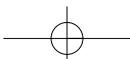


**William Jay
Sunday Morning Sermons**



**William Jay
Sunday Morning Sermons**

Quinta Press

Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire,
England, SY10 7RN

The format of these volume is copyright
© 2009 Quinta Press

This text is taken from a copy in the Evangelical Library, London.

For proof-reading purposes the line breaks are in the same place as the
original, hence the stretched text

**SUNDAY-MORNING
SERMONS.**

**SUNDAY-MORNING
SERMONS,**

**Preached in Argyle Chapel, Bath,
BY THE LATE**

REV. WILLIAM JAY,

AND NOW PRINTED FOR THE FIRST TIME FROM THE
VERBATIM NOTES OF ONE OF HIS HEARERS,

EDITED BY THE REV. R. A. BERTRAM.

LONDON:
R. D. DICKINSON, FARRINGDON STREET.
1878.

[All Rights reserved.]

BUNGAY
CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS

CONTENTS.

I. THE GOD OF BETHEL.

PAGE

GENESIS xxxi. 31. *I am the God of Bethel* I

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

I CHRONICLES xxix. 11. *Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and ill the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all* 10

III. THE DISPOSER OF THE WORLD.

JOB xxxiv. 13. *Who hath disposed the whole world?* 19

IV. A RESOLVE AND A PRAYER.

PSALM v. 7, 8. *But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face* 29

V. THE SECRET OF A TRUE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

PSALM xvi. 8. *I have set the Lord always before me* 41

VI. GLORIFYING GOD.

PSALM l. 23. *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God* 53

vi

VII.
STREAMS FROM THE ROCK.

PAGE

PSALM lxxviii. 16. *He brought streams also out of the rock* 61

VIII.
THE JOYFUL SOUND.

PSALM lxxxix. 15. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound* 71

IX.
OUR HELPER.

PSALM lxxxix. 19. *Thou spakest in vision to Thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people* 82

X.
THE TWO-FOLD SONG.

PSALM ci. 1. *I will sing of mercy and judgment* 91

XI.
STABILITY THROUGH FAITH.

ISAIAH vii. 9. *If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established* 101

XII.
SEEKING A SIGN.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 22. *Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?* 110

XIII.

THE LEADER OF THE BLIND.

ISAIAH xlii. 16. *And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them* 120

XIV.

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

HOSEA vi. 3. *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth* 130

XV.

THE ALMIGHTY HEALER.

MATTHEW viii. 7. *And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him* 141

vii

XVI.

CONFESSION OF CHRIST.

PAGE

MATTHEW x. 32. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven—*150

XVII.

CHRIST'S ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

MARK v. 1-19. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, &c.—*161

XVIII.

ONE OF CHRIST'S CONFERENCES WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

LUKE ix. 18–22. *And it came to pass, as He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him: and He asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias, and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing, saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day* 172

XIX.

CHRISTIAN FEASTING.

LUKE xiv. 12–14. *Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsman, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just* 181

XX.

EVERLASTING LIFE.

JOHN vi. 47. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life* 190

XXI.

THE BLIND RESTORED TO SIGHT.

JOHN ix. 25. *He answered and said, Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see* 200

XXII.

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

JOHN xi. 40. *Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?* 212

viii

XXIII.
PHILIP'S SERMON.

PAGE

ACTS viii. 35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus* 222

XXIV.
CONFIRMATION.

ACTS xiv. 22. *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God* 230

XXV.
PAUL IN ROME.

ACTS xxviii. 30, 31. *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him* 241

XXVI.
RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

ROMANS v. 10. *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life* 251

XXVII.
THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE BELIEVER.

ROMANS vi. 22. *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life* 262

XXVIII.
GLORIOUS LIBERTY.

ROMANS viii. 21. *The glorious liberty of the children of God* 273

XXIX.
THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

EPHESIANS i. 22, 23. *And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all* 283

XXX.
CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

EPHESIANS v. 2. *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, God hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour* 295

ix

XXXI.
HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO THE THESSALONIANS.

PAGE

I Thessalonians i. 5. *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance* 302

XXXII.
BROTHERLY LOVE.

I THESSALONIANS iv. 9, 10. *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren*

which are in all Macedonia; but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more 314

XXXIII.
PRAYER.

I TIMOTHY ii. 8. *I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting* 323

XXXIV.
CHRIST'S WORK ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN.

HEBREWS ix. 12. *By His own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us* 334

XXXV.
THE CHRISTIAN'S TREASURE.

HEBREWS x. 34. *And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance* 347

XXXVI.
THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

HEBREWS xii. 1, 2. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* 358

XXXVII.
A COMPREHENSIVE ADMONITION.

JAMES ii. 1. *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons* 368

x

XXXVIII.
AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER.

page

I PETER v. 10. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you* 379

XXXIX.
A GLORIOUS MESSAGE.

I JOHN i. 5-7. *This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin* 387

XL.
DIVINE SONSHIP,

I JOHN iii. 2. *Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is* 396

XLI.
THE INDWELLING OF GOD.

I JOHN iii. 24. *And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us* 408

XLII.
THE LOVE OF GOD.

I JOHN iv. 10. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* 419

XLIII.
ALPHA AND OMEGA.

REVELATION *xxi.* 6. *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely* 428

I.

THE GOD OF BETHEL.

(Preached in Argyle Chapel, Bath, on Sunday Morning, June
23rd, 1844.)

I am the God of Bethel.—GENESIS xxxi. 13.

THIS does not mean the God of the mere locality. "I will not," says God, "reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, which have been continually before me. Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High; for whoso offereth praise glorifieth me. To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." Here you see how He values what is rational above what is material; what is moral above what is ritual; what is spiritual above what is natural. The case before us is this:—Men derive distinction and fame from places because of something which befell them there, or of something which they accomplished there. Thus we call Nelson "the Hero of the Nile," not in reference to the water of the river, but because at the mouth of it he gained his illustrious victory, Now God means this when He calls Himself the "God of Bethel."

You must therefore go back to the event recorded in an earlier portion of this book. We know what importance and influence things often obtain relatively and from their associations. Nothing indeed comes to us purely, without some of these impressions. You may pass along that deep valley, and come to a particular opening in a wood, without feeling any peculiar emotion; but how would *he* feel as he passed who had rushed forth from thence, and robbed and murdered a fellow-creature? What a horrid spot would it be to him! and what distance would he not have taken to have avoided it!

One day is the same as another with regard to duration, or in itself considered: it may be clear or cloudy; but the day of your espousals is a day of gladness of heart; and the day that

2

bore to the grave the desire of your eyes, or the child of your bosom, excites feelings that no other can produce.

When Joseph's brethren came to their father with the coat of many colours, and said, "We have found this coat: know now whether it be thy son's coat or not," he knew it, and said, "It is my son's coat, an evil beast hath devoured him!" But what a day for him to remember was that when he first heard of his son's life and elevation, and saw the waggons that had come to carry him down and place him near his beloved!

The night of the passover was not otherwise distinguished by the moon and the stars than any other night j but what do we read? "It is a night," says the historian, "much to be remembered throughout your generations."

The Lord appeared to Moses in a bush burning with fire, yet not consumed j we know not the wood or the form of it; but would he ever pass by it with his sheep without feeling it was the symbol of the Divine presence? Why even when he was dying the recollection revived in his mind with the freshness of recent occurrence j therefore he said, "The good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush."

What did you hear on Thursday evening? that is, you who thought it worth while to hear it. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God." It was not distinguished from any other stone, as to its hardness, but could they pass that way without feeling the consciousness of having heard the voice of God?

We have flesh as well as spirit, and the mind is approached through the medium of the senses. How endeared to many of you is this place, where you have often said, "This is none other than the house of God; it is good to be here!" and exclaimed-

"My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss."

But now let us go back to Bethel. Esau hated Jacob for having deprived him of the blessing, and his fury was expressed in such a revengeful way as to lead his parents to concert a scheme for his escape to his uncle Laban. Dismissed with the blessing of Isaac, Jacob went forth to Haran, and though travelling then was less formidable than it appears to persons now, he doubtless experienced many difficulties. Having been pecu-

3
liarily favoured by his mother, who had indulged him with everything he could desire, he was more sensible of privations. "He lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set;" and notwithstanding that the road was exposed to the incursions of wild beasts, as David remarks, "Thou makest darkness and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth," The heavens therefore became his canopy, the darkness his curtain, and the ground his bed. "And he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillow, and lay down to sleep in that place." "So Thou givest thy beloved sleep." "He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will

be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Now observe three things:—What he saw, what he heard, what he did, so as to render the place significant enough to induce God to say, "I am the God of Bethel."

I. Consider what he saw.

It was seen, indeed, in a dream; but, in the absence of a full

B 2

4

and written revelation, God frequently appeared thus to His people of old. "And he dreamed, and beheld a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and beheld the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And, behold, the Lord God stood above it." This reminds us of the language of our Saviour to Nathaniel, when He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

This vision has commonly been considered as representing the Saviour Himself: the top of the ladder denoting His Divinity, and the bottom of it His humanity; His mediation, reaching from earth to heaven and connecting them. But I would rather consider this vision as representing the care of Divine providence. Amongst men attention to little things commonly prevents attention to great ones, and attention to great prevents attention to lesser things. But this is not the case with regard to God; nothing eludes His notice. He rolls the stars along, and He feeds the ravens when they cry; He clothes the grass of the earth; not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice; and the very hairs of our head are numbered,

The angels are the instruments to accomplish the purposes of the Most High. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation?"

These angels did not ascend and descend upon this ladder after the manner of persons amusing themselves, but in obedience to the Divine order. He saith to one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh. For though they “excel in strength,” they do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. And it is *His* will they regard. We read of one in Daniel called “the prince of the kingdom of Persia;” of another carrying a meal to Elijah under the juniper-tree; of another opening the eyes of Hagar and shewing her a well. Yes, it is the will of God they regard, and, as Mr. Newton observes, “if one were sent to manage an empire, and another to sweep the street, they would repair to their employments with equal pleasure, because they could shew their regard to His will.” O that His will could be done on earth as it is done in heaven!

“And the Lord God stood above it,” looking down upon His young pilgrim lying upon the ground, “The eyes of the Lord are upon those that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy.” He withdraweth not His eye from the righteous; He knoweth their soul in adversity, and all their walking through

5

this great wilderness; and nothing affords them more satisfaction than to be able to say with David, “All my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hid from Thee.”

II. Consider what he heard.

“And He said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.”

Let us review each of these articles.

“*I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.*” It is well to have a known God, a tried God, a family God, and a father’s God; it is well to be able to say, as the Church does in the twenty-second Psalm, “Our fathers trusted in Thee: they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them.” It is well for you, when God looks down and sees you walking in the same path that your fathers did who are gone to heaven before you, “followers of those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises,”

“The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.” God had already given it by promise to Abraham, but at present he had none inheritance, not so much as to set his foot on. All that Abraham could call his own in that land was the cave of Machpelah, where he buried his wife Sarah, “By faith,” therefore, “he sojourned in the land of promise.” But as God had given it to him and his seed by promise, it was as sure as if in actual possession. Yet several hundred years were previously to elapse, and they must suffer much in Egypt, and must wander forty years in the wilderness. But what of this? It was the land of promise; God had given them it, and nothing could hinder their possession of it. Therefore Pharaoh lets them go, a way is opened for them through the Red Sea, the flinty rock affords them water, the clouds pour down manna, Jordan is driven back, and they march on with God at their head, proclaiming Himself to be truth and faithfulness itself.

“And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, to the north, and to the south.” And so it was. You know in a few years they became an innumerable people, and what millions since have descended from this one patriarch. How many millions of his offspring are now living all over the face of the earth, What millions would they be, if all the dead and all the living were assembled together.

“And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth

6

be blessed.” This refers to the Messiah. To them as concerning the flesh He came, God having raised up His Son, even Jesus, who “delivered us from the wrath to come.” In His name we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. This promise has as yet received only a partial accomplishment. Few as yet are blessed with faithful Abraham. But we read of a nation being “born in a day;” that *all* nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him; that *all* shall know the Lord from the least even to the greatest. The promise in our text, therefore, has a blessed aspect for our world, What it holds forth is a missionary scene. You must not be discouraged by present appearances, or any obstacles in the way, God has no difficulties, and never

will. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Yes, “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be straight, and the rough places plain j and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

So far what he heard was of a public and general nature. But the Lord is a very present help to His people in times of trouble.

“*And, behold, I am with thee.*” So He is with all His people. His essential presence fills heaven and earth. David says, “Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?” Whenever His presence is spoken of by way of promise, it intimates something more than this perfection of His nature; it means His saving presence specially. “He is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.” And is there a Christian here this morning but is like-minded with Moses, and who with regard to all his movements in life would not say, “If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence”? And He *will* go with thee: thou art weak in thyself, and wilt be exposed in various ways, but “no weapon formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth up in judgment against thee God will condemn.” So dear are they to God that He saith, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye.” This is true whether believers realise it or not, and therefore in the midst of danger they may say,

“More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven.”

“*And will bring thee again into this land.*” This would be gladsome tidings to Jacob, for who is he that could not rejoice

7

at such tidings concerning a country where he was born and bred, the residence of his most impressive years?

“*For I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*” But would He leave him then? Oh no; his anxieties therefore were entirely unnecessary. Thus it is with Christians: they have exceeding great and precious promises, “All yea and Amen in Christ Jesus,” and all of them must be

fulfilled before God leaves His people. Will He leave you then? No, He will never leave you, nor forsake you, to all eternity. As your day is, so shall your strength be while here: hereafter all tears shall be wiped from your eyes, Then “your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.”

III. Observe what he did.

First, *he discovered and acknowledged what he was ignorant of before he went to sleep.* “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.” God’s people often display their ignorance, and imagine they are alone when they are not; forgetting that God hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake, thee;” forgetting that God is peculiarly with them in the hour of trouble, and that as their tribulations abound, so their consolations superabound. Joseph was unjustly imprisoned, but God was with him. Jeremiah was shut up in the dungeon, but God was with him there. Many now living have passed through great and sore trials, but they would have no objection to pass through them again if they were sure they should enjoy the same manifestations of the Divine regard. Good Mr. Spilsbury, who had suffered for conscience sake and had been imprisoned, said to his wife and children, as they were leading him to prison again, “Oh, do not weep about me; I found God with me there the first time, and I hope to find Him there again.”

Again, *he confesses a privilege.* “This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.” There was no sacred building near it: let bigots remember this, who cry, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.” Let those remember this who are placed in a state of spiritual destitution; let those remember it who are confined to the chamber of disease and the bed of languishing. Wherever God appears for His people, wherever He holds communion with them, whether in a barn, in the open air, or in the sanctuary, this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven to their souls. There are

8

carnal men who suppose that heaven is far above them, somewhere beyond the stars, a very fine place; but heaven is a state as well as a place, and our Saviour says, "The kingdom of heaven is within you."

He reared a memorial. Wherever Abraham came, as soon as he had pitched his tent, he built an altar to the Lord, So did Isaac. So did not Jacob, because he had neither the opportunity nor the means. But he did what he could; and though the pillar consisted of a mere rugged stone, yet he consecrates it to God, and said, as he was imbedding it in the ground, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?"

Lastly, *he vowed a vow*, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

We admire here Jacob's temperance and moderation; asking only for bread and raiment and a safe return, His proposition was noble, yet not an exact rule for others to go by. The rule of the Apostle was, Every man should lay by in store according as God has prospered him, Some may give more, and others less; but all should give to the cause of God a due proportion of their enjoyments, and should send covetousness out a-walking, and let conscience sit in the room, when the determination is made.

But Jacob still seems to possess a kind of selfishness in the business, and seems as if he would have nothing to do with God unless He should thus indulge him. This is not the meaning. The meaning is, that he would feel himself under fresh obligations to God. All new mercies should new praises bring, and lead us afresh to devote ourselves to His service.

I am, as you know, not very friendly to vowing, but would rather recommend you to praise God without vowing. Yet the thing may not be improper: it may serve to remind us of our obligations, and be like a hedge to keep the sheep in when they

would wander from the fold; or a hem round a garment to keep it from ravelling out. Should you vow, see that it be not like Jephtha's vow; then see that you place all your dependence on a strength not your own; and, thirdly, that you fulfil your engagements. For better would it be for you not to vow, than to vow and not pay.

9

Well, did Jacob fulfil his engagements? Ah! how soon impressions wear off, Jacob did indeed perform it, but not immediately; not for a long time after it was in his power. God ordered him to return, not as he went, when he had only a staff in his hand, but when he had become "two bands," multiplied and enriched by God, who had delivered him from all his fears. Meeting with Esau—would you believe it?—he lounges about from month to month and year to year without moving towards it; and though he suffered so much from the envious behaviour of his sons, yet this is not enough. God is therefore obliged to pinch and pull him by the ear to make him go up. "Arise and go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then"—for it is better late than never—"Jacob said, Arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the ear-rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." A very good place for them! "So Jacob came to Luz, and called the place El-beth-el; and God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him."

Well, is the God of Bethel your God? To what purpose will it be to you that He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob, and all the righteous, unless you have made a surrender of yourselves to Him? It is prophesied that 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 shall surname himself by the name of Israel." Have you done this? Have you given up yourselves to the

Lord? saying, "I am Thine, save me, employ me. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" If this is the main business of your lives, God, even your own God, will bless you, and you will "find that the Lord God is a sun and shield; no good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly."

10

II.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, September 22nd, 1846.)

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, art Thou art exalted as head above all.—I CHRONICLES XXIX. 11.

THE words before us are the words of David, one of the most extraordinary characters in history, whether we consider his elevation, his sufferings, or his achievements. The words of the text are some of his dying words, for David was determined to live as long as he breathed. Dying words, most commonly, awaken peculiar attention; we listen with earnestness and seriousness to a voice we are to hear no more on earth, and are reminded of the words of Young, "How blessings brighten as they take their flight!" As Christians, we may well leave the time and manner to His pleasure "in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways,"—who has a right to do what He will with His own, and whose ways are all mercy and truth towards those who fear Him. Our Saviour, speaking of the martyrdom of Peter, calls it the death by which he was to glorify God, and "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." A sudden death may seem preferable in many respects to a believer than any other, as it may save him from "the pains, the groans, the dying strife" which often terrify Christians themselves, and induce some to fear the act of dying who are not afraid of the consequences. But for the sake of others, who may derive much benefit by the exemplification of their Christian graces, they sometimes suffer much and long; but the chamber of death is turned into the house of

God, while the timid are confirmed, and led to exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

11

These words refer to the building of the temple, which was a very costly and expensive undertaking. I am afraid David was a little too much alive to outward grandeur and shew, and too forgetful that "God is a Spirit, and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Hear what God Himself hath said, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my foot-stool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

To confirm our remarks, we may observe the language with which God ordered Nathan to address David: "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build *me* a house for me to dwell in?" This refers to the proposal made by David; for one day when the prophet was with him he said, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee." It should seem after this that David retired, and, walking in some concealed situation, confirmed the impression he was under, and "Sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob, Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." The Lord looketh at the heart, and when this is towards Him He accepts it according to what we have, and not according to what we have not. He looks at the will; He regards the purpose, though we may fail in the execution of it; He sees the motive, though we may err in the manner. Thus, as David's motive was essentially good, God was pleased with his resolutions, and though He did not allow him to build a house for His name, He did three things: He said, "It was well it was in thine heart;" He promised that he would build *him* a house; and He gave him

the model and pattern of the house that should be built. Thus encouraged, David said, "I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass; the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones and stones to be set, glistening stones and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own

12

proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver to overlay the walls of the house withal: the gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers." Thus the greatest part of his fortune he left, not to his family, but to the cause of God; and thus David being an example is able to be an exhorter, so he added, "And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"

This shews us that all was to be done voluntarily. You will observe, when the tabernacle was to be erected, that Moses levied nothing compulsory upon the people, nor was it necessary: we read that "they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring *much more* than enough for the service of the work which the Lord commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing." So here, when the temple was to be erected, David levied no compulsory tax upon the people, nor was it necessary. "Then the chief of the fathers, and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, and gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones

were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite." John said, "I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in the truth." When Barnabas came "to Antioch, and saw the grace of God, he was glad." So David here rejoiced in this free-will work, and the people rejoiced that they offered willingly, "because with perfect heart they offered willingly unto the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy;" and it not only awakened his joy, but called forth his praise, for "David blessed the Lord before all the congregation, and David said, Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever."

Now for the words of our text: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head

13

above all." Though I have read the whole verse, I shall confine myself to a single expression in it, "Thine, O Lord, is the kingdom," and I do it because of the comprehensiveness of the passage, and because I would not trespass too long upon your time.

I. "*Thine, O Lord, is the kingdom.*" What kingdom? The kingdom of nature, with all its productions and materials. "All His works praise Him," by wearing impressions of His attributes, and fulfilling His designs. "The night is His, the day also is His." "He appointed the moon for seasons, the sun knoweth his going down." He hath made summer and winter; "the world is His and the fulness thereof." Only think for a moment of the number of His works—of the greatness of some of them—of the minuteness of others—and of the perfection of them all. And here we may exclaim, God is "wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working." We see as yet but little of this kingdom of God; how much more remains for future discoveries! How little, comparatively, of our earth is explored! And what is our earth, compared with the vast universe of God? "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number. He calleth them all by names, by the great-

ness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth.” When your eyes can pierce no farther, take up the telescope, and when that fails let imagination work, and exclaim with Elihu, “Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?”

“*Thine, O Lord, is the kingdom.*” What kingdom? The kingdom of providence. “The kingdom is the Lord’s, and He is the Governor among the nations.” “All nations before Him are as nothing, and less than nothing, and vanity.” But as He made all, so His care extends to all. He feeds the young ravens that cry; He hears the young lions that roar; the eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season; He openeth His hand, and supplieth the wants of every living thing; He controls all, and disposes of all. By Him “kings reign, and princes decree justice.” “He changeth the times and the seasons; He removeth kings, and setteth up kings;” and so disposeth of all, as to shew that they are in His hands but as clay in the hands of the potter. The Assyrian boasted of the number that *he* had cut off; but he was only” the rod of God’s

14

anger, and the staff of His indignation,” by which He punished the nations, and chastised His own people. What a distinguished character was Cyrus, and what a work did he accomplish! But, says God, “I girded thee, though thou didst not know me;” and says Zechariah, “Out of Him came forth the corner, out of Him the nail, out of Him the battle-bow, out of Him every oppressor together;” “and He hath created the waster to destroy.”

Now let us bring home this to our own bosoms. When we look around, confusion seems to pervade the affairs of mortals; but “the Lord reigneth. Let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitations of His throne.” “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” What men call chance is nothing less than the appointment of God, for a sparrow falls not to the ground without your Father, and “the very hairs of your head

are all numbered.” Could we see things as God sees them, we should acknowledge the righteousness of all He does; we should see beauty springing out of confusion; what now appears to be dark would be enlightened—what appears disordered would be adjusted—what appears jarring would be harmonised; and when in His light we shall see light, then shall we exclaim, “He hath done all things well.” “God is a rock, His work is perfect, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”

“*Thine, O Lord, is the kingdom.*” What kingdom? The kingdom of grace. The kingdom of grace is a kingdom within the kingdom of nature and providence. It is a mediatorial, a spiritual empire which is designed to establish the peculiar reign of God, not only over men, but in them. It is sometimes called “the kingdom of God,” and sometimes “the kingdom of heaven.” As our Saviour said before Pilate, “It is not of this world,”—in its rise, or its issue, or its support, or its administration. There are three passages of Scripture where this kingdom is spoken of both negatively and positively: “The kingdom of God is not in word but in power,”—let us remember this. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,”—let us remember this. “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or Lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you,”—let us remember this also.

15

II. David speaks of the glory of this kingdom; and this glory, my brethren, appears in the *Sovereign*, for this Sovereign is the Lord Jesus. “I have set my king,” says God, “upon my holy hill of Zion.” He is “the Prince of the kings of the earth,” “the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” ’Tis He ordains all its ordinances; He commissions all its officers. Says David, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God,” and this is the case with our Sovereign. Therefore it is said, “The sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre: Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.” Therefore let the children of Zion rejoice in

their king; let them say in their family worship, “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us.”

The glory of this kingdom appears in its *universality*. What a kingdom was that of the four monarchs we read of in Scripture; but all these have vanished away like the mists from the mountains, while the kingdom of Jesus remains, and is spreading. “Upon His head shall the crown flourish.” It is not at present universal, but it must be so. The promise is gone forth, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” “In Him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” He must be very unbelieving, and very blind, who does not see everything conducing to such a result. “Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.” They better than these? We have innumerable proofs to the contrary. Look at the societies which have been formed, which we are persuaded will issue in such a diffusion of the gospel that, by God’s blessing on the use of means, the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea, and all shall know the Lord.

The glory of this kingdom appears in its *prospect*. Let us turn to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as explained by Divine authority. “In the days of these kings”—that is, the Romans—“shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms,

16

and it shall stand for ever.” In another place Daniel says, “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto

Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.” “And 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 there 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.” Hence Paul says, “We receive a kingdom which cannot be removed,” that is, it is the final one; no other dispensation is to succeed it; and its influences and effects in the soul, as well as the dispensation itself, are indestructible. “The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger.” “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” They shall flourish as in everlasting youth; “they shall be for ever with the Lord.”

The glory of this kingdom appears in its *subjects*. They “are all the children of the light and of the day;” they are “the excellent of the earth;” they are “the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty;” they are princes; they are kings upon the throne; angels, those glorious beings, are their attendants; they are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.” This world remains for their sakes, and while all creatures are the objects of God’s providence, *these* are the very end of it; and, as He Himself says, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him.”

The glory of this kingdom is seen in its *privileges*. We have neither time nor ability to describe these. “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things God hath prepared for them that love Him.” What are its immunities and securities? What danger are any of its subjects in? for they are “kept by the power of God through

17

faith unto salvation.” “There is no enchantment against Israel, no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper.” They are now safe. Sometimes their fears make them tremble, and induce them to say, “I shall one day perish.” But One infinitely wiser than they are says, “They shall *never* perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” And there are times when they can realise this, when they feel their security, and when they can say with David, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”

Then there is the *peace* of this kingdom. This is a “peace which passeth all understanding.” It is peace with God—peace within—peace around.—The subjects of this kingdom enjoy *liberty*; “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” “If the Son make us free, we are free indeed,”—free to realise our interest in “the everlasting covenant;” and free, when we die, to walk into heaven, where we shall enjoy the light of His presence for ever and ever. Then there is the *Plenitude* of this kingdom. There is no want here. “The Lord of Hosts makes unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.” There is no scarcity here, but enough for you, enough for others, enough for all. “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Now, in conclusion, what think you of this kingdom? Who would not press into it? Who would not be concerned to enjoy all its privileges and advantages? The entrance is now open, and you are not only allowed, but invited, yea, not only invited, but commanded to enter it. But this will not be the case always; it will not be the case long. Provoke not the Saviour to say, therefore, as He did to the Jews, “Oh that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

There are here, I know, some who give “thanks to the Father who hath made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered them from the power of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son.” Oh, be thankful, and shew forth His praises, not only with your lips, but in your lives, and be concerned that others also may enjoy the same privileges. Pray that God’s

C

18

kingdom may come. Remember you are taught by our Lord to ask for this, before you ask for your daily food. Do not pervert the right ways of the Lord, and draw error from truth. Some tell us that God is able to extend His kingdom, and that our strength is to sit still. God is indeed engaged to maintain and extend His kingdom; but He who has ordained the end has also ordained the means, and the certainty of the one infers the use of the other. He works by instrumentality; and if you are in a proper frame of mind you will feel it to be your highest honour to be employed in advancing His kingdom, and will ask, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” He is engaged to maintain and extend His kingdom; but if you hold your peace, enlargement will come from some other quarter, and then you will lose the honour and blessedness of co-operation. Not only so, you will expose yourselves to a most awful curse for the neglect of the use of the means. “Curse ye Meraz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

19

III.

THE DISPOSER OF THE WORLD.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, March 22nd, 1846.)

Who hath disposed the whole world?—JOB xxxiv. 13.

THESE are the words of Elihu. Who was Elihu? It is not easy to determine; there has been much dispute concerning

him. Into this dispute we are not going to enter. When Job's three friends had heard of all the evil that had befallen him, "they came everyone from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." But alas! they soon misunderstood or misrepresented his case, and they censured and condemned him. David said, "Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." Job's friends reproved him, and their reproof was oil too; but verily it was the oil of vitriol. They applied corrosives instead of lenitives, and were found "miserable comforters," "physicians of no value." Elihu introduces himself as a kind of mediator, and seemed to plead Job's case; but, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" He hardly differed from the other two; only read the close of the chapter: "My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God." Again he says, "What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walketh with wicked men. For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God." This was pretty well to be spoken by a special friend. But Elihu, as well as Job's other accusers and

C 2

20

rebukers, interspersed many good things in his address, and, allowing him his own premises, he drew many fair and profitable conclusions therefrom. Said he, "Hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God that He should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that He should do iniquity. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. Who hath given Him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?"

Brethren, it becomes us to entertain proper apprehensions of "Him with whom we have to do." Various are the characters by which He is represented in the Scriptures of truth. The

most dear and interesting is “the Saviour of sinners” in the Son of His love. The most awful is “the Judge of all,” who “will bring every work into judgment whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” But besides these, He is the “Maker,” He is the “Preserver,” He is the “Ruler,” He is the “Disposer” of all; for, when Elihu asks, “Who hath disposed the whole world?” we are naturally, we are necessarily led to Him.

Let us therefore—

I. Remark GOD’S ALL-DISPOSING AGENCY.

Elihu does not refer to an individual, or a family, or a nation only, but to the whole world.

God is the disposer of the whole world of *nature*. In the account of the original creation it is said, “In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth.” Everything was arranged with order and with propriety. There was the day and the night; the various species and productions; and when the whole was finished, God looked upon all that He had made, and behold it was very good. “The day is Thine, the night also is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth; Thou hast made summer and winter.” “He appointed the moon for seasons, and the sun knoweth his going down.” “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man.”

What man can produce man can comprehend. The more we examine a piece of human workmanship, the less wonder we feel, because we find it can be understood, and see that it is capable of alterations and improvements, or at least we find it is limited and finite. But it is otherwise with the works of God. Here nothing is superfluous nothing wanting, nothing by alteration can be improved; here we find ourselves not only on the verge of perfection, but also of infinity. “Lift up your eyes on high,” says Isaiah, “and behold who hath created these things,”

21

that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth.” What arrangement is there in all those numerous and immense worlds which God hath created! Observe their distances and their revolutions. Even the comet

has a prescribed course from which it never deviates. "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." The earth is full of His goodness. As Dr. Young says,

"An undevout astronomer is mad."

Lay down the telescope, and take up the microscope, and after surveying the perfections of God, and the grandeur of His works, survey their minuteness, and you will see that "He is wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working." What perfection is there in the construction of the human frame! What contrivances and adaptations in the eye and the ear! How well may we say with David, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

If in the arrangement of things in the natural world anything should appear strange, or anything useless,—for instance, the disproportion between water and land, between the frozen regions and the burning climes, in regard to sandy deserts, ravenous beasts, poisonous reptiles, &c.,—remember your ignorance, and think how impossible it is for you to ascertain the uses and designs of many things; so that what you may deem an injury may be a real advantage or excellence. A certain king was addicted to the study of astronomy, and supposing he could discover some imperfection or irregularities in the system, he said, "If I had been by the Maker of the world when He made it, I would have given Him some advice." Take care you do not fall into such blasphemy: rather say with Isaiah, "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and shewed to Him the way of understanding?" "His understanding is infinite."

We lament there are so few real lovers of nature; and where persons admire it, how often do they pass by the workman, while they behold the works! Thus are they found to "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore." If we are struck with a single instance of God's arrangement in the world of nature, how much more should we be impressed with the whole if we were in a proper state of mind, and if God were in all our thoughts.

He is the disposer of the whole world of *grace*. "He hath

22

magnified His word above all His name;" and has said, making the comparison Himself, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind." Here "He works all things after the counsel of His own will." Here, says the Apostle, "He hath saved us, and called us with an 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." Observe, he speaks not only of grace, but of the purpose of grace. There was nothing left unappointed or unarranged. He tells us that "God hath appointed us to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ;" and he calls this God's own purpose, peculiarly His own, pre-eminently His own, which is to bring glory to Him in the highest. The scheme stretches from eternity to eternity, and in every part of it we see God abounding in all wisdom and prudence.

The season in which the Messiah was to appear, which is called "the fulness of the time," was arranged by infinite wisdom. He arranged everything pertaining to the Gospel dispensation. We see, in reading the Acts of the Apostles, how the apostles were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to go in one direction, and their feet turned into another. God sometimes giveth not account of His matters. He has reasons for what He does satisfactory to Himself. The Christian must walk by faith, and say in many instances with our Divine Lord, "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." What seems good to us may be evil, what seems good to Him must accord with reality, for His judgment is always "according to truth." See how He arranged everything in the Christian Church. Hear how the Apostle speaks in his Epistle to the Corinthians. "Now there are diversity of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same Lord which worketh all in all. ... But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. ... Now hath God set the members everyone of them in the body as it hath pleased Him." See how things were disposed here. "Are all apostles? Are all prophets?

Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" "He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

23

The same may be exemplified with regard to every individual who is the subject of Divine grace, for, as the Apostle says, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Was there anything here left to accident? No; all was arranged by infinite wisdom: the time of their conversion; the place—perhaps on a journey of business, or perhaps on a visit of friendship; the manner—sometimes by the impressions of terror, and sometimes by a promise of love; and the means also—perhaps a tract, or a book, or a sermon, or a wise reproof, or admonition.

"He is the disposer of the whole world" of *providence*; and while He seems to be doing nothing, He is doing "all things according to the counsel of His own will." "He does according to His will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of earth." "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" Now when we throw our eyes over the world and the present state of the earth, it may seem to us in a state of confusion; but what is confusion to us, may be order to Him; what is deformity to us, may be beauty to Him. Yes, says Elihu in the chapter we read this morning, "He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead." *He* doeth it. "He changeth the times and the seasons; He removeth kings, and setteth up kings;" He causeth empires to fade or flourish, to rise or sink at His pleasure, and disposeth the whole as to shew they are in His hand, more absolutely so than clay in the hands of the potter, and are removed as easily as the down of the thistle is driven by the wind.

He called Nebuchadnezzar His servant. He was "the staff of His indignation, and the rod of His anger," with which He punished the nations of the earth, and severely chastised His

own people the Jews. "He meant not so, neither did his heart think so." He resembled a man in a boat, who rows one way and looks another. The passions of men are under His control. "He maketh the wrath of men to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He restrains." Thus I have seen the owner of a mill drawing up the hatch and letting out as much water as the grinding required, and afterwards letting it down and restraining it.

We have many specimens of God's providence in the Scriptures of truth. Take the case of Joseph. What a scene of suffering did he pass through! During what a length of time did things grow worse and worse, dark and darker! We see

24

him sold to the Ishmaelites, thrown into prison, where the iron enters his very soul. Then things begin to turn. The chief baker and chief butler dream. Joseph interprets; the chief butler promises to think of him. Joseph appears before Pharaoh, and interprets his dreams; we now see him step from prison into the second chariot, and become the governor of the whole land of Egypt. Hear what Joseph said when he made himself known to his brethren, "Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." He observed the hand of God. "You intended it for evil," says he, "but God meant it for good."

Then observe the Jewish male children, who were doomed to perish, at which time Moses was born. The babe's fine countenance pleaded for him. The parents saw that he was a goodly child, and hid him three months, till they could conceal him no longer. They then make an ark of bulrushes, and pitch it within and without, and place it among the flags by the river's side, while his sister is to walk up and down carelessly to see what would become of the child. Pharaoh's daughter comes down to the river; her eye catches sight of the babe; "Fetch it," says she, "to me;" and she added, "This is one of the Hebrew children." The babe weeps, and she has compassion upon it. A nurse is to be provided for it; and this

nurse is his own mother. He is brought up at court, in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and becomes the deliverer of the Jews, and the prophet of the Lord. Here, again, behold a specimen of superintending providence; and what renders it more worthy of our regard is, that there is nothing miraculous in it.

These instances of providence are at work everywhere ever since. They have been at work in your history. It was arranged where you should be born, and the circumstances through which you should pass. Yes, God hath fixed the bounds of our habitation. Had you been previously informed of such and such events, you would have exclaimed, "Impossible! If the Lord should make windows in heaven may this thing be." As to your trials, none of these have been casual. No, they have been. all ordered. Can you imagine that "affliction cometh forth of the dust? and that trouble springs out of the ground? " Ask Job. He says, "Thou hast taken me by the neck and shaken me to pieces. He performeth the

25

thing that is appointed for me. And many such things are with Him." Oh, were you able to view these things as God does, you would see in them *all* His manifold wisdom. "Ah!" some one is ready to say, "if He had afflicted me in anything else I could have borne it." Oh, it is the peculiarity of your affliction which shews the design of it. Verily He has opened a right vein; He has touched a right part—that which was most susceptible of feeling, without which our afflictions will do us no good; and if you were in the mood of David, you would say, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy word unto Thy servant."

Here we end our explanatory notes.

II. Now for some PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS.

How, my brethren, is this doctrine of the all-disposing agency of God to be improved?

I think I see four ways in which it may be applied.

First, in the way of *conviction*. I want to have it settled firm in your minds that you are not in a world ungoverned by Jehovah. I want you to believe that “the Lord reigneth.” There is a notion prevailing among some men, half philosophical, and more than half infidel, that God is attentive to the world, as a whole system, but that He disregards individuality. If this arises from a concern to relieve the Almighty from a good deal of perplexity and care, let me tell you that this is needless, for “He fainteth not, neither is weary, neither is there any searching of His understanding,” and “nothing is too hard for the Lord.” Then reason tells us that an universal providence necessarily implies a particular one, as the whole is made up of parts. Among men an attention to little things prevents an attention to great things, and an attention to great things prevents an attention to little things. But this is not the case with God. While He wings an angel, He hears a grasshopper chirping, and teaches the spider to weave his web. What says the Great Teacher on this subject? “A sparrow falleth not to the ground without your Father,” and, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

My brethren, if there were no controlling agency of God in the concerns of the world, things would always operate according to their own nature and tendency; but you see how often this is checked, so that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor

26

riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all;” that is, what men call chance; for there is no such god or goddess as chance in the Christian’s creed. “Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever and ever.” Yet I am afraid, after all, that many of you are half atheists; you live so much without God in the world.

The second use is, in a way of *adoration*. “There is none like unto Thee,” says David, “among the gods, neither are any works like Thy works.” Then how finely he breaks forth, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth

is Thine: Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all." You think much, perhaps, of managing a single family, of providing for it, of placing the members in arda, and of doing everything decent and becoming. A man may think much of managing an extensive and perplexed business, where he employs perhaps a thousand hands, and has machines of wondrous power. You think much of a man who governs well the concerns of a province or a country. But here we behold God disposing of the *whole* world. How many creatures are visible to us, and how many more are invisible on earth and in the sea! He sustains them all, and feeds them all. What multitudes! what differences are there among them! They think differently, and feel differently, yet each subserves his own interest, and all subserve the interests of all. The heart of a king is in the hand of the Lord, and He turneth him whithersoever He will. Events are made by Him to run into channels, along which they flow to His praise. "Marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty." "Who would not fear Thee, Thou King of saints!"

The third is, in a way of *consolation*. It would be an easy thing for a person to come and say, "Be not careful." But you say, "Our affairs require care; some one must have the management of them;" and you need one on whom you can trust. Therefore, says the Apostle, "be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

We may here make four suppositions. The first is, suppose your affairs were left to chance. Would you like this? Would you like to rise in the morning, and look upon your sick child, and brood upon the thought that you have nothing to comfort

27

you but this dismal reflection that all is left to chance or accident? This will not do.

The second supposition is, that your affairs are left to your own order and arrangement. Would you not tremble at such a thought, and say, "My *ignorance* unfits me for it; I know not what is good in this vain life, which is spent as a shadow. I have often been mistaken, both on the side of hope and fear. I have often desired that which would have been for my injury,

and shunned that which would have been for my advantage. ‘The way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.’ My *impatience* unfits me for it. God is a God of judgment, He knows best when to yield me supplies, but, like an impatient child, I desire the fruit before it be ripe. My *carnality* unfits me for it. I am so worldly-minded, and my soul so cleaveth to the dust, that I should be liable to sacrifice my best interests for the gratification of some earthly good. My *selfishness* unfits me for it. I should think too much of my own concerns, and not enough of those of others.”

The third supposition is, that your affairs should be left to the arrangement of some fellow-creature. Whom would you choose for this purpose? Not an enemy for certain, but a friend. What friend? One who knows you best. There is much folded up in your character that your most intimate connections know nothing of. Would you have a partial friend? Ah, that partiality would most likely ensure your injury and ruin. Then should it be an angel. When God offered an angel to go with Moses, he declined to accept of it, and told God, that unless He Himself went with him, he would not move. “If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.” No creature will suffice.

Well, then, the fourth supposition is, that your affairs are left to the disposal of God Himself. This is a source of your consolation. “Ah,” you say, “will this Lord of glory condescend to be my father and my friend? Will He undertake my cause, and manage all for me by the way, and to the end? O then I would rejoice that all my times are in His hand, all my concerns at His disposal. O who so fit to choose my lot, and regulate my ways, as the only wise God? And who so worthy of all the confidence of my heart as a Being who spared not His own Son, but sacrificed Him for my salvation?” Here then, Christians, is the source of your consolation, and of your joy, which no man taketh from you.

Lastly, let this subject check our *presumption*. Let us beware

28

of reflecting on Him. He does as He pleases. He putteth down one, and setteth up another. Suppose a fellow-creature

succeed more than you; suppose he has greater talents than you possess; suppose he is placed in a higher station than you; what arrangement is this the effect of? And may not God do what He will with His own? "Are you evil, because He is good? " You are to leave others to His disposal as well as yourself; and may you learn from this subject, "In whatsoever state you are, therewith to be content." Yes, and "in everything to give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you."

I want you to remember this in two cases. Think of it when you look back upon life. God said to Moses, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord Thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Life would be a poor business in review unless we could connect God with it—with its crosses, and with its comforts. Have you failed in your plans? Have your purposes been broken off, even the thoughts of your heart? Have you been sent back in life, or put down? Who has done it? Would you learn from David? He says, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." Would you learn from Job? Job was stript of all, yet he says, "The LORD hath taken away." Would Job think of commencing an action against God for damages? So far from it that he said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Or are you looking forward? Who: can avoid it? You "know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." Your eye cannot pierce through these futurities and uncertainties. But think of God's all-disposing agency and say, "With Him I leave myself; with Him I leave my children; with Him I leave my business; with Him I leave everything that can befall me."

"Our cares, we give you lo the wind,
And shake you off like rust;
Well may we leave our all with Him
With whom our souls we trust."

O Christian, put yourself and all your concerns on board this vessel, and give to God the entire command of it. Do not call Him away from the helm, but leave Him to manage all, and say, "The Lord shall choose my inheritance for me. Let Him do with me as seemeth good in His sight."

IV.

A RESOLVE AND A PRAYER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, December 12th, 1847.)

But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face.—PSALM v. 7, 8.

IT has been said that a student may test the progress he has made in the Latin language by the light in which he reads the works of Cicero; may I not venture to say, men may know how far they have advanced in religion by the light in which they read the Scriptures? David says, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb." Job says, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Jeremiah says, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." So it always will be in every partaker of Divine grace: his glory and his delight will be in the law of the Lord. He must be very cold and insensible who is not excited and animated by the perusal of the Book of Psalms, and he must be very unconscious of his infirmities and imperfections who is not humbled and abased thereby. But feeling in religion, even if it be painful feeling, is infinitely preferable to indifference in the things of God. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;" and "To that man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word." What a matter of humiliation must it be to Christians, who are so far above the Jews with regard to means and privileges, that they should ever be inferior to them in experience and devotion; and yet this *is* the case, at least with regard to some.

The man after God's own heart is to be your example and

30

your instructor this morning. Hear how he speaks of God, and how he speaks of himself: “Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with Thee. The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. *But* as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face.”

These words contain two things—David’s resolution and David’s prayer. Let us endeavour to make them both our own; for this purpose let us seek to understand them.

I. DAVID’S RESOLUTION.

“But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple.” Three things are here to be observed: The independence of this resolve, to what it refers, and the manner in which it was to be performed.

First, *The independence of this resolve.* Let others take what course they please; I have chosen mine. ’Tis good for me to draw near to God. Him I am determined to serve and enjoy; and though companionship is pleasant, and though I should rejoice if I could see others walking in the same way, I must not wait for them; I must not be influenced by them; I must not be determined by them; “As for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple.” Such also was the resolution of Joshua, when all Israel assembled before him at Shechem. “Choose you,” says he, “whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell;” but your choice will not determine mine, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” The Apostle tells us, that the Saviour has “purified unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Now you should no (affect singularity

in little things, or for its own sake: this always marks a vain and a weak mind; nor affect peculiarities in order to obtain distinction, like one who in order to engage attention stumbles in the road, and bolts through the hedges, and so makes up in eccentricities what is wanting in excellence. Goodness is always the same in itself, and goodness when followed by a

31

multitude is goodness still; but it is regardless of countenance from others, and is determined, if necessary, to go alone; yea, determined even to press through opposition and reproach, and is above all praise. Such was the praise due to Abdiel, according to Milton's well-known lines—

“—faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful he

Among innumerable false, unmoved,

Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified;

His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.

Nor number, nor example, with him wrought

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,

Though single.”

But we have a higher authority to which we can refer, even that of our Saviour, who says, “He that confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before my Father and His holy angels.”

Observe, secondly, *To what the resolution refers*. It is to the public worship of God. “But as for me, I will come into *Thy house*.”

This resolution was not made when he accompanied the removal of the ark from Kirjath Jearim with singing, with harps and with psalteries. We read that David “returned to bless his house,” that is, to worship God in his family; and that man's religion is a very suspicious business who has not an altar on which to offer the morning and evening sacrifices of prayer and praise. You find that David laid a great stress here: “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart, I will set no wicked thing before my eyes: I

hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave unto me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.”

We find him also distinguished by *private* devotion. “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips, when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate upon Thee in the night watches.” “Morning, evening, and at noon will I pray, and Thou shalt hear my voice.” “Seven times a day will I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous judgments.” And what was the Saviour’s direction to His disciples? “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray

32

to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seest in secret shall reward thee openly.”

But the duty of the family and of the closet is not to exclude the service of the sanctuary, but to prepare us for it. David therefore was much distinguished by this. “I was glad,” said he, “when they said unto me, Let us go up to the house of the Lord.” “I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy honour dwelleth.” “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.” Though a king, he was not above attending public worship, nor did he deem it a thing proper only for the low and common people; yea, though a monarch, he said, “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Though a man full of employment, and giving audience to ambassadors, orders to generals, and managing the affairs of a large and divided empire, he was not like some of you, too busy to attend the courts of the Lord. He could always afford time, for he rose early, and he was a man of order, arrangement, and dispatch; such a man has always time for everything. Though he was a man of genius, of superior endowments, and a prophet of the Lord, yet he did not say, “What shall I learn by my going to the house of the Lord? They cannot tell me more than I know already;” but, said he, “What I have for-

gotten I want to have renewed; what I know already I wish to know *better*; I wish to be impressed, and desire to reduce it to experience and practice." Though he was a good man, and had a large measure of Divine influence, yet he desired more; "and he who says he has enough, confesses he has none." It was Moses, who had seen more of the Divine glory than any of the human race, that said, "I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory." It was Paul, who *knew* so much of Christ, that said, "That I may know Him." It is those who have tasted most of the bread of life who will pray, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Such worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; and a Christian knows where he is encouraged to repair, and he can plead the promises: "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;" "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." He knows too where he has not only sought, but found God, and can look back upon occasions in which he has found "Him in His palaces for a refuge." He therefore is induced to say:

33

"In every new distress
I'll to His house repair;
I'll think upon His wondrous grace,
And seek deliverance there."

"There God has often turned my bondage into liberty; there have I enjoyed earnest and foretastes of the glory to be revealed, and there my prayer has been answered. As for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple."

This leads us to observe, thirdly, *The manner in which the resolution was to be performed*. It was to be done in two ways: under a sense of God's mercy, and with a heart filled with His fear.

First, then, under a sense of God's mercy. He calls it "the multitude of Thy mercy." He calls it so because it is free and entirely undeserved. He not only speaks of mercy, but of "the multitude of Thy mercy;" and though he had many trials, he would not suffer them to distress him, as to lead him to over-

look God's mercies. He would not go to God's house groaning, and murmuring, and complaining, but would "enter His courts with thanksgiving, and His gates with praise." He "would be thankful unto Him, and bless His name." And did not this well become him? And does it not, Christians, well become you?

We may take this more particularly as referring to the worship of God in His house. Why a multitude of mercies are combined with this very thing! Do you not value it? Is it not a mercy that you have a house of God to worship Him in, while there are so many destitute of this privilege?

"The sound of the church-going bell
These valleys and rocks never heard;
Never sighed at the sound of a knell,
Nor smiled when a Sabbath appeared."

And is it not a mercy that the sanctuary is so commodious and so near? You are not like the Jews; they had to go to Jerusalem three times in the year, however distant they might be from it, and however rough the road or unfavourable the weather.

" But we have no such lengths to go,
Nor wander far abroad;
Where'er His saints assemble now,
There is a house for God."

And is it not a mercy that we have liberty of conscience?

D

34

Was it always so? "Call to remembrance the former times;" think of the fines, the imprisonments, and of the fires to which your forefathers were exposed. Think of their worshipping God in the darkness of the night, and in the open air, in dens and caves of the earth; while your eyes see your teachers, while you can enjoy your sabbaths, and can take sweet council together, while you "sit under your own vines and your own fig-trees, none daring to make you afraid." And is it not a mercy that you have leisure, as well as health and strength, to come to the house of God to worship Him, while many of your fellow-creatures, and of your fellow-Christians, are confined on beds of sickness, or detained by the sufferings of others? Is

it not a mercy that you feel a *disposition* to avail yourselves of this privilege, while others prefer the fireside, or a walk in the fields, or an excursion into the country, or balancing their accounts? And is it not a mercy that you have had already so many instances to record in which you have held communion with Him in His house; when you “have seen the goings of your God and King in the sanctuary?” These are a few, and you may add numbers more, and then you will say, “I came into His house in the multitude of His mercy.”

But we must not confine the mercy of God to particular seasons. You have a multitude of mercies to record. You have private mercies, and public mercies; sweet mercies, and bitter mercies; personal mercies, and relative mercies; temporal mercies, and spiritual mercies; redeeming, justifying, and sanctifying mercies; guiding, guarding, and comforting mercies. “Oh how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!” “How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” I live and move and have my being in mercy, and in the multitude of His mercy I will come into God’s house.

David was not only alive to a sense of God’s mercies, but was also filled with His fear: “And in Thy *fear* will I worship toward Thy holy temple.” This fear has nothing in it like terror or dread. You may infer this, because you see it is felt, while he expresses his gratitude for the multitude of God’s mercy. And you may see this in the qualifications associated with it in the Scriptures. Are you required to tremble? You are to “rejoice with trembling.” It is easy to determine what

35

kind of fear that is which admits of joy; and if you are to walk in the fear of the Lord, you are also to walk “in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” This is what is enjoined upon the Hebrews, who are reminded by the Apostle that grace is the only source of it: “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.” And says David, “God

is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence by all them that are round about Him.” Surely this feeling tends more than perhaps anything else to our religious edifying in the means of grace. Nothing is more becoming us than the cultivation of this disposition in our approaches to the Omniscient, Omnipresent Jehovah; and nothing can more become us than a sense of our need and depravity, and our being but dust and ashes when we take upon us to speak unto the Lord.

In order that you may thus worship God, you would do well to remember the importance of the work itself, and to reflect upon the consequences arising from it. I fear many of you think very little of this; but here you act for eternity, and you should bear in mind, that your engagements here will be remembered for ever with pleasure or anguish in a world of blessedness or misery. You should remember that for every opportunity you are responsible, and must give an account of yourselves to God. You should remember that you never leave His house as you enter it; that these means will either soften or harden, save or condemn you; and when you reflect upon this, as you would do well to do, when you come before Him, you will be induced to exclaim, “How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven”—and the gate of hell too. Alas, how many more pass through this gate to the one than to the other; and to how many more is the preaching of the cross “the savour of death unto death, rather than the savour of life unto life!”

II. Let us now proceed to observe DAVID’S PRAYER: “Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face.” Here you see God is addressed as a friend. “The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” We are not sensible of our impatience till we are made to wait. Into what difficulties and perplexities would our presumption lead us if left to ourselves! How often are we forced to exclaim, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed!” And then we are willing to give back the reins into His own hand, seeing

D 2

36

we have but just escaped from destruction. Then, ceasing from our own wisdom, we shall say with the Church, "Thou shalt choose our inheritance for us;" "Lead me in Thy truth, and guide me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." Now, "how condescending and how kind" it is that when we are made sensible of our need of Him, He is willing to lead us! He comes forward and says, "I will guide you with my counsel, I will direct your path;" and as a Leader He possesses every qualification to recommend Himself to us, as wisdom, and power, and patience, and loving kindness, and tender mercy.

But let us remark three things in David's prayer, and first, observe, *What is the rule according to which he looks for this Divine guidance.* "Lead me in Thy righteousness." What is the meaning of this? There is a righteousness mentioned in Scripture, and which we ought never to forget—the righteousness which is the only ground of our acceptance and justification before God. In this Paul desired to be found; it is that which he calls "the righteousness of God by faith." But this is not the righteousness here mentioned. There is also the righteousness of sanctification, and this is always combined with the former: with a title to heaven God always confers a meetness for it. But this is not the righteousness here referred to. It regards nothing in us, but something in God—His *faithfulness*. This is often so understood in the Scriptures. For instance, Paul says to the Hebrews, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister." There by "unrighteous" he means unfaithful. God had promised He would not forget such and such things, and if He had forgotten He would have been unfaithful to His word, and therefore unrighteous. But as the Apostle says, "He is faithful who promised, who also will do it." All God's dealings with His people have been *faithful*. So David says in another place, "All the ways of the Lord are faithfulness and truth," goodness and veracity combined.

Secondly, observe, *Why he wishes this leading*. It is that he may be divinely instructed in the right path. "Make Thy way straight before my face." Or, as Dr. Watts has it,

"Make every path of duty straight,
And plain before my face."

The Christian may sometimes be in a state of great perplexity

37

as to the way he should go. He knows "it is a good thing for the heart to be established with grace." And while there is a measure of uncertainty in regard to matters of importance, he cannot enjoy satisfaction and peace. The believer desires to know the mind of the Spirit. He does not proudly ask, "How can these things be?" he is not unwilling to bind his mind to Divine authority, but is led humbly to implore Divine illumination, and says, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth; cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto Thee. Thou knowest that I wish to embrace the truth, to know and to believe all things Thou hast required of me: make Thy way straight before my face."

He desires Divine guidance in the path of Christian *experience*. He often finds his own views very desponding, and his feelings very distressing. He fears he has no part or lot in the matter, and that his heart is not right in the sight of God; and therefore turns to his fellow-disciples, and says, "You that love the Lord indeed, tell me is it thus with you?" He reads in the word of God that the "ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are paths of peace," but he experiences little of this peace. He reads, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance: in Thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in Thy favour shall they be exalted;" but he does not know how to harmonise this with the sorrow and distress he feels, and the fears and anxieties he entertains, not perhaps aware that God's people are held forth in His word not only in connection with joy, but also in connection with sorrow; that God says, "With weeping and supplication will I bring them;" that they are held fast by their fears as well as by their confidence. Therefore they should mark the footsteps of the flock, and

compare their own with those who have gone before them. Thus often will the snare be broken and the captive delivered.

Then there is the path of *practice*. He desires his conduct may be according to the precepts of the Divine Word.

Then there is the path of *precept*. Perhaps some endeared connection has been formed, or some enterprise has been undertaken. Here something must be determined. Here you see not only the awful consequences of taking a wrong course, but the importance of taking a right one. How much may depend upon that one course, as it may give a complexion to the whole of our future life, and may be the means of either promoting or retarding our usefulness and comfort! And how may the honour and glory of God be connected with it! The

38

man cannot be easy in such a state, but will cry with David, "Make Thy way straight before my face."

Then observe, *The motive he pleads to enforce it with God*. "Lead me in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies." David had enemies, and every Christian will have enemies. Our blessed Lord said, "The world hateth me, because I testify that the works thereof are evil;" and in proportion as our conduct corresponds with His requirements, and we follow Christ, we shall find that the world hateth us.

Our translators have thought it worth while to insert in the margin of our Bibles, "Observers;" so that the text might read—"because of my observers." I lay the more stress here, because a similar prayer is found in another psalm: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies," or "those who observe me," as you have it again in the margin. Admitting this to be the case, let us see how we should be led to pray as David did here, in consequence of our observers. And who are our observers? Here we might remark that the *world* observes the Christian, and observes him with malignity too, because they watch for our halting. What they readily overlook in others they will be sure to observe in you, Christian. They know you profess more than they do, and therefore judge of you by your own rule. The people of the world are not quite so ignorant as you may sometimes think

them to be. They know what you profess, and what ought to be your line of conduct, and if you do not observe this line of conduct, you will cause the enemies of the cross to blaspheme. You know how Saul observed David, and David, to his honour be it spoken, walked wisely, so that Saul could not speak reproachfully of him. But by and by he yielded. In an awful hour he was drawn aside, and after this how bitterly did he sigh, "My sin is ever before me," because of the dishonour he had brought upon the cause of God and truth. Therefore said the honest Nathan to him, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." How anxious was the Apostle Peter to preserve Christians from furnishing matter for reproach with regard to their observers. Thus says he, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear,

39

having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing." Then he says again, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold glorify God in the day of visitation." He knew that by obeying these directions, and being in their lives all they professed, they would not only put to silence all their enemies, but would even constrain them to take knowledge of them that "they had been with Jesus, and had learnt of Him."

Don't complain of this, therefore, that the world observes you, but see to it that the world derives good from you. See to it that the world does not despise you from any misconduct they may observe; but rather say with Nehemiah, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Then you will be observed by your *fellow-Christians*. They will do it from *love*. They are commanded to admonish one

another, to consider one another, and to provoke one another to love and good works. Their eyes, therefore, are upon you, and when they see the grace of God in you “they are glad.” But woe be to you, if you are the means of their distress. In the seventy-third psalm David shews his tenderness with regard to his brethren: “If I should speak thus,” says he, “I should offend against the generation of Thy children.” O let me never offend them, let me never distress them! “Better were it,” says the Saviour, “better were it that a millstone were hanged about his neck, than that he should offend *one* of these little ones.”

Ministers also are observers. They are overseers. “They watch for your souls as those that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief.” And they live, if you stand fast in the Lord. If your conversation is such as becometh the Gospel of Christ, you encourage their hearts, and strengthen their hands; you confirm their doctrine, and recommend their cause.

Angels also are your observers. “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation?” And if they were not witnesses as well as ministering spirits, Paul would never have admonished Timothy as he did, saying, “I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect *angels*, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another; do nothing by partiality.” They therefore

40

observe you when you cannot observe them. You are “a spectacle,” says the Apostle, “not only to men but to angels.” They will therefore have to be called forth as witnesses in cases where persons accused one another, where there were no other witnesses, as in the case of the seducer and the seduced, the murderer and murdered. The angels will soon determine the question.

God Himself is your observer. God said to Abraham, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect. Remember you are walking before me: I see you when you turn back, and when you turn aside, when you sit down, when you stand still, and when you seem to come short.” And, brethren, we should remember that God is a *perfect* observer. He knows all your

walking: nothing escapes Him. And He observes to record, that He may “bring every thought into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” What manner of persons then ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! We are all, my hearers, observed by Him. How circumspect then ought we to be! How earnestly and continually ought we to pray to Him who is able to keep us from falling, that He would keep our goings in His paths, that our footsteps may not slide; that His strength may be made perfect in our weakness; that His grace may be sufficient for us!

We are observed continually by the world, by the Church, by angels, and by God Himself.

“O may these thoughts possess my breast,
Where'er I rove, where'er I rest;
Nor let my weaker passions dare
Consent to sin, for God is there.”

 41

V.

THE SECRET OF A TRUE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, October 15th, 1848.)

I have set the Lord always before me.—PSALM xvi. 8.

YOU well know that I usually employ a short introduction; if my introduction should be longer than usual this morning, it will not be accidental but designed. The reason is, there are some things which bear largely upon our subject before we come to our particular consideration of the text.

In the Acts of the Apostles we have a large quotation including our text, which it may be proper to read: “For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad: moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known

to me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God hath sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that *His* soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

So you see our text is to be considered as the language of the Messiah, in its original and highest sense; but subordinately it was the language of David, and it is the language of all the partakers of Divine grace; for, my brethren, there is an intimate connection between Christ and Christians—a mystical union,

42

as it is called: He being the Head, and they being the members of His body. By His incarnation He partakes of our nature, and by our renovation we partake of His spirit, having His will, His desires, His disposition, His pursuits, for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” Hence in the Scriptures you find that what is spoken by the one is also expressed by the other, only with this difference: these things in Christ were exemplified perfectly, in Christians they are exemplified imperfectly. Yet there is a relation, a growing relation, between them, for they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son, and as they “have borne the image of the earthly, they shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

Then again you will observe, the experience our text breathes is *natural* to Christ, but it is not natural to Christians. So far from it, “by nature they are the children of wrath, even as others,” and are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;” so that what the Apostle says of the Ephesians before their conversion is also applicable to them, “without God in the world.”

There are three kinds of atheism. The first is speculative. This we are persuaded is not very common, and cannot be so, from the numberless proofs of the existence of the Deity. But there are some who have not only avowed their disbelief of a God, but have suffered for it. Witness Bologne, who was burnt at Thoulouse in France, and had his book in favour of atheism suspended to his neck. How far God may “give up to strong delusion, so that they may believe a lie,” those that have: rejected Christianity, and turned “away from Him that speaketh from heaven,” it is impossible to determine. The second is cordial; so that David says, “The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.” That is, he wishes it rather than believes it; it is his prayer, rather than his creed. Therefore, said the Jews, in the days of Isaiah, “Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” The third is practical. The generality of mankind are living just as they would live, if they were persuaded the Scriptures were “a cunningly devised fable,” and the being of a God a lie. They are living in a world where God is perpetually displaying His perfections, but they see Him not, they hear Him not; they lie down and rise up, they begin and end their enterprises, while God is not in all their thoughts: they are dead to His attributes. If He pursues

43

them, “they say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.” Now reflection destroys this indifference and insensibility towards the Blessed God, and awakens in our bosoms the enquiry, “Where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?” This brings us back to Him by making us one with Him again.

If it be asked, and it ought to be asked, How is this accomplished? We answer, Not by nature or providence: no sinner was ever effectually brought back to God but by the cross. “I am the way,” says our Lord, “the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” And says the Apostle “Christ also Himself once suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” Now in Christ Jesus we who sometimes were far, off are made nigh.

But we have now to do with the effect, rather than with the cause. Here are two things we have to remark on. The first

regards the *object* of this presentation: "I have set the LORD always before me." Now as He is not a material being, but a Spirit, He cannot be set before us as an object of sense, but mentally as an object of thought and contemplation, to be realised by faith.

The second regards the *constancy* of it: "I have set the Lord *always* before me." Now this language must be taken with qualification. It cannot mean that he was always actually thinking of God. This was impossible. It was impossible to him, and it is impossible to us. Impossible, first, through the limitation of our faculties; and impossible, secondly, through the multiplicity of our engagements, connections, our calling and concerns in life, for these have demands, and large demands too, upon us while we are here. And while we are "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," we are not to be slothful in business. But it must include a frequency of influence of our religious principles and impressions. It must mean something more than casual and occasional reference to God in our minds, or a reference to Him confined to particular seasons, places, and circumstances, though it may be aided very much by these. It must include the excitement of your minds, and the stirring up of yourself to take hold upon God; a thinking upon Him till your recurrence to Him will be a kind of natural habit or instinct. Thus, then, as soon as your thoughts are loosened from other things, they should rise to God; yea, and be always ready to ascend to Him while you are engaged in other concerns.

This constancy of reflection upon God is possible in every

44

condition, in every period, under every circumstance. David when a stripling, David when a shepherd, David when a conqueror, David when an exile, David when a king,—in the contemplation of the works of nature, or the dispensations of His providence, or the ordinances of religion,—David *could* say, "I have set the Lord always before me."

How? This is what we just now intimated, and it is our particular aim this morning.

There are four ways in which the Psalmist could say, "I have set the Lord always before me," and in which we are

going to urge you to follow Him. Set the Lord always before you as your Protector; set the Lord always before you as your Guide; set the Lord always before you as your Example; set the Lord always before you as your Observer. "Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things."

I. *Set the Lord always before you as your* PROTECTOR.

I mention this first, because it is the particular reference in my text. "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." Ah, Christians, you will find the importance of this all through your religious course. Thus Bunyan, with equal genius and force, has made Mr. Greatheart the conductor of the pilgrims through the wilderness. It was to intimate that this courage would be needful for them all through their journey to the skies; that without it they would be liable to be stopped, or to be turned back, or turned aside, or induced to conceal themselves.

The word *courage*, originally considered, signifies fortitude; but in process of time it has been used to express moral excellence at large, because, if all moral excellence does not depend upon it, it is defended by it; and without it you have no dependence upon a man for avoiding that which is evil and performing that which is good. You can place no reliance upon him for the discharge of any duty where difficulties and dangers attend him; and this will be the case with us so long as we are in a world lying in wickedness.

You mistake, if you suppose that holy courage is only necessary for ministers and missionaries in their work. Why, every Christian is called to do and suffer the will of God, and without this courage in some instances he will be sure always to fail.

Perhaps there is not a single maxim more undeniable, and which can more universally obtain credence, than the words of Peter and John before the Jewish Council: "Whether it be

45

right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Yet, we are bold to say, without holy decision, in a world like this, a man cannot pass a single day

without violating this maxim. As a good writer (Lord Bacon) observes, "If you were to go forth and resolve to call persons and things by their own proper name, you would be knocked on the head before you got to the end of the street."

A profession of religion is a very awful thing. You engage, when you take this upon you, that you will be more than others, that you will do more than others, that you will give more than others, and that you will suffer better than others. You are not, perhaps, aware of the consequences of your assuming such a position. You are placing yourself in such a condition that you may, perhaps, either become an apostate or a martyr—one or the other; and hence, without this courage, how can you cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye? Without this, how can you crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts? how can you mortify the deeds of the body, that you may live?

The Christian life is a warfare,—it is, indeed, a *good* warfare, but it is a very trying one; and the Christian must say with Paul, "I fight not as one that beateth the air." Their enemies, their number, their skill, their malice, their power, their successes, are enough to make you tremble. What is to inspire you with courage? "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." What is to inspire you with confidence? "*I*," says God to Abraham, "*I* am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;" and, says David, "The Lord God is a sun and shield." And what does God say to every Christian? "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Place Him before you, in the eye of your faith, in His covenant engagements and promises and out of weakness you shall be made strong.

"A friend and helper so divine
Does my weak courage raise;
He makes the glorious victory mine,
And His shall be the praise."

What was it that enabled Moses to endure the menaces of

46

Pharaoh? “He endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” What enabled Micaiah to be so courageous when surrounded by four hundred lying chaplains, and two kings in their robes before him? “I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left.” What was Ahab, and what was Jehoshaphat, compared with Him?

II. *Set the Lord always before you as your GUIDE.*

Your way is not only dangerous, but difficult and perplexing; and you know, if you know yourself, that you are ignorant as well as weak. How often, therefore, do you find David, conscious of his inability to guide himself, praying for Divine direction, and saying, “Lead me in the way everlasting;” “Lead me in Thy truth, and guide me, for Thou art the God of my salvation: on Thee do I wait all the day;” “Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy path straight before my face.” And how often do you find him rejoicing in the assurance of this, in the midst of all his perplexities, and saying, “Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee: Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory;” “This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide, even unto death.”

The Jews were typical of the Church of God in all ages of the world. Now see how God in His condescension provided for them in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. Thus Moses says: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.” This met their circumstances and their exigencies. For, how were they to have known their way in the trackless desert? Here was their guide—this fiery cloudy pillar. As soon as this moved, there was a cry throughout all the Jewish camp, whether in the morning, or at noon, in the evening, or at night. When this arose, they immediately struck their tents; as this paused, they immediately

pitched them; as this turned to the right hand or to the left, so they turned. This determined their direction, their continuance, and all their movements; and this meteor did not disappear till their journey ended. By a right, though sometimes by a circuitous and sometimes by a painful way, it brought them to a city of habitation. It was, therefore, their duty and their privilege to keep this always before them,

47

always in their view. And, O Christians, it is equally your privilege to set the Lord always before you as your guide.

How much may depend upon taking a wrong course, or even a wrong step! How may one wrong step destroy your usefulness, injure your reputation, and plunge you into embarrassments from which it may be impossible to extricate yourself; so that, instead of having repentance to call upon you as a kind friend, you would have it quartered upon you, as a dragoon and his horse, for life.

Yet how prone are you to err! In how many instances in life have we gone astray! How often have we suffered from our imprudence, from our impatience, or our rashness! How often have we gone forward till we should have broken our necks, or fallen over a precipice on the other side, had not God hedged up our way with thorns! At first we urged our way onward, till we looked through the hedge and saw the abyss, and then we fell upon our knees, saying, "Lord, I am Thine; save me." Had it been in your power, Christians, would you not sometimes have shunned such and such a trial; and what would you have lost? what, but a rich and lively experience which enabled you to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted"? or with Dr. Young,

"In all my list of blessings infinite
Stands this the foremost,
That my heart has bled."

Therefore, "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;" "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." It is not fancies that are to be our guide; it is not impulses that are to be our guide; it is not our inclinations, or the wishes of our friends, that are our

fiery cloudy pillar to lead us. What was the command, and what was the promise? “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy steps.” You will often, indeed, be called to walk by faith, and not by sight, but you will come under the blessedness of those of whom God, by the Prophet Isaiah, speaks, when He says, “I will lead the blind by a way they know not, and in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

III. *Set the Lord always before you as your EXAMPLE.*

We need not enlarge upon the advantages of example. We

48

pity those persons who are destitute of such assistance and encouragement. We pity the son whose father does not go to the prayer-meeting, or who teaches him to swear, but not to pray. We pity the daughter whose mother teaches her to idolise her person, or to consume her precious time in trifles and vanity, instead of saying to her, “Beauty is deceitful, and favour is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” I pity the family in which there is no one at the head to go before the servants and children in profession, and faith, and practice of holiness, to keep them within view of the loveliness of religion, and within the feeling of its Divine impression. Yet, blessed be God, there are now very few places or neighbourhoods to be found in which there are not some instances of persons loving and fearing God; though they are vastly the minority, yet, blessed be God, there are some; and though the circumstances of their conversion may not be very striking, nor their characters alike good, still there is enough to condemn the careless and to encourage and direct inquirers. And if you will open your Bibles, you will be immediately surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses: you will find examples of every condition near you. You will find youths for the young; and those whose hoary heads are a crown of glory for the old; and persons engaged in the employments of the world, yet pious and holy, for those who are in middle

age and in business; such as are not elated by prosperity, and not depressed but patient in adversity. All these you will hear with one voice saying, "Be not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Above all, God Himself becomes your example. Here we have the Father going before the children, the Master before his servants, and the Sovereign before all His subjects. The essence of religion is to resemble Him. Whom we love we are likely to imitate; and it is impossible to honour anyone so much as by imitation. There is naturally implanted in us a principle of emulation, the design of which is to induce us to imitate whatever we see good and excellent; and as God is the source of all beauty and excellence, the ultimate design of this principle of emulation is to induce us to imitate God: therefore we are required to be "followers of God, as dear children."

There are two things here, with regard to God being our example, which you will do well to notice and remember. The first is, when God places Himself before us as our example, He does not do so in regard to His natural perfections.

49

This is a distinction of vast importance. A desire to imitate God in His natural perfections is the very source of sin. Lucifer wished to be like the Most High, and to exalt his throne among the stars, and was cast down to hell. Adam wished to be like God, knowing good and evil, and was excluded from Paradise. There are those who would be ready to be like God as to His wisdom, and power, and omnipresence; but this is not what is required. What *is* required is, to be like Him in His moral attributes—to be holy like God, to be righteous like God, to be kind like God, to forgive like God, to be merciful like God, that, as the Saviour says, "Ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, who maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and causeth the rain to descend upon the just and upon the unjust. Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful."

The other is, God has humanised His example, and by humanising it has placed it within our reach, and rendered it

more attractive and more complete. I say more complete, because God, absolutely considered, would not be our complete example. He could not be our example in any of those duties which include dependence, or obedience, or prayer, or suffering. But God was manifest in the flesh. Here, therefore, we find Him going before us in all the paths of obedience and suffering. I was the other evening attending a lecture on astronomy, that sublime science which also admits of so much certainty. We see the earth hanging upon nothing, and the heavenly bodies, not one more self-sustained than self-made, moving in their spheres. To see worlds and a multiplicity of worlds! You are carried so far till you are lost in the distance, and feel a painful void; you feel a kind of chilling, overwhelming reverence for a Being capable of such agencies as these, and one is reminded of the words of a writer who says, "There can be no friendship between God and man, because there is no equality." Some little inequality he allows to be consistent with friendship, but asserts that the disparity between God and man is so great that there can be nothing like friendship between them. Why, I felt this, and I said,

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind."

Here I can lay hold of Him. Here I can unbosom myself

E

⁵⁰

to Him. Here I can say, "My Lord and my God." This is the advantage we have by the gospel. Here is IMMANUEL, God with us. When I wish to contemplate God, I go to Judæa, and follow a Being who went about there for thirty-three years doing good, and hear Him say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is our privilege to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, and we behold Him, not only as our friend, but as our great example too, and we say,

"Be Thou my pattern: make me bear
More of Thy gracious image here."

IV. *Set the Lord always before you as your* OBSERVER.

A *perfect* observer, for nothing, however minute or however secret, escapes Him. "His eyes," says Solomon, "are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. Hell is naked before Him, and destruction hath no covering." A *constant* observer. No other witness can be always viewing, but here your observer never slumbers nor sleeps; is never absent, is never abstracted, is never diverted. "The darkness hideth not from Him, the light shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Him." An *awful* observer; for He is not an unconcerned spectator, but He observes all, and observes all to record all, and records all to bring all into judgment, "with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Now see the advantage of placing such a Being as this before you. A heathen philosopher, you may remember, exhorts his pupils, in order to maintain a serious conduct, always to imagine that some illustrious personage was always looking upon them. And we all know how much the eye of a superior, especially of a highly-esteemed and revered being, can always exclude rudeness, produce decorum, and refine our manners and speech, as soon as he enters among us. But what is the eye of a Cato compared with the eye of Jehovah, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, before whose pure eyes the heavens are not clean, and who charges His angels with folly? Therefore set the Lord always before you; realise this, and then you will order your course aright, and your conversation aright. Realise this, and it will be a spur to your diligence, and a safeguard amid the temptations of life. Men hope to commit sin without being observed, but the hope is utterly baseless, for "Be sure your sin will find you out." It has found you out already.

⁵¹

Will you, therefore, offend God to His face? Will you sin in the very presence of Jehovah? Satan says, "Here you have leisure; here you have a fine opportunity; there is no one in the house besides;" but "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" will be the language of conscience even then.

Oh, how will you cherish simplicity and godly sincerity in all your religious concerns! If you had only to do with your fellow-creatures, a form of godliness might be enough, and fair appearances might be sufficient; but though man may be deceived, God is not mocked. God looketh at the heart, and in vain do you pretend to worship Him while your heart is far from Him.

And how consolatory would it be, were it thus realised! how consoling the thought, that nothing is unseen or unknown to God, your heavenly Father! that He knoweth your frame, and remembereth that you are but dust; that He knoweth all your walking through this great wilderness; that He knoweth your soul in adversity; that all your desire is before Him, and your groanings are not hid from Him; that if you are mistaken before your fellow-creatures misrepresented or reproached by them, you can say, "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high; and He shall bring forth my righteousness as the light, and my judgment as the noon-day!" And then from this hour you will always carry with you Hagar's motto: "Thou God seest me."

Do you believe this, my dear hearers? the fact is, independently of your belief; but if you believe it not, its existence is nothing to you. Your minds can only be affected with the truths you believe, and therefore if you believe them not they will be as a nonentity to you. Do you believe God's word? If so, you will tremble at its contents, if the commandment comes home to your heart. Suppose you had a spectator who always followed you—always attended you with book and pen, both when alone and in company; you shut the door, but he is still there! Why do you not get rid of him? Why not say, 'Begone'? He will not! You exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? This watcher will wear out my days! "*Sinner*, what is your condition with regard to God? Is there not One perpetually observing you, with His book and with His pen too? Can you not say, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me; Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off;

52

Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me!" Why do you yield to this? Why do you not free yourself from such a source of terror and of trial? "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee!" Do you feel this now to be a source of terror and trial? You *must* feel it to be so in your present state. But let me shew you how you may turn this into a privilege. Oh seek reconciliation through the blood of the cross! Seek to know your relation to God, seek an interest in the blessed Saviour; then God shall be the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. Then you shall draw near and realise your connection with Him as your Father and your Friend; then you will be able to view it with pleasure, and to say, "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them; if I should count them they are more in number than the sand; when I awake I am still with Thee." And oh, beware of sinning against God, and of bringing guilt upon your conscience. The tendency of guilt is to make you shy of God, afraid of God, unwilling to think of God, and instead of always setting Him before you, to remove Him always from you.

Observe, in closing,—if you are like-minded with David, it is a pledge of your destination and a preparation for it. If you now walk with God, you will assuredly soon dwell with Him; for, says David, "the upright shall dwell in Thy presence." "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

VI. GLORIFYING GOD.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 18th, 1848.)

Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.—PSALM l. 23.

