blue colour, laying the foundation with sapphires: what is it spiritually? Laying the

foundation of Christ to the soul. Every visit from Christ, every manifestation of Christ, every promise from Christ, every opening up of his glory and beauty, every solemn visit from him is laying the foundation with sapphires, laying Christ in the heart, inlaying Christ in the soul. God is in this way continually laying the foundation in a sinner's heart. Christ is the foundation. Every view of Jesus, every testimony of interest in his atonement, every sweet smile of his blessed countenance, every laying of the foundation in the soul for eternal glory: this is laying the foundation with sapphires; because in Jesus every thing is precious. As in this precious stone we see every thing desirable; in this precious sapphire is every thing beautiful. And as this precious stone is very bright, so in this precious stone we see these three distinct characteristics of the Person of God's Son. Who so beautiful as Jesus? Who so adorable as Jesus? And who so precious as the Lord of life and glory? What a precious temple. Who so precious, or what so precious, as a precious Christ! Every time we have a view of Christ; every time we have a manifestation of Christ; every time we have a visit or a word from Christ, is laying the foundation with sapphires, sparkling, bright and brilliant, standing up and shining forth as a precious stone in the heart.

You see Zion's foundation must be tumbled upside down, before laying the foundation with sapphires. God does not mix Christ with works, Christ with the creature, Christ with human piety and creature religion. This is all turned out to lay the foundation with sapphires, to inlay a precious Christ into the soul, to bring anything of Jesus' presence, love, blood and mercy into the heart. This is laying the foundation with sapphires. What a beautiful building it must be, when the very foundation which in common buildings is rubbish and rough stones, is in this foundation precious stones, sapphires, worth one, two, or thirty thousand pounds. Besides, what a sapphire is laid in the foundation; it is as though the Lord would never give any thing more, nor any thing less, than Christ. He never does; he can give nothing but what is worthy of himself; he gives as God; he has given us his dear Son as a free gift; then when Christ is made known to the soul, it is

laying the foundation with sapphires.

iii. "And I will make thy windows of agates." Zion then has windows. These are not made of glass; glass was not known at that time for windows; it was known for ornaments, but not for windows; God has his windows for his Zion made of agates. What is an agate? You that are acquainted with it, know it is a kind of precious stone; not exactly so; this agate is more of a semi-transparent, not quite transparent, but what is called a semi-transparent, clouded over, very beautiful, partly shining with a degree of cloudiness. What do these windows denote, or seem to set forth? They set forth the prospect for Zion. Is it not out of our windows we see the prospect? I live in a very pleasant situation when at home, and can see a pretty prospect before me. When I want to see the prospect I look out of the windows. So these windows of Zion are said to be of agates; they seem to represent the prospect the soul has of Christ, which is indeed only a semi-transparent, only a cloudy view of Jesus, as the apostle says, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." Seen through agate, not perfectly clear, as the bride says, seen through the lattice (1 Cor.13:13, cf. Song of Sol.2:9); like to a person passing by, seen through the lattice, see them for a moment and then they are gone. So Zion's windows made of agate; a sweet prospect of Jesus; a prospect of the heavenly country and eternal things; a prospect of the immortal glorious palace. Immortal beyond the skies, yet often cloudy; faith takes a look; sees as in a glass darkly, not quite a bright view; as the pilgrims on the delectable mountains, when the shepherds gave them the glass to have a view of the celestial city, their hands trembled, so that they only got a dim view. So it is with Zion; she looks through the windows, they have a cloud over, not so bright or transparent as they will be, yet very sweet, raising up the feelings within, enough to set her affections on things above.

Sometimes, when the soul has had a sweet visit from Jesus, or in reading his Word, his Word is made sweet and precious to your soul, both heart and affections cleaving to things above, what a view of the heavenly country, so that you are led to say, "Whom

have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire beside thee" (Psa.73:25). Have you not had to lament how short this prospect was? How soon unbelief, and darkness of the mind, seem to raise a mist over this beautiful prospect, to hide it from your view; how strange it is. We say sometimes, we have seen things as plain and clear, as though we had seen them with our bodily eyes. Have we not seen the God-head of Christ? I remember once on my bed, having such a view of the Person of Christ. How clearly I saw his Godhead, and his manhood; as a divine person, what a sweetness and blessing rested on my soul; how I received him into my heart as God, yet what infidelity lurked in the midst at the time as to his deity! What unbelief as to him altogether. How soon his Person, blood, and work, all seemed swept away and out of sight. I could see no Creator, no God-man, no atoning blood, nothing in him, and nothing in myself. Contrast this with other times, when our faith has been raised up, our eyes anointed with eye-salve, we have had some sweet discoveries of the love of Jesus to the soul. Do we doubt them? No! Then how plain, then how clear; no more doubts; the day begins to break, the light shines forth, increasing from glory to glory; it reaches the soul, and warms the heart. There are no doubts then, they are all gone, and the soul feels as a temple sanctified, a dwelling for the King of kings; a principality for the Lord of Hosts to come down to dwell in, and take up his abode, and perhaps before half an hour has gone, all these views have gone with it, beclouded, dimmed, and out of sight. Little felt but the workings of unbelief and sin; yet what a mercy to have windows of agate, to give these prospects, now and then, to gaze on the heavenly country where Jesus is.

iv. Zion has gates also, and these gates are made of carbuncles. A carbuncle is a precious stone of a blood-colour, as a bloody red. Now gates, we know, are for exit and entrance. It is by the doors we come into the chapel, and by the doors we leave it. Thus Zion has gates, and these gates are for Zion's exit and entrance; out of these gates Zion's prayers, Zion's tears, Zion's desires, and Zion's breathings flow. Through these gates Zion's mercies, Zion's favours, Zion's promises, and Zion's visits come. There

may be something else, I do not say it positively, there may be something else, perhaps here it has a sweet allusion to Christ's blood. The carbuncle is of a red colour, as red as blood. It was through these gates of carbuncle prayers went up. Through these gates answers came down. How do our prayers go up? Through the blood of Jesus. How do the answers come down? Through the blood of Jesus. Through these crimson gates the desires go up, and through these crimson gates the answers descend.

Zion has gates then as well as windows; through these gates our desires ascend, and through these gates there is an entrance for the fulfilment of the longing, hungering soul. These gates are of carbuncles, the Lord would not leave us without them; she could not live without. Zion is a praying city. Prayer is her breath; as long as she lives she prays, and so long as she prays she lives. What a sweet thing it is! Through the gates prayer ascends to God, perfumed with the incense of Christ's intercession; washed in his blood, redeemed with the merits of his priestly office. What a mercy it is that all favours, all blessings, and visits, come through these gates! That God can still be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

v. "And all thy borders of pleasant stones." There is to be nothing common about her; her very borders and walls round about; her fences by which she is surrounded; her very courtyards that bound her length and breadth, all these are precious stones; they do not have any common materials about her borders. What then are her borders? Many of God's poor children, poor people, who cannot come into Zion's inclosure, but walk round about her and count her towers. They are not yet brought by the Spirit's application into Zion's pleasant things, they are borderers, they hang about Zion's gates, they look at her towers, admire her comeliness and beauty, which makes them long to be brought into the sweet enjoyment of Zion's provision, Zion's refreshments. Her very borders are pleasant stones, nothing vile, nothing common about her. She is a queen and all her apparel shall be queenly, all her raiment is queenly, her very gait is queenly, for her husband is the King of kings, and he has

determined as a great king that his queen shall be clothed from head to foot, from top to toe, yea, apparelled in queenly garments. The King of kings and Lord of lords has his Zion decked in queenly apparel. Sometimes the borders of the palaces of earthly monarchs are not so very comely, there is some stabling or mews near to the palace of our queen, but it is not so with Zion. Her borders and courtyards, her bordering walls, everything belonging to her are all built of pleasant stones.

The enemies may go about her but they shall not, and are not able to put their finger on one bit of free-stone, one bit of granite, all her borders are precious stones. They may envy and hate her, but they shall never be able to say this is worthless, common or unbecoming and not fit for Zion. No, they shall not be able to say there is anything common, cheap, or worthless, about her borders. "All thy borders of pleasant stones." Whatever low place Zion may take as regards her feelings, the Lord does not think lightly of her. Though she says of herself, there is none so vile or black as she, yet the Lord will not say so, he says she is all fair, without spot or blemish; she says she is black but comely; the Lord says she is the fairest among women. Why so fair, beautiful, and comely? Not so in herself, but because she is washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and decked with his ornaments. Thus he has prepared her as a queen for himself, adorned her as a bride for her husband, a building for himself, a chosen temple, where she shall be delighted with his presence and glory, wherein she shall shine to all eternity, brighter than the sun, fairer than the moon, and more beautiful than the stars, shall be for ever a palace for the King of kings, a habitation for God. This is her comfort. This is God's glory, that she shall be a palace for the King of kings, a habitation worthy of himself.

Now, have you any hope, any seal that you belong to Zion? Remember this, you must sink before you rise; you must have the bitter before the sweet, as Christiana said to Mercy: affliction before joy, shame before honour, self-loathing before light and beauty, the spirit of heaviness before the garment of praise and robe of righteousness. Afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not

comforted before he lays the foundation with sapphires, the windows of agate, the gates of carbuncles, and all the borders of pleasant stones. So sure as the Lord has done the one, so will he do the other.

