

A Sermon.

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“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power: when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” – 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

The Apostle here speaks of the second coming of Christ. This is a most solemn subject, but we are concerned in it, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

We shall divide our text into the following heads:

- I. – The *time* when Christ shall come again;
- II. – The *manner* of His coming; and
- III. – The *object* of His coming.

I. – The *time* when Christ shall come again. There are different opinions among Christians on this point. The Thessalonians expected Christ to come in their own day; and they thought that the Apostle had in his first epistle given them ground for their expectation. In the fourth and fifth chapters he spoke of the coming of Christ. It is one thing to adduce Scripture in support of one's views, and another thing to understand Scripture. It was partly to correct their error on the subject of Christ's second advent, the Apostle wrote his second epistle to the Thessalonians. In the second chapter, he says, “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that day of Christ is at hand” – (verses 1,2). Christ did not come when the Thessalonians expected Him.

There are other Christians in our own day, who say, with great confidence, that Christ may come within their own life-time. The expectation of these shall be as much disappointed as that of the Thessalonians, for it is not found in the Word of God.

There is, however, certainly a time when Christ shall come again. But of that time no man or angel knows, God only knows it. So Christ tells us: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36). But although the time when Christ shall come is hid from us for wise purposes, yet there are signs of that time clearly revealed to us in the Word of God. We read in Scripture that several notable events were to take place between Christ's ascension to heaven and His second coming. We shall mention these events:

1. A falling away from the faith was to take place. Of this falling away the Apostle, in the second chapter of this epistle, speaks: “Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (verse 3). There can be no doubt but the falling away spoken of here is the apostasy of the Church of Rome, or the Papacy, which took place in the sixth century of the Christian era.

A falling away from the faith has taken place in our own day in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Two of the largest Churches in Scotland – the United Free Church and the Established Church – have fallen away from the doctrines of God's Word, as these doctrines are contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is more dangerous to fall away from

the faith than to fall into any other sin, inasmuch as it is declared in Scripture that it is impossible for those who are guilty of this sin to be renewed again unto repentance (Hebrews 6:4-6). We have sad instances of this *impossibility* in the case of the Jews and the Church of Rome. Individuals of the Jews have been brought to repentance, but as a body they are now for nearly two thousand years denied the grace of repentance. And although individuals in the Church of Rome have been brought to repentance, yet as a whole they remain in their apostasy to this day, as monuments of God's judgment. And, judging from God's dealings with these two bodies, we are warranted to conclude that He will deal in the same manner with the Churches that have fallen away from the faith in our own day. I do not expect that they shall return to the doctrines of the Word of God in this generation; no, not till the millennium. Oh, how many shall perish eternally in these bodies before the dawn of that glorious period! As they are under the judgment of blindness, they will not believe this themselves. They say that they are right, and that those who adhere to the faith are wrong, narrow-minded, and antiquated. The Jews are under the same delusion; they say that they are right, and that Christians are wrong; and the Romanists say that they are right, and that Protestants are wrong.

2. Another event which shall take place before the coming of Christ is the millennium. The millennium shall be brought about by the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 24:14). There are millions of the heathen who have not yet heard the Gospel, and are dying in their sins – without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). No (adult) sinner can be saved without the Word of the Gospel (Romans 10:14,15). As a preparation for the millennium the Bible is at present widely circulated among the heathen, and is blessed to many. But when that glorious period shall begin, the evangelisation of the world shall go on, on a larger scale, and proceed increasingly till “the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). The Word preached shall be accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and sinners shall be converted daily in large numbers, as on the day of Pentecost. This good work begun shall go on till the great majority of men become the disciples of Christ. We have no Scripture warrant to say that there shall be no unconverted sinners during the millennial age. These shall be so few comparatively, and the influence of true godliness so great, that, as Satan is bound in prison, they are laid under a divine restraint that they shall not show any opposition to the people and cause of God. The spirit of grace and supplication shall be poured upon the Jews, and they will receive Jesus, whom they had so long rejected, as their Saviour. Their ingathering to the Messiah shall be as “a resurrection from the dead.”

The Papists shall renounce their superstition and idolatry, and return to the faith once delivered to the saints; and the heathen shall forsake their paganism, and join the Christian Church. There shall be one flock and one Shepherd. At the millennium denominational distinctions, which now exist in the visible Church, shall be broken down, and all Christians throughout the world will join the one Church of Christ on the terms set forth in God's Word. That union shall be quite different from the union of Churches which so many advocate in our day. They seek union at the expense of throwing away the Word of God. But the union at the millennium will have God's Word as its basis. The Church shall be called the Church of God or the Church of Christ. If it be denominated with respect to its government, it will be called the Presbyterian Church, as it was in the days of the Apostles. In the millennial age peace shall reign in the Church and in the world; no strife in the Church, and no war in the world (Isaiah 11:9). They shall learn war no more for a thousand years.

Some are of opinion that at the beginning of the millennium Christ will come down from heaven, and remain on earth to the end of the thousand years. But there is no real ground for that opinion in the Bible. We read of His first coming and of His second at the end of the

world, but not of His third coming. If John in the Isle of Patmos could not bear a sight of the dazzling glory of Christ when He appeared to him, much less can unconverted sinners endure a sight of Him. They would be fleeing from Him as they would flee from a flaming fire! Besides, we are told, that the heavens must contain Him till the times of restitution of all things (Acts 3:21); and that the heavens and the earth shall flee before Him when He comes (Revelation 20:11).

3. Another event which shall take place before His coming again is the great apostasy that will happen after the close of the millennium.

Satan shall be loosed then; and he shall go forth to deceive the nations of the world, and when he succeeds in his evil work he will employ those he has gained to his side to attack the small remnant of God's people – the fruit of the millennium. Now, how long will it be between the end of the millennium and the coming of Christ? Will there be another thousand years? No, for it is called "a little season." "And that he (Satan) must be loosed a little season," or a short time. Immediately after that short time expires, Christ shall come again; for John saw a great white throne (Revelation 20:11).

II. – The *manner* of His coming. In speaking of the manner we shall have to refer to several passages of Scripture bearing on the subject.

1. He shall come in His glory. So Christ Himself says in Matthew 25: 31, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory." When He came first, He veiled His glory. But when He shall come again, the glory of His godhead and the glory of His humanity shall be manifest to all. There shall be no veil upon His glory.

2. All the holy angels shall accompany Him; "and all the holy angels with him" (Matthew 25:31). When He came first some of the holy angels came with Him. They announced His birth and ministered to Him during His state of humiliation; but when He shall come again, *all* the holy angels shall come with Him. In our text these are said to be mighty angels. "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His *mighty angels*." We shall farther on show the reason why all the holy angels come with Christ when He shall come the second time.

3. He shall come *suddenly*. He told this before He left the world: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27). There is no motion quicker than that of the lightning.

4. His coming shall be unexpected. His own people look for His appearing, but the generality of men living in the world when He shall come shall be very wicked, and if one warned them to prepare for the coming of Christ to call them to account they would laugh at him. There shall be scoffers who shall deny that He shall come at all (2 Peter 3:3,9). Christ foretold the state of that generation: "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:38,39). As the flood came unexpectedly upon the people of that generation, and swept them away, so shall the flood of God's wrath come upon the wicked at the day of judgment; and as the people before the flood lived carelessly, forgetting God and minding the things which pertained to this life only, so the generality of men shall be when Christ shall come. Some shall be dancing at a wedding, some at the theatre, some singing vain songs at a concert or at the drunkard's table, some at the football match or some other amusement, when the trumpet shall sound, announcing that the Judge is at the door! What terrible consternation poor sinners shall be put into at that critical moment. There is no time left to cry for mercy, the door of mercy is closed, the invitation of the Gospel is sealed up; for Christ is now come, not to seek and to save lost sinners, but to judge the quick and

the dead. O careless sinner, take warning while it is yet “the accepted time, and the day of salvation!”

5. He shall come in a *flaming fire*. This denotes:

(1) That He comes to execute wrath upon His enemies. The day of His coming is a day of wrath. It is the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16) – the wrath of the Mediator between God and men. God the Father is angry with sinners, and in a day of mercy Christ comes between the sinner and the wrath of the Father; but now, as Christ is the only Mediator, there is none to interpose between the sinner and the wrath of Christ. This makes the case of the sinner hopeless. There is no escape now!

(2) It denotes that He comes to burn up this world. “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Some one compared this world to a scaffold set up to a house in course of construction. The scaffold is needed till the house is finished, but as soon as it is finished the scaffold is taken down. In like manner, God is building a house – the Church – for Himself in this world, and as soon as it is finished the world shall be destroyed – reduced to nothing, out of which it had been called. I am aware that some interpreters hold the idea that the world shall not be annihilated at the day of judgment, but purified by fire, and made the abode of the redeemed for ever; but where they got that idea is a mystery to me. One thing I am sure of is that they did not get it in the Bible, and therefore we do not believe it. The teaching of Scripture is opposed to it. We read in the Bible that when Christ shall come again the earth and the (visible) heaven shall flee away, and there shall be no place found for them (Revelation 20:11). Supposing, for the sake of argument, that these men were correct, is it conceivable that Christ, His redeemed, and all the holy angels should leave heaven and come down to dwell on earth for ever? No, the idea is preposterous.

III. – The object of His coming. When Christ came to the world first, He had an object in view in coming. He came to do the work which His Father gave Him to do – to work out everlasting redemption for His covenant people – which cost Him His humiliation unto death. His object in coming again is to judge the world – the quick and the dead. The Father committed all judgment to Him because He is the Son of man. Judging the world is the last, and the crowning, step of Christ’s exaltation. Many judged Him when He was in His state of humiliation, but He is the only and final Judge of all now. As Judge He shall sit upon the throne of His glory (Matthew 25:31) – a white throne (Revelation 20:11) from which pure justice shall proceed. Those judged: All nations shall be gathered before Him (Matthew 25:32) – every individual of the human race from Adam downward to the last individual of his posterity must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). We shall be among them.

The resurrection of the dead shall precede the judgment. Some shall be living on earth at the day of judgment, but the great majority are dead. The dead shall be raised by Christ. This He told the Jews, who denied His godhead: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28,29). The grave shall give forth the dead, and the sea, the bodies of men buried there (Revelation 20:12,13). The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body, but at the day of judgment they shall see their error, when it is too late.

When all these are raised to life, and re-united to their immortal souls by Christ, then He shall employ the holy and mighty angels to gather them – good and bad – to His judgment-seat. When they are all gathered, the great Judge of all will now begin to separate them into two classes – the righteous and the wicked – “And he shall separate them one from another,

as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” Hitherto, the righteous and the wicked mingled together, with respect to their bodies, in the same family, in the same town or country, in the same Church, some at the same communion table; but now they are separated one from another so completely, that there is not one of the wicked left among the righteous, or one of the righteous left in the society of the wicked; no tares among wheat, as no wheat among the tares. Oh, what a solemn thought this is! But we shall be in either company. “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:5,6).

After this separation the work of trial begins. None is condemned or acquitted without conviction. They are judged according to what is in the books. The books are opened (Revelation 20:12). What are the books?

(1) The Bible shall be opened. Christ said to the Jews, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you at the last day” (John 12:48). Many sit as judges on the Bible now, but the Bible will judge them at the last day. Let the “higher critics” take warning from this.

(2) The book of remembrance which God keeps – not that He needs this book for Himself, but that sinners might be put in remembrance of all the sins which they had committed, and had forgotten. They shall be brought before their eyes, so that they may see that they are not punished without a real cause.

(3) The book of memory shall be opened. Memory is a storehouse which keeps all that is put in it. Some may now complain of a bad memory, but at the day of judgment there shall be no reason for such a complaint. At that day memory shall be very active, and shall reproduce everything that has been put in it. Unpardoned sinners shall remember all the sins which they had committed. All these sins shall spring up readily, and as fresh as if they were committed at that very moment. Sinners may now have some control over their memory in the way of forgetting their sins, but at that day memory shall prove to be stronger than they. The Lord’s people knew something of this when convinced by the Spirit of their sins in a day of mercy: “He told me all things I ever did.” Memory shall maintain its power in full force throughout eternity.

(4) The book of life shall be opened. In this book the names of all men that God, out of His own good pleasure, elected from all eternity unto eternal life are written. All whose names are written in this book of life are now standing on the right hand of Christ, the Judge. Their effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification are the effects of their election. The book of life is opened, and the names therein read, to show that Christ lost none of those given Him by the Father to save, and to show also that they are made meet for heaven – the souls of those who died were made perfect in holiness at death, and their bodies are now made conformable to the glorious body of Christ (Philippians 3:21). After reading their names, Christ will say to His Father, “Behold I and the children thou hast given me” (Hebrews 2:13). “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost” (John 17:12). They are all here. All this shall be publicly proclaimed in the hearing of all the human race now standing before the judgment-seat, and in the hearing of all the holy angels, and in the hearing of Satan and his host of fallen spirits. The proclamation will cause joy to the redeemed and to the holy angels, but sorrow to Satan and his innumerable followers of lost men and evil spirits.

In connection with the opening of the books, I wish to point out that the heathen who had not the Bible shall be judged, not by that Book, but by another standard. We find this expressly stated in Scripture. The Apostle Paul, speaking on the subject, says: “For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without the law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” (Romans 2:12).

The Apostle evidently means by “those who have sinned without the law,” *the heathen* who had not the written law, as the Jews had, and as we have. They had only what is called “the light of nature” to guide them in their conduct. They were possessed of a conscience, which, though in its depraved state is not a sure guide in all things, accused them when they did wrong, and excused them when they did right. They did not act up to the light they had; and although they did, they could not be saved without the written Word of God, or the Gospel. Some say that the heathen who live and die without the Word of the Gospel are saved. But what does the Apostle Paul say on the subject? He says that they shall perish: “For as many as have sinned without the law shall also *perish* without the law” (Romans 2:12).

In our text the heathen are meant by “them that know not God” (verse 8). They had not the Bible, in which we have the only revelation He has given of Himself as the God of salvation. And those who had the Word of the Gospel, and remained disobedient to the gracious call of the Gospel are described as they “that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The punishment of the latter shall be greater than that of the former, as Christ foretold (Matthew 11:20,24).

The sentence pronounced by the Judge on both parties – those on His right hand, and those on the left. Those on His right hand shall be judged first. Some may ask: “Why is it necessary to judge those at the day of judgment, seeing that they were judged and acquitted from all guilt when God justified them on their believing in Christ?” There are two reasons for it:

(1) The act of God in justifying them on their believing in Christ was more privately done; it was a transaction between themselves and God. Their fellow-creatures were not witnesses to it. But now their justification is publicly proclaimed in the presence of all reasonable creatures, good and bad, standing before the judgment-seat. They are now publicly acknowledged as the redeemed of the Lord – made free by the Son, and therefore free indeed. Some on the left hand called them *heretics, hypocrites, etc.*, but now the Judge of all publicly acknowledges them as His people.