THIS is the language of Jehovah, whose voice always demands and deserves our attention. Whether you consider His infinite understanding, or His judgment, which is always according to truth; or His boundless authority, or His unimpeachable veracity, when He condescends to instruct us in His holy word, it becomes us to bow before Him, and to exclaim with Samuel, "Speak, for Thy servant heareth;" to inquire with an awakened Saul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and to resolve with David, "I will hear what God the Lord shall speak."

Now if this be your disposition, He is ready to shew you what the Lord your God requires of you. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." The following remarks will enable us, I trust, in some measure to understand and improve this. First, we should be concerned to glorify God; Secondly, this concern will be as nothing unless it be accompanied with a conversation ordered aright; and Thirdly, this conversation God will notice and regard. Divine Teacher! may we sit at Thy feet, and receive Thy word, and may the water Thou shalt give us be in us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life!"

I. WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED TO GLORIFY GOD.

This is the great end of our existence. For this we have received reason and an immortal soul. We are taught more than the beasts of the field, and made wiser than the fowls of the air; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth us

54

understanding. Of all that inhabit this lower world, man alone was made capable of knowing and serving, of enjoying and glorifying God.

But here something may be conceded, for first, even inanimate beings glorify God. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handy work." And not only do the sun, moon, and stars shew forth the glory of God, but every plant, and every tree, the flowers of which our Saviour declared, "Not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these." But all these are unconscious of the laws they obey, and of the qualities they possess. We must also allow that animal beings glorify God. They find themselves food, they provide for their young, and have some senses superior to ours. But all these creatures are blind, not only as to their object, but as to their order. They know no more of God, who made and who sustains them, than the trees upon which they may perch, or the grass upon which they may feed. Their skill also is limited to individualism. They are no wiser now than when they went to Noah for shelter, or to Adam for names. We allow, also, that wicked men may glorify God. Cyrus was God's shepherd, though he knew it not; and the Assyrian fulfilled God's pleasure, though he meant not so, nor did his heart think so; yet he was the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation; thus God gave him a charge against the people of His wrath. Thus we are told that "the wrath of man shall praise Him." He is mighty in overruling the conduct of men, causing them to perform His purpose, and display His perfections, without their being conscious of any such design or desire.

But it is otherwise with regard to the subjects of Divine grace. They have had their hearts renewed, and they serve and glorify God from conviction and disposition: they give up themselves to His pleasure, and hold themselves at His disposal. They are therefore peculiarly spoken of as glorifying God; hence, "the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel." Hence He says, "I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory;" that is, for His people from whom His revenue of glory is peculiarly derived. Though no addition

can be made to the reality of His glory, there may be an addition to its manifestation. Thus the Apostle says to the Corinthians, "Glorify God with your bodies, and with your spirits, which are His." And again he says, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This induces them to pray that His name may be sanctified, that

55

His will may be done on earth even as it is done in heaven. This leads them to lament when His cause is dishonoured; they feel the reproach of His name to be a reproach, and rejoice when it is honoured, and when His "word has free course, runs, and is glorified;" when many are added to the Lord, and when in Judah things go well.

Observe, one of the ways in which we can glorify God is by *offering praise*. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." Praise is here considered as an offering or a sacrifice. So the Apostle speaks of it in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Thus Hosea says, "So will we render the calves of our lips." And this sacrifice is here compared, or rather contrasted, with animal sacrifices under the law. You have heard what God hath said by Asaph: "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy fold, for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine; if I were hungry I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God *thanksgiving*, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." And again, in another psalm, he says, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs."

Now these sacrifices were ordained by God of old; they were attached to the Jewish service; but when unaccompanied

by faith in the atonement which they prefigured, and when unaccompanied by moral and religious feelings in the worshippers, they were unacceptable to God; and when they were made substitutes for pious and spiritual devotion, they were even offensive to Him. So that He said of such, "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." Therefore God said by Jeremiah, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them that are circumcised with the uncircumcised: Egypt and Judah and Edam and the children of Ammon and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness;

56

for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised *in the heart*." From the beginning he only was a Jew that was one inwardly; and in David's days, we see, God required "mercy and not sacrifice," and *then* the sacrifices of God were "a broken heart;" "a broken and a contrite spirit, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

But how do they by offering praise glorify God? By the exalted sentiments they entertain in their minds; by their lively sense of His presence and excellences; by their extolling His holiness, and speaking well of His name; by their recommending Him to others and ascribing to Him all the honours so due unto His name, blessing Him for all they possess, and enjoy, and hope for. And this praise is worthy of the high estimation in which we see David here places it. This mode of glorifying God obtained in Paradise; and it will continue in heaven. Now we live under a dispensation that admits of wants and trials, and therefore prayer is necessary. But this dispensation will not continue always: repentance will be unnecessary when we cease to sin; prayer will then be turned into praise, and hope into enjoyment; but—

"Your days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life or breath or being last,
Or immortality endures."

Then praise is the most disinterested exercise in which we can be engaged. There is less of yourselves, and more of

God in it. Your wants lead you to pray, but duty alone excites you to praise. Hear, therefore, how David speaks of it: "Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; praise is comely." Here, you see, are three attributes by which he dignifies and honours it. It is *good*; it is morally good and spiritually good. It is also a *pleasant* thing; it produces the most delightful feeling we can ever experience. And it is *comely*; the garment of praise is a part of the beauty of holiness in which Christians adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.

It is worthy of remark that the Book of the Psalms terminates with praise, and with twelve admonitions: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts: praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise Him upon

57

the loud cymbals: praise Him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

II. OUR OFFERING OF PRAISE WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED UNLESS IT BE ACCOMPANIED WITH A CONVERSATION ORDERED ARIGHT.

Philip Henry remarks upon this passage, that though praise-giving is good, *praise-living* is better. And a portion in the Church Service runs thus: "That we may praise Him, not only with our lips but with our lives, by giving up ourselves to His service; and by walking before Him in righteousness and holiness all our days:" a sentiment as beautifully expressed as it is Scripturally derived. Turn to any part of the Scriptures, and you will see how this furnishes you with instances of thanksgiving from the people of God: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;" "Faith without works is dead;" "Let love be without dissimulation." And to come to the article of praising and glorifying God, says the Saviour: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much

fruit." A tutor is best praised by the proficiency his pupils make under his instructions. So here God speaks by David: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."

Two inquiries should here be made. The first is, what are we to understand by the term "conversation"? The word is often used for discourse; and it is highly important to have this ordered aright. For, as James says, "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." And the same Apostle says again, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." And Paul says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." But you will find in the Scriptures the word "conversation" generally means conduct—the whole of our carriage; your behaviour as it regards God and the various classes of our fellow-creatures.

The second inquiry is, what are we to understand by our conversation being "ordered aright"? Which inquiry we answer by directing you to a few passages of Scripture which refer to this conversation and describe it. Thus it is said: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation

58

and godliness?" and again, "Shew out of a good conversation your works with meekness of wisdom;" and again, "Let your conversation be honest among the Gentiles;" and, "Let your conversation be without covetousness;" and, says the Apostle, "Our conversation is in heaven." I cannot stay to enlarge, but may you take these away and examine yourselves by them.

We observe that *for all this the grace of God is necessary*. The Apostle, therefore, says, "By the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world." And as this grace is necessary, so it is *sufficient* for us, whatever be our conditions or our circumstances in life. This grace enabled Abraham to be faithful in all his house; it enabled Joseph to be circum-spect; it enabled David to walk wisely in a perfect way; and

it is only by this grace that we can have our conversation in the world, in the Church, and in the family, becoming the gospel. Again, this grace is as *attainable* as it is necessary and sufficient, otherwise the Apostle would not have said, "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear;" he would not have said, "Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind;" and again, "Be ye filled with the Spirit;" and our Lord would not have said, "Ask, and ye shall receive: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

III. We now hasten to our last remark, namely, that SUCH CONDUCT AS THIS ATTRACTS GOD'S NOTICE AND REGARD.

"Them that honour me," says God, "I will honour." So here: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him who ordereth his conversation aright *will I shew the salvation of God.*"

There is a temporal salvation, a spiritual salvation, and an eternal salvation; and the Lord will shew each of these to the man who walks so as to please Him.

There is a salvation consisting in our preservation or deliverance from wicked men, from flames, from flood, from disease, from accidents. God will "shew" His people this salvation. Not that He promises this absolutely and in all respects. No; it is a conditional promise: but as far as it is for their good, they are as sure of this as anything He has expressly promised. Oh, how much of this salvation have some of you seen in your passage through life! How many preservations,

59

how many deliverances, and all of these from God! "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord," exclaimed Jonah, as he was discharged from the belly of hell; and David said, "Our salvation is of the Lord, to whom belong the issues from death." He could well speak of this salvation; he was delivered from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, from the hand of Saul, and from all his enemies round about.

Then there is a *spiritual* salvation, and this is God's, and in a nobler sense than in the former. And whoso ordereth his conversation aright will be shewn this salvation. They are saved" by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Does not the Apostle Paul say, "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"? Yes; and He can shew them more and more of this salvation. He can give them clearer views of it, and brighter discoveries of their own interest therein. God's people cannot be more justified than they are, but then they may know more of their justified state than at present they do, and may rejoice in it more; and as to their sanctification, He will carry this on, and complete it: "He who hath begun the good work in you will complete it to the day of Jesus Christ."

Then there is an *eternal* salvation—salvation from death and the grave. The body shall be made like unto the glorious body of Christ; the soul shall be made perfect, in knowledge, and holiness, and joy, in common with all the redeemed people of God, and their pious connections who have gone before them, in His presence; in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. To this the Apostle refers when he speaks of this salvation as a *future* thing: "Israel *shall* be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;" and, "To them that look for Him will He appear a second time without sin unto salvation." Hear what He hath said in the ninety-first Psalm: "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name: he shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him; with long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." When Beza was dying he had this psalm read to him, and, said he, "God hath fulfilled all this in my experience, except the last words, 'with long life will I satisfy him, and *shew him my salvation,*' and *that will be accomplished,*" said he, "*within all hour.*"

Can you, my brethren, realise your interest in this salvation?

60

Will He “shew” *you* this salvation, and accomplish it in your experience? Then ought you not to say,

“For ever His dear sacred name
Shall dwell upon our tongues;
And Jesus and salvation be
The close of all our songs”?

61

VII.

STREAMS FROM THE ROCK.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 14th, 1846.)

He brought streams also out of the rock.—PSALM lxxviii. 16.

WHAT rock? Modern travellers have endeavoured to find it; and some tell us they have found it. They describe it as a large rough stone of granite, seven yards broad and five yards high, from which water oozes; and which must, at the time referred to by Moses, have rushed forth in streams. Now there is no certainty as to this; but there are three things to which we may attach certainty:—

First, that there was such a rock. It was in the wilderness when the people of Israel encamped at Rephidim. Here is the relation of it: “And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith

thou smotest the river, and go. Behold, I will stand upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

Secondly, the Apostle tells us that this rock followed them.

62

How? Not really by its slipping from its basis, and moving after them; but by a common figure of speech, employed by the sacred writers, he means the waters from the rock followed them. But here the question returns: How did the waters follow them? The Jewish Rabbis, the most superstitious and silly beings on the face of the earth, tell us, that this rock always moved along after them: if they marched through trackless deserts, it followed them there; that if they ascended a hill, it followed them there; or if they went down or encompassed a mountain, that there it followed them also. To this some Christian expositors seem to lean, but if it had been the case, why did they offer to buy water when they passed along by the border of Edam? or how was it, when thirty-nine years afterwards they came to Kadesh Barnea, which was their thirtieth station, and the fortieth year of their coming out of Egypt, that they again murmured for water? For we read, “There was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses. And the people chode with Moses, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?”

You will observe that the Apostle only says concerning the water, that it “followed them;” he does not tell us how far, or how long, but doubtless it did for a considerable time, while they moved along level ground, or descended a hill. It no doubt followed them through many windings and meanderings, and they felt happy to encamp, as often as they could, in the neighbourhood of these delightful streams.

Thirdly, here is another thing asserted: “That rock,” says the Apostle, “was Christ;” not indeed literally, but typically, for which reason the Apostle speaks of it as a “spiritual rock.”

“They drank of that rock which followed them; and that rock was Christ.”

Thus have we approached our subject, and we shall now consider this first rock as a representation of the Saviour. Secondly, we will stand and survey some of the fine streams which have flowed from it; and thirdly, we will examine the quality of those supplies.

I. WE CONSIDER THIS ROCK AS A REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST.

It is of infinite importance that we should have a proper knowledge of this Saviour, otherwise we cannot make use of

63

Him; therefore it is said, “By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” How? Do we not read that we are justified by faith? We do. But as the Apostle says, “How can they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” Therefore He was predicted from the beginning, and He has been prefigured in the Scriptures of truth, and set forth under various representations,—as “a sun and shield,” as “a shepherd,” as “a tree of life,” and here as “a rock.” Many have found types in Scripture that God never placed there; but there are some *real* types. There must, as Doddridge says, be likeness and pre-eminence, and the thing signified must be greater than the sign. Here we find it; here are these essentials of a type; let us therefore proceed to shew how Christ resembles the type, and how He surpasses it.

The articles of conformity are four.

1. The first is taken from the nature of the image itself; it is a rock. What does a rock represent, or remind us of?

Is it *solidity and firmness*? He “is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” “With Him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning:” everything with regard to Him is real and substantial, and may be relied upon. “If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed,” “His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.”

Or is it the *power of defence*? Winds and storms overturn houses and towers, but not “the munition of rocks;” and we

read of the Saviour, that "He is mighty to save;" "He is able to save to the uttermost." He can secure His people effectually,

"From all the assaults of death and sin,
From foes without, and foes within."

Or is it *power of support*? How well is that house sustained that is built upon a rock! The rains descend, the winds blow, and the floods arise, but it stands, because it is founded upon a rock. And our Saviour says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." You had need look well to the basis upon which you found the structure of your hope and happiness, especially for eternity, and of the salvation of your souls. Oh, if this falls, the crash will be heard beyond the stars; for we are expressly assured, that as there is no other foundation than this, so "Whosoever believeth in Christ shall never be confounded."

Or is it the *power of refreshment*? How delightful is shade! We read in the Book of Job of the "shady trees" which afford a shadow for behemoth. We read in Isaiah of "a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time," and "the cloud of

64

dew in the time of harvest." This is desirable; but how is it with regard to Christians as to their relation to Christ? "By believing they enter into rest;" they feel "a peace that passeth all understanding;" in all their afflictions, tribulations, and trials, whether personal or relative, they find here "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

A rock generally rises high. There are some which fill one with admiration and astonishment, but He is higher than the princes of the earth; "He is King of kings and Lord of lords;" "He that cometh from heaven is above all." Other rocks are without life, but Christ is a living stone, possessing life in Himself, and affording life to others. Other rocks are unimpressible and unfeeling, but this rock is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" so we read of Christ, "in that He Himself suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that be tempted."

2. We pass from the image to its condition; we mean with regard to its being smitten. It was ordered to be smitten, and only as smitten did it yield those streams which flowed from it.

And how did the Lord Jesus become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him? Not only by the dignity of His nature, though this was necessary; not only by the innocence of His life, though this was necessary; and not only by the perfection of His righteousness, but by suffering and by death: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him: and with His stripes we are healed." Yes, says God Himself, "For the transgression of my people was He smitten." Hence, what was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," is "to them that are saved the power of God." Hence what scandalised others induced Paul to exult and exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes; this Saviour was smitten for you. I hope you will never refuse to be smitten for Him, if called by the providence of God to endure it. What said the Apostle Paul? "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for *Christ's sake*;" "I am ready," said he, "not only to be bound, but also to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus." We shall never be losers by anything we do or suffer for Him. "If ye be reproached for Christ's sake," says Peter, "happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified."

65

3. There is a third article of conformity between this rock and Christ. It was not only smitten, but smitten by Moses. Moses here was a type of the law, and it was by the law our Saviour suffered. Let me explain. Man had sinned. The holiness of God constrained Him to abhor, and His righteousness to punish sin. He had said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," and "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them." But Christ interposed on the behalf of sinners: He became "a propitiation for them," and "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The law, therefore, sued Him as our Substitute, as our Surety, and as our Ransom. "He bore our sin, in His own body on

the tree,” and “He redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us.”

4 The last article of conformity is the result, for from this rock, as smitten by Moses, streams flowed, Our text says, “He brought streams also out of the rock.” This leads us—

II. TO SURVEY SOME OF THE FINE STREAMS WHICH FLOWED FROM IT.

There is, first, the fine stream of the Promises. These are both numerous and various. Samuel Clarke, a Nonconformist minister, published an excellent little book on the promises, in which he has arranged them in constellations, as so many beautiful stars. These, according to his arrangement, are adapted to the Christian’s experience in every situation of life: promises for the Christian individually, for the family, and for the Church of God. And these are “exceeding great and precious” “exceeding great,” because of their contents; exceeding “precious” to the Christian, because of the estimation they are held in by him. All these “are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.” You would not have found one of them in this Book of God if He had not interposed, and suffered, and died in our stead.

Then there is the fine stream of Pardoning Mercy. Sin is nothing to some men, but they are very foolish and wicked men, for it is the most awful thing in the world. But when a man is awakened to a sense of his danger, having seen the evil of sin, he exclaims, “What must I do to be saved?” “How shall I come before the Lord?” In this condition, what can be so delightful to him as to hear a voice saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!” “In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace!” This is

F

66

like “cold waters to a thirsty soul.” And now we see that “with the Lord is forgiveness, and with Him is plenteous redemption,” however heinous, however numerous our offences. We are told that “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.” We are told He casts our sins into the depth of the sea, that

He casts them behind His back, that He will remember them no more. Then it is that we can enter into David's meaning of the happiness, as it is in the original, of "the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." Oh, how blessed the man, whatever be his external condition! He has comforts and enjoyments which others never taste; he has supports under his trials which others never feel; he has strength which others never experience. When he comes to die he will say,

"If sin be pardoned, I'm secure,
Death has no sting beside."

In the great day he will hear a public, solemn absolution pronounced by the Judge of all. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."

There is another fine stream from this smitten rock. It is the stream of Sanctifying Grace. This is as necessary as the former, for men are not only guilty, but polluted: the sinner not only needs pardon, but purification, He not only needs a title to heaven, but a meetness for it; and unless he be sanctified as well as justified, he can neither enjoy or serve God here or hereafter. This blessing, therefore, is as necessary to an awakened and enlightened soul as the other, and such will always "hunger and thirst after righteousness," as well as after justification, And God hears when they cry, and says in "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," "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. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. And I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." And by Jeremiah He says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Thus, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature."

There is a fine stream of Spiritual Consolation. Who does not meet with trouble in a world like this? "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." There are bodily infirmities and pains, worldly losses and failures, disappointments and bereavements.

67

But the Scriptures say, "This Man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land," The Scriptures say, "He is the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble," and He is called "the consolation of Israel." This, therefore, encouraged God's people of old, and encourages them now. In whatever manner He comes to His disciples, all shall be well. He went to them on the bosom of a storm, and if He comes to you in similar distress, and says, "It is I," He will cause a great calm, and will verify the language of the Apostle who said, "As the sufferings of Christ abound, so the consolations of Christ abound also."

Then there is the fine stream of Future Blessedness. I was reading this morning that fine hymn of Watts'—

"Rivers of endless bliss above,
And rills of comfort here below."

This is a fine distinction. Oh, there is "the river of the water of life proceeding from the throne and the Lamb." Then shall we have what David calls "a fulness of joy." This, brethren, we cannot describe or imagine, for "eye hath not seen, or ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love Him." What do we know now of a spiritual body? What do we know now of the meaning of seeing God as He is? How know we what new powers will develop themselves when the soul has shaken off the burden of the flesh? No; "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," and be with Him. This will be the bliss of bliss, and whatever view we take of eternal life, we are assured it is "the gift of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," and that He is not only the procurer, but the dispenser of it: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

III. We have one thing more to notice, THE QUALITY OF THESE STREAMS, a few of which we have mentioned. Now as to those streams which followed the Israelites, it is evident that

they were marvellous, and gratuitous, and reviving; they were refreshing, copious, and constant. A word upon each of these.

First, they were marvellous and unlikely, Who ever saw a stream of water rising out of the rock, a flinty rock? How much more supernatural is the stream of redemption! "Here is the wisdom of God in a mystery;" "The angels desire to look into" this. No wonder, therefore, "the natural man

F 2

68

perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," "but he that is spiritual perceiveth all things;" not that he can comprehend all things, but he believes those things; they are revealed unto him by the Spirit.

Then these streams were gratuitous. The people did not purchase them; they did not labour for them by digging wells. They would, indeed, have given all they had for them, but they were dispensed by the undeserved goodness of God. How was this proved at the moment of His supplying them, for then they were ready to stone His servant, and yet, even then, "He did not deal with them according to their sins, nor reward them after their iniquity," but furnished them with those supplies they needed. And how was it with us? for they were an exact counterpart of us. It was "not by works of righteousness that we have done" that He saved us, "but by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" thus shewing the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us by Christ Jesus."

Thirst is generally supposed to be more painful than hunger. What would you have felt, now, if you had gone three days under a burning sun, having no water to drink? I have seen a picture of this circumstance. People were crowding to the rock for water; some were holding their vessels to catch it, others their mouth; some were lapping from their hands; some were kneeling by the side. Mothers were hastening to give relief to their babes, before they partook of it themselves. So, Christians, you are now passing through a barren wilderness, and can say with David, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God;" "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 Thee in the sanctuary.” Would these Israelites have been satisfied by the presentation of silver or gold instead of water? No; they said, “Give us water, that we may drink,” And what said you, Christians, when repairing to the Saviour? “All my springs are in Thee.” And oh; what a difference between the supplies that He affords, and those which are derived from the creatures! “He,” said the Saviour, “that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life.”

Then these streams also were copious. I have seen some

69

rocks dropping water, but from this one gushed forth streams, and rivers of water, so that the people could drink and be satisfied. In another reference to this circumstance, it is said, “He opened the well, and the waters gushed forth.” “He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.” “He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like *rulers*.” You may naturally suppose that an immense supply was necessary for more than six hundred thousand men, beside all the women and children, and cattle; but here was a sufficiency furnished, and if any thirsted it was their own fault if they did not drink. So in regard to the waters of life, there is enough and to spare; enough for you, enough for others, enough for all, “Ho, everyone that thirsteth; come ye to the waters,” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

Also, they were constant, at least enough so to furnish an exact representation of the waters of salvation, for you have heard how far the reality has the pre-eminence. This rock in its streams followed them partially, and only for a while; and the people moved on in another direction, leaving these streams, and then they thirsted again. But it is true, perfectly true, without any exception, that this rock, or the streams thereof, follow Christians in all their travels in the wilderness, and it will *never* leave them, nor forsake them. When they

look forward, therefore, they may say with holy confidence, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;” and the meanest of them feels assured that he shall dwell for ever in God’s house above.

In conclusion, let me call upon you to make nature an hand-maid to grace,—by a holy mechanism to make a ladder by which to ascend to heaven; and by a spiritual chemistry to extract water from the flinty rock. Then will you find all your reasons of distress reasons of instructions, and every object will become profitable. When you see the orb of day, you will be reminded of “the Sun of Righteousness,” who rises upon the soul “with healing under His wings;” and you will never see a rock without thinking of Him from whence all the streams of salvation flow; knowing also that the Old Testament and the New exhibit the same object; only in one we behold the dawn, in the other the day. The Saviour we set forth is not only all-sufficient to save, but willing to receive you. Why will you not

70

make use of Him? “Why will you die?” Why not come to Him, since He stands with open arms ready to receive you?

“Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
 Grace to pardon all my sin,
 Let the healing stream abound,
 Make and keep me pure within.
 Thou of life the fountain art,
 Freely let me take of Thee;
 Spring Thou up within my heart,
 Rise to all eternity,”

71

VIII. THE JOYFUL SOUND.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, December 26th, 1847.)

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.—PSALM lxxxix. 15.

SOLOMON was the wisest of men, and what he says concerning wisdom is worthy our attention; and what does he say? “In

much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But let us turn the picture and hear the same speaker declaring again, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding;" that "better is a wise and poor child, than an old and foolish king;" that "wisdom is better than weapons of war;" that "wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." Yea, my brethren, there is a species of knowledge connected with happiness. Hear the Apostle: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Hear the Saviour: "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." And of this information our text speaks: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

Let us consider three things. The first regards the sound; the second regards the knowledge; the third, the blessedness.

I. THE SOUND.

"Blessed are the people that know the joyful *sound*." Says the Apostle Paul in reference to the publishers of the gospel, "Their sound went out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world," The gospel is a "joyful sound," because of the mode of its original and continued communication. We read of "the preaching of the cross," of "the foolishness of preaching," save in those who believe; and says the Apostle in the chapter we have just quoted, "Whosoever shall

⁷²

call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

But why is it called a "joyful sound?" "The law was a shadow of good things to come." Among other things was the institution of the Jubilee. This returned every fiftieth year, which was published through the whole country by the sound

of trumpets. The proclamation was, "This day every slave is free from his master: this day every debtor is absolved from his creditor: every loser of his inheritance has his heritage returned to him." This must have been a "joyful sound," even to the proclaimer. It must have been a "joyful sound" to all benevolent minds, not immediately interested in it. But how joyful must it have been to those whose welfare and happiness depended upon it. In allusion to this, when our Saviour went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and stood up for to read, He read the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel unto the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

The gospel is a "joyful sound," for it signifies "good news," "glad tidings of great joy," and what renders it so? We answer generally the birth of a Saviour who "came to seek and to save that which was lost." His name is called JESUS, because He should save His people from their sins. Hence the angel who appeared to the shepherds said, "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." You know that it as much concerns us as it concerned them, and we are therefore authorised to say with Isaiah, "Unto us a child is born: unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder." Our condition is not desperate. Desperate indeed it would be without Him,—for as Newton says,

"The help of men and angels joined,
 Could never reach our case;
 Nor could we hope relief to find,
 But in His boundless grace."

73

"But there is hope in Israel concerning this thing." We are exposed to wrath, but here is a "refuge from the wrath to come." We are sick, but there is "balm in Gilead and a Physician there." We are dying, but He came that we might

have life, that we might have it more abundantly. We are poor and destitute, but He has “unsearchable riches,” and can “fill us with all joy and peace in believing.”

Let us particularise four articles which will justify the language and exemplify the subject.

First, the gospel is a “joyful sound” *because it announces the pardon of sin*. Sin is the transgression of God’s law, which extends to the heart as well as the life, to the motives as well as the actions. It requires an obedience pure in its principles, universal in its extent, and perpetual in its duration. We therefore can derive no relief from the law, but the curse of the law enters with every transgression, for “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them.” In the awakened soul this produces an effect like pronouncing sentence of death upon a malefactor. “He eats ashes like bread, and mingles his drink with weeping.” He sleeps, but he is scared with dreams, and terrified with visions. The world loses its charms. One thing only wraps up his soul in its concern. “What must I do to be saved?” “How can I escape the wrath to come?” “How shall I come before the Lord? and bow myself before the High God?” And oh, how precious, how infinitely precious is the language of the gospel to him now! What a “joyful sound” does he find it to be; that there is a way of mercy; that Christ is “exalted to give repentance and remission of sins;” that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin. Nothing can effectually tranquillise the awakened conscience but the discovery of a way in which God can be just, and the justifier of them who believe in Jesus; a way in which sin can be pardoned, yet condemned in the flesh; a way in which mercy and truth can meet together, and righteousness and peace embrace each other. Such a way the gospel reveals, and “we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Christ.” “We have even boldness to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus,” in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Secondly, another discovery equally necessary to render the gospel a “joyful sound,” is “*the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” We are not only guilty, but depraved, and “who can bring a

74

clean thing out of an unclean thing?” “That which is of the flesh is flesh, and that which is of the spirit is spirit.” We cannot serve God without a suitableness of disposition. We can never enjoy God without being like Him. “Without holiness no man can see the Lord.” And then we are *weak* as we are depraved. We are not sufficient of ourselves to do anything. Without Divine aid we feel we can do nothing. Therefore if we had no other information we should be discouraged, and should lie down and die. But suppose God should come forward and say, “O sinner, I know your depravity and your weakness infinitely better than you do yourself; but it is upon this very principle that my plan of recovery proceeds. Hear, and your soul shall live. All I require I will produce. What I command, I promise to enable you to perform. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you. My strength shall be made perfect in weakness. My grace is sufficient for you, in all your duties and trials, in all your work and your walk.” Is not this a “joyful sound?”

Thirdly, *the freedom with which the gospel holds forth these tidings* is another thing which renders it a “joyful sound.” For the more we need these blessings, and the more valuable they are in themselves, the more they will distress rather than encourage us, unless they are proposed in a way suited to our condition. For we deserve nothing, we can claim nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing to pay; therefore, if these blessings are not to be had” without money and without price,” they are not for us. Unless they are free, absolutely free in their attainment, we cannot rejoice in hope of realising them. But is not this the case? Does not the Saviour say, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth?” and does He not say, “Ho, everyone 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?" Does not the Bible end with this gracious declaration, "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?" Here your worthiness is no recommendation, and your unworthiness is no exclusion. And as Dr. Watts says,

"No mortal has a just pretence
To perish in despair."

75

"I was a persecutor," says Paul, "but I obtained mercy," and "for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

Fourthly, *The gospel proclaims that all these blessings are secure and permanent*: this renders it a "joyful sound." Indeed, what comfort could we find in all these blessings, if the possession of them was uncertain, and their continuance precarious? What comfort could you find if they were liable to be lost? or if the keeping of them depended entirely on ourselves? Why, we should be no match for our spiritual enemies. Even Adam in paradise with a holy nature was soon overcome by temptation. "What then," may the Christian say, "What will become of me, surrounded as I am with a thousand spiritual dangers, and with sin dwelling in me?" Were there no truth therefore in the final perseverance of the saints, believers ought not to be happy, for then their joy would be presumption. They would rejoice in being regenerate to-day, but they might become unregenerate to-morrow. They might rejoice in being justified from all things to-day, and be condemned to-morrow. Oh, how different is the language of the Scripture. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." "The Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory." "It is of faith, that it may be by grace, to the end the promise may be sure." "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them

out of my hand.” “We are confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” “This is the rest wherewith He causeth the weary to rest,” and this is the refreshing—*this*, the proclaiming of a free, full, and final pardon of sin; the gradual and complete renovation of our nature; the freedom with which all these blessings can be obtained; and then security for ever and ever, when they are our own. *This* indeed is a “joyful sound.”

II. “Blessed is the people that *know* the joyful sound.” Now, what is implied in this knowledge? We remark five things:—

First, our hearing, and having opportunities of becoming acquainted with it. “We are constrained to make a concession here which is very painful,—That this does not absolutely ensure the blessedness of any. Yes, persons may perish under the dispensation of the gospel, yea, it may be the means of the

76

increase of their sin, and the aggravation of their condemnation. Yea, “the savour of life unto life” may become “the savour of death unto death.” But surely the dispensation itself should be deemed an unspeakable and invaluable privilege, How was it with the Jews? “What advantage,” asks Paul, “hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way, *chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God.*” And when our Lord was preaching by the sea-side, He turned and said to His disciples, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” And is it not an unspeakable blessing to live in a land of vision, and that” to you is the word of this salvation sent?” From the moment the gospel enters any country God says, “Arise! shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” When the gospel enters a village, however poor, it becomes more dignified than the metropolis of any heathen empire. Capernaum was a poor, little, mean, dirty fishing town, with two or three straggling awkward streets, yet because our

Lord preached the gospel of the kingdom there, He says, "It is exalted unto heaven." It is this that gives a place importance in the eyes of angels. It is this that gives it importance in the eyes of Christians. We might remark that this knowledge intends nothing less than our hearing the word of God, and our having opportunities of becoming acquainted with it; it comprehends much more, and therefore observe—

Secondly, to know this "joyful sound" is to distinguish it from every other sound. When our Saviour was speaking of Himself as a shepherd, He says, "To Him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear His voice, and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out; and when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they *know* His voice;"—that is, they distinguish it—"and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers," I am never so well satisfied that what I preach is the truth of God, as when I find it to be congenial with the hearts of those who give the best evidence of being born of God, and who "desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." Speaking of such, the Apostle says, "Those who by reason of strength have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." By "evil" there, he means doctrinal evil. They shew their

77

discernment; they, too, can commonly judge of the manner of the preacher, as well as of the matter preached. If you were to hear two pieces of artillery fired, one charged with ball, the other with powder only, *you* could not distinguish the difference, but a sailor could, a soldier could. Two men may deliver the very same truths: one produces only excitement, the other explains; one impresses and causes remembrance, the other runs off, and is immediately forgotten.

Further, this knowledge consists in our having an experimental acquaintance with it. When the enemy said, "Ye shall be as gods, *knowing* good and evil," and when God said to Abraham, "I *know* that he will command his household after him," knowledge in these cases intends knowledge derived from proof or trial. You have heard of experimental philosophy, and why should men ridicule the notion of experimental

religion? For such knowledge of the gospel *is* attainable, and such knowledge is absolutely necessary.

“True religion’s more than notion,
Something must be known and felt.”

In vain do we know that there is a refuge, unless we fly to it for security; in vain do we know that there is a foundation, unless we build upon it; in vain do we know that the food is good, unless we partake of it; unless we partake of it, it can never sustain us. Divine things must be known in a Divine manner; accordingly, the Spirit is promised to guide us into ail truth; and when this is the case, when “in God’s light we see light,” the knowledge runs from the head into the heart, flows abroad into the life, and produces “all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God,” “We know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him;” “we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness;” “we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ.” All this, you see, is the language of experience, not of theory. Nothing tends more to confirm the Christian’s confidence in Divine things than this actual experience. “He that believeth,” saith John, “hath the witness in himself.” What one produces another may destroy. Thus we have often seen men who have received the truth in theory only easily led astray. This could not have been the case if they had experienced its power in converting, in refreshing, in sanctifying, and in establishing them in the ways of God.

78

Could a man who has been groaning under a disease ever be persuaded that there is no such thing as pain? Can those who have tasted be persuaded that there is no bitterness in gall, or sweetness in honey? So it is with those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Therefore says our Saviour, “He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but 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.”

Fourthly, this knowledge implies approbation. Our Saviour will say to many professors of religion hereafter, "I never knew you;" that is, I never approved of you. David says, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous;" that is, He approves of it. Paul says, "If a man loveth God, the same is known of Him;" that is, he is approved of Him. He complies with the scheme of the gospel from necessity, for he knows that "there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." He knows that he must be excluded from God, or come to Him in this way. "Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Him," But he doth not only submit, he also *acquiesces*, he approves, he loves, he *glories* in it; yea, he abhors the thought of glorying in anything else. When the Son makes him free, *he is free indeed*, and enjoys "the glorious liberty of the children of God." When he knows the truth as it is in Jesus, he finds that it is "the wisdom of God in a mystery," and that it will bear eternal research. When he comes and stands before the cross, and by faith looks upon Him whom he hath pierced, and who was crucified for him, and by whose "stripes he is healed," he must be encouraged, he must be elevated, he must be "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Lastly, this knowledge implies acknowledgment and respect. Thus the Apostle says, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." To "*know*" them; that is, so as to own them, so as to discharge those duties towards them which become us. Thus you are to know the truth. You are not to be ashamed of it; you are to profess it; you are practically to own it; you are to defend it; you are to recommend it; you are to support it; you are to "adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things;" you are to hold "forth the word of life," so that it may be seen in you, and so seen as to win others "without the word," and constrain them by "your good works"

79

which they behold to glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is to "know the joyful sound."

III. We proceed to consider the BLESSEDNESS.

“*Blessed* is the people that know the joyful sound.” “Happiness is our being’s end and aim;” for this every bosom heaves, and every pulse beats. All the various directions of life are pursuing hard after it; and while all are seeking after it, there are some who find it. They have the true reality. They are “blessed.” “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments.” “The generation of the upright shall be blessed.”

There are two great mistakes made by many in regard to happiness. First, many seek it where it is not to be found, among the things of time and sense. Many think of no higher and better condition than the possession of the wealth and honours of this world. But they were never designed by God to afford happiness, and happiness is not to be found in these. Whatever experiments men may make, their experience will justify the language of Solomon, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit.” The changes of men of the world, whatever they may promise, are like those of the sick who change the place but keep the pain; or, as a good man said when he was raised from a lower to a higher condition, “Remember, I have only stepped out of a smaller into a larger vessel, and am still at sea.”

Then many also imagine that happiness is not to be found where it really is to be found. So you never find them looking for it in the service of God, in true religion, and real godliness. They imagine that these prescribe a course in which you can enjoy nothing, but in which you must meet with dissatisfaction and disappointment. They suppose Christians are miserable, because they abstain from those dissipations and amusements that seem essential to their very existence, They do not consider that a child, when he has found a spring of living water, will not stoop to drink of a dirty puddle; that when he has tasted the grapes of Eschal, no longer desires the onions and garlic of Egypt. The people of the world imagine that Christians are dull in the exercise of religion, because they themselves feel so; they consider not that the believer is renewed, and has within him a taste suitable to these; that it is his element, that he is at home here, and that, “Blessed are

the people that know the joyful sound." Cannot you believe, now, the testimony of the God of Truth? Cannot you abide

80

by the decision of the only wise God? *You* may mistake as to happiness; you may "call the proud happy;" you may envy those whom you ought rather to pity.

Had we time, we might view this blessedness, both as it regards the present and the future state. "Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" And says Paul, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." In our present weak state of flesh and blood, we know but little of future blessedness. Oh, Christians, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And we *know* that "in His presence is fulness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Of this blessed day Christians have now the dawn; of this inheritance they have the first-fruits; of this enjoyment they have now the foretaste. Even now

"The men of grace have found
 Glory begun below:
 Celestial fruits on earthly ground
 From faith and hope may grow."

In conclusion, without the gospel what have we to meet our condition as sinners? What find we suited to our wants, and woes, and weakness? Nothing! But the gospel is a remedy for all our maladies. The gospel saves us from all the dire effects of the fall, and advances us to a condition superior to Adam in paradise.

Let ministers remember in their preaching how much more the gospel says of redemption than destruction; that in the Bible salvation is mentioned forty times oftener than hell; that they are heralds of mercy and peace; that they are to urge their hearers to embrace the messages of mercy, and to improve the means of grace.

And let hearers be regulated by this in their hearing. Let them receive this gospel as being not the word of man, but of God. Let them remember always that it is “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance;” that it should be received with all readiness of mind. Let them read the words immediately following our text: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.” The gospel ought to be viewed as making men blessed. So it was originally received, and those who walked

81

in the fear of the Lord, walked also in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.

Then if the gospel be such a “joyful sound,” and if they are so blessed who know it, is it not wonderful that it should meet with such treatment as it does? When the mariner’s compass and other useful inventions were discovered, they were immediately adopted by surrounding nations. How different was the reception of the gospel! When we consider how wise it is in its contrivance, how wonderful in its tendency, how profitable it is to society, as well as to individuals, we should naturally imagine that it would be universally embraced; but, instead of this, men have generally opposed and rejected it, as if it were “the pestilence that walketh in darkness, or the destruction that wasteth at noon-day.” There are two things which may abate this wonder: for, first, it reproves sin and self, the two great idols of mankind; the second is, to render the gospel acceptable, there must be a sight and sense of our being in that state which it is intended to relieve. Without this we cannot discern its beauty, or feel its efficacy, or relish its blessings. Therefore the great thing is for us to know the condition the gospel reveals.

Then how thankful we should be for this “joyful sound,” and how concerned that others should partake of its blessings with us; for there are thousands who would be thankful for the crumbs which fall from our spiritual table. There are thousands who would hear with rapture those sermons which you hear with indifference. There are millions who are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, who are in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death. Pray, then, and shew that

your prayers are sincere by your lives; importunately pray that “God would send out His light, and His truth, and His saving health among all nations.”

G

82

IX. OUR HELPER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, September 20th, 1846.)

Then Thou spakest in vision to Thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.—

PSALM lxxxix. 19.

OUR Saviour, in reasoning with the Jews, said, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” He referred to the Old Testament, for the New was not as yet written. We learn from thence that the Old Testament as well as the New bears witness of Christ. It does so in every part. We read of things in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him. With regard to the Psalms, some have contended that the whole book should be applied immediately to the Messiah. This is surely pushing the thing to an extreme; but a great deal unquestionably refers to Him, to His Person, to His character, His humiliation, His suffering, and His exaltation; to His people and to His empire.

Much of the psalm before us will apply immediately to David. The text also tends to favour this assertion; but many of the declarations are too strong to be applied to a mere creature, however powerful; or to any person, however glorious, short of our Restorer from the ruins of the Fall to eternal glory. The words therefore imply or express four things: we need help; God has provided the help we need; He has laid this help upon another; and He upon whom it was laid is equal to the engagement. O come, let us eat of this bread of life, and drink of this cup of salvation; let us be satisfied, and bless the Lord who has done such great things for us, of which we should be glad.

I. WE NEED HELP.

We naturally conclude that this help of which we are about to speak refers to our spiritual welfare, and not to the things of time and sense; that it refers to us, not as mere creatures, but as fallen creatures. The religion of the Bible is the dispensation of our remedy. It is not a mere development of the law of nature accompanied with clearer revelations of motives, rewards, and penalties, where we are placed in a state of probation, and left entirely to ourselves, depending upon our own worthiness, resolutions, and resources. If this be the gospel, it ill accords with the import of the words, "good news" and "glad tidings." If this be the gospel, 'tis another gospel than that which announces that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" that "He came to seek and to save that which was lost."

What is all history, but testimony that man is a depraved and fallen creature? If there were a thousand checks employed to restrain a man from a particular course, and these failed, could there be any question that he had an evil principle? If there were a thousand expedients employed to induce him to pursue a particular course, and all these were in vain, could there be any question whether he had a natural aversion to it? Locke, —ah, where is the wise of this world?—Locke says, "A child is naturally like a sheet of white paper, on which you may inscribe anything." Fathers and mothers, where are you? You know, in regard to your children, as to that which is vain and evil, a hint is enough; but as to that which is good and spiritual, "precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little." And what says personal experience? Let any man examine himself morally; must he not be conscious that he has done many things which he ought not to have done, and left undone much of what he ought to have done? Can he plead innocence? Does he not know that he has not felt as he ought to have felt in a thousand instances before God, as his Creator and Benefactor? Will not any man of an ingenuous character acknowledge that he has always been prone to be revengeful, presumptuous, ungrateful, and proud? And if you

ask him to fix a time when he began to feel this, he will be unable to shew you; and even when his character appeared fair in the eyes of others, his motives were defective, he had vain thoughts within him and vain imaginations. Men sometimes talk of their innocency and purity: why, if the impurities that pass through their minds were to be published, they would never be seen in company again.

G 2

84

But what saith the Scripture? for this is the grand criterion: "If they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them." We are informed that before the Flood, "every imagination of man's heart was only evil continually." Ages after this, when God looked down upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, or seek after God, He testified concerning them, saying, "They are all gone out of the way; they are *altogether* become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one." God says by Jeremiah, "I search the heart." Well, what does He say of the heart? "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Our Saviour needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man, and He said, "From within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within and defile a man." How could they come from within except they were there? Man's depravity is implied throughout the Scriptures. God does nothing in vain; and would He have been at the expense of providing a Saviour if man had not been lost? of providing a Redeemer unless he had been enslaved? And here we can infer our danger by the means provided for our security.

Christianity does three things for us, which Deism does not. First, it tells us that this was not our original state; that God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions. Secondly, it checks much of evil now: by its direct influence in many cases, and by its indirect influence in many more; in humanising war, in softening the treatment of prisoners, in abolishing slavery, in taming the human passions, in excluding

bigamy and divorce; it has been the harbinger of peace, and has done more for man than all human institutions in the aggregate beside. Through its means, what efforts have been made to meet every kind of woe and distress; while you could have walked from one end of the pagan world to another, and not have seen a single hospital or infirmary. Then, thirdly, and above all, it tells us of a remedy for all this, and this is placed within our reach, if we would avail ourselves of it; and therefore if we perish in this state, the blame will be our own—"if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven,"—"if we neglect this great salvation."

We need help, and—

II. GOD HAS PROVIDED HELP FOR US.

This is the grand peculiarity of the dispensation of the gospel;

85

and it is our delightful office as ministers to report this, and to shew unto men the way of salvation. It is infinitely adapted to all our wants and weaknesses; it is also all-sufficient, and adequate to meet the ravages of the evil. "Yea," says the Apostle, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

This help includes, first, *redemption*. "With the Lord there is plenteous redemption." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Thus the burden too heavy to be borne is rolled off the conscience, and we now "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have received the Atonement." Secondly, it includes *justification*. Our relief from condemnation does not entitle us to glory, neither does the pardon of sin, but we must have a title to heaven before we can obtain it; and from whence is this to be derived but from the righteousness of Christ by faith, "which is unto all and upon all them that believe." Thirdly, it takes in *renovation*. Man is not only guilty but depraved. Therefore he cannot be happy while in his natural state and under the dominion and love of sin. In this condition it is impossible for him to serve God, or hold communion with him, therefore he must be renewed, he must become spiritually-minded. Fourthly, it takes in *strength*. His duties are arduous; they are numerous and various; and he is

inadequate to anyone; but says the Saviour, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy day, so shall thy strength be." Here is the blessed spirit of promise also enjoyed, and now the man lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit, and prays in the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit helpeth his infirmities. Lastly, it takes in *persevering grace*, for "he only that endureth to the end shall be saved." Perseverance, you will find, is not only required of us as a duty, but ensured to us as a privilege. You are not only commanded to "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," but you have the promise, "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger." "We are confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ." "Therefore," says the Apostle, "it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure." "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help found."

Then—

III. As the work is His own, GOD LAYS THIS HELP ON ANOTHER.

86

Suppose there was nothing said on this subject in the Scriptures, yet first we know we had no claim upon God, and He under no obligation to save and secure us. We know He had a right to determine in what way He would help us; and, secondly, as He had a right, so He had the ability to choose and determine. His understanding is infinite; therefore it is impossible for Him to err, either in reference to His own perfections, or our need; therefore we are informed, "He hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence." Therefore we read again, the very angels desire to look into these things, and that principalities and powers come to the Church to learn the manifold wisdom of God. We infer the perfection of His conduct from the perfection of His nature; and when we cannot harmonise some things with His wisdom and goodness, yet, His wisdom and goodness being so undeniable, we can trust Him for their reality and exercise when unable to trace them. So may it be with the deep things of God in our redemption and salvation;

and here the question is not whether God is a Father, but whether also He is not a righteous Governor who beareth not the sword in vain? The question is not whether He is good when He blesses us, but whether He is not “holy in all His ways and righteous in all His works”? The question is not whether He is merciful, but whether His mercy should be exercised toward the unworthy and the guilty in a particular way? and whether He has made this way known? and if He has, whether anything but ignorance and pride could lead us to oppose the appointment, or whether anything but ruin and wretchedness can arise from our opposition? We are never more liable to err than when we undertake to be the scrutinisers of God’s character and dealings, and determine what is proper, or not proper—what He is to do, or not to do. But if He Himself has come and spoken upon the subject, if He has told us that such a course became Him, then we are bound to obey, however unable we may be to understand it. Let us therefore come to the Scriptures; and here He has told us, that “it became Him by whom are all things, and to whom are all things, to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.” “This is the promise, that He hath given us eternal life; and this life is in His Son.” “Christ also hath once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God.” “And now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” To close the whole of this, the Apostle says, “It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” What pleased Him, we may be sure is

87

perfect We often prize things which seem good to us, but we err often; but what seems good to Him *is* so. Our Saviour once said, “I thank Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.”

We may observe two principles upon which this dispensation is founded, and by which it is justified. The first is, It is an honour to Christ, it being a part of the reward for His doings and sufferings. “Therefore,” said He, “doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep.” Therefore, says

the Apostle, "He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." This was "the joy set before Him:" thus He should see His seed, and should prolong His days; thus He should "see of the travail of His soul and should be satisfied;" and thus He by His knowledge justifies many, "and of His fulness do all we receive, and grace for grace."

The second is for our encouragement and comfort. The grandeur of the Supreme Being so terrified the Jews, that they desired Moses to be their mediator, and said, "Speak thou with us; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." So we are encouraged to go to God through Christ, and "we have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him." When the famished multitudes repaired to Pharaoh, he said, "Go to Joseph; all the stores are at his disposal." Thus God says in the gospel, "Go to Jesus." And the Saviour Himself says, "Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh to me." Yes, "to Him shall the gathering of the nations be." This dispensation therefore is as beneficial to us as honourable to the Saviour Himself. When a child is born he cannot sustain himself, and were he left to himself he would presently die. But he is not left to himself, there is a provision made for him. In whom? In her in whose bosom he will have a welcome access, and the mutual action of giving and receiving endears the mother to the child, and the child to the mother. So it is here, and we ought to bless God that He has made provision for us in the Saviour, and our happiness is connected with our duty in going to Him.

88

IV. HE ON WHOM HELP IS LAID IS EQUAL TO THE ENGAGEMENT.

Many a one has been appointed to an office which he has been inadequate to fill, and the enterprise thereby has failed; and if he has not involved himself in the ruin, he has not escaped reflection and reproach; for there is nothing that dis-

graces a man more than incompetency in this respect, when the work is voluntary, and he has engaged in it without accomplishing the same. For all that pass by begin to mock, saying, "This man began to build, and is not able to finish." But God's appointment of a person to a work is a pledge of final accomplishment. "Go," said He to Gideon, "in this thy might." What might? His own? He was threshing in a barn. No; but, "Go in the might with which I have invested thee, and thou shalt be adequate to the work to which I have called thee." So said God of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd; I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates." His appointment was a proof that he should prosper. So it is in the highest degree with our Lord and Saviour. But this does not go far enough. This might is not relative only, but personal. He had the Spirit without measure, He is not only human, but Divine. All things were made by Him, and He upholdeth all things. Well, therefore, may it be said, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty." This gave infinite value to His mediation. Hence was He able to procure salvation for us. "He trod the winepress alone." "By His one offering up of Himself He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." He said when He died, "It is finished," and it was finished for ever.

The whole dispensation of the Spirit is lodged in His hands, and administered at His pleasure. So was it said in the Acts of the Apostles, after there had been such a display of the Holy Spirit's influence: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." All the miracles were performed in His name. All the operations of Divine grace are through Him. "This people have I formed for myself." We may well, therefore, say with a former verse in this psalm, "Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is Thine hand, and high is Thy right hand;" "Thou art mighty to save; able to save to the uttermost." Remember this, my brethren, in regard to others, and never despair of the conversion of any. Remember this in regard to yourself. Are you an old sinner? He can save you. Are your sins great and numerous? He can save the chief of sinners.

“This powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne.”

“The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin.” He can by His influences, so mighty is He, penetrate and enlighten the darkest understanding; He can subdue the most rebellious will; He can take away the stony heart and give you a heart of flesh.

We conclude these reflections with two or three brief remarks.

1. *See the importance of knowing your spiritual state.* It is desirable, it is necessary you should know this. Without this knowledge it would be impossible for you ever to see the beauty of the gospel, ever to appreciate the evil of sin, or the excellency of purity, or to relish the privileges of the righteous. Yea, the gospel without this knowledge would be repulsive to you; it would be like offering alms to the wealthy, or pardon to the innocent.

You need not be afraid of knowing what your condition is, of knowing what you are and what you deserve; yea, you should be concerned to avail yourselves of this knowledge, that you may seek after the relief provided. This would be much better than sitting down to murmur and complain. If a man going across a common were to fall into a pit where he might perish, and a passer-by should hear him and approach the place, offering him assistance, how absurd it would be, instead of accepting it, to begin to murmur and complain, and say, “Why was there not a rail placed round, or at least a post to warn people of the danger?” (This was done, but he did not see it.) “Why,” says the friend, “take the cord in my hand, it is held out for your relief, and attend to those things afterward. Then you may become acquainted with the owner, and he may explain and afford you satisfaction.”

2. *See the folly of every other dependence,* but upon that rock which God has laid in Zion. Christ is the only ark in which you can be preserved; if you enter into this, you may be safe. Some have vainly asked, “Is there any other way?” If there be, it is either secret or revealed. If secret, I can say nothing

about it. The Scriptures declare there is salvation in no other. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Christ;" "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Let us, therefore, turn away from everything else, and look only and entirely to Him. Let us look for all our hope from Him upon whom He has laid all our help, remembering the language of the Apostle, "To him that worketh not,

90

but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith shall be accounted unto him for righteousness;" as much as if he should have said, "Leave off building,—your edifice will not secure you from the storm of Divine wrath,—and flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel. Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." Here is your Deliverer—here is the Saviour in whom you are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

"He is able, He is willing;
Doubt no more."

91

X. THE TWO-FOLD SONG.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, November 15th, 1846.)

I will sing of mercy and judgment.—PSALM ci, 1.

SUCH is the resolution of David. Resolutions when carelessly formed, or made in our own strength, frequently prove a snare

to souls. Yet when they are seriously formed, and made in simple reliance upon the all-sufficiency of Divine grace, they may be allowable, yea, they may be desirable and useful. They may be beneficial, by awakening our diligence; they may humble us by comparison, remind us of our duty, and bind us to the discharge of it; and therefore you often find the sacred writers expressing themselves by way of resolution.

But what is the resolution David here expresses? for it is with this we have now to do. "I will sing of mercy and judgment." David had not only genius, but a special talent for poetry. He is called "the sweet psalmist of Israel:" first, because he composed so many psalms for his own use and that of others; secondly, because he had provided so abundantly for the conduct of the service of the sanctuary, both vocally and instrumentally; and because he abounded so much in thankfulness and praise. Perhaps by nothing was he so much distinguished as by this disposition. He envies those whose duties require them to dwell in the sanctuary, saying, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee." Does he call upon others to bless God? He does not forget himself. "Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His who do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, O my soul." And again he says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." At no season would he hang his harp upon the willows. "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my

92

mouth." Under no dispensation under which he was placed, in no condition in which he was found, would he be silent. "I will sing of mercy and judgment."

It would be easy for us to find instances of his singing of these separately, but we have also instances in which we find him singing of them unitedly. "Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other." "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command His lovingkindness in

the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

Here you have some of his mingled strains. Do you not resemble him? Will you not sing of mercy and judgment? Surely you can never be at a loss, if this be your resolve, for materials and excitements. Think of the state of the world—of the nation—of the Church—of the family—and of your own cases as individuals, personal or relative. Where are the persons who have not received indulgence from God? Where are the persons not exercised with trials? Do any of you come here this morning under the smiles of Providence? Sing ye of mercy. Are any of you under its frowns? Sing ye of judgment. Sing in the ways of the Lord; sing—

“If light attend the path I go,
Thy praises shall be spread;
And I’ll adore Thy justice too,
That strikes my comforts dead.”

Sing—

“Good when He gives, supremely good,
Nor less when He denies;
E’en crosses from His sovereign hand,
Are blessings in disguise.”

Let us endeavour to answer two questions: first, What is there in mercy to demand a song? and secondly, What is there in judgment to allow of it? “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.”

93

I. Let us ask, WHAT THERE IS IN MERCY TO DEMAND A SONG?

“Ah,” I hear some of you say, “it is well I am not required to sing of merit.” “Were I required to sing,” says another, “I

should exclaim, 'Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.' But I can sing of mercy, and I can sing of this when I can sing of nothing else. Indeed with me all is mercy, and I long to sing of it. I eat and drink and breathe in mercy. Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

There are five things in mercy which demand a song:—

First, the *freeness* of this mercy. For there was nothing in us to excite the regard of God toward us, but our miseries. "Therefore," says the Apostle, "we love Him, because He first loved us." And, says our hymn,

"His love is almighty, preventing, and free!"

every way free. To humble Job, God said, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" and to humble Christians, God says, "Where wast thou when I provided a ransom for thee?" Look as far backward as you will, and when you arrive at the place, you will find Him waiting to be gracious, and exalted to have mercy upon you, and a voice will be heard exclaiming, "Come, for all things are now ready!"

Secondly, look at the *fulness* of this mercy. Ah, Christians, why are you not consumed? It is because of the Lord's mercy. How ungrateful have you been under numberless mercies! How incorrigible under all your corrections! How often have you charged God foolishly and unkindly, when He has been doing that which you have often implored Him to do! Oh, if God were like you—if He had human passions! But, says He, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." What earthly benefactor would have borne so long with your manners in the wilderness? or had such patience after such instances of ingratitude and perverseness? But you can sing with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant." With David, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" "Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"

94

Another thing which demands a song is the *greatness* of His mercy. We read of His “abundant mercy,” of His being “rich in mercy” towards all that call upon Him. We read of “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” Consider the number of the persons it has relieved ever since the beginning of the world. Think of the multitude of the blessings it has conferred upon every individual, in supplying all his exigencies. Think of the extent of the blessings it confers. It has regard to the body and to the soul; to life and death; to time and eternity! “Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!” Consider too the expensive manner in which it became Him to exercise this mercy towards us. I say, “became Him,” because this is His own language: “It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” His law was to be magnified and made honourable, and all His perfections were to be preserved inviolable, as well as man to be saved. Therefore He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; to suffer reproach and persecution; to suffer, and bleed, and die; to die the death of the cross, that He might proclaim Himself “a just God and a Saviour.”

The fourth thing which demands a song is the *seasonableness* of God’s mercy. Much depends upon this; and you will find God never out of season—not too soon nor too late. He may indeed appear to be too late, according to our time of reckoning, but not according to His own; and because He is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for Him. Our extremity is God’s opportunity. “I was brought low,” says the Psalmist, “and He helped me;” and speaking of Zion, the Church, he says, “God shall help her, and that right early,”—not only early, but “*right* early.”

Let us turn to the history of the Jews. “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years,” as He had promised to Abraham. But now

see on what a small space of time He hangs His veracity! Let another day pass, and He forfeits His truth, and His promise fails for evermore! But it did not fail. *“And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.”* “It is a night to be much observed unto

95

the Lord.” Indeed it is; and not only for bringing them out of the land of Egypt, but also to teach us how seasonable are all His interpositions—that they occur at the very time when His people most need His aid.

See the case of Abraham on mount Moriah. Isaac was bound and laid upon the altar, and Abraham stretched out his hand to take the knife to slay his son, when the angel of the Lord out of heaven cried, “Forbear!” So says Watts—

“Just in the last distressing hour
The Lord displays delivering power:
The mount of danger is the place
Where shall be seen surprising grace!”

This should teach you to confide in Him, and you should learn from thence that your case can never be desperate. Means may seem to fail, but He is Almighty, and if He does not find a way, He can make a way for your escape. He can turn the shadow of death into the morning, and at eventide—when only darkness is looked for—it may be light. This shews you, Christians, that God’s time is the best time, as His way is the best way.

There is another thing connected with mercy of which you should sing, and that is its *permanency*. Dr. Young says—

“This permanency of bliss is bliss,”

The mere apprehension of losing it would convert the sweetness of it into gall. But there is no fear on this ground. We read of “the sure mercies of David;”—that “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him;”—that “His mercy endureth for ever;”—that though creatures die, “the Lord liveth;” though they are broken cisterns, He is the Fountain of living waters; He is the Rock of

Ages. And is it nothing, brethren, that He will be with you in trouble; that He will never leave nor forsake you; that in all things you are more than conquerors through Him who loveth you; and that the language of the Apostle Paul is not too strong for you to exult in: "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." O Christians, think of this, and say,

"Awake, awake, my tuneful powers;
With this delightful song

96

I'll entertain the darkest hours,
Nor think the season long."

"I will sing of mercy and judgment." As we have seen what there is in mercy to demand a song, let us consider—

II. WHAT THERE IS IN JUDGMENT TO ALLOW OF A SONG.

For God afflicts His people as well as indulges them. Yea, we are told that "many are the afflictions of the righteous." Some of these regard the body, some regard your worldly circumstances, and some your relative connections. "In the world," says the Saviour, "ye shall have tribulation;" and Paul and Barnabas said to the Christians at Antioch, that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven. How many afflictions had David! Read his history. Yet he sang of mercy and judgment! How stricken and distressed was Job! Yet Job said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Are you commanded in whatsoever state you are therewith to be content? And are you not equally commanded in everything to give thanks? And is there not reason for this, if "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to them that fear Him," and if "all things work together for good to them that love Him"? If you knew all, Christians, in how many cases would you bless God for your crosses as well as for your

comforts, for your disappointments as well as for your successes! You would say with Young,

“In all my list of blessings infinite,
Stands this the foremost, that my heart has bled.”

Let us distinguish. You are not required, properly speaking, to bless God for your afflictions themselves. No; afflictions are in themselves evils; afflictions arise from sin; afflictions are the effects of sin. But, through the overruling providence of God, they may be made the means to take away sin; and Christians are required, not only to be submissive under their sufferings, but to acquiesce in the will of God concerning them. It becomes them not to say with Jeremiah, “This is my grief, and I cannot bear it,” but to say with Eli, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.” Thus James says, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” He does not mean here seductions to moral evil, but *natural* evil, as it is called.

97

There are views to be taken of your afflictions which will allow, yea, require even, your thanksgiving and praise. We might refer to some of these characteristics of affliction, such as—

First, the *nature* of them, They are not the inflictions of the judge, but the chastisements of the Father. They are not designed to atone for your sins, or to redeem you from the curse of the law. No, Christ hath redeemed you from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for you. The curse, therefore, is entirely withdrawn, and nothing remains in all your trials now, Christians, but the cross.

Secondly, their *brevity*. What is time to eternity, and what is our life to time itself? But frequently your trials are much shorter than life. Every term is employed by the sacred writers to hold forth the brevity of your afflictions. Suppose you were to take the duration of them as including the whole of your life here, yet, if life be short, your trials cannot be long. “Ye shall have tribulation ten days.” Ten days is not a year or a month. The season of your afflictions is called “a night:”

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Your nights are not always winter nights; commonly they are only summer nights. It is expressed by “a day:” “the day of temptation,” It is expressed by “an hour;” this is shorter still. It is expressed by “a moment,” the least distinguishable space of time: “These light afflictions, which are but for a moment.” Even this is not enough to satisfy the spirit of inspiration, but He tells you that the time of your suffering is but for a *small* moment: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with everlasting mercies will I gather thee.”

Another feature is their *judiciousness*, if I may so express it. I mean to say, there is nothing casual in them. In God’s dealings with His people, and especially with His afflicted people, there is nothing like what men call chance. All things are arranged with infinite wisdom as to your sufferings—as to time, as to instruments, as to place, and as to their kind and degree. “His work is perfect, His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.” Therefore David could say, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

Another is their *alleviation*. Whose cry is unmingled? Whose condition might not have been much worse than it is? You

H

98

sometimes say, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.” Are you acquainted, then, with all the sufferers upon the face of the earth? Is there no one in the circle you are in who is not called to suffer more than yourself? You may be lame, but some are bed-ridden; you may have lost some of your property, but some have lost their all; you may have buried your child, but some have been bereft of all their loved ones. If you would “sing of mercy and judgment,” you must dwell upon the blessings you still enjoy, as well as upon those of which you have been deprived; you must look upon the bright side, and not be always gazing on the dark.

Then there is their *usefulness*. The Apostle says, "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby," Ah, says Paul, "we glory in tribulations also," Ah, says the Apostle (in the chapter we have read this morning), "these light afflictions work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." If the vine had reason it would thank the vinedresser for the use of the knife by which it was pruned, and made to bring forth more fruit; and if the ground had reason it would bless God for the ploughshare which breaks up the fallow. I never knew a man converted to God by gaining a fortune, but I have known more than one converted to God by losing one. I never knew a man converted to God who has been raised from a state of penury to ride in a carriage, but I have seen such converted who once could ride at their ease, but have since been obliged to travel only on their feet.

Hear again what David says: "*It is good for me*" to have exchanged a shepherd's cottage for a royal palace; it is good for me to have conquered Goliath; it is good for me that God gave me the necks of my enemies; no, but, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted;" that I have been so persecuted; that Doeg betrayed me; that Ahithophel forsook me; that Absalom expelled me from Jerusalem. Yes, says he in the review of life, "It is good for me *that I have been afflicted*; for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word," Ah, Christians, these afflictions prepare you for usefulness;

99

they enable you to speak a word in season to him that is weary; to exercise your graces and thereby to improve them, They are the means under God to embitter sin, to wean you from the world, to endear this blessed book, to render Him more supremely precious who is touched with the feeling of our

infirmities, and to make you even desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Now this you see alters the whole face of the thing. And though you are not called upon to bless God for afflictions in themselves considered, yet as God has made them so beneficial, and the means of producing such blessed results with regard to time and eternity, you may well take up the resolution of David, and not only sing of mercy, but of *judgment*.

We see, in conclusion, that our condition in this world is a very changeable one, and very checkered. So Zechariah, speaking of the day of the Church, says, "It is neither day nor night." So the first Christians said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." The emblem of the Church of Christ has ever been a bush burning but not consumed, or a ship tossed with the winds and waves but not destroyed.

Learn, therefore, not to expect anything here but April weather, showers and sunshine alternately. Do not look for mercy alone, or judgment alone; for comforts alone, or sorrows alone. Beware of sanguine expectations; yet beware of gloomy forebodings. Remember that this intermixture is suited to the state you are now in, suspended as you are between heaven and earth, and that it corresponds with your circumstances. For though you are learning, you are not already perfect; you have not yet attained, but are pressing forward towards the mark. If you had nothing but indulgences, you would be spoiled, If you had nothing but afflictions, your spirits would be broken down, and your souls overwhelmed with sorrow.

Secondly, religion is not that sad, melancholy thing some suppose, since the possessor of it can sing, and by the grace of God can sing whatever be his circumstances. Like the nightingale, he can sing in the night, and with a thorn at his breast; for unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness. Yes, says David, "The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and *in the night His song shall be with me*, and my prayer unto the God of my life." And, says the Church, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither

100

shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; *yet I will rejoice* in the Lord, I will *joy* in the God of my salvation."

What will heaven be? Here, Christians, you sing of mercy and of judgment; but then you will sing of mercy only. The days of your mourning now perhaps are many; but then "the days of your mourning shall be ended." Now your tears, it may be, are many; but "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes," and the words of the prophet shall be exemplified in you, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy: the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more."

Shall I urge you to abound with David in the exercise of thanksgiving and praise? Then let me conclude by his admonition, "Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." He urges it, you see, by three arguments: first, he would have us praise God by way of eminency. This, brethren, is a great mark of spirituality. Selfishness may induce a man to pray, but the love of God alone can induce him to praise. If, therefore, you speak much in a way of complaint, and little in a way of praise and thanksgiving, it shews that your strength is small. Then, secondly, he says nothing is so delightful to the soul, "for it is *pleasant*." And thirdly, he tells us that "it is *comely*." There is nothing so abominable and odious as ingratitude. But we read of "the garment of praise." This is a fine garment. Oh, how beautiful a Christian looks when he is dressed with it; he then *adorns* the doctrine of God his Saviour.

Some of you sing here; will you sing hereafter? You worship God in His temple below; will you worship Him in His temple above? You draw near with your mouth and honour Him with your lips, but is not your heart far from Him?

Some of you are going fast to hell under a load of guilt, making ministers to labour in vain, and preach you into perdition instead of into heaven, when they would gladly lead you to Him who is saying, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Oh, may He have mercy upon you! May you immediately join those who are now singing of mercy and judgment, who will in a little while be singing of mercy without judgment to eternal ages!

101

XI. STABILITY THROUGH FAITH.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, February 28th, 1847.)

If you will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.—ISAIAH vii. 9.

THIS closes the address of Isaiah to Ahaz and his people on a very memorable and trying occasion. Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, formed a confederacy to invade and destroy Judah. We are not informed the cause of the provocation, but excuses for war were never yet wanting. They had begun their march, and were rapidly approaching the capital; and when Ahaz and his people heard thereof, their hearts were moved like the trees of the wood by the wind. This is an image of inspiration, and it conveys a very natural and striking idea. Isaiah was commanded to go forth to encourage Ahaz, not so much for his own sake, for he was a very wicked prince, but for God's promise to the house of David. "Thus saith the Lord God," said Isaiah, in the name of the Lord,—“Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.” This was the assurance given by the Lord of all; and instead of their overcoming Ahaz, they were soon both destroyed together. But he ends with a very significant declaration, and which we

have chosen for our meditation this morning: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

This shews us two things. First, that the promises of God are not at all times easily, steadily, and firmly believed. Error is natural. You find men can believe anything sooner than the

102

truth of God. Our Saviour said to the Jews, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye believe me not: if another should come in his own name, him ye will believe;" and therefore said He again, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

This shews us, too, that God, in the communication of His word, does not regard us as mere machines. What His word is to do for us, it is to do in us and by us. It does not speak like a charm, of whose pretended virtue no one is conscious, and none able to explain. If the word works effectually, it is only in those that believe, and the word cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith in those who hear it. If God determines a blessing, grace is given us to seek it. His blessing us and our seeking Him are linked together. If He intends to deliver us, He leads us to abandon every other resource, and apply to Him only, saying, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord: I will call upon the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." Thus there is an union of intelligence and design between the Giver and the receiver, the Agent and the subject.

Surely, "If ye will not believe, ye shall not be established;" that is, I must take God at His word. I must place my entire reliance upon Him, and not upon an arm of flesh. If ye will not do this as a country, the state cannot be safe; and if you will not do this as individuals, your minds cannot be composed and established.

Now let us pass from the house of David naturally to the house of David spiritually, and pursue the train of thought set in motion. Let us consider the stability of faith, and the peace which it induces.

In the Christian's life there are three kinds of stability: first, of judgment: this regards the truths of religion; secondly, of practice: this regards the duties of religion; thirdly, of

hope: this regards the comforts of religion. Each of these kinds faith is able to produce, and faith only. "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."

I. THERE IS A STABILITY OF JUDGMENT.

This regards the truths of religion. It is of great importance to have a judgment clear and fixed as it respects the great concerns of the soul and eternity, and the doctrines of the gospel of Christ; for as we think we feel, as we feel we desire, as we desire we act, and as we act our characters are formed, and our conditions determined. Right sentiments, therefore,

103

must be necessary for right conduct; for there can be nothing moral in religion without motive.

There are some things in revelation concerning which a man's mind, so to speak, need not be made up. Little or no injury will arise from his hesitation or suspense. But this is not the case with all. There are some things which must be fundamental, and therefore sustain others; and according to the firmness of the foundation will be the firmness of the whole superstructure.

It is not a commendation of those to whom the Apostle wrote, but a reflection upon them, when he says, "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Now hear the language of Peter; he says, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye knew these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And says the Apostle Paul, "Be not carried about with every wind of doctrine, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace."

Now what is to lead us into this stability but faith? It cannot be human authority among men. What one patronises another denies, and here you would soon find yourself like a man in a labyrinth, who on this side and on that is calling out, "Is this the way?" and he knows not what direction to take with safety and comfort. Or, if you depend upon reason, this may do something from observation and analogy; but if you receive the revelation of God only as far as you can

understand it, you will make your faith commensurate with your knowledge. Thus obstructions and difficulties will arise continually, and you will be strangers to all satisfaction and repose. No, we must believe all that the Lord has spoken to us in His word, and because He has spoken it. We must receive the kingdom of God as a little child receives with unsuspecting confidence the declarations of his father, knowing that He is too faithful to deceive us.

“I had a little talent and a little learning,” said Dr. Watts before his death; “but now I lay them all aside, and endeavour to receive the gospel as the poor and unlearned receive it.” Accordingly, you find much more of the simplicity of faith among God’s poor, afflicted people than among others, and among those who have been willing to leave things that are too high for them. To such the entrance of God’s word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple; such go to the Scripture and take of the water of life freely. Newton tells us

104

of a good man and woman who had been accustomed to read the Scriptures every morning and evening; but a friend, thinking he should benefit them, gave them a bulky exposition. This they read for a while, and then laid it aside for the Scriptures, saying, “Before, we had a glass of pure wine from this blessed book; and now it is mixed in a pail of water.”

Other books, as well as God’s blessed book, have had comments written on them. Bunyan’s “Pilgrim,” how many have published their notes upon this matchless book! Among others, the excellent Mr. Scott did so; and he was accustomed to relate the following anecdote:—“When I had published a new edition with my notes, I had a pious, godly woman in my church much attached to the book, to whom I gave a copy, thinking she would be pleased and edified. Some time after this I met her, and said to her, ‘Well, how goes the pilgrim in his progress now?’ ‘Sir,’ said she, ‘I understand it all except your notes.’” Thus it is in regard to the Bible. I say not in every case. But there have been, and are still, those who attempt to explain things, but their explanation has often been darkening counsel by words without knowledge.

The faith of a Christian tends to establish him by the experience which it produces. It brings things into actual trial, and this tends to its confirmation. Thus the Apostle says, “*I know*”—it is not a matter of opinion or conjecture with me—“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.” I know that prayer can afford relief, for I have found it so; I have found it “good for me to draw near to God;” I know that the application of the precious blood of Christ can tranquillise my conscience; I know that the yoke of Christ is easy, and that His burden is light, for I have carried the same. Thus he that believeth hath the witness in himself. Such a man is not reasoned and ridiculed out of his views and feelings. “In vain,” says he, “do you attempt to persuade me that gall is not bitter, or that honey is not sweet, for I have tasted them: I have I tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Such a man I could trust with a heretic, and should not be afraid for him to live in sight of a stake. Like a good man who was perplexed by Bonner, and could not argue with him, he will be able to say, “Though I cannot *dispute* for Him, I can *burn* for Him.”

II. THERE IS A STABILITY OF PRACTICE.

This regards the duties of religion. “If ye will not believe,

¹⁰⁵

surely ye shall not be established.” By faith we stand. This, and this alone, keeps a man steady and firm in the ways of godliness. “Kept,” says the Apostle, “by the power of God *through faith* unto salvation.” By faith the Christian becomes united to the Saviour, and His strength becomes perfect in our weakness.

In order to see the strength and beauty of the sentiment contained in our text, let us place the believer in three positions.

First, we put him in a place of *secrecy*. The Apostle has enjoined servants not to be “eye-servants, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” We are all, perhaps, influenced more or less by those around us who observe our conduct. But when we are alone,

how do we act then? Faith is a principle that always operates alike upon the mind, that is, its motives are the same in private as in public. Faith shews us the future and eternal consequences of our actions. And these will apply to our private as well as to our public doings. Faith brings another world before us. Faith brings God and places Him before us. Faith leads us to say with Hagar, "Thou God seest me." What a situation was Joseph in! how was he tempted! and everything seemed to favour the commission of crime! There was no one at hand, no eye to see, no witness! *Yes, there was!* There was God! And this was enough for him. He saw God by faith; this was enough to preserve him. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Hence the closet is visited as the temple. There may be motives which influence a man to attend the sanctuary, but faith in Christ alone will induce him to enter the closet, and pray to his Father who seeth in secret, believing the declaration of the Saviour, "And your Father, who seeth in secret, Himself will reward you openly." Hence the good fight of faith is carried on amidst many struggles, unobserved by any human being, but all well known to Him who is the Captain of our salvation.

Secondly, we place the believer in cases of *prosperity and indulgence*. How easily is a person drawn aside from the path of duty by the honour which cometh from men, by a regard to the friendship of this world, or by earthly riches! We are therefore told that the prosperity of fools destroys them. But the believer in Christ is not a fool: faith makes him wise unto salvation, wise both for time and eternity. Faith gives a man a new relation, in which he can no longer only and principally

106

mind earthly things. No, he principally seeks those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Faith will lead him to confess that he is a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, and not to be affected with earthly things as others are. Faith brings him the earnest of a better country, the first-fruits and foretastes of it, and thus gives him a victory which others can never achieve. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith."

Thirdly, we place the believer in a condition of *suffering and danger*. What an agonising trial was Abraham called to endure, when God bade him take his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him up for a burnt-offering! yet faith enabled him to do it. Moses had a hard task to accomplish, when he went and stood before Pharaoh, but we are told, “he had respect unto the recompense of the reward;” that “by faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” To the eye of sense, here was an adversary armed with great force, the greatest monarch then existing in the world; but faith saw the King of kings and the Lord of lords, compared with whom Pharaoh was nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. And how was it with Daniel? Daniel was threatened with being thrown into the lions’ den, if he did not comply with the king’s commandment. But we are told that “when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.” There was something dreadful in being cast into the den of lions; but what was this to a man who saw that God would shut the lions’ mouths, so that they should not hurt him? what was this to a man who by faith heard the voice of Him who said, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him.”

Faith also views the Saviour as acting and as suffering for us. What an influence will this have, which is only known to those who are the subjects of this precious grace! “Oh,” says the believer in trying cases, “when He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich! When I was doomed to perish, He died for me and rose again; and now He ever liveth to make intercession for me at the right hand of God! And shall I deny Him? shall I be ashamed of Him and of His word? shall I refuse to go forth to

107

Him without the camp bearing His reproach? shall I be unwilling to follow Him to prison and to death? shall He not be

magnified by me, whether by life or by death?" "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

III. THERE IS A STABILITY OF HOPE.

This regards the comforts of religion. Here we need not endeavour to prove this. At least I hope that religion tends to comfort you. There is a holy peace and joy as soon as a person enters its course. Of wisdom it is said, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and says God, by Isaiah, "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."