If in the Lord's providence, and the Lord's grace, you correspond to Zion's character, as afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, as he has given the description, and has also given the promises in his Word, if that answers the description of the things at work in your soul, he will be sure to accomplish that promise. Thus there is every comfort for a poor child of God; every thing to cause him to hope, every thing to bring him to anchor in a precious Christ. At the same time there is no hope given for anybody else, whilst there is the sweetest hope of salvation for the self-condemned, self-abhorred, afflicted, tempest-tossed, and not comforted; there is no hope for the self-righteous in God's Word, no hope for those who are not exercised, who are not taught by the Spirit, who are not brought into self-condemnation, repentance, and faith, hope, and love. Whatever hope they may have in themselves, they have no solid ground in the Word of God, and by that Word we are to be justified, and by that Word we must be condemned.

## **The Promises Inherited through Faith and Patience**

Preached at Keppel Street Chapel, London, on Thursday Evening,  
August 21, 1845

"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Hebrews 6:12

In the primitive Churches—I mean the Churches to which the epistles were addressed—there were prominent differences; that is, some of the churches were more abundantly blessed with the gifts and graces of the Spirit than others. For instance, the comforts of the Holy Ghost appear to have abounded very greatly in the Thessalonian church; and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as distinct from his graces, appear to have been most prominent in the Corinthian church. The Galatians, on the other hand, we find deeply tinged with legality; the Colossians and Ephesians led more deeply into the mysteries of the gospel; and the Hebrews, to whom the Apostle Paul addressed this epistle, appear to have occupied a position of this nature—1. That they were very weak, timid, and wavering; and 2. That they were more beset by persecutions and severe trials than their sister churches in the New Testament. Now, there was a connection doubtless betwixt these two leading features of their character. They were persecuted chiefly on this account, that they were Hebrews. For that a Jew should renounce the religion of his fathers—that a Jew should profess faith in that Jesus whom his nation had crucified as a malefactor, was, in the eyes of his bigoted countrymen, the very essence of high treason against God and the Law. The Hebrews, therefore, appear to have borne the very brunt of persecution. They stood in the front of the battle. The thundercloud of trial burst immediately over their head. It was but the tail of the shower, so to speak, that fell upon the other churches; the whole burst of the thunderstorm fell upon the head of the Hebrews. But they were weak and wavering. They had not received that power from on high whereby they were able to stand up against this storm of persecution that burst upon them.

Therefore, we find the Apostle Paul, in various places through this epistle, endeavouring to trace out, and fortify them against, those evils which he saw most prominent in them.

There are two chapters in this epistle (the sixth and the tenth) that speak of the sin of apostacy from God, and hold out the most awful threatenings and warnings against those who apostatize from a profession of the truth, when once they have made a profession. These chapters have terrified and alarmed many of God's dear family, though I believe they have nothing to do with the Lord's own quickened and spiritual people; my own firm conviction being, that the characters pointed out in the sixth and tenth of Hebrews are not partakers of the grace of God, not real saints under the teachings of the Holy Ghost, but mere professors, with a name to live while dead. But, to my mind, there is much force and beauty in the very ambiguity that clothes these two chapters. It makes them more searching. Suppose the matters were as plain as ministers endeavour to make it; suppose we took away all the ambiguity that rests upon these fearful passages, we should take away their very force. It is because they come so close that they cut so deep. It is because they hold out such warnings and threatenings against a mere profession of truth, that they are specially adapted to search the heart and conscience of God's people. Thus, their very ambiguity is their very beauty; because, being so close, they cut the children of God more to the quick, they winnow away more of the dust and chaff of profession, they bring them more, in their feelings before the eyes of a heart-searching God, and they thus eventually make the work of grace to be more clear and decided in their conscience.

But you will observe, if you read carefully this chapter, and if the Lord give you understanding to see the spiritual meaning of it, that the Apostle does not mean to include the Hebrews in these awful warnings. "Beloved," he says, "we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." And then he goes on to trace out certain marks which they possessed, but which never, with all their splendid

gifts, were to be found in apostates. He testifies to their work and labour of love; he speaks in the text of faith and patience; and lower down we find him tracing out in them the possession of hope: so that, being partakers of the graces of love, faith, patience, and hope, they, with all their timidity and wavering possessed in their hearts and consciences that which was saving, and that which everlastingly distinguished them from those apostates who had "crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

But the Apostle, knowing the tendencies of the human heart, that it is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," that its bias is to apostacy—that, like gravitation in nature, the heart of man is so bent upon falling, that fall it must except held up by the power of God—knowing the tendencies, the unalterable tendencies of the human heart by nature to depart from the living God, has interspersed this epistle with these solemn warnings; but at the same time has laid down marks of grace, so as not to discourage God's living family; sufficiently close to cause heart-searchings, yet sufficiently clear not to drive to despair; tracing out the line so clearly, as every minister should do, as not to discourage any who need encouragement, and yet to encourage none who need no encouragement. But seeing they were in this timid, wavering state, he gives them the precept which this evening I shall endeavour to unfold—"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

I shall endeavour to open, as far as the Lord shall enable me, the mind and meaning of the Spirit under two leading heads. I shall not dwell much upon the first clause of the text, but confine myself almost exclusively to the latter portion, and show *first, what the promises are; and secondly, how God's people inherit them through faith and patience.*

I.—But we will look a little first at the precept which the Holy Ghost has here given, "that ye be not slothful." The Lord's people are made diligent when he is pleased to work in their hearts with

power. When he suspends his operations, when he does not bestow the dew and unction of the Spirit, they relapse into their own fallen, carnal nature. Now the Lord sends trials upon his people in order to stir them up. He knows that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich; but the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing." We cannot ourselves produce diligence. We may attempt it; we may counterfeit it; we may be full of fleshly zeal; but spiritual diligence is as distinct from natural diligence as Christ from Belial. But when the Lord would make his people diligent in every good word and work, it is instrumentally by sending trials, afflictions, and sorrows, so as to stir up his own blessed graces in their heart, and enable them to be fruitful in the exercise of that faith, hope, and love which are the gift of his own Spirit. And when the Lord is thus pleased to work in our hearts with power, we can no more be slothful than, when the Lord suspends his operations, we can be diligent. We can no more lie in sloth when the Lord is pleased to work in our hearts by his own blessed Spirit, than we can be diligent, earnest, begging, crying, seeking, and pleading with the Lord when his gracious operations are not felt in our heart and conscience.

But to come to the latter clause of the text. There are promises that God has given in his word; in fact, the Scriptures are spangled with them. The stars in the sky are scarcely more abundant, and they scarcely shine with greater lustre than the promises scattered up and down God's word; and though the day will come when the sun will hide its light, and star after star will be extinguished, the promises in all their glorious fulfilment shall shine forth in inextinguishable light, for the word of God endureth for ever.

Now these promises we may class under three heads. There are promises temporal, promises spiritual, and promises of a mixed character—what, if I may compound a word, I may call temporal-spiritual. The Lord has given in his word many temporal promises; for he knew that his people would ever need them. He has "chosen the poor in this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom;" and having chosen them in the furnace of affliction, to

walk for the most part in the path of tribulation, and to be hard and deeply pressed with many providential trials, he has laid up promises suitable to those situations of trial into which his own hand leads them. For instance, such a promise as this is of a temporal nature: "His bread shall be given him, and his waters shall be sure." (Isaiah 33:16.) Now all the Lord's family, so far as they are brought into various providential trials, have an interest in this promise. The Lord, again, has said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33.) These are two sweet promises: one absolute, "His bread shall be given." However it may be opposed by nature, sense, and reason; however, the depth of poverty may stare the poor child of God in the face; however unable to say whence the promised help shall come; yet "bread shall he given him, and his waters shall be sure"—"food and raiment," as the apostle interprets it. The other, I will not say is conditional, but founded on the Spirit's work upon the heart; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." If we are enabled to seek first the salvation of our soul, that we may know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, all temporal things shall be bestowed as an additional gift.

But there are, as I have said, promises of a mixed character. For instance: "All things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom. 8:28.) That promise is of a mixed character; for "all things" include things providential, as well as things spiritual. If all things are to work together for your good, your temporal trials are included in "all things." Every bodily affliction, every family trouble, every thing that tries us in providence, every thing that is bitter and cutting to our flesh, as well as every thing spiritual and gracious is included in that comprehensive expression. Another promise of a mixed character, is, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15 ) The day of trouble is not limited to spiritual trouble, but it includes every kind of trouble. Art thou in temporal trouble? Is thy body afflicted? Art thou suffering in circumstances? "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will answer, and deliver thee." But also, if it be spiritual trouble, the promise still runs the

same—"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." So that the promise is not merely temporal, not merely spiritual, but of a mixed character, including both trouble temporal and trouble spiritual.

But there are other promises, which are given to the Lord's people, entirely spiritual, which have respect to their state and case as living souls. For instance—

1. There is the *promise of eternal life*. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2.) What a sweet feeling is raised up in the soul (I have felt it for myself) by the prospect of immortality! What a sweet text is that, 2 Tim. 1:9, 10, "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Our nature shrinks from annihilation. I have read of an infidel who on his death-bed even preferred an eternity of woe to actual annihilation—to ceasing to exist. There is a craving in the mind of man after immortality. No longer to be, to cease to exist, is repulsive to the mind of man. But when we can penetrate by the eye of faith into the realms of bliss, into the sanctuary of God, and believe that a glorious immortality awaits us, and when we drop our clay bodies, and become divested of the shell that hides the inner man of grace, our ransomed souls will mount up to be with Jesus, to see him face to face, and bathe in streams of endless bliss through the countless ages of eternity, there is something in the feeling unutterably glorious. There is something in immortality, a glorious immortality, an immortality of eternal bliss—there is something in the thought, when felt, when a confidence is raised up in the soul that we shall be clothed with immortality—there is something that feasts the heart with fat things, satisfies all the desires of the spirit, replenishes the sorrowful soul, and becomes indeed marrow and fatness to the believer, who longs not only to live, but to live for ever in the presence of his Lord.