(2) At the day of judgment they are publicly acquitted. Acquitted from what? Not from any real guilt, but from all the false accusations wicked men and Satan – the accuser of the brethren – brought against them. Some of the Lord’s people died under many scandalous charges falsely heaped upon them by their enemies. But at the day of judgment they shall be fully and for ever acquitted from all these charges. These are reasons why it is necessary to judge those on the right hand of Christ. The Apostle Paul includes himself among those who shall be judged at the last day: He says, “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Having publicly acknowledged them, and cleared their character from all false charges, the Judge now proceeds to pronounce the last sentence upon them in the presence of the wicked, which will aggravate the misery of those on the left. What is the sentence? It is this: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

In our text we are told what they shall enjoy in that kingdom. They shall enjoy *rest*. “And to you who are troubled rest with us” (2 Thessalonians 1:7) When they were in the world they had troubles of various kinds; but now they have rest – perfect rest. They had the rest of faith before, but now they have the rest of glory. The former rest was often disturbed by various causes, but the latter shall never be disturbed throughout eternity. They shall have rest of enjoyment – the full enjoyment of God to all eternity. They had foretastes of this on earth – drops out of the ocean to refresh and strengthen them on their way home – but now their cup overflows.

While the Apostle speaks of the perfect rest of the saints in heaven, he omits not to speak of the glory of their Redeemer, through whose mediation they are brought to that

place of perfect bliss. When Christ finished the work of redemption the Father glorified Him. But this is a glory He receives in connection with the application of redemption to His people, whom He found as sinners and changed them into saints by His Spirit and Word. They were imperfect saints on earth; they are perfect saints in heaven. They shine so brightly in the perfect image of Christ that He is clearly seen in them. Christ shall be thus, as the Apostle says, “Glorified *in* them.”

Christ shall also be admired in them. If the holy angels looked at the saints in heaven and admired them, the saints would say to them, “Look not at us, admire us not, but look at our glorious Redeemer; admire Him, for it was He that made us shine so brightly in the beauty of holiness.” Yes, it is Christ that shall be admired in them. Christ, the Head, with His mystical body, shall be the object of admiration in heaven throughout eternity.

The sentence pronounced on those on the left hand: “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). They are driven away to hell. How is the Judge to deal with them there? According to our text, He will:

(1) take vengeance on them (verse 8), that is, He will vindicate the glory of His justice in rendering them retribution for all the evil they had done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who caused trouble to God’s people shall be recompensed with tribulation “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (verse 6). Those who persecuted God’s people, massacred, and burned them at the stake, shall receive a full measure of suffering in return (Matthew 7:2).

(2) He will punish them. The suffering of the lost in hell is a punishment, and the cause of the punishment is their sins.

God punishes none but for sin. Their punishment is called a *destruction* – “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction” (verse 9). Some heretics say that destruction here means annihilation, but those forget that the soul of man is immortal, and that after the resurrection the body is immortal also (1 Corinthians 15:53). The Lord said to a people who existed, and were living in the world: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hosea 13:9). Although they destroyed themselves they were not annihilated. Those who say that the lost shall be annihilated speak according to their wish (Revelation 6:15,17), but not according to Scripture. The punishment is *everlasting*. Some say that the suffering of the wicked in eternity is not everlasting, but limited, and shall come to an end. They infer this from their own interpretation of the word in the original, translated here *everlasting*, because the word in some other parts of Scripture means a long duration, but limited. But it has also the meaning of a duration without any limit or bounds. If the sufferings of the lost shall come to an end, the happiness of the redeemed in heaven shall also come to an end, for it is the same word that is used in both cases. “And these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal, or everlasting” (Matthew 25:46).

There is another error widely taught in our day by false teachers, to which I must refer as a warning to the rising generation, viz., that the heathen who died without hearing of the name of Jesus Christ – the only name by which sinners can be saved – shall get a *second chance* of the offer of the Gospel in eternity, and that those in Gospel lands who had not a full opportunity of knowing the grace of God, shall get another opportunity in a future life! Where did these men find that teaching? Not certainly in the Bible of God, but in the false bible of their own sinful hearts. It is the “Larger Hope,” whose author is Satan the father of lies – to deceive men. Another speculation, widely circulated in this evil day by men who are, in their own conceit, wise above what is written in the Bible, is that the day of judgment will be a *thousand-year day*. Who told them that? It was not God. These men “do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29).

We conclude this solemn subject with the prayer of the Apostle “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (verses 11,12).

[May 1913]

A Salvation Surpassingly Great.

A Sermon by REV. D. BEATON, Wick.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” – Hebrews 2:3,

These words form part of a solemn exhortation addressed by the Apostle to the Hebrews. He had begun by impressing upon them the greater glory of the New Dispensation, inasmuch

as “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in *time past* unto the fathers by *the prophets*,” but “hath in *these last days* spoken unto us by His Son.” And in order that his hearers might be duly impressed he goes on to describe the character of the Son. This he does by showing His equality with God, and so placing Him high above all angels and every created being. At this stage of his argument he turns aside, as it were, as one who has seen a wonderful sight. The greatness of the salvation of God comes within the range of his spiritual vision, and as one looking into its glorious provisions for perishing sinners and its suitability and perfection for the purpose it was intended, he is evidently overwhelmed by the thought of the utter impossibility of being saved if this salvation is neglected. In the Apostle’s view there are certain features connected with this salvation which, in the very nature of the case, renders it eternally impossible that any other salvation can be placed alongside of it, as holding out a hope to lost men of another way of being brought nigh to God. It is a salvation provided on a scale far surpassing all that the mind of man could anticipate, and the evil from which it delivers is not imaginary but very real and terrible. It is the greatness of the salvation that gives solemnity and point to the Apostle’s searching question: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” If God provided a salvation on such an unheard-of scale, then the state from which it delivers must be a thousand times more serious than men generally believe. Hence he presses on their notice the danger they run in neglecting this salvation. In dealing with the surpassing greatness of God’s salvation there are many standpoints from which it may be considered. For instance, if sinful men could fully realise what is implied in sin, then the deliverance from such an evil would appear surpassingly great in their eyes. Of course we take it for granted, in making such a statement, that it applies to those whose minds have been enlightened by God’s Holy Spirit. All others, whatever views they may have of sin, are unable to understand what God’s salvation means. Yet even those who have been most deeply taught by God’s Spirit have only seen, after all, a part of the evil of sin. And yet what a great part it appears to us when we hear a Jonathan Edwards saying, “I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be than by heaping infinite upon infinite and multiplying infinite by infinite.” This is not the language of exaggeration, but of a sinner in true sanity of mind looking at things as they really are. Still, after all, there is a depth in sin that has not been reached by any plummet held in the hand of man. To get some idea of what it really is would imply the fathoming on our part, as it has been said, of three great oceans – “the ocean of human suffering in time, the ocean of the sufferings of the Lord of Glory, and the ocean of future suffering that awaits the impenitent.” Our lines are too short to reach these abysmal depths, and it is from such a state of things that this great salvation saves. But for our present purpose we intend to look at this salvation in order to get a view of its surpassing greatness –

- I. – In its preparation;
- II. – In its marvellous adaptability to the state and condition of those for whom it was intended;
- III. – In its application, and
- IV. – In the infallible security it gives to all the heirs of salvation of being with Christ at last.

I. – The Surpassing Greatness of God’s Salvation seen in its Preparation. –

This is a great theme: let us turn aside with reverence to view the wonderful sight. The Apostle who saw so much of the wonders of God’s salvation took special delight in directing the eyes of his hearers to the great Fountain from which all their blessings, in time and eternity, flowed. Let us seek to follow his example, and direct our thoughts, with all humility, to the transactions of a Covenant God, whose thoughts from all eternity were thoughts of love and not of evil for that multitude who are to be with Him for ever. When God prepared a

remedy whereby ruined men were to be saved, He prepared it on a scale sufficiently great and comprehensive to meet the needs of a countless multitude. It is becoming, therefore, in considering the greatness of God's salvation as seen in its preparation, to notice –

(1) that it was prepared for a multitude whom no man can number. Herein is the omniscience and omnipresence of the God of salvation revealed. His provision was not simply on a scale hitherto unapproached, but forever unapproachable except by Him who provided this. It was no finite mind that scanned the successive generations of men who were to pass through time, for He who provided this salvation knew those whom He had given to Christ, knew their number, the nations from which they would be called, and the time when the dayspring from on high would visit them – and the resources that He had at His command were boundless. It was not a salvation that might save millions of men and then lose its power, but a salvation that would never fail when applied by the Holy Ghost to all for whom it was provided, though they should be countless as the sand on the sea shore for number or the stars in the firmament of heaven.

Again, the surpassing greatness of God's salvation in its preparation is seen in this,

(2) that when God prepared it He did so for beings that were to have an endless existence. He leaves us in no manner of doubt that this was to be a distinguishing feature of His salvation that it would be a salvation forever. He whose eye saw the countless multitude, belonging to every kindred and tongue and nation, that were to be saved, measured the endless years of their existence, and made provision that their joy might be an everlasting joy. There are pleasures for evermore at God's right hand, and as believers contemplate their goodly inheritance, may they not say with the Psalmist –

“God is of mine inheritance
And cup the portion;
The lot that fallen is to me
Thou dost maintain alone.
Unto me happily the lines
In pleasant places fell;
Yea, the inheritance I got
In beauty doth excel.”

The fact that this salvation is *forever* explains the designation that is given to the good tidings that announce it – the *everlasting* gospel. For all eternity this salvation will not cease to be glad tidings. Here below, even in this world with its sins and sorrows, the people who have heard the joyful sound are declared to be blessed; how much more so will this be realised in a state where they shall know even as they are known, and where, no longer looking through a glass darkly, but face to face, they shall realise the greatness of their inheritance.

Again,

(3), in the revelation of God's wisdom, which was given in this salvation, we have a further view of the surpassing greatness of His salvation. Even in the contemplation of certain aspects of it the Apostle Paul is moved to the very depths of his being as he gives expression to his feelings in the words, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever” (Romans 11:33-36). The same impression is left on the mind when he writes to the Ephesians, saying: – “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10,11). In this salvation the principalities and

powers get a view of the many aspects of God's wisdom – the manifold wisdom of God. Herein the divine wisdom is seen, not only in its manifold aspects, but also in its excellency in the adaptation of means, seemingly useless as far as human wisdom can see, yet accomplishing the end intended with infallible certainty. The whole glorious plan of God's salvation, had it been submitted to a council of the wisest of earth's inhabitants, would have been set aside as utterly impossible to accomplish, by the means provided, the end intended. Yet, herein is the depth of God's wisdom revealed that it actually accomplished all that God purposed, proving that "The foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). But that which crowns this salvation with an unspeakable glory is the fact that its very possibility centres in the gift of God's Son. And in this we are not only called to contemplate the utmost length that love went, but the utmost length that it was forever possible for it to go. God could never find a greater gift, and, as the Apostle Paul thinks of God's gift he finds that human language utterly fails to indicate what it means, so he describes Christ as "the unspeakable gift". And what a glory there is in this salvation when we are made to see how it became possible at all that there should be deliverance from sin. It was when the Apostle was speaking of the matchless glory of the eternal Son, His co-equality with the Father, and His connection with this salvation, that he addressed his question to the Hebrews: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation"? If deliverance from sin actually required such a sacrifice, then in the very nature of the case no sacrifice can be provided to equal God's sacrifice. How utterly hopeless does that question make the case of the sinner who neglects this salvation. For in this salvation there was no needless expenditure of power, of wisdom, or of love, and in each case they were immeasurably beyond anything that ever had entered the heart of man. But it should never be forgotten that the very greatness of the gift of Christ gives a note of solemnity to this question the meaning of which no tongue can tell. God's salvation is not a thing to be trifled with. It was provided to meet a real and terrible evil, and the magnitude of the scale on which it was provided shuts out for ever any hope of being delivered by any other way. It also makes very plain that there is no other name given under heaven whereby men must be saved.

II. – The Surpassing Greatness of this Salvation as seen in its Marvellous Adaptability to meet the State and Condition of those for whom it was intended. – The Scriptures, while emphasising the universality of mankind's departure from God, are careful to point out that each one took his own way: "All we like sheep have gone astray," is the witness of the prophet; "we have turned every man to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). And when God provided His salvation it was to meet the state of a people who, while they all had this in common that they had departed from the living God, were at the same time pursuing divers courses in that departure. It was not a salvation that was to prove ineffectual in meeting sin in the countless forms in which it has manifested itself in the world. It came to the most abandoned sinner – the outcast from his fellowmen, with all natural feeling gone, and it told him of a God waiting to be gracious and with sufficient power to break forever the awful power that had led him captive. It came to the sensualist, wallowing in his lusts; to the drunkard, seemingly beyond all hope, and to the blasphemer, and it said to them, in the words of Him who spake as never man spake: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matthew 12:31). What gracious encouragement do these words hold out to the sinner when led by the Holy Spirit to see himself hopelessly lost as far as all human power is concerned. But it has not only to deal with the abandoned, and those whom even their fellowmen brand as sinners, it was a salvation provided for men upon whose moral character there was no outward stain, who were perfect in their own eyes as concerning the law. Between these and the class already mentioned men recognise that there is a wide gulf, but God's great salvation was as much

needed by the latter as the former, and in meeting cases at the opposite poles in human conduct it showed an adaptability that reveals that this was not an ordinary remedy prepared by men, but a remedy prepared by God.

The Scripture tells us not only of the depths to which sin brought sinners, it speaks also of the great distance to which they have wandered from God. God's provision for bringing back His elect was not meant to meet them half-way and allow them to do the rest for themselves, but it was prepared in such a way that it recognised to the fullest extent that if left to themselves they would never come back. To the awakened sinner the distance between him and his God appears immeasurable, but He who knows the fullness of His salvation says: "Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?" (Isaiah 50:2). As much as to say, is the distance you have wandered so great that my hand, by which I dry up the sea and make the rivers a wilderness (Isaiah 50:2), powerless to reach you? To believe so is to set limits to the Holy One of Israel and lightly esteem His salvation.

Again, it must be borne in mind that those for whom this salvation was prepared were dead in trespasses and sins. There are many remedies known among men for the living, but the most deluded physician that ever lived, if in possession of his reason, recognises that the dead are forever beyond his power to restore to life. On this side the grave the skill of the most gifted of earth's healers ends. But any remedy if limited to this sphere spiritually would have utterly failed if it had no power to meet the case of the dead. Hence God's salvation was provided to meet the needs of those who required nothing short of the exceeding greatness of His power to quicken them. It is a salvation that recognises in its provision the utter ruin and wreck sin has made. The boundaries of its provisions are far beyond anything that ever entered into the heart of man, and within these boundaries are all the cases of the countless number given to Christ.

The marvellous adaptability of this salvation is again seen in the manner that it meets the needs of rich and poor, learned and unlearned, wise and foolish. It is as suitable for the rich as the poor when they are made to see their poverty in spiritual things. The gulf dividing rich and poor in this world may be great, but God's salvation is the one remedy for both, and it is suited for the needs of both. It is as suitable for "Angus of the Hills" and Ewen Cameron [These were two half-witted men, wonderfully taught by the Holy Spirit in spiritual things, but incapable of grasping the merest rudiments of human learning.] as it was for men endowed with the extraordinary mental power of the Apostle Paul, Augustine, and Calvin.