And yet it cannot be denied that they often walk mournfully before the Lord; that they sometimes hang down their heads like bulrushes; that their knees are feeble, and their hands tremble. How is this? There must be a cause for it; there must be a reason. It is impossible, when you look over Scripture, not to perceive that provision is made for their comfort in the promises of the gospel, so exceedingly great and precious; and in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the consolation of Israel. Yes, and we have no reason to suppose, from the testimony of Scripture, that the experience of the first Christians was a distressing one generally, but the very reverse. Thus the Thessalonians received the word in much affliction, yet with joy of the Holy Ghost. When Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which were spoken, it is added, "*There was great joy in that city.*" So the Hebrews *took joyfully* the spoiling of their goods, *knowing that in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance.*

How is it that Christians can rejoice amidst their sorrows? There must be a cause. Paul, when he prays for the Romans, prays that they may be "filled with all *joy and peace in believing*; that they might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Peter says, "In whom, though now you see Him not, yet *believing*, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,

receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” The Scripture assigns the reason, when it tells us of the joy of faith. Faith, says the Scripture, appropriates; faith applies

108

the various comforts of the Holy Ghost. If you draw water with joy out of the well of salvation, you must have something to draw with, and this is faith. Little faith may bring you some consolation, but great faith will bring you much, and make you joyful in the house of prayer. If you would be encouraged by the Saviour, you must believe Him when He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” If you would be emboldened in your approach to God, you must believe that Christ once suffered for sin, “the just for the unjust;” “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.” If you would feel a holy joy and peace while you experience the Christian life to be a warfare, you must believe what He says: “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Are you in affliction? You must believe Him who says, “He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee; when thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flames kindle upon thee.” Do you feel burdened under a sense of fresh guilt? You must believe the declaration, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Do you live in a changing world? If you would be established, you must believe that “all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth towards them that fear Him;” that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” Do you think of death? Can you help thinking of it? Is not death continually moving around you? How many comforts has the thought of it destroyed, with regard to some of you! You must believe in Him who hath said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” You must believe in Him who “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and

immortality to light through the gospel.” And *then* indeed your established minds may say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” “Surely the bitterness of death is past!”

We shall dismiss the subject with two observations: a *condemnation* and an *admonition*.

Do you inquire what it is we are going to condemn now? It

109

is *unbelief*. Unbelief the worst sin, unbelief a radical sin, or the seed of every other.

Here we will not notice the infamy of the thing as it regards God, and yet how worthy is this of our attention, when we reflect how abominable it is in the eyes of a faithful God! Abraham was “strong in faith, *giving glory to God*.” On the other hand, unbelief makes God a liar; unbelief charges Him with perjury. Oh, how the guilt of it is aggravated when properly viewed.

But now we regard it as injurious to the unhappy being in whom it is found. Oh, what has it robbed you of, Christian? What did it rob the Jews of in the wilderness? You see, “they could not enter in because of unbelief.” What did it do for the man in the gate of Samaria? He saw it with his eyes but was not allowed to taste thereof, because he said, “If the Lord should open windows in heaven, may this thing be? “ Every sin renders our salvation impossible by the law, but only one sin renders it impossible by the gospel, and that is unbelief; not by any decree, or any threatening of God, but by it: natural tendency and result. For there is only one remedy that can restore a perishing sinner, and if this be rejected, destruction is inevitable. “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

Then, secondly, the *admonition*. Here again you will not question what it is we are going to admonish you of. You may gather from the strain of the discourse that it regards the *excellency of faith*. There is nothing that our Saviour commended so much in the days of His flesh, to all those who appealed to Him, as faith, and which is of so essential importance. According to the Apostle, the very life that the Christian lives in the

flesh is *by the faith* of the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him. To this turn your attention chiefly. For this most earnestly and perseveringly pray. When you draw nigh to God you pray for many things, but when you pray for faith, you pray for all at once; for "*all things are possible to him that believeth.*" Pray, therefore, with the father of the child, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief;" and with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith." "This," said John, "is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Let us be like-minded with one, who, on the very eve of battle, wept and said, "Believe on the Lord and ye shall be established. Believe His prophets and so shall ye prosper."

"Now the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever,"

110

XII. SEEKING A SIGN.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, December 20th, 1846.)

Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?—ISAIAH xxxviii. 22.

REAL religion is the same in every country and in every age. Hence the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, alluding to the examples of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, says, "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." And hence we have so much of the history and experience of the people of God recorded in the Scriptures of truth, that we may compare our experience with theirs, and ascertain that we are of the same species, though not of the same stature, and that we are travelling the same road, though not, indeed, with equal steps. Yes, however remote from us as to time and place, they are not "strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." They do not speak in an unknown tongue; we understand their language, and can make the feelings which produced it easily our own.

This being premised, let us turn to our subject: "Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Hezekiah was a king, but a palace did not keep him from calamity. Hezekiah was a good man, but religion did not screen him from affliction, "Many are the afflictions of the *righteous*." Hezekiah was in the prime of life, but was the subject of disease, and sickness is one of the numerous ills that flesh is heir to. We are not informed what this disorder was, but it was dangerous. Our text shews us the state of his mind on receiving intelligence of his recovery. Let us take these words, and consider them four ways: as the language of a man desirous of life, as the language of a man

III

attached to the house of God, as the language of a man concerned to shew his gratitude for mercies received, and as the language of a man whose faith requires confirmation.

I. AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN DESIROUS OF LIFE.

"Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" That is, he was eager to know whether he should really be spared, and appear abroad among the living, or verify what he had said in his affliction: "I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world." This accords with the preceding parts of the chapter, for we are told that as soon as he had received the message from Isaiah concerning his death, he "turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight: and Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years."

There are persons who can talk lightly of death; but it is a solemn thing to die, to bid farewell to our dearest connections here, to feel the body and soul separating from each other, the one to fall into the grave, and the other to enter into a new,

untried, and eternal state. What was the fortitude of Hume when dying, joking of Charon and his boat, but like "whistling aloud to keep his courage up"? But what we have now to observe is this, that death is not always inviting even to a good man, as Hezekiah was. Let us enter a little into this, it will not be found unedifying.

Referring to the enjoyments of life, the great moralist (Dr. Johnson) said, "Ah, these are the things which make men unwilling to die!" Death comes not only to the poor, but to the rich; not only to the hovel, but to the palace; not only to men who blaspheme the name of God, but to those who revere it; not only to those who lived under an obscure dispensation, and knew less of Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life," than we do, but to us also who know that Christ "hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." We live under a blessed dispensation; but, though the revelation of God's will is complete, there are those who are not yet led into all its truths; as yet they are

112

very imperfect in their views of some of its leading doctrines: as of the manner of a sinner's justification; the nature of his sanctification; the safety that is derivable from the "everlasting covenant"; the freeness and fulness of Divine grace; while they look after something in themselves whereof they may glory, and seek some worthiness to authorise their believing in Christ.

Sometimes, too, a good man's connections draw him back and attach him still to life. A minister may wish "to depart and be with Christ," but he sees a congregation which hang upon his lips; a husband and father may be looking for that blessed hope, and rejoicing in it, but he knows that his death will make the wife a widow and the children fatherless, and bring her down from the sofa of ease to the oar of labour and toil of thought, while it exposes them to temptations, neglect, and severity, or reduces them to error and vice. Paul said, "I long to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better;" and yet, adds he, "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." Therefore he was willing to wait. You talk of self-denial! Who is it that denies himself like that man who is assured of

heaven, and yet is willing to forego the blessedness from year to year, who is willing to weep on and war on for the sake of usefulness to others?

Again, a good man's evidences of glory are not always clear; this will affect his experience. Perhaps he has been tampering with temptation, perhaps indulging some unholy temper, perhaps idolising the creature, perhaps neglecting some known duty, or omitting self-examination. Hence the Spirit of God is grieved; hence peace is banished from the mind; the joy of God's salvation is withdrawn; he walks mournfully before the Lord, and questions whether he has any part or lot in the matter, or whether his heart is right in the sight of God. Howsoever the state of mind we have now described is produced, while it continues what wonder is it that he does not think with pleasure of walking through the vale of death, when he knows not whether hell or heaven will be the issue!

Again, there may be an event, to which the believer may attach some importance, that has not taken place, and which may produce some hesitation in his mind. There was something of this kind, surely, in regard to David, he therefore pleaded for sparing mercy: "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more seen." You remember Simeon, too, had the assurance that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ, and the

113

promise was verified, so that he was able to say, "Lord, *now* lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

There is also a constitutional timidity in some. They are afflicted at the thought of death; if they are not afraid of death itself, they are afraid of dying. Watts says—

"The pains, the groans, the dying strife,
Fright our approaching souls away."

The excellent Dr. Conyers often said, "I am not afraid at death, but I am afraid of dying; I am not afraid of the *end*, but of the *passage*." He therefore often said in prayer, "O Lord, if it be Thy blessed will, let me die in Thy blessed service!" And his wish was granted, for he sank down in the

church, and even in the pulpit; for Christians are indulged by God in some of their peculiar desires, if they are not intemperate in the expression of them. You know parents sometimes say to their children, "You shall have it if you do not cry for it."

Well, Christians, do not imagine that this reluctance to die is peculiar to you; the very apostles themselves wished to enter heaven, if possible, without being unclothed, and therefore said, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life."

The fear of death is not sinful. Nature must abhor its own destruction, and if there be anything that can reconcile us to it, it must be supernatural. Adam himself dreaded it in the day of his innocence, or God would not have addressed a threatening to him: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This was a proof that it was above all things what they dreaded. "The wicked," we are told, "have no bands in their death, but their strength is firm." They refuse to think, and so are not affected by it; they are courageous because they shut their eyes against the danger.

II. We consider the words of our text AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN ATTACHED TO THE HOUSE OF GOD: for he does not inquire, "What is the sign that I shall ascend my throne?" or "that I shall give audience to ambassadors, or commands to generals? What is the sign that I shall head my army, or that I shall travel through my country?" No, but "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Ah, brethren, "where the treasure is, there will the heart be also!"

I

114

The treasure governs the heart, and the heart will always govern the tongue, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

What is it that attaches a good man so much to the house of God? Perhaps 'tis his birth-place: we now refer, not to his first, but to his second birth; and if you are not born twice before you die once, it would have been well if you had never

been born at all. By the way, how much is done sometimes by a particular sentence, or even a word! “The *words* of the wise,” says Solomon, “are as goads.” It is not long ago that I made use of this sentence from this pulpit, when after the service a gentleman came into the vestry and said, “Sir, twenty years ago I heard you use that expression in Surrey Chapel, and, blessed be God, I have heard the word to purpose ever since.” Oh, may that sentence be blessed to some of you! But to return. The greater part of God’s people have been converted in the sanctuary, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” How many have been born there, who have been early “trained up in the words of faith and good doctrine.”

“When God makes up His last account,
Of natives in His holy mount,
’Twill be an honour to appear
As one *new-bam* and nourished there.”

Therefore it is a place of intercourse. Man is a social being; and when the social principle is renewed and sanctified, it will lead us to look after those who have a taste congenial with our own. And where shall we find them? Not in the world, but in the Church. We shall then very soon drop the sons of vanity and vice, and go and “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” There, in the Church, are my chosen companions, there my fellow-travellers—

“There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns.”

We are told with regard to the apostles that, “as soon as they were released from the Council, being let go, they went to their own company.”

It is also a place of instruction. In an earlier part of these prophecies, we read that “many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of our ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Him shall go forth the

115

law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” There are men informed of what they were ignorant of before; there are they reminded of what they had forgotten; there the impressions are revived and renewed that were beginning to wear off; there are they made free from their doubts and fears, and there they have their comfort established. You can bear me witness, Christians, that this is the case. Have you not found “God in His palaces for a refuge”? Have you not often returned better prepared than you came for the duties and the toils of life? Have you not there found a compensation for all your cares, for all your trials? And have you not there had fulfilled to you the ancient prophecy, “Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

It is also a place of devotion. “My house shall be called the house of prayer,” of social prayer, of public prayer; the house where the preaching of the word is, and where the glad tidings of the great salvation blend with prayer and praise. Oh, it is an interesting sight to see a number of immortal beings engaged in the exercises of devotion! Is there a Christian here but can say—

“I have been there, and still will go,
'Tis like a little heaven below!”

If Hezekiah loved the house of God before, you may be sure he did not love it less *now*, having been detained so long from it by sickness. Ah, brethren, we commonly know best the *worth* of our mercies by the *want* of them. How pleasing is the morning after the darkness of the night! How alluring is the spring after the dreary winter! How health is sweetened after the bitterness of pain! and how is liberty endeared by the sufferings of bondage! God will not have His mercies idolised or disregarded. What wonder is it that God should feel angry when people loathe the manna that He sends, and call it “light bread!” And if you do not “call the sabbath a delight, holy

of the Lord, honourable;" if you do not go to the house of God impressed with the privileges of the sanctuary; if you do not there hear with advantage and interest, what wonder is it if God should remove you into a place of barrenness? or if by accident or sickness He were to lay you aside from the public means? How was it with David? It is true God did not

I 2

116

leave him alone in his tribulation. *No*, nor did He suffer him to forget the sanctuary; but, said he, "When I remember these things I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise." He therefore then could say, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." "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 Thee in the sanctuary."

III. Let us view the words AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN CONCERNED TO SHEW HIS GRATITUDE FOR MERCIES RECEIVED.

You will observe he wished this, not only for the enjoyment of a privilege, but for the performance of a duty. He asked, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" He knew that his God "is the God of salvation to whom belong the issues from death." Having experienced delivering mercy, he knew he ought to praise Him, by acknowledging His goodness publicly, and dedicating himself afresh to His glory. So did David. "I will go," said he, "unto Thy house with burnt-offering; I will pay Thee my vows, which my lips have spoken when I was in trouble. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul. I cried unto Him with my mouth and He was extolled with my tongue. Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee,

O Jerusalem." When our Saviour approached the pool of Bethesda, among the many patients there was a poor "man who had an infirmity thirty and eight years." Some of you, perhaps, have had to endure suffering for a few weeks or months; oh, think of a fellow-creature the victim of a disease thirty-eight years, and be thankful. Well, you may be assured he did not escape our Saviour's notice. Jesus therefore had compassion on him, and said unto him, "Rise, and take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked; and on the same day was the sabbath." But this was not all He did, for after this "Jesus findeth him in the temple." Poor creature! he looked about after an absence of thirty-eight years, adoring God for his deliverance;

117

"and Jesus said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Hannah went to the temple after God had given her her desire, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, "O my lord, do you remember the woman of a sorrowful spirit, praying near that pillar, moving only her lips, in consequence of which you censured and condemned her as a drunkard?" "Yes," says he, "I remember her." "Well," she answered, "that is myself; that afflicted, sorrowful, that indulged and honoured woman am I: for this child I prayed;" and then she stroked the dear boy on his head—"and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also have I lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." Thus should it be with us when we have obtained mercy.

This is not always the case. There are many whose only concern when in affliction is to escape from it: whereas, a good man dreads the removal of it, unless it be sanctified, and the end of God be answered in bringing him nearer to Himself. In regard to a worldly man, after affliction, acquaintances are remembered; acknowledgments are made to friends for their obliging inquiries; there is only one Being forgotten, and that is He who gave the physician all his skill, and the medicine all its virtue, and who inspired His connections with all their tenderness. He is the Being who is overlooked; *He* who said, "Return, ye children of men." He sees them returning

again to the course of this world, and to their former errors and vices, instead of glorifying Him who had restored them. So we read of the ten lepers that were cleansed, only one returned to give glory to God.

A proper improvement of deliverance from sickness does not lie simply in the offering up of a single thanksgiving: it requires a great deal more than this, which will be mere formality and mockery in the sight of God, unless accompanied with real gratitude, and thankful views and feelings; and unless the actions and the life correspond therewith.

Hezekiah had a sad falling off; he was very much impressed at the time, as we see in this chapter: "The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day." He here shews his gratitude for mercies received, and resolved to render it a family blessing. "The father to the children shall make known Thy truth." He resolved to praise Him openly, and constantly. "The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." Would God that it had been so! Had

118

he at the time been told that a few months afterwards he would forget his Benefactor, and all the favours he had enjoyed, he would have said, "Is Thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing." But it is said, "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up."

IV. We consider these words AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN WHOSE FAITH REQUIRES CONFIRMATION.

"What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Why? Had he not been assured of this by good Isaiah? Was not *this* sufficient to satisfy him? He *ought* to have been satisfied. Did he believe it? He did *not* believe it, and he *did* believe it. Ah, Christians, you know how to explain such an experience as this; for how often have you expressed yourselves with the father of the lunatic, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief!" Hence you may see two or three things:—

First, the difficulty of believing. Some imagine this is easy enough, but they are strangers to the nature and the exercise of

it. True faith takes God at His word; but this is not always easy, especially when there appears no prospect of the thing. To look upon the world as it now is, and to believe that “the nations of the earth shall become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ;” to see a hell-hardened sinner, and believe that by the grace of God he will become a disciple of Jesus; to feel our guilt, and believe that God is ready to forgive; to know that we are weak and helpless, and also that we are surrounded by enemies, numerous, powerful, and malicious, and believe that through grace “we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us;” to be able to say with Job, “Though after my skin, worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and not for another;” —this is no easy exercise.

The nature of unbelief is such that it always induces persons to pay more attention to their senses and feelings than to the word of God. Hence the destruction of Lot’s wife. She had left Sodom; but the sun had risen upon the earth, and there was no appearance of a storm such as the angel had foretold, which should destroy Sodom and Gomorrah; therefore she desired to return; she” looked back, and became a pillar of salt.” Hence we read, “that there shall come in the last days scoffers, saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. Why, the seasons continue as they

119

were: the earth is not wearing out, is it? the sea is not likely to be dried up, or the sun to be snuffed out; all things continue as they were.” Here is a regard to appearances, and not to the word of God, which assures us all things shall be destroyed; that “the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, with all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.”

Some say that seeing is believing. What an absurdity! Why faith is a substitute for sight, and a substitute for knowledge; but the best way to obtain satisfaction is by simply trusting in the Lord, and waiting for the manifestation of greater things. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee *because* he trusteth in Thee.” “And surely if ye

will not believe, ye shall not be established." You see in the case of Paul, in the broken vessel, he did not wait till he had safely arrived on shore before he expected relief, but rejoiced in the prospect of it, and said in the midst of danger, "There shall no man among you be destroyed; for there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer." Why? "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." What had been told him? You see this in the following verse. If only when you have lively frames and feelings you do not despond, verily you live at the summer brook, and not by the fountain of living waters. Such frames are pleasant, but are not the ground of confidence; they are *cordials*, but not *food*. Faith is as food, but food and grapes are not quite the same.

You see, God meets Hezekiah in his imperfect and improper request. God might have said, "Have I not spoken? Will you not believe? Would you dishonour me by calling in question my veracity?" No, but He gave him a token, and enabled him to rejoice in the expectation of deliverance. "Oh, who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage!" "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust." How concerned is He for the peace and the satisfaction of His servants! He would have them not only safe, but cheerful. He would have them walk in the light of His countenance, in His favour to rejoice all the day, and in His name to be exalted. Let this endear Him to you; and may we be led to inquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?"

 120

XIII. THE LEADER OF THE BLIND.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, July 26th, 1846.)

And I will bring the blind in a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.—ISAIAH xlii. 16.

THE sky is not more beautifully bespangled with stars than the Bible is filled with promises. It is to express invaluable contents that Peter calls them "exceeding great and precious promises." But this would only lead us to disappointment, by raising high our expectations, if we could not absolutely depend upon them; therefore the Apostle comes forward and tells us that "all the promises of God in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." You ought to be well acquainted with them, and frequently to review them. Nothing can be more pleasing and useful than to place them over against all your exigencies; to consider how they contain all that is wanting in creatures; to mark their gradual accomplishment; and to make them your song in the house of your pilgrimage. What says our text? for this will furnish us with an all-sufficiency of matter for our meditation at this time.

I was thinking this morning how completely these promises have been fulfilled in all those who have reached Immanuel's land. Blessed spirits! you could no sooner enter the heavenly country than some Joshua came to you and said, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." But, Christians, "you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you;" but thus far He has been your helper, and there-

121

fore with David it becomes you to say, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with them that uphold my soul; He hath delivered me." What He has done for you is only a pledge of what He will do; and to aid your grateful remembrance of the past, as well as to confirm your confidence in the future, let us survey Him in three characters, which are all plainly expressed and implied in our text, and in which He makes Himself known to us. I. As our Leader: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." II. As our Interpreter: "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." III. As our unchangeable Friend: "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

I. AS OUR LEADER.

“I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known.”

What could we do without such a Leader? What is the condition of men with regard to a future state? Without God, man is a poor wanderer on the mountains of ignorance, a prey to every danger, liable to be led astray by his prejudices and passions. Wise in his own eyes, yet “wherein is he to be accounted of?” He is alienated from the love of God through the ignorance that is in him. If left to himself, he would in the greatness of his folly go astray. You may go to hell without a guide, but you cannot go to heaven without one, nor without the Leader of whom we are now speaking. But, blessed be His name, if we earnestly desire Divine direction, He is disposed to pay attention to our supplications, and to take us under His own peculiar guidance. Hence the Christian can say with David, “He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” Thus the Church sang in triumph of old, “This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death.” Oh, what can equal the satisfaction derivable from the persuasion that I am under Divine guidance, led by One almighty to save, kind to pardon and indulge, patient to bear and deliver, wise to conduct, and to make all things work together for my good?

The subjects of this guidance are blind: “I will lead the blind by a way that they knew not.” How is this? Are not Christians all children of the light and of the day? They are. “They were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord,” and are commanded to “walk as children of the light.” They were once wholly in darkness, and are still partially so; for were they

122

not in a measure only enlightened, they would not stand in need of such a director and guide.

Also observe where He leads them: “I will lead them in paths they have not known.” This is true, first, with regard to their spiritual concerns. They were not born Christians, but have been made such; and if now they differ from others, and from their former selves, it is because He “hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.” “I will lead them in

paths that they have not known.” What did you once know? You once felt conviction of sin, you can now see its evil. You now not only feel an aversion with regard to it, but an *abhorrence*. “You are dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto righteousness.” What did you once know of faith and trust in the Redeemer? Now you can confide in Him as your only foundation. Now you say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” Now you “rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Then what did you once know of the throne of grace? You heard prayer and supplication, and perhaps you *said* your prayers; but you now know what it is to come unto God by Him who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” You have now boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Christ; you now come even to His seat; your “fellowship is now with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.” Did you go this way heretofore? We need not enlarge, your course now is called by the Apostle “walking in newness of life.”

Let us here distinguish. The things of the gospel are not new in reality, but only in experience. Were you to go to India you would see a new country, not new in itself, but new in regard to you. Were you born blind, and your eyes were opened, you would not see a new sun, but the same which has been shining from the beginning, but it would be a new sun to you, you never having seen his beams before. So it is here.

In regard to their temporal concerns, He leads them in paths they have not known. If you look forward, what do you know—what *can* you know—of the future, as to nations, families, or yourselves as individuals? If you look back, and contemplate the bounds of your habitation as fixed by Providence, your connections formed, your friends, your successes, your disappointments, does not all this appear now surprising, rare? Perhaps, if much of it had been foretold you by a seer some years before, you would have been ready to say, “If the Lord should make windows in heaven, may this thing be?” But they have been; and this is more clearly the case with the

¹²³

lives of some than with others. There is as much sameness in the lives of some as you find in walking by the side of a canal;

but in regard to others, they are placed in such opposite positions at different periods in their existence,—in their case there is such obscurity and splendour, such poverty and wealth,—it seems astonishing how many things in their case were accomplished. But the thing was of the Lord of Hosts, “who is wonderful in counsel, who doth marvellous things, and that without number.”

II. We proceed to take a second view of God, AS OUR INTERPRETER.

“I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.”

This is clearly distinguished from the former. You may “lead the blind by a way that they know not, and in paths that they have not known,” while you may not explain to them, but only tell them to depend on you as a guide, while they are unconscious of anything except progress. But it is not so with God. God illumines all whom He guides. The knowledge He gives to His people is gradual; and we may observe four instances in which He makes “darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.”

First, as to *doctrine*. It is not possible for us to determine with how much error in judgment real grace may be found in the heart. We find our Saviour one day putting his fingers upon the eyes of a blind man, who afterwards said, “I see men as trees walking,” yet he was under the Saviour’s own operation; and our Lord touched his eyes again, and commanded him to look up, when he saw all things plainly. For a time persons may have very confused and obscure, and sometimes very perplexing, views of some doctrines of the gospel, compared with what others know now, and with what they shall know afterwards. We are not very fond of finding persons so clear and so high in the head, when the heart is not right. They often remind us of rickety children; the head is too large in proportion to the body. God is gradual in all His operations, both in nature and grace. We see in nature things are slow in proportion to their value and importance. You must have patience. You sometimes seem rather offended because people do not learn in a few hours what God has been

teaching you all your life; and what poor proficients are you still! But if you find a heart broken for and from sin, if people are brought upon their knees, you need not be afraid,

124

but may be assured that if in anything else they be lacking, “God will reveal even this unto them.” Though His mode may be sometimes slow, it is always sure, and under His agency His people will have their hearts established.

Secondly, He makes “darkness light before them, and crooked things straight,” as to *experience*. There are many things perplexing here. The temptations that sometimes assail them are among the number, for they hoped to go on in their Christian course without annoyance. They did not remember that Pharaoh, as soon as Israel was gone, pursued after them, and tried to bring them back again. Then the Christian’s life must be a warfare; you should remember that the unwillingness to fight is a greater proof of want of grace than a desire of victory.

Then, also, in regard to *prayer* they are sometimes perplexed. They read that God answers prayer. “But I have prayed,” says the Christian, “and He has not answered mine.” But you should learn to distinguish. God immediately hears our prayer, but He does not always immediately answer, “for He is a God of judgment;” and while His mercy would constrain Him to give, His wisdom leads Him to withhold the blessing for a time. But “He waits to be gracious.” Sometimes by strange, sometimes “by terrible things in righteousness,” does He answer His people. Newton describes this in regard to himself—

“I asked the Lord that I might grow
 In faith and love and every grace;
 Might more of His salvation know,
 And seek more earnestly His face.

“’Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
 And He, I trust, has answered prayer;
 But it has been in such a way
 As almost drove me to despair.

“I hoped that in some favoured hour
 At once He’d answer my request,
 And by His love’s constraining power
 Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

“Instead of this He made me feel
 The hidden evils of my heart;
 And let the angry powers of hell
 Assault my soul in every part.

“Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed
 Intent to aggravate my woe;
 Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
 Blasted my gourd”, and laid them low.

“‘Lord, why is this?’ I trembling cried;
 ‘Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?’
 ‘Tis in this way,’ the Lord replied,
 ‘I answer prayer for peace and faith.

“‘These inward trials I employ
 From self and pride to set thee free;
 And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
 That thou mayest seek thine all in me.’”

Thus, you see, the Lord makes the darkness light with regard to prayer.

It is the same also with regard to *joy*. Christians read in the Scriptures that religion is friendly to joy; that “the redeemed shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.” But you say, “I have so little of this;” and you find that religion is described by sorrow as well as joy, by fear as well as hope, and that others sigh and sob as well as yourself. Milne, the ecclesiastical historian, said, “Had I been as destitute of comfort some years ago as I am now, I should have been exceedingly confounded; but I have learned not to live on lively frames, but on God’s own word. I know that He is faithful who hath promised.”

So, also, is it in regard to *assurance*. “Oh that I knew my interest in the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure! Oh that He would say, ‘I am thy salvation!’ I could

then face a frowning world, and defy the king of terrors; but it is all obscurity.

‘Tis a point I long to know,
 Oft it causes anxious thought;
 Do I love the Lord, or no?
 Am I His, or am I not?’

The most that I seem able to reach at present is ‘peradventure,’ and to say, ‘What wilt Thou have me to do?’ Do? Why, “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart.”

“Retreat beneath His wings,
 And in His strength confide:
 This more exalts the King of kings
 Than all your works beside.”

Keep at His feet, till He takes you into His bosom. Cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” till you can say with Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” and He will shew you greater things than these.

126

Thirdly, with regard to *practical duties*, such as a Christian’s removal of his situation, his transition from one business to another. He may be at a loss to determine what step to take, and this may awaken in his pious mind a concern that others never feel. It is rational he should feel this, because how much depends upon every step he takes! A wrong step may give a complexion to the whole of his future life. He will therefore feel a concern to know the way wherein he should walk, and his soul will be lifted up to God for Divine direction. Do you ask, “What is he to do?” He is to wait upon the Lord, and to wait patiently for Him. Yea, “it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,” and not lean to his own understanding. God could fulfil His promise by miracles, but this is not His ordinary course, nor are we now to expect this.

Fourthly, with regard to some of His *providential dealings*. God’s way is sometimes in the sea, and His footsteps are not known. But sometimes the darkness is dispelled even *now*; the shadow of death is turned into the morning, and the

Christian sees why he was deprived of such a prop on which he was leaning, why he was exercised with such a soul trouble, and why he was visited with such a disorder of body or distress of mind. What an instructive school has this been to the believer in Jesus!

How was it with poor Job? "Behold," say she, "I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him: hut He knoweth the way that I take." Yes, and *he* knew it after a while: "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Take the case of Joseph. A hard case it seemed for a good while, and for years everything appeared dark and perplexing; yet after a while he saw the clue; the scattered parts are brought, together, the whole is now made to harmonise, and he clearly sees that nothing occurred in his whole history that could have been left out.

Look, again, at David. David could say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I learned to keep Thy commandments."

So it has been with numbers more. "Yes," says the Christian, "when I was following after my lovers, He hedged up my way so that I could not find them; and then I said, 'I will

127

go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.'" We should learn, therefore, not to be hasty to pronounce judgment upon the dealings of God. He that believeth should not make haste. He will know that here, frequently, his "strength is to sit still!" If he does not, he may err as Jacob did, and say with him, "All these things are against me," while they are all really advancing his welfare. Ah when you get to heaven how will those words be realised in your blessed experience, "He hath done all things well!" Then "He will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight." Then you will have leisure to survey, and capacity to understand, the dealings of God; and all His conduct will appear faithfulness and truth. Then the key to the matter will have been supplied, and all things explained.

Then you will see how all things advanced your welfare. Though many have appeared dark, disorderly, and perplexing, yet all will harmonise, and you will exclaim, "Just and true are Thy ways, O Thou King of saints."

III. With less enlargement, we may notice the advantage derivable from God's revealed character AS HIS PEOPLE'S UN-CHANGEABLE FRIEND.

"These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." They deserve to be forsaken, and this they will acknowledge readily enough. They will often say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, *because* His compassions fail not."

They may think themselves forsaken, and we have instances of this upon record. Thus Zion said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will I not forget thee." So Asaph said, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will He be favourable no more?" So David acknowledges, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes; nevertheless, Thou heardest my supplications when I cried unto Thee."

But they may be forsaken. God Himself speaks of this in His word. But observe the *time*: "For a *small moment* have I forsaken thee." So it is in the apprehension of faith; so it is always very short when compared with eternity. Then observe the *manner* of His forsaking them, for however we may explain this, it must be consistent with His assurance of *not* forsaking: "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

128

Now there are three ways in which God may forsake His people, and yet the promise of the text may remain substantially the same.

First, in their outward condition. So He says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." He can reduce them in their circumstances, bereave them of their dearest relations, remove their possession and enjoyments,

and leave them bare and destitute. But all this is very compatible with His presence, for He has expressly said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee! when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Here you find God expressly and peculiarly with His people in trouble.

Secondly, as to the enjoyment of spiritual comfort. "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." "Oh, when," says he, "wilt Thou comfort me?" But when these spiritual consolations are suspended, there are great searchings of heart, much that shews the Spirit of God to be with them; for this could not come from nature.

Thirdly, as to the exercise of grace, not the existence thereof. Here we may refer to good Hezekiah. God, in the midst of trouble and a fearful invasion, left him for a while to see what was in his heart. Peter for a season also was left to himself. Jesus, you know, said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not;" but it *did* fail. It did as to its exercise, not as to its principle. The bough was pressed down by the flood, but not broken off, and soon gained its erect posture and pointed to the sky again. Though weak in himself, reposing on the arm of omnipotence, he shall not faint, or fainting shall not cte. Yea, "though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand." What says the Apostle to the Romans? "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is pleasing to see the agency of God in the works of nature and in His providential dispensations, but above all is it interesting and ennobling to see Him as the God of all grace; to see Him pardoning the guilty, sanctifying the depraved, and

129

detaching a sinner from his sins; to hear Him saying to the lover of idols, "Flee from the wrath to come; follow me;

come, accompany me to glory, honour, and immortality." In effect He says to us—

“Cast on me thine every care;
 ’Tis enough that I am nigh;
 I will all thy burdens bear;
 I will all thy wants supply.”

This, brethren, should be an encouraging motive to induce you to give up yourselves unto Him, who leads His people from this wilderness to Canaan. “Blessed are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.” I pity the poor, and wish I could redress their grievances; I pity those still more who “trust in uncertain riches, and not in the living God;” I pity the learned who know nothing of the language of Canaan; I pity the philosopher who is versed in the secrets of nature, but not in the deep things of God; I pity the astronomer who is familiar with the skies, and those worlds of light, but is plunging into the blackness of darkness for ever; but I cannot pity you, Christians, however afflicted, you who are the children of His grace, and heirs of eternal life. You are enviable characters; you are under the care of God; He has taken the charge of you; He will safely conduct you through all your dangers and distresses. Take this assurance, and use it as a remedy against anxious care, for He hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” You know not, when you look forward, what a day may bring forth; nor is it necessary. You know not, but your God knows. He sees the end from the beginning. “Who, therefore, so wise to choose our lot and regulate our ways?” In an enemy’s country you cannot be always at peace. You may therefore infer this, “Trials must and will befall.” “Nevertheless, God is continually with you: He will guide you with His counsel, and afterwards receive you to glory.”

K

XIV. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, May 4th, 1845.)

Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.—HOSEA vi. 3.

WE may consider this in two ways; first, as an address of good men to themselves, being a kind of soliloquy, or self-admonition and encouragement. It is said, foolish people talk to themselves. I am sure *wise* men do; this is a very effectual way of increasing holy confidence. David not only says, “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still,” but thus addressed his own soul, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul: and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” “O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God; my goodness extendeth not to Thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.”

Or, secondly, as addressed to the godly from each other; for they that are “passed from death unto life” “love the brethren,” and these brethren need to have their minds stirred up by way of remembrance. Hence, Christians are commanded to “exhort one another daily,” “to provoke to love and good works,” “to comfort the feeble-minded,” “to strengthen the weak hands,” and so on. “Come,” say they to each other, “let us not be afraid; let us thank God and take courage, let us go on our way rejoicing; our labour will not be in vain in the Lord;” “then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.”

The language before us is an expression of holy confidence. This admits of various degrees; but without some degree of it we shall never seek the Lord, shall never cleave to Him with

131

full purpose of heart, or follow hard after Him; and, whatever some may say, the more we have of this confidence the better. Between this holy confidence and presumption there is no resemblance.

Addressing ourselves more closely to our text, we find in it—

I. AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT—Divine knowledge.

The importance of Divine knowledge is manifest from our Saviour's declaration: "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Therefore, to be destitute of this knowledge is to be in a perilous and even a perishing condition. "My people are destroyed for want of knowledge." "It is a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them; and He that formed them will shew them no mercy." "For the soul to be without knowledge is not good." Knowledge is the same to the soul as the window is to a building, or the eye to the body. Knowledge is essential to right conduct. Our Saviour said, "If the good man of the house had *known* in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." "That is," says Dr. South, "he would have kept his eyes open, and his door shut." It is from ignorance that a disregard to the Saviour springs. "If thou knewest the gift of God," said He, "and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." It is from ignorance that legality springs. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." Nothing can be truly religious or moral that is done in ignorance; because then there would be no motive or principle, and to these the Lord looks in all our actions: all righteous conduct is begun and carried on in the renewal of the mind. God's empire is founded in light; the devil's kingdom is founded in darkness; he blinds all those he governs, or they could never be induced to follow him through such mazes, to such a miserable end. But God opens the eyes of all His subjects, and they follow Him from conviction and disposition. "God never works in a dark shop," says Bishop Hall, and He who first produced light in the natural creation produces it in the new. Therefore, says the Apostle, "He that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the

132

light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

But now the question returns, What is this knowledge to which such importance is attached? Or what is it to know the Lord? It is much more than some imagine. It is one thing to know that there is a God, and another to know what He is. You may know that He is, and not know Him as "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." But they who come to Him must believe the one as well as the other. It is much more than knowing Him to be Almighty. It is a knowing Him to be "righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." Such knowledge as this, if there be no more, will operate upon a sinner's mind conscious of guilt, so as to produce distance, alarm, and fear. It is necessary to the recovery of a fallen creature that God should be known as the justifier of those who believe in Christ; to believe that in our present state we may return to Him "with weeping and supplication," and to feel a confidence that we may be recovered by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. This seems the simple design of the Scriptures, "for whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Peter tells us this is the grand aim of the Saviour's mediation. "God raised Him up," says he, "and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Therefore God is only to be savingly known in Him. In creation God is above us, in Providence He is beyond us, in His holy law He is against us, but in Christ He is with us, and for us, and *in* us too.

Yes, this knowledge is not a mere speculative knowledge, but, as our divines have very properly called it, it is experimental. It is therefore held forth by the agency of our senses—by our seeing, by our hearing, by our tasting—that He is gracious; by our feeling after Him.

Some professors are like December nights, very dear, but alas, very cold. This is all that can be said with regard to

their religion. But the knowledge of the gospel is saving; it is the light of life; it descends from the head into the heart. God says, "I will give them a heart to know me;" and says Paul, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." The Apostle means, "with the understanding." Why does he not then say so? Surely there was a reason for his saying

¹³³

"heart!" A Sandemanian would never have used the word "heart," or the mere orthodox. What a difference there is between a mere conviction and a cordial assent! You admit that God manages all things, and doth all things well. You ought at His feet also to say, "Here I am, do with me as Thou wilt." But is this always so? In religious concerns knowledge ought to be viewed in the order of means; and when it does not reach its end, it is considered by the sacred writers as nothing at all. So it is said, "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." Do you therefore trust in Him? "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." Do you love Him? "By this we know that we love God, if we keep His commandments." Are you saying, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

II. Here is A NECESSARY DUTY, which is to "follow on to know the Lord."

This includes three things: first, the practising what we know. Why should God give you more light while you are not disposed to make use of what you already have? It is kind in God *not* to give you more, for, since you would abuse and neglect it, it would only be the means of increasing your sin, and enhancing your condemnation; "for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." There are some who hold the truth in unrighteousness. They abandon one truth after another, as it becomes troublesome; while God suffers them to wax worse and worse, till they are given up to a strange delusion that they may believe a lie.

Secondly, it includes diligence in the use of appointed means. God has ordained meditation, reading the Scriptures, hearing the word, conversation with those who know a little

more than ourselves, but, above all, prayer to the Father of mercies, "from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift." But while some diligence is necessary to secure attendance upon the means, much more is necessary to secure attention in them, to keep the thoughts from roving, like the fool's eye, to the ends of the earth, to rouse up the mind, to quicken the affections, and to fill the soul with a lively concern that the whole may be reduced to practice. "In vain do we draw near unto God with our lips, and honour Him with our mouth, while our hearts are far from Him." "The sluggard desireth, and hath not, because his hands refuse to labour." But, "if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice

134

for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Thirdly, it implies continuance in this active course. Hence says wisdom, "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates; waiting at the posts of my doors." Here you find you have not only to hear, but to watch. The Apostle tells us, in running the race set before us we are required not only to be in earnest, but also to be patient; and it is by "patient continuance in well-doing" that we are to seek for glory and immortality. You have heard of Ephraim's goodness, that was like "the morning cloud and early dew that passeth away." The Galatians began well, but were hindered. They began in the Spirit, but ended in the flesh. How many are there whose love waxeth cold; who are turned aside, or turned back! "They went out from us," says John, "but they were not of us." O blessed people who can say, "We are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

III. Then here is AN ASSURED PRIVILEGE.

"Then shall ye know." Men are often stimulated to an enterprise, and are induced to pursue it for a long course, when there is only a probability of success; but if probability is

enough to actuate a man, how much more should real certainty do so, especially when the object is nothing less than “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!” Nothing, perhaps, is so trying as to “labour in vain,” and to weary oneself for very vanity; but there is no other course where men are sure of succeeding. As it regards things of a worldly nature, after the most painful exertion, and the most expensive sacrifices, and when one is just ready to seize the prize which we have been so long in pursuit of, some one has borne it off in scorn and triumph. After you have filled the cup, and raised it to your lips, some disaster may come and dash it to the ground. “All is vanity and vexation of spirit.” “The sower soweth in hope,” or he would never sow at all; yet he may never reap, owing to the blasting, or mildew, or wetness, or drought. But it is otherwise here; here there is no uncertainty. “They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy.” “He that goeth forth weeping, Learning precious seed, shall doubtless come again, bringing bis sheaves with him.” In war, victory is

135

very uncertain, and “let not him that putteth on the harness boast as he that putteth it off.” How different have the results of many battles been from the previous arrangements and expectations! There is no uncertainty here, in the Christian’s warfare; if he has not struck a blow he is sure of victory; or if he has fallen, he may with confidence say, “Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy; though I fall I shall arise again.” “In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.” A good man advanced in years, and near eternity, said to me lately, “It is now many years since I put on the harness with fear and trembling, and now I am putting it off in peace and triumph.” Oh, blessed are the people who are in such a case!

Let this assurance of success encourage you with regard to others. Do not deal harshly with them. If unable for the time to embrace religious truths, be not impatient. Break not “the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.” “Despise not the day of small things.” When you see a heart broken for sin, and from sin, and following out the light already received, you may be fully persuaded, that if in anything else

they be lacking, God shall reveal even this to them, in His own time, and in His own way.

Let this encourage you with regard to prayer. The young ones who are beginning to seek, tell them the Saviour says, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." To those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, say that they are blessed *now*, and they *shall* be blessed, for "they shall be filled." Tell them that "who-soever asketh receiveth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Or are you desirous of knowing more of that blessed Saviour? like Paul, who, after so many years' acquaintance, said, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings;" for, as Dr. Watts says—

"The cross, the manger, and the throne,
Are big with wonders still unknown."

Go on and you will know more, and will see more. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold."

There are two cases in particular in which this encouragement—"Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord"—may be applied. The first is, if you are in perplexity with regard to the path of duty, and are anxious to know the

136

leadings of Providence concerning you; for "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Oh, how much hangs on taking a wrong course, yea, in taking a wrong step; one wrong step may give a complexion to our future character and history. You will be ready to sacrifice your own inclinations to His pleasure; you will beseech God to guide you with His counsel. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." You may be sure that God will perform His own promise in your experience. "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not."

Or, secondly, do you wish to know God better by appropriation? that is, are you anxious to know your own interest in Him? "Oh," you say, "to be able to exclaim with Thomas, 'My Lord, and my God!'" or to be able to say as David did, 'I will

love Thee, O Lord, *my* strength! The Lord is *my* rock, and *my* fortress, and *my* deliverer: *my* God, *my* strength, in whom I will trust; *my* buckler, and the horn of *my* salvation, and *my* high tower.” Nine times David here claims God as His own. So says Dr. Watts—

“When I can say my God is mine,
When I can feel His glories shine,
I’ll tread the world beneath my feet,
And all that earth calls good and great.”

Well, “then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” Yes, “they shall call upon the Lord, and He shall answer them.”

IV. Observe, lastly, A STRIKING ILLUSTRATION here employed: “His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.” The illustration consists of two images, equally simple and encouraging. They are both taken from nature, and from those parts of it which lie open to common observation, which would prevent some persons from employing them.

“*His going forth is prepared as the morning.*” The morning, you know, is always preceded by night. Night is always a period of darkness. Some nights are very dark; other nights are less dark; yet in these you have only the shining of the moon and the stars. The sun is invisible, though in existence, but in the morning he arises; God says, “Let there be light; and there is light;” and—

“The Lord can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us nay for night,
Make floods of godly Sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.”

¹³⁷

“His going forth is prepared as the morning.” We may not wonder that the morning is endeared to us. The night is not only dark, but gloomy. But a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to see the sun. The night is also a period of confinement, in which our faculties are suspended; the morning comes and says to the prisoners, “Go forth.” “Man goeth forth unto his

work and to his labour until the evening." The night is also a dangerous season. "Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, and they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens." If this be not the case here,—for here we have no beasts of prey,—yet there are workers of iniquity; there are the emissaries of hell to be found in abundance. "The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the daytime." But how welcome has the morning been to some! How welcome was it to Paul and his companions when neither sun nor moon appeared for many days, and they cast anchor, and wished for the day! How welcome has it been to the bewildered traveller, who knew not the path! How welcome to the watchman, wearied with watching! Yes, says David, "I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, more than they that watch for the morning."

Well, "His going forth is prepared as the morning;" that is, gradually. The morning does not dash upon us suddenly in all its lustre. First there are some streaks in the heavens; then we see some clouds decked with silver and gold. Thus we read in Joel, "As the morning spread upon the mountains;" for of course the highest eminences see the first beams. "Here we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." But as for some of you, you never in all your lives beheld the break of day; you, *you* would not deal with such a vulgar thing as the rising of the sun. "What is this," say you, "to a little more comfortable slumbering insensibility? What is the liveliness of a thousand birds bursting into song compared with the luxury of snoring in bed? What is wholesome air, with its balsamic odours, to late lying in bed?" "His going forth is prepared as the morning." Remember the words of the Apostle, "He who hath begun the good work in you will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ." Here you see progression, or increase in grace. Solomon says, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto

138

the perfect day.” There is a great difference between twilight and dawn, between day and night, between darkness and light. But here behold a difference: in the evening, twilight and day are behind; the day is spent, the night is coming on. The reverse of this is the case when the morning dawns: the night is behind and the day is coming. Ah, Christians, it shall never be twilight with any of you! No, but dawn; and however small it may be, it *is* dawn. “The night is far spent and the day is at hand.”

Here is another image, for Christians need refreshment and reviving: “*And He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*”

What would nature be without rain? Only what we should be without the grace of God. We are entirely dependent upon the influences of the Holy Spirit. We “live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit,” and without Him we can do nothing; but under these influences we resemble a fruitful field; we “grow as the vine, and spring as the corn.” David refers to grace as well as providence when he says, “Thou, O Lord, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary.” And Moses thus distinguishes between Egypt and Canaan: “For the land whither thou goest in to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine and thy oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.”

The rain, you see, in that land fell periodically; thus their seasons differed from ours. There was the former rain, which might be called autumnal, and the latter, vernal; at these two

seasons particularly the rain fell upon the earth. The one regarded the early or the former rain, that is, the sowing time; which rain softened the ground and caused the grain to spring; and the latter, or autumnal, to swell the seed, and to ripen it for ingathering. How often is this mentioned. Jeremiah says, "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our

139

God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: He reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest." So in our text it is said, "And He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Now without straining the metaphor too much, I think I am justified in remarking, that there is something like this in God's gracious dealings with His people; that there are two seasons particularly distinguished: the one regarding the beginning, the other the close of the spiritual life; the one intended more to encourage and enliven the Christian, the other to establish and mature.

Do you not remember the former rain, in the beginning of your religious course? In other words, do you not "remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Him in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown? Israel was then holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of His increase." Oh, that early rain! Oh, what were your prayers then! *How* often were they offered up in "strong crying and tears to Him who was able to save you." What was your hearing then? How did you drink in the rain of heaven! "Ah!" say you—

"Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?"

"What blessed hours I then enjoyed;
How sweet their memory still!
But now I feel an aching void
The world can never fill."

"Oh that it were with me as in months past!"

And there are some of you ready, surely, for “the latter rain;” some who grow in grace as they grow in days, and “in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour;” as you get nearer heaven, you get more heavenly, more “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” There are some “who bring forth fruit in old age, who are fat and flourishing in the courts of the Lord;” and who, in the ripeness of experience, say to others, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” There are some of you who, having tried the Saviour, can trust Him, and in regard to the past you joyfully bear witness that “He hath done all things well.” You will have the same cause for bearing this testimony in the future. It is true that old age is not without its trials; even to

140

those that are advanced in Christian experiences there come seasons corresponding to those. hot, sultry days of autumn, when all nature seems to languish. But then let not your hearts be troubled. There is no cause for fear. He who gave you “the former rain” will surely also give you in its season “the latter rain,” and there shall be a reviving in your spiritual experience, to your own great comfort, and to the praise of our faithful and covenant-keeping God.

141

XV. THE ALMIGHTY HEALER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, July 14th, 1850.)

And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.—MATTHEW viii. 7.

“**H**EVER went about doing good.” This is the shortest eulogium ever pronounced, and at the same time the most glorious. You know that praise is frequently the offspring of folly and falsehood. Authors in their dedications ascribe to their patrons qualities they never possessed. Charles II. and George IV. were always prayed for as “our *most religious* sovereigns;” and, to add blasphemy to lies, the head of the Man of Sin is called “His Holiness,” when hell itself could hardly exceed

the wickedness of many of the popes. But here the eulogium is just and true, as it is honourable and glorious. Witness the whole of His wonderful life, in which you behold a course of constant benevolence, always imparting instruction and relief; curing the bodies and saving the souls of men.

How delightful must it have been in the days of His flesh to have followed Him from place to place in His journeys of compassion; and even now how pleasing is it, by a perusal of these hallowed pages, to be enabled to follow Him and hear Him. So shall we say with the centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God;" and with the officers, "Never man spake like this man." So that we "upon whom the ends of the world are come," as well as His immediate disciples, may "behold His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

"To Him shall the gathering of the people be," said the dying Jacob. "To Him shall men come," said the evangelical Prophet. Both these testify to the same character, and intimate the same truth concerning His fame, that He was the

142

centre of all attraction, because the source of all supplies. For to whom shall the ignorant look, but to Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"? To whom shall the guilty and the weak repair, but to Him in whom we have righteousness and strength? To whom shall the destitute and distressed go, but to Him who is "the Consolation of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble"? Our text is the answer of our Saviour to the Roman centurion. You have heard the whole narrative. We now beg to confine your attention to the words we have selected. We shall consider these in four ways.

I. AS AN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

Blessed be His name, He has given us a command and a promise with regard to prayer, illustrated by His own conduct. He has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and everyone that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Observe three things: *First*, Whose prayer was it that was here answered? You know He never said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain." But the petitioner here was not of the seed of Abraham. He was an alien to the commonwealth of Israel; he was a Roman, a Gentile, a heathen; yet he was heard, for "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved; for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all that call upon Him." Christ was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of His people Israel. In His name the Gentiles were to trust, and the Saviour says to all, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out."

Secondly, What was the prayer that was here answered? It was not a personal prayer, but a relative one; that is, it was not a prayer offered up for himself, but for another. And it is worthy of our observation, that as Christ never rejected those who came to Him on their own account, so He never refused those who came to Him pleading on the behalf of others. The woman of Canaan came to Him, saying, "Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil;" the nobleman said, "Sir, come down ere my child die;" Martha and Mary sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick;" his relations brought to Him the man who was sick of the palsy, and laid him at our Saviour's feet, "and Jesus seeing *their* faith," not *his*, "said to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be

143

forgiven thee." Now, this should encourage and induce you to pray for others—for your fathers and mothers, for your children, your masters and mistresses, for your servants, and your friends and neighbours, for your connections. Our Saviour says, "When ye pray, say, not *my* Father, but '*our* Father which art in heaven,'" in which He teaches us never to come to a throne of grace alone. He has commanded us in the Scripture to pray for others. There is nothing more commendable than such exercises as these. Look at the history of Job. Doubtless; ob prayed under his sufferings, for afflictions are designed to send men to a throne of grace; but the prayer which accomplished his deliverance was not a prayer for himself, but a prayer for his friends, for those naughty friends

who had so censured and condemned him; for it is said, "Then the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."

I need not tell you you are dwelling in a vale of tears; that you are continually meeting with misery that you cannot remove, and wants you cannot relieve; you "weep with those who weep," but all you can do, you say, is to shed unavailing tears. No, there is a great deal more in your power. You can retire; you can engage the attention of Omnipotence; and prayer has power with God and can prevail. The efficacy and success of it depends not upon office or rank. "He despises not the prayer of the destitute, but will hear their prayer."

Thirdly, When was this prayer answered? Why, immediately; as soon as it was offered. As soon as the centurion had said, "Hear me on behalf of my poor suffering servant," Jesus replied, "I will come and heal him." This is not always the case. But there are instances in which the prayer of faith is immediately answered as well as heard. While the petitioner evinces his distress, and says, "Lord, mine is a trying case, make haste to help me," the answer is, "Here I am, a very present help in time of need; " and so the words of Isaiah are verified, "Before they call I will hear, and while they are yet speaking I will answer." Having considered the words as containing an answer to prayer, let us view them—

II. AS AN INSTANCE OF CONDESCENSION.

It surprised even the centurion; and yet he seems to have been a very humane man, and a very compassionate master, for what did he? He took the trouble of going in search of our Lord on behalf of his afflicted servant, and you will

144

remember the servant was only a slave. Many masters would not have done this; perhaps some Christian masters. They would have turned this sick servant adrift, or have sent him to the hospital, if there was one at hand, and perhaps never again have inquired after him. What is a servant to some masters? Why, a mere drudge, a beast of burden, instead of being regarded as a fellow-creature and as a humble friend. It was

otherwise with Job; who can help admiring him? “If,” said he, “I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant when they contended with me; what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? Did not He that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?”

You may remember the case of the poor creature David’s men found in the wilderness, when he was pursuing the Amalekites: “They found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, for *three days and three nights!* And David said unto him, To whom belondest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, a *servant* to an Amalekite; and *my master lift me, because three days ago I fell sick!*” *A brute! a wretch* to leave a fellow-creature, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, thus! to leave him thus lingering and languishing, dying without attendance and without provision, for the birds and the ravens of the valley to pick out his eyes, and the young eagles to eat thereof. But thus it was.

You need not be informed how slaves were formerly regarded by the Greeks and the Romans, who called the people of all other nations barbarians. They considered these as brutes which they had a right to confine and a right to kill. It was no uncommon thing for a Roman to chain a slave to his door; and it is recorded of one Roman nobleman that often he threw slaves into his pond as food for the fish. But how different was it with this fine officer, this centurion! He keeps this poor diseased slave under his own roof, and goes and begs the Saviour to come and heal him.

Yet, the condescension of our Lord surpassed the expectation of this kind-hearted centurion. That such a personage as He should at a moment’s notice, and at the very mention of the case, set off to go to his house with him, to enter a back-room,

145

and stand by the side of the pallet of the poor dying creature, and say to him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Why, even this centurion could not account for it; he could hardly accept it he deemed it too much condescension, not to his slave only, but also to himself. "Lord," said he, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."

Now we often talk of condescension, and there is nothing that appears more lovely than to see persons in the superior conditions of life condescend to men of low estate. But after all, what is condescension to each other, whatever superiority there may be, remembering that God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth, that all are heirs of the same corruption, and all doomed to the same grave; I say, what is the condescension of one creature to another, however placed above others? It is only the condescension of one mortal to another, of one pauper to another, of one reptile to another, of one worm to another. But here we have real greatness; here we have absolute superiority; here is One "fairer than the children of men;" here is One who is "King of kings and Lord of lords;" here is One who is higher than the heavens, saying, "I will come and heal him."

But our Lord intended that His conduct should be exemplary, and not only admired, but followed; as is intimated in another passage in His history, where it is said, "He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash His disciples' feet. So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Not that you are to do the very same thing, or repeat the very same act, but to carry out the spirit of it. It is the disposition, it is the principle that our Lord requires us to cherish and cultivate. It is as much as to say, Here I give you an instance

of the humility and benevolence you should exercise, so that you are never to deem anything too little or too mean to perform for a fellow-creature when the exigency of the case requires, and when the providence of God affords you an opportunity for the performance of it. Blessed Jesus! we call Thee our Lord and Master; we have borne the image of the

L

146

earthly, oh, may we now bear the image of the heavenly! Oh, that the same mind may be in us which was in Him, “who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich;” who, when He was in the form of God, “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Our Lord, therefore, ended this narrative by saying, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

We have considered the words as containing an answer to prayer, and as also being an instance of condescension; let us view them—

III. AS A DISPLAY OF POWER.

“I will come and see him, and attend upon him, and sympathise with him, and make all his bed in his sickness.” This is all that a *friend* could have said in such a case. “I will come and see him, and pray with him, and endeavour to comfort him, and establish his faith and hope.” This is all that a *minister* could have said on this occasion. “I will come and feel his pulse, and examine his maladies, and prescribe for his recovery.” This is all a *Physician* could have done on this occasion. But Jesus says much more. He speaks as one having authority, as one having Divinity, as a God: “I will come and *heal him*.” He knew He could do this. “All things were made by Him,” and “He upholdeth all things by the word of His power.” And the centurion knew that it was so; it was the principle of his reasoning. Hence he says, “I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and

I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." That is, "I am not a commander-in-chief, I am only an under officer; yet it is not necessary for me to move my bodily presence; I have only to address my subordinates, and I am directly obeyed. How much more, O Lord, are all creatures and all events under Thy control! Diseases come at Thy call, and depart at Thy bidding." So our Lord understood him to mean; therefore He turns to His disciples and said with admiration, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;" that is, "such strength and confidence in my ability, that my presence is not necessary to accomplish this, but only my word."

147

Let us not pass over this without observation. The father of the boy cried out, saying, "If Thou canst do anything, help me, and heal my son." You see he doubted His power. Some, indeed, imagine that their unbelief extends only to His goodness, but they are mistaken; for their unbelief extends to His power as well as His goodness. How is it that *you* despond when difficulties multiply around you? when means fail? for God can always furnish more. You despond when you 'see no way of escape; but He can make a way for your escape. "All things are possible to him that believeth."

"The Lord can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night,
Make floods of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight."

The Jews doubted His power. They asked, not "*Will* He furnish a table in the wilderness?" but "*Can* He furnish a table in the wilderness? *Can* He provide flesh for His people?" even after all the displays of His almightiness they had witnessed. You may learn, therefore, Christians, to bring your faith to the apprehension of His all-sufficiency in all your dealings with Him. You must remember that His blood cleanseth from all sin; that His righteousness is sufficient to justify the ungodly, and entitle them to eternal life; that His grace is equal for every purpose; that His arm can conduct

you safely through all your trials. Preface your approaches to Him with the language of the Apostle, "Unto Him who is able to keep us from falling." Remember you are going to One who has all power in heaven and earth, who is almighty to save, able also to save to the uttermost, and say with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed."

We have considered these words as an answer to prayer, as an instance of condescension, and as a display of power; let us view them—

IV. AS AN EMBLEM OF HIS GRACE.

You often hear of the dignity of human nature. Man, physically and intellectually considered, indeed is dignified. When you view him so fearfully and wonderfully made; when you consider his capacity; when you think of the languages he can acquire, the works he has published, and the edifices he has raised; when you see him exactly finding the time of eclipses for years to come; when you observe the discoveries he makes in science; when you think of the steam and

L 2

148

telegraph; when you see him toiling after the comet in illimitable space, and endeavouring to fix the period of its return, after perhaps fifty years; here, indeed, man does appear to be a little lower than the angels. But this is not the view we take of it; we look at him morally, and examine his disposition towards God; and there we find him a poor, fallen, guilty, depraved, perishing, and helpless creature. It is continually said by many, who do not believe one word of it, that "there is no health in us," meaning spiritual health; but this is an expression of truth. The Scripture tells us that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" that "from within, from the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, and every evil work: these come from within, and defile the man." The disease has reached all the powers of the mind, so that the understanding has become darkened, the will perverted, and the affections sensualised; so that he is left without strength, his memory is corrupted, and his very con-

science is defiled. The Scripture tells us also that sin affects the soul in precisely the same way as disease affects the body; it deprives it of liberty, usefulness, and comfort. And as disease tends to bring the body to death temporal, so this tends to produce death eternal. And the case is desperate as to all creatures. The awakened soul is made sensible of this, and can say with our hymn—

“The help of men and angels joined
Can never reach my case;
Nor can I hope relief to find,
But in Thy boundless grace.”

Well, such is the ruined state of the soul of man. *Cure him!* How is this to be accomplished? Turn him over to the world. The world can indeed increase his disease, while it makes him more insensible to it, but it cannot relieve him. Turn him over to the philosopher. But “the world by wisdom knew not God.” They had the finest opportunities in the world of trying their experiments, and what was the result? “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,” and “their foolish heart was darkened.” Turn him over to Moses. But the law is weak through the flesh. The law broken can only convince and condemn, and work wrath in the mind of the transgressor; but it can afford no relief. All these cannot effect a cure, they only increase the malady. Is the poor wretch, then, to be abandoned? Is he to be left to perish?

149

No! there is balm in Gilead; there is a physician there. Jesus says, “I will come and heal him.” This He said when He interposed on our behalf; this He said when He assumed human nature and visited our world. “I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” “I am come to seek and save that which was lost.” “I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” This He says when He sends the gospel to a place: He sends His word and heals them.

Before we close we would refer to four classes. First, there are some who do not believe they are so morally diseased.

This shews they are under the power of delusion, and that the enemy of souls has blinded their minds. Secondly, there are some who acknowledge they are not quite well; but while they complain of some trifling ailment, they think that ordinary means will be sufficient for their recovery; that with a little caution and care all will be well. Now while this impression remains they will not submit cordially to the remedy the gospel proposes. These go about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God. Then, thirdly, there are some who say, "My soul is diseased, and I need the Great Physician. I confess with shame and sorrow that I have been looking to physicians of no value, and I have wearied myself for very vanity; where am I now to look for relief?" My dear hearers, here is just such a Saviour as you want; one equally able and willing. The question is, whether you can resign yourselves entirely to Him; for be it remembered, this He does require. Are you willing that it should be so? "Oh yes," you say, "if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Oh yes, I am at the point to die, and I gladly submit to Him, however humbling to my pride. Heal me, and I shall be healed." Then there are some here who are healed; or at least whose recovery is both assured and begun. You have a little appetite for spiritual things; you have a little hungering and thirsting after righteousness, some pulsation of sacred passions; you have a little strength, and can be led along to His cross, to His house, and to His table. We may naturally suppose that this poor slave, being healed of his sickness, after praising his Restorer, would extol Him to all around. Go, ye Christians, and do likewise. Recommend the Saviour you have found to others.

 150

XVI. CONFESSION OF CHRIST.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 23rd, 1850.)

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.—MATTHEW x. 32.

CONSTANTIUS, father of Constantine the Great, took an unusual method to distinguish between true and false Christians. One day he ordered the Christians pertaining to his household service to appear before him, and commanded them all immediately to sacrifice to his gods, declaring that those who should refuse to obey should be deprived of their emoluments, banished from the palace, and no more employed by him. The test was a very trying one, and many could not abide it; the love of the world reigning in them, they were overcome, and they obeyed his mandate. But there were some few of a nobler mind. These, like Moses, “endured, as seeing Him who is invisible,” and they preferred the salvation of their souls to every temporal advantage. What was the consequence? Constantius, having by this trial discovered the dispositions of his courtiers, caused all those who had sacrificed their consciences to their emoluments to be banished from his court, declaring that he was sure that those who were faithless to their God would never be faithful to their sovereign. On the other hand, he recalled those who had proved their integrity, and conveyed to them the care of his person, established them in the principal offices of the state, and poured upon them favours and rewards, saying, “Those are the persons on whom I can depend. Those I consider as my dearest friends, and best counsellors.” My brethren, you know who has said, “He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” You know who said in answer to Peter’s question, “We

151

have left all and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.” And you know who is now saying, “Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny also before my Father which is in heaven;” and “Whosoever shall *confess* me before men, *him will I also confess* before my Father which is in heaven.”

Let us view our text under two aspects, and examine, first, what it requires; and secondly, what it ensures.

I. WHAT DOES OUR TEXT REQUIRE?

It is, our confession of Christ before men. What does this confession include? Four articles will sufficiently answer this inquiry.

The first regards the *subject* of this confession. The Saviour says, "Whoso confesseth *me*." We are to confess His person, His character. We are to confess Him in His Messiahship; in His offices as Prophet, Priest, and King; as the Shepherd of His people; in His humiliation and His exaltation; in His cause in the world; in His gospel; in His ministers and His members; in the grace we receive from Him and the service He receives from us—in a word, in everything that has a connection with the development of His grace.

Only observe here one thing, that as our circumstances are continually varying, so our duty as to confessing Him must vary accordingly. For instance, in the days of His flesh what His disciples had to confess was His Messiahship. Therefore our Lord said to them, "Whom say ye that I am?" And when Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God; He said, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjoni, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." After His crucifixion the thing denied was His rising again from the dead; so that became the great subject of confession. Hence the apostles were sent to be witnesses of His resurrection. Hence we read, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

As confession differs in different places, and under different circumstances, what have *we* to confess? Sometimes we have to oppose heresies. Then we have to confess that Jesus is the

152

true God, and the only Mediator between God and man; that righteousness is by His blood, and justification by His righteousness. Sometimes we are called to oppose Antinomianism. Then we have to confess that He is not the minister of sin; that faith works by love; and that the gospel is a doctrine

according to godliness. Sometimes we have to oppose enthusiasm and fanaticism. Then we are to shew that religion is a reasonable service; that it is the highest wisdom; and that wisdom is justified of all her children. Sometimes we are called upon to oppose legality and pharisaism. Then we are to confess that in Him, and in Him *alone*, we have righteousness and strength. In *our* day there is obviously a verging towards Romanism; the wretched doctrines of apostolic succession and baptismal regeneration are openly and zealously broached, and these include one half of Popery and a preparation for the other. Here, therefore, we must speak, and not be afraid. There is always what the Apostle Peter calls, "the present truth"—some one truth either neglected or opposed; and this may decide much of our exertions, and much of our confessions.

The second regards the *persons* before whom this confession is to be made—"before men." "He that confesseth me before men." What men? Does our Lord mean good men only? Surely it will be easy to confess Him before these; they would deem us inconsistent were we not to do it. But you are to confess Him before men at large, before wicked men as well as good men; and before His enemies as well as His friends. What men? The vulgar, with whom you feel free to think and act as you please? No, but before rich men and great men, saying with David, "I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed." What men? Ignorant and illiterate men, who may be induced to acquiesce in your judgment from an apprehension of your pre-eminence? No, but before scholars and philosophers, who might sneer at your creed, and affect to pity the weakness of your understanding.

The third regards the *manner* in which this confession is to be made, and it is to be made three ways.

It is to be made verbally. The Roman magistrate asked Polycarp, "Art thou a Christian?" They had no charge beside to allege against him, and he knew that the answer would condemn him, yet he said, "I am a Christian." Would you have made the same acknowledgment under the same circumstances?

153

The Jewish Sanhedrim called Peter and John, and commanded them not to speak at all in the name of Jesus, nor to preach; but Peter and John said, "Whether it be right to obey men rather than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." This was a noble avowal. The poor dying thief was confined to the tree; his hands and his feet were nailed to it; the only two powers he could use were his heart and his tongue: these he employed, and turned the cross into a pulpit, and proclaimed that the crucified Nazarene was the Lord of all; "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." My brethren, God is to be glorified in our bodies as well as in our spirits, which are His. What has He given you tongues for, but to shew forth His praise? You should therefore say with David, "Awake up, my glory;" and you should resolve with the Church, "So will we render unto Thee the calves of our lips," that is, the fruit of our lips, "giving praise to Thy name."

You are to be wise as serpents. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." If you have reason to conclude that the giving of reproof would at any time do more harm than good, our Lord has forbid you to use it. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." But there is danger arising from cowardice and shame. Oh, how often do professors sit before the wicked and have not a word to say for their God and Saviour! Oh, how many opportunities you have suffered to pass which you could have laid hold of, and when you might have said something "profitable, for reproof or correction, for instruction in righteousness."

The second way in which you are to confess Him before men is by practice. You must not marvel that we ascribe so much to this. The proficiency of the scholar is the praise of the master. The Apostle exhorts the Philippians to "hold forth the word of life." How were they to hold it forth? Was it only by their tongues? No, but by their tempers; not only by their lips, but by their lives; not only by their professions, but by practice. The best way in which you can recommend your

religion is by an exemplification of it. Therefore our Lord said to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works," and not merely hear your good words, "and may thus be led to glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is peculiarly the case in the relative duties of life. All persons can see the importance of these duties.

154

Therefore the Apostle speaks of the duties of servants, saying, "Be obedient to your own masters, not answering again; not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity;" and adds as a motive, that they—persons in their inferior situations, "servants"—"*that they may adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.*" Our Lord said to His disciples, after He had delivered many things, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them," associating the happiness, not with the knowing, but with the doing of them. The Apostle speaks of some who knew God yet in works denied Him, "being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." And our Saviour speaks of knowing "the blasphemy of some who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie." Oh, there are new Judases who betray our Lord with a kiss; there are new murderers of Him, who crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame. There are mere formalists in religion, who draw near to Him with the lips, but whose hearts are far from Him. Therefore, says John, "Love not in word, but in truth." "Let love be without dissimulation."

The third way in which you are to confess Him before men is passively, that is, by suffering. Martyr is the Greek word for witness. Originally martyrs confessed the Saviour by submitting to endure losses and fines, imprisonment, tortures, and death for His sake. The passive graces are always the hardest to be exercised, and always produce the most powerful impressions on spectators. Therefore, says Isaiah, "Glorify God in the fires." You will never have a finer opportunity than this, than when you are called to endure reproach for His sake. We see that Peter and John, instead of complaining and murmuring, were glad that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake.

You may be disposed to ask why are we thus verbally, practically, and passively to confess Him before men?

First, because it falls in with the nature and design of Christianity. The heathen peep and mutter, and the false prophets “privily brought in damnable heresies,” but Moses went and proclaimed his commission in the court of Egypt and before Pharaoh, the most renowned monarch of the day. Here was no fear or shame. Our Saviour said to the high priest, “I spake openly to the world: ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing.” It is very true He begins His instructions in private, but He said, “That which ye have heard

155

in private, that proclaim ye upon the housetops.” Everything here is open. His miracles were performed before enemies; He died in the capital of Judea, at a public festival, upon a hill; He poured out the spirit of tongues and the gift of healing at another, when such immense numbers were assembled together. What is there in the system of Christianity that requires concealment? that will not bear examination and exposure? Was Paul a hole-and-corner man? No, says he, “This thing was not done in a corner,” but openly. “There is nothing secret that shall not be made manifest, nor hidden that shall not be made known.” Speaking of the Messiah, God says, “Say unto the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, *Shew yourselves*. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”

Why are you to confess Him before men? To prove your sincerity. It is not easy for you to confess religion without opposition: you cannot keep your religion to yourself. The people of the world sometimes say to Christians, “Leave us alone; you may be as religious as you please, only keep it to yourselves.” But this is enjoining upon them an absolute impossibility. When the disciples wished to silence the dear children in the temple from singing Hosannas, the Saviour said, “If these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out.” Your religion is too powerful and vital a thing to be shut up in what some people call experience. “While I mused the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue.” Meekness will

make its way into the countenance; charity will slide its hand before you are aware into your pocket, saying, "Freely ye have received, freely give." "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

We have to confess Him before men in order to be useful. We talk of benevolence, and, blessed be God, there are those who feed the hungry; but after all, charity to the soul is the soul of charity. Hear David: "Restore unto me the joys of Thy salvation; uphold me with Thy free spirit; *then* will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." Hear James: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he that converteth the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." The dying Jacob said, "To Him shall the gathering of the nations be;" the evangelical prophet says, "To Him shall men come;" both intimating that He should be the source of attraction, and the only source of relief for a poor perishing sinner. To Him

156

they must go, but then they must know something of Him. "Whosoever shall call on His name shall be saved," but how *can* they call on Him of whom they have not heard? You must therefore be concerned to display Him, in order that by His knowledge He may justify and save many. Like the first Christians, you are to say, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that your fellowship may be with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

"Then will I tell to sinners round
What a dear Saviour I have found;
I'll point to His redeeming blood,
And say, Behold the way to God."

Why are you thus to confess Him? Because He deserves it. It is only an act of justice and gratitude. God, therefore, says, "I will cause Thy name to be remembered in all generations," and you are to be like-minded with Him; you are to be workers with Him in this business.

We say nothing here of His greatness, but “He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” If, therefore, you are afraid to confess Him, whom are you afraid to confess but a Being who has all power in heaven and in earth, who has ascended far above all heavens that He may fill all things? But He is good too. His goodness appears not only in giving you life and health and outward comforts, but especially in this, that “He loved you and gave Himself for you.”

“O, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break,
And all harmonious human tongues
The Saviour’s praises speak.”

Was there ever such a Benefactor as He? and will you be silent in His praise? He is making all things work together for your good. Will not every feeling of your soul excite you to say,

“Let Him be crowned with majesty,
Who bowed His head to death;
And be His honour sounded high
By all things that have breath.”

Having considered what our text requires, namely, our confession of Him before men, let us now consider—

II. WHAT IT ENSURES.

It is *His confession of us*. “Whosoever therefore shall

157

confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”

It is worthy of remark that the sacred writers hold forth future blessedness in terms corresponding with the pursuits of the heirs of glory while they are here. Thus our Lord says to the believers in the Church in Sardis, “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” So our Lord says, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;” “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;” “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Here you see mercy for mercy.

This is the Christian's seed-time: "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." "Wherefore be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." Here you have confession for confession.

The language means more than recognition. It means commendation with applause. Praise is a very influential thing. There is no fragrance so grateful as praise. The desire of praise is congenial with all the finest sensibilities of our nature; to be dead to it is a token of a mind on which no great impression has ever been made. He whose heart does not beat high at the sound of praise, you may be sure is doomed to pass his time in some grovelling earthly engagement. But if you love the praises of men, and are seeking after them, you are liable to be disappointed and tormented. What is the applause of the whole world to such an assurance as this, "Him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven"?

Here you will observe three things:—

First, the Confessor Himself. "I will confess him." Much depends on the being from whom praise comes. Wise men will not be much affected with the applause of the multitude, who are like waves of the sea, tossed with the wind, and whose "Hosanna" to-day may be "Crucify him" to-morrow. We read of a philosopher of antiquity who, having been escorted by the populace to his own door, turned and said, "What evil have I done to deserve *your* praise?" Paul could not bear the thought of being acknowledged by the damsel who possessed a spirit of divination. And our Lord always forbad men to praise Him, and ordered them to hold their peace. But, O Christians, Jesus is the Judge of all: upon His decision everything depends,

158

and you are in reality what you are in His eyes. Praise often becomes worthless by insincerity. Yet there is much of this in the world; much of what is called friendship is mere flattery and deceit. But Jesus never deceives: He said to His disciples, "If it were not so I would have told you; you shall never be deceived by me." "Verily, verily," says He,—“Amen,

amen," in the original,—“he that believeth on me shall have everlasting life.” Paul says, “It is a light thing for me to be judged of men’s judgment: He that judgeth me is the Lord:” and, “Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth.” He can see the internal views and feelings of the Christian; He can read the heart; He therefore accepteth a man “according to what he hath, and not according to that he hath not.” He therefore accepts and rewards His people not only for what they do, which after all is very little, but for what they wish to do, and what they designed to do, what they would do if they had opportunity and ability, but are prevented. Human praise cannot increase our real enjoyment or add to our essential enjoyment. Take man in any of the great exigencies of life—take him on the bed of death, when he is “made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed him;” take him when mortality draws the darkness of the grave around him, when he walks through the valley of the shadow of death; or take him when he stands before the great white throne, and what will human commendation or praise do for him then? But if Jesus speaks for him then, the man is made for ever and ever!

Then observe, secondly, before whom this confession is made: “before my Father which is in heaven.” Could you choose before whom you would be applauded, doubtless it would be those of high esteem, and on whose approbation you place much of your happiness, and who are able to do much for you. What will it be, therefore, to be confessed before Him with whom is the Fountain of life; to be confessed before Him whose favour is life and whose loving-kindness is better than life; to be confessed before Him who is able to do for you “exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think?” Imagine a commander-in-chief, after achieving some great and glorious victory, going before his sovereign with those who had distinguished themselves—there owning and acknowledging them—mentioning their exploits—bearing testimony to their valour and their zeal, and then asking for preferment. Oh,

159

what an animating scene would this be! Yet what is this compared to what will take place by and by when the Captain of your salvation, your warfare being ended, shall take all His soldiers and present them before the presence of His Father, saying, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory!"

Thirdly, observe the season when this confession shall be made: "before my Father which is in heaven." He confesses them even now. He produces in them an inward witness, so that they have the witness in themselves, the testimony of their consciences "that with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have their conversation in the world." He also approves of them, and confesses them even now in the dispensations of His providence, as you see in the case of Noah, Lot, and the Jews in Jeshurun. He knows how to succour His people, and how to reward and punish the wicked, and He has often done it in such a way as to induce men to exclaim, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." But this is not invariably the case. The world knoweth them not, yea, they themselves often know not what they are; they have a thousand fears lest they are not the heirs of salvation. Then commonly also He acknowledges them in their dying hours, so that in many cases they are "joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon their beds," so as to induce those standing by to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his." But the manifestation of the sons of God, as the Apostle remarks, is future, when the last day, for which all other days were made, shall come; when eternal happiness or misery, and honour or disgrace, will be dispensed severally; "*then* shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." "When He who is your life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Therefore, let His servants be content with their present obscurity; let them be patient under their present misrepresentations, and let them rejoice in hope of the glory of God; when their enemies will be vanquished, and when He will

“bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday.”

But what a Master, Christians, do you serve, who not only bears with your infirmities, but accepts your services, poor and defective as they are; yea, who commends them, who applauds them before His Father who is in heaven, and commends them

160

as yours, though you did them only in His strength; and applauds what He could righteously condemn! He thinks much better of your works and services than you do, and as to those things over which you have blushed because of their deficiencies, He will by and by say, “Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

161

XVII. CHRIST’S ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, May 6th, 1849.)

MARK V. 1-19.

YOU cannot expect that I should enter into all the pacts of this interesting and extraordinary narrative, for this would be drawing too largely on your attention, without adding to your profit. Yet I wish to seize the spirit of the passage, and render it “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” We lose much benefit by a careless perusal of the life of Christ, whereas we should read it seriously; we should examine it with deep attention; we should look after our own concern in its contents, bringing home its matters to our own business and bosoms, and above all, be careful to reduce it all to practice, remembering that these things are written not to amuse our minds, or gratify our curiosity, but that we may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing we may have life through His name. Let us then fix on one article, and on one only. Let us fix on the article of prayer.

Now, here are three praying to Jesus. The devils pray, and the Gadarenes pray, and the poor patient prays. The first of these prayers is answered, and the devils obtained their wish. The second of these prayers is answered, and the Gadarenes obtained their wish. But the third prayer is refused; though all the poor patient implored was to be allowed to accompany his Deliverer and his Benefactor, he was denied. What does all this say to us?