2. Again; there is the promise of *pardon of sin*. "I will pardon whom I reserve." (Jer. 50:20.) And all the Lord's people must have this promise sealed upon their heart in time, if ever they are to see Christ as he is in eternity. They never go out of this world in an unpardoned state; remission of sins is given by the Lord of life and glory, who is "exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31.) And every God-taught soul is in one of these two states—either enjoying, or having enjoyed, the felt application of the atoning blood of Jesus, giving him the pardon of his sins, or else hungering, thirsting, begging, pleading, and desiring to experience the sweet sensations in his soul which the pardon of sin brings.

3. *Preservation to the end* is another promise in the word of truth. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5); "He will keep the feet of his saints" (1 Sam. 2:9); "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me." (Isa. 8:18.) Bringing the elect through every storm, setting all the ransomed before the throne of the Almighty for ever, deliverance from every temptation, escape from every snare, and complete salvation from every foe, are all secured to the heirs of promise in the word of truth. How needful this promise of preservation to the end is for the Lord's people to experience, when they discover what hearts they possess, and how perpetually they are departing from the Lord; when they see what they have to contend with from within and from without; when they know that an ever watchful enemy is perpetually endeavouring to ensnare, or to assail their souls; when they view the depth of nature's corruption; when the hidden evils of their heart are dissected by the keen anatomizing knife of the Spirit; when they feel leprous to the core, and know that they have no power and no strength to keep themselves from falling! How sweet, how precious, how suitable it is then to believe that they are written in the book of life, that their names are cut in Jesus' breast and worn on Jesus' shoulder, that he will preserve them to the end, and bring them home through every storm.

4. *Supplies of grace and strength as they are needed*—according to the words, "As thy day is, so thy strength shall be" (Deut. 33:5)—is another promise most suitable to the Lord's poor, tried, and tempted family. Depend upon it, the Lord's family have to go to heaven through much tribulation. So says the unerring word of truth, and so speaks the experience of every God-taught soul. Now, in these seasons of trouble, in these painful exercises, in these perplexing trials, the Lord's people need strength; and the Lord sends these trials in order to drain and exhaust them of creature strength. Such is the self-righteousness of our heart—such the legality intertwined with every fibre of our natural disposition, that we shall cleave to our own righteousness as long as there is a thread to cleave to; we shall stand in our own strength as long as there is a point to stand upon; we shall lean upon our own wisdom as long as a particle remains. In order, then, to exhaust us, drain us, strip us, and purge us of this pharisaic leaven, the Lord sends trials, temptations, exercises, sorrows, and perplexities. What is their effect? To teach us our weakness, and bring us to that only spot, where God and the sinner meet—the spot of creature helplessness. Do you not see how this was shown in the experience of the Apostle Paul? how, after he had been caught up into the third heavens, had heard unspeakable words, and had his soul ravished with the most blissful revelations, he had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him? Why was this? To teach him his weakness; was it not? Therefore, when he had been taught his weakness by it, he found the strength of Christ made perfect in that weakness, according to the Lord's own solution of that most painful enigma of Paul's heart. He then could use those wonderful words, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then am I strong. (2 Cor. 12:9, 10.) When he felt that just in proportion as all his own strength drained away, decayed, and became utter weakness, the strength of the Lord of life and glory was made perfect in his soul he could then glory in his poverty, in his

weakness, in his nothingness, from feeling the blessedness and sweetness of the strength of Christ being made perfect in him. In order, therefore, to bring us to this spot, to know experimentally—and there is no other knowledge worth a straw—to know in our soul (and there is no other knowledge will stand in the day of judgment)—in order to know experimentally the strength of Christ, and feel it to be more than a doctrine, a notion, or a speculation—to know it as an eternal reality, tasted by the inward palate of our soul, descried by the eyes of living faith in the conscience, and felt as actually as anything we can palpably touch—in order to have this experience wrought into our hearts with divine power, we must be brought to this spot—to feel our own utter weakness. Now, when we are brought here, we are brought into the very situation that corresponds with the promise. To use a familiar figure, the promise and our condition is as the mortice to the tenon. The mortice is nothing without the tenon—the tenon is nothing without the mortice; but when the mortice and the tenon come together, and fit into each other, then there is a close joint. So spiritually. Here is the promise—that is the tenon; but if I have no place in my heart for that promise to enter into, there is no junction—it is like putting the tenon against a plank or a wall—there is no union. There must be a cut made—something that the tenon can enter into, before there is a junction. So spiritually, I must have such a work of grace upon my conscience, and be brought into that peculiar place in living experience to which the promise is adapted; and when the Holy Spirit puts this promise into my heart, he not merely puts the tenon in, but cements it firm and fast by his own heavenly unction.

But time would fail me to gather even a few more ears of the rich harvest of promise in God's word. I could no more glean up the rich promises in the Bible than I could carry the produce of a whole field of corn upon my head. I must therefore pass on to the second of my discourse, which is to shew, how the Lord's people come to inherit the promises.

II .—Let us look a little into the expression, "inherit." I love, if the

Lord give the wisdom, to dive beneath the surface, beneath the letter, into the vein of experience below. Look, then, at the word "inherit." It is a familiar figure taken from heirship, the right and title which the son has to his father's property. Now inheritance without possession is but a name. We sometimes hear of heirs presumptive, and of heirs apparent. But the heir presumptive is a very different thing from being the heir apparent. The heir presumptive may be entirely shut out of the property by the coming in of the heir apparent. Many people have what I call a presumptive inheritance. They are not the children of the heavenly Parent, but they stand in such a relation to God as Eliezer of Damascus stood to Abraham. We hear the complaint of the father of the faithful, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward (or rather, 'heir') of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen.15:2.) Who was Eliezer? He was Abraham's servant, a faithful servant: but he had not sprung from Abraham's loins. But when the Lord gave Abraham Isaac, the heir of promise, what became of Eliezer of Damascus? Had he any right, any title, any inheritance when the son came? No; we read, "Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac;" (Gen. 25:5); while Eliezer had nothing but servant's wages, for he had nothing more that he could claim. Now this is exactly the difference between servants in God's house and sons in God's house. Mere professors, who are not born of the Spirit, are not heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, but mere servants. But the true-born sons are children of the living God, members of the body of Christ, branches of the true vine, sheep of the good Shepherd, the Bridegroom's wife, the Spouse of the Lamb. These are the heirs, the true heirs, because they are inheritors by birth.

But there is a being put into a possession of the inheritance. The Apostle in the Epistle to the Galatians speaks, "Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." (5:1.) There is such a thing then as a child of God being an heir, and yet being, in his feelings, in no way different from a servant; in other words, not yet put into a feeling enjoyment of the inheritance, not able to call God "Abba Father," not able to feel the Spirit of adoption in his heart, not

able to come with holy familiarity to his heavenly feet. This is because the spirit of bondage and servility works in him unto death; perfect love has not been shed abroad in his heart to cast out fear, which hath torment.

But the Apostle in the text points out how we come to inherit the promises. Here they are in God's word. But will their being in God's word give me a title to them? Should I not be a madman, if, as I passed through the country at the rapid rate at which travellers now travel, I should lay claim to all the various lands that meet the eye? I remember well, when I was a boy, there used to be a woman who walked up and down every day before the Bank—perhaps some of you remember her—dressed in widow's weeds; and I believe she had this delusion in her mind, that all the money in the Bank belonged to her. That was her insanity. Are those a whit less mad who think because the promises are in the word of God they have a claim to them? Let a man go into the Bank tomorrow, and lay claim to the money, the claimant would be seized by the police as a madman. Not a whit less mad are those spiritually, whatever verdict might be passed upon them by a commission of lunacy, who, without a title, venture to lay claim to the treasures laid up in God's word of truth.

There are two things, then, necessary to be wrought in a man's conscience by the Spirit of God before he inherits the promises; one is, *the grace of faith*—the other is, *the grace of patience*. "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them"—treading in their footsteps, in the good old paths that were cast up by the saints of old, the Old Testament worthies, who fought the battle, gained the victory, and now wear the crown—"that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." These two gifts and graces, then, of the Spirit are absolutely indispensable, that we may, in soul feeling, and in personal experience, come into the possession and enjoyment of the promises of God's word.