The more, therefore, the marvellous adaptability of this salvation is considered, the more will the impression grow upon us that it is a salvation surpassingly great.

III. – The Surpassing Greatness of the Salvation seen in its Application. –

The preparation of the remedy, perfect though it was, required application in order that it might benefit those for whom it was intended, and in this application we get another view of the surpassing greatness of God's salvation. The opposition to be overcome – the vast and imposing array of hostile powers that had to be subdued – rendered the work, as far as man's power was concerned, seemingly hopeless. But He to whom this work was entrusted had power sufficient at His command to render His work irresistible. All the faculties of man's soul were opposed to the entrance of this gracious One; but He came in the might of His power, renewed the sinner's will, and enabled him to receive Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel. Bunyan has shown, in his own inimitable way, the manner in which man's heart was garrisoned by the enemy. Out of that citadel every enemy of Christ is to be driven; for the purpose of God is that all that were given to Christ shall be with Him at last, and through the gates of the city of the Great King no enemy shall ever pass. God's power is a theme too high for us to understand, and the Apostle, in writing to the Ephesians, prays that the eyes of their understanding might be opened, in order that they might know, among other things, "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to

the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:18-20). This is the power that is at work in God’s salvation, and the apostle directs the thoughts of the Ephesians to it working in the grave of Christ, overcoming every obstacle in the way, until He was placed far above all principality and power and might and dominion, “and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come.” Before this power no conceivable combination of created powers can stand and be victorious. We need not fear that this salvation may fail when confronted with some of the mightiest strongholds of Satan, for it is a salvation that has proved in numberless cases that it is the very power of God unto every one that believeth. Hence there is no uncertain note, arising from the thought of the possibility of failure, in the Apostle’s announcement when he says, “He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him.” He who came to the demoniac of Gadara in the might of His power, and cast down that stronghold of Satan in the possessed, is worthy to have His fame declared before assembled elders as one that is mighty to save. In God’s salvation there is a complete provision made for the accomplishment of this end.

There is also to be taken into consideration the powerful armies that held the soul in subjection – the world, the flesh, and the devil. All these must be overcome, and the power by which they are overcome is that of the Holy Ghost. Still the array is imposing enough, and a sight of it brings home to the sinner his utter helplessness. “I see,” said Dr. Kennedy, “three great armies besieging the believer – the world, the flesh, and the devil – and they pursue their object with tireless persistence; and as I see them advance my heart sinks within me as I dread the issue. But I look again, and now I see three great bulwarks defending him; there is the electing love of God the Father, the redeeming love of God the Son, and the sanctifying love of God the Holy Spirit, and over it all the glory of God. And fear and dismay now give place to wonder and adoration.”

IV. – The Surpassing Greatness of God’s Salvation is further seen in the Infallible Security it gives to all the Heirs of Salvation of being with Christ at last. –

If deliverance from sin is a work that requires divine power, the keeping of those thus delivered is no less divine. When it is remembered that the believer, from the day he is quickened by God’s Spirit until the day of his death, is living in an enemy’s country – an enemy who is active, and who with sleepless vigilance watches the career of God’s saints in this world, the fact of their being with Christ in the end is one of the wonders of His marvellous salvation. “We 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,” is the testimony of one who felt what it was to press on towards the mark of the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus through this formidable array of hostile powers. The gospel of the grace of God, however, has no despondent note, as if it might meet with an opposition before which it must go down. It recognises on our part weakness enough and reason that we should pass the time of our sojourn here in fear, but faith in exercise in the believer’s heart cries out when confronted with seemingly insurmountable difficulties, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depth of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” He that wrought these deliverances in the past is the God of salvation and faith sees Him with power capable of drying up the waters of deeper rivers and seas than Israel ever passed through on their way to the promised land.

Not only in journeying through this world will He keep them and deliver them from all their enemies, but when they have to face death He will take them safely through in whatever form it may come or however terrible it may be. For this salvation tells of an incorruptible life which Christ brought to light in the Gospel that is a life over which death has no power.

Death may and will exercise its power over their natural life, but it may not touch the life they received from Christ. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and when we remember that God dwells in light that cannot be approached unto – a light unto which no enemy can approach and live, – then the indestructible nature of the believer’s life is brought home in a convincingly vivid manner.

He has promised that none shall ever pluck them out of His Father’s hand, because He is greater than all. With such a promise well may the believer look forward to the future, putting his trust in God alone. A salvation that infallibly delivers from sin, and as infallibly gives security to all who are delivered that they shall be with Christ at last, is the salvation that is set before us in the Word of God. And how are we to be put in possession of such salvation as this? “We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ,” say the Westminster divines, “by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit,” and the Spirit applies to us this redemption “by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.” When we consider, therefore, on what a comprehensive scale God has made provision, how solemn and searching does the Apostle’s question become: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” May we not apply to this salvation the words of Moses when he addressed Israel of old, saying: “Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?” (Deuteronomy 4:32).

[June 1913]

A Sermon.

By the REV. JOHN OWEN, D.D., Eminent Puritan Divine
(1616-1683).

Preached at Stadham, 21st June, 1674.

[Taken down in shorthand by Sir John Hartopp, Bart.]

“Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty” – Psalm 45:3.

In the second verse we have a description of the Person of Christ, and of the ground of God’s blessing and accepting of Him in His work: the Psalm having a double design, first, to shew the glory of Christ in His kingly office; secondly, to shew the mutual love that is between Christ and His Church. This third verse sets forth His entering upon the first part of His work, and is spoken by the way of encouragement unto Christ in the name of God the Father, to undertake His office, and to go through with it. “Gird thy sword,” saith He, “upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.”

There are three things in the words.

I. – The work that is proposed unto Jesus Christ, or rather His preparation for His work, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.”

II. – The manner how He should go through this work, “With thy glory and thy majesty.” And that which I shall particularly enlarge on,

III. – The appellation that is here given to Christ, which is, “Most Mighty.” He is most mighty in the execution of His office, which He is exalted unto.

I. – We have Christ’s preparation for His work, “Gird thy sword on thy thigh.” Consider two things:

(1) What is the sword of Christ?

(2) What is meant by girding this sword upon His thigh?

(1) The Sword of Christ is the Word of God. So it is called the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), the Spirit being the great immediate agent whereby Christ administers His kingdom. That which is the sword of the Spirit is the sword of Christ, and, therefore, where Christ is described in His kingdom, it is said that He hath a sword proceeding out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16), which in another place is called the rod of His mouth (Isaiah 11:4). It is the Word of God, the great instrument of Christ in the managing of His kingdom, that is called here His sword.

(2) Concerning this, it is said, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.” The girding of the sword upon the thigh is the putting of it into readiness for use. When David was going up against Nabal he said unto his men (1 Samuel 25:13), “Gird ye on every man his sword.” Wherefore Christ’s girding His sword upon His thigh is the disposing of the Word into the ordinances of the Gospel, where it may be ready for use. It hath respect unto the time when He ascended on high, and sent forth His Word for the setting up of His kingdom. Then He put His word in readiness to effect the great designs of His love and grace, when He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). He furnished men with gifts and abilities to disperse this word unto the ends of His kingdom.

II. – The manner of going through His work, is, “with thy glory, and with thy majesty.” The glory and majesty of Christ are His power and authority. And so it is prophesied of as an encouragement unto the Lord Christ, that He should clothe His Word with power and authority for the ends of setting up His Kingdom, the edification of His Church, and the preservation of it in the world. These things I speak in a general way; I shall now more particularly address myself.

III. – To the appellation that is here given unto Christ, “O Most Mighty,” from One that prevails in every thing He takes in hand. Observe from hence, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as King of the Church, is endowed with a mighty power for the accomplishing of all the designs, and ends of this rule, and kingdom. It is said of Him (Psalm 89:19), “God hath laid help upon one that is mighty.” It is spoken there primarily of David, “I have found David my servant.” But what could poor David do, one taken from the sheepfold? It was not a laying help therefore upon David that was mighty, absolutely speaking, but a putting strength into him. But David was a type of Christ, and to Him must the passage be referred; He is the mighty one. Also Isaiah 63:1, describing of Christ in His kingdom, saith, it is “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” And again, in Psalm 24:7, etc., there is a description of His ascension into heaven; the gates and everlasting doors being lifted up, that He, the King of Glory, may enter in; the question being asked: Who is the King of Glory? saith he, the Lord, strong and mighty. It is a property everywhere ascribed unto Jesus Christ, that He is mighty. Here we may inquire:

(1) Whence Christ is thus mighty for the execution of His kingly office? And

(2) to what ends He doth put forth this might and power?

1. Whence is Christ thus mighty? Christ is mighty upon two accounts: –

(1) From the omnipotent power of His divine nature, which is the principle of His mighty operations in the union of his person. So the Prophet declares (Isaiah 9:6), “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”: And how shall He be called? Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God. This Child that is born unto us, this Son that is given unto us, His name shall be, that is, He really is, the mighty God. Why so? Because of the union of the divine nature with the human in the same person, whereby the same person becomes a child born, and also the mighty God.

(2) He is mighty, from the authority and power that was communicated and given, by the Father, unto Him, as Mediator, for the accomplishing of His whole work. Two things concur to make one legally mighty to proper ends; first, strength and power; secondly, authority. Where there is strength and no authority, it is force. And where there is authority, but no strength or power, that authority will be void. Christ had strength and power as the mighty God; and He hath authority too, as all power is communicated to Him by God the Father, as may be seen in Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20,21,22, and many other places. But it will be objected, if Christ be the mighty God by nature, how comes it to pass, that He should have power and authority given unto Him? God hath given unto Him might and dominion, far above all principalities, etc.

I answer: Christ, as His power is given to Him, is considered, not absolutely as God, nor absolutely as man; but as God-man, Mediator, one that mediates between God and man; and so His power to erect His kingdom is given him of His Father.

The second inquiry is, Unto what ends doth the Lord Jesus put forth this mighty power wherewith He is endowed? I answer to these, five ends:

(1) Unto the erecting of His kingdom or Church in the world;

(2) To the preservation of it;

(3) To the subduing of His enemies;

(4) To the raising of the dead

(5) In the judging of all flesh, and distributing of eternal rewards and punishments, all which are acts of mighty power.

(1) Jesus Christ puts forth this mighty power in erecting and building of His Church. In Matthew 16:18, our Lord saith, “I will build my church”; and the Apostle, in Hebrews 3:3,4, shews, that it was an act of Divine power to build this Church of God. “He that built all things is God.” No one could build a Church in all ages, but God Himself. And if we were able to take a view how Jesus Christ first built His Church in the world, we should learn not to distrust His power in anything He had afterwards to do. There was a combination of hell, and of all the power of the world, against the interest of Christ and the Gospel. The concurring suffrage of mankind – wise and unwise, learned and unlearned, Jew and Greek, influenced by their interest – by all that was dear unto them, – set themselves in a combination against Christ’s building of His kingdom. He employed against all this force a few poor men, unlearned, unskilful, and gives into their hands, only the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; furnishes them only with gifts and abilities for the dispensing of the Word, which was His girding of His sword upon His thigh. He set these poor men to work, and clothing them with His glory and majesty, they make havoc in the devil’s kingdom, and destroyed it by degrees, until they root it out of the earth. It was then an act of mighty power in Christ to build His kingdom and Church.

(2) Christ puts forth this mighty power in the preserving of His Church, being so founded, and built on Him. It is that which He expresses, Isaiah 27:3. “I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” The Church being

built, is not able to stand of itself; for unto the end of time, the gates of hell and the power of the world shall be engaged against it. But, saith He, I will keep it, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. There is a carnal Church in the world, or a worldly Church; and how is that kept? By force, laws, and power of men, who have wrapped up their secular interest in the preserving of it, and they will fight for their kingdom. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus hath a spiritual Church of them that believe in Him; they also are preserved; and by what means? By a secret emanation of mighty power from Jesus Christ. There hath not been any age in the world since the ascension of Christ, but there hath been an emanation, or putting forth of this mighty power of Christ in preserving of this Church. He preserves a people under the whole apostasy of antichrist. Had there been none left in the earth to fear Him, and believe in Him, all the promises of God to Him had come to an end. But He did secretly, by His mighty power, preserve a people to Himself in the midst of all the defection of antichrist. And He doth so at this day in the midst of the new defection made to antichrist. For, in former days, the world fell off to antichrist by superstition and idolatry; they are now falling off to Him by profaneness and atheism. Yet Jesus Christ, by His mighty power under both, or by a secret exertion of His power, preserves His Church through all, and carries them as safe through the new opposition, as He did through the old.

(3) He puts forth His power for the subduing and conquering of His and His Church's enemies. What enemies has Christ? What enemies has the Church? As many as there are devils in hell, and men, and women in the world, that are of the seed of the serpent. But I may reduce all the enmity to the interest of Christ upon earth, to these four heads:

- (1) Satan,
- (2) The world,
- (3) Sin,
- (4) Death. Christ is most mighty in conquering all these enemies.

(1) He puts forth His mighty power in conquering of Satan. This was the first word that was spoken of Him in the world, in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman; and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The first discovery God made to His creatures concerning the incarnation of His Son, was in this, that He would destroy Satan; and so the Holy Ghost tells us He hath done, Colossians 2:15, "He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross." These words, "He spoiled principalities and powers," are an exposition of the former promises in Genesis, that the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, should break the serpent's head. How should He do it? Why, in spoiling principalities and powers, and triumphing over them openly in His cross. So he saith, in Hebrews 2:14, "That through death, he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." He did not destroy him as to his being, but as to his power and authority. Hence, first, the devil hath a limited power only remaining, such as shall never prejudice the eternal interest of the Church. And, secondly, he is reserved unto eternal destruction by this mighty power of Christ.

(2) The second enemy of Christ is the world; and that may be considered either in the men of it, or in the power of it. In the men of it: The Lord Christ puts forth His mighty power to deal with, and subdue all the men of the world, that rise up in opposition against Him. Whatever success they may seem to have, they are all made His footstool. "He shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psalm 2:9). And you have Him twice or thrice described in the Revelations, as going forth in His mighty power, for the subduing of all His adversaries (see Revelation 19:11 to the end). And this must be, for He shall subdue all the authority in the world; not only the persons of men, but all the power, and all the authority which is set up against Him, or exercised against His interest. 1 Corinthians 15:24,25, "When he shall put down all rule, and authority and power, for he must reign until he hath put all his enemies under his feet." There is a suspension of the issue of all

things, until Christ hath thus put down all that opposeth Him, and His interest. But there is an expectation in heaven, and in earth, in the whole creation; all are waiting, as if one single person, for the putting forth this mighty power of Christ, for the subduing of all unto Him; for the end will not be till then. Whatever we endure, we must be contented with it; whatsoever we suffer, the end must not be till all His enemies be made His footstool, and there be nothing to stand up against Him, who is most mighty.