I. WE HAVE THE PRAYER OF THE DEVILS.

“And all the devils besought Him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.” They own His power

M

162

over them; they acknowledge they could not injure even a brute without His permission. This is orthodox as far as it goes, and this goes beyond the belief of some, and some who profess to be His followers too, who only allow Him to be a mere man. My brethren, there is not a devil in hell that does not believe in His Divinity. And what of that? “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” “Can faith save a man?” asks James. Surely, or our salvation would be impossible; but he means, “Can *such* a faith save him?”—a faith such as consists in the mere belief of the truth, unaccompanied with the love of the heart and the actions of the life; for as “the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Therefore says James, “Shew me thy faith without thy works,”—that is, shew me a sun that never shines, or a fire that never burns, or a spring that never flows,—“and I will shew thee my faith by my works,” and evince the principle in the practice, the creed in the conduct, and the goodness of the heart in the actions of the life.

Well, here is comfort for all the Lord’s people. They need not fear whatever difficulties they meet with, or dread the existence or agency of evil beings. They know that there is a spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience; they know that he blinds the minds of them that believe not; that he leads his followers captive at his will; they know that they

have to “wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;” against the prince of this world, against the god of this world, and what can weakness, what can ignorance do here? This is their consolation, that formidable as the power of their adversaries is, it is limited. They know that it is perfectly under the control of Him who is their Saviour and their Friend; of Him who loved them well enough to die for them; of Him through whom they are more than conquerors, for greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world, and more are they that are for them than all they that are against them.

“The weakest saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way.”

When they look at themselves and at their enemies, there is enough to make a hero shudder; but when they look at the Captain of their salvation, there is enough to make a coward bold. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob. ... I will help thee,

163

saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: *thou* shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.”

But if these devils prayed, surely they will not be answered. Yes, He answers them immediately. “And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.” Surely our Lord did not answer them because He loved the petitioners. The thing is, therefore, to inquire what was their design in wishing to be allowed to enter this herd. It was from malice and mischief. As they could no longer injure the poor man, they would injure the swine; not from hatred to the swine, but the case is this—they hoped that if at the command of Christ their property was

destroyed, it would render Him obnoxious to the inhabitants, who preferred their swine to Him, and so it turned out.

II. This brings us to the second prayer, THE PRAYER OF THE GADARENES.

“And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts.”

Here was a scene which was enough to have melted a heart of stone. Here was a poor fellow-creature and neighbour, one who had had his dwelling among the tombs, and no man could bind him, no, not with chains; who night and day was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones, now delivered, and tranquillised, and cured both in body and mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus, and clothed, and in his right mind. “But they that saw it told how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.” The moment they heard this, every kind and tender sentiment was destroyed. Instead of their endeavouring to bring others to be healed by Him; instead of encompassing this poor creature with songs of praises to his Deliverer; instead of worshipping such a prophet who was fitly called “the Prophet of the Lord,” they would have offered Him violence, but they were afraid. They therefore “began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts.” *And their prayer was*

M 2

164

answered! He left them, shaking off the very dust of His feet as a testimony against them, and they saw Him no more.

Now, here we may shew the prevalency of this prayer, and inquire whether you have not often made it your own; and see what we can bring forward to encourage you to hope that your prayer will be answered, that you also may get rid of this “troubler of Israel” and of the swine. You are ready to say, “What is the presence of Christ to us?” What, do you consider the absence of Christ a privilege? Were you a Moses, you would pray, “If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.” If you were a David, the very apprehension of losing it would lead you to exclaim, “Cast me not away from

Thy presence: take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” Were you a real Christian, you would be able to say,

“My God, my life, my love,
To Thee, to Thee I call;
I cannot live if Thou remove,
For Thou art all in all.

“Thy shining face can cheer
This dungeon where I dwell;
'Tis paradise, if Thon he here; '
If Thou depart, 'tis hell.”

Why the earth could do much better without the sun than you could do without Him. It would be better for you to be altogether confined in a dungeon, and to have your substance confiscated, and beg from door to door; it would be better for you to be deprived of your health, and made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed you, than to lose Him. What curse can equal that man's, of whom God says, “He is joined to idols; let him alone”? Perhaps you do not believe this. But a jewel is a jewel still, though the fool throws it away, and the swine tramples it under feet. If you do not value the presence of Christ in prosperity, will this be the case in adversity? When your lamps are extinguished, what will you do if you have no “Sun of Righteousness”? If your cisterns are broken and all earthly streams are dried up, what will become of you if you have no fountain of living waters? If you can do without Him in life, will you be able to do without Him in *death*? “Death, 'tis a melancholy day to those who have no God.” When your companions will keep aloof from you, for they love not to be reminded of their own mortality; when conscience will arise like a mighty man; when memory will write bitter things against you, and cause you to “possess the

165

sins of your youth.” What will you do then, when friends can afford you no comfort? when everything within you says, “One thing thou lackest,” and the Judge stands at the door! Yet the Gadarenes thus prayed: “they besought Him to depart out of their coasts.”

Let us just ask now, Have you any reason to rise up and cast the first stone at them? Has the Saviour never rendered Himself unwelcome to you? He has appeared as an admonisher, as a reprover, and brought your sin to remembrance; have you not found His presence irksome? Have you not hated those checks, and restraints, and restrictions? Have you not wished Him to be gone? You may pray without words. "Actions speak louder than words." You may tell a person to go away from you without words: you may do it by a motion of the hand, or by a glance of the eye, or by a turning to him the back instead of the face. God trieth the reins and the heart, and He can interpret your conduct. Thus in the desires of His people words are not necessary; He knows the meaning of their sighs and groans. So it is with the dispositions of the wicked. And I think one of the most awful things in the world is when God puts the conduct and desires of the wicked into language. Then they say, "There is no God." Then they say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Then they say, "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." Are there not those who are ready to say, "Oh that I had never heard such a preacher! Oh that I had never known such a truth! I was easy in my mind before; oh that I could become ignorant again, and feel the tranquillity I once possessed! Oh that I could throw off those uneasy impressions! Oh that I could get rid of those convictions which restrain me from such ways or works, or make me uneasy in them; that keep me from the dissipations of the world, or torment me when I am indulging in them." Is this your wish? God will answer your "prayer!" and is it to be wondered at that He should take you at your word? Is He unrighteous in fulfilling your own desires? Will you be able to complain of His conduct? *Complain*, of what? Of eating of your own ways, of being filled with your own desires? If there be any truth in the Bible, there is such a thing as *retaliation*, as a judicial process, as a final abandonment by God of those who reject Him. There is such a thing as punishing sin with sin. There is such a thing as sealing up the eyes and ears of those who would not open them. There is such a thing as depriving those who neglect this great salvation, and turn away

166

from Him who speaketh from heaven; there is such a thing as depriving them of the means, or of opportunities of attending upon them; of taking away all the enlightening and sanctifying efficacy that would otherwise have followed them. Have you never read, "My Spirit shall not always strive with men"? Have you never read the words of our Saviour, "Oh that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes"? and, "none of the men that were bidden shall taste of *my* supper." Have you never read that those who receive not the love of the truth are given up to strong delusion to believe a lie? Have you never read the words of the address of God by Isaiah, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed"?

This brings us to the *third* particular, namely—

III. THE PRAYER OF THE POOR PATIENT.

When the Gadarenes rejoiced to see Him moving towards the sea and taking ship, this poor man followed Him with other feelings, and as soon as he saw Him in the ship he stretched forth his hands and prayed Him that he might be with Him.

The desire arose from three things:—

First, it arose from *fear*. He connected his recovery with the bodily presence of our Lord, and therefore apprehended if He withdrew those demons would return again, and afflict him with disease.

Secondly, it arose from *gratitude*. He wished to be with Him as a monument of His mercy; as a servant to attend Him personally, to receive His orders, to obey His commands, to wait on Him all the day, asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Thirdly, it arose from *love*. Love longs to be near its object. You would not now wonder that this poor man feels himself attached to our Lord; that he wished to hear His voice, to see

His face, and to know more of Him. He who, like Moses, has seen the glory of the Lord, will be sure to pray, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory." He who has once tasted that the Lord is gracious, will pray, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." They who have known Him really as Paul did, will be sure to say, "That I may know Him, and the power of

167

His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformable unto His death."

But innocent, good, and praiseworthy as this prayer unquestionably was, it is the only prayer our Saviour refused. Now this must be very instructive, and it will teach us at least five things.

It will teach us how to understand what we mean by answers to prayer, particularly will it shew us that our desires may be granted in wrath and refused in kindness. Here you see the devils readily indulged in their wishes, and the Gadarenes in their desires. This is a proof that such success is not a mark of the Divine favour. This shews us that we ought to have something more to rejoice in than the accomplishment of our desires. The Jews wished to have a king like other nations, and "He gave them a king in His anger, and took him away in His wrath." "We will have flesh as well as manna," say they. "You shall have it," says God. "And He gave them their hearts' desire, but sent leanness into their soul; and while the flesh was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them." "I wish to *flee* from the presence of the Lord," says Jonah; and when he came down to the side of the sea there was a ship. How favourable! how providential was this!

Now look at the other side. The Lord's heart is ever towards His people. He "taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy." He delights in the prosperity of His servants, and He has said, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." And yet He often refuses them. "I love the Lord," will every Christian say, in looking back upon life,— "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplication;" and he would equally love the Lord, if he knew all, because He had

not always heard his voice and his supplication. We are impatient; we wish to gather the fruit while it is yet green, and God pulls back our hand and preserves it till it acquires a finer colour, a richer flavour, and a more nutritious quality. We are ignorant; we know not what we are; we cannot distinguish between appearances and reality; we know not what is before us in this vain life which we spend as a shadow: we may therefore pray for things which are evil; we may *ask*, as James says, “and receive not, because we ask amiss.” Our comfort under all is, not only that God is our righteous Governor, but that He is equally wise. “He is a God of judgment, a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is He.” He sees the

168

end from the beginning. He *waits* to be gracious. He looks for the fittest season in which to indulge His children, for everything is beautiful in its season. He knows how to distinguish between our wishes and our welfare, and therefore sacrifices the former to the latter. Thus you will often act if you are parents; you will learn to distinguish between your children’s wishes and their wants. They may wish for holidays, but may want school; they may wish for food, but may want medicine; they may wish for indulgences, but may really want the rod. It is judicious to refuse what they wish, and give what they want—what they would desire, if they knew all and were acquainted with their real welfare and alive to it. When Moses asked that he might see God’s face, he asked for death, for God had said, “No man can see my face and live.” Paul had a thorn in the flesh, and he besought the Lord thrice—that is, frequently and earnestly—that it might be removed; but it was not; his prayer was not answered; the thorn continued; it was necessary that it should remain to humble him. It was better that he should have supporting grace, and therefore the Saviour said, “My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness.” Paul, too, acquiesced in this refusal, as he was indulged with what he did not ask for: “Most gladly therefore would I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Perhaps you have sometimes prayed that God would tell you that your sins are forgiven and that you have a title to heaven. Are you sure that your poor weak frames could bear up under the announcement? Perhaps you have desired that God would reveal to you the secrets of your hearts. It is well, says Newton, that your prayer is not answered; for if He did, it would drive you to despair or to destruction. He therefore reveals it to you as you are able to bear it. You are fond of having your own way, but generation after generation of His people have testified that it is better for us in the end to be visited by the most disappointing of *His* providences than to have our own desire.

Secondly, we learn that there is nothing disingenuous or selfish in the miracles of our Lord. We see frequently how much more persons think of themselves than of those they relieve. They make their bounty to suspend upon conditions. They are fond of fame. They not only let their left hand know what their right hand doeth, but their neighbours and others. I knew a

169

man who engaged to give £5 to one in distress, but when he found that the donations were to be private, and that there was to be no report of them, he immediately recalled the grant. Oh, how little does disingenuousness and humanity accompany the relief of the distressed! But you will observe that this was the case with all our Lord's miracles. The manner in which He performed His miracles of mercy shewed this as well as the miracles themselves. I dare say the widow of Nain would have consented that her son should be restored to life if she had never seen him. Her language would have been, "Since my dear boy is alive, I am satisfied and thankful." But our Lord did not merely restore him; He delivered him to his mother, and he led her to her home, while she leaned upon his arm, looking sideways at him all the way!

What a trophy would this man have been had our Lord taken him along with him, shewing him in every company and occasion. But he did not. This poor man had friends and relations who longed to see him. He owed them many duties. To them he had been worse than dead perhaps for many years.

The poor man in his rapture forgot these, but our Lord did not, and therefore said to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

Thirdly, we learn that there is nothing in the religion of Jesus unnatural or fanatical; nothing that breaks in upon the proprieties and decencies of life; nothing to draw away persons from their connections, stations, offices, and business. To a tradesman who wishes to give up business in order to live retired, it says, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." To a lazy preacher of religion who is living upon alms, it says, "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." To a gospel gossip, an idler, yet a busybody too, it says, "Learn to be quiet and to do your own business." If it meet with a woman running after a favourite preacher every week evening service and prayer-meeting, while her children are in rags, and her husband neglected, it says, "Learn to shew piety at home." To one who goes out into the villages to preach, while his own family is neglected and going astray, it says, "Go home; rule well your own house, and bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Persons may do good indeed in stepping out of their own sphere, and this induces many good people to go astray; but it should be remembered that the good they do is more than counteracted by the

170

evil they occasion. Besides, they should bear in mind that this is not required of them, and therefore not accepted, though God pardons them. I am very well aware, and free to acknowledge, that relative instructions frequently do not strike far into the mind. I have observed fond husbands and devoted parents destitute of piety: something more is necessary here. But on the other hand, in religion a man is nothing more really than he is relatively. If a man be bad at home he is good nowhere else.

Fourthly, we learn we must deny ourselves even comforts of a spiritual nature in order to serve others. Where is the person who has not had some celestial relishes at the house of God, at the table of the Lord, in Christian conversation, or alone in his closet? such as to induce him to say,

“While such a scene of sacred joys
 My raptured eyes and ears employs,
 Fain would I sit and gaze away
 A long and everlasting day.”

But he must not do it: he must leave such scenes. He must leave these to go to the field, or to mind the affairs of the shop. He must leave them to labour with his own hands, that he may visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions.

Upon this principle you must not refuse society in order to rive in solitude. It may seem much more pleasing to many of you to retire by the hour to read your Bible, and to meditate on the word. But the religion we profess not only calls us out of the world, but calls us into it. It not only calls us away from its corrupt maxims, from what the Scripture calls “the course of this world,” but it also calls us to missionary activity and duty. Some may say, we must only have to do with religious people. But if persons are not religious we must endeavour to make them so. And this cannot be done by displaying the spirit of the Pharisee: “Stand by thyself; come not near to me; I am holier than thou.”

Fifthly, it is the duty of saved sinners to make known the mercies they have received. “He that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”

You often see acknowledgments in public journals of persons relieved from a painful or dangerous disorder. The

171

publication of such cures may arise from a benevolent feeling to relieve others, and also from a regard to the physician to honour him. Oh, if all the cases which the Saviour had made whole were published, how numerous would they be! But they will be published at the great day, to the honour of the “Physician of value.” How many will then be published we now know nothing of! The Lord sometimes calls the vilest sinners, those who like this man are the curse and terror of the neighbourhood; some of these He calls to the ministry of the word, others He employs in private. All who are partakers of

His grace wish to be useful, and none need wish for this in vain. All have some resources, all have some opportunities, and for them “the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall blossom and bud as the rose.” One reason why He continues His people in this world, and does not suffer them to be with Him where He now is, and which is far better, is, that He may display more of the freeness and power of His grace. Nothing strikes like a fact. This must have been the case here. What attention must this circumstance have excited! after that our Saviour refused him, and said, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” His case was so notorious, and seemed so hopeless. The people were astonished, saying one to another, “Don’t you remember the man among the tombs who was always crying and cutting himself with stones? He is now delivered, and one of the most meek and gentle creatures upon earth, and employs all his power and influence for the good of others.” Some would say, “This is he;” others, “This is like him;” but he would say, “I *am* he, yet another.” Some professors of religion had better never say anything about their religion; they do much more harm than good in so doing. You must be examples of what you recommend to others; for if you prescribe to others while you are labouring under the very same disease, people will be sure to say, “Physician, heal thyself! you are only trifling with us. If you believe in the efficacy of the remedy, try it upon yourself first, and then come and recommend it to us.” And then remember what James hath declared, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

 172

XVIII.

ONE OF CHRIST’S CONFERENCES WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 2nd, 1844.)

And it came to pass, as He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him: and He asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.—LUKE ix. 18–22.

WHAT can be so interesting and delightful, so instructive and profitable, as to follow the Son of God in the days of His flesh, as He went about doing good? to hear Him preaching the gospel? for “never man spake like this man;” to see Him healing all manner of diseases and afflictions among the people? for “no man could do these miracles that He did, unless God were with him.” Whether we find Him on the mountain or in the wilderness, in retirement or in the temple, in the synagogue or in a private house, in the garden or on the cross, we behold His glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

We have some of His public discourses recorded by the evangelists, and also many of His private addresses. This morning we find Him alone, that is, He was alone from the multitude; for it is expressly said, “His disciples were with Him.” It was therefore comparative retirement, such as we enjoy when we withdraw from the crowd, and unbosom ourselves to our friends.

In our text we observe five things, which may serve for our meditation and improvement: our Lord’s prayer, His inquiry, His charge, His sufferings, and His glory.

173

I. Observe HIS PRAYER.

“He was alone praying.”

Do you ever pray? Our Saviour spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. Here, Christians, your duty and your privilege are connected. Here you

have the honour of immediate access to God through a Redeemer. This is the medium of your obtaining the influences of the Holy Spirit. God, therefore, from whose authority lies no appeal, says, "For all these things will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." And the command is softened by the excellence and usefulness of the performance, and by promises upon which He has caused us to hope, wherein He has said, "Their heart shall live, that seek God." "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Prayer can be offered up in every place, and God knows the desire when no voice is used. We ask again, Do any of you live without prayer? What confusion would you feel were your name now mentioned as such! yet living and dying in this state, it will be published by and by before an assembled world and the holy angels. But whoever of you lives without prayer, Christ did not. He found time for prayer. He prayed whenever He was going to engage in any enterprise. He often prayed alone.

"Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer."

It is said, "As He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him." Probably He had prayed vocally, and we are reminded of another occasion, where we read, "It came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place"—Ah, how silent were they during the exercise! Full of admiration, and looking one at another, they said, "What prayer is this! Surely we have never prayed! What fervour and power are here!" When He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, "Lord, *teach us to pray*, as John also taught his disciples." As He prayed with them, we have every reason to believe that He prayed *for* them, according to their exigencies, and for their sanctification, preservation, union, and final glory. Brethren," He ever liveth to make intercession for *us*," and if "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," what are we to think of that Intercessor whom the Father heareth always? It was the privilege of Jacob's family to have a friend at court, and

174

that friend was their own brother. It was the privilege of David to have a friend at court, and that friend was the king's own son. Ah, Christians, both these are combined in your privilege; you have both in Him who now appears in the presence of God for us.

II. Observe HIS INQUIRY.

"He asked them, Whom say the people that I am?"

This is a frequent question, arising not only from curiosity, but vanity. It would be indeed well if we were anxious to know what God says of us, for "it is a light thing to be judged of men: He that judgeth us is the Lord," and upon His decision depends our happiness or misery. But how frequent is the inquiry, "What do people say of me?" As to some, the answer would be, "Why, nothing at all; they do not even think of you; they do not know enough of you to make you the theme of their discourse." "But what do people say of me?" asks another. Why, they say, "Your tongue walketh through the earth; some call you 'the Morning Herald,' and others, 'the Daily Advertiser.'" "But what do people say of me?" asks another. They say that you are very hard-hearted and close-fisted; that you are "a busy-body in other men's matters;" they say that you are such a Nabal that a man cannot speak to you; they say that you are wiser in your own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. It would be well in certain respects if we knew what people say of us—what friends say of us; yes, and what enemies say of us too. I remember Archbishop Usher says in an address to God, "Lord, bless me with a faithful friend; or if not, with a faithful enemy, that I may know my faults, for I desire to know them."

But Jesus was meek and lowly of heart; He, therefore, did not ask this question from pride or vanity. Neither did He ask it from ignorance. He knew all the numerous opinions afloat concerning Him. Yes, He knows all your thoughts. But this question seems designed to affect them, to bind them to Himself, and to furnish them with further instruction upon it. What then was the reply? "They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of

the old prophets is risen again.” Anything, you see, except what was right. It is a lamentable thing, that we find people disputing among themselves which is in the right, while all are wrong; while they are all going astray, each one turning to his own way. But He renews the inquiry, as if He would know the mind of His disciples. “He said unto them, But

175

whom say ye that I am? you are personally responsible for yourselves; you must answer for yourselves; and unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more. You are my friends and followers; you have opportunities, advantages of knowing me above others.” “We have,” says Peter, “thanks to our kind Master for it!” and therefore immediately answered, “Thou art the Christ of God,” that is, the Messiah. The word signifies THE ANOINTED. Prophets, priests, and kings have always been anointed. but He was all these together; therefore “He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.” He had also the Holy Ghost in a higher degree than others, for “the Spirit was not given by measure unto Him,” “Him had God the Father sealed.”

In another place we find Peter dissuading Him from dying, and drawing forth a severe reproof from our Lord. “Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things which be of God, but they which be of men.” Probably at this time Peter, who made this confession, knew less the way of salvation than many in the present assembly, and yet Matthew tells us that Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; you are a partaker of Divine illumination, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Let us learn to be careful how we exclude from the kingdom of God any who may have only a knowledge of things essential to salvation. We may not know what ignorance and darkness the grace of God may be associated with. We may not know under what disadvantages individuals may have been labouring. What saith the Apostle? “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we must all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge this rather,

that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

III. Observe THE CHARGE here given.

"And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing."

We should rather have supposed that He would have ordered His disciples to go and publish it, but His thoughts are not as ours; "There is a time for every purpose under the heaven." It seems to be a general law of heaven, that knowledge of every kind should gradually spread. There are some things which must precede others, and make way for them. It is thus you

176

deal with your children, keeping back for a time things from their knowledge. Thus a wise instructor will do with his pupils, he will teach them as they are able to bear it. And this was the method of our Saviour Himself in dealing with His disciples. He said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, who is the Spirit of truth, shall come, He shall guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." Accordingly this was the case, but His example is not always followed. There are some who instead of beginning with A, B, C, send their children to the university of Predestination, before even they have entered the grammar-school of Repentance; and instead of feeding them with milk, feed them with what they call "strong meat," and furnish them with the bones of controversy. These grow up like rickety children, whose heads are larger than their bodies. Had our Lord then immediately proclaimed Himself as the Messiah, it is easy to suppose what insurrections might have taken place by those who would have endeavoured to make Him a king, and to keep Him from suffering. Besides this, the prohibition was only for a limited period. After His resurrection from the dead He appeared to His disciples, and said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel, beginning at Jerusalem;" and Peter, to whom He here spake, filled Jerusalem with his doctrine, and

said to the murderers of the Saviour, "God hath made this same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ."

IV. Observe HIS SUFFERINGS.

"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be slain."

You see, first, that He foreknew them. The future is kindly and wisely concealed from you, but He saw the end from the beginning: He moved on through life with all in view. While this aggravated His sufferings, it also enhanced His love. The condition of His interposing on our behalf was all laid before Him, and He drew not back.

"This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

Secondly, He foretold His sufferings as well as foresaw them.

¹⁷⁷

This was to prepare His disciples for their approach. He would thus forewarn them: this might be for their instruction, and might prevent the scandal and offence they would otherwise feel when these things did befall them; for now they would look for them, believing His declaration. Then it might tend to correct mistakes they may have entertained respecting His temporal kingdom, for there was something of this still in their minds, and remained even down to the time of His ascension, for then they came and asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Thirdly, He describes His sufferings. He tells them He "must suffer many things," and very numerous were His sufferings, for "He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." At what period of His life, from Bethlehem to Calvary, was He exempt? Everything evil was laid to His charge. As He suffered from bad men, so He suffered from good men. One of His disciples betrayed Him, another denied Him, and they "all forsook Him and fled." He suffered in His body when they pierced His hands and His feet, and nailed Him to

the cross. He suffered in His soul: "His soul was made an offering for sin." In the garden His soul was troubled, and it is said, "He was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" and "He sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He tells them also that He was to be disowned" and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes." Though "the common people heard Him gladly," at length they clamoured for His blood; this was owing to the impression which prevailed; their "elders, chief priests, and scribes" led them on, and therefore theirs was the greater sin. They ought to have been an example, and to have gone before others in the practice of righteousness; but these "elders, chief priests, and scribes" were some of the vilest miscreants that ever cursed the earth; though they had a place in the Church, they were children of the devil, and enemies to all righteousness; they were governed by pride, hypocrisy, malice, and all wickedness; ever seeking to pervert the right ways of the Lord. He tells them further that He was to be slain; for He was to be persecuted even unto death, and that the death of the cross. "*Slain;*" This is the very word the glorified use, when they say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," and the angels employ the same word. And the Apostle uses it in describing the conduct of the Jews: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

N

177

Yet He tells them all this was necessary "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken." "The Son of man *must* suffer" all this, or the types would not have been fulfilled, or the prophecies going before could not have been accomplished, or He could not have been our example, or have sympathised from experience with our woes, or have gained our confidence in our distresses, or have "made reconciliation for the sins of the people."

V. Observe HIS GLORY.

"And be raised the third day."

His glory, you see, was to begin with His resurrection. This precise time was alluded to by Hosea, where he says, "He hath torn, and He will heal us. He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: and in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight." And it was prefigured by Jonah, for, said the Saviour, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth;" therefore the Apostle tells the Corinthians, that it was "according to the Scriptures that He was buried and rose again the third day."

But it is with the truth of this event that we have now to do, and of this we have the greatest assurance, for if the resurrection of Christ cannot be ascertained, it is impossible to say what historical fact can be ascertained. If "in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word be established," here we have many witnesses. He was seen of the twelve; after that, of above five hundred brethren at once, to whom He shewed Himself alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. These could not have been mistaken, nor could they have been under any temptation to deceive in a case which would bring upon themselves nothing but reproach, imprisonment, and death. We have demonstrations in proof of this. See the witnesses as they come before their adversaries. "We speak in His name," say they, "and He is now with us in His agency, though He is invisible; and if you ask for a demonstration of this, bring forth your blind, and we will give them eyes; bring forth your deaf, and they shall hear; bring forth your dead, and they shall live; bring forth those from various countries, and they shall hear every man, though unlearned, speak in their own tongue the wonderful works of God." Believers have other kinds of evidences. They

179

have the witness in themselves; they know the power of His resurrection; they have felt it raising them from a death of sin to a life of righteousness; that "like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so should they also walk in newness of life."

It is no wonder, brethren, that we should have had such proofs and demonstrations of the resurrection of the Saviour, when we consider the importance attached to it. Our Saviour not only mentions the thing, but the necessity of it. For you must take the word "must" as applied to His resurrection as well as to His sufferings. "The Son of man *must* suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." That is, He *must* "be raised again the third day;" for unless He had been raised again we could not have depended upon Him, as the object of our faith and hope in God. Now we know that His sacrifice is all-sufficient, and that it is infinitely acceptable to God; that by means of it we become dearer to God than we could have been in our original condition. He now lives and reigns for us, and because He lives His people shall live also. He lives to take charge of His Church, and to carry on His cause. "He ever liveth to make intercession" for His people, to be their "advocate with the Father." Therefore says Paul to Timothy, "Remember that Jesus Christ, according to my gospel, was raised from the dead." "We bring you glad tidings," said Paul and Barnabas to the Jews, "how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." Hence our Saviour said to poor John, who fell as dead at His feet, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." If it be true, as Owen said, that we dwell not enough on the death of Christ, surely it is true that we dwell too little upon His life. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Then in triumphant language we may exclaim with the Apostle, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

180

But are there not some here who “neglect the great salvation”? We remark two things with regard to you. The one respects your own resurrection, the other the resurrection of Christ. It would be well for you, if, dying as you are, you never rose from the dead; but you will indeed rise; you will come forth, as the Saviour says, “to the resurrection of damnation.” And it were well for you if Christ had not risen from the dead, for you know how you have disregarded Him; yea, how you have spurned Him; but you will have to meet Him at the judgment-seat. Oh, what will be the nature and character of that interview? Well had it been for you had you never been born. Even now “there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; “ even concerning your salvation, for He will be found of those who seek Him with their whole heart. Therefore says Isaiah, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon!”

181

XIX. CHRISTIAN FEASTING.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, February 16th, 1845.)

*Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper,
call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.
But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.—LUKE xiv. 12-14.*

IT is said of the Messiah, “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever.” Hence we read, “Never man spake like this man.” This was the testimony not only of His friends,

but of His foes; not only of those who went to hear, but of those who went to apprehend Him.

Much of the impressiveness of our Lord as a preacher arose from the miracles He performed in confirmation of the divinity of His mission, and the truth of His doctrine; much also from His adapting Himself to the state and condition of His hearers; and much also from His deriving His instructions and encouragements from present objects and occurrences, for this always gives a freshness to our discourse, and a superiority to the artificialness of study. He sees a sower going forth to sow, and for the instruction of the people is led to deliver a parable on the good seed of the kingdom. Being one day by the seaside, He saw a fisherman separating the contents of his net, and He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world." Another time He sat on the well, and there came a woman of

 182

Samaria to draw water, and He immediately made the water of Sychar's well the means of her acquaintance with the water of life. And here you have a circumstance of the same kind. We read that" He put forth a parable to those that were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee." Our Saviour did not deem it beneath His attention to notice behaviour and manners. He would not have His disciples rude, and forward, and assuming; yet though He does not overlook such things as these, He looks beyond them, therefore He adds His favourite maxim, "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted." It is so commonly among men: they always like to bring down those

who carry their heads high, and raise themselves above others; and we know it is the pleasure of the Almighty to rebuke the lofty, and to raise the lowly. Then follow the words of our text, from which we shall observe—

I. THE OCCASION OF THE ADDRESS.

“Then said He also to him that bade Him.”

Concerning this invitation let us make four inquiries. First, *Who* was it that bade Him? It was one of the chief Pharisees, a man of some substance and respectability, probably a ruler of the synagogue, or one of the Sanhedrim. We never read of any of the Sadducees inviting our Lord, nor do we ever read of the Herodians inviting Him. Though the Pharisees were the bitterest enemies of Christ, they had frequent interviews with Him. Nicodemus who came to Jesus was a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews. In an earlier part of this book one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat bread with him, and so here the person who bade Him was a Pharisee.

Secondly, *For what* was He bidden? The first verse tells us that it was to eat bread. This is an expression which we frequently find in the Scriptures. It means just the same as eating meat with us, or partaking of any provision. Some suppose that this was a common meal, but the narrative requires us to view it as an entertainment, or some kind of festivity.

183

Thirdly, *When* was He bidden? We are told that it was on the Sabbath day. According to Josephus and others, the Sabbath day had now become among the Jews a day of feasting, when they often made large and sumptuous entertainments. Some years ago our nobles and statesmen and others frequently gave their public dinners on the Sabbath day, and if the usage has diminished, I fear it has been less from principle than a regard to appearances. In commercial and trading life the Sabbath is frequently thus observed, and the excuses alleged, if an excuse be deemed necessary, are the pressure of business, and the want of leisure in the week. If the poor have a meal better than another, it is upon this day, but this arises from necessity, and we would not be severe with them, for who can blame them if they have a little more indulgence then, during the toils of harvest, and after

the privations of a whole week? All days are the same with many of you, but there are thousands of your fellow-creatures who would be glad of the crumbs that fall from your table.

Our Saviour sanctioned the observance of the Sabbath by His attendance in the temple and in the synagogue; but He performed many of His miracles on that day, to the annoyance of the murmuring and sanctimonious, and by various actions shewed that the Jewishness of the Sabbath was rapidly passing away; that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" and that He was "Lord also of the Sabbath day."

Fourthly, *Why* was he bidden? He was invited by Martha from a principle of duty and benevolence, and she and Mary hoped to derive some spiritual advantage from Him. I wish I could think that this Pharisee invited our Lord under the influence of similar motives; but it is more probable that he was prompted in this partly by curiosity, for nothing excites so much notice as extraordinary characters; and you may observe that persons in the higher ranks of life may sometimes use their means to raise in the scale of society an individual who may become a blessing to the community, and by which their own names may be handed down to posterity. But it was from something more than mere curiosity that our Lord was now invited, it was from malevolence also; for you observe that it is said, "As He went into the house of one of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, *they watched Him.*" It seems that he suborned spies, or liars in wait, who were to try to catch Him in His sayings, or to make Him an offender for a word, or to see if they could not lay hold of some little expression by way of disparagement, or to run Him down.

184

But from whatever motive they were impelled, He went not to eat and drink only. No, He went about His Father's business, this He constantly kept in view. He knew what His work required. He knew that the Good Shepherd must seek after the lost sheep until He find it. He knew that mankind were disordered and dying. "I am," says He, "the Physician, and I must work the work of Him that sent me. They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call

the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” My brethren, you must here learn to distinguish between Him and yourselves. He had nothing inflammable in Him. The enemy came and found nothing in Him. But you have much remaining depravity, and are in danger from external circumstances; you, therefore, must watch and pray lest you enter in to temptation; you are safe when in the path of duty, there God has engaged to keep you.

Let us learn from the Saviour’s conduct to exercise good behaviour, that others may not have occasion to speak evil of us on account of our religion. Let us seek to let our light so shine before men that they may glorify our Father which is in heaven. Let us seek to cultivate “whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.” “If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, let us think on those things” and pursue them.

Consider—

II. WHAT OUR SAVIOUR FORBIDS.

He said, “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.”

This “supper or dinner” supposes something costly, for you observe that in the following verse it is called “a feast.” We read of many feasts in Scripture. Abraham made one when he weaned Isaac. And our Lord speaks of a marriage feast. Sometimes the reference is to the gospel: “And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”

Observe, it is not absolutely wrong to invite our friends, or our brethren, or our rich kinsmen, or our rich neighbours; but our Saviour looks at the motive here, “lest a recompense be made thee;” as much as to say, there is no friendship or charity in all this. And the Apostle says, “Let all things be done with charity.” This must never be forgotten. God will teach you

185

in due time that you have something more to do than to feast those only who will invite you again, and recompense you. You

are commanded not only to look on your own things, "but every man also on the things of others," and to remember "the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind." You are to shew more hospitality than vanity, and more charity than ostentation, and to be more concerned for those who want your relief.

This brings us to consider—

III. WHAT HE ENJOINS.

"But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind."

Here we see what a variety of evils and miseries are incident to the human race. Here are "the poor," without the necessities of life; "the maimed," whose hands are unable to perform their office; "the halt," who are indebted to a crutch to enable them to walk at all; "the blind"—poor creatures! I see them waiting alone, or creeping by the side of a wall, or led about by a faithful animal, or begging by the wayside. Here we learn, also, the proper objects of your compassion, and the fittest subjects of your charity. "The poor," those who are so for want of employment, or from sickness, or losses. What duty does our Saviour enjoin with regard to these? "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the halt, and blind." Our Saviour often speaks metaphorically: then our concern is with the meaning and the spirit of the thing. For instance, He requires us to wash His disciples' feet; that is, we are to exercise humility, to be always willing to stoop. As there may be the performance without the spirit of the thing, so there may be the spirit without the performance of it. If you are "meek and lowly in heart," if you "condescend to men of low estate," if you are conscious of your willingness to perform any act of kindness to the poor, however humiliating, if their welfare requires it, this is washing the disciples' feet, and following our Lord's example. It is the same here. It is not necessary that you should always have "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind" at your table. You may fulfil the Saviour's design without this, and do as Nehemiah did, "send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared." And with what a little of your superabundance you may make a feast at their own home, by

sending them necessary toad, or furnishing them with means to procure it themselves. May you do this, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; not only saying, "Be ye

186

warmed and be ye filled," but giving those things which are needful for them!

Consider—

IV. WHAT OUR SAVIOUR INSURES.

"And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the Just."

Here observe three things: the blessedness, the certainty of it, and the season when it shall be conferred. All these must be briefly noticed.

First, the blessedness: "Thou shalt be blessed." Blessed even in the act itself. Oh, the pleasures of benevolence! Oh, how I pity those who have not learnt ere now that "it is more blessed to give than to receive!" Oh, how pure, how heavenly is this pleasure! How blessed is it even in the review! for this blessedness can be continued and improved on reflection. How superior in the performance to sordid entertainments!

"Thou shalt be blessed"—blessed by the receiver. Think of Job. He says, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." What do we see yonder when we enter Joppa with Peter? "When he was come they brought him into an upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them."

"And thou shalt be blessed"—blessed by the observers. Who does not observe? And who observes and does not bless on such occasions? Few, perhaps none of us, knew personally a Reynolds, a Thornton, or a Howard, of whom we have read; but in reading their history, when we come to their names we

cannot help blessing them, and thus the words of the Scripture are fulfilled, "The memory of the just is blessed."

"And thou shalt be blessed." Above all, blessed by God Himself, upon whom everything depends, "whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life." He blesses personally and relatively. He grants you spiritual and temporal blessings. You are to have "the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush," and His blessing is worth more than any others. Oh, there is nothing like this. "If God be for us, who can

187

be against us?" David says, "Let them curse, but bless Thou."

Secondly, the certainty of this blessedness: "For they cannot recompense thee." This seems a strange reason, and would tend to check rather than encourage a worldly man. Let us see upon what this reasoning is founded, and a delightful truth will open to our mind. The foundation of this reason is this, that charity must be recompensed. This is a fixed and everlasting principle, that charity must be recompensed; for the word of God declares it, "and the Scriptures cannot be broken." If the poor cannot do this themselves, some one else must undertake it for them, and therefore God Himself must become answerable; and it is much better to have God to recompense us than to rely upon a poor dying creature; it is much better to rely upon God, for He will never fail us, "He is able to do for us above all we can ask or think." He can give us health, He can give us reputation, He can give us friends, He can give us peace of mind, He can make our souls prosperous. Oh, think of this, when you sometimes feel uneasy; think of this, when you say you cannot recompense such a generous friend. You need not fear, for One has undertaken to do this for you. You sometimes say after you have received a favour, "The Lord reward you," and the Lord *will* reward them. Paul, therefore, says to those who had made a collection to relieve him, and had sent it by the hands of Epaphroditus, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." If, therefore, the thought ever occurs to your mind, "I know not those persons who have relieved me; I shall never be able to repay them," so much the better, for then God

must, and if there be any truth in His word, if there be any love in His heart, He will.

Then observe, thirdly, the time of this bestowment: "For thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Not that this will be done then exclusively, for, as we have already shewn, there are advantages attending charity now. But it will be principally then, *publicly* then. The Apostle says to the Corinthians, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and *then* shall every man have praise of God." And therefore said our Saviour, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your

188

Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." Then will it be done *perfectly*. "Then this vile body shall be changed, so that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself." "Then shall the King say unto them at His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer them; Verily I say unto you, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*"

We now conclude with two reflections: first, it is not wrong to look for advantage in religion. But you should be upon your

guard not to entertain a notion of meritoriousness in any of your doings. No, the reward is of grace, not of debt; but then it is so much the better, and it is so much the surer, and will be the more valued when it comes. It is one law of our nature to seek our own happiness. You know how Moses was commended for looking for the recompense of reward, and what an influence it had upon his future life, though this is not the highest motive. The highest motive is that which leads us to say, "For the love of Christ constraineth us." Yet it is a motive, and a motive sanctioned by God Himself. Therefore the Apostle was inspired to say, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Secondly, we learn the importance of a regard for the poor. If you turn to the writings of Moses you will hear God saying, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand

189

wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." And surely if this was so enforced under the law, it is not less so under the gospel. The Apostle makes use or a similar argument when he enjoins labour. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Though there were some little differences among the Apostles, here they all agreed; "only they would that we

should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do." And who, brethren, "makes the sun to shine upon the evil and the good; and causeth the rain to descend upon the just and the unjust"? "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful," "who sent His own Son into the world, that we might live through Him;" "and if He so love us, we ought all to love one another."

190

XX. EVERLASTING LIFE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 25th, 1848.)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.—

JOHN vi. 47.

THIS interesting chapter is partly historical and partly doctrinal. It records two of our Saviour's miracles: His feeding five thousand men with only five loaves and two small fishes, and His walking on the sea in order to afford deliverance to His disciples. After this comes the doctrinal part, when our Saviour addressed the multitude who repaired to Him. It will reward you to read the whole of this interesting chapter when you return home. I shall want your attention immediately to the consideration of the words before us, which contain four things: first, the blessing, "everlasting life;" secondly, the owner of it, "he that believeth on me;" thirdly, the time of possession; fourthly, the ground of our confidence.

I. THE BLESSING, "everlasting life."

The principle of self-preservation runs through the whole animal world, but it is in them the effect of instinct. It is found also in men, who are possessed of reason. He must be in a very peculiar state of mind who does not wish a continuance of his being. Immortality is the craving of the human mind, and such a state revelation exhibits. Therefore the Apostle says, "He hath brought life and immortality to light through the

gospel." Therefore said Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Everlasting life was never proposed in the schools of philosophy to the faith of man, or urged as a principle or motive to holiness. Those who taught were not sure of it themselves. If they spoke of it, it was only as an opinion; or, as Paley

191

says, "It was a guess among many conjectures which happened to be right." When speaking of the heathen world at Athens, the Apostle says, "The Lord hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell upon the face of the earth; and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from everyone of us." The expression is taken from a blind man groping and feeling after an object of which he has no certainty of finding; and this was their condition. "The world by wisdom knew not God." It was the case with their philosophers. They were men of learning, famous for their knowledge, and honoured much for their reasonings and speculations; "but professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." "They were vain in their imaginations." Virgil's imagination, fine as it was, was here a "vain imagination." "And their foolish hearts were darkened." Even Cicero's heart, with all his vast reading, was darkened. And if this was the case with the wise and the learned, if they could do so little toward the discovery of this truth, what could the ignorant do? If persons who had leisure and opportunities for research failed in this, what could be done by those who were immersed in the toils and cares of life, and who got their bread by the sweat of their brow?

But now, what means this "everlasting life"? We may take three views of it: as opposed to eternal death, distinguished from natural life, and from spiritual life.

First, we may view it as opposed to eternal death. Eternal death does not mean annihilation or destruction of being, but of well-being, of happiness and of hope. Man is naturally immortal, and he cannot free himself from his being if he would. Immortality in itself is a blessing, but it may be turned

into a curse, and this is the case with all those who die in impenitency. "They shall seek death, but they shall not find it; they shall desire to die, but death shall flee from them," refusing to shelter in eternity those who refused to fly for refuge to the hope set before them in time. As eternal death is not annihilation, so eternal life is not mere existence: it rather signifies complete well-being. It includes, indeed, duration; but in the Scripture you will find it is used not to signify so much the existence, as the happiness of unceasing being. Life is the foundation of all enjoyment, of all possession, and of all action, and therefore it comes to be used for everything that is dear, and precious, and desirable. Our Saviour says, "A

192

man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;" and Wisdom saith, "Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord;" and David speaking of God says, "His favour is life, and His loving-kindness is better than life."

Then, secondly, it is distinguished from natural life. This we have as creatures, with regard to which Solomon says, "A living dog is better than a dead lion;" and Satan, "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." What sacrifices will a man make in order to preserve his life! But what is this vain life which we spend as a shadow? "It is even as a vapour, which appears for a little time, and then vanisheth away." It is not only of few days, but full of evil; such are its cares, its toils, its disappointments, and its mortifications, that it seems hardly deserving the name of life. But here life, everlasting life, is a state of freedom from all possible evil, and the possession of all possible good. Yea, and "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

The third distinguishing feature of this "everlasting life" is its complete spirituality. That life is even now begun. For God sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him, and our Saviour came "not only that we might have life, but that we may have it more abundantly;" and He complains, "They will not come unto me that they might have life." The people of God are now quickened and made alive. They have

spiritual appetites: they “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” They have spiritual senses: they can hear, and see, and taste, and feel. They have spiritual powers: they can will and act. They have spiritual passions: they love and fear, they hope and rejoice, and mourn and weep. They can perform spiritual exercises: they can move and walk in God’s ways, yea, they can run in the way of His commandments, when He enlarges their heart; and can “fight the tight of faith.” Yet you will observe that all this now is imperfect. There are deficiencies in the exercise of every grace, and in the performance of every duty. “When they would do good, evil is present with them.” But now this state is consummated. Now they have reached a condition that meets all their wants, all their expectations, and all their desires.

But we must not enlarge here; we shall only becloud the subject “by words without knowledge.” There is nothing in which we feel more at a loss than on this subject. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” We know not what heaven is, yet we can apprehend some gleams of it, otherwise we could

 193

not admire, otherwise we could not sympathise with it. Do we value knowledge? Well, there it is; “now we see through a glass darkly, but then *face to face*.” Do we love holiness? Well, there it is; then shall we be presented “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” Do you value the social principle? There you join” the general assembly and church of the first-born;” there you will be with Jesus the Mediator, and God the Judge of all. Do you think of the bodily powers? There this vile body shall be “fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.” All this is to be enjoyed *for ever!* There is something sublime in the very thought. If there were a tree or a plant which was to last for ever, all the ends of the earth would wish to behold it. All this world is perishing, and ready to vanish away; mortality is the disgrace of everything earthly; and this thought is enough to embitter the sweetest pleasure. Oh, the bare idea of seeing and hearing for ever! of being young and in bloom and in health for ever! of being innocent, of being righteous for ever! Oh, the thought of not having this

for myself only, but others also! These children are mine for ever! these friends are mine for ever! this God is my God for ever and ever! He will be my guide even unto death; and when heart and flesh fail, He will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever! Why, the very thought fills the mind with grandeur, and the heart with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

II. WHO IS THE OWNER OF THIS BLESSING?

"He that believeth on me."

We may glance both at the object and the nature of this faith.

First, the object of it. This is the Lord Jesus. He speaks of Himself: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Oh, how peculiar does He appear when He thus expresses Himself! Did you ever observe this? How surprised would you be did Paul, or Peter, or James express themselves in this way! But they well knew that salvation was not in them, but only in Him; therefore they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Thus they preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and shewed that—

"None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good."

O

194

The Saviour Himself says, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." He infinitely knew this, and therefore continually said, "Behold me, behold me; look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Thus, though He was meek and lowly of heart, though He was the example of humility, how did He speak? He said, "I am the light of the world;" "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life." Surely He who says such things must have been more than a mere creature.

But we pass from the object to consider the nature of this faith? What is it to believe on Him? Belief is the giving assent to a declaration as true; and here the subject to be

accredited is the testimony of Jesus, with regard to His presence, His character, His offices, His relations, His influences, and His blessings. But credence in itself is much like knowledge. Now persons may know a thing, and not possess it, and not pursue it. Our Saviour said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them," clearly intimating that things may be known, yet not done. So you will find the Apostle James speaking of faith without works as dead, being alone. Why, any truth may be lodged in the mind and remain inoperative. Faith always operates towards Christ as its object in a way of trust and dependence, and in a way of application too. The sacred writers take the qualities and actions of the body, and transfer them to the mind. Sometimes they refer to the eye; then it is "looking to Jesus." Sometimes to the ear; and then they "hear the voice of the Son of God." Sometimes the reference is to the taste; and then "we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Saviour." Sometimes to the hand; then it is receiving Christ Jesus the Lord. Sometimes to the feet; and then it is our coming to the Saviour. "He that cometh to me shall never hunger."

Let us pass on to consider—

III. THE SEASON OF POSSESSION.

It is *now*, even now: "He that believeth on me *hath* everlasting life," not he shall have, but he "*hath*."

Has he then crossed the river of Jordan? No, he is still in the wilderness, in a vale of tears. Has he laid down the burden of the flesh? No, he groans, being burdened, pressed down by physical and moral infirmities, and exclaims, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Yet what saith the Scripture? What says

195

John? "Beloved, now are ye the sons of God." And what saith Paul to the Ephesians? "By grace *ye are* saved through faith." "Ye are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

How is this? Let us enter a little into it. Observe, first, the believer has everlasting life as his *aim*. The mariner has the port in his eye from the day he sails till he enters the

desired haven. So is it with the Christian; as soon as he is born again he seeks those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. He is bound for glory, declaring himself a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. Thus are Christians described in the Scriptures as looking, not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal; as "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ;" as looking for Him" who shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Men always seek after things according to their principles and their desires. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." The men of this world have their prospects bounded by earth. A covetous man has riches only in view; the ambitious man has honour and fame in view; the sensualist has sensual pleasure in view. But the Christian is seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly.

He has it also in *promise*. This promise is found in the Old Testament and in the New, in the discourses of our Lord, and in the writings of the apostles. Christ says, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you." And the Apostle says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God; and when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory;" "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, hath promised before the world began." These are among the exceeding great and precious promises of the word of God. God's promise is no other than His purpose brought to light. Eternal life in the purpose of God is like gold in the mine, but in the promise of God it is like gold refined, stamped and prepared for currency. And "all these promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus." There are the devil's promises. You have a specimen of these in what he said to our first parents. There are men's promises. Many of these are of very little value. In passing through life how often have you been tempted to say, "Men of low degree are a lie, and men of high degree are vanity." Yea, "in your haste you have said, All men are liars." It is not

196

so with God's promises. No, "God is not a man, that He should lie, or the Son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and will He not do it? Hath He promised, and will He not make it good?" His word is firmer than the earth and the heavens; and surer than the course of nature.

Then he has it also in *trust*. And who is the trustee? The Lord Jesus. He is spoken of as our Forerunner; He has entered into heaven for us, saying as soon as He entered, "I am come, and all my people are coming: leave the door wide open." He is gone to take possession; He holds it on our behalf, and is responsible to make it good as soon as we come of age. Christians will be all "raised up and made to sit together with Him in heavenly places."

Once more, he has this eternal life in *participation*. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But Christians *have* this Spirit, and by this Spirit is the Christian sealed to the day of redemption. This is the earnest of his inheritance, and an earnest is a part of the bargain, not to be returned when the bargain is completed. If natural men attach any importance to religion, they do it in regard to another world; there it may indeed be useful and necessary. Therefore all these Balaams only cry, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Otherwise they think religion is a slavish, poor, and miserable thing. But

"The men of grace have found
Glory begun below."

They know that grace and glory are not only inseparable, but in a sense the same. Thus they are called in the Scripture by each other's names. Grace is called glory, glory is called grace. One is the vintage, the other the firstfruits; one is the bud, the other the flower; one is the dawn, the other the day; one is the child, the other the full-grown man.

When are Christians peculiarly indulged with these anticipations? I answer, they are peculiarly indulged with them when they are alone. It is then they can say,

"In secret silence of the mind
My heaven, and there my God, I find."

There they seem to have God to themselves. David could say, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I remember Thee on my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches."

They are peculiarly indulged thus in the sanctuary services.

¹⁹⁷

"Ah," said the Psalmist, "a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand." Ah, said Watts,

"I have been there, and still will go,
'Tis *like* a little heaven below."

Why, *'tis* a little heaven below.

"'Tis a young heaven on earthly ground,
And glory in the bud."

What have you sometimes enjoyed at His table! You have said, "I sat under His shade with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

You have sometimes been peculiarly favoured with these Divine communications when in trouble. God acts upon the principle of the truest friendship, He is most near in the time of trouble. The mother of a family overlooks none of her little ones; but the sofa, the couch, and the silent room are for the poor, weak, sickly child. So it is with the Lord's people. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." It was while Jacob was an exile, having none to guide him, no defender or companion, when conflicting with those fears which always attend upon uncertain events,- for little did he expect to find God so near him as he did; it was while he was sleeping in the open air, having only a stone for his pillow, that God appeared to him. Thus still in times of trouble He manifests Himself to those who trust in Him, as He does not to the world.

Then He peculiarly indulges others with sweet anticipations in death. Then they are come nearer Immanuel's land, and as they walk along by the verge of the blue, cold stream, so near are they that they can look across and see a little and hear a little of heaven, and inhale some of the fragrance blown over. Yes,

“Jesus can make a dying bed,
 Feel soft as downy pillows are;
 While on His breast I lean my head,
 And breathe my life out sweetly there.”

There is one thing more which we must notice, and that is—

IV. THE GROUND OF THEIR CONFIDENCE.

The fulness of the assurance: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Here you see it is truth itself that speaks; and yet Christ employs a double asseveration, and employs it, we apprehend, for two purposes, so that we may learn two things from it. The first

198

is, *the duty of belief*. We see this by what He said to His disciples when going to Emmaus, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe.” And again when He sat at meat with the eleven, He upbraided them because of their unbelief. Christ knew them better than they knew themselves; He knew that in a few hours they would all forsake Him and flee. Some say it is easy to believe what we wish, but, as Paley says, “the experience of every man gives this the lie.” We all know the more we are attached to a thing, the more our hopes are wrapt up in it, the more concerned we shall be to add assurance to assurance. Then our unworthiness of the thing renders it far from easy to believe. “I am not worthy,” says the Christian, “of the least of all God’s mercies; how can I think of claiming immortality and an eternity of honour and enjoyment?” Then the very simplicity of the way in which we are to obtain it renders it hard to believe. “What! am I to have no hand in the work? no share in the procurement? Am I to place all my dependence on another? Is it only for me to go and wash and be clean?”

The other is, the importance if our having the full assurance if understanding, and the full assurance of faith, to establish our hearts with grace. While we are in a state of indecision and uncertainty, we are like a wave of the sea driven with the waves and tossed. John therefore says, “These things write I unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” And this will apply to the whole

of Scripture. Hence God has not only spoken, but has sworn; He has not only given His word, but His oath; that He must be chargeable not only with falsehood, but perjury, if He does not accomplish all that He has engaged on your behalf. But where are the persons but must exclaim, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief: Lord, increase our faith"?

We have heard the Saviour say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." How then shall we view a real believer? We shall not judge of him by outward circumstances. He may be poor, he may be greatly afflicted; yet he has an estate, and is already a partaker of it, and is even now walking with his Saviour in white, for he is worthy.

Then further, how shall a believer estimate the things of this life? Shall he envy others their poor distinctions and possessions? Shall a prince of heaven envy a beggar upon the dung-hill? and murmur and repine because he has a few pearls more

199

than himself, and a larger portion of this world's goods? Rather let the language of the Christian be, while he looks beyond the present scene,

"A hope so much divine
May trials well endure."

Well, how shall this influence us, when endeavouring individually to answer the Saviour's question, "Dost thou believe Oll the Son of God?" and to comply with the Apostle's admonition, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves."

Then, if Christians have all things (and we know they have), what have some of you? All you have is a portion in this life; and what *is* this portion? you must soon leave it; whatever you possess, a voice will soon say to you, "Come, strip, and die," and you must then leave all that is dear to you. What is Judas the better now for the thirty pieces of silver? What is Alexander the better now for the world he conquered? What is Herod the better for having pleased the Jews and gained their applause? What is Ananias the better for having endeavoured to keep back part of the price? And what will you be the

better, should you “gain the whole world, and lose your own soul”? May you therefore turn from the vanities of the world, and believe in that Saviour who is full of grace and truth, and who will in no wise cast out those who come unto Him!

200

XXI. THE BLIND RESTORED TO SIGHT.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, July 29th, 1849.)

He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.—JOHN ix. 25.

THE history of which these words form a part is well known. Our Saviour had restored to sight a blind man. Some are blind by disease, and others are blind by accident; but this man was *born* blind; and this rendered the miracle more remarkable: for “since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.” The fact was undeniable, and the common people readily acknowledged it. And “they brought him to the Pharisees”—persons then in high reputation, supposing that they would be equally willing to acknowledge it too. But see how the plainest truth can be perplexed when it comes before those whose interest it is to oppose it. At first they admit the fact, but endeavour to turn it against the Saviour, saying that He had done this on the Sabbath day, and that He was therefore a transgressor of the law. Then they affect to deny it. They set aside the man’s own testimony, and call in his parents. His parents acknowledge that it was their son, and that he was born blind; but fearing lest they should be put out of the synagogue, they pretend to be ignorant of the means by which, and the way in which, he had been cured. What stubborn things facts are, and how powerful is truth! These wretches could not deny, and they would not believe and confess, and therefore said they to the man, “Give God the praise: we know this man is a sinner.” “He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or

no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

201

We may view this miracle, firstly, *as an attestation to the truth of the Saviour's Messiahship*. Nicodemus reasoned rightly, when he came to Him, and said, “Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do those miracles which Thou doest, except God be with him.” Isaiah, speaking of His advent, said, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break forth, and streams in the desert.” Therefore when John in prison sent two of his disciples to inquire of the Saviour, “Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another? He said, Go and shew John what things ye do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Secondly, we may view it *as a display of the Saviour's disposition*. His miracles were never a parade of power to shew what He was able to do, but an exercise of pity and compassion, and always proofs that He went about doing good. Had our Saviour performed such a miracle as this in a palace or in a mansion, it would have been kindness even there; for what is a mansion or a palace to a man who gropes about continually in the dark? But there He might have drawn forth the expectation of some reward, or the promise of some dignity or some emolument. But here it was pure benevolence, and it could be nothing else. What had this poor creature begging by the wayside to confer either of honour or reward? And yet to this man the Saviour attends, and kindly delivers him from the degradation and wretchedness he was in, and gave him a capacity to support himself by his own labour. What a change was here produced! In the morning he was led to the place where he was accustomed to ask for alms; a few hours afterwards he went back alone, and threw the whole family into a state of ecstasy, of joy, and surprise.

Thirdly, we may view this as a symbolical representation of His grace in healing diseases of the mind. The wonders He performed upon the bodies of men awakened much attention and astonishment. Even now when we review them we are constrained to exclaim, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea, and disease and death, obey Him?" But the wonders He performs upon the souls of men are much

202

more glorious in themselves, and important in their consequences. Many of those who partook of the former perished, while the exercise of the latter always accompanies salvation. And what is the body to the soul? what is time to eternity? We need not be afraid, therefore, that the type will surpass the antitype. The reality will always in these cases be found infinitely to surpass the figure. And whatever metaphorical representation the sacred writers give us, or symbols or memorials, upon examination we learn much more from the contrast than from the comparison. This being premised, let us now transfer the text from the original speaker to the Christian; and let us consider it three ways: first, with regard to his blindness; secondly, with regard to his illumination; and thirdly, with regard to his knowledge. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." And—

I. With regard to HIS BLINDNESS.

Though the Christian now sees, yet he was once blind, and like this man, too, was *born* blind. Christians are not made Christians by their first birth, but by their second. They become Christians in consequence of a change which they all experience, and of which various representations are given us by the sacred writers. Behold one of them. It is a turning from darkness to light. It is a being called out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Hence the language of the Apostle to the Ephesians: "That ye walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, because of the blindness of their hearts." It will be readily conceded that the Apostle is evidently speaking of the heathen, and there seems to be an immense difference between them and you. They were destitute even of the means of

information, while we live in a land of vision, where the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. But they were blind in the darkness of the night, and we were blind in the blaze of the day. For “the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” We know this will be offensive to men; we know how unwilling men are to acknowledge their ignorance. “Vain man,” as Bildad says, “would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt.” He will run down his memory in order to save his judgment; and he will even give up his integrity, frequently, in order to maintain his intelligence. And there are some who would much rather be considered as knaves than as fools. There is nothing which pleases all mankind more than their modicum of understanding. But

203

the last thing that they ever confess is their spiritual darkness. There you find that all your endeavours to enlighten them will be repulsed with the question, “Are *we* blind also?” There is a marvellous difference between bodily darkness and spiritual darkness. I never met with a blind man who denied his blindness. I never met with a man who confessed his spiritual ignorance till God humbled the pride of his heart. A blind man gives proof enough of his blindness. If you lead him into a garden of flowers or into a gallery of pictures he perceives nothing. There was a time, Christians, when with regard to you truths the most sublime, the most beautiful, and the most endearing, were ineffective scenes; were real, but you perceived nothing in them. Even the Saviour Himself, fairer than the children of men, yea, altogether lovely, had no form, nor beauty, nor any comeliness that you perceived why you should desire Him. You were among those who despised and rejected Him.

A blind man shews his blindness not so much while he is sitting as while he is in motion. So the natural ignorance of man with regard to Divine things is never displayed so much as when, awakened by conscience, he endeavours to become religious. What expedients does he employ in order to gain the favour of God, and peace of mind, and holiness of heart, instead of that new and living way which God hath consecrated for us through the veil of the Redeemer’s flesh, and through whom alone we can have “boldness and access with con-

fidence by the faith of Him.” Here is a little resemblance of him. Elisha sent a messenger unto Naaman, saying, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage;” and was likely to have lost his cure, but his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest not thou have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?” And, says the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans, “the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. *Wherefore?* Because

204

they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.”

II. Let us pass from the blindness to the ILLUMINATION.

Though they were blind they now see. Divine grace never leaves its subjects as it finds them. “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” He makes His people willing in the day of His power. And He does this by opening the eyes of their understanding, so that they see what is the hope of their calling, and what is the riches of the glory of their inheritance in the saints. They may be ignorant,—though they are “all the children of the light and of the day,”—they may be ignorant of many things. Others may far surpass them in the knowledge

and understanding of the languages, and of the arts and sciences. But they know themselves; they know the evil of sin; they know the excellency of Divine and heavenly truth; they know the worth of a Saviour; they know “Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” a kind of knowledge the value of which Paul well knew, and therefore thus extols it, saying, “Vea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Now the grand question will be, Wherein does spiritual illumination in distinction from other knowledge consist? And we answer (as we see in the admirable work of President Edwards on religious affections), Principally in a real sense or apprehension of the excellency of Divine things. The man has heard of them before, he has read of them before, had some loose notions of them before, but now he sees in them an incomparable spirituality and glory. For there is an immense difference between a conviction that there is such a being as Jesus Christ, and a beholding in Him that which renders Him precious to the soul. There is a great difference between a perception of holiness, and a beholding its beauty so as to fall in love with it. There is a great difference between a perception of honey, and a knowledge of its sweetness. The one may be derived from experts, the other must be derived from taste. The Lord’s people have *tasted* that He is gracious. They “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

205

Two things, therefore, will always attend this spiritual illumination. The first is a firmer conviction of the *truth* of these things themselves. Seeing them in their beauty and glory, they appear more fully and more distinctly. Now the prejudices you entertained against these things are removed from the mind, so that this is free to receive evidence concerning them, and they become the subject of intense application and inquiry. The man is most deeply persuaded of their value, beauty, and excellency; that they are not delusions, that they are not contrivances of men, but that they are in reality the things of God. Now you delight in them, now you esteem them more than your necessary food.

Then, secondly, beholding these things in their infinite glory, they will have a commanding energy and influence over the mind. They will fix the mind of the man; they will fix his heart; he will be carried away by them. The love of Christ constrains him, so that he lives under their dominion. He therefore lives no longer to himself, but to Him who died for him, and who rose again.

You will find in the Scripture that the sacred writers never consider anything as faith, real faith, without works: that "faith without works is dead, being alone." And they never consider knowledge as anything unaccompanied by experience and practice. They therefore say, "He that *loveth* not *knoweth* not God, for God is love;" "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee;" and, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The seat of this knowledge, therefore, is the heart. From thence it spreads abroad into the temper, flows into the conversation, and appears in all "the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." So that the possessor of it is neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, my brethren, this is the meaning of those expressions you meet with in the Scriptures of truth, and which perhaps you often read without understanding, such as these: "The spiritual judgeth all things." "And," saith the Saviour, "this is the will of Him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life."

III. Let us pass from the blindness and the illumination to the KNOWLEDGE of it.

"One thing I *know*, that, whereas I was once blind, now I see." Here we may observe the reality of this knowledge; its

206

reference to one thing only; and the confidence it inspires in its possessor.

First, we may notice the *reality* of this consciousness or knowledge. Were I to aver that all the subjects of Divine grace can say "with an unwavering tongue," "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see," I should offend

against the generation of God's children, and I should distress those whom He has commanded us to make merry. But we are sure of this, that there is not a believer here but is anxious to know it, to know whether he has any part or lot in the matter, and whether his heart is right in the sight of God. He can never be content to leave Divine things at a distance; he must bring them near to him; he cannot be satisfied unless he can lay hold of them and say, These are *mine*. Ah, then the world loses its influence; then the Christian goes on his way rejoicing; then he can boldly go forth to Him without the camp, bearing the reproach of the cross; then he can say to those around him, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul."

And can anyone question whether this knowledge is possible, who has read the language of Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth"? and the language of David, "Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory"? and the language of Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day"? But you say, "Job was a patriarch, and David was a king, and Paul was an apostle." Yes, but they were not foolish enough to draw this conclusion in their favour from their circumstances. They knew full well that there is no condition, that there is no office, that there is no talent, that there are no miraculous endowments or achievements that could insure the salvation of anyone. They knew full well, what the Scriptures plainly determine, that many may prophesy in the name of Christ, and in His name cast out devils, and in His name do many wonderful works, and after all be rejected. What, then, could lead them to draw the conclusion? Why, that which lies open equally to you; that which brings us to the foot of the cross, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" that which makes us poor in spirit; that which leads us to hunger and thirst after righteousness; that which induces us to mourn over our own sins, and the sins of others. "To that man will I look," says God, "who is of a humble and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word."

And is not this decision *commanded*? Are you not called u pan

207

to examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, to prove your own selves? and by giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure? And could this be enjoined if there were no possibility of a determination? Then are not means provided for this purpose? Are not the Scriptures written that you may *know* that you have eternal life, as well as believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God? Have you not numberless evidences of every kind and degree by which you may examine yourselves and compare yourselves with them? Then have you not the promise of the Holy Spirit to bear witness with your spirits that you are the children of God: “and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ”?

Some, perhaps, are ready to wonder that this knowledge is not *always* experienced by the subjects of Divine grace, and that such a change as this does not always bring along with it evidences enough to subdue everything like anxiety and hesitation. But you must remember that there is a difference between physical and moral certainty; there is a difference between evidences possessed and evidences realised. A babe in the cradle has an evidence of heirship, but his tender age forbids the knowledge of it; still he is growing up into the knowledge of it as well as into the possession of it. Why weeps Hagar? Oh, the last drop of water in the bottle is spent, and she and her boy must die! Yet she was near a well of water, but she saw it not, and therefore could derive no encouragement from it, till the angel opened her eyes and shewed her the well.

Then the *importance* of the thing to be known adds to the difficulty of this knowledge. For, contrary to the common remark, that it is easy to believe what we wish, we all know from experience that it is hard to believe it, especially with regard to our own interest in salvation. Here we feel so alive to the thing as to be liable to disquietude from every circumstance, and we require evidence upon evidence, and assurance upon assurance. Then the Christian opens his Bible, and what does he read there? Why, that “there is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death;”

that there are many who will carry their vain confidence to heaven's door, and knock, and knock with full assurance, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" but who will hear a voice from within exclaiming, "I know you not; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." And as to his own heart, the Christian knows that it "is deceitful above all things," and therefore he is afraid

208

to trust any report from that old treacherous quarter. Then there is such a want of simplicity in our faith in God and His word. We cannot too readily believe the testimony of God. What we call credulity is a readiness of mind to believe our fellow-creatures: and this may be wrong when applied to them, for they may deceive themselves, and they may deceive us. I say there is a credulity not commendable as exercised towards our fellow-creatures, but this expresses the very temper of mind we should cherish with regard to God; because He cannot be deceived, and He will not deceive us. Therefore, if we believe the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater and more valuable. We can never go on well till there is a greater simplicity in our faith, till we can take God at His word; and that, not only with regard to doctrines, but as to privileges also; till we can receive these as a little child.

Then we may observe the *extent* of this knowledge. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." One thing, but this is the *main* thing, and this is enough; this is everything.

There are many circumstances attending the work of God which the subjects of Divine grace may safely leave at an uncertainty. It may be well to mention a few of these. Such, for instance, as the precise time of this change. Who knows when the first beam of the dawn this morning reached the horizon? and yet you make no scruple to say, "One thing I know, that, whereas it was once night, it is now day." It is the same with regard to life. You know not precisely when you began to be, but you know this, that you live and move and have your being now; you therefore can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas once I had no existence, I now have existence." There are some who are called even at the eleventh hour; more are called

before the meridian of their days; most are called in early life; but there are some who, like Jeremiah, are sanctified from the womb: they can fix upon no period of their conversion.

Then there is another thing of which they may be safely ignorant; namely, the *particular instrumentality* by which it was produced. There are some who can mention these instruments. There is one who can say that it was by God's breaking off his worldly schemes and hopes that he was induced to seek after treasure above the skies, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. Another can tell you that by the death of her beloved

209

child she saw the heavenly Shepherd gather her dear child in His bosom, and ever since she has been seeking him above. Another will perhaps say, "O what a wretch I was, I had not the least serious thought about my poor soul, but I heard a sermon which produced in me the inquiry of the jailer, 'What must I do to be saved?'"

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" and this commonly preached rather than read. Yet God is not confined here. Some are awakened to it by reading the word as well as in hearing it. God peculiarly honours the Sabbath. The greater number of conversions have been accomplished on that blessed day. And yet God works all days. Some years ago I received two letters, one from a dissenting minister and another from a clergyman, reporting that, as they were passing by this chapel on a Thursday evening, they were induced to come in, and the word in both cases was rendered effective. In one case the minister was preaching from these words, "I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon;" and the other some time after from, "I will teach you the good and the right way." You must not therefore undervalue week-day services. The God of the Sabbath is the God of every period.

Well, there is another thing of which you may be safely uncertain, and that is, the *manner* in which this change has been effected. In some it has been more rapid; in others it has been slow. To some God speaks in thunder; to others

by a still small voice. Some he lays hold of by fear, pulling them out of the fire; others are drawn by the cords of love, and by the bands of a man. One goes through a great deal of anguish of mind in conviction; another believes and afterwards sorrows after a godly sort, and is ashamed and confounded, when God is pacified towards him, for all his sin and abominations.

Now from this part of our subject there are two conclusions which we should draw. The one is, not to condemn our fellow Christians because they are unable to particularise many things with regard to their conversion. It is indeed very pleasing to hear persons tell you of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear. But there are some who are unable to do this precisely; and sometimes as individuals in judging, and sometimes as a Church in the admission of members, we lay too much stress here; for there are some unable to make out a narrative; and I am afraid others strain and colour circumstances to furnish a narrative that it may appear more satisfactory. On the other

P

210

hand, we should never be backward to acknowledge what God has done for others, or to tell others what He has done for us.

Observe the confidence of this poor man in regard to what God had done for him. The Pharisees wished to confound him, but cavils had no weight with him. He did not deem it right to dispute. He was in possession of an undeniable and invincible argument, and this was enough for him. "Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was once blind, now I see. You cannot argue or ridicule me out of this." No, my brethren, "he that believeth hath the witness in himself; " and though the believer does not despise external evidences,—far from it,—yet, after all, his chief evidence must arise from the conviction of his own mind. This may not convince others, but then it is satisfactory to his own soul. Therefore, in the possession of this we can trust a Christian in the presence of infidels. They may endeavour to perplex, they may scoff and insult him; but we can trust him under all their ridicule and their reason, yea, we can trust him not only with regard to infidelity, but heresy also;

that is, as to his being drawn into a disbelief of the doctrine of the Saviour's atonement, of justification by His blood, and sanctification by His Holy Spirit. Yes, I could trust such a man as this, for he has received the truth in the love and in the power of it. Thus, in dealing with others, he can feel a holy confidence; he can speak like a man who has evidence within. Without hesitation he says with the first Christians, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Before I conclude I would address a word to those who are still in their sins. You are sinners. We wish you to be persuaded that you are so. But, then, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing—concerning the pardon of your sins and the salvation of your souls. We should feel no pleasure in speaking to you of your misery and danger, and of the delight and advantages of spiritual sight, if we could not assure you that there is One able and willing to open your eyes; and He is now passing by. *I know He is*; I see Him; I hear Him; I feel Him; I know He is now passing by. Oh, may you resemble poor Bartimeus, who, when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, began to cry out, and to say, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me! I can beg alms of others, but they cannot

211

give me eyes. This is my opportunity, let me improve it." Many charged him that he should hold his peace; but he cried the more a great deal, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me;" "and Jesus stood still." Once the sun in the skies stood still while Joshua finished his battle; now the Sun of Righteousness stands still in order to receive the addresses of a poor blind beggar; "And He commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee." "And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go

thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”

P 2

212

XXII. THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, September 28th, 1845.)

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?—I JOHN xi. 40.

THE event for which this was a preparation you well know. It is perhaps the most remarkable miracle our Lord performed; yet it is recorded with all the simplicity which characterises the writings of the sacred historians, when they would describe the works of their honoured Lord. That which is so excellent in itself needs not the aids of art to embellish it. Real beauty can always dispense with paint.

Let us take a rapid view which will introduce our text, and then derive from it a few reflections.

In Bethany, a little village near Jerusalem, and within the bills of mortality, lived a pious and happy family, consisting of Lazarus, and his sisters, Martha and Mary. These were all beloved of Jesus; but afflictions invade them: Lazarus is taken ill. The affliction of the brother is the distress of the sisters; they therefore sent unto Jesus, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” They naturally hoped, after having been honoured with the friendship of Jesus, who had been so frequently at their house, that He would have immediately repaired to the scene of affliction. Instead of this He remained two days in the same place where He was. Lazarus, however, was not out of His thoughts, for after that; csns saith unto His disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.” “His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the

day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is

213

no light in him. These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." He spake metaphorically; they thought He spake literally. Therefore said the disciples, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought He spoke of taking rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." That the information was affecting is more than probable, not only from our Saviour's saying, "Let us go unto him," which included them with Himself in the friendship, but also from the language of Thomas, who is called Didymus, who said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

We now approach the interesting scene. Jesus arrives at Bethany. He finds that Lazarus had been in the grave four days. Only conceive of the condition of the sisters. Since they had sent to Him, they had heard nothing from Him. As their brother grew worse, they would often walk up and down, wringing their hands with sorrow, and asking, Where is He? They looked from the housetop, and sent James the servant to look down from the end of the field. What so painful as the apprehension of being disregarded by those we love in the hour of distress? At length Lazarus expires; and Jesus was neither seen nor heard from, for though He did not come to prevent his dying, He might have sent a message. Many of the Jews seemed more compassionate than He, for many of them went "to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother." This was kind. How this was conducted we know not, for such visits to comfort mourners demand much skill and tenderness. Jesus could have done this infinitely well, He who is the consolation of Israel. He who hath the tongue of the learned, and knoweth how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; He who spake as never man spake, Where is He? Oh, He is near now, even at Bethany. Upon the hearing of which Martha immediately went and met him; but Mary sat still in the house. I imagine Mary was retired, and did not

hear of His coming, or else she was too much overpowered with grief to go to Him.

Now behold the interview of Martha and Jesus. Grief has but few words, and, like love, makes way at once to its object. “Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at

214

the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and calleth Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto Him.”

As the message was secret to her, so she withdrew from the house without informing those who were there of her purpose; but her consolers followed, as it is written: “The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.”

Now see the interview between Jesus and Mary. “Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet” (ah, there she had often sat to hear His words), “saying, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,”—using the same language as her sister had done.

Both sisters seemed to reflect on the apparent want of kindness in our Lord. Both seemed to charge Him with their brother’s death. And He might have prevented it, but He did not. He knew their frame, He remembered they were but dust. People should be careful how they behave themselves in their sufferings; and spectators should always take care not to magnify hasty expressions uttered in anguish and distress. We find even Job and Jeremiah spoke unadvisedly with their lips in their distress.

What a scene, what a vacuum was here! What an emblem of this vale of tears! "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept." This shewed He was a real man; such sympathy as Jesus manifested well becomes those who bear His name. There are two remarks the observers make. First, their admiration of His sensibility: "Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!" Secondly, their surprise that He did not prevent his death. They said, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" Yes, He could have done it; and He will soon give proof of it. "Jesus therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said,

215

Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

We have here three things to review: first, a command; secondly, an objection; thirdly, a reproof.

I. A COMMAND. "Jesus said, Take ye away the stone."

This command was issued for two reasons: first, to shew that miracles were not to be needlessly performed. When the angel released Peter from prison, he opened the door and struck off his fetters, for this Peter could not do; but he ordered him to rise and follow him out, for this Peter could do. Why should the angel stoop down and bind on his sandals, or carry him on his shoulders? Even natural things are used in miracles supernaturally. Peter took his rod and hook to catch the fish; this was very natural. But our Saviour foretold that he should take the fish, and mentioned the very piece of money that he should find in its mouth. So here, people could not revive Lazarus, but they could remove the stone; they could not bring him forth from the grave, but they could, after the miracle was performed, release him and let him go.

Again, our Saviour prepared them for the miracle by rendering the circumstances connected with it obvious. How often have I been struck with this in the history of our Saviour! Was a miracle to be performed, the thing was not done in a corner, but before witnesses—witnesses who wished to prove it was only delusion. Take the prodigies performed at our Saviour's death; they were not performed in an obscure retreat, but on a hill. So when the Saviour poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost; it was done in Jerusalem, and at a festival when there were gathered together devout men out of every nation under heaven to be witnesses. Was the widow's son to be raised? it was in the common road, and where two companies met, one following the young man to the grave, the other our Saviour. So here were some of His disciples, here were Martha and Mary, and many of the Jews. Then it was not a piece of legerdemain. It awakens their attention; He asks them to shew where the dead lay. They all go together to the very place. The grave was covered with a stone; this He orders to be removed, that all the bystanders might look in and see the state of the corpse; and the very circumstance of

 216

His calling upon them to loose him from his grave-clothes added to the conviction that there was no delusion. Compare with this the wizards who, as Isaiah says, "peep and mutter." Compare with it false teachers who "prophesy lies." Compare with it false prophets who "bring in damnable heresies." Or compare with this "the lying wonders of the Church of Rome."

"Hence and for ever from my heart
I bid my doubts and fears depart;
And to His hands my soul resign,
Which bear credentials so Divine."

II. Let us review THE OBJECTION; for no sooner did the Saviour give the command to remove the stone, than Martha said, "Lord, it is no use now; it is all too late. Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days."