The first is, *faith*. There are two kinds of faith. There is faith

natural, and faith spiritual; there is faith temporal, and faith the work of God upon the heart, which lasts all through the pilgrimage of the favoured saint until landed in glory. There is a faith that can move mountains, but utterly unconnected with the sister graces of hope and love. There is a faith which can do great things in the eyes of man; and yet only a delusion of Satan, a mere breath of nature. Now, that faith never can put us into possession of the promises. The promises are of a spiritual kind; they must therefore be laid hold of by a spiritual hand. A dead hand cannot handle the word of God so as to bring life and power into the soul. The ancients used to put a piece of money into the hands of their corpses, to pay toll to Charon on coming to the infernal regions. But what sensation had that clay, cold hand of the money entrusted to it? So spiritually. If my hand be dead—if my faith, in other words, be not of divine operation—can I handle the living words of the living God? I need spiritual hands to handle spiritual things, I need spiritual eyes to see spiritual objects, I need spiritual ears to hear spiritual sounds, I need spiritual feet to walk in spiritual paths, I need a spiritual heart to embrace and love the truth as it is in Jesus. Thus, "without faith it is impossible to please God." We cannot realise any one portion of God's truth in our own experience without faith; and if we do not realize it there, it is but a name, but a notion, but a theory. It is the grand province of faith to receive what God gives, to receive it as from God, to receive it with simplicity, sincerity, humility, tenderness, contrition, hope, confidence. Do we not see this set forth and verified in the experience of the saints? Look at Abraham's faith. He is set forth in Scripture as the pattern of them that believe, as the father of the faithful. Was not Abraham's faith dependent upon the word of God? Did not God say to him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he said, so shall thy seed be." (Gen. 15:5.) Was not that promise laid hold of in Abraham's soul by the hand of living faith; and was not that imputed to him for righteousness? Now you will observe that Abraham's faith never wandered (shall I used the word?) into generalities. Abraham's faith was not like a bark committed to the wide ocean without sail, rudder, or compass. It had a certain point in view; it looked

to one object, and one object only. It was like a well fitted ship upon the sea bound to one destination, sailing thither by a good chart, guided according to a certain preordained course. Abraham's faith was not wandering here and there, like a dismasted ship, through loose generalities; but it dwelt upon the word of God dropped into his heart. He trusted it and relied upon that word, and felt in his soul the sweet experience of it. That faith God honoured; that faith God crowned by giving him the fulfilment of the promise which he himself had given.

Another mark of Abraham's faith was, that it was severely tried. He waited for the promise twenty-four years, amid the unbelief of his carnal heart, and every other obstacle which rose in the way. Now, if I am walking in the footsteps of our father; (and if we walk not in the steps of our father Abraham, we may call ourselves believers, but we call ourselves so in vain)—I say, if we walk in the steps of our father Abraham, our faith will be of precisely the same nature as our father Abraham's was. It will not be as strong. The Lord gave it to him as a pattern. Abraham's faith therefore was exceedingly strong; and Abraham's faith was exceedingly tried, because it was so strong. We shall not, then, have it so strong. I think the offering up of Isaac upon the altar was the greatest act of faith the world has ever seen, or will see, with one exception, and that is, the faith of the Lord of life and glory on the cross—the faith of Jesus Christ in his human nature. That was indeed the greatest faith the world ever saw, or will see. But next to that, the type and figure of it—the offering up of Isaac by his father—seems to be the greatest exploit of faith the world ever witnessed, or ever will witness. Your faith, then, will not be as strong as Abraham's was; but still you will walk in the same footsteps as Abraham; and if this be the case, your faith will deal with the word of God just in the same way as Abraham's faith dealt with the word of God. Did not Abraham's faith restrict itself to one certain definite promise, cleave to it, hang upon it, rely upon it, trust in it, venture upon the faithfulness of it? Our faith, if like Abraham's, will be exactly similar. The Lord said, in the days of old to his bitter enemies, the Pharisees, "My word hath no place in you." That was the mark of unregeneracy. To

use my former illustration—there was no mortice for the tenon—no empty, no broken, no humble, no tender heart for the word of God to come into. And the Apostle, speaking of the Old Testament Hebrews—those of them who were not the Lord's people—says, "The word preached did not profit them;" and he tells us why—because "it was not mixed with faith in them that heard it." In other words, they heard the gospel preached; but not having faith mixed with it, turning it into a living reality, so as to mingle with it, and receive it in all its blessed fulness, it did not profit their souls.

If our faith, then, be like Abraham's it will not be dealing with loose generalities. We shall not read a chapter of God's word, and have faith upon every verse; but we shall believe simply what we receive into our heart and conscience. Does God speak to our soul? Does he whisper a word or two to the conscience? Does he apply a promise with his own divine savour and unction? Does our eye see, our ear hear, our heart feel any portion of God's word? Is it sweet and savoury? Does it drop like honey and the honeycomb? Does dew, savour, unction, and power attend it? Immediately that takes place, faith springs up in the soul, embraces it, realizes it, mixes with, enters into the beauty of it, and eventually is honoured with the full enjoyment of it. I will endeavour to illustrate this by a figure. My eye is formed to see objects—my ear is formed to hear objects—my hand is formed to touch objects. Now, as my eye sees, as my ear hears, as my hand touches, certain sensations are produced in me. These sensations produce ideas. If I look out into infinite space, I see nothing—my eye receives into it no object. In the dead season of night, when all is still, my ear hears nothing. In stretching forth my hand into the air, I touch nothing. Must not the eye, must not the ear, must not the hand have an object before each sense can act? So spiritually. Faith is the eye of the soul, faith is the ear of the soul, faith is the hand of the soul; for faith sees, hears and touches. Now if there be no object, faith cannot see any more than the eye can see; faith cannot hear any more than the ear can hear; faith cannot touch any more than the hand can touch. But when an object comes, the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand

touches, and sensation is produced. So when Christ appears, his blood felt in the conscience, his love is received into the heart, and his righteousness revealed; faith is raised up in the soul. But if these objects of faith are not revealed, we can no more see them than we can touch the stars. If these objects be hidden or absent, though I may have faith as a grace in my soul, it will lie still and dormant till the object comes before it.

Now all that the Lord drops into your heart with power—all that you see of beauty and glory in Jesus—all that your soul flows out after in tender affection as to the living God—all that your conscience embraces—all that encourages, softens, impresses, revives, humbles, melts out of God's word—faith receives, mixes with, feeds upon, enjoys, turns into nutriment, digests, and issues forth in the fruits and graces of the Spirit. The word of God is, if I may use the illustration, as food; but do we not need a stomach to receive it? You may put the word of God into a spiritually dead stomach, as the ancients put money into the dead man's hand, and it corrupts there with the corrupt corpse. So the word of God, put into a dead man's stomach does but increase his corruption, turning the doctrines of the gospel into licentiousness. Those good doctrines which in a living stomach turn to good food, and nourish the whole frame, in a dead stomach, are like good food in a corpse, which corrupts and rots in the corrupt and rotten body. We want, then, living faith in the soul, in order to receive this spiritual food. Now, thus it is that we find many of the Lord's people who are doubting, fearing, perplexed, exercised, tempted, have living faith, while many who think they have great faith have not a solitary grain. It is this which keeps them down that they dare not say they are what they are not. They dare not lay claim to anything that God does not give. They can only feed upon such things as the Lord puts into their hearts. But presumptuous professors can draw comfort from every promise and every doctrine, without knowing anything of their blessed bestowment by God the Spirit. So that, if we look at what faith is and what faith does, we shall often find in the heart of a poor trembling sinner, who will perhaps almost cut himself off as not having a grain of faith in his soul, the grace of

God in active operation, while others, with high-sounding names, great pretentious, and strong confidence, are dead in unbelief and infidelity.

2. But there is another way pointed out, and that closely connected with the other, by which we become inheritors of the promise—*patience*. What is patience? It means waiting, endurance. Was not this the case with Abraham? "So after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." Now, my friends, wherever the Lord gives faith he tries that faith. What says the Apostle Peter? "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7.) It is "the trial of faith," not faith itself, that is "precious." The trial of faith is eminently precious. Wherever true faith is in the soul it must be tried. This trial is the trial of patience. It is the trial of faith which proves its reality. It is the fire that burns away the dross; the fan that winnows away the chaff; the water that drowns presumption.

Now patience is necessary in order to prove the genuineness and reality of faith. The Lord generally—I may say invariably—does not accomplish his purposes at once. He usually—I might say almost invariably—works by gradations. Is not this the case in creation? Do we see the oak starting up in all its gigantic proportion in one day? Is not a tiny acorn committed to the ground; and is not the giant oak, whose huge limbs we admire, the growth of a century? Men and women are years growing up to their full stature. So spiritually, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Faith in the soul is of slow growth for the most part; for the Lord takes care that every step in the path shall be tried by the perplexities and difficulties that surround it. And he has appointed this that it may be a means of distinguishing the faith of God's elect from the faith of those who have a name to live while dead. They apostatize and turn away from the faith. Like the stony ground hearers, they believe for a time, but in temptation fall away. The various hindrances of nature, sense, and reason, sin, the devil, and the world get the better of them;

thus they turn back, often give up all profession of religion, and die in their sins. But the Lord's people cannot so die. Their faith is of a lasting nature, because what God doth he doth for ever. Thus their faith stands every storm and endures for ever.

This, then, is the use, this the end of patience—that it enables the soul not only to plead, to beg, and to cry, but also to wait. Its work is to believe against infidelity, hope against despondency, trust in God in spite of nature, sense, and reason—look to God in the dark—hope in God when hope is well nigh lost, when the waves and surges of despair beat upon the head. Thus there is need of patience on the one hand, and of faith on the other, to inherit the promises. Faith is necessary as the hand of the soul to lay hold of them; patience is necessary to wait for their fulfilment. Faith is necessary to give us soul possession and soul enjoyment of the glorious realities of God's truth; patience is necessary to prove to ourselves and to others that we are really partakers of the faith of God's elect.