(3) Sin in His people is another enemy of Christ. Sin, as it is in men by nature, is that which gives life and efficacy to all the enmity that is acted against Him, and as it remains even in believers themselves, it doth act a great enmity against Christ. How come we then to be freed from it? How comes it to be subdued? The Apostle, in Romans 7, gives an account of the great contest and conflict that believers have with the remainder of sin in them, that makes them cry out for deliverance from it (verses 24-25). It is a sudden breaking forth of the Apostle there when he was describing the law of sin, for he cries out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me! &c." But he as suddenly takes up, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, through the power of Christ, this enemy, sin, shall be subdued." Therefore, chapter 6:14, it is said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." If you come under grace, or under the rule of Christ, sin shall not have dominion over you. What is the reason of it? Where is the consequence of the argument? Because sin is one great enemy of Christ, and He will certainly conquer it.

(4) Death is another enemy. It is the last enemy. 1 Corinthians 15:25,26, "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And, in verse 54, he tells us that "death is swallowed up in victory," a conquest is obtained over it. 'Tis the last enemy, because, until the consummation of all things, we shall be subject to its power; but that shall also come under the feet of Christ, when we shall die no more. This is the third end, wherefore Christ puts forth this mighty, or exceeding greatness of His power, namely, for the subduing of His enemies.

(4) The fourth end for which Christ puts forth the greatness of His power is "for the raising up all His Church from the dead." Philippians 3:20,21, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." The mighty power of Christ reaches thus far, that the dead shall be raised thereby: yes, our vile body shall, the body of our humiliation, that is, the body as 'tis fallen into corruption, into a vile estate, though it come to worms and dust, yet He shall revive it by the exceeding greatness of His power. He shall raise the bodies of His people. The privilege of believers on that day will be, that they shall be first raised, and they shall be peculiarly raised by the power of Christ as mediator. Their bodies shall be raised in conformity to His glorious body; when others shall be raised after them by the mere divine power of Christ, and raised with all their own vileness upon them.

(5) And lastly, to mention no more, the mighty power of Christ is put forth in judging of all the world, and distributing to them rewards of bliss, or woe, that shall abide to all eternity (Matthew 25:31 to end).

Thus you see why the Holy Ghost, by the Psalmist, calls Christ here the Mighty One, one that will mightily prevail in everything. It is because of His divine power He is the Mighty God, and because of His mediatorial authority, there is committed unto Him all power in heaven and in earth. He doth put forth this power for the erecting of His Church, for its preservation, for the subduing of His enemies, in the raising of the dead, and distributing rewards and punishments.

[July 1913]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. ROBERT MURRAY MACCHEYNE, Dundee.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” – Romans 8:35-37.

In this passage there are three very remarkable questions:

1. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” Paul stands forth like a herald, and he looks up to the holy angels, and down to the accusing devils, and round about on a scowling world, and into conscience, and he asks, Who can accuse one whom God has chosen, and Christ has washed? It is God who justifieth. The holy God has declared believers clean every whit.

2. “Who shall condemn?” Paul looks round all the judges of the world – all who are skilled in law and equity; he looks upward to the holy angels, whose superhuman sight pierces deep and far into the righteous government of God; he looks up to God, the Judge of all, who must do right – whose ways are equal and perfect righteousness – and he asks, Who shall condemn? It is Christ that died. Christ has paid the uttermost farthing: so that every judge must cry out, There is now no condemnation.

3. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Again, he looks round all created worlds – he looks at the might of the mightiest archangels – the satanic power of legions of devils – the rage of a God-defying world – the united forces of all created

things; and, when he sees sinners folded in the arms of Jesus, he cries, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Not all the forces of ten thousand worlds combined, for Jesus is greater than all. “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

The love of Christ! Paul says: “The love of Christ passeth knowledge.” It is like the blue sky, into which you may see clearly, but the real vastness of which you cannot measure. It is like the deep, deep sea, into whose bosom you can look a little way, but its depths are unfathomable. It has a breadth without a bound, length without end, height without top, and depth without bottom. If holy Paul said this, who was so deeply taught in divine things – who had been in the third heaven, and seen the glorified face of Jesus – how much more may we, poor and weak believers, look into that love and say: It passeth knowledge!

There are three things in these words:

- I. Explain the love of Christ.
- II. Who would separate us from it?
- III. They shall not be able.

I. – I would speak of the love of Christ.

1. When it began – in the past eternity: “Then I was by him as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:30,31). This river of love began to flow before the world was – from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Christ’s love to us is as old as the Father’s love to the Son. This river of light began to stream from Jesus toward us before the beams poured from the sun – before the rivers flowed to the ocean – before angel loved angel, or man loved man – before creatures were, Christ loved us. This is a great deep – who can fathom it? This love passeth knowledge.

2. And who was it that loved? It was Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the blessed Godhead. His name is “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace,” “King of kings and Lord of lords,” Immanuel, and Jesus the Saviour, the only begotten of His Father. His beauty is perfect: He is the brightness of His Father’s glory, and the express image of His person. All the purity, majesty, and love of Jehovah, dwell fully in Him. He is the bright and morning Star: He is the Sun of righteousness and the Light of the world: He is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys – fairer than the children of men. His riches are infinite: he could say, “All that the Father hath is mine.” He is Lord of all. All the crowns in heaven were cast at His feet – all angels and seraphs were His servants – all worlds His domain. His doings were infinitely glorious. By Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible. He called the things that are not as though they were – worlds started into being at His word. Yet He loved us. It is much to be loved by one greater in rank than ourselves – to be loved by an angel; but O, to be loved by the Son of God! – this is wonderful – it passeth knowledge.

3. Whom did He love? He loved us! He came into the world “to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.” Had He loved one as glorious as Himself, we would not have wondered. Had He loved the holy angels, that reflected His pure bright image, we would not have wondered. Had He loved the lovely among the sons of men – the amiable, the gentle, the kind, the rich, the great, the noble – it would not have been so great a wonder. But, ah! He loved sinners – the vilest sinners – the poorest, meanest, guiltiest wretches that crawl upon the ground. Manasseh, who murdered his own children, was one whom He loved; Zaccheus, the grey-haired swindler, was another; blaspheming Paul was a third; the wanton of Samaria was another; the dying thief was another; and the lascivious

Corinthians were more. "And such were some of you." We were black as hell when He looked on us – we were hell-worthy, under His Father's wrath and curse – and yet He loved us, and said: I will die for them. "Thou hast loved me out of the pit of corruption," each saved one can say. Oh, brethren! this is strange love: He that was so great, and lovely, and pure, chose us, who were mean and filthy with sin, that He might wash and purify, and present us to Himself. This love passeth knowledge!

4. What this love cost Him. When Jacob loved Rachel, he served seven years for her – he bore the summer's heat and winter's cold. But Jesus bore the hot wrath of God, and the winter blast of His Father's anger, for those He loved. Jonathan loved David with more than the love of women, and for his sake he bore the cruel anger of his father, Saul. But Jesus, out of love to us, bore the wrath of His Father poured out without mixture. It was the love of Christ that made Him leave the love of His Father, the adoration of angels, and the throne of glory – it was love that made Him not despise the Virgin's womb – it was love that brought Him to the manger at Bethlehem – it was love that drove Him into the wilderness; love made Him a man of sorrows – love made Him hungry, and thirsty, and weary – love made Him hasten to Jerusalem – love led Him to gloomy, dark Gethsemane – love bound and dragged Him to the judgment hall – love nailed Him to the cross – love bowed His head beneath the amazing load of His Father's anger. "Greater love hath no man than this." "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

Sinners were sinking beneath the red-hot flames of hell; He plunged in and swam through the awful surge, and gathered His own into His bosom. The sword of justice was bare and glittering, ready to destroy us; He, the man that was God's fellow, opened His bosom and let the stroke fall on Him. We were set up as a mark for God's arrows of vengeance; Jesus came between, and they pierced Him through and through – every arrow that should have pierced our souls stuck fast in Him. He, His own self, bare our sins in His own body on the tree. As far as east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. This is the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. This is what is set before you to-day in the broken bread and poured-out wine. This is what we shall see on the throne – a Lamb as it had been slain. This will be the matter of our song through eternity: "Worthy is the Lamb!"

(1.) O the joy of being in the love of Christ! Are you in this amazing love? Has He loved you out of the pit of corruption? Then, He will wash you, and make you a king and a priest unto God. He will wash you in His own blood whiter than the snow – He will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. A new heart also will He give you. He will keep your conscience clean, and your heart right with God. He will put His Holy Spirit within you, and make you pray with groanings that cannot be uttered. He will justify you – He will pray for you – He will glorify you. All the world may oppose you – dear friends may die and forsake you – you may be left alone in the wilderness; still you will not be alone – Christ will love you still.

(2.) O the misery of being out of the love of Christ! If Christ loves you not, how vain all other loves! Your friends may love you – your neighbours may be kind to you – the world may praise you – ministers may love your souls; but, if Christ love you not, all creature-love will be vain. You will be unwashed, unpardoned, unholy – you will sink into hell, and all the creatures will stand around and be unable to reach out a hand to help you.

(3.) How shall I know that I am in the love of Christ? By your being drawn to Christ: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Have you seen something attractive in Jesus? The world are attracted by beauty, or dress, or glittering jewels – have you been attracted to Christ by His good

ointments? This is the mark of all who are graven on Christ's heart – they come to Him; they see Jesus to be precious. The easy world see no preciousness in Christ; they prize a lust higher, the smile of the world higher, money higher, pleasure higher; but those whom Christ loves He draws after Him by the sight of His preciousness. Have you thus followed Him, prized Him – as a drowning sinner cleaved to Him? – then He will in no wise cast you out – in no wise, not for all you have done against Him. “But I spent my best days in sin” – Still, I will in no wise cast you out. “I lived in open sin” – I will in no wise cast you out. “But I have sinned against light and conviction” – Still I will in no wise cast you out. “But I am a backslider” – Still the arms of His love are open to infold your poor guilty soul, and He will not cast you out.

II. – Many would separate us.

From the beginning of the world it has been the great aim of Satan to separate believers from the love of Christ; and though he never has succeeded in the case of a single soul, yet still he tries it as eagerly as he did at first. The moment he sees the Saviour lift a lost sheep upon His shoulder, from that hour he plies all his efforts to pluck down the poor saved sheep from its place of rest. The moment the pierced hand of Jesus is laid on a poor, trembling, guilty sinner, from that hour does Satan try to pluck him out of Jesus' hand.

1. He did this in old times: “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (verse 36). This is a cry taken from the Book of Psalms. God's people in all ages have been hated and persecuted by Satan and the world. Observe the reason: “For thy sake” – because they were like Jesus, and belonged to Jesus. The time: “All day long” – from morning till night. The world have a perpetual hatred against true believers, so that we have to say at evening “Would God it were morning; and at morning, Would God it were evening.” They have no other perpetual hatred. The manner: “We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” The world care no more for ill-treating a Christian than the butcher does when he lays hold of a sheep for the slaughter. The drunkards make a song of us. Such was the cry of believers of old. The same cry has been heard amid the snowy heights of Piedmont; and, in later days, amid the green hills and valleys of Scotland. And we are miserably deceived if we flatter ourselves that the same cry will not be heard again. Is the devil changed? Does he love Christ and His dear people any better? Is the worldly heart changed? Does it hate God and God's people any less than it did? Ah! no. I have a deep conviction that, if God only withdraw His restraining grace, the flood-gates of persecution will soon break loose again; and many of you, left unconverted under our ministry, will turn out bloody persecutors – you will yet avenge yourselves for the sermons that have pricked your hearts.

2. The Apostle names seven forms in which trouble comes. Two of them relate to the troubles that are common to man, and five to those that are more peculiar to the children of God.

(1) Tribulation and distress: “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.” God's children are not freed from distresses – sickness, poverty, loss of friends. Jesus said to them: “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” “Whom I love I rebuke and chasten.” Now, Satan tries to take advantage of these times of tribulation, to separate the soul from the love of Christ; he tempts the believer to despise the chastening of the Lord – to plunge into business, or among worldly friends, or to follow worldly means of soothing sorrow. Again: he tries to make the soul faint under them – repine and murmur, and charge God foolishly – not believe His love and wisdom in the furnace. In these ways Satan tries to separate from the love of Christ. A time of tribulation is a time of danger.

(2) Persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword – all these are the weapons Satan stirs up against God’s children. The history of the Church in all ages has been a history of persecution. No sooner does a soul begin to show concern for religion – no sooner does that soul cleave to Jesus, than the world talk, to the grief of those whom God hath wounded. What bitter words are hurled against that soul! In all ages this has been true: “They wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy.” Those that eat the bread of God have often been driven from their quiet meal – those who are clothed with Christ have often had to part with worldly clothing, and have been exposed to famine, nakedness, peril, and sword – the last extremity. Cain murdered Abel. They killed the Prince of Life; and so all His creatures ever since have been exposed to the same. Do not say, The times are changed, and these are the days of toleration. Christ is not changed – Satan is not changed, and, when it suits his turn, he will use the same weapons.

III. – All these cannot separate us.

“In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.”

How are we more than conquerors?

1. We conquer even before the battle is done. In all other battles we do not know how the victory is to turn until the battle is won. In the battle of Waterloo, it was long thought that the French had gained; and Napoleon sent several dispatches to Paris, declaring that he had won. But in the fight with the world, Satan, and the flesh, we know how the victory is to turn already. Christ has engaged to carry us through. He will guard us against the darts of the law, by hiding us in His blood. He defends us from the power of sin by His Holy Spirit, put within us. He will keep us, in the secret of His presence, from the strife of tongues. The thicker the battle, the closer will He keep to us; so that we can sing already: “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” We know that we shall overcome. Though the world were a million times more enraged – though the fires of persecution were again to be kindled – though my heart were a million times more wicked – though all the temptations of hell were let loose upon me – I know I shall overcome through Him that loved me. When Paul and Silas sang in the low dungeon, they were more than conquerors. When Paul sang, in spite of his thorn, “I will glory in my infirmities,” he was more than a conqueror.

2. We gain by our conflict. Often a victory is a loss. So it was in that battle in Israel, after the dark night in Gibeah. All Israel mourned, for a tribe was nearly cut off out of Israel; and so, in most victories, the song of triumph is mingled with the sobbings of the widow and orphan. Not so in the good fight of faith. We are more than conquerors. We gain by our enemies.

(1) We cling closer to Christ. Every wave of trouble for Christ’s sake lifts the soul higher upon the Rock. Every arrow of bitterness shot after the believer makes Him hide more in the clefts of Jesus. Be content, dear friend, to bear these troubles, which make you cling closer to your Beloved.

(2) They shake us loose from sin. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own. If the world smiled and fawned upon you, you would lie on its lap. But when it frowns, then Jesus is our all.

(3) Great is your reward in heaven. We gain a brighter crown. Be not afraid; nothing shall ever separate you from the love of Christ. O that I could know that you were all in Christ’s love – that the arms of Jesus were infolding you – then I would know that all the hatred of men, and all the policy of hell, would never prevail against you! “If God be for you, who can be against you?” If God has chosen you – called you – washed you – justified you – then He will glorify you. O yield to His loving hands, you that are not far from the kingdom of God! Let Him wash you, for then He will carry you to glory. Amen.