Martha had nothing of phlegm in her constitution; she had a sanguine complexion and a volubility of temper; she was one

of those peculiar beings (yet they are not very rare) who speak first and think afterwards; and as they are always speaking, no wonder if they sometimes offend with their tongue. There is great dignity in comparative silence. So is there also in being slow to speak; for as Solomon says, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." Archbishop Tillotson says, "I have read several sermons on the grace of speech; I hope before I die to see one on the grace of silence."

Observe here two things: first, the fact itself asserted by Martha. The truth of her assertion is not only possible but certain, considering the warmth of the region. How humbling! behold the contents of that grave; behold Lazarus, once active in his station; we used to see him often walking between his sisters, affording relief to the poor, and making the widow's heart rejoice. But see him now! his eyes no longer beam intelligence, his right hand has forgot its cunning, and the whole body is a mass of corruption. Behold what ravages sin has made. See the folly of pride, for "all flesh is as grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field." Even in health, brethren, ours is a vile body. Witness the afflictions to which it is liable; what offensive diseases, often requiring all the force of friendship to discharge the common offices of humanity! But see that body in various degrees decomposed after death! Why so much display of expense at funerals? Why do you not retain the dear remains? You dare not. Abraham must bury his lovely Sarah out of his sight. Ah! your dearest connections will soon be in the condition of

217

Lazarus, and you will be glad of the earth to hide the dishonour of our nature. You cannot retain the wife of your bosom, or the child of your affection. No, they have said to corruption, "Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and sister." No, you have shut the door of mortality upon them, and inscribed over it

"How loved, how valued once avails thee not,
To whom related, Or by whom begot;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

Yes, your own selves will soon be in the same state. Those bodies you pamper so much, those bodies you indulge with so much excess of luxuries, will soon die. Vanity hangs out a sign that tells what is hid within. Not only are your pleasures going, but you are going; “the graves are ready for you,” and soon the worm will feed sweetly upon you.

But though the body dies, the soul will live for ever: “The gospel has brought life and immortality to light.” Though the grave is so dark, there is light beyond the shadow of this valley of death. Here is comfort for the afflicted; not for the infidel, who says there is no hereafter; not for the cold philosopher, who says this is a debt due to nature. Here is the Lord Jesus, who says to the Christian on the bed of languishing, “Look unto me, and be ye saved. I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly.”

Secondly, observe her design in mentioning the state of her brother. It is a complaint, a lament of despondency, as much as to say, “Wilt Thou shew wonders to the dead? The grave cannot praise Thee; death cannot celebrate Thee. What is to be done now?” “Why anything, everything: I undertake it, Martha.”

We may observe here how long it may be before the Lord appears for the help and comfort of His people. The sufferings of His people may reach their very extremity, to shew that nothing is too hard for the Lord; that “at even time it shall be light;” that He can “turn the shadow of death into the morning.” When did He interpose on the behalf of Abraham? Not before he had raised the altar, and bound his son, and had taken the knife to slay his Isaac. What says Paul? “We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raised the dead.” When did He appear on behalf of the three Hebrew children? Not till they

218

were bound and cast into the burning fiery furnace. Why did He not come earlier to Lazarus. The delay sprung not from any unkind design, for He intended to do something extraordinary. He came not to cure him of his sickness—that He had done in many instances; He came not simply to revive him when he was dead—that He had done in some in-

stances; but to raise him to life when buried and putrefied—this He had never done in any instance. How little do we know what grand designs He can accomplish by what we are often led to think mysterious if not unkind towards us, for “He is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.” Oh, how thankful were all these three, a little while afterwards, that He had so long delayed His coming!

You see also how liable we are to err when we only judge of a thing by that part of it before us, and draw our conclusions from present appearances only. We are to stay, in order to judge of God, till the work He is doing is finished. Is not this reasonable? The end which completes His work will also explain it. “He brings the blind by a way that they know not,” but “He makes darkness light before them.” Then the explanation issuing from the completion will draw forth infinite satisfaction in the minds of all His people, and bring infinite praise and glory to the Great Name from admirers who will say, “He hath done all things well;” who will say, “God is a Rock, His way is perfect, for all His ways are judgment: just and right is He.”

But how hard is it to walk by faith, and not by sight! Looking over the Scriptures, we see how good men are affected by present difficulties, and how they require an explanation, and sign upon sign before they can feel complete content. Even the Jews, who had witnessed so much of the wonders of God, spake against the Almighty, and said, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, He smote the rock that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can He give bread also? Can He provide flesh for His people?” Even Moses, to whom God had issued so many promises,—even Moses said, “The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen, and Thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to suffice them?” And the Lord said unto Moses, “Moses, how are you talking? how are you reasoning? Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.” So now, if the

219

Lord does not explain Himself as soon as we look for it, we are not to say, "Why should we wait for the Lord any longer?" And if means fail, and dangers multiply, still let us trust in Him who is "too wise to err, too good to be unkind."

III. Observe THE REPROOF, for God can rebuke as well as comfort. "Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God? I would, Martha, you had more faith, and a better memory; the thing you should look after is the glory of God, and the medium of enjoying this is believing, and believing is injured by want of remembrance."

First, then, the thing to be seen here is the glory of God, and without controversy the glory of God here meant is power. We have a similar phrase in Ephesians, where the Apostle prays, "That the Lord would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." "God hath spoken once: twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Once there was no earth: He had only to speak, and it was done. "He commanded, and it stood fast." "There is no power but of God." He spake, and the sea opened a passage for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over. There is nothing, perhaps, that men so much wish to possess as power. As Bacon says, "Though money procureth all things, yet it is seldom that power is the glory of its possessor." When is ever power employed in acts of benevolence, to relieve, to succour, or to bless? Oh, there is a glory in the power of God! Therefore says David, "To see Thy power and Thy glory, as I have seen it in the sanctuary." Oh, what glory is displayed in the conversion of sinners! What a glory will there be in the resurrection of the dead; in the bodies in which they rise, "fashioned like their Saviour's own glorious body!" What a glory in the production of the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!" What a glorious display of His power is here! For the end was worthy of a God; it relieved the disconsolate sisters; it confirmed the wavering disciples;

it converted some of the unbelieving Jews; it magnified and honoured the Son of God.

But observe, the medium of discerning and enjoying is believing: "Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldest believe,

220

thou shouldest see the glory of God?" "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "By faith ye are saved." Faith is therefore as necessary as Christ Himself. Christ is food to the soul, but food' is nothing to us unless it be eaten, and it is by faith we feed upon Him. He is indeed the only refuge from the wrath to come, but a refuge can only secure those who are within. What is ascribed meritoriously to Christ is ascribed instrumentally to faith: "Believest thou," said the Saviour, "that I am able to do this?" It is said, He could not do many mighty works in Samaria "because of their unbelief." Unbelief ties up the hand of Omnipotence. Unbelief is an injurious bar; it is this that stands between us and our enjoyment of the Saviour; it is this that robs us of our comfort. What did unbelief to the Jews with regard to the land of Canaan? "They could not enter in because of their unbelief," and it will rob millions of a better country. Christians, how much does this rob you of your peace and God of His glory!

God peculiarly honours faith, and the greater difficulties faith surmounts the more does it honour God. Therefore it is said concerning Abraham, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform." He was therefore "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Christians, have you not had reason to commend faith, as well as God in His Word? As faith prevails, you will be kept in perfect peace, your minds being stayed on God. Faith is taking God at His Word, believing all His promises are "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus."

What, therefore, is your humiliation before God in private, unless you cry out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief"? What is your desire and prayer, unless with the disciples you cry, "Lord, increase our faith"?

Now, lastly, this fear is increased by forgetfulness. "Why did you not mind my word? then would you have been not faithless, but believing." So she stands reprov'd; and he that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone. Do you not deserve the same rebuke? Have you not forgotten what the Saviour has often said to you? The use we are to make of the Bible is to remember it, and bring home the contents thereof to ourselves.

"Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Infidelity must have miracles;

221

enthusiasts, dreams, impulses, extravagance, and messengers from another world. "If one went unto them from the dead, they would repent." But no; "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them." "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." He has therefore spoken to you, and it becomes you to remember the things which have proceeded out of His mouth. Remember His commands; you may yet be released from the burden of your guilt. "Go down," says He, "to Jordan and wash;" but this seems too simple a thing for you; you are "going about to establish your own righteousness, not submitting yourself to the righteousness of God."

So in regard to the predictions of the Word of God. What is said to be the state of the world? That "it lieth in wickedness." But here God hath said, "The wilderness and the solitary places shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;" that "in Him shall all the kingdoms of the earth be blessed."

And let this be the case with regard to the promises He hath given you. He has said unto you, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be."

"O for a strong, a lasting faith,
To credit what the Almighty saith,
To embrace the message of His Son,
And call the joys of heaven my own."

XXIII.**PHILIP'S SERMON.****(Preached on Sunday Morning, November 19th, 1843)***Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.—ACTS viii. 35*

HERE we have the preacher, the hearer, and the text of this peculiar and extraordinary discourse.

The preacher was Philip; mention of him is made in an earlier chapter. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch." Philip, therefore, was one of the seven, but he did not long confine himself to his original appointment, but we find him abounding in the word and doctrine; for as the Apostle says, "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." So we find that Philip went into Samaria, and preached unto the people, and "there was great joy in that city;" and while there "the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went."

Next we find the hearer: "And, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had

223

come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” And so we have not only preacher and hearer, but the text.

You have heard it already, but I repeat it, and beseech you to keep it in your remembrance; it was this: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so opened He not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth.”

In the Book of Daniel we read of things *noted* in the Scriptures of truth; and there are some things noted there more than others. Some passages of Scripture are more noted for the occasion for which they were spoken; some for the warmth with which they were delivered; some for the importance of the communications they announced; some passages of Scripture have been rendered more noted by having been used by servants of God in peculiar and interesting circumstances. Thus Latimer at the stake said to his fellow-sufferer, “*Be not afraid, my brother: God can abate the fury of the flames, or give us strength to bear it.*” You know the words of the Apostle, “No temptation shall happen to you but that which is common to men; and God wil! with the temptation make a way for your escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” I can never read these words without thinking of this heroic martyr. It is the same

with many other passages of Scripture, which have been quoted by Christians in deep distress or on their dying beds. I was one day in a room with an affectionate and pious mother, "and she was a widow:" she was in full expectation of the announcement of the death of a beloved child. Presently her daughter came in, and her manner betrayed the solemn event. The

224

mother immediately fell on the neck of her daughter, and remained thus in silence for some considerable time; then loosing her arms, and raising her hands towards heaven, exclaimed, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." These words have ever since been engraven on my memory.

Some passages have also been rendered remarkable by having been made useful. When persons have told me of a sermon from such a text as being instrumental in their conversion, do you think I could read such a text without emotion, or longing to preach from it again? The words of our text were blessed to the conversion of two individuals. One was Earl Rochester. They might not have appeared very likely to affect a man so sinful and licentious as he was, but every word of God is pure, and whatever refers to Christ is always important. He told Bishop Burnett, that when he read these words an indescribable light broke in upon his mind, and he felt such a change in his heart that he seemed to be a new creature, shedding a thousand tears of grief and joy. The other was an Ethiopian, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasures. No sooner had Philip preached unto him Jesus, than, professing his faith in Jesus, he was baptized, and "went on his way rejoicing."

O Lord, give testimony to the word of Thy grace this morning, and let it come "not in word only but in power"!

Let us notice the text on which he discollfised: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth." Here is no difficulty at all, but there are two difficulties following which require some notice and explanation.

First, it is said, "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away." He appeared in such an impoverished and humble condition, that Pilate, though fully convinced of His innocence, did not consider Him of importance enough to risk anything for His deliverance. Taking away His judgment seems an expression used in Scripture to imply oppressing Him, and denying the rights of legal justice.

The other is, "And who shall declare His generation?" Some have referred this to what they call His eternal generation, or His deriving Divine nature from the Father. But what has this to do here? I remember hearing Romaine say, "Eternal generation is eternal nonsense;" but, true or false,

225

he ought to have believed it, for it is the doctrine of every Church that holds the Athanasian Creed. And when we see the words "very God of very God," and "being of one substance with the Father," what are we to think of those who use this book and teach another doctrine? Alas for those poor fathers who are with some "all in all," with such who would bring in tradition to aid the Holy Scriptures! I am fully of Mr. Addison's opinion, that John Bunyan the tinker was a better father than anyone of them.

"Who shall declare His generation?" Some have referred this to His being conceived by the Holy Ghost. Some again to the resurrection of the dead; then it was, according to the Apostle, that God the Father said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee." Some have referred it to His spiritual seed, for a seed was to "serve Him, who were to be accounted a generation;" numerous, according to David, "as the drops of morning dew." But this is spoken of in another part of the chapter from whence this is taken: "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand."

There are only two probable meanings: the first is, Who shall declare the manner of His life? Bishop Lowth leads to this conclusion, and refers to Jewish authorities. Before the execution of criminals, proclamation was made to this effect, "Will anyone come forward to testify anything in favour of the

condemned?” Sometimes they saw one hastening with a long white flag, and exclaiming, “A witness is come.” But there was no white flag on Cavalry! “Nail on,” was the cry, “nail Him to the cross.” There was no one to declare His manner of life. Oh, where were the five thousand whom He fed? where was Bartimeus, whom He restored to sight? Where were Martha and Mary? and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead? Will none of them come forward? Where were His apostles? Oh, where was he who said, “Though all men forsake Thee, yet will not I”? Alas!” they all forsook Him and fled.”

“Who shall declare His generation?” The second probable meaning of this is, Who shall declare the generation of men in which He lived? and is it not strange that men should have overlooked this? Thus God says to Noah, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” “Forty years was I grieved with this generation,” says God. David, it is said, “served his own

Q

226

generation,” that is, the generation of his day. Thus Luke says, “He shall suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.” Thus the Apostle says, “Save us from this untoward generation.” Therefore there was no one in this sense to declare His generation; no one that declared the wickedness, the baseness, the vileness of the men in whose day He lived, in which He suffered and was slain. “He was despised and rejected of men,” and when “He came to His own,” who should have been prepared for His coming, “His own received Him not,” but treated Him with all manner of indignities. They vented their malice against Him, spat in His face, scourged Him, crowned Him with thorns, and at last hung Him upon a tree; so base and wicked were they in His day! His life was taken from the earth; He was treated by them as a slave and malefactor, and crucified without a crime, and without a charge.

Well, this was Philip’s text, and he preached off-hand to the eunuch. The apostles were admonished not to meditate beforehand, for said the Saviour, “It shall be given you in that

same hour what ye ought to say." And ministers should never be at a loss to say something about Christ, whatever leads to it.

Our Saviour says, "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." We would not deem him a good housekeeper who, if a friend calls suddenly, could not bring something to feed him, if he could not feast him. Sometimes a minister's best thoughts will be those produced by present circumstances and present feelings, but of which they can take no advantage whose eyes are always glued to their book. Baxter was once preaching in a church in London, when there occurred a tremendous storm of thunder, by which His audience were thrown into great consternation. He paused and exclaimed, "My brethren, we are assembled this morning to prepare against that day when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up." This hushed and calmed the audience. When Peter was preaching, a multitude broke in upon him, being pricked in their heart, and exclaimed, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter was not disconcerted, and unable to answer them, but directed them to the paths of peace. So when

227

Philip was addressed by the eunuch, he began at the same Scripture to preach unto him the Lord Jesus.

Let us observe here four things: first, the *subject*. As here, so when he went to the city of Samaria, he preached Christ unto the people. This was his constant practice, nor was it peculiar to him. What said Paul to the Corinthians? "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The Saviour, when He commissioned the apostles, instructed them to preach in His name repentance and remission of sins, beginning at Jerusalem. This is the subject which, though so old, is always so new; and not only a faithful saying, but "worthy of all acceptation." This is that which is so relished by every real Christian, whose language is, "Evermore give us this bread."

“With joy they hasten to the place
Where they the Saviour oft have met;
And while they feast upon His grace,
Their burdens and their griefs forget.”

In order to be useful to others we must preach the truth as it is in Jesus; for “none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good.” “There is salvation in no other.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh to the Father but by me.”

Secondly, observe, this sermon was very *Scriptural*: “He began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” He began here, and this was a good beginning; but we must extend the thing. When Christ was going to Emmaus it is said, “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” So then, according to His own testimony, there are things concerning Him in all the Scriptures. So again after His resurrection from the dead, when He appeared to His apostles, He said, “These are the words I spake unto you while I was yet in Galilee, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me.” So in His address to the Jews, He says, “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they that testify of me.” Divide them, arrange them as you please, take the historical, leuitical, prophetic, or take the promissory or the doctrinal part, and you will find that HE is “all in all.” Wherever, therefore, you step

Q 2

228

on this holy ground, immediately a star is in motion, going before you till it stands over where the young child is; wherever you listen, you hear a voice saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world;” wherever you open the leaves in this sacred book, “His name is as ointment poured forth.”

Thirdly, His sacrifice is no barrier to Philip’s viewing Him as our *example*: “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.”

There is nothing here said of the grano design of His death as an expiation for sin, but much said in the chapter from whence the text is taken: "He was wounded for our transgressions: He was bruised for our iniquities: and by His stripes we are healed." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; but the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all." Here you see He is mentioned as an example, and the example is held forth by a very affecting image. What a difference is there between a swine and a sheep! Lay hold of a swine, and he insists upon it the whole neighbourhood shall be informed; but who knows anything of the poor sheep's being led to the slaughter-house? See the dear innocent lamb, it is going to be stripped of its covering, yet it is dumb before its shearers. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! He opened not His mouth," either to repine against God or to menace those who were the instruments of His sufferings.

Now, brethren, let us remember His example is not to be severed from His sacrifice: this is one end He had in view in His suffering, though not the principal one. There is no inconsistency. "He suffered for us," says Peter, "leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps."

Fourthly, though our Lord suffered, He was an innocent sufferer: a lamb in blamelessness as well as in silence and meekness. Though He was condemned to be crucified, His judge pronounced Him to be not guilty. He could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Judas threw down the money he had received, and said, "I have betrayed innocent blood." The prince of this world came, and found nothing in Him. Brethren, this is a matter of vast importance to us;

"He that doth for sin atone,
Must have no failings of his own."

"Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, unde-

229

filed, separate from sinners;" and such an High Priest we have, who "was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin."

If no one could describe the wickedness of that generation, what are we to think of the generation of men who now oppose Him after He has been “justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, received up into glory”? The reproach of the cross has been rolled away: the gospel has been preached in the world, and nations, and families, and individuals have been blessed. Though infidels may scoff, they have nothing to offer in the room of it, but leave mankind in all their errors and wretchedness, in a world like this, without peace and without hope. Such persons are the greatest enemies of God and the community. The motto upon the banners of every infidel is, though all persons cannot read it, “I fear not God, nor regard man.” But said the Apostle, “He who despised Moses’ law died without mercy before two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trampled under-foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?”

230

XXIV. CONFIRMATION.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, January 27th, 1850.)

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.—ACTS xiv. 22.

CREATION and redemption have one and the same Author, and between the works of nature and the works of grace there is a remarkable correspondence and resemblance. As in the world of nature God not only creates beings, but sustains them; and in the economy of His providence “opens His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing; for the eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season;” so it is in the world of grace. Christians are new creatures, and those new creatures have new wants and new desires, and can no more live independent of God than any other creature;

yea, the nobler and more elevated any being is, the more does it depend on the Divine agency. Our Saviour says, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Hence we read of "the provisions of His home." Hence God hath appointed the Sabbath and the sanctuary, and established the means and ordinances of religion, especially the preaching of the everlasting gospel. The first design of the Christian ministry, unquestionably, is the conversion of sinners. The commission addressed to Saul of Tarsus is addressed to every servant of the Most High: "I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." But this is not the only design; ministers are not only to plant, but to water; not only to lay the foundation, but to rear the superstructure; they are to "bring up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" the children they have begotten in the Lord. Paul

231

therefore sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to comfort them concerning their faith. When Apollos visited the believers in Achaia, "he helped them much who had believed through grace." And here we find that Paul and Barnabas departed to Derbe, "and when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and Iconium, confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." So then they did three things, which we are going to review. They confirmed, they exhorted, they forewarned. They confirmed the souls of the disciples; they exhorted them to continue in the faith; and they foretold that they "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

From hence the Church of Rome derives the sacrament of confirmation; and hence another Church has a confirmation, in which a bishop in lawn sleeves,—a true successor of the apostles, who got their living by fishing and tent-making,—lays his hand on the head of a number, principally of boys and girls, reminding them of their regeneration, and now discharging their sponsors from an obligation which perhaps never gave them much anxiety, tells them they must take those vows upon

themselves, and henceforth fight, not by proxy, but in their own person, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, unto their lives' end.

But we have to do with a very different confirmation, a spiritual confirmation. Who were those the apostles confirmed? They were the disciples, and these were real Christians, for a disciple signifies a scholar, a learner, a pupil, one who professes to receive his instructions from another, adheres to him for this purpose, and calls himself by his name. Thus we read of the disciples of Socrates and others. Christians are the disciples of Christ, and as far as we are true disciples, we are bound to regard no authority but His as binding. I mean, remember this, in matters of conscience and religion.

Nothing would be more wrong than to call yourselves by the names of men who only stand on a level with ourselves, who derive all their information from a book which we have as well as they. And yet we read of Calvinists, who derive their name from Calvin; of Arminians, who derive their name from Arminius; and of Baxterians, from Baxter. Why if I called myself by any human name, I would go a little farther back at once, and would call myself after the name of some inspired person; I would call myself a Judite, from Jude; or a Johnite, from

232

John; or a Paulite, from Paul. But no; a voice is heard, saying, "Call no man master on earth, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

The demoniac, after he had been dispossessed, was seen "clothed, and in his right mind," sitting at the feet of Jesus. This was Mary's place; and this is the place which is desired by all real Christians. They sit at His feet, they receive His words, and by His Spirit are led into all truth. Oh, the honour and the privilege of being under His tuition! But all His children are taught of the Lord. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; the queen of Sheba came from a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon; "but a greater than Solomon is here," and none like Him. Here is One "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of wisdom and knowledge;" One who is patient in long-suffering; One whose words are spirit

and life; One who can give the life as well as the lesson, eyes as well as sight, and ears as well as sound.

In many instances Solomon's remark is true, "In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But here wisdom is combined with blessedness: "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted;" and He Himself has proclaimed, "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life"—life spiritual, life eternal, life more abundantly.

I. Observe THE ACTION. He "confirmed the souls of the disciples."

They therefore *needed* confirmation. "Yes," you say, "for they were but young, who had but lately received the knowledge of the truth; and such, like little children, stand in need of much attention, kindness, and care. A little impediment would be enough to throw them down; they are easily imposed upon; they are perplexed with doubts and fears. The falls of professors scandalise them; the divisions that prevail amongst good men confound them; they are often ready to halt, and their sorrow is continually before them. Therefore the kindness of the Saviour to such is represented as 'feeding His flock like a shepherd, and carrying them,' not like another shepherd, on His shoulder, but 'in His bosom.' He taught His hearers as they were able to bear it. He said unto His

233

disciples, 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' So far was He from breaking the bruised reed, or quenching the smoking flax, or despising the day of small things, that He told His disciples not only to feed His sheep, but to feed His lambs. So Paul told the Hebrews to 'make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed;' to 'comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak.'"

Now this is all true, but do not older disciples need confirmation too? Have they a better opinion of themselves than they

had some years ago? Have they less sense of their guilt, of their depravity, and of their weakness? Who has made such advances in the divine life as Paul did? yet Paul says, "I have not already attained; I am not already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." And is there a Christian here but feels, if "the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak"? Who, if he can say, "To will is present with me," yet has to confess, "How to perform that which is good I know not. I find a war in my members, that when I would do good, evil is present with me"? Yes, there is something defective in every part of the Christian character; there are imperfections in the exercise of every grace, and in the performance of every duty. Hear, therefore, what David says: "Thou didst send a gracious rain, by which Thou didst confirm thine inheritance when it was weary." We should have thought he would have said "refreshed;" but have you never been in a garden on a summer day, and under a summer sun? Have you not observed the plants and flowers, how the leaves droop, and seem ready to fade away? but after a shower how have they revived, and then you have seen they were not only refreshed, but confirmed and strengthened, and seemed to begin to grow afresh. Hear Isaiah: "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." When the body is disordered and full of infirmities, the hands hang down, and the knees tremble; but let the man's health be renewed, and the weak hands and the feeble knees are confirmed and prepared, the one for working and the other for walking.

II. Let us pass from the confirmation to THE EXHORTATION.

"They exhorted them to continue in the faith."

We may consider this in one view, perhaps, as a continuation of the former, or as reminding us of one way in which this confirmation may be accomplished. God Himself indeed can only efficiently confirm the souls of His people. Therefore Paul

234

says to the Corinthians, speaking of God, "Who shall also confirm you to the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of God." Therefore Peter says also, "Now the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make

you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” But then God is pleased to employ means, and His perfections are much more developed and displayed by His using means than by His operating without them. It is true that they were confirmed by their prayers and example, but it is done principally by instruction, admonition, and exhortation.

Let us turn to a few passages of Scripture in confirmation of this.

But let us inquire, first, whether this exhortation to continue in the faith implies a belief that they could really fall from it. We are persuaded they did not thus believe. Did he believe that they could really fall away from it, who said to the Philippians, “We are *confident* of this very thing, that He who hath begun the good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”? Did he believe this, who said, “In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”? And we hope we are fully persuaded of the same thing. David said, “A good man’s steps are ordered of the Lord, and He delighteth in his way: though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.” The Christian may therefore say with the Church to his insulting adversary, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me.” But though we allow that we may not fall *from* the way everlasting, we may fall *in* it. Though they cannot become apostates, they may become backsliders, and so injure themselves, and injure others too, and prove a distress to the strong, and a stumbling-block to the weak, a grief to God’s ministers, a triumph to His enemies, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of; “therefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” “Blessed is the man that feareth always.” “Be not high-minded, but fear.” Besides, the certainty of the end does not supersede the use of the means: so far from it, we see that though Paul believed

God, who assured him that not one on board should perish, yet when he saw the men endeavouring to loose away from the

235

ship, he made no scruple to say, "If these abide not in the ship ye cannot be saved." Yea, the certainty of the end does not only not supersede the use of the means, but insures it; and as our old divines quaintly express it, "We do not plead for perseverance without persevering." We never say man may cease to love God and yet be safe, but that he never will be allowed to cease to love God. We never say that if a Christian departs from God he will yet be saved, but we say he never will be allowed to depart entirely from God. We say, to use His own language, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that they shall not depart from me."

Then how are we to understand this exhortation of Paul and Barnabas? "exhorting them to continue in the faith." There is the doctrine of faith, and the grace of faith. They exhorted them in the belief of faith as a *doctrine*. They exhorted them to strive together for the faith of the gospel, and to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." They said to them, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace;" and they said to them, "Be no more children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." They would tell them to guard against everything that tended to shew that error was harmless, for in proportion as error is harmless, truth must be worthless. But they knew that truth was of infinite importance, therefore they said, "Buy the truth at any price, and sell it not for any offer."

This holds true peculiarly with regard to some doctrines, for all doctrines are not equally important. A man may lose an arm, or leg, or eye, and live still; but he cannot live without his head, or heart, or lungs. There are doctrines of such vital importance that wherever they are either denied, or slurred, or withholden, that Church will soon become unevangelical, and *Ichabod*, "the glory is departed," may be written on the doors of the place. Therefore John says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He

that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”

Secondly, they exhorted them to continue in the exercise of the *grace* of faith. The grace of faith is of unspeakable moment. It is by faith we stand. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;” and we are “filled with all joy and peace in believing.” From hence, how necessary it appears, not only to have the principle of faith in

236

existence, but to have it also in exercise. You need not wonder that the disciples should say, “Lord, increase our faith.” This exercise is necessary in every condition, and in every period of the Christian life. In Peter’s case there was a failure in the exercise of faith, not in the principle, being overcome momentarily by unbelief. Our Saviour considered his recovery a kind of conversion: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

Thirdly, they also exhorted them to continue in the *profession* of faith. You are not only to be Christians, but to appear so. You are not only to believe with the heart, but confess with the mouth. You are required not only to hold fast the reality of your faith, but the profession of it also. You are not to do your good works to be seen of men, yet you are not to object to their seeing them. You are not to take “a candle and put it under a bushel, but to set it on a table, that it may give light to all that are in the house;” and so, says the Saviour, “men may by your good works which they behold glorify your Father which is in heaven.” If you believe the gospel to be true, if you believe it to be important and interesting to you, never be backward, never be ashamed of the Saviour, or of His words. Rise up for Him; stand on His side; avow yourself to be the Lord’s; leave your reputation, as you do everything else, with God; and if you are called to suffer shame and reproach for His name, remember it is the only way in which you can shew your love to Him, in a way of suffering; and remember, too, if you suffer for Him, the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

III. THEY FOREWARNED THEM, saying, “that through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom of God.”

If this was designed to add to the confirmation and exhortation already given, you may think it very strange, and suppose that it would make them tremble, and feel discouraged, instead of confirming and strengthening them. Observe, therefore, in answer, three remarks, which will serve to display the wisdom of Paul and Barnabas in “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith,” and in adding that “through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom of God.”

First, “to be forewarned is to be forearmed.” The Saviour exhorted His disciples to look forward. He exhorted them to “sit down,”—they were not to think of the case cursorily,—to sit down, and reflect upon the thing coolly; to sit down and, before they undertook the building, to “count the cost,” and

237

before they undertook the war to reflect whether they could meet the force of the foe, whether with ten thousand they could meet an adversary that cometh with twenty thousand. This was our Saviour’s method. He would not have you enter His service in a mistake. When a young man said, “Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,” He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” And He said to the sons of Zebedee, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? Can you bear all these privations and difficulties?” Thus it was our Lord’s followers drew back from time to time,—those who went after Him for the loaves and fishes; but as to those who came to Him for His own sake and service, and under a real attachment, though He told them such things, they were not driven back, they still adhered to Him, and were willing to follow Him whithersoever He went. When we are forewarned of things we become prepared for them, and, instead of being discouragements, they are way-marks, so that the man can say, “I believe I am right; I was foretold that there would be a slough of Despond; I was foretold there would be a hill Difficulty, with the lions at the top, and here it is; I was foretold there would be a Valley of the Shadow of Death, and here is its dark-

ness, danger, and horrors; I believe, therefore, I am right; I believe I am in the way everlasting, that I am going “forth by the footsteps of the flock.”

Then, being forewarned of these difficulties and trials, we are sent to a throne of grace; we are induced to pray, and prayer brings us all the resources we want, and—

“Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

When we are weak, then are we strong.

Thus we can see the wisdom of the Apostle in adding forewarning to the confirmation and exhortation.

But let us see what this premonition really announces. In general terms it tells us, the way to heaven is a way of difficulties and trials. The path is not velvet, nor is it on carpet, or grass even, or we should not have needed the promise, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy day so shall thy strength be.” This premonition tells us that—

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown:

238

No traveller e'er reached that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briars on his road,”

Or, in the language of Paul, “What son is he whom the father chasteneth not? If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

“Bastards may escape the rod,
Sunk in earthly vain delight,
But the true-born child of God
Must not, would not if he might.”

We, however, conceive that there are three things announced in this premonition, “that through *much* tribulation they must enter the kingdom.” The first is, that the trials awaiting them may be great. “*Much* tribulation,” that is, they may have trials, not only great, but repeated; “the clouds return after the rain;” not only trials of one kind, but of various kinds. They may have trials, not only personal, but relative; not only visible, but invisible, and the heart's bitterness known only to

oneself; not only real, but imaginary. Oh, what do some with shattered nerves and broken spirits and morbid tendencies endure! They love the Saviour, they glory in His cross, they desire to be conformed in all things to His will; why should persons possessing such evidences as these write bitter things against themselves, and draw conclusions that their "heart is not right in the sight of God"? There is no reason why they should, but the reason why they do is told by the change in the weather, by the state of the blood, and of the bile.

The second is, these trials are inevitable: "And that through much tribulation they *must* enter the kingdom." Why *must*? Because sin has sown the seeds of sorrow in every heart; because the world through which they pass will always be a foe. And if we view the subject morally, then says the Apostle, "If needs be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." And where is the Christian who does not need trial? Where is the vine that does not need pruning? Where is the fallow ground that does not need the ploughshare? Where is the gold or silver ore that does not need the furnace? Trials, therefore, are indispensable. "They are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ," and a suffering Head must have afflicted members. Trials are of much importance, too; too valuable, too useful for Christians to be ever dispensed with.

" God in Israel sows the seeds
Of affliction, pain, and toil,

239

These spring up and choke the weeds,
Which would else o'erspread the soil.

"Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to His feet.
Lay me low, and keep me there."

The third is, the issue of them is most blessed and glorious: "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." In accordance with the promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee," God's people often have to pass

through the waters, yea, through the floods and the flames; but then there are three things that encourage them: they are not alone there, God is with them; they are not injured there, they are not overwhelmed, they are not burnt; and they do not remain there, but they pass through, they even walk through, and they say with the Church, "We went through fire and through water, and Thou broughtest us into a wealthy place." So will it be with you, Christians; you are now in the wilderness, but are going to the "land flowing with milk and honey." David had to go through much tribulation to reach his kingdom, and sometimes was cast down. He tells us he "had fainted unless he had believed."

And what is this kingdom to which the Apostle here refers? Paul does not call it anything but the kingdom of God. It was the kingdom of God as to its author, prepared for the believer from before the foundation of the world. They knew this would be the issue of the whole; and we do not wonder that Christians should be supported under trials; we do not wonder that Paul should say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." We do not wonder that he should say to the Corinthians, "Those light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for you a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Blessed Jesus, Thou hast not only said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," but, "In me ye shall have peace." And He has also said, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Now let us turn the medal. Think of Satan. He blinds the minds of them that believe him, and deceives by false promises, and by raising expectations which shall never be realised. There is a kingdom, but he tries to hide it. He knows there is an awful futurity, but he tries to delude men by things present.

240

But the Scripture tells us, "There will be bitterness in the end." He is "the god of *this* world," and deals deceitfully with his votaries, as Jael did with Sisera, who "brought forth milk and butter in a lordly dish," and lays these down and lulls them to sleep, but conceals the hammer and the nail. But

these things will not be concealed always: "The end of these things is death;" and not only so, but, "the way of transgressors is hard." Yes, and the pleasures of sin are but for a season; they, too, have their vexations and disappointments, and what have they after these? They leave a stain upon the mind, and a sting upon the conscience. Hence they often sink in the day of adversity, and all their present trials and difficulties are but the beginning of sorrows, and the introduction to mourning, lamentation, and woe. But as yet there is a hope.

"You may His mercy know:
Though His hand be lifted up,
He still forbears the blow.

"'Twas for sinners Jesus died;
Sinners He invites to come;
None who come will be denied;
He says, There yet is room."

 241

XXV. PAUL IN ROME.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, September 15th, 1844.)

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came out unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.—ACTS xxviii. 30, 31.

THE Apostle Paul had an anxious desire to see Rome, but little did he think how his wish was to be accomplished, for he went not as a traveller, but as a criminal. In this chapter we see him leaving Melita, touching at Appii Forum, and going towards Rome. We read of the brethren, many of whom came to "his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening."

Thus have we seen his entrance into the imperial city, and his introduction to his countrymen, and what more? Why this, “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

In looking over these words we shall see six sources of remark, which will all furnish reflections, “for doctrine, for reproof, and for instruction in righteousness.”

I. We see Paul in a place of privacy; not in close custody, but intrusted to a soldier who took care of him.

But it should seem strange that such a man as Paul the aged should be thus confined. Why, what evil hath he done? We see nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Ah, brethren, we must not judge of persons now by their external conditions

R

242

and circumstances. *Who* was born in a stable? *Who* had not where to lay His head? *Who* was despised and rejected of men? And *who* at last died between two thieves? The image of the invisible God, the maker of all things! With regard to our own country, at one time some of the best characters would have been found in exile, or in a prison. In the parable the rich man who “was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day,” was the heir of hell, where he was very soon found; while Lazarus, who was the friend of God, was a beggar full of sores at the rich man’s gates. And now here is Paul, the first man upon earth for graces, gifts, and usefulness; yet we find him reviled, persecuted, and suffering as an evil-doer, even unto bonds.

II. Learn, if ever you suffer, it should be your concern to suffer as Paul did. He suffered *as* an evil-doer, but he was not really so. No, he could say, in his measure and degree, as his Saviour had before him, “Which of you convinceth me of sin? If I have done anything worthy of death I refuse not to die.”

You should remember, dear brethren, that Satan has his sufferers as well as the Saviour. Yes, and “the way of transgressors is hard.” Many now bring themselves into sad con-

ditions, to whom it may be said, "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."

In order that you may be the Lord's sufferers, it must be for well-doing, or for righteousness' sake; you must suffer for moral, nay, for prudent conduct also. Ah, says Peter, it "is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." Again says he, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

III. Observe here the length of his confinement: "two whole years." This is mentioned as if with an emphasis. This was a long time. How tedious does time seem to some of you when called to suffer from personal or domestic disease for a few hours! how long does a week appear! a month!

243

Paul was very familiar with prisons, therefore says he, "In prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." He was imprisoned two whole years at Cæsarea, and now at Rome. Here, then, were four years of his precious life in which he was deprived of his liberty, and we are ready to lament this, because he was so unjustly prevented from doing good, for verily, how would he have travelled to publish the glad tidings of salvation! How would he have fled like an angel to preach the everlasting gospel to those that dwell on the earth! How many might he have been the means of converting! How many Churches might he have established or visited! But where are we now? Let us remember that the cause of Christianity is nearer to Christ than to any of His servants who tremble for the ark of God, and that "*He* who has all power in heaven and in earth" had

reasons very satisfactory to Himself in permitting this, and will be satisfactory to us when they are developed.

But He will shew us that He was not dependent on any instrument, however eminent or qualified they may be. He could say, "My servant Moses, who conducted the Jews forty years in the wilderness, shall not lead them into the promised land." He said, "Let Paul suffer two years in one place, and two years in another, *as an evil-doer*; but the word of God is not bound." You cannot restrain the progress of God's word, nay more, this has "turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." It seems like the stepping back of a giant when going to strike, that he may gain a peculiar advantage.

We are often mistaken when we suppose that publicity is necessary for usefulness. Why out of the thirty-three years of our Saviour's life, thirty of them were passed in obscurity, and only three in public ministry. Take the private Christian when by infirmity or disease he has been laid aside from public services, we have sometimes supposed he was going to be superannuated, when perhaps he was approaching the most useful period in his whole life. Nothing is so impressive as the passive graces, nothing seems to strike us like them. Here you may mourn, but not murmur; there you may desire deliverance, and yet in patience possess your souls. The Psalmist says, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;" while sense says, "Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort." God can sustain you when every prop is withdrawn, He can cheer you when every other source of consolation is dried up. "*All things*," says the Apostle, "work together for good to them that love God," and not only for the sufferer's good, but

R 2

244

for the good of others. How thankful have you often. felt that the wretches confined John Bunyan in prison for so many years: but for this we should never have had his "Holy War" and "Pilgrim's Progress." Do you not think Bunyan is blessing God that this was the case? And have you not been thankful that the Nonconformists were imprisoned? They were men of whom the world was unworthy; some of their best

works, such as “Alleine’s Alarm,” and so on, were written while they were in prison.

Why should you lament that the Apostle was imprisoned so long? Why he was not unhappy. “I take pleasure,” says he, “in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” Hear his language: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

The Apostle says, “For the which cause I also suffer these things.” “You see,” says the unbeliever, “to what your religion has brought you at last!” “O yes,” says he, “nevertheless I am not ashamed!” “Ah, but are you not deprived of your freedom?” “My body is, but my soul ranges at large, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him—against that day.”

And was he useless in this state? He was peculiarly useful. Before him stood a Roman governor who trembled, and a king who was almost persuaded to be a Christian; and if we come to the “two whole years” through which he was imprisoned at Rome, hear what he tells the Philippians: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.”

IV. His residence: he “dwelt two whole years in his own hired house.” Everything connected with the Apostle wins upon the attention. Where now, we might ask, is this residence? and what now is Rome, once the mistress of the world? and where is Cæsarea, where the Apostle was also imprisoned? We might make the same inquiry with regard to other places that we read of in Scripture that we might have liked to have visited. There are places in our own country that we might like to visit. Whoever goes to Cambridge without seeing the mulberry tree Milton planted, aged as it is now, and surrounded with hoops? With what feelings do we visit the study at Olney, where Cowper

245

spent so much of his life! When my grandson was going to Rome, I said, Be sure you find out Paul's lodgings; but the truth is, where Popery prevails we cannot depend upon anything, on account of its lying wonders and deceiveableness.

Paul mentions Gaius as being his host, and you may be sure he was no loser. At another time we find him in the house of Priscilla and Aquila.

He frequently desired that lodgings might be provided for him against he came. Oh, there is an independency of spirit as remote from pride as it is from meanness! and the Apostle possessed this.

We read of his dwelling in "his own hired house." How came he with such an accommodation? He had no possessions of his own. You talk of what your religion has cost you. "For His sake," says Paul, "I have suffered the loss of all things;" and in his epistles how often does he mention his privations, and his occasional straits. This seems to be the meaning when he refers to his "nakedness," because we may suppose he had on a thread-worn garment, which he would rather appear in than run in debt for a fine one, when persuaded he would never be able to pay for it. So when he speaks of his "fastings:" he would not speak of his religious fastings, not he, but of his actual want. How came he "in his own hired house?" Did he labour again at his own craft? This would have been no disgrace to him; no, if he had stretched out his hardy hands it would have been more to his credit than if he had exposed his dandy fingers with rings upon them. Our Saviour had friends, yes, female friends who ministered unto Him, and these ought to be had in everlasting remembrance. These were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. We also read of others whose names are not mentioned, but who are in the book of life. So it might have been here: some of Paul's friends had been kind enough to procure lodgings for him, and generously paid the rent; and as he was not fond of self-indulgence, so was he not carried away with the pride of life; he desired nothing more than a plain apartment and common furniture.

You may here be reminded of that excellent woman, the Shunamite, what she did for another good man: she built not a palace, but what was necessary for a man of God; and so she said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick." It is

246

lamentable that there should be so much property wasted, so much extravagance, while these same persons talk of their inability to do anything for the cause of Christ when called upon. How much might they do were they to exercise self-denial, that first lesson in the Christian school, without denying themselves any earthly good!

V. Remark his courteousness: he "received all that came in unto him," whether from good motives or otherwise. But we should hope there were none mean enough to sponge upon him in such a state.

Men of mind and of learning like Paul are fond of reading and reflection, and therefore love retirement, but they are sometimes very much tried by gossipers and loungers, who, having nothing to do themselves, can come and discharge an hour's idleness upon them. When some one had been gossiping for some length of time with poor Baxter, he said, "I fear I have been intruding too much upon your time." "To be sure you have," said Baxter; for he would rather a person had robbed him of a silver spoon than of a golden hour.

We are not told who these were, or for what purpose they "came in unto him." But we read in the twenty-third verse, that "when they had appointed a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." Of these, it is probable some came to dispute; others with a desire of information, inquiring, "What must I do to be saved?" others with cases of conscience; some came from mere curiosity to see this extraordinary man, and this perhaps in some cases was attended with the blessing of

God; some for consolation, and he “strengthened the weak hands and confirmed the feeble knees.” Many also of his own acquaintance came to enjoy communion with him; and I suppose some of you would have made him a call or two had you been there. Oh, to have heard him talk! to have heard him expound the Scriptures of truth! and to have heard him pray. Some if they had called would have had all the talk entirely to themselves, for neither Paul nor an angel would have induced them to be “slow to speak.”

We are acquainted with some of the names of those who came in unto him. The first of these was Onesiphorus, of whom the Apostle speaks so highly: “But the Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me,

247

and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me,” for persons could not be found so easily then as at this time. “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.”

The second person we read of was Epaphroditus. He came with a present which the Philippians had prepared and sent to Paul. He exposed himself on his journey, fell sick, and was nigh unto death; and when he returned the Apostle sent by him the Epistle to the Philippians. What a reward had they for their kindness! What a pleasure must those good people at Philippi have felt in having relieved such a character as this! to hear such language as the following: “I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.” “You shall be no losers,” says he, “by it; but my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” It is owing to the kindness of these people that we have this incomparable Epistle to the Philippians.

And then there is another person: Onesimus, a slave and a villain. He had robbed his master; and in order to avoid detection he fled to Rome; and there he” heard of Paul, of whom he had heard his master speak. Well, he called, and the word spoken by Paul was “quick and powerful.” Paul

inquires, "Who are you?" He replies, "I am Onesimus." "Were you with my old friend Philemon?" "Yes, sir." "But what brought you here?" "Shame and remorse, but I fled here for safety." So after Paul had kept him under his eye for a while, to see if his conversion were real, he sent him back, saying, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds, which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." Oh, the overruling providence of God! "Perhaps he departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever: not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

There was another person, and this was Timothy. "I greatly desired," says he, "to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy." Again he says, "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed into Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only

248

Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." What an intercourse must there have been between Paul and Timothy, his own son in the faith.

Well, these were some who came in unto him while he "dwelt two whole years in his own hired house."

Consider, lastly, his employment. He was not idle while there. He not only wrote many epistles to the Churches, and not only conversed with all those who came in unto him, but we are told of his "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

Preaching and teaching, these should always go together; but how often are they found apart! What, preaching in an unconsecrated place? Yes. What holiness is there in mortar and timber? "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands:" as saith the prophet. "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or

what is the place of my rest?" "To that man will I look, who is humble and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

A few years ago a noted man preached abroad to crowds in Wales. The bishop sent and reprov'd him, saying, "You must never preach but in consecrated places." "My lord," said he, "I never do; when Christ descended and set His foot on our earth, He took possession of the whole, and I preach wherever I find an audience to hear me."

What did the Apostle preach? He preached "the kingdom of God"—His reign in grace; that kingdom of which the Scriptures often speak. Daniel spoke of it, and said, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed;" and he represented it by a stone cut out of the mountain Without hands. Concerning this kingdom, our Saviour witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, saying, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." And when questioned when the kingdom should come, He answered, "The kingdom of God cometh not by observation: neither shall they say, lo, there! or, lo here! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

249

Paul, when preaching to the Romans, said, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is in word, but in heart. It is a kingdom which shall become general without disruption of the present system. It shall spread till it has filled the whole earth as the waters cover the seas.

"And teaching." And what did He teach? "The things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ"—concerning His person and character, His death and resurrection, His sufferings and His glory, testifying that he that believeth on Him hath everlasting life.

Observe the manner in which he performed this: "with all confidence, no man forbidding him." You may notice his

mode of address; it was with the assurance of the truth of what he delivered. His conversion had been very miraculous. No one could question this. And he had the witness in himself, for he could say, "I know in whom I have believed." This is the thing for which he begged the Ephesians to pray: "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak"—as one who knows that his conscience and truth are on his side. It is well for ministers to feel this, to feel raised above all fear and shame, and to say—

"Happy, O Lord, if *Thou* approve,
Though all beside condemn."

Thus it was with God's servants of old. "I will speak also of Thy testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed." Daniel addressed Nebuchadnezzar as if he had been a common man: "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor: if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." Nero had put to death his own preceptor, had destroyed many Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, and yet we see that God can restrain the passions and lusts of men, and make them the means of accomplishing His own purposes. So David says, "The wrath of man shall praise Thee, O Lord; and the remainder of wrath wilt Thou restrain." Thus one day I saw the owner of a mill draw the hatch, and let as much water as the grinding of the corn required, and then he let down the hatch, and the remainder of the water he restrained.

This calls upon us to look back and consider the days of our forefathers. How many excellent men were put in prison for

250

the truth's sake! They were unable to meet together, except in holes and corners of the earth, while we sit under our own vines and fig-trees, none daring to make us afraid. Let us acknowledge the hand of God in all this. You come together as you please, and we can speak the word of God without fear. Some of you have long and often heard concerning the kingdom of God, "and of the things of the Lord Jesus Christ."

How have you received it? Have you been induced to live to the glory of God? and constrained to say, "Lord, save me! Other lords have had dominion over me, but henceforth I will be governed by Thee only." God grant that this may be the case with each of us.

251

XXVI. RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, July 1st, 1850.)

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.—

ROMANS v. 10.

OUR subject is peculiarly copious and extensive; and this morning in addition to the preaching of the word we have the administration of the Lord's Supper. I will therefore immediately commend three things to your candid, prayerful, and serious attention. The first regards the believer's reconciliation; the second regards his salvation; and the third regards his confirmation—his reconciliation to God by the death of His Son, his salvation by His life, and his confirmation by the inference drawn from the one to the other, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

I. Observe THE BELIEVER'S RECONCILIATION.

"When we were enemies, we were reconciled by the death of His Son."

Here we have the previous character of the partakers of this benefit; they "were enemies to God." This indeed is fully implied in the word "reconciliation." But the change is expressly mentioned: "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." This, my brethren, all those who are convinced of sin will readily allow to have been their former character, for they are willing to look to the rock whence

they were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence they were digged, and to confess that by nature they were children of wrath, even as others. But it is no easy thing to induce men to

252

acknowledge this. They may indeed acknowledge that they have some imperfections and infirmities; they may indeed acknowledge, in the language of the formula of public worship, "We have left undone the things we ought to have done, and done the things we ought not to have done;" but when they add, "There is no health in us," they do not believe it, nor can they be persuaded, however defective they may have been, that they are "enemies to God." Enemies to God! Why who can be an enemy to God? If they can be prevailed to suppose that God will not be severe to punish what they have done amiss, and after a life of irreligion they will be admitted to heaven, He is too much like themselves to awaken their resentment. But this is not the God of the Bible. "In Him there is no darkness at all," and "He is angry with the wicked every day; "and you know" the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Let us look at this inestimable boon itself—reconciliation to God. There is something very pleasing in the very word, and there are but very few who do not know the value of it, for "it must needs be that offences come," and who has not tasted the bitterness of alienation and estrangement? who has not enjoyed the deliciousness of renewed exercises and habits of friendship? It is wonderful that any who have the least regard for their welfare and their enjoyment should ever repulse offers of reconciliation, and live in the wretchedness of hatred and strife. "I am for peace," said David. How delicious is national peace, when those who before were at variance, and would destroy one another, shall beat their spears into ploughshares, and their swords into pruning-hooks! How delicious is domestic peace! "How pleasant and lovely is it for brethren to dwell together in unity," and—

"When mutual care to serve and please
Through all their actions run."

How delightful is ecclesiastical peace, when all the members of a Church walk together in love, and are striving together for the faith once delivered to the saints; when the beautiful admonition of the Apostle is carried out, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

253

"'Tis like the oil divinely sweet,
On Aaron's reverend head;
The trickling drops perfumed his feet,
And o'er his garments spread.

"'Tis pleasant as the morning dews
That fall on Zion's hill,
Where God His mildest glory shews,
And makes His grace distil."

But the blessing of reconciliation must be judged of by the Being whom we have offended and provoked. Now it is with God we have principally to do. In Him we live and move, and have our being; in Him our breath is, and in Him are all our ways. Who knoweth the power of His anger? If the wrath of a king is so terrible, what must be the wrath of God, the mighty God, the Almighty God, whose eye you cannot escape, and whose arm you cannot resist? For "have you an arm like God? and can you thunder with a voice like Him?" or "would you provoke the Lord to jealousy? are you stronger than He?" "Fury," says He, "fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." And oh, to know that the breach between heaven and earth is made up, that we are one with God again! Oh, to be able to exclaim with the Church, "Thou wast angry with me, but Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me." Oh, to be able to say with Paul, "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have now received the atonement!" Why then trials have no curse, and death has

no sting, and hell has no existence, and all things work together for good.

But there is another thing which shews the grandeur of this blessing, namely, that the reconciliation is *perfect and perpetual*. A breach may be so far made up as to exclude hostility. Absalom was allowed to live three years in; ertlsalem without seeing the king's face. There may be an admission of civilities and even general intercour.s.e, where there may be no admission of cordialness. But how is it here? We are accepted in the Beloved. We could not originally have been so dear to God as we now are, when we come to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, making mention of His righteousness, and sprinkled with His blood. We are not only employed in His house as servants, but adopted into His family as children, and allowed to call God our Father. And as He forgives, so He forgets too, and says,

254

“Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” No, the breach can never be re-opened; the peace can never be disturbed; the intercourse can never be interrupted; and He

“Has fixed our standing more secure
Than ’twas before we fell.”

“Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But we are to notice not only the nature of this reconciliation, but the *medium* of it. “We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” “He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.” We escape, but *He* suffered; and He once “suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” But how can this be? You know there are some who deny the vicariousness of the sufferings of Christ, or that they are substitutional. But upon their principles it seems

hard to account for His sufferings at all. According to their principles, He died not for others' sins, and we know He could not for His own, for He did no sin, and He had no sin to suffer for; so upon this ground He suffered in every respect as innocent; and if this were true, we may well ask, Where is the God of judgment? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. Why is He thus laying on Him the iniquity of us all? making Him to be sin for us who knew no sin? "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Why, if our tears, or repentance, or alms could have made reconciliation with God, He never would have been pleased to bruise His only begotten Son, and put Him to death; and if in His sacrifice God did nothing needlessly or in vain,—and the supposition would be blasphemy,—then there must have been a propriety, there must have been a

255

necessity in the great transaction. So the Apostle affirms, "It *became* Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings." People talk of making their peace with God: why, if it be not made, it never will be made. But it *is* made, and Jesus Christ came into the world not to proclaim peace, but to procure it. He made peace "by the blood of His cross." Thus, my brethren, your reconciliation is made in a way that is as honourable to God as it is safe to us; while He forgives Jacob, He glorifies Himself in Israel; while He pardons the transgressor, He condemns sin in the flesh. The just God appears a Saviour, and glory to God in the highest blends with peace on earth and good will towards men.

Now this blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, having spoken to the justice of God, and satisfied it, speaks to the conscience of the sinner, and gives it quiet and peace. Thus have we boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of Christ; and in pleading for

our forgiveness and reconciliation we do not in the least degrade His own law; that law is magnified, and made honourable; we do not ask God to deny His truth and righteousness, for “mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

“Oh, the sweet wonders of that cross
On which the Saviour groaned and died;
My highest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my Lord:
All the vain charms that please me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.”

II. Observe THE BELIEVER’S SALVATION.

We are “saved by His life.”

But are we not saved, then, by Christ when we are reconciled to God? Surely not. We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, but we are “saved by His life.” The one regards God, the other regards ourselves. But did not He exclaim when He expired, “It is finished”? He did; and it was finished, and nothing can ever be added to it. But *what* was finished? It was the work of redemption, or the procuring of the thing; not the work of salvation, or the applying of the thing. The case is this. We were guilty, and by the death of God’s Son expiation was made for our offences. He put away

256

sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and thus removed every hindrance on God’s side to our return to Him. We are made nigh by the death of His Son. Yet we are not actually saved till we receive Christ Jesus the Lord, and are found in Him. We are saved by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. We are saved by an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His “own purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Indeed as to the commencement of the work, and the certainty of the issue, Christians are said to be saved already. “By grace,” says the Apostle, “are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” But

as to the actual consummation of their salvation, they are not saved, and they cannot be thus saved, till death is swallowed up in victory; and therefore, says the Apostle, “we not only have our conversation in heaven, but we are looking for the Saviour,”—the *Saviour*, you observe,—“the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that He may fashion it according to His own glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” And again he says, “To them that look for Him will He appear a second time, without sin unto salvation,” to their complete and eternal triumph and deliverance.

This work of salvation is a gradual work carried on through the whole of the Christian’s life on earth. We go from strength to strength, and in the Divine image we are “renewed day by day,” by heavenly agency, and are “changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” There is “first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear.” The Christian carries about with him a body of sin and death; the Christian is now in a vale of tears, and in a world lying in the wicked one; he is surrounded by a thousand temptations to evil; he has fightings without and fears within, feeling a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, complaining that when he would do good evil is present with him, and that how to perform that which is good he finds not, having vain thoughts, though he hates them, and often not able to attend upon God without distraction. Is this all his salvation and all his desire? is this all the Saviour promised to him? is this all the Saviour purchased for him? Oh, no! “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” No! “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” No! He will

257

make us “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” No! He will keep us from falling, and will present us “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” No! in our flesh shall we see God, and we shall hear the Judge of all proclaim, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit

the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

You will observe how this salvation is achieved: “We are saved by His life.” His “*life*” means His mediatorial life; that life in which He is now living in our nature in heaven, and which He resumed when He both rose, and revived, and became the Lord both of dead and living. This is what He referred to when He said to His disciples, “Because I live ye shall live also;” and His meaning when He addressed John in exile, “I am He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.” Had He not risen from the dead, our hopes would have perished in the same grave. Then our preaching would have been vain, and your faith also would have been vain. “But we are begotten again,” says the Apostle, “to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation.” Everything that concerns their salvation is now to be viewed in connection with His life. He is now making intercession for us. He is a living Saviour, ascended up on high, “having led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them.” It is as a living Saviour that He received the whole dispensation of the Spirit in His miraculous agency, and in His ordinary influences to the end of time. “Therefore,” Peter said to the Jews, “being exalted to the Tight hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.” It is as a living Saviour “it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and out of His fulness have all we received grace for grace.”

From hence you should learn to dwell more upon the present life of Christ. Christians love to hear of Christ’s death, to talk of His death; and who can wonder at it? But it would be in vain to view Him as the crucified One, unless we could view Him as the glorified One. It would be in vain to view Him as delivered for our offences, unless we could say, He is raised again for our justification. Here, according to the Apostle, is

258

the ground of our highest triumph: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, *yea rather* that is risen again, and now sitteth at the right hand of God." The question with you, therefore, Christian, should be, Where is He now? what is He now? what has He now? and what is He doing? You know that He has power given Him over all flesh; that He is Head over all things to the Church, which is His body; that He has all power in heaven and in earth; that we were reconciled to God by His death, but are saved by His life. Do you only view Him now as a glorified Saviour, as doing no more for you than the glorified saints? they are living now, and they are living unto God, but they are not living like Him. They are living in glory like private individuals; but He is the Head and representative of His people. Their intercession for us ceased with their life, but "He *ever* liveth to make intercession for us." He is living now not a life of mere glory and blessedness, but a life also of office, carrying on the cause of His people; and the Apostle tells us that He will be doing this unto the end of time, when "the kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all." Dr. Priestley was exceedingly perplexed to know where Christ now is, and what He is doing, and suggested that probably He is somewhere on this earth now, for what relation has He to any other planet? Here He was born, here He lived, and here He died; and says he, "It does seem, too, from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, as if He had something to do even now with His Church, but it is impossible to conjecture what this can be." But if it were impossible for him to conjecture what it is, there is not a Christian here, however illiterate, but could have told him that "we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous;" that "we have a great High Priest, passed into the heavens, who is now touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" that "He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, seeing He *ever liveth* to make intercession for them."

III. Observe THEIR CONFIRMATION: derived from an inference drawn from one to the other.

“For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

What can be more simple and yet more forcible than the reasons of the sacred writings? While they are adapted to the meanest capacity, they will yet bear every kind of examination.

259

For instance, take an admonition of the Saviour’s: “My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, who after that have no more that they can do. I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear Him, who after that He hath killed the body hath power to destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him.” Or take a promise: “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more worth than many sparrows.” Or take a duty. Would He persuade us from yielding to anxious and unbelieving cares for the future: “Take no thought,” says He, “for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

Observe the conclusiveness of the inference: “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” What can be more natural than for us to argue from the past to the future; from what has been done to what may be? When David was dissuaded from engaging in the duel with the giant, “Oh,” said he, “I have been in danger before now; and the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and

out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me from this uncircumcised Philistine;" and therefore he was able to say afterward, encouraged by this, "Because Thou hast been my defence, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." And says our poet—

"His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink."

How natural is it to feel the remembrance of one favour encouraging our hope of another, especially when we argue from the greater to the less; as Paul does, when he says, "He that spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all,

S 2

260

how shall He not *with Him* also freely give us all things?" My brethren, we need not wonder at God dealing with us in a way of promise. It was wonderful that God should have provided an ark for the saving of Noah and his house; but it was not wonderful, after He had provided it, that He should not suffer him to sink and go to the bottom. It is wonderful that God should have given us exceeding great and precious promises; but it is not wonderful, after He had given them, that He should fulfil the same; it would have been wonderful if He did not, for "He is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it." It is wonderful, Christians, that He should have begun a good work in you; but having begun it, it is not wonderful that He should perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, and so escape from the reproach of foolish builders, of whom it is said, "This man began to build, and is not able to finish!" What, will He who regarded you in your low estate abandon you? Will He who reconciled you by the death of His Son, when you were enemies, abandon you now you are become His friends? How reasonable was the remark of Manoah's wife, when her husband said, "We shall die!" "Oh," said she, "if the Lord had meant to destroy us, He would not have shewed us such things as these, neither would He have received an offering at our hands."

The subject thus explained is fruitful of application. We see that God has provided not only for the welfare, but the consolation of His people. He has therefore said to His ministers, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;" and Christians are exhorted to comfort one another; and the Apostle has said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

Again, think of what importance it is for Christians not only to possess a good hope through grace, but to have the full assurance of this hope. It is a good thing to have the heart established with grace. The practical importance of this knowledge is great. You see joy arising from holy confidence and assurance. How it weans' from the world! It enables us to go forth without the camp, bearing the reproach of the cross. Thus said David, "Restore unto me the joys of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit: then will I teach transgressors Thy way, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." And again, "I will run in the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart."

But the subject says also, You see how hard a matter it is for Christians to maintain and preserve this degree of confidence

261

and assurance. We may infer this from many things. Between the people of God and others, what a difference exists in this respect! They who are not convinced of sin are always inclined to presumption: they flee from one refuge of lies to another, and sport themselves with their own deceivings; whereas the people of God often yield to despondency, and think there is some speciality in their case which forbids their hope. We are told that the end of the whole of revelation is this, "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The Apostle here tells us that "God raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

Then also see the importance of the Lord Jesus, and what reason have we to exclaim with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" "He is the Hope of Israel; their Consolation and their Saviour in the time of trouble." If we are enlightened, He is our Sun.; if we are defended, He is our Refuge; if we are recovered, He is our Physician; if

we are reconciled to God, it is by His death; if we are saved, it is by His life.

Lastly, what says the subject to others? There are some here this morning, probably, who to the present time know nothing of all this by experience. We speak this to your shame, because you might have known; and not only your shame, but your sin; and it is your unhappiness. Oh, what are you losing! We feel for you; we pray for you; we pray that you may pray for yourselves, and cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" "Lord, save; or I perish." For there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. God waits to be gracious. But He will not wait always! May you therefore "seek Him while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near!" "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Oh, there are many here this morning who could rise up, if allowable, and recommend this Saviour. They could tell you that they never sought Him in vain; that they have found Him to be the help of the helpless, and the Friend of sinners. But we cannot communicate to you the knowledge we derive from our experience. But listen to us, when we say, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are all they that trust in Him." We are journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, "I will give it thee: come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

262

XXVII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE BELIEVER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, December 7th, 1851.)

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.—ROMANS vi. 22.

THE gospel contains two things equally true and interesting. First, that all men are naturally alike. We mean not physically and mentally, but morally and spiritually alike. They are not in different states, but only in different degrees of the same

state. All are fallen creatures, but displaying their guilt and depravity in diversified instances; each turning to his own way, while all like sheep are going astray. Hence the Scriptures conclude all under sin, and Christians freely acknowledge that they themselves are no exception to this mortifying universality, for they often look, but not half enough, to “the rock from whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence they were digged,” saying, “We also were children of disobedience like unto others: for we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”

But, secondly, though all are naturally alike, some are made to differ, and to differ not only from others, but from their former selves, so as to become new creatures. They were far off, they are now made nigh by the blood of Christ; they were once darkness, they are now light in the Lord. They were once thorns and briers, but now instead of the thorn is come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle tree, and it is to the Lord a name and an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off.

Such is the decision of the text, which is now waiting to lead the members of this Church to the table of the Lord, and,

263

we hope, to awaken in others the prayer, “Look Thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do to those that fear Thy name.”

“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” It is more than useless to make any other division than the words themselves readily and naturally afford. They tell us four things concerning the partakers of Divine grace. The first is their freedom from sin, the second is their consecration to the service of God, the third their present privileges, and the fourth their final blessedness. “Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.”

I. THEIR FREEDOM FROM SIN.

“Being made free from sin.”

Let us look at this and consider wherein this freedom consists, and how it is accomplished.

It does not mean that they are made free from the indwelling of sin, and that they are free from the being of sin. This *will* be the case by and by, for there is a blessed hour approaching when

“Sin, their worst enemy before,
Shall vex their eyes and ears no more;”

“When they shall see His face,
And never, never sin;”

when the very remains of sin, if sought for, shall no more be found; when there shall be no more vagrancy in their thoughts, no more darkness in their understandings, no more error in their judgments, no more perverseness in their wills, no more carnality in their affections, no more pride in their humility. They will be “presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,” as innocent as Adam in Paradise, and in their measure and degree as holy as the Son of God, for they shall be *like Him*, as well as see Him as He is.

But now, who can say, “I have made my heart clean”? who will contend that there is now an entire freedom from moral pollution? That would be to belie the language of Scripture, —to break the bruised reed, and to make sad those whom God has commanded us to make merry. The Apostle Paul had advanced perhaps further than any other in the Divine life, yet says he, “I have not attained: I am not already perfect.” “When I would do good evil is present with me.” “The good that I would I find not.” “O wretch”d man that I am I

²⁶⁴

who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And thus runs the Divine record: “There is not a just man upon *earth*, that doeth good and sinneth not.” “In many things we offend all.” Our Lord teaches us to pray for daily pardon as well as for daily bread.

But then there is a sense, and a very important sense, in which this is true, that they are made free from sin.

First, they are free from its *penal consequences*. For them eternity has no hell: Jesus hath delivered them from the wrath to come. For them the law has no curse, for Christ hath redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. Their severest trials are only the rod of a father, and not the inflictions of a judge. "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." For them there is no sting in death: the bitterness of death is past, and they hear the Saviour saying, "They shall never see death." They can sing, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is. the law; but thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So we read, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

Then they are made free from sin as to its *empire*. This is expressly determined by the Apostle in his Epistle before us: "Sin shall not have dominion over you." And he confirms this by a very convincing reason: "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." And what is grace, if it suffers sin to conquer? There is a warfare now in believers between opposite principles. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." But how disgraceful would it be if the spirit did not gain the victory! But the grace of God is sufficient to secure our standing and our perseverance to the end, however weak we are, and though in a world lying in wickedness. If you were under the law, you would find no provision made, no promise of help there, you would have to rely entirely upon your own strength, and therefore would entirely fail; but grace is almighty, as well as "preventing and free." And this grace is *for* you, Christians, as well as *with* you and *in* you. And so "in all these things you shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved you." Sin is dethroned, though it is not entirely destroyed. It may rise and rebel; it cannot reign and rule.

 265

"What though our inhred lusts rebel?
'Tis but a struggling gasp for life:

The weapons of victorious grace
Shall slay thy sins and end the strife.”

Once more, they are made free from the *love* of sin. Says Solomon, “The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil;” and the fear of the Lord is to *hate* evil, and to *hate* evil is much more than even to avoid it. Persons may leave what they do not by any means loathe, and still may be hankering after it. This was the case with the Israelites, “they turned back” in their hearts; they said, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can He give bread also? can He provide flesh for His people?” So it was with Lot’s wife; she drew her body out of Sodom, but she left her soul there; and she looked back, and became a pillar of salt.

Now try yourselves by this standard. Are there not some of you who would be glad if God would allow you to live in sin as long as you are here, and then receive you unto Himself when you die? Do you not desire to drink in iniquity as the ox drinketh in water? But this is not the case with the real Christian. No, the streams of sin are embittered to him; or, to change the metaphor, the believer at the foot of the cross vows eternal hatred to sin, and he can never be reconciled to it again; he can never love that again which killed the Lord of life and glory, who is all his salvation and all his desire.

And this aversion extends not to some sins only; not to some sins to which he has no propensity in his constitution, and no temptation from external circumstances and connections; but to his darling lusts, to those which are as dear as a right eye or a right hand. He will say with Ephraim, “What have I any more to do with idols?” or with Jesus, “Get you hence;” or with our sweet psalmist,—

“Furnish me, Lord, with heavenly arms
From Grace’s magazine;
And I’ll proclaim eternal war
With every darling sin.”

Now such is the deliverance. Thus they are made free from sin: not from its indwelling and being, but free from its empire, and free from the love of it.

But a deliverance supposes a Deliverer, and who is the Deliverer here? Who made them free? or did they make them-

266

selves free? Did creatures make them free? Did ministers, or did angels?

“The help of men and angels join’d
Can never reach my case;
Nor can I hope relief to find,
But in Thy boundless grace.”

No, it was the work of God Himself. This is not here expressly mentioned, but it is necessarily implied. It is implied in the form of the assertion itself, for it is expressed in the passive voice: “Being *made* free from sin.” We would not, however, suspend a doctrine of such moment upon a mere grammaticism. “Ye must have clear and convincing assertions, and we have them too plain to need the aid of learning or of science to decipher; for we are declared to be “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” He Himself begins the good work, and carries it on to the day of Christ.

II. Let us pass on to the second article, THEIR CONSECRATION TO THE SERVICE OF GOD.

“But now being made free from sin, *and become servants to God.*”

From whence you see that negative religion is not enough. It is not enough that you cease to do evil; you must learn to do well. It is not enough that you walk not after the flesh; you must walk after the Spirit. It is not enough that you are made free from sin; you must become the servants of Gael. A change here is always necessary; a change from service to service, from master to master. Every believer, therefore, can say with the returning Church, “O Lord, other lords have had dominion over us; but henceforth will we make mention of Thy name.”

Truly God has every claim to admiration and affection. We are His absolutely, we are His exclusively. He made us. From Him we derived our very being, and all its powers. And if God were to say to anyone of us, “Take that thine is, and go thy way,” what could we take away? Why, not one faculty

of the mind, or one sense of the body. Were He to suspend His sustaining influence, we should immediately relapse into our original nothingness. For it is He who sustains us; “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

And know you not that you are not your own in a much nobler sense still? Know you not that you are bought with a price, and that therefore you are bound to glorify God with your bodies, and with your spirits, which are His?

267

Let us notice the *nature* of this service. There is a sense in which all are God’s servants. The wicked themselves are not exempted. He calls Nebuchadnezzar His servant: “the rod of His anger, and the staff of His indignation,” by which He crushed the nations and chastised the people. “But he meant not so, neither did his heart think so.” He was like a man in a boat, rowing one way and looking another. David observes that He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and restrains the remainder of it. Thus I have seen the miller draw off the hatch, and let in as much water as the grinding requires, and then lower it again and restrain the rest. This is to serve God by an overruling Providence. But there are servants from conviction and disposition. They are made willing in the day of His power, they give up themselves to His service, and hold themselves at His disposal, asking, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

We may notice two or three things here which are not always viewed in connection with the service of God. For instance, this service is not confined to official characters. Moses and Job are called God’s servants; so is David. You do not wonder perhaps that these personages were so denominated. Ministers also are called the servants of the Most High God, who shew unto men the way of salvation. But the name itself is applicable to *all* real Christians. The highest angel in heaven is no more than a servant of God, and the poorest believer on earth is nothing less. The man of five talents can serve God as well as the man of ten. His service is not confined to persons of exalted circumstances and superior abilities. There is no individual but is capable of being useful. The little girl that was taken captive by the Assyrians was the means of healing Naaman, and

of spreading the knowledge of the God of Israel in Assyria. Our situations and our services are assigned us by the sovereignty of God, and what He does not give He does not require of us; and “where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.” The Saviour said of Mary, “She hath done what she could.” I have more than once told you that moral greatness consists not in doing great things, but in doing little things with a great mind. Therefore, to be great in the sight of God lies open to all, to the poor as well as to the rich, to the slave as well as to the master.

“Honour and shame from no condition rise:
Act well your part, there all your glory lies.”

268

The service of God is not confined to what we occasionally call His service,—attendance upon the public and private means of grace. A Christian will not neglect this: he will be found worshipping God in public as well as in secret, he will search the Scriptures, he will hear the word, he will go to His house, he will repair to His table. But he will not consider these things as religion, but as the means. They are therefore called the “means of grace,” because they are those things in the use of which we obtain the supply of the Spirit, which enables us to go forth and live to God entirely. “Whether, therefore, we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.” Whether, therefore, a Christian is on the throne or on the bench, in the shop or on the road, or however engaged, he may be still serving God, and may have the testimony that he pleases God.

Then the service is not to be viewed only as active; it is also passive. There is a waiting service as well as a working one. There is nothing strikes us like facts, therefore God is affording His children opportunities to display themselves as His servants. They also serve who wait; and we may add, they also serve God who suffer. And perhaps God’s people never glorify Him more than in the fires. Perhaps nothing impresses others so much as the exercise of the passive graces in Christians. God therefore places the Christian in the midst of calamity,

that shall attract the notice of beholders, so that it will shew to those around the reality, truth, excellency, and influence of the religion of the Bible. And when the sufferer can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; though I mourn, I do not murmur; not my will, but Thine be done;"—when in patience he can possess his soul; when he can rejoice in tribulation also, knowing its blessed design,—what impressions must this make upon beholders! And if there be no earthly beholders,—for the sufferer may be in an obscure position, and hardly known to his neighbour,—there are observers more than human: there are observers above. Angels may look down, and be excited to praise God the more when they see the power of His grace which He is exercising in His afflicted people; for the Apostle tells us that we are a spectacle to angels as well as to men.

III. Let us observe THEIR PRESENT PRIVILEGES.

They have "their fruit unto holiness."

When we speak of the fruit of a tree, we do not mean merely its produce; there are its leaves and its blossoms. The *fruit*

269

is something from which we derive pleasure and profit, and by which it is known and identified. It is the very same if we turn to the believer in Jesus, in reference to Divine things. Our Saviour said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." And the Apostle said, "No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." Thus he prays that God would fill them with all "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God,"—that is, in its effects. In the verse preceding our text the Apostle is alluding to their former state of unregeneracy, and asks, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" As if he should say, What delight and profit do you now derive from any of your criminal ways and works? Are you not now ashamed of them? Are you not now ashamed to think how you were duped and deceived by them? how you were degraded and disgraced, what sufferings you endured, and you found the way of trans-

gressors was hard? Are you not now ashamed to think that you spent your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Are you not ashamed of the grapes and clusters you gathered? The grapes were the grapes of Sodom, and the clusters were the clusters of Gomorrah. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" But, says he, if sin be unprofitable, and even injurious, it is otherwise with holiness: holiness is its own reward; holiness is every way advantageous to its possessor. "You have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

What fruit? True profit. In the days of Job, infidels asked, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" And in the days of Malachi they were audacious enough to say, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?" To all which the Apostle returns a perfect answer: "Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

"You have your fruit unto holiness." *What fruit? Safety.*

And "who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

What fruit? Peace. "Great peace have they that love Thy

270

laws, and nothing shall offend them." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

What fruit? Pleasure that deserves the name, pleasure that reaches the very soul, and produces sunshine and satisfaction there. "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance; in Thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in Thy favour shall they be exalted."

What fruit? Health, if it be good for you; *sickness*, if it be good for you; *wealth*, if it be good for you; *reputation*, if it be good for you: for "no good thing will He withhold from

them that walk uprightly.” Therefore the Saviour says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

IV. Then, lastly, we have THEIR FINAL BLESSEDNESS.

“The end everlasting life.”

There is nothing so valuable as life. “Skin for skin,” said Satan; “all that a man hath will he give for his life.” “A living dog,” says Solomon, “is better than a dead lion.” And is this the case with regard to this life, this vain life,—this life of cares and of toil; this life of pains and disappointments and mortifications; this life, concerning which perhaps there never was an individual upon earth, however happy, but has sometimes said, “I loathe it: I would not live alway”? And oh, what is that life which is spiritual—the life of God in the soul of man? a life that raises us from the ruins of the Fall, and makes us an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations.

Eternal life—a life that cannot be destroyed; a life that cannot be injured; over which even the shadow of death shall not pass; a life that not only gives immortality to the soul, but immortality to the body. The Scripture attaches eternity to everything relating to the future blessedness of the righteous. It tells us the building is not made with hands, but is eternal in the heavens; that His crown is a crown that fadeth not away; and that His kingdom is a kingdom that cannot be shaken; that it is the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“What,” you may ask, “is this everlasting life?” I wish you may be more concerned to obtain it,—to obtain a title to it and a meetness for it. But “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Our present apprehensions are suited to our present condition, and as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom

271

of God, neither can they comprehend it. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” It is therefore called the glory that is to be revealed.

Yet as a thing unknown it cannot excite our sympathies, or call forth our desires after it. Something of it may be known,

and known so as to lead us to adore and praise the goodness and beneficence of God in the donation. The Apostle therefore says, "The wages of sin is death,"—sin deserves, it earns death,—“but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” an endowment conferred irrespective of any worthiness in the recipient. And what a gift, what a display of His love! And oh, the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us by Christ Jesus! He not only spares us, but feeds us and clothes us. He not only forgives, but admits us into His service, and ranks us amongst the number of “the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.” He not only saves us, but confers upon us an eternity and an immensity of blessedness.

Oh, brethren, should not this subject reprove us? should it not wean us from this present evil world? should it not induce us to have our conversation in heaven? should it not keep us from murmuring under a few trials and light afflictions which are but for a moment, seeing they work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? And seeing death is the only way by which we can reach this blessedness, does not the prospect more than reconcile us to leave this world to go unto the Father?

We often sing—

“The men of grace have found
 Glory begun below;
 Celestial fruit on earthly ground
 From faith and hope may grow.”