Now this is the way in which we inherit the promises. O how different from the way of man's devising! O how different from what is usually preached up as the way to come into the possession of them! Persons would fain try to teach us that all we have to do is to take God's word, read this and that promise, and implicitly believe, and lay claim to, and enjoy it. Was that Abraham's faith? Was that David's faith? Was he not hunted upon the mountains, with his life in his hand? Was that the faith of Jesus, who learned obedience through suffering? Was that the faith of the ancient worthies—"those who subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness," &c.? Was their faith of this easy, slipshod nature whom John saw with palms in their hands? Did they not wade through seas of tribulation till they came to that blessed land where the palms of victory are in their hands, and the songs of triumph in their mouths? Are you and I to get to heaven by an easy path, while they went theirs by a rough one? How, if shame could enter heaven, we should blush and hang down our heads with shame, as we stood by the side of the suffering heroes, who had waded there through seas of trouble.

There is no getting to heaven without tribulation. I do not define (who can define?) how long the trial, trouble, or temptation shall last. But if we walk not in a path of trial, tribulation, temptation, exercise, and sorrow, what do we know of the promises?—what do we know of the sweet enjoyment of the promises? We have to inherit them through faith and patience; and depend upon it, if you are ever to enjoy them here in their sweetness, and hope to enjoy the blessed fulfilment of them hereafter in the realms of eternal bliss, we must be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit these glorious promises."

## Proving All Things

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 2, 1859

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." 1 Thess. 5:21

In this business scene in which our earthly lot is cast—in this buying, selling, toiling, trafficking every-day world, where many a stout swimmer is struggling hard for life, how little are men of business, generally speaking, liable to be imposed upon by plausible pretexts, or to be deceived by specious pretences. Knowing the vast amount of trickery practised in every trade, and what fraudulent, dishonest conduct men can be guilty of to obtain credit or secure profit, how the man of business is armed at all points to detect the attempted fraud, and how alive he is to every appearance calculated to arouse suspicion; so that no smooth words, no apparent show of honesty, can impose upon him, if he have reason to suspect that a person has designs upon his purse, or to take advantage of his simplicity. How carefully does the buyer examine the goods of the seller, that he may not be deceived by a smooth face either of the manufacture or of the manufacturer; and how the seller scrutinizes with as keen a glance the bills and cheques of the buyer that he may not give credit to a bankrupt speculator. Nor is this confined to the higher walks of business, to the sellers by the ton and the buyers by the six months' bill: it runs through every transaction where money may be gained or lost; so that the poor old woman who receives her half-crown a week from the relieving officer is as careful to examine her money, if the coin be suspicious, as a banker's clerk scrutinizes a doubtful cheque, or as the careful tradesman chinks a dull-looking sovereign on the counter. But why all this suspicion? Why all this close and constant watchfulness against deception? Why are persons so keenly alive to imposition in money matters except for these two reasons? First, they know how fraud everywhere abounds, that there is scarcely a trade or profession in which there are not dishonest men and dishonest

practices; and secondly, because they know that if they are deceived by them, they are deceived to their own injury—that the trader will soon be in the Gazette, or at least incur serious loss, unless he be as much on his guard against the customer by day as he is against the thief by night.

But how comes it to pass that men who are so keenly alive to fraud and trickery in the every-day business of life, are so easily imposed upon in the solemn matters of religion? How is it that men who could not be deceived by any pretext, and who even suspect deception where none was intended, almost assuming as an axiom that every man was dishonest till clearly proved to be the contrary, yet can believe every lie of Satan and of their own heart, can think well of their own state for eternity without one spiritual evidence in their favour, and even persuade themselves that they shall go to heaven when their whole life manifestly proves that they are on the broad road that leads to destruction! Is not this willingness to be deceived a fatal mark? And does it not evidently show that the things of time and sense are with such men of far deeper importance than the solemn matters of eternity; and that the consideration of a few pounds or a few pence is in their eyes a weightier question than whether their soul be saved or damned—whether heaven or hell is to be their everlasting portion?

I admire very much what I may call the manly nobility of our divine religion: I call it a divine religion, for no less than God himself is its Source and Fountain. He has revealed it as with a ray of light in the inspired page, and he himself works it with a divine power in the heart. Sprung, then, of such a heavenly birth, when it shows its lovely face among the children of men, it courts inquiry; nor is it afraid of being examined by friend or foe, for it bears stamped upon it the very image of God himself. The word of truth both as we have it in our hands and as we have it in our hearts, comes before the eyes of men and says, if not in so many words, yet by the very aspect it wears—"Examine me for yourselves: I can bear the light. I want no shroud, no concealment. Look at me fairly in the face, and say whether I be

not the truth of God." Nor does it want witnesses that it can speak with this authority both among sinners and saints; for such an impress of divine power is stamped upon the word of truth, that it plants even in men's consciences who do not fear God the conviction that it is the very language of Jehovah himself. Nor need I say that every saint has a witness in his own bosom to the truth and power of God's word as made spirit and life to his own soul. And so, in my feeble and faint way, I trust I may say to all whose ears my voice may reach, of the doctrines I preach, the experience I contend for, and the practice I enforce, Examine them for yourselves; see whether they be agreeable to the truth as it is in Jesus—in harmony with the oracles of God and the experience of the saints. I hold no novel doctrines, I entertain no secret or mysterious views. I preach what I am taught in my own heart out of the Scriptures, and advance nothing but what is commended to my conscience as the truth of God. And in saying so, I do but adopt the language of the text, where the apostle enjoins upon the church of God at Thessalonica and upon all into whose hands this epistle may come—"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

In opening up these words, as there must be some means of examination, for we cannot prove all things unless we know how to set about it, I shall, with God's blessing:

I.—Show, *First*, how we are to "prove all things." II.—

*Secondly*, what the things are which we are thus to prove.

III.—*Thirdly*, that as in examining such a variety of matters we shall no doubt find much to reject, what we are *to cast aside*.

IV .—*Fourthly*, as there will be some to be retained, what we are to hold fast: "*Hold fast that which is good.*"

I.—Before then we can prove all things, we must know how to set about it. A figure or two may help us to see this more clearly. A mathematician, for instance, might put before you a

mathematical problem, and say "Prove this." Most of you would probably answer, "I cannot do it: I don't even know how to begin: it is a subject beyond my power." Or take a simpler figure: a schoolmaster might set a boy, who had no knowledge of arithmetic beyond the first four simple rules, a sum in the rule of three. The boy would say at once, "I cannot do it: I have not got so far." So if we are to act upon the apostolic exhortation, "Prove all things," we must know *how* these things are to be proved, or else we shall be in the position of the person ignorant of mathematics before whom a problem is set, or of the boy at school who has a sum put before him beyond his present reach.

Having thus shown you the *necessity* of knowing how to set about proving all things, I shall now, with God's blessing, show you its *nature*; in other words, how we are to accomplish this prescribed task, and what is requisite to do it wisely and well, scripturally and experimentally, that we may neither ignorantly or wilfully be deceived ourselves, nor deceive others.

1. The first requisite is an *unerring standard* to prove all things by. Take an illustration from an object before your eyes. Before this building was erected, there was a certain plan conceived in the mind of the architect. This plan he drew out upon paper according to scale; and the builder who worked upon the plan in due time set it out. Now if, in setting out the foundation, the builder had worked by a two-foot rule which was by some accident two inches too short, or had used a tape measure which, through some error, had been wrongly marked, it would be found, when the building was measured after its completion, that it did not agree with the plan; that a mistake somehow had been made, which, being investigated, would bring out the fact that the builder had worked by a measure not of the standard length. The same necessity for an unerring standard runs through every weight and every measure, every coin and calculation, is enforced by rigorous laws and heavy penalties, and lies at the foundation of every mercantile transaction, and, in fact, the whole business of every-day life. In divine matters, if we are to prove all things, it is no less imperative at the very outset to have an unerring standard, by which everything in religion may be tested and

weighed. This unerring standard we have *in the word of God*. God the Holy Ghost has inspired every part of the Scriptures of truth which we hold in our hands. The Bible, therefore, is our standard: we have no other. Here it lies open upon my pulpit before all your eyes as a witness for me or against me, whether I make it my standard or not. Every doctrine, every branch of experience, and every precept that I enforce upon your conscience are contained in the Book of God. By this unerring, infallible standard, all my preaching, all other men's preaching, is to be measured, weighed, and proved—so that no doctrine advanced by me or by any other man is to be received as a doctrine according to godliness which is not found in the word of truth; no experience is to be admitted as genuine which is not in accordance with the experience of God's saints as revealed in scripture; nor is any precept or practice to be enforced which is not in the pages of the inspired record, as written there by the finger of him who cannot lie.