[August 1913]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. CHARLES MACKINTOSH, D.D.,
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“Looking unto Jesus” – Hebrews 12:2.

The apostle having, in the preceding chapter, illustrated the power of the faith which is to the saving of the soul, proceeds in this chapter to exhort the Hebrew Christians to follow “them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.” He compares the Christian life to a race. True religion is not the bare – the easy – profession of Christ’s name. To follow Christ is arduous work, in which hardness must be endured and a conflict fought; in which the flesh must not be spared, but in which continual self-denial must be exercised; and in which there must be perseverance to the end. It is a struggle for an incorruptible crown; a journey from the city of destruction, through a world full of temptation and sources of trial, to the celestial city. The believer in Jesus is called to the enjoyment of a peace which the world cannot give, a peace which passeth understanding; but that very peace can only be enjoyed while fighting the good fight of faith – a fight which must be maintained till his dying hour. Moreover, there are things that must be laid aside if we would so run this race as to obtain: – namely, “every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Whatever interferes with the following of Christ as the one thing needful – in an especial manner, the things of this world and its love – must be laid aside. In all circumstances the kingdom of God and His righteousness must be first sought; and growth in grace, as connected with the divine glory, must be the thing supremely desired by the believer if he would make progress in holiness. “The sin that doth so easily beset us” must also be laid aside. There belongs to every one what we may call the sin of his temperament or constitution, which it is of great importance to know, and against the outbreakings of which special guard must be kept. There is in many also some sin which, in consequence of special circumstances – special fostering in the days of their impenitence – has grown to gigantic dimensions in the soul, and which must be laid aside to run this race. They must conflict with it; they must labour to mortify it. But,

especially, there is indwelling sin manifesting its power in unbelief – a sin of which the apostle speaks so much in this epistle, and against which, above all others, he warns his brethren – “the evil heart of unbelief.” This must be laid aside, in the sense of keeping it under and mortifying it. Further, patience is necessary; patient continuance in well-doing; patience in the enduring of whatever trials or afflictions may attend the following of Christ. For every follower of Christ will be tested as to the reality of his principles and as to the truth of grace in him. He may be called to suffer, and to suffer much; to part with his earthly all, and with life itself, for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s. And while many are offended – while many draw back and shrink from the cross – he must take it up and bear it after Christ if he would follow Him.

It may be said, “These are heavy and great requirements; who is sufficient for these things?” Well, there are grounds of encouragement. There is, first, what we may call a subordinate ground of encouragement, yet a very precious one: “We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.” It is refreshing to find the inspired apostle speaking thus of the Old Testament saints. Often we may be ready to think that they were few – and they *were* few in particular ages of the Church – but yet he speaks of them as a great company, a “cloud of witnesses” – witnesses for God and for His truth in their day and generation. And he speaks of them as having obtained a good report through faith – as witnessing to us of the nature of the race, of what we may look for if we would follow the Lord fully, and of what will carry us through; and not only witnessing of these things, but looking on and sympathizing with us, and thus not only stimulating but encouraging us to follow their footsteps and to run the same blessed race. And how powerfully do they stimulate and encourage, when we consider that there is no case in which the Christian is found to which he will not find a corresponding one among those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises!

But in our text we have what we must call the grand encouragement, as well as the grand direction and the source of strength: “*Looking unto Jesus.*” Not only is the racecourse compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses, but Christ is looking on. His sleepless eye is upon His people; He is watching them with the deepest interest. The success of those who have preceded us in this race – notwithstanding the fears with which many of them were oppressed, the difficulties they had to encounter, the fiery trial through which, in many cases, they were brought – is a powerful motive to patient endurance and to hope against hope. But it is the presence and the unchangeableness of that glorious Object, in looking to whom *they* ran and obtained, that can inspire the believer with the hope that he, too, shall be enabled to persevere and to overcome. If a great cloud of witnesses encompasses the believer’s path – if the eyes of all the glorified spirits are upon him as a conflicting, suffering brother, and if this is a motive to follow their faith and patience – yet it is in looking unto Jesus that the hope is produced of being enabled to follow them. And if to run the race successfully it be necessary that the believer lay aside every weight and his easily-besetting sin, it is in looking unto Jesus – and in this way alone – that he is enabled to comply with these requirements.

It is in looking unto Jesus that the racecourse is entered upon; looking away from other objects to Him; looking away from the accusations of a guilt-laden conscience, from a fiery law, to Jesus for rest; and looking away from the world to Jesus. It is in obtaining a view of Him as the Lamb slain that the soul is drawn by the invisible but almighty chain of His grace and love out of the fearful pit and miry clay; and it is under the joint influence of His authority, His love, and His teaching, that it is brought to say, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Faith in Christ is the starting-point of true religion; faith that depends upon Jesus for salvation – that gives the heart to Him, saying, “What have I to do any more with idols?” And whatever impressions may be made on the heart with respect to the necessity and all-importance of true religion, and whatever efforts may be made to follow Christ in the path

pointed out to His followers, these impressions are not saving and these efforts are unavailing until the soul complies with the Gospel call, and receives Christ as *Jesus*, who “saves his people from their sins.” This is a truth of vital importance.

It is in looking to the Lord Jesus that we run the race. He is not only the Alpha and Omega of the sinner’s hope when he first attains to good hope of salvation, but He is the Alpha and Omega of His people’s continued hope – the beginning and end of their confidence. He is the believer’s strength, and light, and guide, and consolation, and salvation, and glory – his *all*. He is the Sun of Righteousness in his firmament, in whose light alone he can see spiritual objects or discharge spiritual duty; in whose warmth alone he can taste of true joy. It is on His righteousness that he depends altogether for the acceptance of his person; it is on His grace he depends for the sanctification of his nature. It is His arm that supports him; it is His love that satisfies him. To contemplate Him, indeed, in the unveiled glory of His divinity, apart from His work as Immanuel, would only dazzle and consume him; but as He is revealed in the mellowed lustre of His mediatorial work, the contemplation is inexpressibly refreshing to the soul. The poor, dark, guilty sinner can contemplate Him with the deepest humiliation, and yet as the object of his trust and confidence. Humiliation and hope can thus take root and flourish side by side in “looking unto Jesus.”

You are to remember, believer, and you are to be animated to greater hope in remembering, that a company which no man can number has trod the same path which you are treading – that you are compassed about by a cloud of witnesses; but you are to look to Jesus. The whole company of the redeemed are but so many mirrors, in which some small part of His beauty is to be seen; and even in their glorified state what can they do for a poor sinner – for a burdened spirit? They can sympathize with him, but that is all. There is but one object that can meet all his need; that can fill his eyes when capacitated for perceiving and drinking in moral and spiritual beauty; that can fill his heart for ever; and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal Father is never weary of contemplating His excellences; the holy angels are never weary of singing His praises; the redeemed will never complain that their constant contemplation of His beauty has brought satiety. Many are the groans of the burdened soul under a sense of distance from Christ, and of dim, dim views of Him; but he will never weary of seeing His face when he comes to the heavenly Zion.

But we must view this subject in another light. A poor, dark, weak creature is called to run the race from sin to holiness; to aspire after nothing less than perfect likeness to God; to seek after nothing less than to glorify God. Very true, he has undergone a glorious change. He has passed from condemnation to a state of acceptance in God’s sight; he has been renewed in the spirit of his mind; old things have passed away; the world has been made vanity to him for Christ. And yet he is, in himself, as utterly without strength as he was before. He has no stock of grace on which to trade; he has no inherent might to resist his spiritual enemies. He cannot preserve his own soul, cannot exercise aright any one of the graces of the Spirit, and whatever may be his advances in the divine life, his condition in this respect remains unchangeable. He is still, while in this world, a sinner needing mercy as surely as when he first sought and obtained mercy; needing the everlasting strength of the Lord Jesus to sustain him as surely as when he began the conflict. And the more he advances in the divine life the more vividly does he realise this, and the more does he shrink from the workings of that evil principle which would conjoin with the finished work of Christ, as a ground of hope, anything of his own – anything even of what the Spirit of God has wrought in him – or that would interfere with his looking to Jesus with the same feeling of strengthlessness in himself as when he first looked and was saved. And yet he is called to run this race. How then can he run it? He is to run it as he entered it, “looking unto Jesus.” As there is One who has done all for him as regards the deliverance of his soul from condemnation and the beginning of the good work, so He is to continue to do all for him, and

to perfect that which concerns him. On Him therefore he is to depend; to Him he is to look; and for all the necessities of the Christian life there is provision in the Lord Jesus. Observe, then, how spiritual sloth on the one hand, and despondency on the other, are shut out by the provision of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus seeks no rival to Himself in beginning or in carrying on the work of grace. What He seeks is dependence – simple, exclusive dependence – on Himself for beginning and for perfecting it; and in this dependence He is glorified.

On the one hand, then, it is the confiding, depending believer that will be the diligent and the active believer. It is he who carries all his wants and burdens to the Lord Jesus, to have his wants supplied out of His fulness, who will be engaged with his whole heart in running the race. And, on the other hand, the call to run this race is not like Pharaoh's call to the children of Israel: "Make bricks without straw." The poor, empty believer is not called, in the exercise of his own resources, to be holy. No; Christ is made of God to His people not only righteousness, but sanctification. The doctrine which gives works any place whatever in the justification of the sinner, or which gives the Christian inherent power to carry on the work of sanctification, independently of its being a soul-destroying doctrine, is a miserable and a cheerless one.

Faith, then, is the great principle of obedience. The obedience of the true Christian is distinguished from the obedience of the formalist in many respects – it is the obedience of love, love to Christ, and of universal respect to all Christ's commandments; but it is specially distinguished in this, that it is the obedience of faith. When we say that it is the obedience of faith, we mean, first, that it is opposed to the obedience prompted by self-righteousness or produced by slavish fear, for it is animated by hope; and secondly, that it is opposed to the obedience that draws on self for its supplies, for it draws its supplies from an unseen Saviour.

I shall not at present dwell upon the nature of faith as set forth under this beautiful emblem or simile, "looking unto Jesus." I do not know that there is in the Word of God an exhibition of faith that is more fitted for the weak believer, more fitted to "help unbelief," than this one. The glorious simplicity that belongs to faith in Christ is brought out by it – the simplicity that makes it so hard for the self-righteous heart to understand what faith is – that it is the simple looking of a consciously-lost and helpless sinner to the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, for that salvation which He died to purchase, which he lives to bestow. Two or three things, however, we must keep in view as necessarily included in it. For example, there must be the knowledge of Christ, some measure of true spiritual knowledge of His person and work. Faith cannot be exercised on an unknown Christ; cannot be exercised except in so far as the understanding, illuminated by the Spirit of God, discerns the glory of Jesus the Christ. And so, for the continued actings of this faith, there is needed growth in the knowledge of Christ. Therefore it is that when the Apostle Peter exhorts his brethren to "grow in grace," he adds, as one thing in which, in an especial manner, growth in grace consists, "and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then there must be trust in Christ. Now, the general call of the Gospel affords a warrant at all times to the believer for a fresh exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus; *e.g.*, such a glorious passage of God's Word as this – "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." And blessed be God that we are warranted to make this use of the glorious Gospel from hour to hour. But in addition to this there are particular exhibitions of the Redeemer suited to all the conditions or circumstances in which His people are found in this world. Now, "looking unto Jesus" is looking to Him in the exercise of expectation and trust that He will be to us according to His own word and according to our need; that He will be our life in our deadness, our advocate to undertake for us; our keeper to protect us, our shepherd to feed us. And so for all our wants.

Then again, this "looking unto Jesus" must be such a looking as implies heart-complacency in the glorious object of faith. No doubt, we are to distinguish between faith and

love. We are not to confound these two graces; but we must remember that they are ever inseparable. Faith kindles love, and love stirs up faith to increasing exercise. It is to the look of love as well as to the look of trust that the believer is invited.

Now let me notice, ere we come to a close, some of the special characters in which the Lord Jesus is to be contemplated.

Here let us not forget that if our faith be exercised on the Lord Jesus Christ so that we shall really run the race set before us, it must first realise the glory of His Person. We cannot perceive the preciousness of Christ's work unless we perceive the glory of Christ's Person – God-man, Immanuel. There is no human teaching that can give us one right view of Christ in His Person. The Spirit of God can give this. He gives this to His people; He will give it to us if we ask it of Him. Oh, where there is a "looking unto Jesus," and a running of the race, there is prayer from day to day and hour to hour for the teaching of the Spirit to show us Jesus in the Word in the glory of His Person!

He is to be contemplated as the Lord of this race, whose we are by creation and by redemption, so that each one of His people ought to be able to say, "To me to live is Christ," and so that they ought to come each day to Him with the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? what wilt Thou have me to part with? what wilt Thou have me to suffer in running this race? I am thine." A sense of His authority and of infinite obligation must possess His people if they would follow Him.

Again, He is to be looked unto as the great High Priest, or the propitiation for sin, and as the Advocate with the Father. It is a view of Christ in His priestly office that first attracts the sinner and gives him peace, and a continued view of Christ in His priestly office is necessary for preserving peace in His people. It was as the Lamb of God that He manifested forth on earth the glory of the Father; it is as the Lamb that was slain that He is adored and worshipped in heaven, and while seated there at the Father's right hand, representing the persons of His people, He presents their services too, perfumed with the incense of His own merits. Oh! how soon would the believer faint, give over, and sink into utter despondency, unless he had the great High Priest to look to – and *such* a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of His people's infirmities, and who saveth to the uttermost, because He liveth for ever to make intercession.

Again, He is to be looked unto as the Forerunner. He hath gone before His people in this race. And now the very print of His steps is to be seen in the course. It is to be seen in the doing of the Father's will – this was His meat and drink. It is to be seen in prayer – He spent whole nights, He wrestled and agonized, in prayer. It is to be seen in the deep valley of humiliation – His whole life on earth was spent in it. It is to be seen in temptation – He suffered, being tempted. It is to be seen in the dark valley of the shadow of death – He passed through that valley. He has gone before, and now He says to His people, "Follow me." Christ has thus consecrated with the true consecration, He has sanctified and hallowed, every step of the way to glory. There is no enemy with which His people must contend that has not been vanquished by Christ, there is no trial which He has not converted into a blessing. He has taken the sting out of death, and because He lives, His people shall live also.

With this blessed truth we must connect another. He is the Example – "that we should follow His steps." The believer in Jesus is to aim at nothing short of being *like Christ*, and if he aims not at this, he cannot follow Christ at all. Oh! are not many of us condemned by this truth? How little is it realized and laid to heart! In seeking to run the race set before us we should consider how He endured the cross, despising the shame. These are great words – may they sink in our hearts! – "He that saith he abideth in him," that saith he is a follower of Christ, "ought himself also so to walk even as he walked."

In the last place He is to be contemplated as the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the *life* of His people. So that their life depends not on what they have received from Him, but

on their continued union to Him; and the exercise of this life depends not on any inherent strength of theirs, but on continued communications from the life-giving Head. And so that, if He is to be trusted in as the Priest, submitted to as the Master, rejoiced in as the Forerunner, and imitated as the Example, it must be through cleaving to Him as the Life, and looking to Him for that very faith which depends upon Him. So true is it that Christ "is all and in all." It is He who begets this faith when the sinner cries, "Lord, save me, I perish." It is He who keeps it from fainting in the time of trial, when it says, "Lord, to whom can I go?" It is He who clears its eye when it waxes dim, to see afresh His own beauty in the page of truth. It is He who strengthens its vision to see the land that is very far off. It is He who teaches it to say, "My soul, wait thou with patience upon thy God alone." It is He who nerves it to do and to suffer great things for His name's sake. It is He who will teach it to commit the spirit to Him who has redeemed it, when its race is run. He is, then, to be looked unto as the Author and Finisher of faith. And let it be observed, faith is here singled out as comprehending every other grace. He who is the Author and Finisher of faith is the Author and Finisher of every other grace; the source of all life, light, consolation, and joy, without whom His people can do nothing.

We must distinguish between the hold that faith takes of Christ and the hold that Christ has of the soul. What is necessary in order to saving faith is a renouncing of every false refuge, and a resting in truth upon Christ for salvation. Now, though this is the production of almighty power, yet, as it exists in the sinner and is matter of his consciousness, this precious grace is often very weak, very feeble, quivering like a leaf. Yes, and as he runs the race it is often so. But then while faith, so to speak, stretches out its weak, trembling hands to Christ, Christ has the everlasting arms about it, and holds it secure from wrath and sin and all that can harm it, in a grasp stronger than death and the grave; and nothing can pluck it out of His hands. He saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

And now to close. Dear friends, pray for him who has been addressing you from these blessed words, that it may be given to him, through abounding grace, so to run as that he shall obtain; not to run uncertainly, not to fight as one that beats the air. It is a solemn truth – woe to us if we overlook or forget it - that there is a running which is unsuccessful, which does not obtain the crown. There is the running of mere profession. There is the running of him who subordinates Christ and the care of the soul to the world in some form or other. There is the running of the self-righteous, who thinks more of his own goodness than of the finished work of Christ. There is the running of the man who trifles with the obligations of God's law, who holds by some darling lust and will not let it go, though God says that "they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." There is the running of the prayerless, the spiritually dead man, who never seeks communion with the unseen Saviour. There is the running of those who have set out well and have drawn back – some wiled away, some engulfed by the world, some terrified back in the time of sore trial. And there are those who run to the very gate of heaven with the hope of being admitted there – "Lord, Lord, open to us"; to whom Christ will say, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." Is it possible that an immortal spirit should go on under this strong delusion to face death and to enter eternity, if he really sat down to examine himself by God's word, to try his state and to know the case of his soul? Is there one of my hearers who says, "God forbid that I should go on so! What will mere profession avail? What will a name or place in the visible Church avail if I do not know and love the Lord, and if Christ Himself be not formed in me the hope of glory?" Remember, if you are Christ's, you will have a struggle to maintain. You must expect a struggle and a contest while here. Seek preparedness for it, and pray for the continued teaching of the Holy Spirit to show you the things of Christ. It is looking unto Jesus that makes the race blessed in all its hardships, temptations, and difficulties. Young Christian, if, through grace you have counted the cost – if you *would* follow the Lord fully in the way He has marked out for His

people – if you *would* be kept from looking back to Sodom – then we bid you welcome in Christ’s name. Be not discouraged; be not afraid. Christ can keep, support, carry you through; giving you to feel that His “yoke is easy” and His “burden light.” And this is what the advanced Christian needs – to have the things of Christ shown him. This is what the aged Christian needs “till the day break and the shadows flee away,” when he shall see that head, which was crowned with thorns, now with the many crowns.

Once more. How many are there of us (the Lord knoweth) who are still strangers to this race, without the strait gate, in an unconverted and impenitent state; who have never realised that the salvation of the soul is the one thing needful; never been brought to lay to heart that to flee from the wrath to come is a thing which cannot be put off till to-morrow, which requires haste – is pressing – urgent? “Press into the kingdom.” “To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts.” O, that the Lord, the Spirit, would cause His own solemn truth – His own glorious truth – to enter consciences and hearts; the truth in regard to the race, to eternity, to the blessedness of the saved, the misery of the lost; the truth in regard to Jesus. O, that some wandering eye might be fixed this day upon the Lamb of God; that some vain mind were fixed – some vain heart brought under the power of the Cross of the Lord Jesus! And then never, never, my dear fellow-sinner, would you find rest until that union was made up between you and Christ, which would be manifested by your cleaving to Him in this world, and which would last for ever; for who shall separate His people from His love?

[September 1913]

A Sermon.

By the REV. NEIL MACINTYRE, Stornoway,
Moderator of Synod.

*Preached at the Opening of Synod in the Free Presbyterian Church, Inverness,
on 1st July, 1913.*

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it” – Zechariah 4:9.

These are the words of the Lord to Zerubbabel. He and a considerable number of the Jews had returned some years previously from Babylon, where they had been in captivity for seventy years. On their return they found their holy and beautiful house, where their fathers worshipped, burnt up with fire. In the second month of the second year after their return they laid the foundation of the house, but no sooner had they begun to build than they met with opposition from enemies, which caused the work to be stopped for many years. During this suspension the people became indifferent regarding the building of God’s house, and were more concerned about their own houses. It was at this time that the Lord sent them two prophets – Haggai and Zechariah – with messages of reproof and encouragement, reproving them for their inactivity and indifference. “Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say the time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai, the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?” (Haggai 1:2-4). In this passage under consideration they are encouraged to go forward and build the house which had been so long neglected. “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.”

In considering this passage we shall take –

- I. – A brief review of the history of Israel at this period.
- II. – Consider the laying of the foundation. “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house.”
- III. – The building and finishing of the house. “His hands shall also finish it.”

I. – A brief review of the history of Israel at this period. –

God had delivered Israel into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, for their sins – particularly the sin of idolatry – and they were kept in bondage for seventy years, and had little or no prospect of ever returning to the land of promise. “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion; we hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.” When God’s set time came to restore them He soon made the

crooked places straight and the rough places plain. He turned the heart of Cyrus, King of Persia, in their favour. “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” “The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, King of Persia: The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-3).

Then rose Sheshbazzar, Prince of Judah (who is Zerubbabel) and with him forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty people, together with seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven servants, and came to Jerusalem, and in the second year, in the second month, laid the foundation of the Temple. No doubt, having the authority and permission of the king, they would naturally conclude that they would meet with no opposition, but they soon found out that they had bitter and cruel enemies to contend with. These enemies were the Samaritans. These Samaritans were transplanted from Babylon and adjacent places, and placed in room of the ten tribes. They continued their Babylonish idolatry, for which cause God punished them by destroying many of them by lions. Suspecting the cause of their destruction, they appealed to the king to send them a Jewish priest, “who would teach them the manner of the God of the land.” A priest was sent, who instructed them in the Jewish religion, with the result that they blended the Jewish religion with their own idolatry. When Zerubbabel therefore began to build the Temple, these Samaritans came to him, saying, “Let us build with you, for we seek your God as ye do, and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Ezarhaddon, King of Assur, which brought us up hither” (Ezra 4:2). But Zerubbabel was a discerning man, as future events proved, and would have none of them, and answered, “Ye have nothing to do with us, to build an house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus commanded us.” Zerubbabel and the rest of the people knew from bitter experience that it was an evil and bitter thing for them to mix with the heathen and learn their ways. They had spent seventy years in captivity on account of this very thing, and they believed that, if they were to join in affinity with these idolaters, the consequence would be that, instead of their overcoming and checking the evil practices of the Samaritans, their evil practices would overcome them, and that they would probably find themselves again in captivity. So they answered, “Ye have nothing to do with us.” When the Samaritans saw that their offer was rejected, they immediately showed what spirit they were of. They sent letter after letter up to Babylon, accusing the city, Jerusalem, of being a rebellious city and the people to be disturbers of the peace, and that there could be no peace or safety until the work was stopped and this impracticable element silenced. During the reign of Artaxerxes they had their desire, for a proclamation was issued authorising them to stop the work, and on receipt of this letter “they immediately went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power” (Ezra 4:23). They had now legal and regal force and power behind them, and they were determined to take full advantage of it. They might possibly have used the argument which many of their successors did – “that they were only carrying out the law in the matter.” We see, however, how unscrupulous they were, for in the proclamation issued by Artaxerxes there is no mention of the Temple – it is altogether about the city. But these were evidently more concerned about the building of the Temple than the city. They, no doubt, saw that if the Temple were built it would be a standing monument to the glory of Jehovah, that His worship would be established, and that thus a permanent witness would be raised against their own idolatry.

Satan, who is an ingenious adversary, cannot see the cause of Christ advanced without rage, and “the gates of hell” engage to fight against it, either by plausible means or by open

persecution. We believe he is more afraid of a body of men, however small and insignificant they may be, who hold fast the Word of God and establish themselves to the land, than he is of any number of individuals who still remain in fellowship with a Church which is corrupt in principle and in practice, though they may disapprove of its errors. In the case of the latter, he (Satan) knows that one of two things will most likely take place: either that they will gradually cease to denounce error – like the blacksmith’s dog, which gets accustomed to the sparks from the anvil and gives up barking – or that they will soon pass away to eternity and leave the field at his disposal.

We do not here stay to make any application of this wonderful piece of history, but any careful and observant person may see that it corresponds with many chapters in the history of the Church of Christ in our land.

II – Let us consider the laying of the foundation. “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation.”

1. Who laid the foundation? Zerubbabel. He was a Prince of Judah. He was the leader and commander of those fifty thousand who returned from captivity. He also brought back some of the vessels of the Temple which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away and had put them in the house of his own god in Babylon. Now Zerubbabel may be taken as type of Christ. Christ is “the Prince of the tribe of Judah.” He is “given as a leader and commander to the people.” It was part of His mission “to proclaim liberty to the captives.” “He is the nail in a sure place and upon him shall they hang all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity from the vessels of cups even to all the vessels of flagons.” The Lord by Malachi asks the question: “Can a man rob God?” And He answers, “Yet ye have robbed me.” It is impossible that the essential glory of God can be invaded, but His declarative glory can be and has been invaded. We read of Christ that “He restored that which he took not away.” He restored to God all the glory of which He was deprived by the disobedience of man, and also delivered from their captivity not fifty thousand of Adam’s lost race, but a “great multitude which no man can number of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues.”

2. Let us now consider the laying of the foundation. Solomon laid the foundation of the first Temple and built it. It was a most magnificent building, “the joy of all the land,” but Nebuchadnezzar with his army destroyed it and burnt it to its very foundation, so that when Zerubbabel returned from Babylon, he found it in heaps and ruins. Now the first Temple may be taken as a type of man as created by God. He was created in a holy and happy state. He was the crown and keystone of all creation, a most magnificent building. His glory and happiness depended on his obedience to the law of God. Satan, who is a murderer and destroyer from the beginning, enticed man to disobey God, and the foundation being removed, the whole fabric collapsed. This beautiful Temple became heaps and ruins. “By the disobedience of one many were made sinners” (Romans 5:19).

When Zerubbabel began anew to lay the foundation of the Temple, he had much to clear away before he could lay one stone of it. It was much easier to lay the foundation of the first than of the second Temple. Solomon probably had little more to do than to begin and lay the foundation, but Zerubbabel had to clear away the heaps of rubbish which were lying on the site before he could begin to build. In like manner, when God created man, He had simply to say, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” But when man was to be saved it was impossible to say regarding him, “Let us make man in our own image,” until first satisfaction was given to law and justice for man’s disobedience.

Where was the second Temple built? It was built on the same “site” as the first, but not on the same foundation. When God created man, He placed him under a law and that law was “the site” on which his eternal happiness was to be built, but the foundation of that design

was man's own obedience. If man is to be saved from the ruined condition in which he is by nature, it must be in a way which shall be agreeable to the divine and holy demands of the law. Now it is impossible that the second Temple – the Church – can be built on the old foundation – man's obedience, "for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God." Christ, our Zerubbabel, undertook to lay a foundation on this site – the law of God – in His obedience and sufferings. He entered into covenant with the Father on behalf of His elect people, and that covenant to Him personally was a covenant of works, for we find Him continually referring to Himself as the servant who "must work the works of him that sent him." He also speaks of "having finished the work which the Father gave him to do." It is His finished work which is the foundation of their salvation. "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law and make it honourable." This covenant is one of grace to them through Him. The first foundation was man's own obedience; the second is Christ's finished work.

Now before this foundation could be laid much had to be removed.

(1) There is the curse of a broken covenant. God's law had nothing but condemnation for these "lively stones" in their natural state, which were to be laid on this foundation. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." This mountain the sinner could never remove. But "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Christ, our Zerubbabel, went surety for us, and God the Father as Judge imputed to Him the sins of His elect people. "He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." In being made sin, He was made a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." In His obedience and sufferings He "finished the transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9:24). The curse of the law is removed and their salvation is laid in eternal righteousness.

(2) There is the wrath of an offended God. God is angry with them because of sin. Sin is the only thing with which He is angry. No creature would ever know that there was anger in Him were it not for sin. "Where there is no wood," said Solomon, "there the fire goeth out." But where there is the least chip of this wood, sin, it will keep the fire of God's anger burning forever. Now, this mountain is so great that the sinner can never remove it, but "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." God the Father, as Judge, laid the sins of His people upon Him who is "mighty to save," and He willingly took them, and in laying their sins, He also laid upon Him the wrath that was due to sin. Christ made an end of sin, and when He made an end of sin, He also made an end of wrath. There is no wood, so the fire goeth out. "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee."

Another thing to be observed in connection with the foundation is that, though the enemies stopped the building of the Temple for eighteen or twenty years, yet they were not allowed to touch the foundation, and when Zerubbabel began to build again, it was on the same foundation which he had laid at the beginning. Now, God has laid the foundation stone in Zion, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. "Heathen and people and kings and rulers may take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." But God will laugh at them. God in His mercy and love laid the foundation of the Temple of His Church in our land, but many attempts have been made to destroy it. More than once the State and professors of religion joined together to persecute the poor Church of Christ in Scotland, but persecution could never destroy her. It only helped to establish her more firmly. When Satan saw that this mode of attack was unsuccessful, like a wily general he changed his tactics. He got men to flock into office in the hitherto faithful Church who had no regard for truth or principle.

These have done all in their power to remove the foundation by denying the inspiration of God's word and corrupting His worship, turning the house of God into a den of thieves. "But the foundation of God standeth sure."

There is another attempt made in the present day to remove the foundation. The people of the Established and United Free Churches are anticipating a union between these two large bodies, and as far as we can learn from the press, it is to be consummated in a way which will remove the establishment principle from her constitution, except some slight connection which will secure to them the endowments. The Established and U.F. Churches ought to understand that the establishment principle, embodied in a national Church as the nation's tribute to Christ, is not the principle of any one Church in Scotland. It is a national principle – a part of our national heritage. It is one which was bought for this nation by the shedding of much blood. But it is more; it is a scriptural principle, and therefore one of which no civil or ecclesiastical power has the right to deprive us. May we have grace to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints!

III. – Let us briefly consider the building and finishing of the Temple.

1. The building of the Temple. –

When a house which has fallen is to be rebuilt, the stones of the former house are generally used in the building, though not necessarily all. It is for the builder to choose which stone he will take and leave. When God purposed to build a Temple for Himself He also purposed that all the stones be taken from the ruined race of Adam; yet He did not purpose that all the stones of that ruin be used. But who can find fault? "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." The stones which He has chosen were in the heap, and were as lost and ruined in their state and nature as the rest of mankind. "They were the children of wrath, even as others."

When the builder goes in search of a stone to put in the building there must be much digging and clearing away of the rubbish with which it may be covered. So it is with the Holy Spirit when He comes to translate the sinner from a state of nature to a state of grace. He finds him dead in trespasses and sins. He quickens him, and makes him realise that he is a lost sinner, guilty of transgressing God's law in thought, word, and action. The sinner now sees his sins as mountains rising between him and God, and does all in his power to remove them by his own obedience, for he is convinced that unless these mountains be removed he can never have peace. It would, however, be as likely that the child with his little barrow could remove the sand on the seashore, as that he could remove his sins. When the sinner is thus convinced of his inability to atone for his sins he is then ready to conclude that they can never be blotted out. But "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." When the Spirit reveals Christ to him in the glory of His person and finished work, and he is enabled by faith to receive Him as He is freely offered in the Gospel, he there sees a foundation on which he can lay his guilty soul. "For I know," saith Paul, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." In that day his sins, which were many, are forgiven, and a foundation by grace laid which shall never be removed. "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever." Again, all the stones were not laid on the wall in one day. It probably took them four or five years to build the Temple. Neither does God build His own Church in one day. He began to build in the beginning of time, and He has been laying stone after stone, and will continue until the last is put on. Christ is to have a seed in the world while sun and moon endure.

2. The finishing of the Temple. –

"His hands shall also finish it." The finishing of it is to be "with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." It may be difficult to understand the application of these words, "Grace,

grace unto it." Was this predicted concerning Zerubbabel or the Temple, or may we apply it to both? We think it may be applied to both.

(1) In applying it to Zerubbabel or Christ, it may be taken as a prayer, the Church praying for Christ. It is written, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually" (Psalm 72:15). Does this mean that Christ needs their prayers personally on His own behalf? No, for that would be blasphemy, but He needs their prayers on behalf of His cause in the world. It is the desire of every true believer that His cause and kingdom would prosper in the world. Like David, they pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory."

(2) It may more particularly be applied to the Church.

(a) It may be taken as an acknowledgment that their whole salvation is of grace. They have no reason to boast. "Where is boasting? It is excluded." If they are saved from their awful condition, it is not to them the praise is due. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." "Grace, grace unto it."

(b) It may be further taken as a prayer on behalf of the Church that favour may be shewn it, and a prayer by the members of the Church on behalf of one another. They pray that God would be favourable to each individual soul in the building by giving much of His presence, that He would give grace that their feet might be kept from falling and their eyes from tears, that they might be preserved from bringing reproach on the cause of Christ in the world, and that they might be enabled to stand steadfast in the truth in a backsliding generation.

(c) It may be finally taken to mean that when the last sinner is converted, and all the members of the Church of God are brought home to glory, this will be the general chorus to the praise of grace. "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." May we be among the number of the redeemed in that day!

[October 1913]

“Stewards.”

A Sermon by the late C. H. SPURGEON, Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.

Delivered to the Annual Conference of the Pastors' College Association, 1887.

[A friend who was much impressed with this sermon obtained permission for its republication in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, from Messrs. Marshall Brothers, Ltd., London, the proprietors of Spurgeon's sermons. – ED.]

“Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” – 1 Corinthians 4:1,2.

My beloved brethren – I might even say with Paul, “My dearly beloved and longed for” – it gives me intense delight to look into your faces once again; and yet I feel weighted with a solemn responsibility in having to direct your thoughts at this time so as to give the keynote to our solemn conference. I ask your continued prayers that I may speak aright, saying the right thing in the right way.

There is considerable advantage in the freedom of the usual inaugural address. It may take the methodical form of a sermon, or it may wear looser garments and come forth in the undress of a speech. Certain freedoms which are not usually accorded to a set sermon are allowed me in this discursive discourse. You shall call my talk by what name you choose when I have done, but it will be a sermon, for I have a very definite and distinct text in my mind, and I shall keep to it with at least an average closeness.

I may as well announce the text, for it will furnish you with a clue to my intent. You will find the passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in the first verses of the fourth chapter: “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”

The apostle was anxious to be rightly accounted of, and well he might be, for ministers are not often estimated rightly. As a rule, they are either gloried in or else despised. At the commencement of our ministry, when our stores are fresh and our energies are full – when we blaze and flash and spend much time in the firework factory – people are apt to think us wonderful beings, and then the apostle's word is needed: “Therefore let no man glory in men” (1 Corinthians 3:21). It is not true, as flatterers insinuate, that in our case the gods have come down in the likeness of men, and we shall be idiots if we think so. In due time foolish expectations will be cured by disappointment, and then we shall hear unwelcome truth, mingled with unrighteous censure. The idol of yesterday is the butt of to-day. Nine days, nine weeks, nine months, or nine years; be it more or less, time works disenchantment and changes our position in the world's account. The primrose day is over and the nettle months are come. After the time of the singing of birds has passed away we come nearer to the season of fruit; but the children are not half so pleased with us as when they wandered in our luxuriant meadows and strung our daisies and buttercups into crowns and garlands. In our more autumnal years the people miss our flowers and greenery. Perhaps we are becoming sensible that it is so. The old man is solid and slow, whereas the young man rode upon the wings of the wind. It is clear that some think too much of us and some think too

little of us; it would be far better if they accounted of us soberly “as the ministers of Christ.” It would be for the advantage of the Church, for our own benefit, and for the glory of God, if we were put in our right places and kept there, being neither overrated nor unduly censured, but viewed in our relation to our Lord rather than in our own personalities. “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ.”

We are *ministers*. The word has a very respectable sound. To be a minister is the aspiration of many a youth. Perhaps if the word were otherwise rendered their ambition might cool. Ministers are *servants*. They are not guests, but waiters; not landlords, but labourers. The word has been rendered “under-rowers,” men who tug the oar on the lowest bench. It was hard work to row a galley. Those rapid strokes consumed the life-forces of the slaves. There were three banks of oars. Those on the upper bank of oars had the advantage of fresh air; those who were beneath were more closely shut in; but I suppose that the lowest bank of rowers would be faint with heat as well as worn out with sore travail. Brethren, let us be content to wear out our lives even in the worst position, if by our labour we can speed the passage of our great “Caesar” and give speed to the trireme of the Church in which He has embarked. We are willing to be chained to the oar and to work on through life to make His barque cleave the waves. We are not captains nor owners of the galley, but only the oarsmen of Christ.

The text, however, does not call us simply ministers or servants, but it adds, “*of Christ*.” We are not the servants of men but of the Lord Jesus. Esteemed sir, if you think, because you subscribe to my support, that I am bound to do your bidding, you are under a mistake. Truly, we are “ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake,” but in the highest sense our sole responsibility is to Him whom we call Master and Lord. We obey superior orders, but we cannot yield to the dictation of our fellow-servants, however influential they may be. Our service is glorious because it is the service of Christ. We feel honoured in being permitted to wait upon Him whose shoe’s latchet we are not worthy to unloose.

We are also said to be “*stewards*.” What are stewards? Let us consider –

I. – *What is the office of steward?*

What is required of stewards? This is our duty. We are not now speaking of anybody outside, but of you and myself; therefore let us make personal application of all that is said.

First, *a steward is a servant and no more*. Perhaps he does not always remember this, and it is a very pitiful business when the servant begins to think that he is “my lord.” It is a pity that servants, when honoured by their master, should be so apt to give themselves airs. How ridiculous Jack-in-office makes himself! I do not refer now to butlers and footmen, but to ourselves. If we magnify ourselves we shall become contemptible, and we shall neither magnify our office nor our Lord. We are the servants of Christ, and not lords over His heritage.

Ministers are for churches, and not churches for ministers. In our work among the churches we must not dare to view them as estates to be farmed for our own profit or gardens to be trimmed to our own taste.

A steward is a servant of a peculiar kind, for he has to superintend the other servants, and that is a difficult thing to do. An old friend of mine, who is now with God, once said, “I have always been a shepherd. Forty years I was a shepherd of sheep, and another forty years I was a shepherd of men, and the last flock was a deal more sheepish than the first.” This witness is true. I think I have heard that a sheep has as many diseases as there are days in the year; but I am sure that the other sort of sheep are liable to ten times as many. A pastor’s work is an anxious one. All sorts of difficulties occur with our fellow-servants; and, alas! unwise stewards make a great many more than there need be by expecting perfection in others

although they do not possess it themselves. Our fellow-servants are, after all, wisely selected, for He who put them into His household knew what He was at. At any rate, they are *His* choice and not ours. It is not our place to find fault with our Lord's own election.

The other servants will take their cue from us. A steward who is dull, inert, and slow will have a slow team of servants about him, and the business of his lordship will fare badly. Those who travel will have noticed that the servants in a hotel are very much like the landlord. If the landlord is cheery, attentive, and obliging, all the maids and waiters partake of his geniality; but if he looks sourly at you and treats you with indifference, you will find that the whole establishment is of a disdainful order. Oh, that we may always be alive and earnest in the service of the Lord Jesus that our people may be alive also! A minister must give himself wholly to his work. I have read of a Puritan divine that he was so full of life that his people said he lived like one who fed on live things. Oh, for a life sustained by living bread! We shall not be good stewards in the management of our fellow-servants unless we are ourselves filled with the grace of God. We must set our fellow-servants an example of zeal and tenderness, constancy, hopefulness, energy, and obedience. We must ourselves practise constant self-denial, and select as our own part of the work that which is hardest and most humiliating. We are to rise above our fellows by superior self-forgetfulness. Be it ours to lead the forlorn hopes and bear the heaviest burdens. Archdeacon Hare was giving a lecture at Trinity College when a cry of "Fire" was raised. His pupils rushed away and formed themselves into a line, to pass buckets of water from the river to the burning building. The tutor saw a consumptive student standing up to his waist in the water, and cried to him, "What! you in the water, Sterling." The reply was, "Somebody must be in it, and why not I as well as another?" Let us say to ourselves, "Some fellows must be doing the drudgery of the Church and labouring in the hardest places, and why should not we take that post."

Next, remember that *stewards are servants under the more immediate command of the great Master*. We should be as the steward who daily goes into his lord's private room to receive orders. John Ploughman was never in the squire's parlour, but the steward is often there. If he neglected to consult the squire he would soon be doing amiss, and involving himself in heavy responsibility. How often ought you and I to say, "Lord, show me what thou wouldst have me to do." To cease to look up to God, so as to learn and practise His will, would be to quit our true position. A steward who never communicates with his master! Give him his wages and let him go. He who does his own will and not his master's is of no value as a steward. Brethren, we must wait upon God continually. The habit of going for orders must be cultivated. How grateful should we be that our Master is always within call! He guides His servants with His eye, and with His guidance He gives also the needful power. He will make our faces to shine before the eyes of our fellows if we commune with him. Our example must encourage others to wait upon the Lord. As our business is to tell them the mind of God, let us study that mind very carefully.

Again, *stewards are constantly giving account*. Their account is given as they go along. A businesslike proprietor requires an account of outgoings and incomings from day to day. There is great truth in the old proverb that "short reckonings make long friends." If we make short reckonings with God we shall be long friends with Him. I wonder if any of you keep account of your faults and shortcomings. Perhaps the time will be better spent in constant efforts to serve your Master and increase His estate. We ought each one to ask himself, "What am I doing by my preaching? Is it of the right kind? Am I giving prominence to those doctrines which my Lord would have me put in the forefront? Am I caring for souls as He would have me care for them?" It is a good thing thus to review one's whole life and inquire, "Do I give sufficient time to private prayer? Do I study the Scriptures as intensely as I should? I hurry about to many meetings, but am I in all this fulfilling my Master's orders? May I not be gratifying myself with the appearance of doing much, whereas I should really

be doing more if I were more attentive to the quality than to the quantity of the work?" Oh, to go often to the Master, and to be right and clear in our accounts with Him! This will be profitable both to our Churches and to ourselves.

To come to the main point: *a steward is a trustee of his master's goods*. Whatever he has belongs to his master, and choice things are put into his custody not that he may do as he likes with them, but that he may take care of them. The Lord has entrusted to each one of us certain talents, and these are not our own. Gifts of knowledge and thought and speech and influence are not ours to glory in, but ours in trust for the Lord alone. It is His pound that gains five pounds.

We ought to increase our capital stock. Are all the young brethren doing that? Are you increasing in gift and capacity? My brethren, do not neglect yourselves. I observe that some brethren grow, and others stand still, dwarfed and stunted. Men, like horses, are very disappointing creatures. Good colts drop suddenly lame or develop a vice of which they were never before suspected. To be always giving out and never taking in tendeth to emptiness.

Brethren, we are stewards of the mysteries of God; we are "put in trust with the Gospel." Paul speaks of the Gospel of the blessed God which was committed to his trust. I hope none of you have ever had the misfortune to be made a trustee. It is a thankless office. In executing a trust there is little scope for originality. We are bound to carry out a trust with literal exactness. One person wishes to receive more money and another desires to alter a clause in the deed; but the faithful trustee falls back upon the document and abides by its provisions. I hear him say as they worry him, "Dear friends, I did not make this trust; I am simply the administrator of it, and I am bound to carry it out." The Gospel of the grace of God needs great improvement – at least, so I am informed. But I know it is no business of mine to improve it; my part is to act upon it. No doubt many would improve God Himself from off the face of the earth if they could; they would improve the Atonement until it vanished. Great alterations are demanded of us in the name of the spirit of the age. Of course, we are warned that the very notion of punishment for sin is a barbarous relic of mediaeval ages, and must be given up, and with it the doctrine of substitution and many other old-fashioned dogmas. We have nothing to do with these demands; we have only to preach the Gospel as we find it. Stewards must keep to their orders, and trustees must carry out the terms of their trust.

My brethren, we are at this present hour set for the *defence* of the gospel. If ever men were called to this office, we are so called. These are times of drifting: men have pulled up their anchors, and are driven to and fro with winds and tides of divers kinds. As for me, I have in this hour of danger not only let down the great bower anchor, but I have cast four anchors out of the stern. That may be quite the wrong place; but in these times we need anchoring both fore and aft. Now am I fixed. Sceptical reasonings might have moved me at one time, but not now. Do our enemies ask us to lay down our swords, and cease to fight for the old faith? Like the Greeks to Xerxes, we answer, "Come and take them." The other day the advanced thinkers were going to sweep the orthodox into limbo; but, as yet, we survive their assaults. These boasters do not know the vitality of evangelical truth. No, glorious gospel, thou shalt never perish! If we are to die, we will die fighting. If we shall personally pass away, fresh evangelists will preach upon our graves. Evangelical truths are like the dragon's teeth which Cadmus sowed, they breed men all armed for the fray. The gospel lives by dying. Brethren, at any rate, in this contest, if we are not victorious, we will at least be faithful.

A steward's business is to dispense his master's goods according to their design. He is to bring forth things new and old; to provide milk for babes and strong meat for men, giving to each one his portion of meat in due season. At some tables I fear the strong men have been waiting a long time for the meat, and there is small hope of its yet appearing: the milk and water is more plentiful by far. Someone went to hear a certain preacher last Sunday, and

complained that he did not preach Christ. Another remarked that perhaps that it was not the due season; but, my brethren, the due season for preaching Christ is every time you preach. God's children are always hungry, and no bread will satisfy them but that which came down from heaven.

A wise steward will maintain the proportion of truth. He will bring forth things new and old; not always doctrine, not always practice, and not always experience. He will not always preach conflict, nor always victory; not giving a one-sided view of truth, but a sort of stereoscopic view, which shall make truth stand out "evidently set forth" before them. Much of the preparation of spiritual food lies in the correct proportion of the ingredients. Excess in one direction and failure in another may breed much mischief; let us, therefore, use weight and measure, and look up for guidance.

Brethren, take care that you use your talents for your Master, and for your Master only. It is disloyalty to our Master if we wish to be soul-winners in order to be thought to be so. It is unfaithfulness to Jesus if we even preach sound doctrine with the view to be thought sound; or pray earnestly with the desire that we may be known as praying men. It is for us to pursue our Lord's glory with a single eye, and with our whole heart. We must use our Lord's gospel, and our Lord's people, and our Lord's talents, for our Lord, and for Him alone.

The steward should also be the guardian of his master's family. Look to the interests of all who are in Christ Jesus, and let them all be as dear to you as your own children. Servants in the olden times were often so united to the family, and so interested in their masters' affairs, that they spoke of *our* house, *our* land, *our* carriage, *our* horses, and *our* children. Our Lord would have us thus identify ourselves with His holy business, and especially He would have us love His chosen. We, beyond all others, should lay down our lives for the brethren. Because they belong to Christ, we love them for His sake. I trust we can heartily say:

"There's not a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed."

Brethren, let us heartily love all whom Jesus loves. Cherish the tried and suffering. Visit the fatherless and the widow. Care for the faint and the feeble. Bear with the melancholy and despondent. Be mindful of all parts of the household, and thus shall you be a good steward.

I shall cease from this picture when I have said that *the steward represents his master*. When the master is away, everybody comes to the steward for orders. He had need to behave himself well who represents such a Lord as ours. A steward should speak much more carefully and wisely when he speaks for his lord than when he speaks on his own account. Unless he is guarded in his utterances, his lord may be forced to say to him, "You had better speak for yourself. I cannot allow you thus to misrepresent *me*." My beloved brethren and fellow-servants, the Lord Jesus is compromised by us if we do not keep His way, declare His truth, and manifest His Spirit. Men infer the master from the servant. Are they not to be excused if they so do? Ought not the steward to act after his master's manner? You cannot dissociate the squire from the steward; the Lord from His representative. A Puritan was told that He was too precise, but replied, "I serve a precise God."

If urged to utter your own thoughts rather than revealed truth, follow Jesus, who spake not His own things, but those of the Father. In this you will be acting as a steward should do. Here lies your wisdom, your comfort, and your strength. It was a sufficient vindication for a steward, when one accused him of folly, that he could reply, "Say what you please of what I did, for therein I followed my master's orders." Caviller, do not blame the steward. The man has done according to the command of his superior; what

else would you have him to do? Our conscience is clear, and our heart is restful, when we feel that we have taken up our cross, and have followed the footprints of the Crucified One. Wisdom is justified of her children.

II. – *Our obligations as stewards.*

“It is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*.” It is not required that a man be found brilliant, or that he be found pleasing to his associates, or even that he be found successful. All that is required is, that he be found *faithful*; and truly this is no small matter. It will need that the Lord Himself be both our wisdom and our strength, or we shall surely fail. Many are the ways by which we may come short of this requirement, however simple it may seem to be.

We may fail to be faithful through *acting as if we were chiefs instead of servants*. A difficulty arises in the church which might readily be settled by loving forbearance, but we “stand upon our dignity;” and then the servant grows out of His livery. We can be very high and mighty if we please; and the smaller we are, the more easily do we swell out. No cock is greater in fight than a bantam; and no minister is more ready to contend for his “dignity” than the man who has no dignity. How foolish we look when we play the grandee! The steward thinks he has not been treated with proper respect, and he will “let the servants know who he is.” His master was roughly used the other day by an angry tenant, and he took no notice, for he had too much mind to be put out with so small a matter; but his steward passes by nothing, and fires up at everything; is this as it should be? I think I see the gentle master lay his hand upon his furious servant’s shoulder, and I hear him say, “Can you not bear it? I have borne far more than this.”

Brethren, our Master “endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself,” and shall we be weary and faint in our minds? How can we be stewards of the gentle Jesus if we behave ourselves haughtily? Let us never ride the high horse, nor attempt to be lords over God’s heritage; for He will not have it, and we cannot be faithful if we give way to pride.

We shall also fail in our duty as stewards if we begin speculating with our Master’s money. We may play ducks and drakes with our own, but not with our Lord’s money. We are not bidden to speculate, but to “occupy” till He comes. Honest trading with His goods is one thing; but to play a high game and run unlawful risks is quite another. I do not intend to speculate with my Master’s gospel, by dreaming that I can improve it by my own deep thinking, or by soaring aloft with the philosophers. We will not, even with the idea of saving souls, speak other than the gospel. If I could create a great excitement by delivering novel doctrine, I would abhor the thought. To raise a revival by suppressing truth is dealing deceitfully; it is a pious fraud, and our Lord wants no gain which might come by such a transaction. It is ours simply and honestly to trade with our Master’s pounds, and bring Him such increase as they gain in fair dealing.

We may become false to our trust *by acting as men-pleasers*. When the steward studies the good pleasure of the ploughman, or the whims of the servant-maid, everything must go wrong, for everything is out of place. We are influenced by one another, and we influence one another. The greatest are unconsciously influenced in some measure by the least. The minister must be overwhelmingly influenced by the Lord his God, so that other influences may not warp him from his fidelity. We must resort continually to headquarters, and receive the word from the mouth of the Lord Himself, so that we may be kept straight and true, otherwise we shall soon be biassed, although we may not be aware of it. There must be no holding back to please one person; no rushing forward to satisfy another; no moving an inch even to gratify the whole community. We must not harp upon a certain string to win the approval of this party, neither must we be silent upon an important doctrine to avoid

offending that clique. What have we to do with idols, dead or alive? O brethren, if you go in for pleasing everybody, you have indeed set yourselves a task! The toils of Sisyphus and the labours of Hercules are nothing to this! We must not flatter men; we must speak plain words, and words which conscience will approve. If we please men, we shall displease our Lord; so that success in our self-imposed task would be fatal to our eternal interests. In trying to please men, we shall not even succeed in pleasing ourselves. To please our Lord, though it may seem very difficult, is an easier task than pleasing men. O steward, have thine eye alone upon thy Master!

We shall not be found faithful stewards *if we are idlers and triflers*. Do you ever meet with lazy ministers? I have heard of them; but when mine eye sees them, my heart abhors them. If you plan to be lazy, there are plenty of avocations in which you will not be wanted; but, above all, you are not wanted in the Christian ministry. The man who finds the ministry an easy life will also find that it will bring a hard death. If we are not labourers, we are not true stewards; for we are to be examples of diligence to the household. I like Adam Clarke's precept – "Kill yourselves with work, and pray yourselves alive again." We shall never do our duty either to God or man if we are sluggards.

Yet some who are always busy, may yet be unfaithful, if all that they do is done in a jaunty, trifling manner. If we play at preaching, we have chosen an awful game. To shuffle texts like cards, and make literary essays out of themes which move all heaven and hell, is shameful work. We must be serious as death in this solemn work. There are boys and girls who are always giggling, but who never laugh; and they are the very image of certain ever-jesting preachers. I like an honest laugh – true humour can be sanctified – and those who can stir men to smile, can also move them to weep. But even this has limits, which the foolish soon exceed. Be seriously in earnest. Live like men who have something to live for, and preach like men to whom preaching is the highest exercise of their being. Our work is the most important under heaven, or else it is sheer imposture. If you are not earnest in carrying out His instructions, your Lord will give His vineyard to another, for He will not put up with those who turn His service into trifling.

When we *misuse our Master's property*, we are false to our trust. We are entrusted with a certain amount of talent, and strength, and influence, and we have to use this trust money with a single purpose. Our purpose is to promote the Master's honour and glory. We are to seek God's glory, and nothing else. By all means let every man use his best influence on the right side in politics; but no minister has liberty to use his position in the church to promote party ends. I do not censure workers for temperance; but even this admirable purpose must not push out the gospel; I trust it never does. I hold that no minister has a right to use his ability or office to cater for the mere amusement of the multitude. The Master has sent us to win souls – all is within the compass of our commission which tends towards that – but that is chiefly our work which drives directly and distinctly at that end. The danger lies at this time in setting up theatricals, semi-theatricals, concerts, and so forth. Until I see that the Lord Jesus Christ has set up a theatre, or planned a miracle-play, I shall not think of emulating the stage or competing with the music-hall. If I do my own business, by preaching the gospel, I shall have enough to do. One object is enough for most men – one such as ours is enough for any minister, however many his talents, however versatile his mind.

If we would be faithful as stewards, *we must not neglect any one of the family*, nor neglect any portion of the estate. I wonder whether we practise a personal observation of our hearers. Our beloved friend, Mr. Archibald Brown, is right when he says that London needs not only house-to-house visitation, but room-to-room visitation. We must, in the case of our people, go further, and practise man-to-man visitation. By personal intercourse alone can certain persons be reached. If I had a number of bottles before me, and were to play upon

them with a fire-engine, how much of the water would be lost? If I want to make sure of filling them, I must take them up one by one, and carefully pour the liquid into them. We must watch over our sheep, one by one. This is to be done not only by personal talk, but by personal prayer. Dr. Guthrie says that he called upon a sick man, who greatly refreshed his soul, for he told him that he was wont to accompany his minister in his visits. "While I lie here, I shall follow you in your visitation. I keep on remembering house after house in my prayer, and I pray for the man, and his wife, and his children, and all who dwell with him." Thus, without moving a step, the sick saint visited Macfarlane, and Douglas, and Duncan, and all the others whom his pastor called to see. We ought thus to beat the bounds of our parish, and go round and round our congregations, forgetting none, despairing of none, bearing all upon our hearts before the Lord. Especially let us think of the poor, the crotchety, the desponding. Let our care, like the hurdles of a sheepfold, enclose all the flock.

Another thing must not be overlooked: in order to faithfulness *we must never connive at evil*. This injunction will be warmly commended by certain brethren, whose only notion of pruning a tree is to cut it down. A gardener comes to a gentleman's house, and when he is told that the shrubs are a little overgrown, he answers, "I will see to it." In a few days you walk round the garden. He has seen to it with a vengeance. He has done the garden, and done for it. Some persons cannot learn the balance of virtues: they cannot kill a mouse except by burning down the barn. Did I hear you say, "I was faithful, I never connived at evil"? So far so good, but may it not happen that by a bad temper you yourself produced more evil than that which you destroyed? Yield in all things personal, but be firm where truth and holiness are concerned. We must be faithful, lest we incur the sin and penalty of Eli. Be honest to the rich and influential; be firm with the wavering and unsteady; for the blood of these will be required at our hand. Brothers, you will need all the wisdom and grace you can get in order to fulfil your duties as pastors. There is an adaptation to rule men which would seem to be quite absent from certain preachers, and the place of it is supplied by an adaptation to set a house on fire, for they scatter firebrands and burning coals wherever they go. Be ye not like unto them. Strive not, and yet wink not at sin!

Some neglect their obligations as stewards by *forgetting that the Master is coming*. "He will not come *yet*," whisper some; "there are so many prophecies to be fulfilled; and it is even possible that he will not come at all, in the vulgar sense of the term. There is no particular need for us to make haste." Ah, my brethren, it is the unfaithful servant who says, "My Lord delayeth his coming." This belief allows him to put off labour and travail. The servant will not clean the room by daily duty because the master is away, and she can have a great clear up, in the form of a revival, before her Lord arrives. If we would each feel that each day may be our last day we would be more intense in our work. While preaching the gospel, we may some day be interrupted by the blast of the trumpet, and the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." This expectation will tend to quicken our pace. The time is short, our account is near, our Lord is at the door, we must work with all our might. We must not be eye-servants, except in this sense that we labour in the Lord's presence since he is so near.

I am impressed with the rapid flight of time, the swift approach of the last great audit. These annual conferences return so speedily: to some of us it seems only a day or two since that of 1886; the last of them hastens on. I shall soon be giving in the account of my stewardship; or if I should survive for a while others of you may be summoned to meet your Lord; you will soon go home to your Lord if your Lord does not soon come to you. We must work on from hour to hour with our eye upon the audit, that we may not be ashamed of the record which will be found in the volume of the book.

The *reward* of faithful stewards is exceeding great; let us aspire to it. The Lord will make the man who is faithful in a few things to be ruler over many things. That is an extraordinary

passage where our Lord says, "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and he will come forth and serve them." It is wonderful that our Lord has already served us; but how can we comprehend that he will serve us again? Think of Jesus rising up from His throne to wait upon us! "Behold," He cries, "here comes a man who served me faithfully on earth! Make way for him, ye angels, and principalities, and powers. This is the man whom the King delighteth to honour." And to our surprise the King girds Himself and waits upon us. We are ready to cry, "Not so, my Lord." But He must, and will, keep His word. This unspeakable honour He will pay to His true servants. Happy man to have been the poorest and most despised of ministers to be now served by the King of kings!

Beloved brethren, we are bound to go forward, cost us what it may, for we dare not go back: we have no armour for our backs. We believe ourselves to be called to this ministry, and we cannot be false to the call. If I must be a lost soul, let me be lost as a thief, a blasphemer, or a murderer, rather than as an unfaithful steward to the Lord Jesus. This is to be a Judas, a son of perdition indeed. Remember, if any of you are unfaithful, you win for yourselves a superfluity of condemnation. You were not forced to be ministers. You were not forced to enter upon this sacred office. By your own choice you are here. In your youth you aspired to this holy thing, and thought yourselves happy in attaining your desire. Brethren, if we meant to be untrue to Jesus, there was no necessity to have climbed this sacred rock in order to multiply the horrors of our final fall. We could have perished quite sufficiently in the ordinary ways of sin. What need to qualify ourselves for a greater condemnation? This will be a dreadful result if this is all that comes of our college studies, and our burning of the midnight oil in acquiring knowledge. My heart and my flesh tremble while I contemplate the possibility of anyone of us being found guilty of treachery to our charge and treason to our King. May the good Lord so abide with us, that at the last we may be clear of the blood of all men. It will be seven heavens in one to hear our Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

[November 1913]