But there is a glorious and triumphant end, and “the end crowns all.” And what is the end of the Christian’s course? What saith the Scripture? “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.” What did even Balaam think of it? “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

To conclude the whole: you see eternal death and eternal life are brought before us in the Scriptures, and I set life and death before you this morning; wherefore choose life. Oh, wrap not up

272

your immortal souls in the low inquiry, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" rather ask with the jailor, "What must I do to be saved?" and with Bunyan's pilgrim run on, crying, "Life, life! eternal life!" And give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you are inspired with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. I don't know what many of you are doing, but I know what time is doing, and that it is bearing you along as fast as it can move to your eternal states. Again I say, Therefore choose life. "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." The enemy of souls may perhaps now tell you that it is too soon to attend to these things, and probably ere long he may tell you that it is too late; and concerning some this, alas, will be too true. For hear the mandate from the skies: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

273

XXVIII. GLORIOUS LIBERTY.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, April 6th, 1851.)

The glorious liberty of the children of God.—ROMANS viii. 21.

NOTHING is more prized than liberty: indeed he deserves not the name of a man who can ever be reconciled to slavery. Slavery, by depriving a human being of his free agency, despoils him of the nobleness of his nature, and degrades him into a brute or a machine. But while civil liberty is so valuable and desirable, there is a liberty referred to in our text of a still more important character. It does not consist in the absence of restraints; it is not a licence to do what we will, but what we ought.

Perfect beings may be allowed to follow their inclinations, but depraved beings, and even imperfect beings, must be bounded by moral laws. Men are prepared to enjoy civil liberty just in proportion as they can lay moral fetters on themselves. Newton, alluding to some of these sons of liberty, says—

“Men toil for freedom in a senseless mood,
But he who loves it must first be wise and good.”

There are some who imagine they are free because they have broken asunder the bonds of moral restraint. These walk after their ungodly lusts, saying, “With our lips will we prevail: who is Lord over us?” “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those who were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” “His servants ye are whom ye obey;” and “He that committeth sin is the servant of sin,” and the slave of sin.

T

274

But there is a liberty “unsung by poets, and by senators unpraised.” “Ye shall know the truth,” says the Saviour; “and the truth shall make you free.” “And if the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed.” Of this liberty we may take two views: we may consider it as *gracious*, or as *glorious*; as gracious, and so enjoyed by believers even now; or as glorious, and so enjoyed in the life to come. It is of the latter of these the Apostle speaks in the words of our text, which we detach from a mysterious connection on which we have not time to enlarge this morning; nor indeed is it necessary, for the words form a subject in themselves.

“The glorious liberty of the children of God.” Let us first examine the excellency of this liberty; and secondly, let us inquire who are the heirs of this liberty; then we will shew how this glorious liberty belongs to these children.

I. Let us examine THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS LIBERTY.

You will not expect a full development of it. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,” “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.” No, after all the believer’s experience, it is “a glory to be revealed.” Yet if we were entirely ignorant, we could feel no sympathy with it, and desires after it. We are not therefore left completely in the dark concerning it. We have various and numerous representations given us, and though these representations cannot do justice to the subject, they can aid our meditations, and enliven our affections. We are this morning to contemplate it as the glorious liberty of the children of God, and it may well be so called on five accounts.

First, if we consider its *price*.

There are many things estimated according to their price. The chief captain asked Paul, “Art thou a Roman?” “I am,” said Paul. And the chief captain answered, “With a great sum obtained I this freedom.” But our freedom was obtained at much greater cost—at a price, as Young says,

“All price beyond!

Archangels failed to cast the mighty sum.”

“We are redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”—with the blood of God; so the Apostle calls it, and he is answerable for the

275

language, not we: “Feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

“Glorious,” secondly, if we consider its *immunities*. Only think from what evils it will free us.

Is it nothing that it will free us from the powers of darkness, and all the assaults and all the temptations of the enemy of our souls? from all his wiles, and devices, and accusations? for how often now are we led to exclaim, “The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground;

he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.”

Is it nothing that it will free us from a world lying in wickedness; from its spiritual wickedness in high places; from its crimes and its errors; from its frowns and its smiles; from its examples, its pollutions, and its vexations; and no longer allow of our saying, “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar”?

Is it nothing that it will free us from indwelling sin; from an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; from a law in our members warring against the law of our minds; from vain thoughts lodging within us; from distraction in the worship of God, and allow of our saying—

“Sin, my worst enemy before,
Shall vex my eyes and ears no more;
My inward foes shall all be slain,
Nor Satan break my peace again”?

Is it nothing that it will free us from the blindness of our understanding; from difficulty and apprehension; from perplexity, and doubt, and uncertainty? Then in His light we shall see light. “Now we see through a glass darkly; then shall we see face to face: now we know in part, and prophesy in part; but then shall we know even as we are known. For when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

Is it nothing that we shall be free from anxiety, and trouble, and toil, and that, while full of life and activity, we should rest from our labours, and feel no exhaustion or fatigue, and not only never be weary *of* the service, but never be weary *in* it, serving Him day and night in His temple without the least interval of languor or season of fatigue?

Is it nothing that we should be freed from the body of this death, this vile body, this clod, and this prison? Is it nothing

T 2

that we should bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the image of the earthly?

Is it nothing that we should experience the change described by the Apostle: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body"? And there will be no deficient member, no withered limb, no broken spirits, no injured nerves, no impaired senses, no danger of accident or disease, no aching head or throbbing heart. "There the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick." Then "the tabernacle of God will be with men, and God Himself will be with them; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes: for the former things are passed away."

"Glorious," thirdly, if we consider its *accesses*; and to what will it not give us access?

To what a *Place* will it give us access! "I go," says the Saviour, "to prepare a place for you." What a place must that be which required Him to bleed and die, to ascend and reign, in order to prepare it! What a place must be the palace of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the abode of God Himself!

To what *society* will it give us access! Society the most endearing: our own beloved connections, with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company; who have died in the faith, and who are now present with the Lord, waiting to receive us into everlasting habitations. Society the most pure and perfect: there enters nothing that defileth; there the Canaanite is no more in the house of the Lord for ever. Society the most dignified: we shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and mingle with patriarchs and apostles. Society the most glorious: for we shall not only join the spirits of just men made perfect, but the "innumerable company of angels, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and God the Judge of all."

To what *entertainments* will it give us access! To rivers of delight; to the marriage supper of the Lamb; to fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore; to the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, where the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters.

“Glorious,” fourthly, if we consider its *anticipations*. “We who believe do enter into rest” even now. We have a peace

277

which passeth all understanding, and a joy unspeakable and full of glory. We “have fellowship with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.”

What God does for His people here is but little to what He designs to do. He hath prepared new heavens and a new earth wherein the righteous shall dwell. But we must not undervalue their present condition. Even now they have Bethel visits, and Pisgah views, and Elim stations, where are twelve fountains of water and threescore and ten palm trees. They have grapes from Eshcol even now.

“When Christ with all His beauties crowned
Sheds His kind beams abroad,
'Tis a young heaven on earthly ground,
And glory in the bud.”

Even now, my brethren, there is a blessedness, there is a glory, to be enjoyed that enters the believer before he enters into heaven. He feels this in the retirement of the closet, in the enjoyment of the sanctuary, and even in his very trials and troubles; for “as the sufferings of Christ abound in him, his consolations abound also;” and he can be joyful now in glory, and sing aloud upon his bed.

Once more, it is glorious if we consider its *duration*.

Men have acquired a glimpse of that of which they have been deprived, and have had their bondage embittered by the remembrance of their former freedom. But said the Saviour to His disciples, “It shall not be so among you: sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” “Yea,” says the Saviour, “in all these things ye are more than conquerors through Him who hath loved you.” “Yes,” says our Apostle, “I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. “Permanency,” says Young, “adds bliss to bliss;” and here is the consummation of

the believer's blessedness and glory: it is absolutely eternal. As they are creatures, they would be incapable of enjoying a blessing infinite in a finite space, and therefore God has determined that they shall enjoy a blessing infinite in its duration; and this they are qualified for. If it were possible that this glory could be lost or destroyed, the thought would turn the blessing into a curse. But we are assured of its perpetuity; that their sun shall no more go down; that their

278

moon shall not withdraw its shining; that the building is eternal; that the inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away; that the kingdom is the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And this immortality will extend to the body as well as the soul. The eye will never grow dim, the ear shall never become dull, the hand will never forget its cunning, the bloom of youth shall never leave the cheek; neither shall they die any more, neither shall the shadow of death flit over anything pertaining to them to eternal ages. This is the excellency of the condition, it is "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

II. BUT WHO ARE THE HEIRS OF THIS LIBERTY?

You will remark, my brethren, that the sacred writers never speak of the privilege of believers in the abstract, but always in connection with character. Thus says the Saviour, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." So our Apostle here says, "There is a glorious liberty;" but whose is it? "The glorious liberty of the children of God."

This must intend something more than the relation in which we stand to God as our Creator. He made us, and not we ourselves; He is the former of our bodies, and of our spirits within us; and even this lays some foundation for our hope, for surely He will have respect to the work of His own hands. But as far as we are sinners, we are not the work of His hands; and He has taken care in His word to exclude this presumptuous hope. "Because they are a people of no understanding,

therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour.”

It is true also with regard to providence; for if Job called himself the father of the poor because he defended the weak, made the widow’s heart to sing, and helped the fatherless, what are we to think of Him in whom we live and move and have our being? What are we to think of Him who has fed and clothed us all our life long; whose mercies are new every morning, and who is daily loading us with His benefits? Yet persons may be not only the creatures of His power, but the beneficiaries of His providence, and nothing more.

But, my brethren, that which distinguishes us as the heirs of this privilege, as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, is produced three ways.

279

First, by *adoption*, by which God admits us into His favour, and we are made the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. The Apostle says, “He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, in whom He has made us accepted in the Beloved.” And so exclaims John, “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!” that is, owned, and acknowledged, and dealt with as the sons of God.

The second is by *regeneration*, or a new and divine birth; for every Christian is a new creature, and a new creature not only as to his state, but as to his nature. Adoption, indeed, renders regeneration necessary. We know that elevation only exposes a man to scorn and ridicule without education; we know that high offices embarrass only without preparation; we know that a new condition requires new and suitable qualities. We are told that God” raises up the poor from the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people; “but he would not be very comfortable there if he took with him his dunghill mind and manners. But God frees him from these; God makes him “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” When God introduces His people into a new world, He gives them a new heart and puts a right

spirit within them; “old things are made to pass away, and all things become new.”

The third is by *imitation*. Christ said to the Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil;” you resemble him, “and the lusts of your father ye will do.” Thus Christians are the followers of God as dear children; they are obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to their former lusts in their ignorance, but as He who has called them is holy, so are they holy in all manner of conversation. Therefore said our Saviour to His disciples, “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, who maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

III. We have to shew HOW THIS GLORIOUS LIBERTY BELONGS TO THESE CHILDREN.

And here we remark, it belongs to them *only*: “The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” The very nature of it tells us so, for enjoyment does not result only from the

280

quality of the object, but from its adaptation to the mind. Therefore our Saviour says to the Jews, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He does not mean so much that he cannot possess it, as that he cannot enjoy it. Without this he can have no relish, no desire after it; and though sometimes it is used as a kind of argument, and people plead for charity, saying, “We ought to be charitable towards each other, for we all hope for the same heaven at last,” nothing can be more false than this. All hope for *a* heaven, but only a Christian, a regenerate man, can hope for the heaven of the Bible. John says, “He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.”

It belongs to them also *universally*; as it belongs to none else, so it belongs to all of them without exception. There is no difference here with regard to condition or circumstances: “Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” There are indeed degrees of grace among the children of God, but these make no difference in

the state itself—in the relation itself. There are those who may be considered as bruised reeds and smoking flax, but they shall not be extinguished or destroyed; no, He despises not the day of small things. Therefore the Scriptures say, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God;” “as many as walk according to this rule,” whatever distinctions may prevail among them, “mercy and peace shall be with them, and upon the Israel of God.”

It belongs to them also *assuredly*—as sure as the promise of God can make it. His promises “are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.” As sure as the purchase of the Redeemer can make it: “And He shall see His seed; He shall prolong His days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands.” As sure as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can make it: “He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us His Holy Spirit.”

Yes, and it belongs to them *freely and without desert*. They can claim it to enjoy, but they cannot claim it on the ground of their own worthiness or works. Sin is always penal, and “the wages of sin is death, but eternal life is the gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore, instead of glorying in their performances, they mourn over them; and a review of their sabbaths and communings lead them to cry out with David, “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.” When they

281

have done all, they confess they are unprofitable servants, and look for the mercy of the Lord through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, let us *adore and praise the goodness of God in remembering us in our low estate*, and in providing for us such a glorious liberty, for we are not worthy of the least of all His mercies. Oh, think of Him, not only in creating them, but forgiving them; and not only in forgiving them, but aggrandising them, and raising them up from the ruins of the Fall, and making them an eternal excellency, the joy of all generations. “Is this the manner of men, O Lord God?” “Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that

fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men.”

Seek after and ascertain your title to this glorious liberty. As you are not to live here always, nor to live here long, and as you know not what a day may bring forth, how does it become you to pray, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation: shew me a token for good, that I may rejoice in Thee.” When you are warned out of the house in which you are living, you naturally look out for another dwelling. Well, you are warned, all of you are warned, out of your present tabernacle of clay. The Scripture warns you; the death of your fellow-creatures warn you: you are equally mortal and exposed to death; your own experience warns you. Oh that you would examine yourselves! Is there no pane taken out of your window? is there no cord loosed? is there no desire failing? is there no infirmity that tells you that you are going to your long home? “Oh that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end!” Oh, pray that He would remember you with the favour which He bears unto His people, and be merciful, as He is to them that love His name.

Then further, Christians, rejoice in the hope of this glorious liberty. Let it dwell much upon your thoughts. Simeon is commended for having waited for the consolation of Israel, and Joseph of Arimathea for having waited for the kingdom of God. So should you be looking for that blessed hope, and the blessed appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you should apply this to all that is painful and trying here, and all with which you are exercised in the present state. Are you in tribulation? “In patience possess ye your souls.” Are you afflicted? Remember that those light afflictions are but for a moment, but work out for you a far more exceeding weight of glory. Are

282

you now poor? You will soon be unspeakably rich. Are you pressed down? and do you groan, being burdened? You will soon be delivered from the burden of corruption, and emancipated into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Then walk worthy of this vocation. We mean not with the worthiness of merit—this is impossible; but with the worthi-

ness of meetness. There is an elevation of mind and manners becoming your destination—a destination of an eternity and an infinity of blessedness; a destination of an eternity and an infinity of grandeur. Raise your mind to it, despise the baseness of meaner things, and soar above the course of this present evil world. Have your conversation in heaven, and be concerned to walk worthy of God who hath called you to His kingdom and glory.

Lastly, be concerned for those who are strangers to all this. Endeavour by your conduct to win others to Christ. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” There is no room for envy here: there is enough for you, enough for others, enough for all. You should be ashamed to sit down alone to a feast that is made for all people, “a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees, of wine on the lees well refined.” I say you should be ashamed to sit down to this alone. Address others, and say, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.” You should be ashamed to be seen going to heaven alone: say to all you meet, “We are journeying toward the place which the Lord hath said, I will give it you. Come with us, and we will do you good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”

XXIX.

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, September 3rd, 1848.)

And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.—EPHESIANS i. 22, 23.

HAVE you ever observed the expressive admonition of the Apostle, “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”? Is it improper to suppose that he designed to shew that there exists a connection between these—that one is necessary to the other; that thus the way to grow in grace is to grow in the knowledge of Christ? The

Apostle speaks of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He was never satisfied with any progress he had made in this knowledge. Thus, after years of intimate acquaintance with Him, he exclaims, as if he knew nothing of Him, "That I *may* know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." And such, we are persuaded, will be the language of all now whom God has called by His grace, and in whom He has revealed His Son as the head over all things to His Church. Those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious will evermore cry, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Whatever they have seen of His glory will only serve to draw forth more earnestly the prayer, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory." So true are the words of our admired Cowper—

"Whoever says, I want no more,
Confesses he has none."

Whatever you have beheld already, you may discover far more, *infinitely* more; for, as Watts expresses it—

"The cross, the manger, and the throne,
Are big with blessings yet unknown."

284

The passage which I have read, and which is waiting to engage your attention in your approach to the table of the Lord, presents five things concerning Him, and to them that believe He will be precious in everyone of them. God "hath put all things under His feet," this is the first; "and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church," this is the second; the Church is "His body," this is the third; this body is His "fulness," this is the fourth; and this fulness is "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

I. HE HATH PLACED ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET.

I believe it will be necessary to remark both the *nature* and the *extensiveness* of this dominion; for you will observe it is the effect of Divine appointment.

He, that is, God the Father, "hath put all things under His feet," therefore it is very different from that dominion which

essentially belongs to His Divine nature. This He always possessed; this, therefore, He could not obtain. Thus our Lord Himself hath said, "All power is *given* unto me in heaven and in earth;" "All things are *delivered* unto me," &c.; "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hands." This dominion, therefore, means His mediatorial empire, and which was obtained. The question is, *How* He obtained it? that is, whether He obtained it by an act of bounty, or by an act of grace, or by an act of recompense? The angels obtained their pre-eminence by pure bounty; the saints obtained their pre-eminence by pure grace; but the Saviour obtained His as a recompense. He deserved it; He won it.

Creatures can never serve God beyond the obligations they are under, and therefore there can never be such a thing as merit among creatures. If there were God would be *bound* to reward it, for He would be only doing justice. But the Saviour could claim His dominion, His power, His glory, meritoriously. He had performed the tremendous condition on which it was suspended. Thus it was righteously His due.

And as it was thus obtained, so you will observe with regard to its extent that it is universal, it is boundless. "He hath put *all* things under His feet."

He hath put all *beings* under His feet.

All *angels* are put under His feet. All things, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. Though they excel in strength, they "do His commandments, hearkening

285

unto the voice of His word." He says to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; to each of them, Do this, and they do it. They are all His ministers, they are all His messengers, and they are all His worshippers, or they are rebels. "For when He bringeth in His first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of the Lord worship Him."

All *devils* are under His feet. They are all chained, and He holds the chain in His own hand, and He never lets it go for one moment. Satan desired to have Peter, but he could not

even sift him until he had obtained leave. The legion of demons could not enter into the herd of swine till He suffered them. And we know that in the days of His flesh He commanded the unclean spirits to come out of men, and they immediately obeyed, though with great reluctance, saying, "We know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God! Art Thou come to torment us before the time?"

All *men* are under His control. The greatest of them, for "the shields of the earth belong unto the Lord." He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. They are all raised up by His power, all employed by His providence; they subserve His purposes, and are all amenable to His tribunal. He changes the times and the seasons; He setteth up kings and putteth them down at His pleasure; He disposeth of them all, and they are as clay in the hands of the potter. The worst of men as well as the greatest are under His control. Balaam is constrained to prophesy good concerning Israel instead of evil, and to pronounce a blessing upon those he wished to curse. Nebuchadnezzar, while displaying his own ambition and rage, was the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation to destroy the nations and to chastise the people. Henry VIII. by his passions much aided the cause of the Reformation; the earth then helped the woman, and the earth has helped the woman many a time since. The wrath of man has been made to praise the Lord, and the remainder of that wrath He has restrained.

There is not a being in the universe but is either His servant or His slave.

God hath put all *things* under His feet.

All the ordinances of nature, all the heavenly bodies, David says, are His servants; all the dispensations of providence, whether pleasing, or painful, or intermingled; all the seasons of the year. "The day is His, the night also is His; He has appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down." "The sea is His, and He made it." He walked

286

upon its waters as upon marble pavement, and hushed its roaring, and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." The elements are His. Fire and hail, snow and vapour and stormy wind all

fulfil His word. War is His. He calls for the sword upon the land, and every man's hand is against his brother. Famine is His. He calls for a famine upon the land, and cleanness of teeth stalks through the whole country. Diseases are His. They come at His call, and go at His bidding. Death and hell are His. He hath the keys of hell and of death. He is Lord both of the dead and of the living. There is not a departed spirit, there is not a buried corpse, but is in His possession, and under His control; and "the hour cometh when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: those that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation."

What a dignity does this attach to our Lord and Saviour! What an enemy must this render Him to those who are His adversaries! Who dares to provoke one whom every being in the universe, from an insect to Gabriel, is ready to hear and arise to execute His displeasure? "Be wise, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King; let them be joyful for His sake, that He whom they love supremely, though not perfectly, has exchanged the cross for the throne! Let them rejoice on their own account, for He is all their salvation and all their desire.

II. GOD HATH MADE HIM TO BE THE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO HIS CHURCH.

Two things may be here premised. The word "to" here has the signification of "for." Thus we read, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself," that is, *for* himself. And we read, "In that He died, He died unto sin once," that is, *for* sin; "and in that He liveth, He liveth unto God," that is, *for* God. So here it is said, "He gave Him to be head over all things to the Church," that is, *for* the Church, *for* the saints, *for* the blessedness, the honour, and the glory of the Church.

The second thing we may observe here is, that the Church is not

287

any particular congregation or communion, but the whole fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, in all places, and of all denominations; all who worship God in the spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. As when we read, "The Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven;" as when we read, "He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it;" He will "present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing;" "Upon this rock will I build my Church."

This being premised, the doctrine to be deduced is, that His mediatorial power and dominion are peculiar, and principally for the sake of His own people.

Let us explain. When God delivered Joseph from prison, He raised him also to a state of distinction; he was made governor, not of a mere village, or town, or province, but over all the land of Egypt, then the most renowned monarchy in the world; and without him, as the expression is, no man was to lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. But what was the end of this dispensation? Was it the mere aggrandisement of this youth? *No*; but the preservation, the welfare of one particular family, his own family; a family of little note in the world, living in obscurity, and now on the verge of famine, and yet a family of singular importance; a family attached to the worship of God, who were the depositories of His laws, heirs of the righteousness of faith, to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. To Joseph they all repaired for support: he had all the stores at his disposal, and all the command of them. By him they were preserved and nourished; and that his exaltation was peculiarly and principally for their sakes, appears undeniable, in that as soon as he was removed by death they were in bondage, and enslaved and in the lowest state of degradation, for there arose another king which knew not Joseph. Thus was Joseph a striking representation of the Messiah who was to come, and who came to give His life a

ransom for us; who came not only that His people might have life, but that they might have it more abundantly. What would have become of them but for His exaltation on their behalf? But says He, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

To this our Saviour bore testimony in His last intercessory prayer. Says He to the Father, "Thou hast given me power over all flesh, that I might give eternal life to as many as Thou

288

hast given me," that is, He acknowledges that God Himself conferred universal empire upon Him, as Mediator for this specific purpose, namely, the full and everlasting salvation of all His people from all their sorrows and from all their sins. For, my brethren, how could an agent make everything conduce to a particular purpose, unless he had the control and management of everything pertaining to it? How could a commander make everything in a province bend to the carrying on of the war, unless all the resources were submitted to his disposal? Now this is the case with regard to our Lord Jesus Christ. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." For what purpose? that from His fulness we might all receive, and grace for grace. He is exalted at God's own right hand. For what purpose? To be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. "He ascended up on high," says the Apostle. For what purpose? "He received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

Since all things are put under His feet, He is Lord of all. We see Him occupying a state, and commanding resources adequate to the subduing all His people's enemies, to the delivering them from all dangers, and to the relieving all their exigencies, according to His riches in glory. The world would have soon allured them, sin would have enslaved them, and the powers of darkness would soon have destroyed them; but the Captain of their salvation is leading them on to glory, and, as we often sing,—"Their Captain is stronger than all that oppose." Yea, says the Apostle, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." There are some who love but cannot help their fellow-creatures: they can only shed unavailing tears; they can only say, "Be ye warmed, and be ye clothed,"

for they have it not in their power to give. But here, Christians, He who loves you is able to do for you exceeding abundantly above what you are able to ask or think. He loved you and gave Himself for you, and He died for you: therefore He will save you if He can. And is this a question? Where is He now? What has He now? All things are put under His feet, and He is Lord of all.

All things are under His control; all creatures are the subjects of His agency, but you see His people are the *end* thereof. He manages all their affairs. He makes all things work together for their good. “His eyes run to and fro in the earth, to shew Himself strong”—strong in His expressions, strong in His affections, strong in His actions,—“on the behalf of those

289

whose hearts are perfect towards Him.” He therefore “takes pleasure in those that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.” They are the purchase of His blood; they are His own workmanship; they are His jewels, His sheep, His family; yea, they are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

Thus have you seen that God hath put all things under His feet, and as you have seen that He has given Him to be Head over all things to His Church, you are now reminded—

III. THAT THIS CHURCH IS HIS BODY.

The comparison is peculiar to Scripture, and is very expressive.

We must not weaken the force of a similitude by a multiplicity of distinctions in which the whole spirit evaporates, yet on the other hand, we must not pass it by unnoticed as many do. We must observe the words the Holy Ghost speaketh, for they are words of truth as well as of kindness. We shall observe therefore *four things,* and—

First, the body has its progress as it passes from one state and condition to another; so it is with the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church, the Apostle says, grows in “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” So we read of little children, and of young men, and of fathers in Christ; so we read of milk for babes and of meat

for them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Then, secondly, there is another article of resemblance. Though the body is of one substance, yet it has various parts, and all these have a mutual relation, not only to the head, but to each other. So in the Church there is the intellectual eye, the active hand, the speaking tongue, &c.; all equally useful and necessary in their respective places. And be it remembered that none of these differences affect their union or their unity. Hear the Apostle: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." It is a favourite representation of

 U

 290

the Apostle. Let us hear what he says again: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all." "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

He then applies this familiar image to two purposes. First, to prevent discouragement, when some reflect how inferior they are to others. "If the foot should say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members

everyone of them in the body as it hath pleased Him, and if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.”

Then, secondly, he applies it to exclude all possible pride and haughtiness, in those who by their abilities or condition are placed above others. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary; and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour.”

What is derivable, what is inferable, from this language, but that Christians should despise none; that they should refuse to hold communion with none who are the partakers of Divine grace? If they should, would not this be as if some of the members of the body should refuse to co-operate and sympathize with other members of the same body? whereas they should love as brethren; they should be pitiful and courteous, that there be no schism in the body: but that the members should have all the same care one for another; that whether one member suffer, all the members should suffer with it; or whether one member rejoice, all the members should rejoice with It. There is the application, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

Observe, thirdly, the body is united to the head. It is of the same flesh and blood and constitution as the head. So we are

²⁹¹

“assured that Christians are joined to the Lord, and are of one spirit with Him. And “He who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.” There is a union between them and Christ; only you will observe, one is the vine, the other the branch; one is the head of the body, the other the members of this body; but all are united, and form one. They are not to be viewed separately, but as united to Him, as being the body of which He is the head.

Fourthly, the members depend upon the head, so does the Church rely entirely upon Christ. Take away the head, and what becomes of the members? The head is the watching part, the guiding part, the governing part, and all the members yield

to it and obey it. There are the eyes placed to see; there are the ears placed to hear; the tongue to speak, and the palate to taste; there all the senses have their residence. All the parts of the body are influenced and governed by the head: down from the head to the feet, animal life descends and flows through the whole frame of man by means of nerves and ligatures. Thus Jesus is the life of the Church, and holds communion therewith, as the Apostle has finely expressed it in his Epistle to the Ephesians; "speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." And again, for (as I observed before) this is a favourite image with the Apostle, he speaks of some who hold not the Head, "from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

What an honour, therefore, my brethren, to belong to Christ, to be one of His family; to be a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones! What a privilege to be a part of His body! what safety must we infer from His care and from His kindness! for surely He will take care of His own body. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church." Rejoice, therefore, that in all your distresses your Head feels the same. "He that touches you touches the apple of His eye."

Again, as all things are put under His feet, as God hath made Him to be head over all things to the Church, and as this Church is His body, so—

U 2

292

IV. THIS BODY IS HIS FULNESS.

How is this? How is the Church His fulness? There are only two conceivable ways in which this can be explained: either because the Church fills Him, or because He fills the Church. It is true in both these senses.

Observe how the Church as His body fills Him. He has a mystical fulness, as our old divines called it. What would a governor be without a people? or what would a householder be without a household? or what would a head be without a body? The Church is His body, and therefore all His people, so to speak, are necessary to His completion, His relative and mystical completion. All of them, therefore, will be called in due time and presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, not one failing. In this sense, therefore, the whole Church is His fulness, and every individual belonging to it contributes to that fulness. And if that be only a little finger, still that is a part of this body, and without it the body would not be complete.

But though this is true, this is not the principal truth. The Church is His fulness, because it fills Him relatively and mystically; but the principal thing is, that *He fills them*. We are indeed said to possess this fulness, and we do possess it. We are the recipients of this fulness; therefore so far it may be called our fulness. But then He is the author and the source of it; therefore it must be called *His* fulness. What are we in ourselves spiritually considered? "In us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing." But then there is a plenitude of fulness derived from Him. Everything that deserves the name of wisdom, righteousness, and goodness is derived from Him; therefore it is *His* fulness. We receive it from Him. Our righteousness is *His* righteousness; our honour and glory is His honour and glory; and He possesses His people with all spiritual blessings: and that this is the meaning, as Mr. Locke observes, is obvious from what immediately follows, namely, "The fulness of Him who filleth all in all," which is the last thing we have to notice; that as all things are put under His feet, as He is head over all things to His Church, as this Church is His body, and its fulness is His fulness, so—

V. THIS FULNESS IS THE FULNESS OF HIM THAT FILLETH ALL IN ALL, which is designed to shew us His greatness and the infinite degree of His fulness: that it is not the fulness of a stream, if it be as wide as the Nile or the Ganges, but the fulness of a fountain, which supplies the streams; not the fulness of a

293

lighted candle, which fills only one room with light, but the fulness of the sun, which enlightens the world, so that nothing is hid from the heat thereof.

“He filleth all in all.” He fills the universe with worlds. How many can the eye see! how many more does the telescope enable us to behold! “He filleth all in all.” He fills heaven with His glory, the earth with His goodness, and hell with His wrath. He fills all the Scriptures of truth: all its types, all its prophecies, and all its promises. He fills all ordinances; without Him they are as clouds without water, or as wells that are dried up. He fills all creatures. “The eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season; He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desires of every living thing.” He fills all His subjects; philosophers with wisdom, mechanics with skill; and there is no creature in heaven or in earth that is not under His control.

“The fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” He has filled His people in all ages of the world. He filled the patriarchs with faith; the prophets with capacity to foretell future events; the apostles with the Holy Ghost. He fills all common believers; He fills their understandings with knowledge; their consciences with peace; their wills with holy desires; their affections with love to holiness; their lives with all “the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.”

What then are we to think of those who only consult how they may cast Him down from His excellency? for some take Him to be a creature, a man, or an angel at most. But, O Christians, you have not so learned Christ; you are made willing to give Him all the glory due unto His name.

To whom then, brethren, should we repair in all our woes and our wants but unto Him? He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.” Cry unto Him, therefore, and say, “Fill my poor heart with Thy grace.”

We have set before you an infinite fulness from which you may receive, and sinners are encouraged to repair to Him in all

their exigencies and amidst all their sins, from which unless they are relieved they will be reduced to lamentation, mourning, and woe. "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, saith the Lord; eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Go unto the blessed

294

Saviour, take of the bread of life, and of the water of life, and live for ever.

And, O Christians, make more use of Him than you have done.

You are not straitened in Him; you see, He filleth all things. Be not then straitened in your own hopes in Him, and desires after Him. Open your mouth wide, and He will fill it. Ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.

295

XXX. CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, April 5th, 1846.)

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.—

EPHESIANS v. 2.

THE truths of revelation will be found to harmonise. If there be any appearance to us of disagreement, it will be found to arise from the weakness or perverseness of our minds. We cannot see the bottom of the well, not because the water is muddy, but because the well is deep. The more we examine the truth, the more we know that God hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. The doctrines exemplified in the gospel we should maintain by practice. What God has joined together let no man put asunder. Jesus is the Saviour and the Sanctifier, the Redeemer and the Advocate. The difference between a moral and an evangelical preacher is not that a moral preacher enforces good works, and an evangelical one does not; the latter indeed enforces them, but not as the means of salvation, not as the atonement. The difference

is, that the one waters dead plants and trees, but the other living ones. Each of them preaches that man is a fallen, guilty creature; they hold up the Saviour as our help and hope, and we are to avail ourselves of this help by faith.

You have all this in the text we have read. Let us then consider four things: first, the design of the Saviour's interposition; secondly, the acceptability of the sacrifice; thirdly, the principles which actuated the Redeemer; and, fourthly, draw some inferences from it.

Let us consider—

I. THE DESIGN OF THE SAVIOUR'S INTERPOSITION.

“He gave Himself a sacrifice for us.”

296

He had given us many things before. He had given us the sun to cheer us, the air to brace us, the rain to refresh us, and made the earth to bring forth and to bud; and at last He gave us Himself. Well may you sing—

“Give what Thou wilt, without Thee we are poor;
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.”

He gave Himself for us long before His incarnation; and “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that are under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” “He gave Himself for us” by partaking of our “flesh and blood;” and what did He take upon Him our nature for, but to be our Teacher and Example? It was for this, but this was not the great reason; it was an end, but not the only or the principal end. For this end, indeed, was He born, and for this cause came He into the world, that He might bear witness unto the truth. But here we are brought to a very important article of the faith once delivered unto the saints. Conceal this,—conceal the Atonement,—and what can wipe away the mourner's tear? what can heal the broken heart? where can the weary find rest? But plead before God this sacrifice, and you cannot fail to find pardon. Let a man search the Scriptures, and he will soon hear the servants of the

most High God say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

It has often been brought forward as a proof against the truth of the Atonement that the four Gospels contain nothing of it. But surely "*all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work." It is not necessary that God should repeat the same thing over two or three times. But there *is* something concerning the Atonement in the Gospels. What! is there nothing in the exclamation of John, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world"? Is there nothing in the language of Jesus Himself, when He stood up on that great day of the feast and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink"? What! nothing when He took the cup, and said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for many"?

We find that sacrifices were very early known in the world, and how can we account for this? Regarding them only as

297

ceremonies, are they not destitute of meaning? Then we know that sacrifices were divinely prescribed among the Jews. They were a shadow of good things to come, but the body was' Christ. And if these sacrifices typified the Saviour at all, they typified Him as dying. As an example, the victim was brought to the foot of the altar, the sins of the people were confessed over it, and laid upon it; the victim was killed, and the sins of the people were forgiven, and thus they went away in peace. But this could never take away sin, for then would they not have ceased to be offered? But these sacrifices were renewed year by year. "But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice, for ever sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

And, Christian, you needed such an expiation as was thus prefigured. You can say,

"My faith shall lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

Sin had deprived man of intercourse with God. "The earth was filled with violence;" and did it become God to pardon us as a proof of His abhorrence? What would you think of a legislator who promised to forgive all those who broke the laws, upon their repentance and confession? or would any of you in trade like to have it written over your door, that whoever had run in your debt should be forgiven as soon as they promised to do so no more? If God declares in His Word that such a mode of procedure became Him, what have we to do but believe it? Has He chosen us to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth? we see the appointed means. "Ye are to seek for it; we are to ask that we may receive; and seek that we may find. "It became Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings."

Let us hasten to consider—

II. THE ACCEPTABLENESS OF THE SACRIFICE.

"An offering and sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour."

Go back to the time of the Flood. Here we are informed that "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord," and offered sacrifices; "and the Lord smelled a sweet savour: and the Lord said, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." So God delighted in the sacrifice of His Son, and said, "This

298

is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." You may be reconciled to a servant, and you may admit him to a place in your house; still it may not be easy to admit him to a place in your affections. But we never can be so dear to God as when clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and sprinkled with His precious blood. Why were the sacrifices under the law annual? Because they were not available. You see the oneness of Christ's salvation; He has offered *one* sacrifice for sin. And what says the Divine Saviour upon the cross? "It is finished"—not the work of salvation, but the work of redemption. Nothing could be added to it. He arose from the dead, but it was not to discharge part of His obligation, for that was all discharged upon the cross. I do not mean to say that it did nothing in confirming the death of Christ. What says His

glorification? What says Peter? “Believe in God that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.” The Father loved the Son, and as an avowal of it, made Him a present of the universe. “Ask of me,” says God, “and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” And this is not all, for He has made Him the medium of all the benefits which He confers upon us; and when by a poor suppliant His name is mentioned, He can deny us nothing.

We consider—

III. THE PRINCIPLES THAT ACTUATED HIM.

“He loved us, and gave Himself for us.”

The Apostle, speaking of this love to the Ephesians, says, “That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” That which cannot be known perfectly may be known pre-eminently.

Let us glance at six things: and first, *His love is magnified in His gift*. God is represented as saying, “I called, and there was none to help—mine own arm brought salvation.” And says the awakened sinner,

“The help of man and angels too
 Could never reach my case;
 Nor can I hope relief to find
 But in Thy pardoning grace.”

“No man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him.” The Prophet asked, “Wherewith shall I come before

299

the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” No, this will not suffice. Nor can angels, those holy inhabitants of the better world, afford me any relief here. But Jesus can help, though He alone can. He took the finite with the infinite; *He*

only had compassion enough in His bosom, He only had power enough in His arm.

Again, secondly, it is magnified in the *greatness of His sufferings*. "Behold, and see if there were ever sorrow like unto my sorrow." No, brethren, our sufferings are not worth a thought when once compared with His. You sometimes sorrow, but He was "a man of sorrows." You suffer in one part, but He suffered in every part capable of suffering.

Thirdly, it is magnified *because He was acquainted with every part of His sufferings before He engaged to suffer*. There are some who say, "If I could have foreseen this, I would have had nothing to do with it." But He knew all. He said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" If an angel were to whisper into the ears of some of you what would happen to you before the close of the year, you would ask your fellow-worshippers to take you by the arm and lead you out. But when He read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, He knew the reference was to Himself. When He read, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." He knew that that sword was to pierce Him. The prospect must have enhanced His sorrow, as it did His love and compassion.

Fourthly, it magnifies His love *because we were unworthy of its exercise*. There was nothing in us that deserved His favour. We were very undeserving. Pharaoh's daughter saw the babe weep, and she had compassion on it; but what should we have thought of her if she had not? He had never done any harm. There was far more compassion in Joseph. His brethren had wronged him, but he returned good for evil. There are some who have suffered for the cause of Christ, but then He was infinitely worthy of it. There are some who have suffered for their country, but then it was *their* country; there was a father, and there the mother. But the instance remains to be recorded of the history of a man's suffering and dying for his foe, when he was yet at enmity against him.

Fifthly, it magnifies His love *because He did not wait to be*

300

asked. He did this not only without our desert, but without our desire.

Sixthly, it magnifies His love *by the number of blessings to be derived from it*. All spiritual blessings in heavenly places are in Christ Jesus, from whence we derive all our peace and joy now. But what shall we derive from it hereafter? Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? We know that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him!” Who can describe His love to sinners? I beseech you not to treat this with a reckless indifference; but pray over it, and pray till you feel the subject in your own soul.

IV. We have now to DRAW SOME INFERENCES FROM THIS SUBJECT.

“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.”

Here let us observe four things: first, *what* is enjoined? secondly, *for whom* it is enjoined; thirdly, *to whom* it is enjoined; and *how* it is enjoined.

First, *What* is enjoined? “Walk in love.” Strive to excel in it. We read of men walking in pride. He is lofty; he swaggers as he walks; he answers those beneath him roughly. Pride is his region; it is the air in which he breathes. So is it with love: you are not only to walk in love, but to live in it.

Secondly, *For whom* is this enjoined? It is to be exercised towards Himself. Walk in love towards God the Father of mercies. He gave you His Son; may you give Him your praises! You are to “walk in love” towards all of God’s creatures. “A merciful man is merciful to his beast.” You are to walk in love towards your fellow-creatures. You are to love all men. You are to love your neighbour as yourself. You are to love your enemies. You are to love them with a love of benevolence, if you cannot take them into your bosom. You are to love your fellow-Christians. “If any man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he

hath not seen?" Then you are to love your fellow-sinners, and to pray for their salvation.

Thirdly, *To whom* is this enjoined? "Walk in love." It was to the Ephesians. But are you blameless here? Cannot you say,

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God love?"

301

The Apostle appealed thus to the Ephesians. He accuses them of having left their first love. Oh, how necessary is this grace! It is the fulfilling of the law. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another."

Lastly, *How* is it enjoined? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Mark this. Does the Apostle mean this to be the model or the motive? We may view it both ways.

First, as the model of our love. Thus our love must resemble His. "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And are *you* to exercise no self-denial? His love was a constant love; is yours to be changeable and varying? I

But the Apostle means that we should make the love of Christ the *motive* as well as the model of ours. "We love Him, because He first loved us." This love does not arise from fear; but it reaches the affections, and is of all motives the most powerful. The Apostle felt this to be the case after many years' experience: "The love of Christ constraineth us." This is true morality—the love the believer exercises towards his God and Saviour. By this motive be led to present your bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

XXXI.
HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO THE
THESSALONIANS.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, May 11th, 1845.)

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the

Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.—I THESSALONIANS i. 5.

WHEN a man's heart is set on any particular thing, and when he has made many sacrifices and exertions, nothing is more painful than disappointment, nothing more painful than to have "to labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought." How mortifying and affecting to pursue a long and hazardous journey, and miss the end! To pay for the education of a child, and find him year after year still untaught! To cultivate a field, and see nothing that presents itself but unprofitableness! And such are the feelings of a minister who after successive efforts is ready to lay down his commission at the feet of Him from whom he received it, and to say, "Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" But after sowing the good seed of the kingdom, with what pleasure does he behold, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; " after planting and watering, the trees of righteousness blossoming and bringing forth fruit! In other words, and to drop metaphor, how delightful to stand before our hearers as Paul did, and to be able to say to them as he did to his beloved Thessalonians, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

Now we always wish to have a few simple and easily-remembered divisions, to enable you the better to carry them away, for what evaporates in the exercise of hearing can do but little good. It is most desirable that the word of Christ should

303

dwell in you richly in all wisdom. Now there are two things, and only two, contained in the text. I. Here is a fact asserted; II. Here is the manner of it explained.

I. Here IS A FACT ASSERTED.

“For our gospel came unto you.”

You cannot suppose for a moment that he called it “our gospel” by way of revelation, but only by dispensation; they had it in trust for the use and advantage of others, to whom they were debtors, and along with the consignment made them they received a command to preach it to every creature, and to make it known to all nations for the obedience of faith. And so sure were they that what they received was from God, that they made no scruple to say, “If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached, let him be accursed.”

But now the question is, What is the gospel? Much has been said concerning it, and much to little purpose. Some are exceedingly offended when you use the word restrictively and distinctively. When you say, “Such a one preaches the gospel;” “Well,” they are ready to say, “what do others preach? Do they preach Mohammedanism or Judaism?” Now this is very unwise. If a man’s taking his text from the Old or New Testament were enough to constitute him a gospel preacher, then all who preach may be so called.

What is the gospel? The word signifies glad tidings and good news. But it is obvious that the goodness of the news must regard the state the receiver is in. The proclamation of deliverance will be acceptable only to the captives, and the opening of the prison will be delightful only to those who are bound. To offer pardon to an innocent man, or alms to a wealthy one, would not only be rejected as useless, but spurned at as an insult. But in what state does the gospel find every man? “All by nature children of wrath.” The relief it gives is adapted to his condition. Is he lost? Here is a Saviour. Is he enslaved? Here is a Deliverer. Is he far off? He is made nigh by the blood of Christ. Is he guilty? is he unholy? Here is renewing grace. Is he poor? Here are “unsearchable riches.” Has

he nothing by which to purchase? They are free, and he can buy them without money and without price. Is he desirous of retaining these in his possession? and is the apprehension of losing them enough to embitter his enjoyment? He is assured that He who hath begun the good work in him will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ; that the righteous shall hold on his

304

way; and he that hath clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger. Yea, he can hear the Saviour say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This is good news, and "blessed are the people who know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

"Our gospel came to you," said the Apostle. Here is the account as recorded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles: "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few," These were Jews and proselytes to Judaism.

The largest number here mentioned were from the Gentiles. This seems obvious, for, as the Apostle said, "they were turned from dumb idols to serve the living God." This was not the case as regarded the Jews, but it was true as concerning the Gentiles; they served dumb idols in their heathen state.

But you ask, "How came the gospel to them, and from whom did it come?" From God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, and who is without variableness or the shadow of a turning. It came to them instrumentally by Paul and Silas. The Thessalonians, you observe, did not come to the gospel, but the gospel came to them. They sent not for it, but the

apostles came to them, and when they had no thought of the benefit. Thus the Lord presented them with the blessings of His goodness.

Our missionary institutions have sent the gospel to the East, to the West, and to the South, but in no instance did the people apply for it. And how came it here, into our own highly-favoured land, originally? Did we send for it? No, some pious men whose names are written in the book of life compassionated our condition and brought the precious treasure. But who furnished them with it? Who put it into their minds to pity our state? Who preserved them on their journey? Who accompanied them, when they received a door of entrance

305

and acceptance? *You* were not born in heathen lands. How came your lot to be cast in a Christian country? Was it the effect of your choice? You found the gospel, and all the means which led you to an acquaintance with it, but it was by none of your appointments or arrangements. No! Well says He, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name."

Such is the fact asserted.

II. Observe THE MANNER OF IT EXPLAINED.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

"Ye meet with somewhat similar expressions in other passages; for instance, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

We must enter further into this subject, for here are four particulars as to the manner of this fact. It came not in word only; it came in power; it came in the Holy Ghost; and with much assurance. Now these partake in some measure of the same quality. There is a connection between them; and though there may appear a similarity, the expressions are distinguishable from each other.

"*Our gospel came not unto you in word only.*" It came to you in word when you received the gospel of salvation, and heard

the word proclaimed in your own land and in your own language. For to what avail would the Bible be to many of you, if it were in your own houses, if written in Hebrew and Greek? It cannot come to you, if it be not in a language you understand. It came in word when it was preached to you and explained by the servants of the Most High God, who shew unto us the way of salvation. It came in word when you were made acquainted with the doctrines of it in theory. In each of these respects you have been privileged, and we may address you in the words of Christ to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For of a truth many kings and righteous men desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that ye hear, and have not heard them." Oh, it is a great blessing for the gospel to come to you in word. And it must come to you in word before you can savingly receive it. There must be a foundation before the superstructure is raised, unless you mean it to fall. There may be indeed a theoretical without a

X

306

practical and experimental acquaintance therewith—a speculative knowledge without a faith unto salvation.

Now observe two things here: First, such a coming of the word of God cannot answer the design of the gospel. Can you imagine this for a moment, that God has inspired men to write the Holy Scriptures, that He has magnified His word above all His name, only to amuse your minds, to gratify your curiosity, and to furnish you with materials for controversy? How should we then read that "whatsoever things were written afore time were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." "These things were written that ye might believe, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Secondly, this will only aggravate your sin, and increase your condemnation. The gospel whenever it comes, produces one of these effects: it will operate either injuriously or beneficially;

it will be as a medicine, either to kill or cure; it will prove either the savour of life unto life or of death unto death. Do you imagine that you can disregard it with impunity when God brings it you? What says the Apostle? "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him who spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under-foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" As there are many mansions in heaven, so there are many gloomy ones in hell; and for which are the most dreadful of all provided? For you who hear the Scriptures; for you who know the truth, but who hold it in unrighteousness, and have never fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel.

It came in power. Now when the gospel comes in power, it produces conviction for sin; deep and lasting conviction. You see this exemplified in the first gospel sermon preached by Peter. This was on the day of Pentecost: an immense number were now in Jerusalem; the streets were lined. Persons had come from a great distance. Fathers were seen leading along

307

their little boys, and showing them the beautiful temple. Mothers were seen carrying in their arms their infant babes. In the midst of all this, Peter stood up and cried, saying, "That young man you crucified on yonder hill of Calvary is the Messiah; He is now alive again; and we come in His name; and behold He is coming to judge the world." What was the effect? The word was quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and was a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Oh, said one, that I had never cried out in the palace yard, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Oh, said another, that I had never insulted Him upon the cross! Oh, said a third, that I had known that He was the Lord of life and glory, for I

knew not what I did. When they heard these things they were pricked in their hearts, and cried out, Men and brethren, what must we do? It is the same now; the man who before was asleep, has his conscience awakened, and he sees that he is in a perishing condition. Before this he was filled with confidence, and was a stranger to fear: now he trembles, and inquires, Men and brethren, what must I do? Before this he thought much of his worth and of himself; He now cries, "Behold, I am vile. In me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." Now a burden is laid upon him too heavy for him to bear. He is expelled from every refuge of lies, and sees nothing but wrath, and now is led to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" Thus, though this process is painful, it has a blessed effect; for till we feel our disease, we shall never value the Physician. But the obtainment of relief seemed impossible. The awakened sinner turned to many an expedient, but was soon led to say, as Job concerning his friends, "Miserable comforters are ye all." The storm that for a while seemed to be subsiding now comes as with increasing force, and the clouds return after the rain. Now nothing can effectually relieve and tranquillise the conscience, but the application of the blood of sprinkling. But this can. Every other dependence will be found a sand-bank, but "He that believeth on Him, shall never be confounded." Thus hope is introduced, and fixed in the very bosom of despair. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, he now joys in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also he now receives the atonement.

The same also takes place with regard to outward trials and distresses as well as inward. When the Gospel comes in power, Christians know the truth of the Apostle's words, that "it comforts them in all their tribulations," and "as tribulations abound,

X 2

308

consolations abound also." Are they bereaved of beloved friends and connections?—they can say with Mrs. Rowe,

"Thou dost but take the lamp away,
To bless me with unclouded day."

Are they deprived of their possessions? "Oh," said Bolingbroke, "I find my philosophy fail me now in this affliction." But did the gospel fail the Church when she said, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Oh, what a power is that, that can restrain the *enemy* of souls, that can enliven and even enrapture the soul when heart and flesh fail!

Then when it comes in power, it not only convinces and relieves, but it sanctifies. It is called "a doctrine according to godliness." We are "called to be saints." The grace of God which bringeth salvation, teacheth us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world.

Plato often complained that he could not bring the inhabitants of even a single village to live according to his rules. But did the fishermen of Galilee complain in a similar way? Were there no converts in Rome and Corinth? The Apostle gives us a catalogue of the most infamous characters, and then adds: "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God." Yes, and instances of a similar nature are to be found in our own day. "We speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen." We have seen the profligate become moral; the swearer fearing an oath; the covetous become liberal; and the implacable ready to forgive. We have seen the timid become magnanimous, and facing a frowning world, cutting off a right hand and plucking out a right eye, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts. We have seen the children of God, though comparatively ignorant in regard to this world, unliberalised by education, unrefined by the schools, displaying a taste and conduct that leave all earthly exertions far behind.

Then, thirdly, *it came in the Holy Ghost*. This marks the nature and the source of the power concerning which he had

309

been speaking. It is spiritual, and derived from the Spirit. But here some little distinction will be allowed.

It cannot be denied that a miraculous power attended the gospel, "which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will." For our Saviour had said to His disciples, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father." This was soon fully accomplished in them. And we see what signs and wonders follow. But this is not the power of which the Apostle here speaks. No, for, first, it was peculiar to that period and dispensation. The Apostle expressly assures us that it was so limited. "Charity," indeed, says he, "never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." "But now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three," in distinction from these miraculous powers, "but the greatest of these is charity." And the cause is obvious; for had these miracles continued, they would have become common, and then they would have been miracles no longer. Secondly, miracles were never designed for the conversion of the soul. All through the Scriptures we see their inefficiency. Look at the history of the Jews in regard to Canaan. They saw the manna descend; they saw the water flow from the rock; they saw the fiery pillar; and yet they entered not in because of unbelief. You perceive the same in the days of our Saviour. They saw, yet they believed not: they saw the miracles that He wrought; they saw the blind restored to sight, the lame made to walk, and the dead to arise; and yet they persecuted Him with remorseless malice, and at length hung Him on a tree.

The power which attends the gospel when a sinner is converted is common to every age of the Church. It is that which the Apostle gloried in, when he said to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Every part of

Christianity may be traced up to the operation of the Holy Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." The gospel is attended by the presence of Jehovah, therefore it is called the ministry of the Spirit, and is said to excel in glory. Originally it was preached as With the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and now it is the

310

ingrafted word which is able to save the soul. Instrumentality is not excluded. What is the sword without the hand to wield it? The Apostle has stated it in his Epistle to the Corinthians:

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollas, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth;" that is, as to efficiency, not as to instrumentality; "but God that giveth the increase." "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Man's voice can only reach the outward ear: it is God alone can reach the heart. He opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. No figure of rhetoric, no charms of eloquence, no force of argument, will ever be able to turn a man from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. You may have powers of reason akin to Paley or Barrow, but no argument will ever deliver a man from the love of sin, or produce in him the love of holiness. No, says Isaiah, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall *be to the Lord* for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Yes, the gospel of itself, when alone, will never be available; God must give testimony to the word of His grace.

We have an instance of this in the Acts of the Apostles, where we are told, that those "which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose against Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word; and some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which. when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." But what rendered it available? "The hand

of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.”

Let ministers remember this, and bear in mind that, “It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” The sooner we are convinced of this, and act upon it, the better; for God hath said, “Them that honour me, I will honour.” Young Melancthon in his zeal for God hoped that all he addressed on such a melting subject as the love of Christ to sinners, would embrace Him as their Saviour; but after having made the trial, he soon found that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon.

But let us not run into the other extreme, and let ministers remember that though it is not by any human efforts that any

311

are converted, the Spirit of the Lord is not tamed. God hath said, “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” And you, hearers, must not forget it, if you would have your “barrenness turned into a fruitful field.”

Lastly, *It came also in much assurance.*

love find three full assurances: the full assurance of knowledge and understanding; the full assurance of faith; and the full assurance of hope. The gospel came to these Thessalonians in all these.

The Apostle speaks in his Epistle to the Colossians, saying: “That your hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto *all riches of the full assurance of understanding*, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Oh, it is very desirable to have clear and comprehensive views of Divine truth, to be led into all truth as it is in Jesus; not to be led away by divers and strange doctrines, but understanding what the will of the Lord is! “In malice to be children, but in understanding to be men.” “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the

Lord is.” “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” And, says Paul, “The spiritual judgeth all things, though he himself is judged of no man.” Here you see “the full assurance of understanding.”

Then there is the full assurance of *faith*. This is spoken of by the Apostle to the Hebrews: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.” This has not regard, as frequently quoted by some, to a personal and natural interest, but refers to a firm persuasion of the truth, that it is the mind and will of God that we may come to Him through Christ, the new and living way; that we may have boldness and access with confluence by the faith of Him; that we may come, and partake of the fountain of the water of life freely.

Then we read of the full assurance of *hope*. This *does* regard personal and actual interest in the blessings of salvation. This

312

is what the Apostle says unto the Hebrews, “and we desire that everyone of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” Oh, there are many well versed in the Scriptures, and acquainted with the contents of Revelation, persuaded of the importance and excellency of the gospel, who yet do not possess this. A man may have hope, and not the full assurance of it. But the first Christians had this. They believed the things reported, and one of them said, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Others of them could say with confidence, for themselves, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” But was this privilege of possessing a full assurance of hope peculiar to them? Oh, no! How desirable, brethren, is it that we should possess it! How desirable to look to the promises, and say, All these are mine: to look up and say, “This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death: God, even our own God, shall bless

us: God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.”

“O might I hear Thy heavenly tongue
But whisper, Thou art mine;
These gentle words should raise my song
To notes almost divine.”

And is it possible to reach this assurance? You are commanded and enjoined to examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Inspiration says, “These things have I written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name.” “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.”

So much for our explanatory notes. We now conclude with a few brief reflections. And—

First, Here is matter for lamentation. Do not many of those who are favoured with the gospel receive it in word only? In the parable of our Lord, we see there are four soils in which the seed is sown, and only one that brought forth fruit. Are we to infer, therefore, that one out of four of our hearers should be saved? Would this be a fair and candid construction? Oh, if we could but reckon upon one in ten! Oh, if we could but reckon upon one in twenty! Shall I go further? I would leave it to that day, when the secrets of the heart shall be made manifest, and they shall stand before the Judge of all. But

313

what a state are many of our congregations in—“Ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.” Always remaining the same. No, they do not always remain the same! No, they always leave this place as vessels of wrath more fitted for destruction! No; for says the Apostle, “That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

Again, Let this subject produce self-inquiry. If the charge of receiving the grace of God in vain be applied to a single individual in this assembly, everyone ought to inquire, “Lord, is it I?” But when the charge is so general, when it takes in

so many, the danger is proportionably great. "Let us, therefore, fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

As to some of you, surely you have reason to be thankful that the gospel has come to you, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Oh, what a difference have you found now you are "free from all condemnation." What a difference have you in your experience! You have been upheld while passing through deep waters. Sometimes your soul has been "satisfied as with marrow and fatness." Though you have mourned you have been comforted; you have had more pleasure in bewailing your sins than in committing them. Now your language is, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me? O my relations, O my friends and neighbours, that you all saw and felt as I see and feel! then you would be really blessed. O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him!"

314

XXXII. BROTHERLY LOVE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, February 16th, 1851.)

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.—I THESSALONIANS iv. 9, 10.

THERE are numbers who plead for a system of forms and ceremonies and rituals in which the heart has no concern. But, my brethren, "to the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." What saith the Scripture? There we find Christianity to be a doctrine according to godliness,—and the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. We find it to be not meat and drink, but peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. There it requires and inclines its professors to love

God supremely, and their neighbours as themselves. For if a man say, "I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar, and the truth is not in him." "He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also." This is in accordance with the language of the Apostle concerning these Thessalonians; it teaches brotherly love: so here we have, first, the lesson; secondly, the teacher; thirdly, the tractableness of the pupils.

I. THE LESSON: Brotherly love.

Brotherly love is love to a brother. Let us explain. It operates in various ways and instances, six of which we shall mention with as much enlargement as your time will allow.

First, it operates in a way of esteem and affection. "The precious sons of Zion comparable to fine gold," though not

315

esteemed by the world, God knows and esteems. He calls them His inheritance—His portion—His jewels. Now Christians are all likeminded with Him who has said to His Church, "Since thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." He calls the saints which are in the earth, "The excellent in whom is all His delight." David deemed it his highest privilege to be able to say, "Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear Thy name." So it is with all those that are born from above, and bound for glory. As they love Him that begat, so they love them that are begotten of Him. They love the brethren.

Secondly, it operates in a way of intercourse. If they are to be our associates in heaven for ever, surely we should not be unacquainted with them on earth. Men naturally love society, and grace sanctifies this disposition. It turns his face Zion ward. Love not only begets, but attracts love. Thus, as soon as Peter and John were let go, they went unto their own company. As soon as Paul came to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the brethren. Thus in the dark days of Malachi, "They who feared the Lord spake often one to another." Henry says, "There are three classes of persons easily attached to each

other: children, beggars, and Christians; and Christians because they are of both the former." When several Christians therefore meet together, they are like so many drops of water upon the table; when they touch they run into one. They all bear the same spirit; they all use the same language; they are all one in Christ Jesus. David says, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee," and he was so though a king. And, my brethren, though civil distinctions are to be maintained, spiritual intercourse is not to be confined to rank and endowment. 'Tis well to see those who are placed above others condescend to men of low estate. There are many far below you in condition, who may be above you in experience, and able to teach and edify you. Paul, addressing the Romans, says, "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift," but they imparted unto him some temporal gift, before he imparted this to them. For when Paul was going to Rome, they came to meet him as far as Appii forum, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage." His heart had sunk within him, but the view of these brethren revived him, and filled him with joy and peace.

Thirdly, it operates in a way of sympathy. You are to make the case of your brethren your own. This Paul did. "Who," says he, "is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and

316

I burn not?" He exemplified this disposition in all things. "Rejoice," said he, "with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." If they succeed and prosper, you are not to envy them; and if they are afflicted, you are not to hear with insensibility and indifference the cry of a brother in distress. To him that is afflicted pity should be shewn. And if you are Christians you will be likeminded with Him who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. You are also to comfort them with the consolations with which you yourselves are comforted of God. It was a very commendable thing that obtained formerly. We find the Jews came to comfort "Martha and Mary concerning their brother. Job's friends, when they heard of all the evils that had come upon him, "made an appointment together to mourn with him, and to comfort him;" and

Jonathan went to David in the wood to strengthen him in the Lord.

Fourthly, it operates in a way of instruction. Says Paul, "That it may minister grace to the hearers." Sometimes our hearers may stand in need of instruction; so much depends on a wrong course, or a wrong step in a right course: the temporal evils arising from it may be remediless here, and you may be the means of preventing much good.

Fifthly, it operates in a way of reproof. Here will be a trial of brotherly love. The way in which reproof is generally received renders it almost an act of heroism to administer it: and yet will you forbear to do this? What says Moses? "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." And if you are in a proper state of mind, you will deem the "wounds of a friend to be faithful, while the kisses of an enemy are deceitful;" and will say with David, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil that shall not break my head; for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities."

Sixthly, it operates in a way of actual succour and relief. "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion toward him, how dwellcth the love of God in him?" And if an inspired apostle was at a loss to determine, no wonder it should perplex us. This is the law of the house, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." "Let us love not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." I have frequently

317

observed when persons rise in life they not only do less comparatively, but *really* when you call upon them.

It operates in a way of prayer. Prayer should be considered not only as a duty but as a privilege. It is a privilege not only with regard to yourselves, but with regard to others. What a delightful resource is it in our difficulties and trials! We must remember our brethren. If we love one another we shall pray for one another. Prayer has power with God and can prevail,

and success does not depend upon some distinction or endowment, neither does it depend, and it is well it does not, upon perfection of character. "Elias was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Thus you see that "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," though he had infirmities, "availeth much." Oh, what obligations must we be under to others! How much do owe, through a long life, to the prayers of others! I hope that I shall not have less of them, when the conclusion is labour and sorrow, and the days draw nigh when I shall say I have no pleasure in them.

Having considered the lesson, let us pass on to consider—

II. THE TEACHER.

"For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."

How did He teach these Thessalonians, and how does He teach us? There are four ways:—

First, by our constitution itself. Let me explain. The senses are inlets to the mind, and so we are affected with things without. The eye is affected at the sight of distress; as Jeremiah says, "The eye affecteth the heart." You see a fellow-creature languish, and you feel pained on this account. And is it not equally true that there are some who endeavour to elude occasions of this excitement? Thus the priest and the Levite, when they came down from Jerusalem, saw at a distance before them a man prostrate and writhing on the road, and they crossed over and walked down on the other side.

Secondly, by injunction. He has commanded us, and here we refer not only to the law, but to the testimony; for as love is the fulfilling of the law, even so, the Apostle says, "The end of the commandment"—meaning the gospel there: "the end of the commandment"—"is charity, out of a pure heart, and of

318

a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." It is remarkable and worthy of your attention that the injunction to believe on

the Lord Jesus, and to love one another, is expressed in the same passage, on the same authority, and by the very same words. "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment;" for "faith worketh by love."

Thirdly, He teaches us to love one another by example. What example?

By the example of men living at the same time with us and in our own neighbourhood. Perhaps there is not an individual to be found who has not heard of or seen some godly character, and though their conversion and attainments are not very remarkable, yet there is enough to awaken their attention and reflection; and seeing, or hearing of, their patience and concern to do the will of God, their rising above the influence of the fear of death, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God: these—much oftener than many imagine—induce them to exclaim, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob; and thy tabernacle, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

By the examples of those who are gone before, and who now through faith and patience are inheriting the promises. Of a Paul, constrained by the love of Christ. We see him suffering the loss of all things, and enduring a series of suffering without complaint; "yea," says he, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in persecutions, and reproaches, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." Of the noble army of martyrs, not counting their lives dear unto them.

By the example of angels: "We are come to an innumerable company of angels." Angels are our models, and we are to do the will of God on earth as they do it in heaven. We don't know a great many things concerning angels, but you mothers know that they are the guardians of your babes, and they do not deem this beneath them. "Their angels," our Lord says, "do always behold the face of their Father who is in heaven." You Christian pilgrims know that "the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." They hold you up in their arms, "lest at any time

you dash your foot against a stone;" and we know that they "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth."

Above all, He teaches by His own Son and our Saviour. To allure us, He moves on before us. He enjoins nothing but

319

what He exemplifies. He represents Himself to us as "the Father of mercies and the God of all grace," as not sparing His own Son, and thereby assuring us that He will with Him also *freely* give us all things. Our fellow-creatures, whatever they are, have some claim upon us, but we have no claim upon God. We were not only unworthy of the least of all His mercies, but deserving of His wrath; yet "God hath commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "Herein is love," says John, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us; and gave His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." Surely if God so loved us,—this is the inference John has drawn from it,—"we ought also to love one another." See to it that you walk worthy of God unto all well-pleasing. Be the children of Him who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;" and comply with the admonition, "Be ye followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given Himself for us, an offering to God of a sweet-smelling savour."

Fourthly, He teaches us by His Spirit's agency, or all the former teaching would be in vain. None teacheth like Him. Human teachers can improve the capacity of a pupil, but He can impart it. He can give, not only the lesson, but the faculty to receive it. He works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and accomplishes in us "all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power."

I hope I need not take up any of your time to prove this Divine teaching and the need of it, for why do we pray for the Holy Spirit of God unless we stand in need of His influence? It is through Him we are quickened and sanctified, and enabled to mortify the deeds of the body. Thus we read in the Liturgy of the Church, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may shew forth Thy praise, and worthily magnify Thy holy name."

Let us pass on to consider—

III. THE TRACTABLENESS OF THE PUPILS. “But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”

“If ye know these things,” says the Saviour, “happy are ye if ye do them.” “Blessed are they that know the word of God, and keep it.” What a satisfaction must it be to a minister of Christ when he explains and enforces a duty, to be able to

320

appeal to his people for illustrations and proofs of it, and able to say, as the Apostle said to the Corinthians, “Ye are our epistles, known and read of all men.” And what an advantage to our people not only to hear but to *see* those things; to see in the lives of their fellow-worshippers all they hear from time to time in our doctrine, so that if they refuse to hear, they may be “won without the word.” And, therefore, says our Saviour, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” You know that commonly the doctrine we preach is considered, if not leading to licentiousness, yet as not very friendly to holiness and good works. From time to time therefore we endeavour to prove the falseness of the representation; but after all you must be our best proofs. And oh, it is well when we can appeal to you; when we can represent you as holding forth the Word of Life, not only with your tongues, but by your tempers; “not only with your lips, but in your lives;” “that we may rejoice in the day of God, that we have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”

Such advantage and satisfaction Paul derived from these Thessalonians. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy.” “When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.” And here again he says, “As touching brotherly love

ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”

But does Paul flatter these Thessalonians? Paul could say with Elihu, “I scorn to give flattering titles unto any: in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.” But Paul well knew that all that was wise and good in these Thessalonians was from the grace of God; therefore all he admired and acknowledged in their attainments was ascribed to the grace of God in them. Paul knew the importance of character,—that religion binds a man to consistency.

But we have here not only the reality of their “brotherly love,” but the extent of it: “And indeed ye do it towards all the brethren which are in all Macedonia.” How could they do this? How could they exercise their benevolence and kindness towards every individual? How could their liberality

321

extend to all? But it must mean two things; that their love in this case was very great and general, and that it was very in exceptionable and impartial. “Ye do it towards *all* the brethren which are in all Macedonia.” Doubtless there were some among them with small attainments, and some who had the little grace they possessed mixed with much imperfection. But these Thessalonians would not despise the day of small things. They would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

We must learn to love all real Christians notwithstanding their failings and disagreeable faces; for, says Whitfield, “God kindly condescends to dwell with some with whom I should not like to dwell for a thousand a year.” The Apostle says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Then, again, with regard to religious opinions, on matters of minor import; these have now so increased and so magnified that it is really not only an exercise, but an effort, of brotherly love to overcome them. We are to regard all who hold the Head as really our brethren, and never rest satisfied till we can say with the Apostle, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;” and with our Saviour, who stretched

forth His hand and said, "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Lastly, Consider THE PROFICIENCY THE APOSTLE WOULD HAVE THEM ATTAIN TO. "But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more."

So great is the importance of brotherly love, that too much cannot be said in commendation of it, or in the enforcement of it. So the Apostle says, "Above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." "And," says John, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." Oh, what honour does it confer upon the individuals themselves, when others say, "See how these Christians love one another." Our Lord makes it the very badge of discipleship, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And John notes it as the evidence of regeneration; "we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Y

322

This exhortation was added to teach us also that Divine life was progressive, and admits of degrees. There are those who tell us that there is no such thing as growth in grace. What then becomes of the field where there is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear"? What becomes of the family in Zion, where there are babes, and young men, and fathers in Christ? "The righteous shall wax stronger and stronger," it is said. "Changed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of God." Cannot a man have more patience under his sufferings than he now has? Is it not possible for faith to be increased, and charity to abound. Why, says the Apostle to the Thessalonians, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth."

It was added to shew us also, that Christians should never be satisfied with any increase they have made, or attainments

they now possess. Thus, the Apostle says, "I am not already perfect, but this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded,"—that is, let them seek after greater degrees of perfection, for there are greater degrees of moral and spiritual perfection. More grace is attainable; more grace is needed for the duties and trials of life—

"And he who says he has enough confesses he has none."

There is not a better criterion whereby you may judge of yourselves than by comparison. Moses knew more of the Divine glory than any other, yet he prays, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory." They who are the richest in grace will always be the poorest in spirit. They who are the purest in heart will feel most of the disposition of Job, who said, "Behold, I am vile." And says Newton, "If an angel were sent down from heaven to select the most advanced Christian upon earth, he would fix upon the man who had the most adoring thoughts of Christ and the lowest thoughts of himself."

 323

XXXIII. PRAYER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 27th, 1847.)

I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.—I TIMOTHY ii. 8.

THE apostolical epistles may be considered as of three kinds. Some are addressed to Christians at large, some to particular churches, and some to individuals. The epistle before us is of the latter class. It is addressed to Timothy. Paul calls him his "own son in the faith," not, however, that he had begotten him in the bonds of the gospel;—he seems to have been the fruit of maternal piety; "from a child" he knew the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, by faith which is in Christ Jesus,—but because he was much younger than himself, and exceedingly beloved by him, and because he had laboured with him in the gospel.

This letter is principally ministerial, yet you are mistaken if you suppose that private Christians are not concerned in its contents; for you as hearers may learn from the things enjoined upon us, “what manner of persons *you* ought to be, in all manner of conversation and godliness;” for we are to “put you in remembrance of these things,” and you are to “give the more diligent heed, lest at any time you should let them slip.” If we are to “charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”—it is obvious, that your obligation is involved in ours, and that if we are to give the charge, you are to obey it. And who does not our text regard, when, says the Apostle, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting?”

Y2

324

Let us first consider *the subject of attention*—this is prayer; secondly, *the injunction*, “I will that men pray;” thirdly, *where it is to be offered*, “everywhere;” fourthly, *how their duty is to be discharged*, “lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

I. Let us consider THE SUBJECT OF ATTENTION. This is prayer.

And what is prayer? Prayer is the breathing of desire towards God. Words are not essential to it. As words may be used without the heart, so the heart may be engaged where words are wanting. It is better to want words than affections, when we address a Being who seeketh such to worship Him, as “worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Desire soon sets the tongue in motion, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Rarely do we find persons at a loss for language, when they feel that their affections are deeply interested. Words are not always necessary to inform a fellow-creature, and they are *never* necessary to inform God, who “searcheth the heart,” and knoweth what is in the mind. What interesting looks will the hunger of the beggar

at the door display. "A certain man who came down from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, leaving him half-dead." Perhaps he was not able to speak, and do you imagine that the good Samaritan wanted words? His nakedness, his wounds, his pallid face, his apparently dying state,—these spake loudly enough to his benefactor. Would not the suffering of a friend, without any words, address you, as you approached his bed of anguish, in the language of Job, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me"? Complain not, then, that you cannot pray; you can weep, you can sigh. And He regards the voice of our weeping; He hears the eloquence of a groan; He sees beauty in a tear; and those prayers even which you groan, are acceptable as the songs of angels, if they arise from "a broken heart and a contrite spirit." He then says, "Let me see thy countenance; let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." How is it in the family? You have several children; the first can come and ask for what he wants in proper language, and the second can only ask in broken terms, but here is a third who cannot speak at all: but he can point, he can look, and stretch out his little hand; he can cry, and shall he plead in vain? "No! *no!* says the mother," refuse *him?* his dimpled

325

cheeks, his speaking eye, his big round tears, plead for him. Refuse *him?* "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children," who ask as they are able, "how much more shall your Heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him," according as they are able?

Further, we notice the kinds of prayer.

Prayer may be considered as *public*. Thus it constitutes a *very* distinguished and important part of our sanctuary service. God's house is to be called "a house of prayer for all nations." Always therefore be careful to show that you lay stress upon this, and see that you are always in time for it.

There is also *domestic* prayer, by which we mean the prayer that is offered every morning and every evening at the family altar. Mr. Henry observes, "A house without this has no

roof.” And God threatens to pour out His fury upon those that call not upon His name, and what is to hinder the desolation following? This will be found, not only calculated to ùless the man’s household, but to bless the *man* too; it will be found one of the best preservatives from evil, and one of the best vouchers for consistent character and conduct.

Prayer may be considered as *private*. “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door, and pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” The advantages of private prayer are these; it affords more opportunity for frequency; it allows of more freedom; you have God entirely to yourself for a time. You are engaged with Him alone, and it will always be the bes’, evidence of sincerity. There may be much to attract you in public; the eloquence of the speaker, the excellency of the singing, the largeness of the congregation; all these may influence you, so that your going there is no decisive proof of your seeking God; and your enduring all this, your being pleased with it too, is not an infallible evidence of your desiring to meet God. If you were to go into a large company, in which there was a personage which you exceedingly disliked, you could endure his presence while the company remained, but suppose they should all withdraw, and you should be left alone with this disliked individual, ah, Jonah, where would you be then? How would you then feel? This is the grand question, How would you feel with God alone? And could you ever say truly with Dr. Watts,

“In secret silence of the mind,
My heaven, and there my God, I find”?

326

Prayer may be considered as *ejaculatory*, a darting up of the mind to God, as the word signifies. This may be done at any time, and under any circumstance. Nehemiah was the king’s cup-bearer, and while he was in the room attending upon his office, he prayed to the God of heaven, though there was no one there who knew it but God Himself and his own conscience. One told David of Ahithophel giving counsel to Absalom when he had conspired against him, and what did David? Did he

call for a prayer-meeting, or did he retire alone? No; but instantly he said, Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. You cannot abound too much in the exercise of this Christian grace: often through the day, and while your hands are engaged, and when no one sees you, you may look up and say, as the occasion requires, "Lord, help me! Lord, comfort! Lord, sanctify me!"

So much for the subject of attention, which is prayer.

II. Observe THE INJUNCTION. "I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

Every minister, my brethren, ought to feel the ground, the sacred ground, on which he stands. He should rise above the fear of censure, as well as the love of fame, and resolve to "declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." It is remarked of some one by Baxter, that he always preached with one foot in the grave and the other on the brink, and he himself says, "I preach as if I ne'er should preach again, as a dying man to dying men." Henry II. observed concerning one of his ministers, "That man preaches before me, as though death stood at his elbow." Bishop Hall tells us, that there are three things which allow of no distinction, and of no deference: The judgment-bar, the grave, and the pulpit. David could say, "I will speak of Thy testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed." Daniel admonished Nebuchadnezzar to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor. John told Herod to his face, that he was no more above law than one of his subjects, "for it is not lawful for thee to have her."

But here let it be remembered that the man who speaks with this authority, "I will therefore that men pray always," was Paul: Paul was an apostle. It is proverbially said, "I *will* is for the king;" well, so it is here, for "the King of kings, and the Lord of lords." Paul was immediately commissioned by God; he was Divinely inspired, miraculously endowed and sent forth; he here speaks in the name of the Holy One of Israel; and therefore he says to the Thessalonians, "He that despiseth,

327

despiseth not man but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit." And hence also he says, "We thank God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." When therefore Paul here says, "I will that men pray everywhere," he speaks in God's name; he delivers His message; and it reminds us of what God Himself says to the prophet Ezekiel. After mentioning the promises of the new covenant, He says, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." "I will," says He, "be inquired of:" it is an expression of His authority. It is an indispensable duty enjoined by God Himself. It is in vain to cavil or question here. It is enjoined by Him whose understanding is infinite, and therefore needs not be informed; who is full of mercy and grace, and needs not to be persuaded; who "is of one mind," and stands not in need of repentance or change. But He says, "I will;" and surely this is enough to crush a thousand objections. There is nothing in which you so much honour the perfections of God as prayer; and it is beneficial to us, as it is glorifying to Him; it is an evidence of the Divine life; it is the means of sustaining and increasing the graces of the Spirit; it is the medium of Divine supplies. It is thus that we obtain wisdom to direct us, "strength to help in every time of need," and support under our trials and difficulties.

Observe the promises attached to it. We find God saying, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." That these promises have been fulfilled is attested by the history of His people in all ages. He never said to the seed of Jacob, "seek ye me in vain." I hope there are many here this morning that can bear their testimony to this truth. Ah, Christians, you have found it good to draw near to God. You have found that the very exercise of prayer has calmed your ruffled thoughts, and enlivened your Christian graces. By your intercourse with God, you have resembled Him, and have been refreshed; you have gone from His presence with your face shining, so that others have taken knowledge of you that you have been with

Jesus. Ah, Christians, "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary." You can say with the poet—

"That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst Thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer hearing, answering God,
Supports me under every load."

328

III. WHERE IT IS TO BE OFFERED. "Everywhere."

Now, this is opposed to restriction or respect. Let us see what we can make of it in either of these views. Here mankind have been under the influence of delusion. There is much of this delusion remaining. You remember the Assyrians thought that the God of Israel was the God of the hills, and not of the valleys. And when Balaam was baffled in one of his endeavours to curse Israel, he went to another place to see if he could be more prosperous, and to try if he could curse them from thence. You see how the devotions of the heathens always depended upon times, and places, or pilgrimages. Among the Jews, who were for a time under a Theocracy, God chose a place where He might reside, and where were the symbols of His presence, and there all the males resorted thrice in the year; but even then God said to Moses, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee." As Christianity was drawing near, which was to be distinguished by no restrictiveness whatever, God said, "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised." But call to remembrance the intercourse of the woman of Samaria and Our Saviour. When Our Saviour pressed her conscience, and she was afraid of His laying open her sin, "The woman saith unto Him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the

Father seeketh such to worship Him.” And Paul here says, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere.”