2. But we want something further still before we can prove all things. All unerring standard is not sufficient, unless we possess *skill* to use it. Let me illustrate this by a figure or two. You might go into an astronomical observatory and there see a great variety of beautiful instruments, constructed with the greatest skill to measure the angular distances of the heavenly bodies, and determine the time to the tenth of a second; and you might be asked to observe a transit, or measure the distance of a particular star from the moon. You would answer, "I cannot do it; I do not know even the names or uses of these curious contrivances." Here, then, are beautiful instruments, but you cannot use them for want of knowledge and skill. Or take another case. You might be going to Australia and suffer shipwreck on the voyage; but you might escape in the ship's boat, with compass, sextant, chart, almanac, and chronometer. Now the first question would be which course to steer to reach land. This may be ascertained by the instruments, and the boat's crew might say to you, "Take the sextant and chronometer, and tell us our exact latitude and longitude;" but you would reply, "I have not the skill to do it. I have never taken an observation with the sextant in my life." Then you might all be cast away with the means of safety in

your hands for want of skill to use them. So in grace. Here is the word of truth, the Bible, in itself compass, chart, sextant, and every means of escaping the shipwreck of the fall and reaching the heavenly harbour. But being a divine book, you must have *divine skill* to understand and make use of it; in other words, you must have the *teaching of the Holy Ghost* in your heart that you may understand the Scriptures, and use the standard of truth with skilful eye and hand. The apostle speaks of those who are "unskilful in the word of righteousness" (Heb. 4:13); and tells his beloved Timothy that the Scriptures are able to make him wise unto salvation if rightly used, that is, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:15.) The Holy Spirit, then, must enlighten our understanding, or else we are in the same position as the man who goes into the observatory and sees instruments which he cannot use, or as the shipwrecked voyager in the boat who cannot avail himself of the appliances within his reach. So the Bible is in well-nigh every house and every hand; it is read in every church and chapel, and in almost every family; but without the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit it is no more use towards salvation than a sextant in the hand of a landsman to ascertain the position of the ship.

3. Then there is a third thing necessary still, and that is, *honesty of purpose*. See how this stands in human matters. A nobleman might visit his estate to be surveyed, and might employ a surveyor who thoroughly understood his business, but who was dishonest. He might have with him the best instruments—the Gunter's chain, the theodolite, the spirit-level, the field-book, and every other requisite for a first-class survey; but if he purposely measure every field wrong, of what avail are his unerring instruments, or his practical skill in their use? Or, to take a more familiar figure, a tradesman may have the very best scales and weights on his counter that money can buy; but of what advantage is this to the customer if he puts his thumb upon the scale which holds the article to be weighed? So with the word of God; it is an unerring standard, but it may be used dishonestly as well as unskilfully. There are those who, "wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16), and there are those who

"handle the word deceitfully." (2 Cor. 4:2.) The third requisite, therefore, is that "good and honest heart" which the Lord speaks of in the parable of the sower, and by which the fruitful hearer is specially distinguished. This is produced by *the implanting of godly fear*, which makes the heart honest, the conscience tender, and the soul sincere.

Let me, for the sake of clearness, recapitulate the three necessary requisites before you can "prove all things:"—First, you must have an *unerring standard*, or you are like a man measuring with a faulty measure, or weighing with uneven scales. This unerring standard we have in the word of truth. Secondly, you must have *skill to use it*; in other words, you must have the light of God in your understanding, and the life of God in your heart. And thirdly, you must have *an honest purpose*; in other words, the fear of God in a tender conscience, that you may make a right use of God's word, whether that word be for your condemnation or for your justification.

II. Now I come to my second point, which is—*what the things* are thus to be proved. A Christian has to prove everything as he goes along. Every step of the way, first and last, has to be tried over and over again, backwards and forwards, up and down, inside and out. For as judgment begins at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17), and the Lord judges and acquits the righteous before he judges and condemns the ungodly, so all true spiritual judgment begins at home. A man must be a criminal before he can be a judge, be condemned and acquitted himself before he can sit in judgment on others. But many now assume the crime and put on the black cap, whose right place would be the criminal's bar; and lift up the sword of judgment, when they ought to have the handcuffs on their own wrists. But a Christian has first to prove the genuineness of *his own* religion, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." (2 Cor. 13:5.) He has to weigh it according to the word of truth, by the light of divine teaching in his heart, and by the working of godly fear in his conscience. Thus he who would walk before God in truth with an upright heart, in the very light of his countenance, has much to

do—yea, he has everything to do. When we look at what is to be done, how vast the precept, how wide the exhortation, that he has to prove all things, well may we say, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." To carry out a precept like this gives a Christian a daily, I may go further, an hourly task. As "all things" come before his eyes, rise up from time to time, without or within, in the church or in the world, in providence or in grace, if he is to act upon the apostolic exhortation, "Prove all things," and is to do it as I have pointed out, it will give him not only a sum to be done every day, but almost every hour of his life.

But as the expression "all things" is so wide we shall lose ourselves in generals if I attempt to grasp the whole. We will then come to particulars; for unless I come to some stated points, we may lose ourselves in a labyrinth of confusion.

Let me then show some of the most marked of the "all things" which the saint of God has spiritually and experimentally to prove.

I. And, first, let us view them *as regards himself*;—

1. The first thing that he proves, is *the very being of God*; for though he may have by tradition, by the dictates of natural conscience, or by the external manifestations of God in creation, a faint glimmering light to see that there is a God, so as to cause a degree of fear and bondage towards that great and glorious Being of whom he has this dim trace, yet he has no real acquaintance with him such as dwells in a regenerate breast. Has not the Lord himself said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?" (John 17:3.) And how can we know the only true God, or come to him in prayer unless we first believe that he exists? And so the Apostle speaks, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." We have then to prove by faith the very being of a God; that he searches and knows us; that he compasses our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. (Psalm 139:1, 2, 3.) This is not a matter of reasoning, but a gracious

feeling, a reverential conviction, an inward teaching, a divine persuasion communicated by the Spirit of God when he applies the word of truth to the conscience, and thus differs not so much in degree as in nature from any other knowledge of God's being, such as the unregenerate may possess.

2. But we have to prove, secondly, not only that God *is*, but that he is *what* the Scripture has declared him to be: unspeakably *holy*, intrinsically *just*, and *pure* beyond all thought and all expression; so holy that the very heavens are not clean in his sight, and he chargeth his angels with folly; so pure, that he cannot behold evil and cannot look on iniquity. (Hab. 1:13.) There is no line of truth that the Holy Spirit writes upon the conscience with a firmer hand, than this inward testimony to the holiness, purity, justice, and majesty of God. It enters into every gracious feeling concerning him; it forms the living breath of every warm petition, indeed, of all spiritual prayer and supplication; it bows down the saint upon his knees with holy reverence before the majesty of heaven, penetrating his soul with a godly fear and awe of the great and glorious, self-existent "I AM." Unless you were checked in drawing near to the mercy-seat by some believing apprehension of the greatness, glory, justice, holiness, and purity of God, you would rush into his presence in daring confidence and arrogant presumption. But knowing and feeling that he is a consuming fire, you serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear. (Heb. 12:28, 29.) And all this you daily prove by the word of God in your hands, the light of life in your heart, and the fear of God in your conscience.

3. The child of grace has also to prove that this great and glorious God has *revealed his justice and righteousness in a holy law*; that he has not left a knowledge of his justice and of his wrath against sin to mere impressions made upon the mind, to mere feelings that come and go, or to fluctuating sensations of guilt and fear that may spring up in the heart, for a measure of these the very heathen had; but that he has given a permanent record in the word of truth to his righteousness by revealing it in a holy law given with every accompaniment of terror from heaven. The

justice of God dwelt in his eternal bosom before he gave it expression in a holy law. So in human legislature, justice exists in the bosom of Parliament before an act is passed to embody it. Some new crime, for instance, bursts forth which must be punished and suppressed. This is done by a law passed against it; but the justice which condemns the crime existed in the breast of Parliament before expression was given to it in a written statute. So it is with the law of God. The law is the expression of God's holiness—the declaration of God's justice; and as all laws must have penalties for disobedience, this also has its penalty, for the divine Law-giver declares as in a voice of thunder, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." When then, the Spirit of God animates the law, puts breath into it, gives it a voice, and speaks through it to the conscience, then it becomes the living expression of the justice and holiness of God, and the soul falls before it: condemned by this terrible sentence, it puts its mouth in the dust, and becomes guilty before God. Thus it proves that God is not only eternally and intrinsically just, but that he is just in a condemning law, as revealed in the Scriptures, that unerring standard, shown to the conscience in the light and life of the Spirit, and felt therein by the inward operation of the fear of God.

4. The Christian also proves that nothing *escapes the eyes* of this just and holy God; that he lays bare every secret thought, searches every hidden purpose, and scrutinizes every desire and every movement of the mind. He thus discovers and brings to light all the secret sins of the heart. Men in general take no notice of heart sins: if they can keep from sins in life, from open acts of immorality, they are satisfied. What passes in the chambers of imagery they neither see nor feel. Not so with the child of grace: he knows the experience described in Psalm 139. He carries about with him the secret conviction that the eye of God reads every thought. Every inward movement of pride and self-righteousness, rebellion, discontent, peevishness, fretfulness, lust, and wantonness, he inwardly feels that the eye of God reads all, marks all, condemns by his righteous law all, and, because he is so intrinsically pure, hates and abhors all. Thus he proves,

amongst the "all things," which are weighed up and measured in the inward court of conscience by the unerring standard of the word of truth, the light of the Spirit's teaching, and the workings of godly fear, that he is a sinner before God, and that of a deeper dye and more crimson hue than any other transgressor, for he sees and knows his own heart, which nobody else can see or know. He is indeed aware that many may have sinned more deeply and grossly as regards outward acts; but he feels that no one can have sinned inwardly more foully and continually than he; and this makes him say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5, 6.)

5. But he also proves that *he has no strength* to believe, to hope or to love; and he is led, from the testimony of the Blessed Spirit, to see that in and by the Adam-fall he lost all power and all will Godward, and became dead in trespasses and sins, without help or hope. He thus becomes deeply convinced that he cannot by any means save or deliver his own soul from eternal death; that if saved, it must be by an act of sovereign grace; that mercy must come down to him, for he cannot come up to it; that the cord of love must be let down from heaven into his heart to lift him up into the bosom of God, for without it he must sink under the weight of his sins and the helplessness of his fallen, corrupt nature.

6. But he has much else to prove. He has not only to prove that salvation is of sovereign grace, by being persuaded that it must be sovereign to reach him, and thus to learn it negatively; but he must advance a step further still in this training school of instruction, this proving house of the weapons of Christian warfare. He has to prove that *salvation is treasured up in the Person and work of the Son of God*. Hitherto he has been proving what salvation is not; now he has to prove what salvation is. The previous work was to bring him out of self, to lay him low in the dust, and thus make him a fit subject for mercy. But he has now to prove where mercy is to be found, through whom it comes, and whence it is to be obtained. But he still proves it by the word

of truth, the teaching of the Spirit, and the operations of godly fear. As then the Lord the Spirit is pleased to enlighten the eyes of his understanding to see the Person and work of the Lord Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures, and to manifest him in some measure to his heart, he proves that there is salvation in the blood and obedience of God's dear Son, and in no other. As he has had to prove the justice of God in a broken law; so has he now in the same way to prove the mercy of God in a glorious gospel. He proves it by reading with believing eyes the testimony given to the Lord Jesus in the word of truth, the unerring standard; for his faith is founded upon nothing short of the inspired word of God. His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is no passing fancy, no warm mental emotion; it is no swelling of enthusiasm, airy flight of imagination, or dreamy, visionary fanaticism built on shadows. His faith rests upon the solid word of God—the sacred, inspired record. And this he proves by finding the instability of everything else; that feelings come and go, rise and sink, flow and ebb, like the ever-moving sea; that in them, apart from the word of truth, therefore, there is no dependence. Being often deeply tried not only about his faith, but the very grounds of his belief, he feels that without a firm foothold, faith itself cannot stand. To build for eternity, faith must build on a rock which cannot be moved; or, to change the figure, like Noah's dove, it wants something to rest upon, suitable to its nature. The dove sent out of the ark could not, like the raven, settle upon the floating carcasses destroyed by the deluge, nor rest upon the cold, dripping, foodless, shelterless mountain tops, though they were just emerging out of the general wreck. Upon the ark alone could she find rest for the sole of her foot; and when Noah put forth his hand and pulled her in unto him in the ark, she found herself fully at home again in her beloved nest. So with faith. Faith cannot rest upon fancy; it can only rest upon the solid truth of God, as revealed in the Scriptures. And when it comes into the truth of God, as Noah's dove came into the ark its own nest and home, then it finds rest and peace. I wish to express myself clearly here, as many persons think we build our faith and hope, not on the Scriptures, but on some mental feelings, or fancies of our own, distinct from the word of God. I do not, and cannot build my faith

on anything but what is revealed in the Bible; and I must do it because I have no other foothold for it to stand upon. Do you not feel the same, you who know anything of the trial of faith? You have had many a tossing up and down, and have often wanted a foothold for your faith to stand upon. You have tried to believe this or that doctrine, or to get into this or that experience; but you kept still falling short, for you found that your faith wanted something stronger than the testimony of men; you needed a solid foundation on which to build for eternity; for the things to be believed were so invisible and so mysterious that nothing but the word of God could suffice for your faith to stand upon and rest in. When, then, in this trial of faith, the truth of God as it stands revealed in the Scripture was applied to your heart by a divine power, then you found that there was a foothold for belief, and that your faith could then rest upon the inspired word of God, as a rock on which to build, for life and death, time and eternity. It was so with Abraham. When Abraham was looking forward to the birth of the promised seed, many a doubt or fear might have arisen in his mind as to whether he should have a son by Sarah. But he rested upon the word of promise, and thus obtained a foothold for his faith. As the apostle speaks, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." (Rom. 4:18.) Our faith must in the same way rest on the word of promise, that "by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb. 6:18.) Here then is the strong foundation, that God cannot lie, and that he has spoken by two immutable things, his word, and his oath. Thus in the gospel, which we hold in our hands, the Person and work, the love, blood, and righteousness of the Son of God, are revealed as with a ray of light to believing eyes. By the operation of the Holy Spirit on your heart, you believe the testimony thus given of Jesus; you credit God's truth; and by an unction from above, it is made life and power to your soul. Faith is thus raised up and drawn forth, and embraces the Lord Jesus Christ as thus revealed; and so the gospel becomes to you "the power of God unto salvation," for it is so to "every one that

believeth." (Rom. 1:16.) You believe with your heart unto righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ is the very and true, real and proper Son of God, and that being such by his very mode of subsistence, as a Person in the Godhead, he has taken into union with his own divine Person a sacred humanity, in which he has suffered, bled, and died, and by the offering of that sacred humanity upon the cross at Calvary, has finished the work which the Father gave him to do—which was, to bring in an everlasting righteousness, and to reconcile the church unto God.

7. But you want fully to prove *your interest therein*. You believe the doctrines which I have advanced to be true; you have no other hope, but what rests in and springs out of it: but you want to prove your clear interest in the blessing. When God the Spirit, then, is pleased to apply this glorious gospel to your heart; to reveal this precious Saviour to your soul; to sprinkle this atoning blood upon your conscience; to bring near this righteousness and to put it upon you, then you prove for yourself, that not only is Christ the Son of God, but that he is formed in you "the hope of glory;" that his blood not only cleanseth from all sin, but *you* from *your* sins; and that his righteousness justifies not only all the church of God, but your needy and naked soul, because you are a living member of that mystical body. And thus you prove the blessedness of the Gospel as a message of glad tidings, personally and individually, to yourself.

8. But there are other things which you have to prove, as well as those which I have thus far mentioned. You have to prove that the way to heaven is a *way of trial, temptation, and tribulation*. It is not a smooth and easy, but a rough, rugged, and thorny road. Events in providence and trials in grace are continually springing up from without or from within, to teach us that lesson. Family afflictions, illness of body, painful bereavements; losses in property, and a path extremely rough and rugged in a variety of outward circumstances, are usually allotted to God's family. And to this rough path from without, there are generally added many painful trials from within. Thus they are in no uncertainty as to whether the path Zion-ward be a way of tribulation, for they find

it to be so by almost daily experience: and when they examine it by the light of God's word, they find it there revealed, that "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." As, then, their minds are enlightened to see the way in which God's saints have trodden in all ages, as described in the Scriptures, they find it true more or less of all that "these are they which came out of great tribulation," and "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And as the fear of God springs up in their heart, they see that they too must suffer with Christ, that they may be also glorified together. Thus they prove that the way to heaven is a rough and thorny road by its harmonising with what is declared of it in the lively oracles of God, corresponding with the experience of the saints, from the days of righteous Abel, and agreeing with the way in which the Lord is personally leading them.

9. They have to prove also that God is *a faithful God*—that he has made a covenant with his dear Son and the Holy Spirit on their behalf, and that all his promises are "yea and amen in Christ Jesus to his own glory." But though they believe this from the testimony of God in the word, they find many things very much to try their faith in the faithfulness of God, as regards themselves. Dark clouds often gather round them, through which they can see no friendly beam of light appearing; temptations spring up to darken their evidences; God hides his face and they cannot behold him; the work of the Lord upon their souls, which once seemed plain and clear, is now cast in obscurity. Then they begin to doubt God's faithfulness. But after a time the clouds disperse, the sun shines, and the Lord lifts up once more upon them the light of his countenance; faith then springs up, hope again casts out its anchor, and love flows forth afresh to the God of all their mercies. They then see and believe that he is a faithful God; that what he has promised he will certainly fulfil; that he told them the way to heaven was through much tribulation; and that they must suffer with Christ, that they might also be glorified together. Thus they see he is faithful in leading them into fellowship with Christ's sufferings, that they may share his glory; for he told them they would be hated and despised by the world,

and would have to walk in a path of sorrow. They find, then, that he is faithful to his word, by leading them into those paths in which they find this trying experience verified. But they also find that all these things work together for their spiritual good, that none of these trials and afflictions do or can separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord. They discover also, that all these things are weighed out in due weight and measure, are all appointed by sovereign wisdom, and all timed by eternal love. Thus they prove the faithfulness of God—that even if he hide his face, he is faithful as well as when he discovers it; and that if he bring affliction, he is as faithful to his promise in laying it on, as in taking it off. Thus they prove that he is an unchanging and unchangeable God, one "in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning;" that all the fluctuations are in themselves; but that the Lord is of one mind and none can turn him, for he ever rests in his love.

ii. But they prove also many things not only as regards themselves, but *as regards others*. 1. They prove that God *has a people here below* whom he especially loves; whom he has redeemed by the blood of his dear Son and reconciled to himself; and whom he is training up for glory. They find these people are led for the most part into the same path as themselves; have the same temptations and trials, and enjoy the same blessings and mercies; have the same God and Father, the same elder Brother and Saviour, and the same Holy Spirit as their Teacher, Guide, and Comforter. This kindles love to this peculiar people; and as their hearts are drawn forth in love and affection towards them, they prove their possession of one of the first marks of regenerating grace.—"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14.) But they have also to prove that these brethren are compassed with many infirmities, and that they have to bear and to forbear with one another in love. Thus they learn that the church of God here below is no more perfect than themselves—than even those who possess the grace of God are often very crooked in their tempers, obstinate in their determinations, and prejudiced in their feelings; that jealousy and envy are soon awakened and slowly put to

sleep; that strife and division exist in well-nigh every church; and that many things are very trying in the choicest saints. But they thus prove their continual need of the exercise of much Christian forbearance, brotherly love, meekness, patience, and longsuffering, and the urgent necessity on their own part of avoiding all cause of contention and division.

2. They prove also, as the Lord leads them onward, that God has *servants of his own teaching, equipping, and commissioning*, whom he sends forth to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. If in rich mercy their lot is stately cast under a gospel ministry, they also prove to their soul's joy and establishment in the truth that the Lord does sometimes put into the mouth of his servant a message from himself, for he describes their experience, the feelings of their soul, their peculiar temptations, as well as their deliverances and blessings; and thus as eye sees to eye and heart feels to heart, they have an inward evidence that God does teach his servant and enables him to preach with light, life, and power to their conscience. They thus prove also that the word of God has in the hands of the Spirit a living effect upon the heart—that it can wound and that deeply at times, and that it can also blessedly heal; that there is in the word of grace, as preached by the servants of God, a power to comfort when cast down; a power to deliver from darkness and bondage; a power to stir up the life of God within, to revive the graces of the Spirit, and to deepen and carry on the work of faith, the patience of hope, and the labour of love.

iii. As thus led and taught and blessed, they prove also other things. 1. They prove *the power of prayer*: that though there is at times a sad destitution of prayer as well as of every other grace of the Spirit within, yet that the Lord does occasionally pour out upon them the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and that he answers the prayers that he thus indites. When, then, they get answers to prayer, not only sweet liberty of access to the throne, but inward and outward testimonies that their petitions are heard and answered, they prove that there is still a God in Israel, who yet says and fulfils what he says, "Call on me in the day of

trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15.)

2. They also prove the *blessedness of union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ*; that there is such a living and divine reality as being united to the Lord the Lamb, as a member to the body, as a branch to the stem, as a wife to the husband; and that this union and communion with the Son of God produces also union and communion with the Father and the Holy Ghost; and thus they have sacred fellowship with each Person of the Holy Trinity.

3. They also prove as a fruit of this union and communion other heavenly blessings; as that there is such a thing as God's *opening his heart* and speaking in words of consolation to their troubled breast. So they prove at times that there is such a blessing, such a divine reality as the kingdom of God set up in the heart, and that this is the beginning of heaven below; that even here in this vale of tears they may have such a foretaste of immortal joy as will amply recompense them for all their troubles and sorrows, and fully satisfy them that they are in the way to Zion to enjoy it in full.

iv. But to prove all these things *will give them* more or less a *daily task*; for if "all things" are to come before them, both good and evil, and they have to prove them all by examination according to God's word, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and the movements of godly fear, what a daily task lies before them; a task always beginning and never ending! Thus, sometimes all manner of sin and uncleanness works within and strives for the mastery: they have to prove its evil; temptations of every kind assail their faith, and dash their very hope; they have to prove their violence; snares are laid for them by Satan: they have to prove their danger. Sometimes they have to prove their weakness in the hour of temptation, and to prove therein the power of God; how he is able to deliver in the darkest hour, and what strength and consolation he can give to their fainting spirit. Thus day by day, as the work of God is being carried on in their breast, they keep proving all things: for a living tribunal is set up in their heart—a court of conscience, which is ever sitting and

allowing no vacation. Though outwardly, therefore, the child of God may seem unoccupied, his occupation is within, in that busiest of all busy worlds—his own heart. He may have little to say to others, live a solitary and secluded life, for his occupation is with God and his own soul; and this is ample work. But "in all labour there is profit," and so he finds it; for in this daily task of proving all things, he finds much to discourage and much to encourage, much to sink and much to raise him, much matter of humiliation, grief, and godly sorrow, and yet much matter for praising and blessing his kind and gracious God.

III. But I pass on to my next point, which is, to show that when we begin to prove all things, we are sure to *find much to be rejected*. The very circumstances of our being called upon to "prove all things," assumes that there are things which cannot stand the trial; and as we are expressly told to "hold fast that which is good," it is clearly implied thereby, that we are to reject and throw aside that which is bad. The child of grace, then, as he begins to prove all things, soon finds much to be rejected. It is with him almost like a warehouse where there has lately been a fire. When the fire is extinguished, the goods are in due time examined. Some are thoroughly burnt and worthless; others are damaged with the water which has been brought to quench the flames; others again are partially scorched, or so much so as to fall in pieces directly they are touched. Then there may be a few goods, perhaps, in the very innermost part of the bales which neither water nor fire have injured; and these are kept when the rest are thrown away.

Or we may compare this examination to that of a ship which has been cast upon the shore and wrecked: when what remains of the cargo is examined, much is found so damaged by water as to be utterly worthless. In parts of the ship which the water has not reached, as in the innermost cabin, or the water-tight locker, a few articles may be found untouched, untarnished, and these are carefully separated from those which have been irreparably injured. So it is in this divine examination when the Christian comes to prove all things, he finds the task much like examining

damaged goods. He finds many burned bales—bales once filled with his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, with which house and warehouse, parlour, cellar, bedroom, and attic were all thoroughly crammed. The fiery law has passed over and through all these things and scorched them up.

Therefore, when he examines these goods after the flames have somewhat subsided, he has to cast them all away, because they could not stand the fire. But he finds some precious jewels in the cabinet, some gold and silver in the cash box, which the fire has not touched. Other goods are scorched, and fall to pieces when handled. Thus he finds there are many doctrines and sentiments, views and opinions in religion of which he once thought highly, but which he now has to reject as worthless: they could not stand the fire. They may look pretty well, but handled by firm Christian fingers they drop to pieces like scorched handkerchiefs. He finds also, as he goes on with the examination, that he has to give up many people whom he once held very close. He begins to see that there are in the visible Church such characters as dead professors, loose antinomians, it may be, under the sound of the gospel which he himself hears, erroneous men who hold part of God's truth, and cloak up their errors with soft glozing words, letter-ministers, sound in the truth but without life or power in their souls or their ministry; all these he feels he must reject as goods either scorched by fire, or damaged by the very water which they have brought to put out the flame.

He finds also that the world he once so fondly loved not only in its company and maxims, but in the inward spirit of it; the bosom sins which sticks so close; the idols set up in the chambers of imagery, he must give up all, because to keep them is not consistent with the word of truth, the light and life of God in the soul, and the dictates of a tender conscience. As, then, he pursues his examination, he finds he must give up one thing after another until well nigh all is lost, and he seems to have scarcely anything left. His own good name; his reputation amongst men; the opinion of his own wisdom and abilities and what he fain would be amongst his fellow creatures,—all these he has to

discard, because they are inconsistent with the grace of God, the mind of Christ, and the teachings of the Spirit. Thus the more he proves all things by the standard of God's truth, the light of the Spirit within, and the dictates and workings of godly fear, the more and more he has to discard. To revert to our figure: As in this burnt house, or in this shipwrecked vessel, much at first sight might appear passable, but a closer examination betrays it to be worthless; so it is with many things which the Christian once held very closely. A better examination, a closer acquaintance, a deeper knowledge of God's truth, show the worthlessness of many things and of many persons too, once by him highly esteemed. All these must be discarded, until at last he seems, not only despised by the world, as a poor narrow-minded, prejudiced, bigoted creature, ever discontented and dissatisfied, but to have lost everything except what God has wrought by his own power in his soul.

IV. We now then come to that which you are "*to hold fast,*" namely "*that which is good.*" Now that you have gone through your examination and proved all things, there are certain things which you find to be good. *The truth of God* you find to be very good: it has been life and power to your soul. You never saw before as you do now the beauty and blessedness of God's truth; and the more you see it in the light of God's Spirit, the more you love and the faster you hold it. It is the very nature of the things of God to make themselves more and more acceptable to an enlightened judgment and an honest heart.

But, as time presses, I can only name a few of these good things. There are two things especially which every saint of God is called upon to hold fast: these are, First, *the beginning of God's work* upon his soul; and, secondly, his *deliverance*. Any manifestation too that you have had of the Lord Jesus Christ; any application of his atoning blood; any discovery of his glorious Person or shedding abroad of his love; hold that fast, for it is good. And so I may say, hold fast any promise you have ever had applied; any answer to prayer you have ever received; any felt blessing that may have been wrought in your heart by a divine power. All this

is good. It comes from a good God; it works in a good way: it leads to a good end; it will make a good death-bed, and will land you in a most blessed eternity. Therefore "hold fast that which is good." Everything which is commended to your conscience as really good; every good man; every good minister; every child of God with whom you feel union or communion; every good precept, word, and work; in short, whatever is fully commended to your conscience as spiritual and divine, hold that fast, and you will find the benefit of it. Discard and reject everything bad, unbecoming, inconsistent, ungodly, erroneous, or heretical; discard them all—show them no mercy. In heart but not in hand, hew them down, as Samuel hewed down Agag in Gilgal.

Thus I lay before you a sum to prove, and you are called upon to prove it every day of your life; and do it you will, do it you must, whether I call you to do it or not. You cannot but do it; it is God's own word: "Prove all things." Prove, then, for yourself all that I say. Begin with my ministry, what you hear from my lips, or read from my pen; examine my doctrines, the experience I preach, the precepts I enforce: examine them well by the light of God's truth. They will bear examination. I am not ashamed of my religion, of what I preach and write, or of my doctrines. Let what I bring forward as the truth of God be fairly examined: it will bear it. If it cannot, let it perish. So with you: what God has done for your soul will bear examination. What you have received of God, here or elsewhere, is good: hold it fast, for it is your life.