What think you of those sons and daughters of superstition and bigotry who would confine God to particular places and stations? Where was Jacob when he said, “This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven?” Where did Paul take leave of his friends? “He kneeled down on the sea-shore.” Where did the Saviour pray? “He went out into a private place;” “He went into a desert place;” “He went up into a mountain to pray.” When Jones, a famous Welsh preacher, was commanded to appear before the Bishop of St. David’s, the bishop said to him, “I must insist upon it that you never preach upon unconsecrated ground.” “My lord,” said he, “I never do; I never did; for ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof;’ and when Immanuel came down to set

329

His foot upon our earth, the whole was sanctified by it.” God is no more a respecter of places than of persons. He seldom receives much from those whose attachment to particular places leads them to exclaim, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!” as if there could be holiness in stones and brick and timber. All places are alike to Him who said, “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool.” “What house will ye build me, saith the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?”

This should also encourage you when you are under disadvantageous circumstances. For instance, if you are called to assemble in a very poor place, or in a very small place, He Himself hath said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name”—let it be where it will—“there am I in the midst of them.” Yea, and if your lot were cast where you might have no temple, you should remember, “God is not confined to temples made with hands;” that

“Where’er you seek Him, He is found,
And every place is holy ground.”

David knew this, and therefore said, "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

But now, further, as men *may* pray everywhere, so they *ought* to pray everywhere. The injunction not only allows, but enjoins, universal prayer. The duty is more opposed to neglect than even restriction. If God says, "I will that men pray everywhere;" if He wills, not only that they should pray always, but in every place, seeing He is in every place, beholding, observing, and recording their actions, how solemn and extensive is the injunction! In every place they may have something to do for themselves or for others; in every place they may be in danger of sin, or from the powers of darkness. Men should pray everywhere, because they may die everywhere. They have died in all places: they have died in a bath; they have died in a tavern; they have died upon the road; they have died in the temple of God. You are therefore to pray everywhere. What, then, are you to pray in the *play-house*? Yes, to be sure, if you are to pray everywhere. The late Mr. Hill wrote some fine little prayers, to be used before persons went to the theatre; some nice little thanksgivings when they came out; and some nice little petitions to be used

330

when they were there. My friends, this affords a good criterion relative to answering the question, "What dost thou here, Elijah?"

But what are we to say of those who, instead of praying "everywhere," pray nowhere? There are persons here this morning who have never prayed. They rise and retire, they go out and come in, and never pray. Many present have passed many hundreds of hours here, and it has never been said of them, "Behold, he prayeth." But you all must pray sooner or later: you must pray with Dives in hell, unless you pray for mercy now. You must pray at a time when God hears your supplication, or call on Him at a period when He will not answer. The Lord enable you in a time accepted to seek Him.

IV. Let us notice HOW THIS DUTY IS TO BE DISCHARGED.

It is to be offered up under three attributes.

The first implies *purity*, "lifting up holy hands." Solomon says, "the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Now this is full to our purpose. But you will observe that neither one nor the other means that we should be perfectly holy in the present state. If none were to pray but those who are free from all sin, the throne of grace would soon be forsaken. But in many things we offend all, and the Psalmist says, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." By secret faults he does not mean those which were concealed from others, but those which were hidden from himself, and which he desired to be acquainted with. Therefore he prays, "Search me, O God, and try me; prove my reins and my heart." The poor blind man said, "God heareth not sinners:" how then is He to hear us? The meaning is to be derived from the context. The Pharisees accused the Saviour of being a Sabbath-breaker: if He had been so, He would have been a sinner, and it is not likely that God would have honoured Him by answering His prayer. If you live in the profanation of the Sabbath, God will not hear you while you continue in such a course. But when with the publican you pray, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" or exclaim with Peter, "Lord, save, or I perish," you will find that He hears sinners. But you will observe that if a man lives in any known or loved sin, he is not, he cannot be sincere in his addresses to God; he is a mere hypocrite, and insults the Almighty by his pretensions. You have heard the

33¹

Dutch proverb, "Sinning will make a man leave off praying, or praying will make a man leave off sinning." These will not do well together, therefore they must be separated. It would be better for a man to neglect his benefactor, than to call at his house to spit in his face, or to smite him on the cheek. James says, "Can a fountain bring forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" And again, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." Never imagine that your

prayers are to atone for your sinful alliances; never imagine that the semblance of piety will serve as a cover for crime. What said our Saviour of the Pharisees? "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

The second attribute is *kindness*. This is expressed by the opposite extreme. "Without wrath." There are those whose lives may be far from egregious vices, but whose tempers do not partake of the meekness and gentleness of Christ; they bring their rancorous spirit into their worship, and think to appease the anger of God for their uncharitableness by offering it up on the altar of devotion. "But the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God." You ought to "reprove a brother, and not suffer sin upon him;" but then, you have to tell him his faults between him and you alone, and you are to pray for him. When the three kings in their distresses called for Elijah, Elijah addressing the king of Israel said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." This was wrong: it manifested a disposition uncongenial with the spirit of the gospel. He soon felt it; therefore he could not prophesy till he had called for a minstrel, for melody soon tends to calm the ruffled mind. We should "live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit."

"The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the scene of noise and strife."

This Spirit is a spirit of prayer, and it is the spirit of love. "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

The third attribute is *confidence*. This is expressed negatively: "I will that men pray everywhere," not only "without wrath,"

332

but "without doubting." Our Lord says in the Gospel by St. Matthew, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive." This passage of Scripture has given rise to a great

deal of enthusiasm, though properly regarded it would secure us from it; for if we pray in faith, faith must have a foundation. Faith is nothing unless it has a warrant. Faith must have a testimony to lay hold of, and to depend upon. What is this testimony but the Scriptures of truth? James, therefore, has the same caution, when he says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." But now, what is this confidence in God? You are not to suppose that this confidence means a certainty of your personal and actual interest in the blessings of salvation. There are many who pray well, and successfully too, who have many doubts and fears respecting their state.

This confidence includes a persuasion in the lawfulness of the things we pray for. You are to be in the compass of God's will; as John says, "Whatsoever we ask according to His will He heareth us." Now you cannot pray for anything that is sinful, because God forbids it. It would be unlawful, not being according to His will.

Then it takes in confidence in the power of God. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" 'Tis no easy thing to do this. Moses found it difficult when he said, "Where am I to find bread for all this multitude." You must have confidence that He is able to supply, and to sanctify you wholly.

This confidence takes in the disposition of God towards you; you are not only to "believe that He is," but that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him;" that is, you are to regard His willingness as well as His power, or else you cannot pray acceptably. You must remember not only that He is infinitely holy, but infinitely good; that "He desireth not the death of a sinner." You must think of the freeness of the invitation given in His word: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Especially you must have confidence in the mediation of Christ. Without this we can never look for acceptance of God in our services, far we are only accepted in the Beloved, but

here our distresses are relieved. I am a sinner. but then here is a Saviour. I have nothing of my own to plead, but here is "a

333

Name above every name:" whatsoever I ask the Father in His name I shall receive.

God sometimes affords His people special confidence: this should be considered as a privilege, rather than a rule.

Our religious concern is to extend not only to the matter, but to the manner. "Take heed how ye hear." Now add to it another admonition. "You ask, and have not," says James, "because ye ask amiss." You talk of being humble for your sins: have you ever been humble? And can you reflect upon your Sabbaths, upon your holy communions, upon your praising and upon your prayers, without falling upon your knees and crying, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O God, for in Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." Have you not often wondered that God has not driven you away from His door? and have you not frequently exclaimed, "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed"? Still be not discouraged, but "encourage yourself in the Lord your God." Remember, "a bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench." Seek to Him for mercy and grace, and then, after a while, a life of prayer will issue in an eternity of praise.

334

XXXIV. CHRIST'S WORK ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, October 1st, 1848.)

By His own blood He entered in once the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.—HEBREWS ix. 12.

WE read of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that shall follow," and, according to the testimony of the Apostle Peter, these are worthy of the most careful study: for first, he tells us,

they were the substance of all ancient prophecy; and secondly, they are the subject of angelic study—"which things the angels desire to look into." Angels are proverbial for their knowledge, and yet their knowledge admits of increase, and we see the direction they take in order to improve it. They come to learn "by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." They leave the wonders of nature and providence, and drop around the Cross. They are Christian philosophers. Yes, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that shall follow,"—*these* are the things they desire to look into. If they study them much, how much more should we, to whom they are not only true, sublime, and marvellous (so they are to them), but infinitely important, interesting, and necessary! They are the history of the means of our salvation. What, then, can more properly engage our attention this morning, especially as we are approaching the table of the Lord, where, "as oft as ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come."

Our text is partly a contrast: "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

335

We leave the order of the words, and follow the order of the thing, and thus they furnish us with two arrangements of thought. The first regards His work on earth, and the second His appearance in heaven. "Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things."

I. The first regards HIS WORK ON EARTH.

"He obtained eternal redemption for us."
Four things are here observable.

First, the blessing in question: it is *redemption*—redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ, or deliverance *from the sentence of condemnation*. For we were chargeable with innumerable transgressions; and the law, like a merciless creditor, said, "Pay me what thou owest," and we had nothing to pay; therefore we must have been led away into prison for ever, had He

not come forward and said, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;" but He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Therefore, there is now no penalty in the law, no sting in death, no wrath to come, "no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Redemption by power, *from the dominion of sin*, from the vassalage of the world, and from the power of darkness. For we were in the bondage of corruption as well as in the bondage of condemnation. And a dreadful and vile bondage it was. Through being natural to them, God's people were not sensible of it for a time, for sin not only hardens, but blinds also. Yes, they commonly resembled Peter asleep in the prison, though to die in the morning; or they resembled a maniac singing and dancing in his chains. This, however, was not always the case. "The way of transgressors is hard." There are a thousand temporal effects which serve to show that it is not only an exceeding evil, but an exceeding bitter thing to sin against the Lord. The loss of substance, the loss of health, our bones filled with the sins of our youth; loathsomeness, beggary, shame—these sometimes make men groan, and induce them to say, "we will be slaves no longer." But the resolution has been formed in their own strength; it is therefore unavailing and soon over, and they have been caught in the snare of the fowler, and bound faster than before. These short-lived reformations are put off as long as possible, and resorted to with reluctance. But the latter end has been found worse than the beginning.

336

At first perhaps there has been only a change of sin: the grossest have been parted with, while unbelief, self-righteousness, and pride have remained. Thus the strong man armed kept his palace and his goods in peace, till a stronger than he came, and in a tone of uncontrollable authority said, "Loose him, and let him go." And then it is by experience they know that "if the Son make them free, they are free indeed."

Secondly, we see the extensiveness of the attribute, “*eternal redemption*.” How is this? Eternal, *completely*. We often read in the Old Testament of the Jews being delivered out of the hands of their enemies. These deliverances were temporal. They were often soon again in bondage, and sometimes in severer bondage than before. But this will never be the case with the subjects of Divine grace. Not one of them shall ever fall again under the power of their adversaries. Sin shall not have dominion over them, for they are not under the law but under grace, and the God of grace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly. We are told by infallible authority, that “he who believeth on the Son of God shall not come into condemnation, but *is passed from death unto life*.”

Eternal, *absolutely*. There are many things which are called eternal which are not endless in their duration. Thus, we read of the perpetual hills, and of the everlasting mountains. The earth is said to abide for ever, but this is spoken of in contrast with one generation passing away and another coming. But there is no figure necessary here; no qualification. The duration of empires, the duration of time itself, O Christian, is not the measure of thy salvation. “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner, *but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished*.” When the angel shall raise his hands, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever that time shall be no longer, the Christian’s happiness shall only be beginning. “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: they shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.”

Eternal, *emphatically*. What we mean here is this; though this redemption does not overlook time, it regards eternity. It scatters indeed a thousand blessings along the road, but its end is everlasting life; and “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.” No: eternity is the

337

sphere of this redemption; eternity is its own world; there and there only its blessings shall be fully revealed, its treasures fully

possessed, and its pleasures fully enjoyed. God would be ashamed to be called the God of His people, if he did nothing more for them than He does here; but He has prepared for them a city. The ages to come are to shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. In order to express the immensity of His goodness, time is too short, and earth is too narrow. There must be for this purpose an endless duration. There must be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." We have often told you that

"The men of grace have found
 Glory begun below;
 Celestial fruits on earthly ground
 From faith and hope may grow."

But this is only the beginning. The Christian's experience now is only the dawn, the day is to come; he has only the earnest now, the inheritance is future: "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," reserved in heaven for him. His eyes must "see evil no more:" that which is perfect must come, and that which is in part must be done away. They must be presented faultless before the presence of the Divine glory with exceeding joy: and then shall they find that in His presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore.

Now what a pleasure there always is in certainty; and the more we value a thing the more are we concerned for its safety and its continuance. Who would set his heart upon that which is not? but riches, and all earthly things, make to themselves wings and fly away. Everything is perishing here. Don't you feel everything giving way under your feet?

"All, all on earth is shadow:
 All beyond is substance.
 The reverse is folly's creed.
 How solid all where change shall be no more!"

Blessed be God, there is something lasting; something everlasting. There is something that will not deceive, something that *cannot* deceive, that cannot disappoint us. The word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by

the gospel is preached unto you. The kingdom which believers receive is a kingdom which cannot be shaken, but must remain. There is “a building of God, a house not made

Z

338

with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Eternity attached to a comparative trifle would give it dignity and interest. But eternity is attached to my life, to my health, to the use of my eyes, my ears, my hands; eternity attached to my dear friendships and connections. All this renders it infinitely important and desirable; and this is the portion of every Christian. “Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”

Observe thirdly, it is eternal in its *procuring*. It is done already. Christ has obtained eternal redemption for us. It was done while He was here. Before He departed out of this world unto the Father, He accomplished the work given Him to do. For you will observe here that there is a difference between the purchase and the application of this redemption. The one is obtained for us, the other is imparted to us. What says the Apostle to the Romans? “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to. God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” He had not done all His work as a Saviour when He left our world. No, He had then much to do. He has much to do still as a Saviour. He will, until the end come, when He “shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all.” But this is not suffering work, this is not atoning work: He dieth thus no more. Death hath no more dominion over Him. He therefore said when He expired, “*It is finished.*” We see, therefore, how deluded those are who think of adding anything to the value and efficacy of His atonement by any sufferings or doings of their own. So true are the words of Dr. Watts;

“The death of Christ must still remain
Sufficient and alone.”

He has thus obtained eternal redemption for us. Has he obtained it in vain? Do you imagine that, after having

obtained it, He will lose the glory, and His people the blessedness of the purchase? Impossible! as the moral Teacher, and as minister of the circumcision, He *did* so; He laboured in vain, and spent His strength for nought and in vain. But not as your Surety, not as the Mediator of a better covenant: He there “shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” “By His knowledge,” says God, “shall my righteous Servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”

339

Fourthly, we are reminded of the eternity of the *benefit*. “He hath obtained eternal redemption *for us*.” “*For us*” is written in italics, and therefore it is not in the original, and you are not generally to lay the same stress upon these words as upon the original. We therefore often omit these, for they rather weaken the sense of many passages. But here we retain these words as a part of our text, and consequently as forming the basis of our discourse; and we do so, first, because we are always afraid of saying anything to shake the popular confidence in our own translation, as the most able judges have always pronounced it so excellent; and, secondly, because the subject embodied is important. The conscience of a man will put an inquiry of this kind, and the Apostle calls upon us to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, to prove our own selves. Especially should this be the case when going to surround the table of the Lord; and, therefore, says he, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.”

In answer to the inquiry, How are we to understand these words, “Having obtained eternal redemption for us;” we reply, first, for *men*, in distinction from angels. He was to restore in the same nature in which men fell. Hence the language and the reasoning of the Apostle, “For verily, He took not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.” “And because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of

death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” “It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren.”

Then, secondly, this “for us” is for us *believers*. There are those who neglect this great salvation, who turn away from Him who speaketh from heaven, who have judged themselves to be unworthy of everlasting life. So in the days of His flesh we read that “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” “He came unto His own,” to the Jews, and the Jews “received Him not.” But some received Him, and “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” So it is now; to such He is “made of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” And, if you have forsaken every false hope, and have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel; if you build alone upon Him as your foundation;

Z 2

340

if you receive Him as your Prince as well as Saviour; as the Giver of repentance as well as the Bestower of forgiveness; if you give up yourselves to Him, not only to be saved, but asking, “Lord, what will Thou have me to do?” if to you as “to them that believe, *He is precious*;” why, then, my brethren, without any hesitation you may take up the language of our text and say, “having obtained eternal redemption for us.” For so the appropriation will universally apply. Paul, in saying, “having obtained eternal redemption for us,” does not mean for us apostles, or even for us Christians endowed with such extraordinary powers. Office never yet saved any man under heaven. Miracles were not “things which accompanied salvation.” They were never designed to be so. There are now in hell numbers who spake with tongues, and who prophesied, and who performed miracles. Our Saviour tells us that many will come to Him in that day, saying, “Lord, Lord, we have eaten and drank in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name have done many wonderful works.” And yet He will answer and say unto them, “I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” “But to that man,” says God, “will I look, even to him who is

poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word.” “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy.” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

So much as regards His work on earth.

II. Let us consider HIS APPEARANCE IN HEAVEN. For having obtained eternal redemption for us with His own blood, “*He entered in once into the holy place.*”

Concerning this the Apostle enables us to answer three questions: *Where* did he enter? “Into the holy place.” With *what* did He enter? “With His own blood.” *How* often did He enter? “Once.” Let us briefly review each of these.

First, *where* did He enter? “Having obtained eternal redemption for us,” “into the holy place,” that is, into heaven. But we look at the sanctity rather than at the locality of this expression. For, my brethren, we have principally to do with heaven as a state. Remember this. Jacob was an exile, and

341

on his journey from Beersheba to Haran, when he found himself at the gate of heaven. What our Saviour said is the experience of every Christian. “The kingdom of heaven is within you.” Yet it is a place too. It must be a place. It contains embodied beings. Enoch and Elijah entered heaven incarnately, with their bodies on; and our Saviour, as a man, was “clothed with a body like our own.” And wherever He is, there is heaven. He also calls it a place. “I go,” says he, “to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.”

But we refer to heaven as being *a holy place*; for it is as holy as it is high. God says, “I dwell in the high and holy place.” Angels, therefore, after they had sinned could no longer remain there, but were banished. “Into it entereth nothing that

defileth, nor whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." A holy place could never be designed for unholy beings: "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" Unholy beings could never derive happiness from a holy place; such would find it their burden and their misery. But it is otherwise with those who have seen the evil of their ways, who feel sin to be an exceeding bitter thing, who are groaning out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and who are often upon their knees crying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me!" There you see holiness implanted, and in a measure prevailing. The subjects of it love purity; they love God, and this holy place is prepared for them that love Him.

Secondly, if it be asked *with what* did He enter? the Apostle answers, "with His own blood." The high priest entered the holy place with blood. As soon as the victim was sacrificed, "he took the blood that was in the basin, and struck the lintel and the two side posts with the blood." But you know it was impossible for the blood of bulls or goats to take away sin. But Jesus entered with His own blood into the most holy place. Not that the blood He shed was taken up in a vessel and sprinkled by Him in heaven. But there He presented His own body from which this blood has flowed—from His back, His head, and cheeks, and hands, and side. Thus it was that He entered.

When we reflect, we see all this was necessary to our salvation. For having engaged to stand in our place, and to

342

become our surety and substitute, and God having laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, and He having become answerable for it, He could not go back into the most holy place till He had suffered for our sins, and expiated our guilt by the sacrifice of Himself, and brought in everlasting righteousness. But this He did, and in consequence of this attained a passage for Himself as our surety, and for us on whose behalf He engaged. Thus the Apostle says, "We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which

He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

Thus have we seen what difficulties there were in the way of our recovery. We are but little impressed with this, because we have but low views of the evil of sin, and of the holiness and sanctity of His law. But we are sure God does nothing in vain, that the Judge of all the earth does nothing unnecessary. If His justice could have been satisfied without it, we may feel assured the world would never have witnessed the sufferings and death of His own "beloved Son." But it pleased the Father to bruise Him; and if He would save others, Himself He could not save. If He would open a passage for Himself as our surety, and for us, His followers, it must be by His own blood, the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. For while the one is calling for vengeance, the other is calling for pardon more loudly still.

And while we see that He entered the holy place by His own blood, we see the difference between His entering heaven and our entering heaven. We enter it by mercy, but *He* entered it by merit. Having performed the tremendous condition upon which it was set before Him, He could demand heaven as a right.

If you ask, thirdly, *How often* did He enter? We answer, "Once."

The Apostle settles this. The high priest under the law never entered the holy place without blood; but he entered it with blood every year, and this shews us the imperfection of the legal services and their inefficacy. For as the Apostle here observes, "The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the

343

comers thereunto perfect; for then would they not have ceased to be offered?" Assured of the end being accomplished, the worshippers being once purged should have had no more

conscience of sins. But in these sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. Now see how the Apostle triumphantly applies this to the Saviour, so that in all things He has the pre-eminence. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

Thus have we seen Him upon earth obtaining eternal redemption for us, and entering into the holy place for us. Fix it then in your minds and meditations where He now is. Poor Dr. Priestley was sadly at a loss here. He tells us in one of his works, that it is impossible to determine where Christ now is. "He is," says he, "probably upon earth, for He is invisible. He was born in a stable, and laid in a manger, and He died here upon earth; therefore what relation can He have to any other planet than earth? Probably, from some expressions in the epistles, He has something still to do here." But we have not so learned Christ. He said to His disciples, "Whither I go, ye know; and the way, ye know." We know also that Christ was received up into heaven; that He is gone into the holiest of holies, angels and principalities and powers being subject unto Him. How much, my brethren, depends upon His being there! How much depends upon your being there! How much depends upon the relation and connection between Him and you! Let us look briefly at these, and then hasten to the table of the Lord.

Why should our Lord's being in heaven concern us? Why, in consequence of this, Christians, you are in a sense already

344

there. This is bold language, but it is the Apostle's own language. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." So you see it is done already. There are many who entered heaven beside our Saviour. Patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and the whole army of martyrs. But these entered as private individuals. He entered as our Head and Representative. And when He arose and ascended, He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Yes, and therefore in due time you shall arrive there actually; that is, in your own persons.

"Yet a season, and you know
Happy entrance shall be given,
All your sorrows left below,
And earth exchanged for heaven."

If you are not there where He is, you know He will be unfaithful, for He hath said, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be." And He will be disappointed, for He prayed to His Father, saying, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." And I am sure without this He will be imperfect, for His people are the members of His body.

Secondly, we shall also enter it. We have much to do in heaven, and our concerns there are very important. It is therefore desirable we should have one to manage all things perfectly. It is well to have a friend at court, and you have such an one. Jacob's sons had a friend at court, and this friend was their own brother; he was lord of all the land of Egypt; he had all the stores at his disposal. You have a Friend at court, and He is able to supply all your need according to His riches in glory. It was David's privilege to have a friend at court, and this friend was the king's son. Yours, Christians, is the same privilege; your Friend is "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." There He is as your Repre-

sentative, as your Advocate and Forerunner. In Him are deposited all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is able and engaged to make all things work together for your good.

Some of you have much in heaven already, and very much to endear heaven to your minds; but your language is—

“Jesus, my all, to heaven is gone,
He whom I fix my hopes upon;
His track I see, and I’ll pursue
The narrow way till Him I view.”

345

Oh, it is a solemn thing to die; but, says the Saviour, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death:” he shall only fall asleep; he shall only depart to be with Christ, which is far better. If He were here upon earth, when you come to die, you would have to leave Him behind you; but He is gone before you to heaven! How then should this draw you to it! What have you here? What do you here?

“There your best friend, your Saviour, dwells,
There God your Saviour reigns.
See the kind angels at the gates
Inviting you to come;
There Jesus, your Forerunner, waits
To welcome travellers home.”

And, oh, the happiness of the dying believer, when as he enters another world he opens his eyes and sees Him whom his soul loveth. Not Jacob, who in the excitement of joy said, “Is Joseph my son yet alive! I will go and see him before I die;” not Israel’s entering upon the promised land after all their toils in the wilderness; not the man born blind, when he gazed upon the wonders of nature; none of these can hold forth to fancy what the believer shall enjoy when he shall see the Saviour as He is, and shall be for ever with the Lord.

“O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul.”

Then it should also influence you to walk as becometh the gospel of Christ. As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. Your treasure is in heaven now: there also should your hearts be. Your principal concern lies there, and your chief happiness is there. Why then seek ye your chief happiness among the dead? "*He is not here; He is risen!*" He is at the right hand of God the Father, and ever liveth to make intercession for you. May you maintain continually communion with Him. Forget not the language of the Apostle in this case: "Having a great High Priest over the house of God, let us hold fast our profession."

And let not His people now be ashamed of Him or of His words. Speaking after the manner of men, there might appear some ground for excuse for a poor sinner when he saw Jesus crowned with thorns, and being conducted to Calvary bearing His cross; *but where is He when you are ashamed of Him?* Why, at the head of the universe! "Ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." And will you be

346

ashamed of Him now? or ashamed of His people? Will you not rather say with Doddridge:

"Hast Thou a lamb in all Thy fold

I would refuse to feed?

Hast Thou a foe before whose face

I fear Thy cause to plead?"

Oh, but we have trials personal and relative. Well, the Apostle adds, "We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." Though He has passed into the heavens, He took along with Him all His tenderness, compassion, and love. Therefore hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful who hath promised. For you "have *not* a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," but One who was in all points tempted and tried as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

XXXV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S TREASURE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, February 22nd, 1846.)*And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and alt enduring substance.—HEBREWS x. 34.*

DAVID tells us that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.” He is so in three ways: in his condition, in his principles, and in his practice. Happy is he who observing all these can say, “Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name;” and blessed too are all those who pray, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation; that I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance.” Yes, blessed are they, for they are safe, for “the Eternal God is their refuge, underneath them are the everlasting arms.” They are *wise*; they have the wisdom “which cometh from above;” they are “wise unto salvation.” They are *honourable*; “they have the honour that cometh from God only.” They are *rich*; truly rich, for the Saviour says, “I will cause them that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures.” They have much in hand, more in hope—much in possession, more in reversion. Nor is it necessary for them to be held in ignorance of their claims, as you would in many cases conceal from heirs what is due to them, lest they should become proud and profuse. So says the Apostle, “knowing that in heaven ye have a better and an enduring substance.”

Let us now inquire how Christians come to be possessed of property; let us examine the nature of their wealth; and consider the knowledge they have of their riches; and endeavour to ascertain the relation of this assembly to this treasure.

348

I. Let us inquire HOW CHRISTIANS CAME TO BE POSSESSED OF PROPERTY?

They were originally poor, very poor; and each of them could say with Paul, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." There was a time indeed when they were unwilling to confess this, for they were once as proud as they were poor. They said, "We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" when at the very moment they were "poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked." They also now are willing to acknowledge that what they possess has not been earned by their own labour, or prepared by their own worthiness, but was received without their desert or desire; and even before their very existence. To humble Job, God said, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" So may I say to you Christians, Where were you when He interposed on your behalf; when He undertook to obtain eternal redemption for us?

This leads me to the very secret of the property they possess. But no, it is not a secret. No, the property they are acquiring should not be concealed. What says the Apostle? "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Here the business is explained, and you will observe two things-

The one is, the generosity and munificence of God's design. He found His people poor, but His aim with regard to them was not only to redeem them, but to enrich them; not merely to justify them, but that in His righteousness they might be exalted; not only that they might have life, but that they may have it more abundantly; not only to raise them up as poor from the dust, and as beggars from the dunghill, but to set them among princes, even the princes of His people. You sometimes see the poor (I wish you saw it oftener) clothed in comfortable but humble dress. But what is the voice of the Church? "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation." Everything here is delivered in a kind of excess or superabundance. Mark the sacred language, "I will

abundantly bless her.” They not only travel, but they *sing* in the ways of the Lord. They “return to Sion with songs and everlasting joy.” They are not only conquerors, but “*more* than conquerors through Him that loved them.” And all things are theirs.

The other is the medium through which His liberality

349

operates. He became poor, who was rich, that we through His poverty might become rich. This was expedient and necessary. “He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” But in this form He could not serve, and could not suffer. He could not become their ransom, or sacrifice, or their sympathising friend, or their example. He therefore “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And did He veil His glory, did He take upon Him flesh and blood, needlessly? But if all this were necessary, what idea should you attach to the importance and difficulty of your salvation? If all this were necessary, what a fulness and fervency is there in the love of Christ to you! There are many who wish to be considered benefactors. They give, that is to get rid of your importunity; they give, but it is what they cannot enjoy themselves; they give, but it is what they can do without, where no sacrifice is needed, and where no self-denial is exercised. But Jesus did not wait for our application. Jesus knew from the beginning the price of His benevolence. Jesus knew all beforehand. He knew that if we were to be enriched, He must be impoverished; that if we were to be redeemed from the curse of the law, He must become a curse for us; that if we lived, He must die; and that “by His stripes” alone we could be healed.

“O for this love let rocks and hills
 Their lasting silence break;
 And all harmonious human tongues
 The Saviour’s praises speak.”

II. Let us examine THE NATURE OF THEIR WEALTH.

“Knowing in yourselves, that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance.”

All earthly “substance” is precarious. What does Solomon say? “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” What says Young in one of his most touching and pathetic passages?

“All, all on earth is shadow, all beyond is substance.
How solid all where change shall be no more!”

But let us attend to the Apostle’s expression. It consists of three articles.

The first regards the *place*. It is in heaven, the abode of the blessed; the habitation of God; the palace of the great King. Where is heaven? There are some who ask, whether or not it

350

is to be considered a place at all. It is principally to be regarded as a *state*. The believer is convinced of this by his acquaintance and enjoyments of it now; for even while here he sometimes finds himself at the gate of heaven, and though the gate is not so near the house as the door, yet he thinks it cannot be far off. So the believer’s experience harmonizes with our Saviour’s declaration, “The kingdom of heaven is within you.” After their fall Adam and Eve found Eden no longer a Paradise.

“Not all the harps above
Can make a joyful place,
If God His residence remove,
Or but conceal His face.”

But heaven must be a place too. Our Saviour is clothed in a body like our own. And this body cannot be everywhere. He once said to His sorrowing disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also.” “He is gone,” said Peter, “into heaven.” We read of “a hope laid up for us in heaven,”—of “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you;”—of our being “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

And the Apostle says, "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." From thence come all your remittances, and all the supplies of God's children now, while they are in a state of education and discipline, till they come of age and take possession of their inheritance.

The second regards the *superiority* of the Christian's inheritance. "Ye have in heaven a *better* and enduring substance." Better than what? The comparison regards the goods they had suffered the loss of, mentioned in the former clause of the verse, "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that in heaven ye had a better and an enduring substance." The Apostle admits that the things they had lost were good in themselves. We now need these things; they are of importance to us while here. The sacred writers are not enthusiasts or fanatics; they always distinguish between God's world and the devil's world; between the pleasures of sin, and pleasures which arise from the beauties of nature. The bounties of Providence

³⁵¹

are the reward of man's diligence and labour. It is the doctrine of *demons* that forbids to marry. These goods may be prayed for, with submission to the will of God. They are sometimes promised in the sacred Scriptures. But we should take care to observe how they are promised, only conditionally. Our Saviour says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"—the things which the Hebrews had sacrificed for their religion. So our Saviour speaks of them not as parts of the promise, but as of something thrown in; not as the articles purchased, but the paper and string in which they are tied up, and conveyed from the shop to the purchaser. These are the views the Saviour seemed to entertain when He said, "all these things shall be added unto you,"—in such proportion as the wisdom and goodness of God sees fit. But we must always remember there are better things than these. "Ye have in heaven a better substance,"—better than anything on earth. There is no hazard, no mortal hazard in obtaining them; there is no need of lies or prevarication, of running down another's property, or wishing

persons to be out of the way, that they might obtain them. There are but few who obtain the riches of this world without some debasement of mind; especially, as the Apostle says, “those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Solomon says, “He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” But here the sooner you get rich the better. Here you cannot obtain riches too speedily, or seek them too earnestly; here riches will always refine and dignify your mind. “A man’s life,” that is, his happiness, “consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” No; it is not in their power to afford satisfaction. No; the desires of a man enlarge with his success. There the more he drinks, the more thirsty he is. This is a moral paradox. Here is a wretched Haman. He had preferment enough, if that was all; but after reckoning up his acquisitions and distinctions, he exclaims, “All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King’s gate.” And here is Ahab, King over Judah, yet he can eat nothing; he is sick, and takes to his bed, because he cannot obtain a little garden of herbs. So we read, “In the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits.” And they still ask, “who will show us any good?”

352

It is better in quality. This is spiritual. It is therefore suited to his soul, and “the soul is the standard of the man.”

The third article is its *duration*. “You have a better and an enduring substance.” This is no attribute of temporal wealth. I need not remind you of this. Riches are spoken of as deceitful and uncertain. How often do they “make to themselves wings and flyaway!” So says the Saviour, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal;” that is, this treasure is destructible in itself; it is exposed to a thousand accidents—to wars, to floods, and flames, to wicked and unreasonable men. But here we find durable riches; here are

bags that wax not old; here is a treasure in heaven, where there is no internal principle of decay, or external dangers from frowns or force. No; it is an enduring substance. Hence the changes which affect others do not affect the believer, for he has sent all his possessions across the river, and they are "where no moth corrupteth, nor thieves can break through and steal." The greater good you possess, the more miserable you will be, if you have an apprehension that it is not safe, or that it is not permanent. "Permanency," says Young, "adds bliss to bliss." An enduring substance! Oh, it is this which is the crown of the Christian's treasure! If he has a home, it is "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." If it is a crown, it is "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." If a city, it is "a city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God." And if a kingdom, it is "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

III. Let us consider THE KNOWLEDGE THEY POSSESS OF THEIR INTEREST IN THIS SUBSTANCE.

"*Knowing*," says the Apostle, "that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."

Here a few explanatory notes will be necessary. There are some difficulties in the attainment of this knowledge. Hence there are many to whom this property belongs who are unable to appropriate it.

The difficulty arises from the importance of the thing itself.

It is commonly said that it is easy to believe what we wish, but the experience of every man gives the lie to this. We all know the more happiness is wrapped up in a thing, the more alive we are to uncertainty. We desire, therefore, evidence upon evidence, assurance upon assurance. The miser wishes to believe that

353

his bags are safe, but finds it difficult to do so. A ship is wrecked at sea. The mother hears that one of the five saved is her son; she wishes to believe the report, but does she find it easy to do so? Her affection will lead her to explore every paper, and search every report. She will seek one confirmation after another, and will hardly feel satisfied till she again presses her son to her bosom. And surely it is no easy thing for me

to decide upon, and set myself down for an heir of immortality; as “an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ.”

Sometimes there is a physical difficulty. There is a degree of morbidness of constitution, so that they view things indistinctly. But you know the deceitfulness of the human heart, and that” he who trusts his own heart is a fool.” Therefore such a one is suspicious of every report from that old treacherous quarter.

Then self-deception is possible. As Solomon says, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

And yet it *is* possible to obtain the knowledge of this, and to know for ourselves that “we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” Why else are you exhorted to “make your calling and election sure,” if the thing be impossible? Why are you called upon to “examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith,” if it be impracticable? Then there have been persons capable of professing this knowledge, and who have acknowledged this assurance. You have a Job who said, “I know that my Redeemer liveth;”—a David who exclaimed, “As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, in Thy likeness;”—a Paul who said, “I know whom I have believed.” These men did not profess it as the consequence of an immediate revelation from God.

This knowledge is not *necessary* to their salvation, but something which accompanies it. These persons have a standard by which they try themselves. So, says John, “We know that we are passed from death unto life,” not because we can prophesy, or because we can speak with tongues, but “because we love the brethren.”

What, brethren, is the source of your evidence? May it be relied upon? When God spoke of Canaan to Abraham, Abraham said, “Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” I hope, therefore, with regard to this better substance, there are many of you who are saying, “Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” For remember this, an attention to the

A A

354

evidence of your interest in it, bears an evidence to the thing itself. I know of no better evidence than a great deal of anxiety about it. We are aware that smoke is not fire, and yet there is no smoke where there is no fire. "Doubts and fears," says Bishop Hall, "are not faith, and yet when there is no faith these are not found;"—and prayerless persons are careless concerning it. There is not a better evidence than the preciousness of the Saviour to your soul, for "to those that believe, He is precious." I know not a better evidence than an attachment to His name, to His house, to His word, to His ways, and to His followers. Have you not something in you congenial to Him? Have you hope? For "He that hath wrought us for this selfsame thing is God, who hath also given to us the earnest of His Spirit." You talk of meetness for "the inheritance of the saints in light:" why, if you could enjoy the heaven described in the Scriptures, you are meet; you may be assured of possessing it. You should compare yourselves with those the Bible describes as heirs to this inheritance. For the sacred writers never speak of the privileges of the saints without giving their characters, that you may compare your views, desires, and experience with theirs. Therefore it is said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "Blessed are the pure in heart," that is, those who love inward and heart purity, "for they shall see God." "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

But, oh, the power and influence of this knowledge! Oh, what cannot it do for the possessor? I need not exemplify this. Does it produce joy? Where is the person who would not be ready to say—

" O could I hear Thine heavenly tongue
But whisper 'Thou art mine;'
Those heavenly words would raise my song
To notes almost Divine."

There is, too, its practical worth; its weaning power.

“When I can say my God is mine,
 When I can feel His glories shine,
 I tread the world beneath my feet,
 And all that earth calls good or great.”

I knew a pious young female some years ago, in the neigh-

355

bourhood of London, who had written in her pocket-book the day before her sudden death—

“I could renounce my all below,
 If my Creator bid;
 And run if I were called to go,
 And die as Moses did.”

Oh, what else can raise you above the dread and fear of death? When you can realise your interest in this dear Saviour, how it draws you up! Your treasure is in heaven, and there will your hearts and your conversation be. Oh, what satisfaction will be experienced under losses and afflictions!

“A hope so much Divine
 May trials well endure.”

“Well,” says the possessor of it, “if I am exercised with affliction, I am not to reside here for ever. I am not a settler here; I am only a stranger and pilgrim upon earth; these are only the inconveniencies of a traveller on his journey; this is not my house or my home; let me look beyond the hardships in my way, to the end of my course.” “My heart and flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” I have seldom found a comfortless Christian an active and diligent one. You remember the language of Isaiah, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Oh, it is this that sets the Christian in motion; in the possession of it, with an enlarged heart, he runs in the way of God’s commandments.

Lastly, LET US ENDEAVOUR TO ASCERTAIN THE RELATION OF THIS ASSEMBLY TO THIS TREASURE.

I look over you, and wish to commend myself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But I cannot address you all individually; all I can do is to divide into four classes; and numerous and diversified as you are, I am sure this will include you all.

First, then, I address those who have no substance either in earth or heaven. Your case, dear hearers, is truly deplorable; you are poor in body and in mind, both as it regards time and eternity. You have a vale of tears in this world, and a *hell in the world to come*. Can you imagine that I can speak of this without human feelings, to say nothing of Christian? Vet how could I be faithful, and shew my real concern for your welfare, by keeping you in ignorance? There are many who seem to think their present hardships and trials a kind of exception. You may frequently have heard this saying, "How hard would

A A 2

356

it be to suffer here and hereafter too!" And so it would be. What if after all your privations these should be found only the beginning of sorrows?

In the second division, we place those who have substance on earth, but none in heaven. This substance, perhaps, lifts you up, and makes you swagger as you walk, and leads you to answer roughly, and gives you consequence, especially when you view yourself in comparison with others, because waters of a full cup are wrung out to you, and you have more of this world's goods than they. But what has this done for you already? What can it do? "Success in the world," said a person of large affluence to me one day, "shews us more of the vanity thereof than disappointment. Those who have sought these things and have not obtained them, think there is something satisfactory in them; but those who have succeeded in gaining them, know the vanity of the world, not from the want of them, but from the things themselves." This was a wise remark. Arise, my friends; seek those things which are above, for what thousands are there to be found, who know that here we have no continuing city, yet seek not one to come!

In the third class, we place those who have treasure in heaven, but none upon earth. This is the case with not a few. God says, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He hath promised to them that love Him? Brethren, remember

you have the honour of most conformity to the Apostles, who said, "Silver and gold have I none;" and even to this very hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place. You have the honour of the greatest conformity to Him who had not where to lay His head, and who was ministered to by the creatures of His power. You have the advantage of living more immediately and entirely on the providence of God, of receiving supplies more directly from Him in whom you live, and move, and have your being." Oh, are there such here this morning? I would say to them, as our blessed Saviour said to one of the Churches, "I know thy poverty; but thou art *rich*." O yes, you are *rich* toward God; *rich* in faith; *rich* in your interest in the exceeding great and precious promises; *rich* in your relations, being "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

But in the last division we place those who have substance both on earth and in heaven. In your portion flow both the

357

"upper and the nether springs." Is it nothing, brethren, that you have the conveniencies of life, that you have not only enough for your own wants, but an ability to relieve him that needeth? Is it nothing that you are thus distinguished by temporal and spiritual mercies? It becomes you to give God thanks for the possession of these earthly favours, and to praise Him still more that He has not put you off with these. You can say with Dr. Watts,

"To Thee we owe our life and health,
And wealth and safe abode;
Thanks to Thy name for meaner things,
But they are not my God."

"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I trust in Him." And as you have now spiritual blessings added to temporal ones, you will soon have eternal added to spiritual! "Blessed are the people who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord."

XXXVI. THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, June 30th, 1848.)

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let

us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking- unto Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.—HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

IT must be acknowledged that Christians are imperfect. The people of the world are very unjust in dealing with their imperfections. They are guilty of four improprieties: for first, they imagine and surmise evils which have no existence; and when they find nothing exceptional in their conduct, they assail their motives, and insinuate that they are false and selfish, and no better than others, if everything concerning them was known. Then secondly, they magnify their imperfections into crimes, and what they overlook in others, they magnify in them. Thirdly, they impute the failings and miscarriages of a few to the whole body. And fourthly, they will not distinguish between their imperfections and Christianity itself. To judge of Christians by Christianity is allowable and proper, for they profess to know it and to feel it; and this being the case, it is very fair to look after their consistency, and to inquire, "What do they more than others?" But to judge of Christianity by Christians is neither reasonable nor righteous. Religion is one thing in the Scriptures, and another often in the lives of professors; but if the professors of religion were in all things to be influenced by the Spirit, and governed by the rules of Christianity, they would pursue "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;" if there were any virtue or any praise,

359

they would think of these things; and the men of God would be “furnished unto every good work.” Before we beheld a glorified Church above, we should see a glorious Church on earth, “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” I need only to appeal, for instance, to the comprehensive language of our text, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.”

Here we have duties, precautions, and encouragements. Duties the most important, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Precautions the most wise, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.” Encouragements the most noble and cheering, derived from the saints and the Saviour, surrounding us with the one, and placing the other before us.

I. WE HAVE DUTIES THE MOST IMPORTANT.

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Here we see the Christian life is a race; and that this race is set before us; and that this race cannot be accomplished without patience. This language is frequently employed by the Apostle. One of the games in ancient times which were celebrated with so much pomp was running a race. The Apostle borrowed the metaphor to represent the Christian’s course. It is obvious what impression the Apostle intends to make,—that as in a race there is no prize without running, so in religion there is no heaven without diligence and zeal. As a race not only requires exertion, but strenuous exertion, so religion demands the most vigorous stretch of all our powers, allowing of no mischance, or of repose. He that imagines the religion of the Bible to be an easy thing, and that it may be possessed and realised by mere opinions, forms and ceremonies, and cheap moralities, without sacrifices, and without the dedication of the heart and life entirely to the service of God, is, as

Isaiah says, "Feeding upon ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot perceive his danger, and say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" "If ye know these things," says the Saviour, "happy are ye if ye do them." "Strive," says He, "to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able."

360

You will observe that this race is "set before us," that is, it is marked out in the Scriptures, so that He whom we serve has prescribed our course, and determined what we are to observe, and what we are to avoid. For this is not a course into which we drop by chance, nor is it a scheme of our own devices: it is not will worship, it is not the appointment of man. God's authority alone is binding in religious concerns; in civil, indeed, we are to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," but in spiritual, "to God the things that are God's." Ignorance therefore is not the mother of *our* devotion. And, as Dr. Owen finely remarks, "All the operations of Divine grace are begun and continued in the illumination of the mind." And God has not left us in darkness; we find everything plain in the Scriptures, in proportion as they are important; so that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."

Then we have set before us the advantages of this race, and the fine prize with which it will be crowned at last; and He has also set before us its difficulties. We have no reason therefore to murmur and complain when we think of these. When we meet with them, we cannot say, "Well, I did not think I should ever find such trials, or be tempted to turn back." Rather, we shall say, "All was laid before me; He told me, I remember, when I entered my unworthy name to become one of His followers, In the world ye shall have tribulation: marvel not if the world hate you." He places all before us as a subject of contemplation, to prepare us for the prosecution and trial, saying, "Whosoever does not bear his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." In his own inimitable manner He says, "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin

to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace, so likewise,"—you see how He sets all before us,—“so likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

Then we are reminded also that this race cannot be accomplished without patience: “Run with patience.” O Christians, you will have need of this in your way to the kingdom. You

361

will meet with many provocations, and you are not to “avenge yourselves, but rather to give place unto wrath,” remembering He hath said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” You will meet with many trials, personal and relative, and you are not to faint in the day of adversity; you are not to murmur and complain; you are to acquiesce, saying, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast corrected me;” though you may add, “Let Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy word unto Thy servant.” You will experience many discouraging delays, and “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” Sometimes God hides His face from His people; their prayers seem unanswered, and the promise seems clean gone for evermore. Sometimes the Christian seems to have little success in his spiritual work, and while without are fightings, within are fears. Anxiety prevails. The race is trying and tedious, and the road rough. But you are not to cast away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; you are to “hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful who hath promised;” you are not to grow weary in well-doing, for in *due season* you shall reap, if you faint not.

So this race requires not only patience but perseverance. It is not the first step in the race, or the thousandth, but the last, that brings you to the goal; and he only who endureth to the end shall be saved. Then, says the Apostle, are we “made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence

steadfast unto the end.” Ephraim displayed some goodness, but this “goodness was as the morning cloud and early dew, which soon passeth away.” The Galatians did run well, but were hindered; they began in the Spirit, but ended in the flesh. If you would therefore so run that you may obtain, you must, as the Apostle says, “run with patience the race that is set before you.”

II. Not only have we duties the most important, we have also PRECAUTIONS THE MOST WISE. These are two. The one more external, and the other more internal. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.”

First, if you would so run that you may obtain, you must “lay aside every weight.” A person designing to run a race would naturally divest himself of every encumbrance, and prepare himself as much as possible for action. So should it be with us. We should throw off everything that would hinder us, and that impedes us in our spiritual course. These mischances

362

are very numerous and very various, but as you know I do not wish to be too long I will particularise only one, but a very comprehensive one. It is earthly attachments, attractions, and engagements.

Nothing can be more injurious than to be under the influence of some worldly attachment. This reigns with uncontrolled power in the ungodly, and renders them secure, and careless as to all their most important concerns, and in many instances have the unhappy influence to check the convictions of conscience, and of subduing many a promising impression. Paul says, “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith”—they got out of the road—“and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” “Demas,” says the Apostle, “hath forsaken us, having loved this present evil world.” Thus the young man who had gained the Saviour’s affection—for “Jesus seeing him, loved him,”—“went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” So it was

with Herod; "He heard John gladly, and did many things," but the charms of Herodias blasted all these fair appearances. The thorny ground hearers received the word with joy, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choked the word, and it became unfruitful. So it is with those who are almost but not altogether Christians, they are under the influence of some worldly affection; this prevents their hungering and thirsting after righteousness; this obscures the beauty of the good land, and makes them, like Reuben and Manasseh, satisfied with the portion on this side Jordan.

Now where this evil does not prevail in such a degree as to be incompatible with a certainty or a hope of heaven, yet it is strong enough to abate the fervour of spirit in serving the Lord, just as you can damp the fire by throwing earth upon it as well as water. Real Christians may have too keen a relish for the lawful enjoyments of providence; they may be too much alive to the pride of life; they may be too eager to gain human applause, and too much awed by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare; they may be too much elated by success, too much depressed by disappointment. It is hard to have a soft bed, and not be tempted to lie too long; it is hard to increase in riches, and not set our heart upon them; it is hard to have an enlargement in business, and not be entangled in the affairs of this life.

363

We ought therefore to remember, and to pray to be delivered from, such a weight as this, for the evil is more dangerous because it gains its influence by slow and imperceptible degrees. There are various accesses of which some of you are little aware, to gain possession of the heart. "Oh," said the dying Hervey to the physician who was attending him, and who was a professor of religion, "Oh!" exclaimed he three times with his dying breath, "Dr. Stonehouse, beware of the world, *beware of the world*, BEWARE OF THE WORLD!" And in a long ministry, O how many have I known, without any gross immoralities, who have either abandoned the way everlasting, or have been impeded in their course by the present evil world.

But this is not all. As you are to “lay aside every weight,” so are you to avoid “the sin that doth so easily beset us.” This means the innate corruption of our nature. Blessed be God, this does not reign or rule in the believer, for “sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace. “Yet, though its power is destroyed, its being remains in them. A painful being, too, it is; and a pernicious being, spoiling their peace, marring their performances, and endeavouring to draw away their hearts from loving God. This is what Paul complains of so much in the seventh of Romans. “I find a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind: when I would do good, evil is present with me: how to perform that which is good I find not.” “O wretched man that I am!” The Apostle may well call it, “The sin that so easily besets us,” for it is near us: at the family altar—it is there; in the closet—it is there; in the sanctuary—it is there; at the Lord’s table—it is there. Yes, and it is not only near us, but in us. The Apostle says, “The sin that dwelleth *in me*”—in us, invading the understanding to darken it, the conscience to defile it, and the affections to sensualise them. But the Apostle would have us, not only lay aside the practice, but the principle. This is the thing to seek after, the mortification of the principle. Owen has a noble book on the mortification of sin in believers. This does not sufficiently engage the attention of many professed Christians, but it will be allowed that some evil exists in various ways, though everyone is turned to his own way. There is what is called “a besetting sin,” and it is undeniable that there are some who are more easily beset by pride; some are more inclined to anger, some to malice, some to covetousness, some to sensuality, some are naturally insulting and impudent.

364

What are those sins by which we are most easily beset? Before we answer this question I would ask another; How are we to know our easily besetting sin? This we readily and decisively answer. It is that to which you are most readily and frequently tempted; that which you are most anxious to conceal; that by which you are most easily offended when reminded of it. Then we naturally suppose that it is impossible not to be acquainted with our inbred propensities, and with the sin

that doth so easily beset us. Yet there are many who are very ignorant, and strangers to themselves. I have read of one who said, "I think if I am remarkable for anything, it is humility;" and I heard a female say, "I think if I am free from anything, it is selfishness," the very thing which principally distinguished her infirmities. But you should endeavour to become acquainted with this; you should seek to know the propensity which most naturally prevails. David says, "I have kept myself from *mine* iniquity"—some one sin to which he was more prone, yet he was preserved from it; upon which Dr. Bates has a most admirable sermon. It becomes you to know your peculiar propensity, to examine on what side the enemy has assailed you with most success, and there to watch with peculiar vigilance; and not only to watch, but to pray that you enter not into temptation.

But we have not only duties the most important, and precautions the most wise, but—

III. ENCOURAGEMENTS THE MOST NOBLE AND CHEERING, derived from the saints and the Saviour. We are encompassed with a great cloud, and we have Jesus—we are to be "looking unto Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set *down* on the right hand of the throne of God."

First, the Apostle leads us to the saints. He means by this "great cloud of witnesses," though not exclusively, to refer to the preceding chapter, commencing with Abel and running down to the Maccabean period, to the commonwealth of Israel. He calls this "a great cloud."

Mark their name; they are called witnesses because of the testimony they bore to the truth and cause of God, by their lips, their lives, but more especially by their sufferings. "Ye," says God, by Isaiah, "Ye are my witnesses." It is easy to see the testimony they bore: the testimony that religion was the one thing needful. They found no substitute for it in any

365

period, in any condition, in any office, or under any circumstances. They showed that it was needful for the young; that

there was a Jonah, a David, a Samuel, a Timothy, and many more who remembered God their Creator in the days of their youth. They showed that men of business should possess it; that they did not make this an excuse; that there were persons oppressed with numerous and various engagements—a Daniel, a prime minister of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, who retired three times a day to pray and to praise; a David, who reigned over a large and distracted empire, yet who could say, “Morning, evening, and noon, will I pray and cry aloud.” They testified that religion was not an unprofitable thing; that though persons might lose *in* the service of God, they never lost *by* it. Their services were always more than recompensed. He never forsook them; He always fulfilled His promise, “As thy day is, so shall thy strength be.” And whatever they endured, they could always bear this testimony, “Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according unto Thy word.” They taught that it was not a dishonourable thing; that the righteous were the excellent of the earth, more excellent than their neighbours, and that of such the world was not worthy.

Mark their number, “A great cloud of witnesses.” Compared with their contemporaries, they were few, but considered collectively they were many. Elijah’s fears led him to reduce their number, and there were few then, compared to what there are now. “I only am left, and they seek my life.” “No,” says God, “you are not alone: I have reserved to myself seven thousand men whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and whose lips have not kissed him.” And there are more who love and serve the Saviour than we are aware of.

Let us remark here, if this number was so great in the days of the Apostle, how has it increased ever since by additions! What is it now? If we could see, what a great cloud of witnesses have we now to encourage and animate us!

Observe their position. “We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses,” that is, they surround us on all sides and in every direction. As to their bodies, they have long ago returned to dust, and their spirits have returned to God who gave them. In this state it is commonly supposed they have no more intercourse with us. I presume they have much. But also, their words, their actions, their trials; all these, rescued

from oblivion, are preserved in the Scriptures of truth, and in the memories of those who read the word. We can by faith see them—see their number, and be animated by it; we can

366

hear their voice, saying unto us, “Fear not; gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought *Unto you* at the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “We were once in the same circumstances with you; cheer up, you will soon be in the same condition with us.”

But this is not all. Paul leads us from the saints to the Saviour, from the servants to the Master, from the stars to the Sun of Righteousness, from the subjects of faith to the Author and Finisher of our faith; and while the former are around us, He is before us. We are to look unto Jesus.

Observe His character. “The Author and Finisher of our faith;” that is, of faith as a doctrine. He began it in Paradise, and finished it in Patmos. Nothing is to be added, nothing is to be taken away: there is to be no further revelation from God. “The Author and Finisher of our faith,” as an inward principle. To Him we are to cry, “Lord, I believe, help Thou our unbelief;” to Him we are to pray, “Lord, increase our faith.”

How are we to look to Him, in order that we may be animated and encouraged? Certainly as our Example—We are to bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the image of the earthly. There is to be a conformity between Him and us. Have we a course to run? Had He not a course to run? Did He not say, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me”? Had He a glorious prize set before Him? And have not we a blessed prize set before us? Have we difficulties in running this race, and had not He much greater? Yes, there was a cross in His way. What a cross! what sufferings did He endure! But He endured the cross, and despised the shame; and did He at the end of His course sit down at the right hand of the throne of God? So, assuredly, shall every Christian when he has finished his course, crowned with glory and honour, immortality and eternal life. Thus therefore we are to look to Him. As Dr. Watts in his beautiful hymn says,

“Our glorious Leader claims our praise
 For His own pattern given;
 While a long train of witnesses
 Shew the same path to heaven.”

But, my brethren, if this was the Apostle’s *immediate* reference, it was not the *exclusive*. Would he confine our regard to Him, do you imagine, as a mere example? Is this our chief

367

encouragement? Ought we not continually to be looking to Him under another and a higher character? No man can be a real Christian without resembling Him, and without seeking to walk even as He walked. They whom God foreknew, them also did He “predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” How can I become capable of following Him and treading in His steps, in holiness and suffering? “Without me,” says He, “ye can do nothing;” but He adds, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” You are therefore to look to Him, not only as an example, but also as infinitely more than an example; for “He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification,” and, “He made peace by the blood of His cross.” Where is our atonement? “We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have received the atonement.” Where is our righteousness and strength? “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” What is the ground of our resolution? “I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of His righteousness only.” Therefore let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus only, and always, in every condition, in every trial, and in every duty. And after looking to Him in the whole of your religious course here, then go and see Him, a Lamb in the midst of the throne, where He attracts every eye, engages every heart, and employs every tongue; and join in the rapturous song, “Unto Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

XXXVII.

A COMPREHENSIVE ADMONITION.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, October 24th, 1847.)

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.—JAMES ii. 1.

THESE are the words of James. But among the apostles there were two called by that name. One of them soon, according to Our Saviour's prediction, drank of the cup that He drank of; for Herod "killed James, the brother of John, with a sword." The other is called "James, the Lord's brother;" that is, His kinsman, or relation, for in this large acceptance of the word the Jews employed it. He is also called "James the less," or the little, and what signifies the smallness of his stature? The mind is the man. James is also called "a pillar," to denote his firmness and his elevation. He was chosen to reside at Jerusalem, not only to manage the affairs of the Church there, but to occupy a sphere of correspondence and intercourse with regard to all the Churches. We cannot precisely determine when he wrote this Epistle; it was probably near the destruction of Jerusalem, but the reasons of his writing it may be reasonably inferred from the errors in doctrine, and failures in practice, which prevailed.

For instance, take the case, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." To arrange our thoughts, and not to let them evaporate (for very little good will be produced unless you retain what you hear), we may observe four things: a relationship—a character—a peculiar endowment—and a prohibition. "Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things."

I. Observe—A RELATIONSHIP.

The Apostle addresses them as his "brethren."

So they were, *nationally*; they were Jews as well as himself. You see how he addresses them in the first verse—"James, a servant of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, greeting;" that is, whether they were in Judea, or any other country; and here it is obvious that some of all the tribes were in existence, as Paul before Agrippa admitted, when he said, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." We may also see, that the distinction of the tribes was in some manner still preserved. Anna was of the tribe of Aser; and Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin. We may observe that the narratives of Scripture are often very brief, but we have sufficient to register the tribe from which in fulness of time the Messiah was to descend. There were a number from the ten tribes, who returned to Jerusalem after those of Judah, especially when they heard that the brethren were prospering and building the temple. I have no notion that the ten tribes are somewhere now living as a separate body. How fruitless have attempts been to find them; for what part of the earth is there but has been explored by merchants or travellers in our day? and had they been living in a large, distinct, Jewish community, they must have been discovered; and would not some of their own body have been able to tell where they were? It was in this way that the Apostle uses the term in his Epistle to the Romans, "My brethren," meaning the Jews: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

They were his "brethren" *naturally*, partaking of the same humanity with him. For "God hath made of one blood all the nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." We have all one Maker, God: and we have all one father, Adam: and we see the wisdom of this constitution, for by deriving all the human race from one original pair, all mankind are brethren. Even the poor negro, with his sable complexion, may raise his hands and ask, "Am not I a man, and a brother?"

They were his "brethren" *graciously*. Here another and a nobler relation is gendered, and this comprehends all that "worship God in the spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus, and

who have no confidence in the flesh.” “For there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all.” They

B B

370

are all “one in Christ Jesus.” Yes, they are all one-one in the purpose that chose them—one in the blood which redeemed them—one in the righteousness that justified them, and one in the Spirit that renewed them; they have all one way, and have all one end, “one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

They were His “brethren” *impartially*, without any distinction; that is, he was regardless of everything that might seem to render them unworthy the privilege as to condition, or gifts, or office. Now you will remember how our Lord addressed His disciples in this case. Says He, “Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren;” and nothing more. The Apostles, though they were such extraordinary beings, never forget this; they never lorded it over God’s heritage, they did not exercise dominion over their faith, hut were helpers of their joy. They never call their hearers their people, much less their subjects, but always their “brethren;” and desired their prayers, as if they had been their superiors, and as if the success of their labours depended upon their co-operation and assistance. “Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, run, and be glorified.”

II. Here is A CHARACTER.

“The Lord of glory.”

You well know to whom this belongs; and this is not the only place where this title is given; for Paul, speaking of the princes of this world, said, “None of them knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Isaiah makes use of a similar term as applied to the Blessed God Himself. “There,” says he, “the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby; for

the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King, He will save us." Let us enter into the meaning a little further. The radical idea of glory is brilliancy; the second idea is excellency displayed; and there are three ways in which this character will apply to Our Lord and Saviour—Because of His personal excellencies; because all the excellencies possessed by creatures are produced by Him; and because He is the only Sovereign whose character is all made up of excellencies and nothing else.

He is "the Lord of glory," first, because of his personal

371

excellencies. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." "The precious sons of Zion, who are comparable to fine gold," are such as this world are not worthy of." Oh, we have seen lovely characters, noble, excellent characters, and we have read of many more; but they will bear no comparison to Him. "He is fairer than the children of men; He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely."

"All human beauties, all Divine,
In our Redeemer meet and shine."

Speak we of wisdom? in Him dwell all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Talk we of power? "He is mighty to save," "able also to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." Speak we of righteousness? "He is the Holy One, and the Just." Talk we of friendship? "He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Or speak we of love?

"His heart is made of tenderness,
His bowels melt with love."

And His excellencies surpass all others. All the glory of creatures, whether in earth or in heaven, in their aggregate, is nothing more to His glory than a drop to the ocean, or a beam to the sun.

Then, secondly, He is called "the Lord of glory," because He produces and confers all the excellencies possessed by creatures. It is with Him to make great. "By Him kings reign, and princes decree justice." "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." It was He who breathed on his Apostles and said, "Receive ye

the Holy Ghost," and who gave them power to heal diseases, and to raise the dead, to cast out devils, and foretell things to come. And says the Apostle, "He is head over all things to His Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." David calls our fallen condition, "our low estate," as well he may; saying, "He remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever." Oh how low!

"Buried in sorrow and in sin,
At hell's dark door we lay."

And it is He who raises us up from this depth of degradation, misery, and ruin; and who makes us "an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations." Young says, "A Christian is the highest style of man." Luther says, "I had rather be a Christian clown than a heathen monarch." God will always

B B 2

372

honour them that honour Him, and peculiarly will He honour those who are ready to forsake all for His cause, and to suffer for His name. Therefore says Peter, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." But, if He glorifies them here, how much more will He glorify them at death, and after death, when they "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Oh, how will He own and glorify them in the resurrection of the just, when He will say with regard to services over which they have mourned and have been ashamed, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter into the joy of your Lord."

But we remark, thirdly, there is a world made up entirely of excellencies and glory, where nothing else is to be found, and of that world He is the only Sovereign, the only Disposer. You may have remarked in the reading of the Scriptures, how continually this state is expressed by the word glory. So said David, "He shall receive me to glory." "I am a partaker," says Peter, "of the glory to be revealed." And says the Apostle Paul, "When He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." And you will observe how well this character belongs to Him, how well He may be called "the Lord of glory." It is He who giveth it to whom-

soever He will. It is He who said to the dying thief, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;" examine His address to each of them. You will find that all who conquered were rewarded with a reward not of debt but of grace, but He conferred it, and He alone. "I will grant him to sit with me on my throne; I will give him to eat of the hidden manna; I will give him the morning star; I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels; I will make him a pillar in the house of my God, and he shall go no more out." All, you see, is conferred by Him; all, therefore, who receive this blessedness and glory, are represented as casting their crowns at His feet, as much as to say, "We are unworthy to wear them, and we cannot wear them, unless Thou art pleased to place them on our heads in the view of all. Then will we say, 'Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy name be all the glory.'"

III. The third thing we have to remark from the text is
A PECULIAR ENDOWMENT.

"The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Not that we have this faith in equal possession and exercise with Him. No, in all things He had the pre-eminence. He

373

received the Spirit without measure, and in everyone of its graces He excelled. For instance, was He zealous? He could say to His Father, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Was he submissive? He could say, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" "Not my will, but Thine be done." Had he faith? He had it in a superior degree. What was His belief in the truth of the Scriptures, which He so often quoted? What was His confidence, even when He was called to walk in darkness? Even when abandoned by His disciples, and when even Divine consolations were withdrawn, His confidence was not shaken; He said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." And when He was going to be crucified, through weakness He was able to view the future, and with confidence to express Himself, "Thou hast given me power over all flesh, that I should give eternal life to as many as Thou

hast given me; and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." "Now is the hour that the Son of Man shall be glorified."

But the Apostle does not speak here of the faith He possessed and exercised, but of that faith, first, of which He was the *author*. He is called, "The Author and the Finisher of faith," and this is as true of the graces of faith, as of the doctrine of faith. His apostles, who had learned of Him, knew this, and under a sense of their deficiency repaired to Him, and said, "Lord, increase our faith." Therefore the father of the lunatic said to Him, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

When the Apostle speaks of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, he means, secondly, that of which He is the *object*. Therefore they that believe are said to believe in *Him*. In the Scriptures faith is held forth by figures of speech taken from the body, and conveyed to the mind. Sometimes the reference is to the eye, and then it is "looking to Jesus." Sometimes the reference is to the ear; then it is "hearkening to the voice of His word." Sometimes to the feet; then it is running to Him. Sometimes to the hand; then it is receiving Him. Sometimes to the mouth, and then it is feeding upon Him. But now, observe one thing here, all these references regard *Him*. This therefore is the peculiar endowment of faith, of "the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ"—the faith of which He is the Author, and of which He is object. This is the grand thing, and this leads me for one moment, before I pass to the last article, to ask, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" This, my dear hearers, is the turning-point. "He that believeth on the Son of God, shall never come into condemnation, but hath passed

374

from death unto life." We are saved through faith; by faith are we justified; we walk by faith, and stand by faith, and live by faith; the very life we live in the flesh is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. "Dost thou, therefore, believe on the Son of God?"

IV. The last article, and this will require a little more enlargement, is A PROHIBITION.

"Have not the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to persons."

This regards not its character, but its perversion; its abuse, and not its nature. “Have it not,” says James; that is, let it never be so seen in you, let it never be so exercised in you; nothing can be so unbecoming, so reproachful to you; if it be so exercised in others, it must never be so with *you*,. you must never have “the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”

Here, however, it will be necessary to observe, that there is a lawful respect of persons, and there is an unlawful one. The thing, therefore, is not forbidden in every instance, and in every measure and degree. For, in the first place, it is impossible to respect some persons. You will never feel towards a Nero as you would towards a Howard. You cannot esteem a covetous man as you do a generous one; you cannot ever feel towards a bad man as you do towards a good one, for whom “some would even dare to die.” And if it were *possible*, it would be *improper*. The Scripture justifies the distinctions and inequalities of life, and rank and office are to be regarded. The Scripture tells us, that we are to “render fear unto whom fear is due, and honour to whom honour.” The Scripture calls upon us to “honour all men,” but peculiarly to honour the king. The Scripture tells us to “rise up before the hoary head.” But the meaning here, is that, other things being equal, you should not shew more regard to one person than to another, because of some things belonging to him, which have no relation to cases of duty or conscience.

Let us allude to a few of these, let us exemplify the thing four ways.

The first is *judicially*. In a case of this kind pending, how very improper it would be to be lenient to the rich and severe to the poor! How expressly did God forbid this! “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness thou shalt judge thy neighbour.” So again in

375

the first of Deuteronomy God declares, “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God’s.” Here you see a repetition of the same thing,

to impress it the more upon us. Now this is the case to which our text immediately refers. "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly"—in the margin it is, "into your synagogue,"—"a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool." This refers not to worship. The synagogue was not only a place of instruction and devotion, but also of trial and decision, and correction. This may seem strange to us, that such a place should be a place of penalty, but see how often this is referred to. The Saviour said, "They shall punish you in every synagogue; and Paul said, "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests: and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue." It is to this he refers in another place when he says, "They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee." And you will find as you proceed further that the Apostle refers to the synagogue in this use of it, and not to a religious assembly for worship or instruction, as he says, "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? but ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seat?" Thus we have found out the Apostle's reference, so that, should you be called in as umpire between two persons, in judging you should never be influenced by the outward circumstances of individuals or families, but by their conduct. Solomon said in his day, and if he were living now he would say the same, "I saw under the place of judgment that wickedness was there."

The second class we call *ministerial*. "We beseech you, brethren," says the Apostle, "to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;" and if God blesses the labours of a minister to your soul, you will esteem such; but you are not to make an idol of straw. You should regard *all* the servants of God who are doing His work

as equal; you are to view them in reference to their Master—in reference to their commission—in reference to their place and

376

office—as all respectable, and equally regarded by God. The man who possesses only five talents may be equal in usefulness to the man of ten, and may be equally acceptable to God, perhaps more so. Why then should you ever depreciate any of the Lord's servants, especially before your children, and your servants? If a minister does not suit you, he may others, and why should you prevent their edification? Dr. Owen once went to hear the famous Dr. Calamy. He sat some time in the pew impatient of his arrival. By and by he saw a very plain countryman ascend the pulpit. Being mortified, he thought of leaving the place, but he supposed that decency would forbid this. By and by this plain preacher from the country took his text from the words of the Saviour, "O ye of little faith! wherefore didst thou doubt?" The doctor at that time was in a state of mental perplexity, and ready to despair from doubts and fears. The plain preacher from the country was the means of so removing these as to make him free indeed, and from that hour to the day of his death he was mercifully kept from being exercised with them. Why the best preacher in your eyes can do nothing without God, and the poorest and the weakest can do anything if God be with him.

There are some who not only think that they are justifiable in giving their opinion, but they think, forsooth, that they shew superior skill and great spirituality in this. I wish such would remember what the Apostle says of such to the Corinthians:

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul? and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? " And remember,

improper partiality may either remove a minister, or render his labours unprofitable, for God will not give His glory to another.

The third class we call *ecclesiastical*. Here we might refer to the terms of admission into the Church of God, and to the table of the Lord. These ought not to be rigid and severe, but whatever they may be, they ought to be equally applied to the high and the low, to the rich and to the poor. I would not have the door opened wider for rich individuals than for the poor, and for your minister and deacons to stand blinking behind

377

the door, while they are sharp-sighted enough with regard to the poor. No, In such cases there should be no difference between the peasant and the prince, the servant and the master. All here are on an equality before God. The same impartiality should be exercised when relations and friends are proposed as candidates; and the same also should be observed in cases of suspension and exclusion. "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons."

The last class we call *denominational*. There are many denominations now-a-days, and it is not wrong for you to attach yourselves to a body. Yea, I love a man who attaches himself to a party, though I dislike a party man. I do not like that professors of religion should live a kind of spiritual gipsy life, in order to avoid house rent and taxes. Those who live without a Church, and who belong to no party, are less likely to "walk circumspectly," are less likely to be reproached with inconsistencies, having none to watch over them, and to consider them, "to provoke to love and good works." All, therefore, should belong to some Christian community, where they can go and commune with their brethren in Divine things; but when you enter, you should never exclaim, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" or suppose that the party you have joined have all the truth, and that nothing is to be done without them. Let us never forbid others because they walk not with us. Let us remember, if they are not against us, they are for us. If we cannot associate with them, if we cannot commune with them, if we cannot co-operate with them, let us love them, and consider them as brethren, behaving towards them as fellow-citizens with the saints.

Though they may not live in the same street,—some of them live in strait street, and some in narrow alley,—still let us consider them as “the household of God.”

To conclude, let us learn then to judge of men regardless of adventitious circumstances. Let our inquiry be, What are they morally? what are they spiritually? Thus may we resemble the citizens of Zion, of whom it is said, in their view a vile person is contemned, while those who fear the Lord are honoured. John says, “We know that we are passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” He does not mean Baptist, or Presbyterian, or Congregational brethren, but those who were the image of Christ, and possessed His Spirit, and who are living to His praise. And happy are they who, after the example of their Lord, can stretch forth their hand to

378

His disciples of every name and denomination: “Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Happy are they who can say from the very heart, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity;” for “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

379

XXXVIII. AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, November 24th, 1844.)

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.—I PETER v. 10.

IT is the duty of a Christian minister to endeavour to convert sinners to God. The Saviour says to all His messengers, as He did to Saul of Tarsus, “I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and

inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

The second object of the Christian ministry is the improvement of those already converted; for these blessed children, born again of the Holy Spirit, are to be nourished up in the words of faith and sound doctrine. These heavenly travellers are not only to enter the way everlasting, but to hold on their way, and to wax stronger and stronger. And those trees of righteousness are not only to be planted in the garden of the Lord, but to be watered also. Hence Timothy is sent among the Thessalonians to establish and comfort them concerning their faith. When Apollos was at Achaia, he helped them much who had believed through grace. When Barnabas had seen the grace of God, “he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord;” and the same object is observable in the words of our text: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

There are in this passage four things which it will be necessary for us to review and explain: first, the character of

380

Jehovah, “The God of all grace;” secondly, an operation, “Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus;” thirdly, a prayer, “Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you;” and fourthly, a concession, “After that ye have suffered a while.”

I. THE CHARACTER OF JEHOVAH. He is called “the God of all grace.”

There are two ways of justifying this title.

First, by our observing that from Him has been derived all the grace that has ever been possessed by any individual from the beginning of the world. He inspired the fear of Noah, the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the devotion of David, the zeal of Paul, the love of John, the heroism of the martyrs; He conferred upon them all their excellencies; He maintained and supplied them, “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Secondly, He has every kind of grace for the relief and use of sinners now, for He “is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” His “hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear.” What grace is there you can stand in need of that He is not willing and able to communicate? Do you need pardoning grace? Are you guilty? He is able to forgive you all trespasses. Are you depraved and do you need renovation? He has sanctifying grace, according to His own promise, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your idols will I cleanse you.” Are you ignorant and need information? He has enlightening grace, and saith, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” Or are you weak and need strength? “In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;” and His strength is made perfect in His people’s weakness. He is called the God of hope, because He inspires and sustains hope. He is the God of patience, the God of peace, and the God of all comfort.

“All needful grace will God bestow,
And crown that grace with glory too.”

“He giveth more grace.” His promise is, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” “Ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.” Go, therefore, to Him with confidence for yourselves, and repair to Him for others; and ever remember as you approach His footstool that He is the God of all grace.

381

II. AN OPERATION.

“Who hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus.”

It would hardly be necessary to observe that the term “glory” is applied to denote the future condition of God’s people, or to remark the frequency of this word for this purpose in the Scriptures. Thus Asaph says, “Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Thus Peter here says, “Who hath called us to His eternal glory.” Thus the Captain of our salvation is leading many sons unto glory; and “when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.”

The radical idea of glory is *brilliancy*, but this is too childish an idea for a Christian to dwell upon; and I therefore observe at once that the second idea of it is excellency displayed.

This glory is eternal. A future state of being is intended to develop all our spiritual excellencies, and therefore it is called glory. How much does this fact, that it is eternal, add to its value, and distinguish it from everything that is merely temporal! Whatever a man gains here (and frequently it is by much labour and sorrow) is vain and vanishing. The idol of the crowd to-day may be the victim of reproach to-morrow. The laurels of the warrior wither upon his brow. And can you set your eyes upon that which is not? for riches make to themselves wings and flee away. Have you health? How soon may it be exchanged for months of vanity and wearisomeness! Have you beloved connections, of whom you have been heard to say, "This same shall comfort us"? How soon have they been removed! You have been constrained to exclaim with David, "Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness." If these things do not leave the man, the man will soon leave them. He has only a life interest in any of them. And what *is* his life? "It is a vapour that appeareth but for a little time, and then vanisheth away." But it is not so with "the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus." No, if this be "a building, it is a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." If this be a crown, it is "a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away." If it be a life, it is an "eternal life." If an inheritance, it is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." If it be a kingdom, it is "an everlasting kingdom."

This glory is what He "hath called" His people to the enjoyment of. Conscious of our unworthiness, and sensible that we deserve nothing but that His wrath should come upon

382

us as children of disobedience, this, and this alone, is our authority to seek after it; for if He "hath called us" to this glory, it is not humility, but disobedience, to refuse it. If conscience murmurs, and if "the accuser of the brethren" asks, "Where is your warrant to be in this palace, and to sit at this

feast?" shew your ticket; shew your ticket written and sealed by God Himself. You can answer, "He has *called* me unto His eternal glory." Is not this enough? Without this we should no more have been induced to seek Him than authorised to hope in His mercy. Naturally we are careless of the things of God. Naturally we "turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." But God comes and says, "It is high time to awake out of sleep." "Go work to-day in my vineyard." And this call as addressed universally to Christians is effectual. It comes to the ear and affects the heart; and they are made "willing in the day of His power." Thus the sun comes in spring and calls for the flowers, and brings them forth. Thus "God spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." In the new creation He calls things which are not, and they appear. He calls us to repent, to believe, and we obey; and the power goes with the word, and produces the things required.

It is upon this principle ministers are fully justified in addressing themselves to the unconverted. Some say, "Where is the consistency of doing this, if men are dead in trespasses and sins? Where is the propriety of calling upon them to awake and live?" Now without dwelling on the fact that they are only morally, and not physically, dead, possessing understanding, reason, will, and affections, the question is whether God has enjoined this. "Would you," said a person to me, "go into the churchyard and say to the dead, 'Arise and live?'" "To be sure," said I, "if God went with me and ordered me to do it, for then it would not be *my* word, but *His*, and He is able to accomplish it." This is what He enjoined upon Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. "Son of man," said He, "prophesy to these dry bones." Ezekiel might have asked, "Of what use can this be?" "Prophesy," says God; so when this was done, "there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said He unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So

383

I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”

Finally, consider the medium through which this operation is accomplished. It is by “Christ Jesus.” Ah, my brethren, all is through Him, all is by Him. He is the mediator between God and man. “This is the record, that God hath given unto us even eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” Thus though “we are blessed with all spiritual blessings,” it is through Him. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And “it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” So that “He is the way, the truth, and the life.” He “hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus.” He procured it on the cross, and confers it now He is upon the throne, and thus quickens whom He will. He is “exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

III. We have here A PRAYER.

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

It would be trifling to give a distinction to either of these. The word of God is not bound by our rules of composition, and frequently what we deem an imperfection abounds with relative excellencies. When the Prime Minister remarked in reference to an eminent speaker that he was too diffuse, he said, “Every man who addresses a popular assembly must either abound in tautology or diffusion, and I prefer diffusion.” Peter here has a pleonasm which shews how earnestly he felt it in his own mind; he was deeply impressed, but could hardly find words to express his meaning and desire, and therefore breaks forth, “Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you;” that is, “Do for you exceeding abundantly above all that ye can ask or think.”

There are, however, in this prayer three things which we may distinctly observe.

First, it includes much *progress* in religion: “Make you perfect.” Christians should never be satisfied. Paul was not; he made no scruple to say, “I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended;

384

but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” It is well for us to have a high aim, for if we do not reach it in our attempts, the effort to reach it is beneficial, and we gain something either to comfort or admonish. So shall we arrive at a higher degree of moral and spiritual attainment. In your secular affairs you wish not only to go on, but to *prosper*. Why not shew the same concern in your religious affairs? A little does not satisfy you in temporals, why should it in spirituals? especially since the latter is much more necessary and desirable; and you are commanded not only to have the Spirit, but to be “filled with the Spirit.”

Another thing to be observed in this prayer is *confirmation*. For it is to little purpose to gain, unless you retain also. Therefore says the Apostle, “Stablish, strengthen, settle you.” The dying Jacob said to Reuben, “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.” We are told the children of Ephraim were well prepared for the war, for they all carried spears and swords, yet they turned back in the day of battle. Many lose in religion the ground they once attained. This is very sad. Yes; there are backsliders in heart, and backsliders in life too. So we read of the first days of David, and does it not carry with it the melancholy idea that they were his best days. God said by Jeremiah, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord; and the first-fruits of His increase.” You know how the Saviour addresses the Church at Ephesus. Although He commends them for their “works, and labour, and patience,” yet He charges them with the loss of their “first love,” and exhorts them to do their “first works.” Oh, it is sad to see

lovely and promising youths whose goodness has been “as the morning cloud and early dew, which soon passeth away.” It is sad to see this,—to see those who did run well, but have been hindered; to see liberality followed by covetousness; to see zeal succeeded by indifference; to see prayerful attendance upon the means of grace followed, alas! by one absence after another, till in time the whole bears not upon the conscience. Oh, how should we listen to the language of Paul to the Corinthians, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord!” Wherefore Peter says here, “Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” So in your profession of godliness may

385

you be preserved, unallured, and unalarmed, so that you may not be driven aside from the path of duty.

But observe, thirdly, *the Divine agency necessary for this*. Peter not only admonishes, but prays for them. Who is to make them so? “Why,” said he, “the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory.” Who is to be the finisher, but He who is the Author? “He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.” “He shall fulfil in you all the good pleasure of His will, and the work of faith with power.” Paul, therefore, not only admonishes the Ephesians, but prays for them, saying, that the excellency of the power was of God, whom he entreats would strengthen them “with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” He did not wish them to be immediately glorified; neither did the Saviour His disciples: He therefore prayed the Father, not that He would take them out of the world, but that He would “keep them from the evil thereof.”

IV. Consider THE CONCESSION.

“After that ye have suffered a while.”

Three things are here intimated by this concession.

First, a suffering state is to precede their finishing their course with joy. Yes, before you reign with Him you are to suffer with Him. Yes,

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unkuown.
No traveller e’er reached that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briers on the road.”

Said our Lord, “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” It is through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom.

In the beginning of the gospel the sufferings of Christians arose much from persecution. If any preached the word, it was attended with loss of reputation, property, liberty, and sometimes the loss of life. We know very little of this. Blessed be God, by the laws of our country, as well as the laws of God, we may sit under our own vines, and under our own fig-trees, none daring to make us afraid. But the tongue can no man tame;

C C

386

therefore, whoever will go without the camp ni’lst in saille way or other bear the reproach of the cross. Yes,

“Trials of every shape and name
Attend the followers of the Lamb,
Who leave the world’s deceitful shore,
And travel to return no more.”

Yes, it matters not from what quarter you suffer. I have known persons who have probably suffered more than many of the martyrs. The martyr has had public excitement; these have suffered in obscurity: the martyr’s sufferings have soon ended; but here the melancholy experience stretches out from week to week, month to month, and even from year to year. Christians may suffer long from some kind of afflictions while here: this is implied in the expression, “After that ye have suffered a while.” He takes it for granted that they will have to suffer. After this is the glory; their sufferings are for “a while.” The sacred writers endeavour to abbreviate the sufferings of God’s people. In one place they suffered persecution *ten days*—ten days will soon be over. In another place they say, “Weeping

may endure for a *night*, but joy cometh in the morning”—a night is soon over. We read of the *hour* of temptation—this is shorter still. Then of “our light affliction, which is but for a *moment*.” Even this is not enough to satisfy Inspiration. “For a *small moment*,” says God, “have I forsaken thee.” O brethren! so in reality it is compared to eternity. So is it in the estimation of faith. “Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

“Yet a season, and you know
Happy entrance will be given;
All your sorrows left below,
And earth exchanged for heaven.”

These sufferings are needful: God, who loves His people infinitely, would not allow them to suffer without some gracious design. “He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” He designs it for their good. Yes, the fallow ground requires the ploughshare to prepare it for the seed. Even the vine needs the pruning-knife, that it may bring forth fruit. The gold requires the furnace. The child needs the rod of correction. The patient the bitter draught, to restore and sustain his health. Oh, the design of God in all this is to embitter sin, and to wean you from the world; to endear to you the Scriptures, and to induce you to hold more communion with the Father of mercies. Asaph said, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” Christians, you are joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that ye suffer with Him, ye shall be also glorified together.

387

XXXIX. A GLORIOUS MESSAGE.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, November 16th, 1845.)

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.—I JOHN i. 5-7.

IT is of peculiar importance for us always to entertain proper views of the Supreme Being; such views are of the nature of first principles. It is of importance that we should understand the Scripture,—its doctrines, its commands, and its promises. This is to be the standard by which we are morally and religiously to judge ourselves as to our conformity to God. He is the source of life and perfection. He is able to supply all our wants, to accomplish all our desires, to fulfil all our hopes, and “to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.” It is therefore good for us to draw near to God. All our misery springs from our separation from God, and all our happiness depends on our return to, and our communion with Him. Observe how the sacred writers express themselves on this subject. “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their Gael, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father

C C 2

388

unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” And says our text, “This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Here are three things to be observed: a message, a decision, and a privilege: a faithful message, an awful decision, and a glorious privilege.

I. A MESSAGE.

“This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

Let us in considering this message as addressed to us make three inquiries: How was this message obtained? What does this message express? And what does this message exclude?

First, How was this message obtained? “We have heard it, and disclose it unto you,” says John. Heard it; from whom? Unquestionably from the Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the Great Teacher sent from God. He delivered it to His disciples, and they delivered it to others. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son. ... He *hath* declared Him.” And in His intercessory prayer He says, “I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou hast given me out of the world.” He had savingly opened to their minds His character, relations, attributes, and designs, especially the purposes of His mercy and grace, so that what they communicated was not invention, but report. They delivered that which they also received.

Some part of this message He delivered personally while with them; but it would appear that He delivered much more after His resurrection than before, for which purpose He was with them forty days, speaking of the things which pertained to the kingdom of God. Still more did He communicate after His ascension, according to His promise, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now, but when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatever He shall hear, that shall He speak, and He will shew you things to come.” Accordingly, you see what a difference there was afterwards in their views, and how their sentiments enlarged

389

after the pouring down of the Holy Spirit. You may mark this with regard to one article. Take the dying of the Lord Jesus. When our Saviour shewed “unto His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day,” Peter took Him, and said, “Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee,” which drew upon

him the severe rebuke of the Saviour, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things which be of God, but those that be of men." But now afterward, after that he has received the communications of the Holy Spirit, now that Jesus is glorified, how does he view His death? Oh, it is the precious blood of Christ, by which, says he, we are redeemed. "Oh," he says, "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree." And again he says, "He once suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

"Who by searching can find out God? Who can find Him out to perfection?" Vet we are not called upon to worship an unknown God. He never left Himself without witness, in that He has been continually doing us good, in sending us rain from heaven, and filling our hearts with food and gladness; and "all His works praise Him," by wearing impressions of His perfections, and subserving His designs. But what a difference between the discoveries of Him in nature and grace. When a noted heathen philosopher was asked what God was, he required two days to answer; then four, doubling the time by every additional application to him, assigning as the reason, that the more he thought upon the question the less capable he was of replying to it. But now take John, one of the two who were called "unlearned and ignorant" men by the Jewish rulers, what says he? "Go and tell the world what God is!" And what is He? "God is light."

Light is perhaps the most perfect image of the Supreme Being. We can only glance at the subject; yet we remark that light *illuminates*, it derives its name from its discoveries. "That which makes manifest is light." Then may God be called light, for He it is who makes us "wise unto salvation." He it is who by His Spirit leads us into all truth. As it is written, "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." Light *rejoices* the eyes. "Light is sweet," says Solomon, "and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." And says David, "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my

390

exceeding joy." And again he says, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance; in Thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted." And what, brethren, is heaven? "In His presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore." Light is *pure*. Of all bodies light is the most pure. Other things are polluted. The air, the earth, and water are all contaminated, but the rays of light are uncorrupted. Let the light shine upon a dunghill, or upon a dead body, or on a putrefied mass, and it contracts no pollution from its shining. Well, therefore, may God be called light. "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." "He is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works;" and though His providence is universally exercised, infinite wisdom is combined with infinite holiness throughout the universe of God.

What does this light *exclude*? It excludes all darkness, for "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." This shews the supremacy of God, and His sovereign perfection in distinction from all orders of His creatures. Christians are all the children of light and of the day, but we cannot say of any of them, that in them is no darkness at all. Angels are proverbial for their wisdom and rectitude, but says Elihu, "He chargeth His angels with folly." There is none holy as the Lord. Therefore said Job, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth." Therefore says Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

II. So much for the message; let us now proceed to consider THE AWFUL DECISION.

"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

Now men may say this by profession of it to others; and they may say it to their own souls, persuading themselves that they are real Christians, when they have "no part or lot in the

matter,” their hearts not being right in the sight of God. The possibility of this self-delusion is admitted in the very address we find to guard us against it. Thus it is said, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked.” “Let no man deceive himself.” “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls.” Thus we have instances of this delusion recorded

³⁹¹

in the Scriptures of truth. Thus it is said of the idolater: “He feedeth upon ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Thus Solomon speaks of a whole generation of these deluded creatures: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! their eyelids are lifted up.” And our Lord addresses a whole Church of these deluded ones: “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” So there are thousands in our day, who hear the word of God, but do it not; who have the form of godliness, but deny its power; who have a name to live, and are dead. The falsehood of such pretensions to godliness unaccompanied by a holy walk is here denounced by the Apostle in his usual way, saying, “We lie.” “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” So our Saviour says, by His servant John, to the Church in Smyrna, “I know thy works and tribulation and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” He calls it “blasphemy” you see. Yes, they are blasphemers against every chapter, every verse, every sentence, and every word of this blessed Book, which declares that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

Congeniality must precede “fellowship,” and resemblance must precede fellowship, for “how can two walk together except they be agreed?” And therefore it will follow that a change is necessary—a change of heart—before we can enter into the kingdom of heaven; for without this change we can neither enjoy God, nor serve Him acceptably. Therefore

saith the Saviour, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

How long this delusion may continue, indeed, is impossible to determine. Sometimes the snare has been discovered in due time, and it is a mercy if he be enabled to escape from it. In other cases the delusion is kept up, being cherished by the father of lies, till death. Can it continue longer? According to our Saviour, this confidence may be entertained by the man till he has reached the very door of heaven. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to

392

stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not whence ye are." "Not know us? Why we were born in Thy house; we heard continually Thy gospel; we have partaken of Thy ordinances; we have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets." "But He shall say, I know ye not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out." How awful will this be, and how awful the discovery then! It would be bad enough to go to hell from heathen countries, but to go to hell from the gospel, and the sanctuary of God, from His ordinances and from His table; to go there as deacons and as members professing godliness, how awful must this be! Yet Solomon says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." There is nothing so distressing and tormenting as disappointment here, especially when your confidence is strong.

But John is not satisfied with speaking of the thing negatively only; he therefore adds, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

III. This therefore is the third article, namely, THE GLORIOUS PRIVILEGE.

Ministers are to separate the precious from the vile, and while they condemn the wicked, they are to take care not to make sad the hearts of the people of God. Their Master says to them, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;" and He gives His ministers the tongue of the learned, that they "should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." When Ambrose had spoken against hypocrites and apostates, he cried out with a loud voice in his sermon, "CHRISTIANS, *this is not for you.*" So when Paul addresses the un believing Hebrews, in a way of severe reproof which was enough to awaken fears in the minds of the believers of Jesus, he immediately adds, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." And this is the case with John in the words of our text.

In considering this glorious privilege, we may remark that it takes in two things, *fellowship* and *pardon*.

393

First, it takes in *fellowship*. "We have fellowship one with another." There is a fellowship belonging to all the people of God wherever they live. They are all fellow-heirs of the grace of life; they are all partakers of the heavenly calling; they are all in the same bond of the gospel; they are all interested in the common salvation; they are all redeemed by the same blood, justified by the same grace, sanctified by the same Spirit, kept by the same mighty power of God, and destined to the same everlasting kingdom. Therefore, whatever distinctions may prevail among them, they are all one in Christ Jesus. But this is not the fellowship referred to here. No, here the "fellowship one with another" means the fellowship that exists between God and us. Observe what he has said before: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." And observe what he says in the third verse: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." There is a fellowship existing between God and His

people; a mutual participation, a mutual intercourse. They have “fellowship one with another,” so that in all their afflictions He is afflicted; they feel pained when His name is dishonoured, and they are “sorrowful for the solemn assembly.” “He rejoices over them,” and they rejoice in Him. He ennobleth them, and they love to honour Him. He is their God, and they are His people, and all that is His is theirs. It is by this that you are to judge of them, and not by their adventitious and external circumstances. The world often despises them, and they think very little of themselves. Could you have seen the tabernacle in the wilderness, you would not have seen it externally very splendid; no, it, was covered with goats’ skins, and badgers’ dyed red. But if you entered within, you would have seen there the tables of the law, the altar of incense, and the mercy-seat, and the glory of God shining above it. So it was here. John says, “We have fellowship one with another.” “And who are *you*? you who are the filth of the world; who are naked and destitute; is it such a privilege to have fellowship with *you*?” “Oh,” but says he, “*truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*”

The other article here is *the assurance of pardon*. “And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Observe the *procurer*, the Son of God. However this term may be explained, it always in Scripture means dignity. It

394

does so when He is called the Son of man, as having taken upon Him human nature; but especially when He is called the Son of God. “Unto which of the angels saith He at any time, Thou art my Son?” But could He as the Son of God have blood to shed? Could He suffer and die? Here the matter is explained, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” I need not tell you, that though the Divine nature cannot suffer, human nature can; and so we read, “Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death all

their lifetime were subject to bondage.” Thus by partaking of our nature He could suffer and die; and in consequence of this His blood is called the blood of God. “Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

Mark next the *efficacy* of His death: “His blood cleanseth us from all sin.” It delivers us from the heinousness of it, however offensive it is in the eyes of a holy God. The application of this blood to our souls will deliver us from the love of sin, and make us “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.”

Then mark the *extent* of it: it “cleanseth us from *all* sin”—from original sin and actual sin; from all sin, however aggravated. His blood cleanseth perfectly from all sin, and completely from all transgression. “Jesus by His one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” As saith the poet—

“His one offering takes away
For ever all our guilt.”

For if one sin were to be unpardoned and unatoned for, it would be sufficient to plunge the sinner into endless perdition.

Then mark the *personal reference*: it “cleanseth *us* from all sin.” Yes, it cleanseth those who walk in the light, as He is in the light, and who have fellowship with Him. What, do *they* need pardon? Most certainly. Ask them if it be not so; they know that “in many things they offend all,” and they know that in regard to their most holy things, their performance of them calls for condemnation rather than recompense. Do they need pardon? Yes, we are taught by the Saviour to pray for daily forgiveness as well as for daily food.

395

What additional reflections remain? Let us learn, brethren, to rise from the creature to the Creator, from “things seen and temporal, to things unseen and eternal.” When we see the sun shining, let us think of Him who rises “with healing in His wings.” For “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” And when we see the descending showers, let us think of Him who has given us His word, as showers that water the earth.

Again, let us guard against delusion. Let us be honest to ourselves for once. I know this is not a very easy thing, especially when we consider that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” What interest, my dear friends, can you have in deceiving yourselves? for the delusion cannot last long. “Remember God is greater than your hearts, and knoweth all things.” Come, therefore, to the standard of the Scriptures, and fear not to be judged by them. Fall upon your knees before God and say with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Then observe what losses they sustain who walk in another course. God deals with them as He did with Israel. “My people,” says He, “would not hearken unto my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust, and they walked in their own counsels.” But “blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, and whose transgressions are covered.” He is indeed blessed—blessed in his mercies and in his trials; blessed in life and in death. All things shall work together for his good; and he will be blessed at the last great day, and blessed for ever.

Let us learn also to regard Christ in His sacrificial character. Let us not be satisfied with viewing Him as a prophet and as a king merely. The great thing will be to view Him as dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification. Let this relieve the believer, whenever he contracts fresh guilt, remembering, as saith our Apostle, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

396

XL. DIVINE SONSHIP.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, July 16th, 1848.)

Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall

be: but we know that, when He shall appear, We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.—I JOHN iii. 2.

WE are assured by infallible authority, that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.” It would be very easy to exemplify this pre-eminence, in numberless instances; but we shall now only remark on one, namely, in his prospects. The sinner, when he looks back, finds a thousand things filling his mind and conscience with pain and remorse; and what pleasure can he feel if he looks forward, when he sees death and eternity advancing? All his relief must arise from his banishing the thing from his thoughts, and this is no easy matter. And then, putting the day far off, is not putting it away: *come it must*. And does the Christian feel no sorrow in the review, and in the remembrance of the sins of his unregeneracy, and his deficiencies since he has known God, or rather, since he has been known of Him? Then he mourns before God, and in doing so feels more pleasure than he ever found in the dissipations of the world. Oh, it was a time of love, when God passed by, and said unto him, “Live!” Oh, the thought of the means He employed—to turn his feet into the way of peace! Oh, the various dispensations, which often surpassed and surprised his hopes! This fills him with a joy, that strangers intermeddle not with. And oh, what a scene opens before him, beyond this vale of tears! The proverb says, “All’s well that *ends* well:” it is the end that proves all, that finishes all, and that crowns all. We are far from denying present advantages in religion; but everything now in regard to the Christian,—all this service; all this sacrifice; all this warring,—we should “reckon that all

397

this suffering of this present life is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” He has much in hand, but more in hope; much in possession, but more in reversion. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,” but “it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”

Oh, what a frame of soul does such a text require! I should feel chilled in silence, if you expected this morning that I should give a full explanation of it. But something must be done, and what can be more suitable than the arrangement lying before us? These three things: the Christian’s present privileges—

“Now are we the sons of God:” the obscurity that veils his future destination—“it doth not yet appear what we shall be:” the degree of development which we are allowed to realise now—“when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”

I. THE PRESENT PRIVILEGES OF THE CHRISTIAN.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.”

Two things are observable: the privilege itself, and the time when we may take the comfort of it.

As to the privilege itself, it consists in our relation to God: “We are the sons of God.” By this the Apostle means much more than our relation to Him as our Maker and Benefactor, “in whom we live, and move, and have our being.” It is very true that we have some claim upon God as creatures, for surely “He will have respect to the work of His hands.” But as far as we are sinners we are not the work of His hands; not His children, but the children of the wicked one; and to preclude all hope on this ground, God says by Isaiah, “Because they are a people of no understanding, therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour.” Both adoption and birth are conjoined in the experience of Christians. The believer not only feels the relative change accomplished by adoption, but also a personal change accomplished by regeneration; for as he is adopted, so is he born of God, “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Therefore with the name, he has the relation; and with the rank, he has the heart of a child.

Now what a privilege does this relation constitute! Do you know how the Jews prided themselves in having Abraham to their father; and with what pleasure did David speak of being

398

the king’s son-in-law? Yet, all the lines of human ancestry are found to originate in one first pair, where all are upon a perfect level. But Christians can go much higher than this. They are the children of God, and this title confers real honour, compared with which all human grandeur vanishes into insignificance; for consider, Christians, His wisdom, His power, His

greatness. Reflect on all the works of His hands, and exclaim, "My Father made them all!" "He governs all, upholds all, and observes all!" An earthly parent may be unable to afford relief and tenderness to a child in distress and danger, but nothing is "too hard for the Lord."

This relation gives us free access to God, at all times, and in all circumstances. We can enter His presence, and spread before Him what we are unwilling perhaps to communicate to the dearest friend on earth. It is true, we can approach Him as the Sovereign of the Universe, for "all kings shall bow down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." But then we may approach Him as our Father, who is full of compassion.

Again, all His children are taught of the Lord. He will not have any of them brought up in ignorance nor will He trust their education to another.

It also secures a sufficiency of temporal supplies. Their heavenly Father has engaged to feed and clothe them. "If He clothe the grass of the field, how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Mr. Crane, a Nonconformist minister, who was deprived of his living by the base Act of Uniformity, when dying (and he had a large family unprovided for), said quaintly, but strikingly, "He that feeds the young ravens, will not starve the young cranes."

They have an inheritance reserved in heaven for them.

This is the privilege.

Observe the time when we may take the comfort of it. They are said to be the children of God, being "the children of the resurrection," because then everything "will be displayed and revealed. But even now, under all their disadvantages, they are the sons of God. Everything is not future with the Christian. The Christian is now saved by grace; "believing in the Lord Jesus," he is "justified from all things by which he could not be justified by the law of Moses." "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God;" "now," though despised, and reproached, and persecuted by the world. The Apostle had just said, "the world knoweth us not" it does not discern the excellency of the Christian character. Even the apostles

399

were called” the filth and the offscouring of all things.” The Saviour “was despised and rejected of men:” therefore, said He, “Ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

“*Now* are you the sons of God,” *though pressed down with calamities*. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” It is true they are delivered from the curse of the law. Their Saviour has borne the curse in His own body on the tree: but yet, though freed from the curse, they are liable to the cross. They may suffer much in their persons, connections, and circumstances. This is so far from being incompatible with sonship, that the Apostle says, “What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” and “if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.”

“*Now* are you the sons of God,” *though assailed by the enemy of souls*. Perhaps some of you say as to temptation, “None know so much as I,—the tempter follows me into the closet, and into the house of God, and to the supper of the Lord; he embitters all my comforts, and I fear will destroy my soul at last.” But he never will. Did not David say, “The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead: therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate”? And was not the Saviour tempted? Was He not tempted to suicide, to idolatry, and to devil-worship? “But in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”

“*Now* are you the sons of God,” *though you feel the remains of corruption*. We do not plead for sin. God forbid! But suppose we were to contend that real Christians have no sin in them, which some have contended, what would become of the language of Scripture, that “there is not a just man upon earth, that liveth and sinneth not”? “In many things,” says James, “we offend all.” What would become of the consolation of those whom God has commanded us to make merry? Did not the Apostle say, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit ...

so that ye cannot [in order that ye may not] do the things that ye would"? And again, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" So all real Christians feel, and because they feel, it is a proof that there is something in them beside nature. Hence a constant internal conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

400

"Now are you the sons of God," *even when you are destitute of inward peace and joy*. Isaiah describes a man who fears the Lord, and who obeyeth the voice of His servant, yet as "walking in darkness and having no light." David says, "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." And the Church says, "I will wait upon the Lord, who hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him."

Yea, you are *now* "the children of God," *though full of doubts and fears*. I would not be an advocate for these. Christians should feel confidence in God; but what wonder if they should feel self-suspicion, after being so often betrayed into sin? Self-delusion is not only possible, but common as it is dreadful. We should exercise confidence in the grace and power of God. Our comfort depends upon this confidence; our safety is secured by His grace and love.

This, then, is the present privileged state of believers: "Now are they the sons of God."

II. Let us proceed to observe THE OBSCURITY THAT VEILS THEIR FUTURE DESTINATION.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be;" and it is well that it does not, for, my brethren, the full disclosure would be too much for our poor faculties. The eye could not endure the effulgence; the ear could not bear the melody and harmony; the frail frame would break down under "that eternal weight of glory." When Daniel "beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool," and when he "saw in the night visions one like the Son of Man," he said, "My cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me." And John, though so familiar with our Lord as to lie on His bosom, yet when he saw Him in His glory fell

at His feet as dead. So “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption.”

The full display now would render us insensible to many things which have claims upon us. We are told of a French vessel which had been four years in India. Of course the crew very naturally wished to see their own country. For many weeks as they drew near, they became more eager and anxious. They sang; they employed their glasses; they mounted the masts. After awhile the sound was heard, “Land! Land! France! France!” And now they scarcely knew what to do with themselves. But as they advanced, and when they saw their native hills, and the spires of their own villages, some of

401

them dressed in their best clothes; others opened their boxes, and spread out the presents they were going to give; but when the vessel entered the harbour, and they saw upon the shore some of their friends and relations expecting them, many could not be contained on board, and they were obliged to employ some others to aid the men in bringing the vessel to its moorings. Ah, brethren, if you could behold “the land that is very far off;” if you could see your dear friends waiting to “receive you into everlasting habitations”—the son of your love, the wife of your bosom, or your hallowed mother, your conduct would soon say, for you would have no words at command, “What do I here? what have I here?”

But not only would the full disclosure be improper, if possible, but it would also be impossible, if proper. With regard to this state there is that which no human understanding can now take in, for our faculties are very defective, and there is very much remaining in us, and will remain, of imperfection, till we hear the voice saying, “Come and see.”

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” in the intermediate state. The Scriptures tell us, “absent from the body, present with the Lord.” But what do we know of the soul in its unembodied state—of a soul retaining consciousness, when freed from material organisation? The body and soul now partake of sorrow and enjoyment, but what do we know of the soul when set free from this? whether it has any com-

munication from the material world; whether you will know one another before the resurrection, for now we know each other by the body, not by the soul. If my soul were to appear in another world, you might not know me; or if you were to appear without a body, I might not know you.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” in the resurrection of the just. What do we know of the difference between our present and future bodies? It will be the same body, but infinitely superior. “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” But what know we of the qualities of all these? What conceptions have we of a spiritual body? of a body that can render itself visible and invisible, and that can by a wish transport itself from one region to another? What know we of a body that needs no food, no sleep, and that is incapable of any accident, disease, or death? What know we of a body which instead of being a toil, a burden, and a clog,

D D

402

will even add to the soul’s perfection, and enable it to enjoy pleasure and delight more completely than before?

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” as to social intercourse. Moses and Elias spake of the Saviour’s death which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Paul tells us of words he heard, which were “not lawful for him to utter,” and he speaks of “the tongues of angels and of men.” Are words, then, arbitrary signs, as they are with us? or what better modes have they which we know not of? What latent powers await us, when we shall be borne out of this embryo state into another world?

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” as to place. Heaven is a place. It must be a place as well as a state. Our Saviour said, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” as to employments. In the proportion to the degree of light will be our capacity, activity, and happiness, we may be sure; for none are so miserable as those of you who do nothing, or have nothing to do. We read that His servants serve Him; that they shall

serve Him day and night in His temple. Watts has published a selection of curious conjectures as to our future employments, viewing them in connection with our talents, tastes, and so on. These are conjectures merely, yet what a variety of employments must be furnished to engage the powers of our souls, without weariness or cloying through millions of ages!

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be” as to our pleasures. Who can tell us what happiness is provided for us separately or collectively? No; after all that the Scriptures say, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that love Him.” For heaven is not a throne, it is not a kingdom, it is not a building, it is not a crown of glory, or the river of pleasure, or the tree of life, *only*; but it is *all these*, and it is infinitely more. And all these are only the hidings of His power, and the smoking of the glass to enable us to view the sun. After all the experience of believers (and they have a much better acquaintance from experience than from all they may read), after all their experience of its earnestness and foretastes—after all their views and feelings, in which they have often said,

“While such a scene of sacred joy
My raptured soul and eyes employ,
Here would I sit and gaze away,
A long and everlasting day;”—

after all this, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

403

III. Are we, then, left in entire ignorance? Do we know nothing of, and have we no sympathy with, a future state of blessedness? then we could have no desires after it. But we are favoured with A PARTIAL DEVELOPMENT, and enabled here to see how far this extends, and how much it comprehends.

And, first, the Apostle says, that with all our ignorance, “we know that He shall appear.” He is now hid, as to His appearance and glory, but we read of His being revealed from heaven; of His being revealed with His mighty angels, and of being “admired in all them that believe.”

The appearance of our Lord here spoken of is personal. We only find in Scripture two personal appearances of the Saviour; one past, the other future. In one He appeared as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:” in the other He shall appear in His glory, shall “sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.” “Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.” Oh, the solemnity, the grandeur, and the glory of that scene! Then infidels will believe, but it will be too late. Then worldlings will see, but all their hoardings and treasure will be gone for ever. Then Christians will see the wisdom of their choice, and will “lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption draweth nigh;” and while “the kindreds of the earth wail because of Him,” and are ashamed and confounded of His appearance, they will be enabled to exclaim, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him. This is our God: we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

Secondly, The Apostle says, that notwithstanding all our ignorance, “when He shall appear we shall be like Him.”

“Like Him” in holiness. This is remarkable when we consider how inherently and universally we have been depraved. What a miracle of grace is here! that we should be transformed into the image of Him, who “is the brightness of His Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” The likeness is begun here. They have the same views and dispositions, but only in their measure and degree. Here they have only the outlines impressed, but then the whole figure will be filled. The mind will be freed from all error, from all vile affections, from all irregular and carnal bias. Every Christian will be as pure as Adam when he came from his Maker, and as holy as an angel in heaven; yea, like the Son of God, abiding for ever.

The likeness extends to the body. The Apostle therefore

DD 2

404

says, “As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” The reference there is to the heavenly body. Yes, “this vile body” of our humiliation will be made “like unto His glorious body.”

It will take in the state too. There will be a likeness to Him in this. "He is our life," and "when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." "I appoint unto you a kingdom," said He, "as my Father appointed me;" and to the conqueror He says, "I grant you to sit on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down on His throne."

Thirdly, He tells us, notwithstanding their ignorance, they "know that when He shall appear they shall be like Him," for they "shall see Him as He is." This likeness secures the vision, and not the vision the likeness. The one is mentioned here, not as the consequence, but as the proof of the other. "We shall be like Him," and as an evidence of it, "we shall see Him as He is," which we could not do unless we had been previously made like Him; for "no man can see God and live." Think of this. The word "for" is frequently used, not as the cause, but as evidential. Thus, you say, "Spring is come, for the singing of birds is come." The singing of birds does not bring spring, but shews that it is come.

The greatest favour our Saviour could, while on earth, ask for His disciples was, that they might be with Him where He is, that they might behold His glory. Many followed Him to see Him; the Greeks said, "Sirs, we would see Jesus." Zaccheus climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was to pass that way. Perhaps we have all been sometimes ready to envy those who heard Him, and saw Him, and were familiar with Him while here. Well, Christians,

"We shall quickly pass the night,
To the fair realms of endless light;
Then shall our raptured senses rove
O'er the dear object of our love."

We naturally like to see persons of unparalleled greatness, and such who may have done great things for us, or bestowed any particular favour; though you may bestow as many thanks as you could, you would like to thank them in person. If the mother who bore you had been taken away very early, and you were sure that she was living abroad, you would be very anxious, if you were good children, to see her. You know how Cowper

405

was affected at the sight of his mother's picture. When he received it, he exclaimed—

“O that those lips had language! Life has pass'd
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smile I see,
The same that oft in childhood solaced me;
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,
'Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!'
The meek intelligence of those dear eyes
(Blest be the art that can immortalise,
The art that baffles Time's tyrannic claim
To quench it!) here shines on me still the same.

Faithful remembrancer of one so dear,
O welcome guest, though unexpected here!
Who bidd'st me honour with an artless song,
Affectionate, a mother lost so long.
I will obey, not willingly alone,
But gladly, as the precept were her own:
And while that face renews my filial grief,
Fancy shall weave a charm for my relief—
Shall steep me in Elysian reverie,
A momentary dream, that thou art she.”

Here you will not have a *picture*, for you will see Him as He is. You have seen His picture in His works, in His word, and in His ordinances. Oh, what a picture have you seen of Him in these! but then we shall see Him as He is, in the very nature in which He was born, in which He suffered, and in which He died. We have precious views of Him now by faith, but we shall not always depend upon testimony, nor upon His own testimony concerning Him. When Simeon saw Him as a babe only, he looked at Him, and wished immediately to depart. When the Queen of Sheba came to see the glory of Solomon, she said, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land. Howbeit, I believed not the words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it, and, behold, the half was not told me.” What, then, will it be with the believer when he shall be like Him, and see Him as He is?

They knew this; this was the conviction and apprehension of John and his fellow-disciple: they knew this, notwithstanding their ignorance of other things. They knew that they should see Him as He is. They knew it, not only as a truth to be believed, but to be appropriated, and could apply it to themselves. There are some of you who are persuaded that this is the blessedness which awaits the righteous at the last day, but you know that your heart is not right in the sight of God.

406

We shall not have time to shew that this knowledge of appropriation is desirable; but it has been possessed by common Christians, and it is possible to be able to say with John, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." The grand inquiry therefore is, whether this will be your blessedness. Will this destination be your own? We have often been told that "we should exercise candour in religion, for we all hope for the same heaven," than which nothing can be more false. All hope for a heaven, but all do not hope for the same heaven. All do not hope for the heaven referred to in our text, a heaven coming from the likeness, the vision, and the presence of the blessed Saviour. The words that immediately follow our text, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure," remind us that there are many who will not find this blessed state. Of all the passions none is so soothing as hope, or so raging as the disappointment of it, especially when confidence is great, and the object to be realised is great also. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death;" therefore, my dear hearers, remember you cannot reconcile the service of God with the service of Satan. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon;" you cannot have your treasure in heaven, unless your hearts are there also. Therefore all we require of you, in conclusion, is, that you would do one of these two things; that you would give up all thought of heaven in another world, or that you would leave off sinning. For, says the Apostle, "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

But as to you who have this hope, do you prize it, do you use it, do you employ it, and continually employ it? Call to mind the words of Watts—

“A hope so much Divine,
May trials well endure.”

Oh, how it can sweeten the bitter cup of life! how it can soothe the mind under trials and disappointments! how it can illuminate the valley of the shadow of death! Take the staff of the gospel in your hand, and hold it fast, and you will “run and not be weary, walk and not faint.” This valley is introductory to future blessedness, and if even Jordan rolls between, remember what there is beyond—

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand drest in living green.”

407

“There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers.”

Oh, realise this, and you will say, “The bitterness of death is past.” Time flies, life diminishes, and we shall all soon be in the condition of the mariner who leaves his native shores—as the vessel advances, the land disappears; we shall all soon pass from time into eternity. Oh, for “a hope full of immortality!” Oh, to have “the full assurance of hope,” and to be able to say, “As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.”

408

XLI.

THE INDWELLING OF GOD.

*And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given
us.—1 JOHN iii. 24.*

WE are all made of social materials. Much of our happiness depends therefore upon social intercourse. Some Unitarians

(I mean Unitarians not in doctrine but in condition) deny this; but God Himself, the Judge of all, hath said, "It is not good that man should be alone," and, "Let God be true; and every man a liar." But, my brethren, what is a source of good, may also be a source of evil. Much, therefore, depends upon the quality of our associates, and especially of our intimates. It is trying to travel upon the road with an unpleasant companion; but you may count the mile-stones, and hope soon to be freed from the annoyance. A visit may be irksome, but you number the days when you shall be disengaged from the irksomeness of it. But oh, how painful when the plague is found in your own family—in a perverse son, an undutiful child, an unkind wife, or a tyrannical husband. And yet much more depends upon what we *are* than upon what we *have*; much more depends upon what we have within us, than upon what we have without. Much more depends upon what occupies the heart, than upon what fills the house.

Now the Scripture speaks of man as a receptacle. The Scripture speaks of him as a *house*; as an "habitation of God, by the Spirit." The Scripture speaks of him as a *temple*; "Know ye not," says the Apostle, that "ye are the temple of God?" "As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." And observe the language of our text, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

Let us here examine the privilege, the means by which it is to be ascertained, and the usefulness of the subject; and as all

409

this will be taken in our way to the table of our dying Lord, "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

I. LET US EXAMINE THE PRIVILEGE.

It is the indwelling of God in the soul—His "*abiding* in us." The sentiment is not peculiar to John, but the frequency of it is.

Let us look at this "*abiding*." John says in the following chapter, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Every writer has some distinguishing phrase, some favoured word derived more or less from the

affection, the complexion, the natural temper, or imagination. And we are persuaded this was the case with the sacred writers. They were left to communicate the information with which they were charged in their own peculiar modes. The information they received from above did not, I conceive, confine them to the words, but to the things themselves. This secured them from error or mistake. The inspiration they received did not reduce them to mere machines or telegraphs.

But to our text, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us." Now, my brethren, it is the chief happiness and glory of man to be able to say, "God is in us." When Moses would distinguish the Jews from others, he said, "God is nigh them." "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for?" So nigh unto them in the care of His providence, so nigh unto them in regard to His oracles, His laws, and His servants. When the Son of God descended from heaven, the blessing and the glory was increased. Then they could say, God is with us, according to the language of the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." God with us! by a participation of our nature, and by His residence in our world: for, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." When Christ died upon the cross for our sins, the privilege of the Church was enlarged, and they then could say, "God is *for* us;" according to the Apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Here we behold Him for us in His readiness to receive us; for us to resign anything, however dear, for our welfare; giving His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life; turning away His wrath, and

410

becoming our Benefactor and intimate Friend for ever! But the honour and blessedness of the Church are not yet complete. There is something still wanting. It is not enough to say with Moses, God is near to us; or with Isaiah, God is with us; but oh, to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "God is for us," and

with John, God is *in* us! And, my brethren, this is the privilege of which our text speaks: "And hereby we know that He *abideth in us*, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

Let us enter a little further into this subject. There was a time when the persons here referred to were without God in the world; when another being had possession of them,—“the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” But God hath delivered them from the power of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son. God has entered, and taken possession of the heart. Oh, I love to think of, I love to contemplate, the power, and the dominion, and the agency of God in the world of nature; to see Him making His sun to rise, and the dawn breaking into day. I love to see the springing of the earth; “first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear;” to see His word running very swiftly, and all the seasons conspire to crown the year with His goodness. I love also to contemplate His dominion and agency in the providential world; to see by what unlikely means He accomplishes His designs; how He makes the wrath of man to praise Him; how He changes the times and the seasons; removing kings and setting up kings at His pleasure. I love to contemplate the universality and the minuteness of His attentions; for, “the eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them meat in due season.” He openeth His hand and satisfieth the wants of every living thing. A sparrow falleth not to the ground without His knowledge, and the very hairs of our head are numbered! But, oh! to see God go and take possession of the soul to be His own! Perhaps too, after the parent had pleaded to no purpose; perhaps after the minister had long laboured for nought and in vain; perhaps after he had been wooed and awed, blest and chastised, in vain. Then, God says, “I will work, and who shall let it?” “Zaccheus,” said the Saviour, “make haste and come down,” and he made haste, and came down and received Him joyfully. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” said Christ; and he soon replied, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

Now the grace of God is exceeding abundant towards some who have been long hastening on to destruction, and they have

411

been almost instantaneously wrought upon, while they have been suddenly arrested in their career of iniquity. The man was going on to destruction blindfolded, till he had reached the very precincts of ruin; then the bandage was torn away from his eyes, and he looked down into the dreadful abyss, and cried, "Lord, save, or I perish."

Others are more gradually affected. One thought leads on to another, and one feeling to another. They are drawn by the cords of love, and by the bands of a man. They may not be able to furnish any narrative to lay before the Church; but they found and felt that they were sinners against God, but that He was able and willing to save them through Christ Jesus. So they flew unto His arms, and said, "Lord, save me:" "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over me, but henceforth do I desire to be called by Thy name." But it matters not so much how the work of grace has been accomplished, if God is in us of a truth.

His abiding in us supposes not only entrance, but continuance. There are some who for awhile are wrapt up with delight in a beloved paradise; and yet by various events they may be torn away, or led, into a foreign land, and the place that once knew them knows them no more. Others are fickleness itself. They can abide nowhere. The restlessness of their minds appears in the frequent change of their habitation. But there is nothing of the kind here, "I the Lord change not," says He; "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Nothing occurs in the experience of His people but He foresaw when He first took knowledge of them. And nothing will ever induce Him to abandon those He has graciously taken possession of. We may therefore say with the Apostle Paul, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But how does He abide in them?

If I should answer this question negatively, I should say, not *personally*, as it was in the Redeemer Himself. "In Him," says the Apostle, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "He that hath seen me," said He, "hath seen the Father." Nor does He abide in them *essentially*. Thus

412

indeed, he *is* in them, as to the perfection of His nature, as to His Omnipresence, as to the presence by which He fills heaven and earth; but when His presence is spoken of by way of providence or privilege, it intends some peculiar regard. "The Lord is nigh unto all those who are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

But if I am required to answer this question positively, I should say, first, *objectively*. Do you apprehend my meaning? Paul says to the Philippians, "I have you in my heart." When you value a thing, it is in your mind; you apprehend it; you love it. Thus the child is in its mother's heart; she hears it cry, and sees its falling tear, before a stranger. And when you fear God, and desire God, and love Him, the object is in your mind. And though, while you are here, you do not love and serve Him perfectly, yet it is equally true that you love Him supremely.

But this does not go far enough. He dwells in His people by a real *union*; a gracious union; by a spiritual operative influence in all the powers of their souls. Thus He dwells in them as water in a well, our Saviour's own image. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life." He dwells in them as the sap in the tree, sustaining its life and producing fertility. He dwells in them as the soul dwells in the body, enlivening every limb and pervading every part.

Can you *explain* this? Why the doctrine of union is one of the hardest chapters in all natural philosophy? First, explain to me how the soul is in the body; the spirit, without parts, combining with matter and coalescing with substance; explain first, how God is in the highest heavens, and is also about our path, and about our bed, and spying out all our ways, words, and thoughts. It is acknowledged to be a very trite remark, that

“we are sure of a thousand things whose modes of existence or agency we are ignorant of.” Nothing can be more absurd than to imagine that our knowledge is the extent of all realities. A man who says that he will believe no more than he can comprehend must have either a very little creed or a very large understanding. The philosopher in many things is only acquainted with facts; and if a man pretends to know the cause, he must be conscious himself that he is “darkening counsel by words without knowledge.” Here the wise and learned must come to the Scriptures with the simplicity of a child, and receive the truths therein contained as a little child

413

receives the declarations of his father, with unsuspecting confidence, if they would be wise unto salvation.

So much for the privilege.

II. Let us consider HOW IT IS TO BE ASCERTAINED.

The Apostle says, “We know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us.” Now, what was the Spirit God had given to them? It is very true God had given to many a miraculous Spirit, so that they could open the eyes of the blind, open the ears of the deaf, raise the dead to life, and foretell things to come. But do you imagine this is the Spirit referred to by John in the words of our text? Do we not know that the possession of all this is no proof of adoption and salvation? Do we not know that all these endowments and achievements may be found without the grace of God? He had probably seen Judas perform miracles, and he had heard our Lord declaring, “Many will come unto me in that day, saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?” yet He would disown them. He knew also that this Spirit was temporary; that it regarded the superstructure only; that if miracles were to be continued and common, they would soon cease to be miracles, but that, according to the language of the Apostle, they were to cease. “Charity,” says he, “never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

“Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Therefore the Spirit here spoken of was not the Spirit of miraculous agency. No, but the Spirit which we call the *common influences of the Spirit of God*. We call it “common,” not because all men have it, but because all Christians have it; and all Christians will experience it to the very end of time. Thus they are said to “live in the Spirit,” and to “walk in the Spirit;” to walk “in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,” and to “be filled with the Spirit.”

But as the thing exemplified should always be plainer than the thing proved, let us inquire what manner of spirit that is which evinces the privilege of union with God? “We know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.” I am aware the Spirit is said to anoint us; He is said to seal us to the day of redemption; and to bear witness with our

414

spirits, that we are the children of God. But this is not done by sounds in the air, and by sudden impulses in the mind, but by its residing in us. Our having this Spirit is the anointing; our having this Spirit is the sealing; and our having it is the witness. When you read that “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,” you must not suppose that the Apostle refers to two contemporary witnesses bearing the same concurrent testimony. No; He means that one is the agent, the other the subject. The Spirit beareth witness with our, or by our, spirit, that we are the children of God, by His residing in us; and by His influences operating there. But the question is, *How?* And as it is of so much importance to know whether we are in possession of this privilege, let us inquire, what kind of spirit that is by which we are to judge of our state.

This Spirit is known by five attributes.

First, it is the Spirit of *conviction*: and the process is generally this:—He first convinces of the guilt of sin; then of its pollution; and then awakens in us a sense of its abhorrence; causing us to repent before God as in dust and ashes. Thus it is said, “They shall loathe themselves for all their abominations.” Commonly He begins by charging home upon the conscience some gross sin of which the man may have been guilty; some

sin against morality, or against the law of God. But it does not stop here. The conviction leads from the action to the disposition, and the man is brought to see that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. Thus sin is hated from its very nature, and as our Saviour says, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me."

Secondly, it is the Spirit of *faith*. Here, by faith, we mean not the assurance of faith, and the apprehension of his salvation in Christ. Indeed, till a man is convinced of sin, till this Spirit has produced a self-abhorrence and self-renunciation, he is not in a state likely to apply to Christ. No; the main reason why ministers endeavour to produce this state of mind—this conviction of sin, and this humiliation before God,—is not to endear you to the Saviour, but to endear the Saviour to you, and to induce you to apply to Him. And it is certain that while you are insensible of your disease, you never will seek after Him who is the Physician of value, crying at His feet, "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." Till you are convinced of the danger of your state, you will not be induced to fly for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before you in the

415

gospel. But the work of the Spirit puts the man into the position of looking to Christ, and of coming to Christ, and of dealing with Christ, concerning all the affairs of the soul and eternity. "When He is come," says the Saviour, "He shall glorify me." Exalted views of the Lord Jesus will be produced in the mind of the believer, in regard to his dependence upon Him, and his application to Him. Thus the Saviour says, "Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

Then, thirdly, it is the Spirit of *grace*. It is expressly called the Spirit of grace and of supplication, which was to be poured upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul says, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." How? it is the Saviour, properly speaking, that makes intercession for us. But when the Apostle addresses the Romans, he would convey the idea that the Spirit maketh

intercession *in* us, “helping our infirmities,” as he says elsewhere; teaching us to pray, exciting us to engage in the holy exercise, and enabling us to pray with the Spirit, and with the understanding also. He always brings a man upon his knees, and keeps him there too. Of him whom He makes intercession in, it may be emphatically said, “Behold, he prayeth.” Yes; and there is no ceasing of praying with him, till he ceaseth to breathe. We read of praying in the Spirit, and of praying in the Holy Ghost. We read of our receiving “not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

Fourthly, this Spirit is a Spirit of *sanctification*. Hence, He is so often called “the Holy Spirit,” and in one place, “The Spirit of holiness.” Hence, we read of the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost: and hence the promise of the New Covenant—“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. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” And hence, says the Apostle Paul, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Fifthly, this Spirit is the Spirit of *affection*. We read therefore of “the Spirit of love.” “He that loveth Him that begat,”

416

says John, “loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.” And, says the Saviour, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

III. Let us consider THE USEFULNESS OF THIS SUBJECT.

For I would never take a subject of a merely speculative nature, and which I could not bring to bear upon the conscience and the life; and in every part of genuine Christianity, it is a doctrine according to godliness.

The subject is useful, in the first place, to induce us to adore the condescension of God. David was struck with this; he was astonished that God should “try” man and “visit” him. “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” Solomon was still more struck with His dwelling with man, “Will God in very deed dwell with man upon earth?” Will he dwell with *man*? with a creature so unworthy, with a sinner so guilty? Will He dwell with man upon *Earth*? that Bedlam of insanity! that Hospital of diseases! that sink of every corruption? “Will God in *very deed* dwell with man on the earth?” But John goes further than this, and speaks of God as not only *visiting* man, as not only *dwelling* with man, but of His *abiding* in him! And here, my brethren, God Himself draws the contrast which is so worthy of our consideration: “Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” “Who is a God like unto Thee?”

This subject is useful, also, as it reproves those who think there is nothing in religion connected with certainty. This, indeed, would be a serious objection if true. The mind can never be at ease with regard to things of importance while fluctuating between two opinions, and, like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. But there is certainty in the religion of the Bible. There is certainty in regard to its principles. A man need not be always learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth. Christians have their hearts established with grace. There is certainty with regard to its privileges. A believer in Christ knows that its doctrines and its promises are not a mere fancy, but a blessed reality; that

417

if Christ makes us free, we shall be free indeed; that His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed. He knows there is a peace passing all understanding, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

Nor is this all, but there is a certainty with regard to our possession of these blessings. "Yes," says Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." "Yes," says the Apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed." "Yes," says John, "We know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." And are you not commanded by God Himself to give all diligence that your calling and election may be sure? And does not this imply a possibility of a decision? And, what says our text? "Hereby we *know* that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

Believers must be anxious to know this. What can be so desirable, what can be so influential, as to know this? And can they know it? Oh, yes; there are marks enough, if you are in the way everlasting, to show that you are not in a mistaken direction, but in a right road. Go forth by the footsteps of the flock; and observe those who have given the best evidence of being born of the Spirit, and bound for glory. God is concerned, Christians, not only for your salvation but for your comfort; and we can say with the Apostle Paul, "We desire that everyone of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

This subject is useful also, as it censures those who seek to determine their religious state by any other standard than that which is Divine. Here we have such a mass of absurdities upon which persons depend, that we have not time to enumerate. Some would determine their condition before God by what they call a direct act of faith as the only evidence; another would conclude that his heart is right in the sight of God, because his creed is very orthodox, and because he could not endure to sit under any other minister but one truly evangelical, forgetting there may be the form of godliness without the power thereof, and that faith without works is dead. Then some would ascertain their state by dreams and visions; and others are weak enough to throw open the Word of God by chance in order to decide by the first passage that presents itself to their eye. But, O brethren, judge yourselves rather by the Spirit that influences and governs you, and remember, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

418

Then this subject is useful to comfort those who are partakers of the Holy Ghost. They should rejoice in the Lord always. If they are in danger, they need not fear, because greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world. And if they are in affliction, it is enough to sustain them to know that God is a very present help. He is not far off, so that you can never be injured or perish before He can arrive. He is ever near you; He is *for* you, and is *in* you.

Or if you are mourning over your withered gourds, and saying, "Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness," yet you may say with the Saviour, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me." He is the Rock of Ages that never moves; He is the Fountain of living waters.

Lastly, let us turn the medal, and then we shall see the subject is useful to alarm those who, as the Apostle terms it, are sensual, not having the Spirit of God in you. Have you the Spirit?—the spirit of prayer, and the spirit of love, and the spirit of meekness? Rather, have you not a proud spirit? an ungrateful spirit? a careless spirit? a revengeful spirit? or a covetous spirit? "This spirit cometh not from Him that calleth you." And if you have nothing better to actuate you than this, you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. You are not in God, nor is God in you. And what will you do without Him in trouble? and in the hour of death? and in the day of judgment? Yet I would not conclude in the language of terror. Though your present state is not safe, yet you may obtain deliverance from it. Though you are destitute of the blessing of which we have been speaking, yet that blessing is attainable. And as there is no blessing you so much need, so there is none you are more encouraged to pray for. For, says the Saviour Himself, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

XLII. THE LOVE OF GOD.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, January 11th, 1846.)

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son

to be the propitiation for our sins.—I JOHN iv. 10.

REFLECTIONS on the love of God are always pleasing and profitable, nor need we go far before we find materials for meditation. Everything we behold, properly considered, bears us away to the bosom of Him who is the Father of mercies, to Him who is light and who is love itself. What a multitude of pleasing and lovely creatures surround us, all of which are the work of His hands; and formed to shew forth His praise! In what an honourable rank has He placed us in the gradation of being, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made! What faculties of mind has He given us! What capabilities of happiness, improvement, and enjoyment has He bestowed upon us! He has not only provided for our support, but also for our indulgence. What odours for the smell! what charms for the eye! what melodies for the ear! and what relishes for the taste! "He is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." "The eyes of all wait upon Him. He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing;" and all the seasons concur to "crown the year with His goodness, and His paths drop fatness." But, brethren, it is not to anyone of these subjects the exclamation in our text refers. "He has magnified His word above all His name." "Behold," says He, "I create new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, for the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind." "Herein is love." Where? where shall we find an answer? "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." "Herein is love." Where?

E E 2

420

in what instance? "Not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." All other instances of Divine favour are obscured by this far more illustrious display of it, as the light of a glow-worm or lamp is obscured by the radiance of the rising sun.

John would have us magnify the love of God by the demerit of its objects, and by the exclusiveness of its exercise; these thoughts will, we trust, prepare your minds for some reflections at the close.

I. John would have us magnify the love of God by the demerit of its objects.

God had thoughts of love towards us before man had existence. He had not made the elements by which he was formed. God said to Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" So here, where were we when God determined to make provision for our deliverance in the Son of His love? The kingdom which God gives to His people will not be fully enjoyed till the end of time, but it was prepared from the commencement. The Saviour will therefore say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Yes, says the Apostle, "We rejoice in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath given us before the world began."

Then view man as created. "God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions." Sin soon entered our "world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." God came down and said to Adam, "Adam, where art thou?" When He gave the promise which has since been accomplished, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," was Adam, our head and representative, then serving God? or, having disobeyed Him, was he then seeking His favour? No, he had fled, and was endeavouring to hide himself among the trees of the garden. The Apostle, speaking of the heathen nations, says, "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for evermore."

They liked not to retain God in their thoughts, and so He gave them up to a reprobate mind. So when God looked down upon the children of men, to see if there were any that sought after God, He says, "They are all gone out of the way, there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Do you ask, "Were not the Jews an exception here? for to

421

them were committed the oracles of God." They have been distinguished all along by signs and privileges; while the world was a wide wilderness, they were God's peculiar people; God planted them in His vineyard, and fenced it in, and gave it every kind of culture, so that He said, "What more could have been done than I have done to my vineyard?" Yet what was His testimony? "When I looked that it should bring forth grapes, wherefore brought it forth wild grapes." The evangelical prophet spake much of the Saviour. "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." This was how it was foreseen that His people would regard Him; and here is what God declared concerning Him: "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to Him whom men despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose Thee." We pass from the *prediction*, and read the *history* of the transgression. "He was in the world, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Hmen had loved God, surely they would have revered His Son. Did they reverence Him? Did they love Him? What is His own testimony? "He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did they had not had sin; but now have they seen and hated both me and my Father." Therefore they cast out His name as evil; they persecuted Him without a cause; pursued him with remorseless malice; then hanged Him on a tree; they crucified Him between two thieves;

and, adding insult to cruelty, they derided Him upon a cross,—thus, by shewing what they did to the very “express image of His person,” they shewed what they would have done with the original, that is, with God Himself, had it been possible for them to have laid hold of Him.

My brethren, what is the inference to be drawn from all this? Men can easily impose upon themselves. I dare say there are some here this morning who would be ready to think and say, “If we had lived when He was upon earth, we would not have used Him so, we would have welcomed Him, and entertained Him; we would have laid down all we had at His dear feet.” Thus it is that “the heart is deceitful above all things.” Thus,

422

when the Saviour was upon earth, they were acknowledging the prophets their forefathers had slain, and garnishing their tombs, saying, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of prophets;” at the very time they were purposing to embroe their hands in the blood of God’s own Son. What inference then do we derive from hence? We see that there is no difference between them and us; “that every mouth must be stopped, and all the world be guilty before God.” And is not this an undeniable proof of the demerit of those objects? What must have been the condition of man, not to love the perfection of holiness, the source of excellence, the fountain of life, the supreme good? What must have been the perversity of his mind which should induce him to regard God as an invader, and to say, “Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways”? What is implied in the doctrines of the gospel and the provisions of Christianity? God does nothing needlessly. Why, if man is not lost, should He then provide a Saviour? If He is not in bonds, why a Redeemer? If he is not sick and dying, what need of a Physician? What kind of servant must that be who has no regard to his master’s commands? What child must that be who has no affection towards the dearest of all fathers? What beneficiary, who has no esteem for his benefactor? What creature, who has no love to his Maker and Preserver? Why, can man be in a right state of mind while this is the case? Have we not proof of the depravity of man? And how came

he in this state? I can no more believe that God made him so than that God made fiends.

Now the carnal mind is enmity against God; there is no neutrality here. "He that is not with me," says the Saviour, "is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad," We are alienated in our minds by wicked works. It is in vain for a man to exclaim, "I have never *said*, I desire not the knowledge of God's ways." Actions speak louder than words. Neither will it do for you to say, "We feel no aversion to God." It is Satan alone who will try to persuade you that you will not be called to an account for your conduct in the sight of God, but believe him not; he was a liar from the beginning. And you must not expect, as Latimer said, that after dancing with the devil all day you will sup with Christ at night. What does our Apostle say? "If a man say he loves God, and walketh in darkness, he lies, and speaks not the truth."

Men love to talk of reward, but what saith the Scripture? "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life by

423

Jesus Christ our Lord." They love to talk of being saved in consequence of our loving God, but the Scriptures speak of salvation as a consequence of His love to us. Men love to talk of worthiness. But says the Apostle, "God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace ye are saved."

II. We are now brought to another demonstration, namely, *the exclusiveness of the exercise*. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Here observe the *person* who was sent for this purpose: "His Son." It was not a mere man. It was no son of Adam encompassed with infirmities, who could not expiate his *own* guilt; and much less by any means of suffering could take away our sins. Neither was it an angel; none of the thrones, principalities, or powers would have been adequate to the greatness of the undertaking. Our sins would have been a burden too heavy for any creature, therefore the Lord laid them upon" One

mighty to save,”—“able to save to the uttermost,”—even upon the Son of His love.

Had it been possible for one of these angels around the throne of God to have expiated our guilt, it would have been goodness worthy of our everlasting gratitude that He should resign one of these ministering spirits that execute His commands, and do all His pleasure, for the sake of creatures so inferior to them in condition, and so defiled by sin. But that He should send in the fulness of time His own Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; that He should send One so infinitely dear to Him, that He should send One more valuable than the whole creation itself,—this is an instance beyond all expression or conception, and which puts wonder itself to a stand; which angels themselves “desire to look into.”

From hence we may have a full assurance that His purposes concerning you shall have a full accomplishment. How infinitely qualified, Christian, was Jesus for this purpose! It is impossible your interest can suffer linder His management. “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.”

We may also observe the *purpose* for which the Saviour was

424

sent. He was sent to “be a propitiation,” “to make an atonement.” The question is, how He was to accomplish it? Was it by being our example? He is our example. “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him.” Or was He our propitiation by His teaching? For this end was He born, for this purpose came He into the world, that He might bear testimony unto the truth. He is a Teacher; “none teacheth like Him.” What is there in His example or doctrine that constituted an atonement for our sins? He came, not to shew us the way to heaven, but to be Himself the way, and” He *is* the way, the truth, and the life.” He came, not to tell us how to make our peace with God, but to make it, and” He hath made peace by the blood of His cross.” He came to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. The law was a shadow of good

things to come: the victim was to be brought to the door of the tabernacle; there the priest stood and confessed over it the sins of the people,-so there was a transfer typically of their guilt to the victim; while the people were dismissed with a blessing, being reconciled to God. I need not stay to explain this to you, for you have often sung-

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

His being a propitiation for our sins involves His sufferings: “For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew.”

He came not to sacrifice His subjects, but to sacrifice Himself. “He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” Who can conceive, much less describe, the things He has prepared for them that love Him? The cup given Him to drink was sharper than vinegar, more bitter than gall. Unless we were possessed of the same feelings, or capable of bearing the same load, no language can express, no liveliness of imagination can conceive,

425

the greatness of His sufferings in order “to make reconciliation for the sins of the people,” rendering the words of the weeping prophet so applicable to Himself, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”

And could nothing else suffice? No; God Himself being the Judge. Can any of you think lightly of sin? Some of you, I fear, are rolling “it as a sweet morsel under your tongue.” But what thought *He* of it when suffering on the tree; He by whose stripes you are healed? Where, brethren, should your

resentment rest? I dare say had you heard the cry of “Crucify Him! crucify Him!” you think you would have been ready to say, “Oh, you wretches: “ Or had you seen them driving the nails, while you saw the blood spurting from His dear hands, you would have felt revenge; but, remember, it was your sins that caused all this. Upon *them* let your vengeance fall, while you exclaim—

“Furnish me, Lord, with heavenly arms,
From Grace’s magazine,
And I’ll declare eternal war
With every darling sin.”

Here, brethren, we have a subject for our admiration and wonder. Our admiration and regard for other things may arise from ignorance, and be diminished by knowledge, whereas here it arises from knowledge, and the more we know, the more we shall adore and wonder. “Who is a God like unto Thee, which pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin?”

But now we must bring the subject to a practical conclusion; and if we regard it properly it will lead us to self-examination. Do we value those things which God values? Take a natural man. If he desires any blessing, it will be a temporal one; or if sincere in his thanksgiving, it will be for a safe journey, or a happy stroke of business. But Christians are peculiar in all their views and feelings; they judge not of things as others do. They are not insensible as to the good things of this life; but still a Christian cannot say, “Who will shew us *any* good?” as if *any* good would answer his purpose; but while thankful for outward mercies, he will say with the poet—

“Give what Thou wilt, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.”

Or with Dr. Watts—

“To Thee we owe our wealth and friends,
And health and safe abode;
Thanks to Thy name for meaner things,
But they are not my God.”

426

Again, what think you of those who despise the riches of His goodness in this dispensation? There are those who think lightly of that love, the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of which surpass knowledge. Would you disobey God's choicest commands? He commands "that ye believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Would you rob Him of His highest glory? It is here that glory to God is combined with peace on earth, and goodwill towards men, Would you frustrate the grace of God, and make Him to be dead in vain? How can you neglect so great salvation? The Apostle says, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?" "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh, for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven."

Again, What encouragement is there for the convinced sinner! Does your conscience tell you that you have transgressed God's holy law, and does the Bible assure you that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"? and that "cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them"? Are you inquiring, "What shall I do to be saved?" and saying, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" He hath shewed thee, O man, what thou must do. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." Are you fully persuaded of the all-sufficiency of this sacrifice?

But then, Christians, this should gender confidence in you. Yes, you should "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the atonement." Now you are "accepted in the Beloved." Now you can enter His presence sprinkled with the blood of Christ, making mention of His righteousness alone. Now you can reckon with the

Apostle, who said, "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not with Him freely give us all things?" And you say with him, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

How is it that you have such little, low, un influential views of

427

this love of God in Christ Jesus? Ah, Christians, you will soon have other views of this adorable sacrifice, and how will you wonder then that you were not more delighted and influenced by it! Yes, and shall not this marvellous love of Christ induce us to love Him in return? "We," says the Apostle, "love Him because He first loved us," *because* "love begets love." If, therefore, there be any ingenuous feeling in your souls, you must be induced by reflection to inquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" Your whole life will be holiness to the Lord; you will love Him, not in word only, but in deed and in truth.

428

XLIII. ALPHA AND OMEGA.

(Preached on Sunday Morning, October 12th, 1851.)

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.—REVELATION
xxi. 6.

ALLOW me this morning without preface or introduction to call your serious attention immediately to the two parts contained in our text—the description and the promise. The description, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end;" the promise, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." In the one we have the speaker's character, and in the other the sinner's hope.

I. THE DESCRIPTION, which contains the speaker's character. But you may be disposed to say, Who is the speaker? Surely this is hardly a question; there is only one Being in the universe to whom the words can be emphatically or even

properly ascribed: it is the Lord of life and glory. He is not only the speaker, but He is the subject. He not only speaks, but speaks of Himself. And we may draw very important inferences from it.

Ministers ought to be able to say, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord;" but our Lord always preached Himself. This may seem strange, as He proposes Himself as an example of humility, and calls upon us to learn of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart." But when we come to reflect, we see He could not speak otherwise with propriety and truth. He knows what He is, and feels no fear of the imputation of pride and vanity. He knows what He is, and knows that—

"None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good;"

and therefore He invariably seeks to draw our attention to

429

Himself, saying, "Behold me, behold me, I am God, and there is none else."

But what does He here say concerning Himself? "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." "Alpha and Omega" are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, and they therefore stand for the commencement and the close of every concern in question. This, therefore, is explained by the expression, "the beginning and the end."

Before we proceed further, we would call upon you to observe how in this way Jehovah speaks of Himself in the prophecies of Isaiah. "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts; I am the first and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." Now this is very express and decisive; and does our Lord appropriate the title to Himself? Hear what He says in the beginning of this book, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, *the Almighty.*"

I am well aware that some have endeavoured to prove that God the Father is here speaking, but without any shadow of evidence or argument. But if these words are really the words of our Saviour, His duty is established of course. Well then,

observe what is said further on in the same chapter. “ I turned,” says John, “to see the voice that spake with me; and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead: and He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

Hear also what He has said in the twenty-second chapter: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” Here He is evidently the speaker, nor is He less so in the words of our text, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” Now if He had only called Himself by this title in one place, it would have been sufficient for our

430

purpose; while the several repetitions of the appellation shew of what importance it is that we should entertain proper apprehensions of Him with whom we have to do.

But what is the import of the title here: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”?

First, it regards His personal nature, and shews the duration and immutability of His being. In another place we read, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” The Apostle expresses this in a way of comparison, or rather in a way of contrast with creatures, when he says in his Epistle to the Hebrews, “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou

fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.”

It is very true that angels will live for ever, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and their bodies too when raised from the dead will be immortalised. But then, none of them will live like Him; they are the streams, He is the fountain, sustaining and supplying them; they are the branches only, He is the tree sustaining them. In Him they will live, and move, and have their being; and therefore if He were to suspend His influences for a moment, they would relapse into their original nothingness. So true is it, as the Apostle says, *He* “only hath immortality.”

Then, secondly, it regards agency, and is intended to express not only its continuance, but its peculiarity and exclusiveness; that He is the commencer, and that He is the completer; that in all influences He is all and in all. All and in all of what? Let us look at three articles.

First, let us look at *creation*. Here, it is true, He is the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” “Without Him was not anything made that was made.” I will use the very words of Scripture here. “By Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.” So that here, you see, He is the first great cause and the last end.

Secondly, let us look at *salvation*; and here it is equally true that He is “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no

431

name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” “I am the way,” says He, “the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

This is true if we consider the *procuring* of this salvation. This is entirely His own work. “By Himself,” says the Apostle, “He purged our sins.” “He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him.” “His blood cleanseth from all sin.” By the one offering up of Himself “He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” In His intercessory

prayer before His death, He said, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do." And with His last breath He exclaimed, "It is finished!" and it was finished, and so finished that nothing need be added to it; and the notion of filling up the sufferings of Christ in our bodies, as if they were not infinitely full before, and that we shall be able to perform works of supererogation and merit, is the damnable doctrine of the mother of harlots and abomination of the earth, "whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming; whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." This is what our reformers—blessed be their names—pleaded for, suffered for, bled for, and died for; and here they were united. They differed with regard to many things,—with regard to the decrees of God, and with regard to the modes of Church government, &c.; but there was no difference here, as to what is the ground of a sinner's justification before God. They all accorded with the sentiment which Watts expresses with so much force when he says,

"The death of Christ must still remain
Sufficient and alone."

So again this is true if we consider the *application* of this salvation. When may we view a man as actually in a state of salvation? I answer, When he is *accepted*. And how is he accepted? He is accepted in the Beloved. I answer, When he is *justified*. And how is he justified? By his own righteousness which is of the law? No, but by the righteousness of Christ; "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference" between the Jew and the Greek. "There is no difference;" "we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." I answer, When he is

432

sanctified. I do not mean when he is perfectly sanctified. There is no such thing while we are here; but when he is changed, when he is made a new creature in Christ Jesus, when

old things are passed away, and all things are become new. But says the Apostle in reference to this, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." "The Son quickeneth whom He will." That Spirit, without which no man can be His, is expressly called by the Apostle "the Spirit of Christ;" and it is in this Spirit we live, and in this Spirit we walk. By this Spirit we are led; we walk after the Spirit; and we walk in the Holy Ghost.

We may take a fine expression of this as used by the Apostle in addressing the Hebrews; "Let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith,"—not of *our* faith: the word *our* is not in the original. "The author and finisher of faith." This is true if we consider faith *objectively*. He is the author and finisher of it. He is the author and finisher of everything that faith sees, that faith lays hold of, of everything that faith leans upon, of everything that faith glories in. For it is the blood of Christ alone that it pleads. It is the righteousness of Christ alone on which it depends. It is the name of Christ on which alone it trusts. The Apostle therefore goes so far as to say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." And so it is equally true if we consider faith *subjectively*, that is, if we turn away from faith as an object and refer to it as a grace. Here too He is the author and finisher of faith. He produces it in us; He maintains it in its exercise. And by a parity of reasoning we may apply this to every other grace as well as faith; and thus He is the author and finisher of hope and of love and of patience. From Him it is that we receive, and grace for grace. To Him, therefore, the praise and the glory of all we possess belongs; and when He shall come, to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, they will all exclaim, "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, to *Him* be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Thirdly, let us look at *Providence*, and here it is equally true that He is "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." It has been disputed whether what we call preservation

is a continued creation or not; if it be not a continued creation, it is unquestionably a continued agency, and see how

433

it belongs to Him. "He upholds all things," says the Apostle, "by the word of His power," for he speaketh of Him. "The eyes of all wait upon Him, and He giveth them their meat in due season." "By me," says He, "kings reign and princes decree justice." And says Daniel, "He changes the times and the seasons; He removeth kings and setteth up kings." Empires rise or fall, fade or flourish, at His bidding; and He so disposes of all, to shew that we are in His hands as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and that He controls all events concerning us more easily than the down of the thistle is driven by the wind. All the revolutions which take place among men—though they think not so, neither do their hearts mean so—are all arranged in a subserviency to the extension, the security, and glory of His cause. "And the nation and the people that will not serve Him shall perish." "Christ," says the Apostle, "is head over all things to the Church, which is His body." How delightful is this consideration to Christians, that He holds universal empire for a particular purpose, that He might make all things work together for their good. And this brings Him near. They can see Him then in every trial and in every comfort; they can hold communion with Him in every ordinance, and know, as David says, that "He performeth all things for them."

So much for the first part, the description, portraying the speaker's character.

II. Let us proceed to consider THE PROMISE, in which we shall find the sinner's hope, and therefore our hope.

"I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Now here is enough to review this morning, if we consider the blessing itself, the manner in which it is to be imparted, and the disposition that is found in the recipients. Let us briefly notice each of these.

First, the excellence of the blessing itself. Observe the representation; it is water,—it is water from a fountain. And

what can this fountain be but Himself? He is not a vessel; He is not a reservoir, which, however large, may in time be drained dry. But He is a fountain; always full, always flowing, always fresh. Therefore it is also called "the water of life;" not a dull, dead, stagnant water to be found in a pool, but living water,—water springing in its effusions from a living spring-head.

F F

434

And what, my brethren, can this water issuing from this fountain be but the ordinances of religion?—the doctrines of revelation, the influences of the Holy Spirit?—in a word, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Between this grace and living water there is an obvious and a very striking analogy. Each of them is the one thing needful. But the one is not so necessary for the body as the other is for the soul. There have been several instances in which persons have lived for forty days and nights without the one; but for a soul to live one day or one hour without the other is a miracle which never has been, never will be, and never can be accomplished. Does water soften? The grace of God melts the hardest heart and turns the stone to flesh. Does water purify and cleanse? So does the grace of God. "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." Does water fertilise? The Scripture compares a man, whose hope the Lord is, to a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. And says Jeremiah, "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." In what a condition would the tree now be, if all the springs were exhausted, and the rivers were dried up; yea, if there were no rain in the land for a single year! But nothing can be compared to the barrenness of a soul devoid of the waters of grace. But this water of life enlivens all where it comes, and produces in them all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

But the principal reference here is to the relief and refreshment afforded by water. Oh, how welcome is cold water to a thirsty soul! How welcome was it to the Jews as it rushed from the smitten rock! So that Moses, in his song, alluding to it, says, "He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." It was not honey really. Ah, but it was as rich as honey; it was as sweet as honey to them in their dreadful thirst. And says the Psalmist land this corresponds with the desire of every Christian), "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." "I opened my mouth, and panted for thy salvation."

Such, my brethren, are the desires which Divine grace produces, and nothing else can satisfy. But can this satisfy?

435

You shall hear what our Saviour says upon the subject, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." What! do not believers then desire more? Yes, they desire more *of* this, but not more *than* this. It is this, and this alone, that satisfies them; it is this that quenches the thirst after the pleasures and vanities and dissipations of the world; and it is this that throws a satisfactoriness into their temporal supplies and comforts,—to know that what Providence denies them grace will not suffer them to want; but they will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." Therefore says Solomon, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." It is sweeter in the enjoyment, and goes much further. So Philip Henry often told his family that "the grace of God can make a little go a great way."

Then, secondly, observe the manner in which it is to be imparted. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life." But this is not all. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life *freely*."

This is surely enough to encourage us; but it is not too much. Our Lord knew what a disposition there is in man to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; that he naturally leans to the side of self. For he is as proud as he is

poor; and though his necessity brings him continually upon his knees to ask of God for his daily bread, yet when he comes to God with his wants, he would rather come as a merchant than as a beggar; and nothing seems to satisfy him, but that he would seem to *purchase* the very thing he implores.

Then the Saviour knew what strong consolation they needed who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. He well knew what a change conviction of sin produces in the soul. So that the man is hardly before this encouraged to hope; but now he hears the Saviour saying, "As your penury is such that you cannot offer to buy, my grace is such it disdains to sell. Therefore come and take of the blessings freely; therefore they are as gracious as they are indispensable; therefore you are as welcome as you are guilty. Worthiness has no recommendation here, and unworthiness has no barrier."

Then, thirdly, observe the distinction by which the recipients are characterised. "I will give to him that is *athirst* of the water of life freely."

 F F 2

436

How is this? These are the only things that are mentioned—our want, and our desire. Our Saviour knew the necessity of such a representation as this; and therefore He comes forward, and says, "I will give of the water of life *freely*." How well, how kindly is this said! There is no hard condition to perform, no meritorious qualifications to be possessed. But it is necessary there should be thirst. This, therefore, is wisely as well as kindly mentioned. This is the condition: no desire or thirst, no promise of a blessing. Enjoyment does not arise only from the excellency of the object, but from its adaptation to our state, to our wants, to our wishes, and to our hopes. Then the gratification it affords is satisfaction; and this is the case here. Without this thirst, what is even the water of life itself? "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "The full soul loatheth the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." And therefore it is mentioned not as a qualification in the receiver, but as

necessary to induce us to seek for the blessing, and to our enjoyment of it.

The great thing, therefore, is to bring persons into this state: and here is the difficulty. Hence, as ministers, we often labour again and again to produce this state of mind; to convince them as sinners: not to recommend them as sinners to Christ, but to recommend Christ to them. And how delightful is the thought, that we may at all times repair immediately to Christ; that we may receive the blessings we need; as unholy to be renewed, and as poor that we may be enriched.

To conclude, Are you all in this state? Are you all thirsting after the waters of life and salvation? Oh, how many are there who are strangers to this desire! This is the case with all you careless ones,—you who disregard the gospel; you who never read its important statements; you who disregard the Lord's Day; you who, Gallio-like, care for none of these things. *Not you!* And this is the case with all those who are worldly,—you who make light of these things and go your way, one to his farm and another to his merchandise; and if you are applauded by your fellow-creatures, and succeed in your enterprises, you never dream of a better state than this, and are ready to say, "What would men have? What can satisfy them if the enjoyments of this world cannot?" So it is with all those who are Pharisees—who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others. And such are all the Laodiceans, who say, "We are rich and increased with goods, and stand in

437

need of nothing;" while they are "poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked." None, *none* of all these are thirsty; and therefore it is that the waters of the river of life, though they flow hard by them, are neglected or forgotten.

But some of you are thirsty; you feel you are devoid of comfort without this blessing. Everything else in your esteem is nothing; less than nothing, and vanity. You know the chief cry of your heart is, "Give me Christ, or else I die." You know that you are waiting for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning. And thus you are saying, "When wilt Thou come

unto me? When wilt Thou comfort me?" You know that nothing can speak peace but the Saviour's blood; nothing can fill you with all joy and peace in believing, but His saying to your soul, "I am Thy salvation." Well, this is a proof of something good, and a pledge of something better. And our Saviour hath said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness;" He says, they are blessed already, and shall be blessed hereafter, "for they shall be filled." Refuse not, therefore, to be comforted. Go and drink of the river of the water of life; and go and drink largely, since you are invited to drink "*freely*." You cannot desire to receive too much from Him, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. Blessed be God for representing the blessings of Divine grace under the notion of water. Now, if you wanted wine, and applied to a neighbour to give you some, and were to carry along with you a pail, you would only excite anger and ridicule. Not so, if you wanted water. Oh, remember that when you go to beg of God, you go for water—the water of life; and of this water you cannot ask too much. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

And when you are partaking of these blessings yourselves, oh, admonish others, invite others, press others to come and partake of the same blessings with you. And look forward to the hour when you shall drink from the spring-head itself; and, as our hymn says—

"If such the sweetness of the streams,
What will the fountain be,
"here saints and angels draw their bliss
Immediately from Thee! "

THE END.

Bungay
CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS