

Notes of a Sermon.

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(TAKEN BY A HEARER.)

“And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment” – LUKE 7:37-38.-

Here we have a woman: her character is that she is a sinner- – a notorious sinner. She was known as one that lived an immoral life, and was an open transgressor of God’s holy law. She lived in sin and delighted in sin. Sin is so pleasant to the carnal mind, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” Her sins gave her no trouble for a time. When did sin become a burden and a trouble to her conscience? Not until Christ made her a sinner. An arrow of conviction penetrated her heart, and she became alarmed about her never-dying soul. The guilt of sin was in a measure let loose upon her. This turned her conscience -into a hell. This sent her in search of Christ. It was to the blessed Saviour she went for relief.

In the first place, let us consider what this woman did to get Christ, and, in the second place, what Christ did for her.

I. This woman was a sinner. So were all in the city. All were sinners, both through original sin and actual transgressions. But to this poor woman sin became an intolerable burden. She went in search of Christ. Can you, my hearer, say that sin has sent you in search of Him? Remember that one sin unpardoned will cast you to hell for ever. The fire of sin and guilt was burning within this woman, and she came to Jesus for peace and pardon. She left the city in pursuit of Jesus. John Bunyan left the city of destruction with a heavy burden. Your natural state will prove the city of destruction to you if you are not born again. You could not be in a worse state than in a state of nature. This woman was anxious to get rid of Satan as a master, but at one time she was quite in her element in his service. Christ now became precious to her. Is He precious to you? Or is He to you as “a root out of a dry ground?” Do you find sin sweeter than Christ? Did you ever cry with another – “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” Where is He to be found?

(1) Christ is to be found in His own Word. Do you search the Scriptures for Christ? He promised to open the doors to those who knock, and He said “Seek and ye shall find.” Are you anxious to find Christ in His Word? Remember there is a woe against those at ease in Zion. Are you afraid of death? We must all die, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Many found Christ in His Word. The Bible is sweet to God’s people, because they find Christ and His blessings there.

(2) I would ask you to seek for Christ in secret prayer. Pray for salvation. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The poor in spirit are destitute of all good in themselves, so that they go to Christ for every blessing. They have no confidence in the flesh, they are done for ever with their own works. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.” They now look to Christ for salvation, and not to the law.

We believe that when this woman thought of going to Christ for salvation there were many obstacles put in her way, but she overcame them all.

(1) She, had to meet with Simon’s frowns. You see the evil thoughts of his heart toward her (verse 39). The Lord Jesus Christ knew the thoughts of his heart and might have answered him – “I knew you and her both from a past eternity.” Simon and his guests would know her past life, and would feel much offended and displeased at her for disturbing them. She had to meet their

fierce and cold stare, which said as much as – “What do you want here, you ugly, wicked woman?” Well, she didn’t wish to touch anything on his table or anything belonging to him. The dear woman came with a broken heart to see Jesus about her lost soul. She could get no peace, no rest, and “no salvation in any other.” Now, is there any soul here that has a desire to go to Christ for salvation? If so, know for certain that many hindrances will be put in your way. The devil will say – “You are not in the covenant, Christ did not suffer and die for your sins, you are not among the elect, and there is no salvation for you.” If he does not succeed with such arguments, he will change his dress and come to you as an angel of light with arguments of a different kind, as follows: – “There is no hell, you need not fear; continue doing as you have done in the past; you have many good works of your own,” and so on. He is afraid he may lose a prisoner, and he will do all in his power to keep poor sinners from coming to Christ. Remember, his aim is to keep you until you are ripe for hell. O! poor soul, see that you are not kept from Christ by the devil or his agents – wicked men and women.

(2) Was it difficult for her to get into the house where Christ was? Yes, she had a fight with the devil’s first-born – unbelief. Do you ask how she could distinguish the blessed Jesus from the others that sat at meat? Well, we would say that there was a sweet, drawing expression in His beloved face that won her heart and drew her to His blessed feet. “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” Remember, dear soul, that He was constrained to tarry with others. He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and “the express image of his person.” There was something in His countenance that encouraged this dear woman to approach Him. Yes, sinner, there is something in Christ that will encourage His broken-hearted ones to cry after Him and follow Him. Did you ever see anything of His glory? Do you know anything of His people’s joys and sorrows? Are you going to continue in sin and spend your eternity in outer darkness? Christ wishes you, on this solemn Sabbath, to make choice of Him. Oh, see you that you make Mary’s choice, dear friends, and you will have satisfaction in the end. All you will have of this world will soon be over. A few boards of wood and a little cheap linen will be the end of it. Do not make this world your portion.

We find the woman now at Christ’s feet. She is weeping there. Why is she weeping? Because of her sins. Your sins will cause you to weep yet, either in time or eternity. She denied herself, renounced her sins, and shed tears of godly sorrow. Her religion was not the fashionable religion in her day. Her cry was – “Save me, I perish.” Oh, why do you weep so bitterly? “Ah, I have been such a wicked, such an abandoned, sinner.” Her former sins were now made very bitter to her. The arrows of conviction were drinking up her spirit. “Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed!” The tears came like heavy rain, so copiously, as her former sins came to her remembrance, like Job’s messengers coming with sad tidings. The holy law condemned her, the thunders of Mount Sinai were in her ears. “Oh, can I find mercy, can I get pardon?” The more her sins came before her, the heavier did her tears become. “Oh woman, look at ‘the blood.’ There is efficacy there to cleanse from all sin.” “My sins are as scarlet, how can I look up?” The Holy Spirit enlightened her mind in the knowledge of Christ, as if saying – “Come you to the great sacrifice for sin. There is forgiveness in Christ for the chief of sinners, you need not despair.” But the tears are coming heavier and heavier, and Christ’s heart is glad, as if He said, “Oh, I never felt rain so sweet, as this. This is surely tears of repentance,” “He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.” As she wept, she prayed – “Oh may the blood of Jesus come in between me and the guilt of my sins! “Again, she wept when the Spirit gave her a sight of Christ on Calvary’s cross, suffering “the just for the unjust.” She now beholds Him suffering on the accursed tree for her. In her tears there was a mixture of joy and sorrow. Sometimes beams

from the sun would break through the dark clouds. The clouds are disappearing and scattering before the sun. Do you know what it is to weep for joy? She washed His feet with her tears. He washed, and purified her soul in His own blood.

II. Let us now consider what Christ did for her. The Holy Spirit led her to the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel. “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.” “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Christ brings joy and peace to the soul when He takes possession there. How unspeakably sweet and precious are such promises as the following to the broken-hearted soul that has been brought to Christ’s feet! “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” (Isaiah 54:9). Would her tears not be tears of joy as He spoke comfort to her soul? Think of the value of such a portion of truth as this to a soul “sick of love” and longing for reconciliation: – “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them: and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:16,17). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit” (Romans 8:1). Surely, then, her tears would be for joy as her enlightened soul was feeding upon Christ through the Spirit. The spiritual marriage between Christ and this poor woman – now happy woman – was going on in Simon’s house. But, before there could be marriage, both Jesus and the woman had to die. He had to die for sin, and she had to die unto sin. If a much-beloved brother or sister were away for many long years in a foreign land, think of the joy you would have in meeting again your dear brother and sister. Well, you could not compare such a joy to the joy of the soul that could say of Christ – “My beloved is mine and I am his.” Her weeping is entirely different now, as she is now born of God, born of water and the Spirit. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made” her “free from the law of sin and death.” As she found her sins freely pardoned, what a shower of precious tears would fall from her heart and eyes down upon the blessed feet! How unlike the mountains of Gilboa! But God’s children get tears of sorrow as well as tears of joy in this world.

“Thou tears of sorrow giv’st to them
Instead of bread to eat;
Yea, tears instead of drink thou giv’st
To them, in measure great.

Psalm 80:5.

You that will not weep for your sins in time, you will make the floor of hell wet with your tears in eternity. It is time for you, my dear fellow-sinners, to awake and seek Christ. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6).

This ransomed soul is now on fire with love to Him who washed her from her sins in His blood. She is so overcome with His mercy and kindness to her soul that she begins to kiss His feet. “Love is strong as death.” “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song 8:7). The deep river of love in her soul was now overflowing its banks, as if she would say – “I am seeing His matchless glory and beauty. He applied the eye salve to my eyes, and I see Him as altogether lovely. He clothed me with the robe of His righteousness.” The glory of His cross broke in upon her soul, and her kisses were tokens of her intense love to the Beloved. “These are the feet that will soon be nailed to the cross for my sins.” It was loving kisses, not the kisses of a Judas, and, as she kissed His feet, He kissed her soul with kisses of encouragement. As she washed His feet with tears her prayer would be –

“Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me,
I shall be cleansed so;

Yea, wash thou me, and then I shall
Be whiter than the snow.”

Psalm 51:7.

This poor woman’s kisses were real, not like Orpah’s; there was no deception or guile in them. She was now one of God’s family, and had the family kiss.

The woman not only washed His feet with her tears, but also dried or “wiped them with the hairs of her head.” She conferred honour after honour on Christ. The gracious soul cannot do enough for Christ. You will not grudge Him anything you possess. You delight in worshipping Him upon the earth all your days, and you will not find eternity too long to worship and glorify Christ. Grace was now overflowing in this loving woman’s soul. The hairs of her head were the towel she used to wipe the feet of her Redeemer, as if she said: “Though all the hairs of my head were precious diamonds, I would not think them too precious for wiping His dear feet.” She got very near Christ, she embraced Him in the arms of faith and love. Oh, dear friends, do you know anything of this sweet exercise? Can it be said of you that there is no room for blessed Jesus in your hearts? Well, we would say that Christ is worthy of the best place you can offer Him – the heart. “My son, give me thine heart.” See that it cannot be said of you that you give Christ the lips, fine words, and give your heart to the devil. The throat of this generation cries – “Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15). The language of the “higher critics” is – “Away with the fundamental doctrines of His Word.”

The ointment brought in the alabaster box was now poured out. It might be said – “And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (John 12:3). However sweet this odour, it is nothing in comparison to the sweet savour of Christ to every broken-hearted one whom He pardons and cleanses.

“Of aloes, myrrh, and cassia,
A smell thy garments had,
Out of the iv’ry palaces,
Whereby they made thee glad.”

Psalm 45:8.

This believer had the stony heart taken away, and the alabaster box resembled her new heart full of the oil of grace. She was richly anointed with the Holy Ghost, and therefore was at Christ’s feet, worshipping “in spirit and in truth.” There is a sweet odour arising from the broken-hearted of God’s children, wherever they are. The Holy Spirit is poured upon them, and they, from that day forward, recommend Christ. As the dear martyr shouted, when laying down His life in the flames for Christ and His cause – “None but Christ for me; Christ, Christ, none but Christ.” The woman of Samaria had a good word to speak for Christ. And how wonderful! “He never despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted” (Psalm 22:24). “Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee” (Song 1:3). God hears the groans and prayers of “the poor,” such as Cornelius, the greatly beloved Daniel, the unclean leper, &c. But He will never regard the prayer of the hypocrite. We sometimes compare the prayers of God’s children to telegrams sent in great haste, and answers earnestly looked for.

Here we have this woman weeping, washing, wiping, anointing, kissing. She is quite overwhelmed “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” She has a place in His blessed Word. She will never be forgotten. He caused her to be kept among the blessed ones in His book, who loved much and were forgiven much. It is said she kissed His feet; why not His mouth? The Lord’s people must deny themselves while in this world. But when they get home to heaven they will not be kept at His feet, they may then kiss His blessed lips. Moses will not be heard saying,

“Show me thy glory,” he will see Him then “as he is.” Oh, think of His condescension to His servant, Moses, as if He said – “Moses, I will do what I can to accommodate you, but I cannot show you much now, you are frail, and a sight of My glory would be too much for you in your ‘earthly house of this tabernacle’ But you will soon see My glory in heaven.”

Such was this woman’s love to Christ that she could continue many hours at His feet, as if so happy and delighted to be of any service to Christ. Think of the water and towel she used. And, after all, think of His kindness and humility in allowing her to minister to His holy body in any way. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

Read verse 39 and see Simon’s evil thoughts. “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner.” Christ might have answered – “Yes, I know you both, and I knew you both from a past eternity. I know you both in your walk and conversation. You, Simon, expect to be justified by the works of the law, and I say that you are yet in your sins; but this woman whom you despise is justified by faith.” She was one of Christ’s blood-purchased ones, with whom He left the parting blessing – “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Now, in conclusion, we would entreat of you, dear friends, that you would not rest in ease and in sin, but seek the Lord Jesus Christ while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Remember His promise – “He that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:8).

[May 1897]

A Sermon.

By the Rev. JONATHAN RANKEN ANDERSON.

preached in Kirkfield Church, Glasgow, 24th December, 1837.

“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” – Isaiah 1:10.

The visible Church, both in the Jewish and in the Christian dispensations, has ever contained two widely different classes of men; the one whose hearts are right with God, and steadfast in His covenant; the other false hearted and hypocritical. But He who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire, hath always been able to distinguish the one from the other. For, however men may succeed in concealing their formality and deadness from their fellows, they cannot possibly hide it from Him who, with the glance of His all-seeing eye, can penetrate the thickest gloom, and pierce the best wrought covering. And as He thus distinguishes His friends from His enemies, even though they wear the same name, and make the same profession, so He can hold communion with the former, and keep at a distance the latter. In His word, accordingly, there are messages addressed to His own people, and others addressed to persons of an opposite character; and when accompanied by His good Spirit, these messages reach their respective destinations, even though the two classes be mixed up into one body, and exhibit to the eye of man the same general aspect. In the chapter from which the text is taken, the Messiah Himself appears, and describes in very sublime terms the greatness of His might, and the fitness He possessed for His prophetic office, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning: he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” And then, looking at the mass of the Jewish people, and afterwards at the body of professed Christians, he says, “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” We have here to notice:

I. – The character of the person addressed.

II. – The condition he is supposed to be in.

III. – The direction given how to act in this condition.

I. – We have then, in the first place, to notice the character of the person that is addressed: he is one “that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant.”

1. “*He fears the Lord.*” By many this is considered a very common and a very easy attainment; for, in their view, it means only a sober and honest mode of life, as distinguished from gross intemperance and flagrant wickedness. But this is a deep and fatal mistake, which, if not renounced, will conduct the soul down to the gates of destruction. The truth is, that so rare and so difficult is it to fear the Lord, that it is not to be found, no not in the slightest degree, in any unregenerate man, and altogether exceeds the power of a creature to produce it. The account which God gives of men in their natural state is, that “there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

The Lord Himself must come near to the stout-hearted and rebellious sinner, and manifest to him somewhat of His glorious majesty and infinite holiness. By such a visit, the soul is awakened from its atheistical sleep, the veil of pride is torn from the heart, the scales of prejudice are taken from the understanding, and the whole man is roused to contemplate the great sight. For God discovers Himself as the I Am, the incomprehensible, the all sufficient, the eternal God, to whom every knee should bow in holy reverence and every tongue confess in deep humility. He further discovers Himself as the Supreme Law-Giver, and Judge, and Ruler of the creature that is now brought into His presence, and presses upon his conscience the obligations of His

holy, just, and good law. He yet further discovers Himself as the Being against whom the creature hath sinned, and by whom He hath been dishonoured; and therefore as He who is ready to take vengeance on him for his manifold iniquities. By these discoveries the man is filled with great dismay, and feels as if he were ready to drop into a gulf of misery, from which it is impossible he can escape. He is constrained to own that he is guilty, and that he deserves to perish; and he sees that he is in the hands of One against whom it is utterly vain to contend. He therefore submits himself to His sovereign will, and gives himself up into His hands to be disposed of as seems good in His sight. "I have sinned, and what shall I do unto Thee, O Thou preserver of men?"

And now, the Lord begins to impart a new series of discoveries, as wonderfully encouraging and consolatory as the former were awfully afflicting and overwhelming. For, observe, a man never will be brought to fear the Lord by a discovery of the character of God as the Creator, the Law Giver, the Judge, or the Avenger of sin, and the enemy of the sinner. This may produce slavish terror, causing its subject to flee from the Divine presence, or to wish that God did not exist; but it will not generate the filial fear of which the text speaks, which draws the heart to God, and causes it to delight in Him. But the same glorious God manifests Himself as merciful and gracious, as "rich in mercy to all that call upon him," as waiting "to be gracious" to the returning prodigal, as ready to pardon and bless sinners, even the chief, who come unto Him; and thus a ray of hope dawns upon the soul, and the sinner looks for the mercy of God to help him in his time of need. "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

The work we have thus noticed is carried on by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man; and it is in His person, office, and work that the awakened sinner is taught to contemplate the Divine character as at once the just God, and yet the Saviour; and it is at His hands that he receives the spirit of wisdom, power, and love, by whom the views we have glanced at are opened up and applied to the production and maintenance of the principle of the fear of the Lord. By the principle thus implanted, the man is led to worship reverently at the footstool of the heavenly throne; to hearken diligently to the voice of His word, to stand in awe of offending Him, and to labour to do what is pleasing in His sight. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

2. The person is further, characterised as one "that obeys the voice of his servant." He has his mind enlightened in the knowledge of the personal glory of Christ as God-man, at once the Son of God, of the same nature with the Father, and the Son of man, partaker of flesh and blood. He is instructed in His official character as the Servant of the Father, and sees His commission with the seal of supreme authority upon it. And from a discovery of these truths he is led to take his seat at the feet of this great Prophet, and in an humble, docile, and submissive frame of mind to say, "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." The Lord Christ accordingly condescends by the word, read or preached, by the exercise of meditation and prayer, or by other means which He has Himself appointed, to open His lips, and to tell the lowly disciple what He hath seen and heard with His Father. He unfolds to him the immensity of the Divine perfections, till the believer sometimes exclaims in profound admiration and awe, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" He reveals to him the wisdom, holiness, and infallibility of His counsels, till the believer, wrapt in astonishment, cries out, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" He leads him, sometimes by deep and painful exercises, into a further knowledge of the law of God, the enormity of his own sins, and the inveterate nature of his depravity, so that he loathes himself in his own eyes,

because of his abominations. He shews to him His covenant of grace in its immutable basis in the Divine purpose, in its precious blood that cleanses from all sin, in its perfect righteousness, in the obedience unto death of the surety Christ Jesus, in its abundant blessings of grace here, and glory hereafter; and by the discovery the soul is refreshed and exhilarated, and takes up the language of the Psalmist, "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire." He tells him how it becomes him as a believer to walk, the disposition he should cultivate, the temper he should exhibit, the motives by which he should be actuated, and the ends he should pursue; and the believer says in all lowliness of mind, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." He tells him of the trials he is to endure, the dangers he is to encounter, and the afflictions he is to suffer, but cheers him with the promise of His presence, the assurance of His help, and the hope of final victory; and therefore the disciple replies, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

He who thus obeys the voice of Christ, the faithful servant of the Father, is the man who proves that he fears the Lord; and in vain does any man pretend to fear the Lord who does not obey the voice of Christ. For what is the most simple test of reverence for God? Is it not bowing to His revealed will? And what is His will to His people? "Behold I send my angel before you, beware of him, and obey his voice, forsake him not for my name is in him." "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who sent him."

II. – We have, in the second place, to notice the condition in which the person is supposed to be: it is "walking in darkness and having no light." By this remarkable language is denoted in general a state of perplexity and distress; for as liberty and joy are in Scriptures expressed by the term *light*, so bondage and affliction are called darkness. We must, however, carefully distinguish between the *darkness* in which they who fear the Lord and obey His servant may sometimes walk, and that in which the children of this world are said to dwell. For though they be called by the same name, yet in their nature they are essentially different. The children of Israel met with many afflictions in the wilderness, but they never returned to the darkness and servitude of Egypt.

1. The darkness of the people of God is *felt*: they know when they are deprived of the light and left to grope in the darkness. The children of men are insensible to the darkness in which they are enveloped: they think they see their way clearly: they often feel quite satisfied with themselves: they are full of hope, and sometimes of joy. "Now ye say, we see, therefore your sin remaineth."

2. The darkness of the people of God is afflictive; it is felt to be a cause of grief and alarm, nor are they at ease and in comfort till it be dispelled. But the world are full of mirth and cheerfulness; the blessed God is far away, but they do not miss Him; the salvation of Christ is not possessed by them, but they do not feel the want of it; the consolations of the Holy Ghost are not enjoyed by them, but they are not alive to their need of them; and thus it is that the world rejoice when the disciples of Christ have sorrow.

3. The darkness of the people of God is temporary; it is a cloud which sooner or later passes away, and then the light arises upon them in its divine sweetness and power. The darkness of the world is *eternal*: for while the people of God are approaching nearer and nearer to deliverance,

the world are sinking deeper and deeper in guilt and misery, and the darkness of unbelief and sin grows denser and more dense till it is succeeded by the gloom of the second death. For in eternity, as there will be no night to the saved, so there will be no day to the damned. But though the darkness in which true believers may walk is thus essentially different from that of the ungodly world, yet it is far from being agreeable to them. For, first, the perception of divine things is clouded. The things of God are exceedingly lovely in themselves, and to a true believer they contain all which is necessary to his true happiness. For the world offers nothing which can afford suitable exercise to his mind, nor supply satisfactory good to his heart. Let the foolish ones of the earth amuse themselves with the fine sights that are exhibited in the vain show of the world: the man who fears the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of His servant, can get no pleasure from these that will yield true and solid happiness. He has got a new nature, and it pants after the objects of another world altogether; and that world is revealed only by the light of the truth and Spirit of Christ, Let a believer get into the spiritual world, and contemplate any of the objects which it presents, it matters not what it be, he is in his proper element, for there is not an object which does not to him reflect somewhat of the divine glory: even sin, the most odious and destructive thing in the universe, is so exhibited, in the light of Divine justice and holiness and truth, in such a way as to awe and delight and satisfy the believing soul. But there are times when this spiritual scene is to his apprehension wrapt in thick darkness, and he cannot apprehend in its true beauty and grandeur any one of the objects with which it is peopled. In this case his mind is entirely vacant, or rather filled with vain thoughts, and these are as little fitted to fill his understanding as chaff is to allay the cravings of hunger. His soul needs truth, divine saving truth, and if he do not obtain it, he is in darkness. In this case, was the patriarch Job when he said, "O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!"

Secondly, he that walks in darkness and has no light may have his faith in divine things shaken. In the absence of a clear and vivid perception of these he may be upheld by a firm persuasion at once of the reality of their existence, and of the certainty of his interest in them, just as a person in the darkest night may most firmly believe that this city is peopled with inhabitants, though he do not see them. The darkness, however, may so far prevail as to deprive him of any comfortable hope that he is interested in the things that are unseen and eternal. He may be assailed with doubts whether he hath indeed found Christ, the pearl of great price, and obtained in and with Him a title to the heavenly inheritance, and a begun and growing meetness for its enjoyment. Nay, he may come to the conclusion that his past experience has been an illusive dream, and that still he is in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. But even this conclusion, grievous as it may seem, would be tolerable did the soul see the way clear and open to the glorious Saviour, and were it enabled to embrace the invitations of the gospel in their rich and free grace. He may not, however, have this refuge just at hand into which he may flee, but in the darkness that surrounds him may judge that he is cut off for his part, and that there is no hope. For he may at the time be unable to realize Christ as altogether glorious, and able to save to the uttermost, and may see nothing in Him that is excellent or desirable. But there is worse than this: the darkness may continue to thicken around him till he begin to question whether there be any Saviour at all, and to fear that after all the gospel may be a cunningly devised fable. For, when a man cannot realize it to his relief and comfort, the enemy takes occasion to insinuate that there is no such thing, and that it is vain to look to that quarter for help. In many instances, things grow to such a height, that the man begins to doubt the very existence of God, and may be reduced to the gloomiest and most wretched of all conclusions, that "there is no God." In this case, the darkness is deeply distressing, for it not only covers with blackness the present joys of

the soul, but seems to cut off for ever the hope of their returning. To self conceited professors of religion it may appear scarcely credible that any man who fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of His servant, can be brought into such depths; and therefore little sympathy may be expected from such towards those who are visited with this affliction. But, ask the most deeply exercised saints, and they will tell you that this is no strange trial, but that often have they been called to encounter it. The Psalmist seems to have been under the influence of this atheistical temper when he said, “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

In the third place, he that walks in darkness and has no light may be full of fears and perplexities as to the path of duty. For it is the light of Divine truth that he has chosen as his guide in all things, and that we have seen is obscured, and it is by faith he discovers the path which this light points out, and that may be shaken and ready to fail. By these means, he is deprived of that which was wont to make his path plain, and now he is brought to a stand, and knows not to which hand to turn. He may even be like the Egyptians when visited with the plague of darkness: they rose not out of their places during its continuance. The poor believer cannot advance on the way to Zion, nor attend with any comfort or success to his spiritual concerns. He may appear, indeed, to the eye of sense to be active and laborious, but he knows that it is with him a mere bodily exercise, which profits little. He may go through the form of prayer, but the way to the throne of grace is to him barred up, and he cannot enter into the Divine presence. He may listen to the preaching of the Word, but it meets with no cordial response in his heart, and affords no solid satisfaction to his soul. He may associate with those who fear the Lord, and talk with them of the great things of His law, but still he is not what he desires to be, and has not what he desires to enjoy. He is even like a captive shut up in a dungeon, that sees not the light of heaven, that breathes not the pure atmosphere, but is fed with the water of affliction: “I am shut up, and cannot come forth. He hath laid me in the lowest pits, in darkness, in the depths.”

Now, it is hard to conceive how afflicted is the condition of the man who thus walks in spiritual darkness, and has no light. For it is not merely the privation of positive good that he endures, in the light of the Divine countenance, in the absence of Christ, the life, the stay, and the joy of the soul, in the suspension of the sweet communion of the Comforter, the spring of his activity and consolation; but there is also the infliction of positive evil in a barren state of mind, a cold heart, an unprofitable life, a stupid or an accusing conscience, and in the prevalence of every manner of corruption. For darkness is the season in which men are assailed with terrors and dangers and death; and so a season of darkness and desertion to a believer is a time when his enemies take advantage to vex and harass and wound him. “I am a derision to all my people, and their song all the day: he hath filled me with bitterness: he hath made me drunk with wormwood.”

III. – We are thus brought to consider, in the third place, the direction given to the person in this condition, how he is to act. “Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God.” The speaker in the text we have already seen is the Lord Christ, the great Prophet of the Church, who has “the tongue of the learned, that he may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” He is not an unconcerned observer of the afflictions of His people, for “in all their afflictions he is afflicted.” And while he sits by the furnace, and tempers the flame, and controls its operations, He prepares the way for them in due time coming forth like gold seven times tried. “*I have seen, I have seen*” – He says to Moses with great energy of expression – “*I have seen* the affliction of my people Israel, who are in Egypt, and am come down to deliver

them.” And in the text He is introduced as marking the dark and distressed condition of His chosen, and addressing to them the words of counsel and comfort. The simple fact that he condescends to address them, and that in the language of hope, is full of encouragement, and ought to prepare them to listen with interest and attention.

He tells the man who walks in darkness and hath no light to trust in the name of the Lord. For that name is descriptive of all which is necessary to ensure his preservation in the hour of trial, and to accomplish, in the proper season, his deliverance from it. For is he deprived of the light which discloses to his soul the spiritual and heavenly things in which he delights? In the name of the Lord there is a light which can dissipate the thickest gloom and open up to the weakest understanding the treasures of Divine wisdom and love. Is he deprived of all evidence of his interest in Christ and His great salvation; and is he therefore filled with despondency and fear? In the name of the Lord there is light to clear up this important matter and to animate him with good hope, through grace. Is he perplexed with doubts as to the ability and readiness of Christ to receive him? In the name of the Lord there is light to set before him the all-sufficiency of Christ to save, with such clearness and power as to overcome all his doubts, and to confirm his faith in the word of Divine testimony, that He is able to save to the uttermost. Is he involved in the horrible gloom of Atheism, and does the universe appear to him wrapt in a darkness blacker than death? In the name of the Lord there is power to dispel this awful darkness, and to exhibit the glory of His Being in a light the most convincing and establishing. Is he bewildered as to the dealings of Divine Providence, the state of the Church of Christ, or the path of his own duty? In the name of the Lord there is treasured up all that is needful to supply his wants as to these matters.

For, brethren, what is the name of the Lord but the Lord Himself, in the peculiar view of a revealed or manifested God? And can any one for a moment doubt that there is in Him everything which His people can require, in the different situations in which they may be placed? To doubt of this is to sap the foundations of all religion, and to cut off the hope of all creatures. For, in the infinite sufficiency of the Divine nature lies the stability and happiness, yea the very existence of angels and men. And this is the principal view in which the name of the Lord is to be contemplated by the man who walks in darkness and has no light. But along with this, he must remember that this name is immeasurably exalted above the possibility of being affected by the changes of time. The believer's feelings may vary, his views may alter, and even his principles may be shaken. He may thus see what he was wont to confide in pass away, and his soul assume the appearance of a desolate waste, without one prop on which he may lean. But, though the desolation were real, not apparent; though it were permanent, not temporary; the name of the Lord remains unsullied: His majesty is not impaired: His beauty is not tarnished: His greatness is not diminished: His power is not weakened: His mercy is not dried up: His truth doth not fail; and therefore in the midst of the deepest affliction may the believer exclaim, “God lives, and blessed be my rock.”

Now, as he is thus called upon to trust in the name of the Lord as all-sufficient for his help, and independent of time and circumstances, so he is further directed to “stay himself upon his God.” The glorious Being, whose name has just been referred to, has condescended to establish a peculiar relation between Himself and those who fear Him and obey the voice of His servant. He takes them to be His people, and manifests Himself to them as their God. The basis of this relation is the sovereign and eternal purpose of Divine love in Christ Jesus, by whose mediation and work it is fully carried into effect, and this purpose, resting as it does on the glory and all-sufficiency of the eternal I Am, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is as firm and immutable as the

Divine nature itself. The ground, therefore, on which the believer in darkness is commanded to stay himself, is substantially the same as that on which he is commanded to trust, with this most important addition, that the whole fulness of Godhead is seen to be engaged for his protection, and safety, and happiness, and that in a covenant which shall never be dissolved. And hence, He who in one passage appears as declaring that His name is “I am, that I am,” and in another thus speaks, “The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you; this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

How suitable and sufficient is this support to the believer that walks in darkness! For, as it is one which is not, and cannot be affected by any darkness that can arise – for “the darkness and the light are both alike to him” – so, observe, it is one to which, in the very greatest extremity, the believer may repair, and from which he may derive seasonable relief. The darkness may be such that he can see no manifestation of the Lord his God; for manifestations are His acts, and therefore clearly distinguished from Himself, and moreover, can be apprehended only in particular circumstances. But no darkness can affect His glorious being and fulness, and therefore on this immovable rock may the soul repose, till the gloom of desolation, and distress, and danger pass away. The floods of temptation and affliction may lift up their voice; the waves of tribulation may dash with tremendous fury; the heavens may be clothed with sackcloth, and the earth may reel like a drunken man; the whole system of created things, temporal and spiritual, may be awfully convulsed, and appear as if they were ready to pass away. In the midst of the commotion may the soul rest with entire confidence on the Lord, for He that is on high, is higher than the great sea billows, and in Him the believer is as safe as Noah was in the Ark from the waters of the deluge. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

And to trust in the Lord in the midst of darkness is most honouring to Him. We grant that it is difficult to exercise this confidence in such circumstances, for the darkness may not only be very deep and distressing, it may appear to be sent by God Himself, and the believer may have to say, “He hath cast me out of his sight.” Now, to trust to a Being whose throne is covered with clouds, whose wrath seems to wax hot against us, who not only lets enemies fight against us and prevail, but who stretches out His own hand to afflict, oh! here brethren is a noble triumph of faith. And how does faith come up to this? Why, it deliberates with itself thus – The dark clouds that I see gather around me, from whatever quarter they come, are but the works of the Lord; it is not on them I have cast anchor but upon His name, His self-existent, immutable, and eternal being; and that upon a covenant which is built upon the Rock of Ages. Let the darkness therefore be increased a thousand fold, let the blackness of hell encompass me, I know that Jehovah remains the same; He shines in transcendent glory, and beauty, and majesty, and therefore my eternal interests are unaffected by the thick darkness. He indeed seems to set His terrors in array against me; He appears as if He would swallow me up, but He has told me to trust in Him, and he cannot deny Himself. “Though he slay me, therefore, yet will I trust in him.” “I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.”

APPLICATION.

1. We here see who they are that fear the Lord. Not every one that makes a profession to that effect; for many say they fear Him who give mournful evidence that they are totally destitute of that holy principle, and the inconsistency of these people is most glaring, if they had only eyes to

see it. For, in one and the same breath they will lay claim to the fear of God, and confess that they are not saints or religious persons. From this it is plain that their fear of the Lord is a very different thing from that which is spoken of in Scripture, for in this infallible record it is one of the most common designations of the true people of God; the people of prayer; the people of holy lives and heavenly conversation; and they who are not of this character are charged with having no fear of God. We know that it is very mortifying to the pride of the carnal heart, to admit that a man has no religion at all, and do what we will, and say what we may, people will continue to flatter themselves that they have some little religion, even though they do not make so much work about it as many. What can we do but pity the delusion of such persons, and plead that God would convince them of their error before it be too late. For never will a man seek the fear of the Lord in right earnest till he be convinced that he is an entire stranger to it.

2. We further learn from this passage that those who fear the Lord, and obey the voice of His servant, may sometimes be in great perplexity and distress, and that too not for a short but even for a long period; they may walk in darkness and have no light. The causes of this are very various. The Lord sometimes afflicts them in His sovereign pleasure, for the glory of His grace. So was it with Job who was brought into deep darkness, though no particular crime is laid to his charge. He may afflict them in wrath against the church generally, and we take it that much darkness is at present experienced on this account. The church is overrun with a set of formal and dead professors, who have no more life in them than the boards they sit upon. And these come before the Lord as His people come, and pretend to worship as His people worship, but they are an offence to the Holy One of Israel; their services are an abomination in His sight. Let them not say, if they get no good in the house of God, they can do no harm: this is a mistake, they do harm to themselves, for by sleeping under the word of life, or dreaming with their eyes open, they get inwardly hardened, and they do harm to God's people; for they are the cause of the withholding of the blessing as Achan was. We know from bitter experience that there is a great withholding of the Spirit of God in our public assemblies, and the children of God go mourning over their leanness when they ought to be rejoicing in the abundance of His goodness. And one cause of it, we believe, is, that the house of prayer is very much a house of merchandise. But another cause of the darkness with which they who fear the Lord are afflicted is their own sins: they wander from their chief good, and are engrossed with the world: they are alienated from Christ, and full of their own spirit: they neglect secret duties, or superficially perform them; and thus they grieve the Holy Spirit, and bring upon their souls darkness and sorrow. "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face, in their affliction they will seek me early."

3. We see hence that even when they walk in darkness and have no light, whatever be the cause of it, they are not forgotten, nor forsaken by the Lord Christ. He does not, indeed, appear to their spiritual sense, and this is a principal aggravation of their distress; for what is tempest or gloom to the soul that has Christ along with it? He may even appear to be asleep, as He was in the ship with His disciples, and insensible to the dangers that surround them. But, in truth, He is awake to their condition, and concerned for their interests. His eyes are upon their "ways, and he seeth all their goings," and even in the midst of the darkness may they hear His voice directing them how to comfort themselves in the time of trial. He does not tell them to be contented with the darkness, knowing they might suffer much worse. He does not tell them to do what they can to get out of it. He does not tell them to apply to men and means for relief. No. He bids them take refuge in the name of the Lord, and in the exercise of faith look for help from its immense and unfailing treasures. But, it may be asked, how is a man to trust in this name who is perhaps groping in the darkness of Atheism? We answer, just by setting this name in opposition to the

suggestions of the devil, and maintaining that it cannot be that there is no God; and we put it to you, Whose voice ought to prevail, that of the father of lies, or that of the Faithful and True Witness? The devil says "Despair," Christ says "Trust," the devil says "Doubt," Christ says "Stay yourselves upon God." Now, look to Christ's Word, and He who gave the Word will give strength to apprehend and make use of it. Let those who are in darkness but take up the words of Christ and put them to the test, and they will find that here indeed He has spoken a word in season.

4. We must not conclude, however, without adverting shortly to the case of those who are not immediately addressed in the text. To them there may appear no great distinction between themselves and the people of God; but to the blessed Redeemer it seems otherwise, for He spies out His people, let them be ever so closely mixed up with others, and sends to them by His good Spirit a word of consolation and hope. To this word, however, you have no right who do not possess the character we have described, and, indeed, to you it will appear of little use, for not being in the situation to which it is applicable you know nothing of its value. But Christ has a word for you too. Oh that you would incline your ear and hear it, for it is your life. "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings." "If thou wilt not fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God, then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful."

[June 1897]

A Sermon

by the Rev. ALEXANDER MACRAE, Kames, Tighnabruaich.

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” – John 16:8.

These are words addressed by Christ to His disciples shortly before His passion. They have as yet little understanding of the eternal verities about which He had spoken to them. They are sad and downcast. They are sorrowful and miserable, for they do not conceive how it can be to their advantage to lose the bodily presence of Christ. He, however, assures them that He will not leave them comfortless. He promises to send them the Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who shall lead them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance whatsoever He said unto them. He promises to give them His spiritual presence, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” In the midst of the many trials and sufferings that they will be called upon to endure for Christ’s sake, they shall be upheld by the strong consolations of the Holy Ghost. He tells them that they shall be put out of the synagogues, and men shall be so much under the influence of the prince of darkness as to think that in killing them they shall be doing God service. But they shall not be forsaken, they shall not be left disconsolate. He shall send the Comforter to them, whose prerogative it is to minister heavenly comfort and consolation to those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. He will not only comfort the people of God, but He will also “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

I. – Christ speaks of a certain Person, “He.” We shall for a little enquire who this Person is.

God the Father, to whom the plan of redemption is ascribed, is represented as bestowing upon His people two gifts of infinite value and preciousness. He hath, in an everlasting covenant, bestowed the gift of his only begotten Son to accomplish, in the fulness of time, redemption for the objects of His love. He is the unspeakable gift of the Father. In Him truth met with mercy; righteousness and peace have kissed mutually. Without His obedience unto death, vicarious sufferings, and triumph over death and the grave, all hope of salvation would for ever be cut off. But it is equally true that we cannot be saved without the effectual and saving application to our souls of the redemption procured by Him in the obedience and sufferings of His life and death. We regret that the absolute necessity of the application of redemption is, to an alarming extent, overlooked nowadays. We may speak about the love of the Father in giving the Son, we may dwell upon the exhibition Christ has given of His love in obeying, suffering, and dying the accursed death of the cross; but what shall redemption accomplished avail us, if it be not savingly applied to us by the Holy Ghost? The coming of the Holy Ghost to take of Christ’s, and shew it unto us, is absolutely necessary for our salvation. In the plan of redemption, the Father is represented, as bestowing the gift of the Spirit upon His people to quicken and sanctify them, so that He is no less the gift of the Father than the Son is, who died for them and rose again. As entrusted with the work of applying redemption, He is spoken of in the words of our text, “When He is come.”

There are not a few who have had the unsanctified boldness to deny the personality of the Holy Spirit. Many have regarded Him as a mere influence or energy without a distinct personal subsistence. But if this passage lays emphasis on, or gives prominence to one doctrine more than another, it is the doctrine of His distinct personality. The whole Word of God represents Him as having a distinct and necessary subsistence in the undivided and indivisible essence of the Godhead. In the Godhead there is a unity of essence; but in that unity there is a distinction of Persons. The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the other Persons by personal properties that are peculiar to Him. He proceedeth from the Father and the Son; but with them He is equal in all

essential perfections. He is thus a divine Person. He is an object of worship, praise, and adoration, so that to Him all divine perfections are ascribed.

1. He is omnipresent, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? . . . If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." All in heaven, in hell, and on earth are at once within His omnipresence. His gracious presence is a different thing. Without this presence the Lord's people feel that they are utterly powerless and hopeless. After it they vehemently long; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Moses earnestly prayed for it, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." In secret, at the family altar, in the public ordinances of His appointment, in contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, and in the performance of all their duties, they need His gracious presence. By it they are comforted and strengthened, so that "they will not be afraid though ten thousands of people should set themselves against them round about." Without it they are in darkness, in distress, discouraged, and haunted with many fears, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled."

2. He is omniscient. "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." His absolute knowledge of the secret counsels of eternity, Christ shows in the words, "He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak." He reveals the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world, and which none of the princes of this world knew, so that "the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." An infinite mind only can comprehend the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God as unfolded in redemption as well as in the works of creation and providence.

The riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus are a shoreless ocean. There is a height, a depth, a length, and breadth that no finite mind can ever comprehend. It is in the measure in which the Spirit, who searches the deep things of God, reveals them to His people that they can be understood. And as "the things of God" infinitely transcend reason, the natural man cannot receive them. He regards them as foolishness; and because they are spiritually discerned, he cannot know them. "The world by wisdom knew not God." This is enough to show how utterly unwarrantable and unscriptural the position of those is, who hold that man has yet a knowledge of God and of duty. It is by the inward illumination of the Spirit only that any can have, in the smallest degree a saving knowledge of "the things of God."

3. He is the Spirit of truth. The whole Word of God is given by inspiration of Him. "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." By a supernatural influence of the Spirit on their minds they were rendered fit organs for infallibly communicating the mind and will of God. Their thoughts and words were subject to His divine influence. Yet, they acted intelligently and spontaneously; for in delivering this "sure word of prophecy," their self-consciousness was not suppressed neither were their faculties suspended. They spake as the Spirit gave them utterance. They were influenced and infallibly guided by Him, so that His inspiration equally extends to every word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; for no part of Scripture can be more inspired than another. The Church of Christ in this age is specially called upon to emphasise this fundamental doctrine of truth. Many of the Churches have already abandoned it, and the result is that they are like a ship in mid ocean without compass or rudder, tossed about with every wind that blows. A vain and silly pride influences the mind of not a few that finds expression in destructive criticism of the Word of God. We live in a time that calls for steadfast and unflinching adherence to this fundamental article of our faith. The inspired word is the medium by which the Spirit ministers

comfort to His people. "This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me," so that as He is the Spirit of truth, He is also the Comforter.

4. He is here represented as coming. It does not mean that the Spirit was not given till the exaltation of Christ. He was the exclusive author of regeneration under the old as He is under this present dispensation. All the saints, who lived under the dispensation that has passed away, were His temples. Many of them had Him as the Spirit of inspiration; but they all had Him as the Spirit of grace and supplications. So David prayed, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." The eleven disciples were subjects of His saving and gracious operations. He dwelt in them from the moment in which they were called effectually. What then can the meaning of the words be, "And when he is come?"

(1) The ministration under which the Church had hitherto been was the ministration of condemnation and death. These words have respect to the ministration of the Spirit which was to excel the former ministration in glory. On the exaltation of Christ, the Spirit was to descend in larger and richer measure than He ever descended before. The disciples themselves were commanded to tarry at Jerusalem till they should be endued with power from on high. They needed Him not only to create them anew in Christ Jesus, but also to fit and qualify them for unfolding the mysteries of the kingdom of God. On the day of Pentecost the words of our text were partly fulfilled when He descended in an extraordinary and visible manner.

(2) As the ministrations of the Spirit will continue to the end of time, these words shall not be completely fulfilled until the last of the lost sheep is brought within the fold. They are fulfilled in some in every generation. But have they been fulfilled in us? In other words, has He come to convince *us* of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment? This leads us to consider the functions discharged by Him.

II. The functions discharged by Him, as here represented, are threefold, "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The original words signify, "Will *convince* the world;" and for this rendering we have a preference.

1. He will convince the world of sin. All in a state of sin and wrath are here named "the world." "The whole world lieth in sin and wickedness." They are the abject vassals of Satan, "the god of this world." Of their sins they all shall most assuredly be convinced – some in time and others in eternity. "Be sure your sin will find you out." The arrows of a harrowing conviction shall eternally stick fast in the consciences of lost men and angels, so that "the smoke of their torment shall ascend for ever and ever." But the convictions of sin to which our attention is here directed are such as evidence the beginning of a work of grace in the soul. The Holy Spirit, in His saving operations, convinces the sinner of three particular sins.

(1) He convinces him of actual sin. This is sin in thought, in word, and in deed. All sin is a transgression of the law of God, so that it is by the law there can be knowledge of sin. There is thus a certain relation in which the law and sin stand to each other; for "sin is not imputed when there is no law." The law is the instrument by which the Spirit produces true conviction. It enters into the heart and conscience armed with a terrible denunciation of wrath against the sinner. It is in its light that he now beholds the innumerable number of his transgressions. His iniquities are gone over his head, and the favourable opinion he before entertained of his condition immediately dies. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He now feels that he has to do with a law that is infinitely pure, holy, and spiritual. He realises that it binds him to obey its precepts and to endure its penalty. Responsibility for all his actions is brought home upon him, and he sees that his inability to meet the law's requirements does not extenuate his guilt but only aggravates it. The law has as much right as ever to demand a perfect obedience. It

will not relax one iota of its demands. He feels that it sits in judgment not only upon his outward actions, but upon his inward thoughts. It “pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.” His heart indeed fails him as his iniquities take such hold upon him that he cannot look up, and beholds the face of an angry God in the mirror of the infinite holiness of His law, while His incensed justice demands the sentence of death pronounced upon him to be immediately carried out. He shews him all things that ever he did.

(2) He convinces him of original sin. He has already met with streams of sins in number numberless. Alongside of them he is by degrees led on, until he ultimately reaches the fountainhead itself. That fountainhead is original sin. Now he beholds his connection with the first Adam, and learns by painful experience how he became involved in the guilt of his first transgression. “By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” He is thus convinced that any want of conformity to the law is sin. Shapen as he was in iniquity, and conceived in guiltiness and sin without a hair’s breadth of conformity to the law of God, what could he say, though he should, on drawing the very first breath of life, be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? He would for ever have to acknowledge the justice of God; for in His sight shall no man, destitute of perfect moral rectitude, be justified. Apart altogether from actual sins. His people feel that original sin is sufficient ground for eternal condemnation.

(3) He convinces of the sin of unbelief. Christ mentions particularly this sin, “Of sin, because they believe not on me.” If he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, how utterly impossible it is for him to escape the vengeance of everlasting punishment, who, through unbelief, treads under foot the Son of God, counts the blood of the everlasting covenant an unholy thing, and does despite unto the Spirit of grace? It is a most God dishonouring sin; yea, it makes Him a liar. It will have none of the gracious invitations of the Gospel. The sinner disdainfully rejects the proposals of peace and of reconciliation God makes to him on the ground of the rich provision made, in sovereign grace, in Christ Jesus. Unbelief is his crowning sin. Wisdom cries without and she utters her voice in the streets; but against her charming notes he stops his ear like the adder. Salvation stands at his very door; but the iron bar of unbelief firmly fastened in it refuses it admission. Many are thus lost, and they shall lie for ever under a severer condemnation than the heathen themselves. The deadly nature of the sin of unbelief might well be described in the language of the women of old, “Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands.” If the sinner felt the condemnation of the law to have been awful, he now feels the condemnation of rejecting Christ in the free offer of the gospel to be unspeakably more so. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” And it is by processes such as these he comes to know that saving faith is the gift of God.

2. He will convince of righteousness.

(1) He convinces the sinner not only of the righteousness of the action of God the Father, as the supreme Judge in passing sentence of death, but also in executing that sentence upon him at once. He deserves to endure for ever the strokes of vindictive justice. He does not experience this till after he is convinced of sin, so that prior to conviction of righteousness there must necessarily be conviction of sin. He is arraigned before the bar of his own conscience; and, in acknowledgment of the righteousness of this procedure, he is compelled to subscribe his amen. For his sins committed against a Being of infinite goodness and mercy, of absolute purity and unspotted holiness, he deserves to be eternally cast away from His presence and from the glory of His power. His mouth is stopped; for he is found guilty before God. He is thus convinced of

the righteousness of God in immediately inflicting upon him the whole penalty attached to disobedience.

(2) He convinces him of the insufficiency of his own righteousness. He is actively employed in going about to establish a righteousness of his own with a view to merit salvation at the hand of God from it. Still clinging to his legal righteousness he cherishes the delusive hope that, by his so-called good works, he can himself make up the breach effected between him and God. How many there are who stumble on this rock and fall into eternal perdition! But as a deeper sense of the inflexibility and the requirements of the law of God is given him, his delusive hope gradually fades away, and ultimately he is convinced that the best of his actions would suffice to condemn him for ever. They all bear the stamp of imperfection. The law is perfect and will accept of no imperfection. It is exacting and stringent in its demands; and his righteousness it condemns as imperfect and polluted. It is as a filthy rag. That in which he formerly confided leaves him now exposed to the condemnation and curse of the law, so that he may as well hope to cross the Atlantic on a mere blade of grass as to think that he can be saved on the ground of his personal or inherent righteousness. It is insufficient, and, therefore, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

(3) When his whole hope of salvation by the works of the law is completely cut off, another door of hope is opened up by a revelation made to him of the all-sufficiency and all-suitability of the righteousness of Christ. It is not the righteousness of His claims as the Messiah merely, or His righteousness as man that he is now convinced of, but of His righteousness as the God-man. It is within view of the awful and solemn realities of the cross that he beholds it. The law arrests the Surety. He obeys its precepts and endures its penalty. He magnifies it and makes it honourable by meeting the utmost extent of its requirements. The furbished sword of vindictive justice is unsheathed. It smites the Shepherd, and in His blood it is infinitely and eternally satisfied. Here Christ makes an end of sin, finishes transgression, makes reconciliation for iniquities, and brings in an all-suitable righteousness. But it is one thing to behold its all-suitability; it is another thing to have it made over to one's self. How can the sinner receive it? How can it become his own? His hand is withered and he cannot lay hold of it. Here he lies like the impotent man who said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." He felt the strength of unbelief in him from which he could not deliver himself. He felt his absolute need of saving faith which he himself could not work in him. But what he needed he received, as Christ said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." So it is here. The sinner is utterly helpless, and yet for his helplessness he is himself responsible. It is as he lies in this state of extreme helplessness that, by an act of divine power exercised towards him, the withered hand is stretched forth, and instantly he is enabled to hold Christ, in his salvation and righteousness, in the embrace of faith. If ever there was an act of grace and power exercised by God, he felt it to have been peculiarly exercised here. He is now thoroughly convinced that salvation is the gift of God as well as the faith wrought by the Holy Ghost in His people through the instrumentality of His inspired word. Saving faith then is the hand by which he receives the righteousness of Christ imputed to him in justification. The Father, the law, justice, and the sinner's own conscience are infinitely satisfied with it; and, therefore, Christ says, "I go to my Father, and ye see me no more," that is, in a state of humiliation.

(4) But here he receives another view of the righteousness of God. Can the sentence of condemnation passed upon him be recalled without dishonour to any of the divine perfections? It can; and here God the Father acts in infinite righteousness. In the Gospel he beholds the righteousness of God in acquitting the guilty sinner, his acquittal is effected in strictest justice;

for there can be no injustice with God. Without a sufficient satisfaction to justice, without an atonement of infinite value, He could acquit none. But in Christ, “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” He is the end of the law for righteousness. Therefore, on the ground of the imputed righteousness of Christ, the Father, in the exercise of His judicial functions, wondrously exhibits the glory of His righteousness in pronouncing the condemned sinner justified, and when He justifies, who can any more condemn him? He frequently condemns himself; but he shall never again, if once justified, come under the condemnation of the law. His salvation is thus secured by the conjoint action of the three Persons to whom the glory of it shall be ascribed for ever and ever.

3. He will convince of judgment. Here an all-important case in law is to be disposed of. Judgment is to be pronounced upon it. The presiding Judge is God the Father. The question of who now is the sinner’s rightful lord is to be settled, for “other lords besides Thee have had dominion over us.” The prince of this world claims him as his lawful captive. He advances the plea that he voluntarily surrendered himself to him and that in justice he was handed over to him. Christ, on the other hand, claims him as his peculiar and lawful possession. He advances the plea that He engaged for him in an everlasting covenant, obeyed the law, satisfied justice, died and rose for him, and, moreover, in death bruised the head of the serpent, so that on lines of strictest justice He lawfully despoiled him of his prey. “Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross.” Law and justice – the one fulfilled and the other satisfied – adduce their testimony in favour of the claims advanced by Christ. The case goes against the prince of this world; for the prey is in infinite righteousness taken from the mighty. Judgment is pronounced against the mighty, so that now Christ brings forth judgment into victory. The enemy is cast out and adjudged to everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire. He was judged in the counsels of eternity when he had as yet no being but in the purpose of God. He was judged in every step Christ took in His obedience and sufferings unto death. In death He perfected judgment by the overthrow of Satan, according to the announcement He Himself made, “Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” When Christ sprinkled the mercy seat with His own blood, Satan was judged in the court of heaven; and when the Holy Spirit sprinkles the blood of Christ upon the heart and conscience of His people, he is judged in the court of their conscience. “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Christ thus proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, so that those whom He makes free are free indeed.

In conclusion, consider the absolute necessity of knowing experimentally the functions discharged by the Holy Ghost in His regenerating influences. He convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Beware of imbibing the loose, superficial, and unscriptural views of the new birth that are so prevalent in this ungodly generation. Seek to know the saving operations of the Spirit by experience, and be not satisfied with an outward appearance of godliness while you may be ignorant of its power in your heart. Happy eternally shall he be who receives an experimental knowledge of the Spirit’s gracious operations in convincing of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Notwithstanding all the fears with which he may now be frequently overwhelmed, he shall yet be publicly adjudged to everlasting blessedness. But inconceivably miserable shall he be for ever and ever who passes from time to eternity in ignorance of the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost; for, in the presence of men and angels, he shall be sentenced to everlasting punishment. The worm of a gnawing conscience shall never die, neither shall the fire be ever quenched.

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A Sermon.

(REPRINTED FROM THE WORKS OF CHRISTOPHER LOVE.)

“But rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” – MATTHEW 10:38.

The observation you may remember from these words, is this, That the consideration of this, that God hath absolute authority over men and women to cast their souls into hell, should work in the hearts of His own people an awful fear of God.

In the prosecution of which, I have gone over seven queries already; I now proceed to the eighth in order, which is this,

Query 8. Whether the torments of hell are eternal or no? whether they shall last for ever, or whether they shall have an end? And herein speaking of this, I shall first resolve it in the general, and then answer it more particularly.

1. In general, that the torments of the damned are eternal torments. And to prove this, I shall give you both Scripture and reason. For Scripture, in Matthew 18:8, there the fire is called unquenchable fire; and in Jude verse 7 it is called eternal fire, that torments the wicked; and in Matthew 25:6, they are called everlasting torments, which shall last for ever. And in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, everlasting destruction; they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord; and in Daniel 12:2, they shall be put into everlasting contempt. Now put all these together, unquenchable fire, eternal fire, everlasting punishment, everlasting destruction, and everlasting contempt, and these Scriptures will clearly evidence, that the torments of the damned must be everlasting torments.

But now for reasons to prove this; I shall name a few.

1. These torments must be eternal; because the justice of God, which they have wronged by their sins, can never be satisfied. But till the justice of God be satisfied, the wicked must be tormented (Luke 16: 28). The wicked shall be in hell, till they have paid the utmost mite. Now if he cannot pay God his due, and make God amends for the sins he hath done, he must so long lie in hell. But it is impossible for a wicked man to pay his utmost mite, to satisfy God for what he hath wronged Him; therefore Jesus Christ, who is God as well as man, must come down in the elect's stead to make God amends for the wrong they have done Him in Adam, and by their sins upon earth; and for this reason the torments of the damned must be eternal. I have read a story of Tiberius Caesar, that being incensed against an offender in his court, the offender petitioned to the emperor, that his punishment might be hastened, that he might know to what he should trust. The emperor returns this answer “O man, I am not yet friends.” Why beloved, thus saith God, wicked men they wrong God's justice, and they wrong God's kindness, and they wrong God's authority, and will not be subject to his commands. Now wicked men they expect their torments should soon end. No, saith God. He answers them as Tiberius did his malefactor, I have not yet restored you to favour; you and I are not yet friends, you have not made me amends for the wrong you have done Me; therefore you must yet suffer.

2. Wicked men will sin to all eternity; therefore their torments must be eternal. As long as there is sin in a man, the Lord will torment that man; for sin and punishment cannot be severed, sin is like oil, and God's wrath like fire. As long as you cast oil upon fire, the fire cannot cease burning; as long as sin is in a man's nature, a man cannot be free from suffering. “The smoke of their torments shall ascend for ever and ever” (Revelation 14:11). The wicked sin in hell for ever, and therefore for ever shall be punished; their cursings are their hymns, howlings their tunes, and blasphemies their ditties; there the wicked blaspheme God that made them to condemn them to hell eternally (Revelation 16:11,19,21). “Being cursed of God, they curse God again.” There they blaspheme his justice, because he judged them, his wrath, because they feel it; there they

condemn his mercy, because they did not taste of those mercies; and there they will curse the blood of Christ, because that blood did save thousands, and not save them. Hell is made up of nothing but blasphemies and sins; there they do everlastingly sin against God; and therefore everlastingly shall be tormented by Him.

3. The godly shall be in everlasting joy, therefore the wicked shall suffer eternal torments, their condition shall be quite contrary one to another; the torments of one shall last as long as the joys of the other. As the one is for the glory of God's grace, so the other is for the glory of his justice. The wicked in hell continually sin against God, yet they have never a heart to repent them of the sins they commit against God, therefore for ever must they be punished. If men go on in sin, and have no heart to repent, God must go on in punishing. For God will go on in punishing so long as man goes on in sinning impenitently. It is the speech of an author, the damned shall still grieve but it shall be for their punishment, they shall never be converted in a way of pardon, or a way of grace. And thus far I have spoken in general.

But now in particular, which will more illustrate and evince the matter. And here I shall show you, that everything that is conducive any way to the torments of the damned, is eternal, and therefore the torments must be eternal. And I entreat you, lend me your attention a little, to go over every sad subject to you. I shall comprise all under eight heads.

1. The God that damns a wicked man is an eternal God, therefore the punishment must needs be eternal. As long as there is a God, so long there shall be a hell, saith Chrysostom. "Who can stand before the everlasting burnings?" (Isaiah 33:14). God is a God from everlasting, burning wicked men: He is so called, because to everlasting God will burn and torment ungodly men. So, "The commandments of the everlasting God" (Romans 16:26). Now, if that God be an everlasting God that torments the wicked, their torments must last as long as God is, and so be everlasting torments. Mr. Bolton, upon this subject, hath this expression, "Suppose all the mountains of the earth were mountains of sand, and many more mountains still added thereto, till they reach up to heaven, and a little bird should once in every thousand years take one sand of this mountain, there would be an innumerable company of years pass over before that mass of sand would be consumed and taken away, and yet this time would have an end; and it would be happy for man, if hell were no longer than this time." But this is man's misery in hell – he shall be in no more hope of coming out after he has been there millions of years than he was when he was first cast in there; for his torments shall be to all eternity, without end, because the God that damns him is eternal.

2. The fire that torments wicked men is eternal fire, "They suffered the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). So, Isaiah 33:33; 66:24. And, if so, then the torments must needs be eternal also.

3. The prison that receives wicked men, is an eternal prison, it is such a prison as shall never fall to ruin, as shall never be broken down, and digged through by thieves; it is a prison that shall shut you in, out of which you shall never escape (Jude 6). Hell is called everlasting chains of darkness. If you are in the dark, you know not which way to go; if you are bound in chains of darkness, you are out of hopes of escaping; and this sets forth the condition of hell, that if you are once in, you cannot get out. It is therefore called a bottomless pit. If a man be once sinking, he shall never cease till he fall to the bottom: so it is in hell, if you are once shut in there, you shall never come forth.

4. The worm that gnaws the conscience of wicked men, it is an eternal worm (Isaiah 66:24) . "There the worm shall never die " (Mark 9:44). Now, this worm is no natural worm, such as gnaw upon men's flesh in the grave, but it is the strivings of conscience, and the accusations of conscience; this is the worm that shall still gnaw, and eat out the peace of man. The heathen

themselves, though they had no Scripture, yet by the light of nature they had a glimpse of this. I have read in Virgil, an heathen poet, that he speaks of one Tytius, that had a vulture every day gnawing in his liver, and in the night it was repaired and made up again, that so the vulture might feed upon the liver the next day; and thus they made a resemblance of hell, and of the gnawing of conscience there. This vulture, thy conscience, shall eat out thy peace, and torment thee with thoughts of terror, and this thou shalt have till time shall be no more. Now put all these together, the God, the prison, the fire, and the worm eternal; the torments must needs be eternal also.

5. The loss of God, and glory, and Jesus Christ, is an eternal loss. You know when friends part, though it be but for a while, their very parting provokes tears; but if they part, never to see each other upon earth, what floods of sorrow doth their parting cause! When thou art a-dying, thou art departing not for a time, but for ever; thou bidst an everlasting adieu to God and Christ, and all the saints among whom thou livest here in company, thou bidst them farewell, never to see them more, never to enjoy society with them more. Thou art to be cast into a dungeon of darkness, never to see the sun; into a bottomless pit, never to come out; into a society of devils, never to be with Christ and His saints. Your loss is an irrecoverable loss. "You shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but you shall be shut out thence." Your loss will be an everlasting loss, therefore needs must your torments be everlasting torments.

6. Sin, the cause of hell torments, is everlasting, therefore the torments must be eternal also. Put but the cause, and the effect must be; take away the cause, and the effect will cease. Seeing sin that is the cause of hellish torments lasts for ever, wicked men shall to all eternity blaspheme God in hell, blaspheme his justice, and blaspheme his mercy, and blaspheme the blood of Jesus Christ; therefore hell torments, the effects of sin, must be so also.

7. The sentence that is passed against wicked men is an everlasting sentence, "Go from me ye cursed into everlasting fire," a sentence like the sentence of the Medes and Persians, never to be revoked.

8. Lastly, the body and soul that is the subject of torments is eternal. The body, it is here mortal and subject to corruption; here it must die, but in hell neither body nor soul shall ever die. Thy soul subject to torments is an eternal soul (Revelation 9:6). No man shall be able to make an end to himself, or of another. Now put all these together – thy God is an eternal God, hell is an eternal prison, the fire an everlasting fire, the worm eternal, the soul and body eternal, and sin the cause of all is eternal also, and then tell me if it can be gainsayed but that the torments of the damned must be eternal.

Use 1. Is this so, that the, torments of the damned they are eternal? Then,

1. This point administers matter of confutation to that ungrounded opinion of Origen, who held that though there be a hell, and though the wicked are tormented (for that he grants), yet he thinks that at the day of judgment there shall be no such thing as hell; but that all, not only the wicked upon earth, but the devils also shall be saved. A most gross opinion; for if these torments be eternal, and the wicked must be punished everlastingly, then surely this opinion of Origen, that all shall be saved, and hell destroyed, yea the very devils themselves saved, must needs be false. This doth plainly and clearly overthrow that opinion.

2. Are the torments of hell eternal torments? This should teach you that live upon earth to take heed that you run not the hazard of enduring these eternal torments for temporary vanities. If you sin, you can sin but for a while; if you get unjust gain, you enjoy it but for a while; but if you are damned, you shall be damned to all eternity. Therefore take heed that for these you run not the hazard of eternal torments. As we say, you may buy gold too dear; so you may buy these worldly vanities too dear. Demosthenes that was tempted by the harlot Lais to uncleanness, this

Lais did demand for one night's pleasure ten thousand drachmes; Demosthenes bethought himself, and returns her this answer, "I do not love to buy pleasure at so dear a rate." If Demosthenes, a heathen, could answer a temptation thus, I would have you that are Christians to answer it stronger. You are tempted by the devil to sin, if you yield you may run the hazard of losing God, losing, Christ, and undergoing these everlasting torments. Now give a check to your hearts, and say I do not intend to buy pleasure at so dear a rate, I do not resolve to lose a God, and lose a Christ, and hazard the sufferings of eternal torments for ever for a sin. Put off a temptation with these resolutions.

3. This affords matter of condemnation to all desperate livers, who wish themselves to be in hell before God would have them there. How many are there that cry God to damn them, and God to sink them, and God to confound them? Alas poor men! they know not what they wish to their souls. Men that do not only by wishing, wish themselves in hell, but that would be self-murderers, would send themselves to hell before God would have them. Did a man but know what this place of torment is, he would never have such words as these in his mouth. Why? If you do not know I will tell you; when you wish God to damn you, you wish but this, that God should take you from a pleasurable world, from your contents and comforts, from a place of delight and pleasure, and that he should send you to a place of darkness, a dungeon of darkness, a bottomless pit, where you shall never see light; that God should banish you from His presence, never to have one good look from Him more; that God should send you into unquenchable fire to burn you, into a lake of brimstone to choke you, and to have devils to torment you, where your torments shall be easeless, endless, and remediless. This is to wish yourselves in hell; and therefore let the thoughts of this, that hell torments are eternal, let this give a check to all those that cry for God to damn them; for alas! you wish the greatest misery that can befall you, either here, or in the world to come.

4. Learn hence, all you that are redeemed by Jesus Christ, learn patiently to undergo whatever temporary affliction God lays upon you in this world. Though God lays never so heavy affliction upon you, though you have a month's pain of the stone, a year's pain of the gout, a lifetime of sickness and weakness in your body, yet bless your God that you are delivered from the greatest pain of all; these are but flea bitings to the torments of the damned. And therefore if God hath freed you from the torments of hell, be patient, though God never so much afflict you while you are in this world. This use the apostle makes of this doctrine, in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 compared together – "You received the word in much affliction, yet with joy." Here they were much afflicted, yet joyful; upon what ground? "Because you did wait for his Son from heaven, even Jesus that delivered us from wrath to come." Here is the ground of their joy in affliction, because they look for a Jesus. As if he should say, O blest be God, who hath delivered us from wrath to come, the greatest torment. Therefore we may very well rejoice and be patient under affliction which for Christ's sake or the profession of the Gospel we meet with in this world. We are freed from the greatest torments, therefore we may very well undergo the less. O all you, the redeemed of the Lord, this doctrine of hell torments should strengthen you much to bear any affliction here, because your afflictions are not eternal; God hath freed you from eternal torments, greater afflictions than ever you shall undergo in this world.

5. Are the torments of the damned eternal torments? Then O labour while you live in the world, that you do not miscarry to all eternity, that you do not plunge yourselves into this infernal gulf out of which there is no recovery. While you are here there is hope, but hereafter you are past hopes. Labour while you live here, that you do not incur an eternal state of misery. Zeuxis the painter being asked why other men slubbered over their work hastily and finished so

much, when he took so much pains, and spent so much time to finish his work and make it complete. He answered – “Other men trade for profit, but I paint for eternity, to have my works seen to eternity, that future ages may behold them.” Beloved, I would have you as this painter was; other men they will sin, and they will swear, and they will get unjust gain, they care not how; but why do they thus? because they are for their profit, they only look after the world, and the pleasures thereof. Yea, but you, you are to work for eternity, and therefore you ought so to live, as that to all eternity you might be happy, and not plunge yourselves into these infernal flames. A ninth query follows.

Query 9. Seeing the torments of the damned are eternal torments, whether can it stand with God’s justice to damn man for ever for sinning but for a time? Flesh and blood might here rise up against his Maker, and say, I died when I was young, haply I did not live 10 years, and I am likely to be damned to all eternity; is this just with God? Another may say I died when I lived but so long, and I am as like to incur as great punishment as the oldest man alive; is this justice in God to damn a man to all eternity for sinning but a while? Thus wicked men may plead against God. To answer this, therefore, I shall resolve it affirmatively, that it is just with God to condemn a man to eternity though he sins but for a little time here in this world. And to make good this, I shall lay down four or five particulars.

1. To vindicate the justice of God, I, answer that punishment is not to be estimated by the length of time wherein the fault is in doing, but to be proportioned to the nature of the fact. As, for instance, suppose a man doth break open a house, it may be he is not an hour in breaking open the house, yet it is just with the magistrate to keep that man in prison till the sessions come, a great while longer than he was in doing the fact. A man, being angry with another, may give him a deadly wound in the twinkling of an eye, that man may be in prison all his life, and well if he escape so, though the fact was done in a minute’s time. Now if man may punish a long time according to the fact, will you straiten God? Shall God be straitened of that in which men have liberty? If a man for doing a fact in an hour may be punished all his life; and man may do it, shall not God also?

2. Because sin is against an infinite God. Now sin being committed against an infinite majesty, it doth deserve an infinite punishment to be inflicted. You know in the same fact the punishment is greatened or lessened, according to the person against whom the fact is done. If you give a blow to an ordinary man, this may only amount to some petty suit at law, and some small fine to be paid; but if you give a blow to a prince, you may endure the rack or imprisonment for life, because the person is eminent against whom you offend. If sin were against an ordinary person, it had not been just in God to inflict extraordinary punishment; but sin, being against that God that is infinite and eternal, therefore it may be just with God that infinite torments should be inflicted; that seeing wicked men sin against God, who is the chiefest good, who is an infinite person, by a divine right, therefore the punishment of evil may be inflicted upon them to all eternity.

3. Should man live for ever, he would sin for ever, and therefore God seeing this disposition in man, He may justly damn man for ever, though he sin but for a time. Man sins his eternity, therefore God may punish his eternity. Man sins as long as he can, therefore God will punish as long as He can. If man will for ever sin, it is just with God to give him a curb, and give him a check, and make him ever to suffer.

4. Because wicked men, though they can sin no longer upon earth, yet after they are dead they carry their very sins into hell with them, and there they go on in sinning still, and repent not, and there they increase their blasphemies still, and their provocations against God still, more than

they did upon earth. Now put all these together, and you can no way tax God's justice for giving hard measure to wicked men, nor any way fasten cruelty or injustice upon your Maker.

5. Lastly. Wicked men by sinning have lost an infinite good, and opposed an infinite good, therefore they must endure an infinite evil. Seeing the wicked do despise the infinite grace and infinite mercy of God, and the infinite merits of a Christ, and the infinite tenders of grace from God, therefore they are justly involved into infinite punishment. You have received infinite kindness from God, kindness without number: if you sin against these infinite mercies, it is just with God to punish you with infinite torments, for the nature of your punishment is to be correspondent to the nature of your offence. It is the speech of an ancient author, "That if there were ten thousand hells, and ten thousand times more torments in those hells than there is, it were not enough to make amends to the justice of God for man's sins." Wicked men, did they endure ten thousand times more than they do, they cannot satisfy and make God amends for the wrong they have done Him by sinning, and therefore it is no way injustice to damn man for ever, though he live but a while to sin here.

Is this a truth, that it very well stands with God's justice to damn man for ever, though he live but a while in this world to sin against Him? Then by way of instruction, this should teach you the evil and abominable nature of sin. If sin were not abominable evil, it would never have such intolerable punishments annexed to it; you may know the lion by his paw, and so you may know sin by its punishment. If sin contract so great a guilt, and deserve so heavy a load of wrath to be laid upon a sinner. Oh sin, sin must be an extreme evil. Therefore do not look upon sin with slight thoughts, you had better run into hell than into sin; sin is worse than hell, because it made hell to be hell. If torments be eternal, and it be just with God to damn men to those torments for one year's sinning, then see sin to be evil indeed. When you see a man drawn on a hurdle to the gallows, you imagine that man no ordinary thief or murderer, but some abominable traitor to the state. By the greatness of the punishment you guess the greatness of the fault. Here you may guess at sin to be a fact extremely sinful and extremely evil, because it hath so extreme and so intolerable a punishment annexed thereto. Therefore I entreat you look upon sin with detestation, and look upon sin in its aggravating nature. We look upon sin in a diminishing glass, and see sin less than it is; but you should look upon sin with an aggravating glass, and see how sin is attended with everlasting and eternal punishments, and therefore must needs be greatly evil.

2. Learn hence, that little children and young infants, though they live but a day, they are in as great danger as men that live an hundred years; for it is not for your time that God will censure you, but for the odious nature of sin. And the reason why I draw this inference from hence, is to take off that blind conceit of people; they will call children innocent, as if they were harmless, as if they were without sin, and many women will wish themselves where that child is, though that child may be damned. Yet mistake me not, I do not say all children are damned, for God hath secret ways to work grace in them and save them, as He hath open ways to save others. Yet children, I say, though they live but a minute in this world, God may justly punish them for the sin of their nature.

3. Is God just though he punish men to all eternity for sinning but a while? Then, O you young men and women that are before God this day, consider this, you have lived long enough in sin to deserve eternal torments, if you are never so young. Let these thoughts rest in your hearts; I have been long enough to be a subject of hell, therefore stop and stay, and do not go further in sin, lest you aggravate and increase your own torments.

4. Lastly. Learn hence, not to charge God with severity, to be a hard-hearted God; do not charge God to be an unjust God; for here you see in resolving this question, God's justice fully

cleared, that he may damn you unto eternal torments, though you have sinned but a little time in this world.

[August 1897]

Outlines of Two Sermons.

By the Late Rev. JOHN SINCLAIR, Bruan, Caithness,
Preached on 1st and 8th March, 1840.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water” – John 4:10.

In speaking of the purpose for which God gave the gift of His only begotten Son, it was observed in general that the purpose was that all who receive the gift might have everlasting life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This implies (1) that we are by nature under the sentence of eternal death. “In Adam all die.” “The wages of sin is death.” The final sentence is “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” The reward of disobedience is already declared, “Dying thou shalt die,” that is, “Thou shalt die in all the terrors of death.” (2) God gave according to our need. The provision extends to the supply of “all your need.” He did not mock man with an inadequate gift. (3) It is well worth receiving. The gift is “worthy of all acceptation.” It will make up for all sacrifices, even to the loss of life here. There remains “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Christ despised the shame for the joy set before Him. So shall His people. Weigh all things here, and they are but vanity. (4) None are bidden to ask less than the gift. “Ye will not come that ye might have life.” “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Come for anything less, and we show pride and disobedience. This opens a wide door to poor creatures. “I am come that they might have life.” “Hear, and your souls shall live.”

We observed the purposes for which God gave His Son more particularly as set forth in these words: “I will give thee for a covenant of the people” (Isaiah 42:6). Here there is implied (1) a deliberate act of God. This is not a hasty thought. The covenant is “ordered in all things and sure.” It is not to be recalled. (2) “Give thee.” The covenant cannot be broken so long as Christ stands. (3) God is at peace with sinners in Christ. He is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. (4) Christ is for a covenant “of the people.” He was given to obey and suffer in their room. O glorious gift!

I. God gave His Son to fulfil the requirements of the covenant of works. He was “made under the law.” He took up His people where Adam, left them. (1) His holy person stood in their room. “Such became us,” suited us. It is by “the holy child Jesus” we sinners have access unto a holy God. (2) He became a servant. This He did so as to obey by suffering even to the death of the cross. He obeyed most willingly for rebels. He became a servant so as to obey the precept of the law. He fulfilled all righteousness in the room of His people. (3) He was made under the law that He might mediate between God and sinners. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” He came to bring back to men communion with God. Hence there is an Advocate within the veil, who was slain and now pleads the merits of His own blood, carried in and sprinkled on the mercy seat. The incense of this sacrifice goes up in heaven. All this is for us who believe.

II. God gave His Son for a covenant to deliver by almighty power poor sinners from the miserable state in which sin left them. They are in that state of spiritual death, hardness, self-righteousness and self-dependence wherein they were left by the covenant of works. Christ came to say to the prisoners “Go forth,” and to them that sit in darkness, “Show yourselves;” “to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isaiah 49:9).

We had said that He is an advocate. He is an exalted one. His people could do nothing for themselves more than any others. They were bound hand and foot in the cords of their sins, but He, having paid their ransom price, has got power as well as price to redeem. (1) He is exalted by God's right hand "to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 6:31). Nothing can resist the day of His power. It is supported by the right hand of the power of God. The Father has sealed a bill of repentance and pardon for all those whom He gave the Son. And further, He has granted the Son power to carry this bill into effect when He will. (2) The Father has given the Son power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as He has given Him (John 17:2). This grant extends to all nations, peoples, kindreds, languages, the heathen, and the ends of the earth. It also extends to "all flesh," to whatever fleshly depth of sin His people have fallen into. So the apostle says, "Such were some of you, but ye are washed." Some of every clime, and some of every crime are included among these. (3) The Father has given Him power over everything that can help or hinder their salvation. He has given Him "all power in heaven and earth." He has given Him power over angels to send them to minister to the heirs of salvation. He has given Him power over devils to subdue them and bind them at His pleasure. He has given Him power over the iniquity of the heart that He may subdue His people to Himself, as in the case of Manasseh, Saul of Tarsus, and the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. (4) He has power to send the Holy Spirit. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed for this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). And so also the Father said, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:34,35). When the Lord shall send forth the rod of His strength out of Zion, then, in the day of His power, a willing people shall come to Him (Psalm 110:2,3).

(1.) The whole work of the deliverance of the soul from sin is contained in the word repentance. Christ is exalted "to give repentance," so that repentance and remission of sins be preached in all nations, and that in His name. This is to say to the prisoners, "Go forth." This repentance includes: –

1. Conviction of sin. This is the first work of the Holy Spirit. He shall reprove or convince the world of sin. Armed with the covenant right of the Father and the Son, the Spirit comes to convince the soul of sin, and in doing so not to make a slight work of it. (1) The Spirit convinces by the Word. If this is not done, then there is no light in the soul. However the Spirit may begin the work, He will give the Word. "I had not known sin, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7). (2) The Spirit convinces by bringing home the leading sin. Take the case of Paul and the three thousand. This is done by their names. They know that it is spoken to them. "Thou art the man." Whoever else the charge may apply to, it is to me, says the soul. (3) The Spirit makes personal sin clear. "My sin I ever see." "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). The Spirit leads the soul on to see sin and nothing but sin in itself. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity." (4) The Spirit convinces by bringing home the reality of a God. "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is" (Hebrews 11:6). "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 90:8). The case is now no longer doubtful. Often death, judgment, and eternity are brought near. The soul cries, "Cast me not from thy sight." (5) The Word thus casts the man into prison. He is tried, proved guilty, condemned, and sentenced. He was before in a prison of ignorance, he is now in chains under sentence of death. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died, saith the Apostle" (Romans 7:9). Others may shake the arrow of conviction out, but not so here. Christ's power is at work.

2. Sin is made hateful. They abhor that which is evil. "I hate every false way," says the psalmist. It cannot be otherwise. The Lord hates the abominable thing. The Spirit has the same nature, and therefore they, in whom He is, abhor sin. They hate wicked company outwardly, and vain thoughts inwardly. The psalmist says of wicked men, "I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies" (Psalm 139:22). "I hate vain thoughts," he also said.

3. Self-loathing. They are made to loathe themselves for their iniquities. Before, they had many excuses for their sins, but now they believe the word, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." They find, instead of excuses, a thousand aggravations to their sins. They are divorced from themselves.

4. Shame. "I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God" (Ezra 9:6). They are ashamed when they contrast their sins with the light, the mercies, the patience, the warnings extended them by the Lord. They are ashamed of their slavish fear and presumptuous boldness. The Lord saith to these prisoners, "Go forth."

5. Sorrow. "I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin" (Psalm 38:18). They are made to sorrow "after a godly sort." They see God's cause injured by their sins. This leads them to see God as the injured party. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4). This sorrow is called godly sorrow, because the soul sees sin as committed against God. This leads them to desire holiness, though they were in a desert, away from their fellowmen. This leads them to complain to God against sin. Although sin would injure no creature, themselves nor any other, yet they hate it and sorrow for it, as committed against God. He saith to these prisoners, "Go forth."

6. Lastly, a desire to leave all sin is implanted in them. The Lord says, "Turn ye from your evil ways." And the soul replies, "What have I to do any more with idols?" These idols are his sorrows, and he is willing to renounce them as such. He desires to leave sin, as a man would leave one who was not only his own enemy, but the enemy of God. "Shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The flesh is still dragging at the soul, and warring against it, but the flesh cannot reign. It is a usurper, not an enthroned prince in actual dominion. It has been cast down by the soul, not only for fear of the lawful sovereign, but from love to Him as the rightful Governor. The Lord saith to these prisoners, "Go forth."

(Seventh Outline.)

When the Spirit comes He convinces of sin, and proves the sinner to be guilty. The Spirit makes it clear that no other person is intended. He says, "Thou art the man." He shows the soul that it is in prison, under sentence of death, condemned already. In the prison He makes convinced persons to hate sin, to hate every false way, to hate the society of the wicked, and their own vain hearts. He makes them ashamed of their ways, and to loathe themselves in their own sight. They would now flee out of themselves if they could. They are unclean lepers now. He causes them to sorrow after a godly sort, bemoaning and bewailing themselves. They see the justice of God in casting them off for ever, if He chooses. They say, "Thou art righteous," and look for satisfaction to justice, for blood, for righteousness, not mere unsatisfied mercy, but "a covenant by sacrifice." The Spirit also makes them turn from all sin. They are led to confess and forsake sin, and to loathe its very existence in the soul. They "would be quite free" from it.

Further, sinners giving up sin are ready to flee to duties, to seek righteousness by the works of the law. Here we may see that the Spirit will leave them unable to perform duties to their satisfaction. Our tears cannot flow, nor our words run, nor anything can we do aright. Our righteousnesses are made to us filthy rags, not merely rags, but filthy rags. What atheism, unbelief, coldness, wanderings, worldliness, hardness, deadness, etc., they feel, so that out of

these evils they must flee. The sins of their holy things make them afraid they will be lost by the very things that saved others. They must therefore flee from all their righteousnesses. The Lord saith to these prisoners, "Go forth."

Lastly, they will now believe in Christ, and in Him only. But they will believe in their own strength. Many rest here, but the Lord says "Go forth." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). No man can call Christ Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost. In this strait Christ is shown by the Spirit in the Word to the lost and the sick, to sinners, helpless, rebellious, and disobedient. The Spirit reveals Christ as the author and finisher of faith. Faith is the gift of God, and is bestowed in and with Christ. The Spirit therefore persuades the soul to depend on Christ, as for blood to redeem, so for the Spirit to apply redemption.

We now give from Scripture the following marks of those to whom the Lord has said, "Go forth."

I. A true hatred of sin. (1) They hate all sin. "Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:20). "For what I would, that I do not; but what I hate that do I" (Romans 7:15). "I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104). (2) They hate little sins. "Vain thoughts." No sins are really little to them. (3) They hate sin in others. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psalm 119:136). (4) They hate sin so as to leave the company of the wicked. "I hate them with perfect hatred" (Psalm 139:22). "I have not sat with vain persons" (Psalm 26:4). (5) They hate sinful self, "Thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hosea 13:9). They do not charge their destruction upon others. (6) They hate sin as against God. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4). So they hate secret sins, the world or friends never knew of. (7) They have jealousy of unseen sin. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12). They are in fear of some deception which may ruin their souls. (8) They have as great a desire for sanctification as for justification. They are equally desirous to be cleansed from pollution as to be freed from guilt. See Psalm 51 throughout. (9) They mourn for sin in the time of the most hope. So it was with Paul. He cried, "O wretched man that I am!" even when he knew there was no condemnation to him. (10) They are more afraid of sin than suffering. So were Joseph, Daniel, the three children in Babylon, the Apostles and the Martyrs.

II. A renunciation of self-righteousness, or of cleaving to the works of the law for justification. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4). "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Galatians 3:10). Here (1) we have renounced self-righteousness if we are thoroughly convinced of the insufficiency of our own righteousness to save or justify in whole or in part. "All our righteousness are filthy rags." Divine justice is perfect, and can only take, as the law is perfect, a perfect righteousness. Now we must be convinced that not only some, but all our righteousnesses are filthy rags, and that in every thing we come short of the glory of God. We must be in everlasting despair of mercy by self-righteousness. Without this we cannot profit by Christ; "Christ shall profit you nothing." (2) We have renounced self-righteousness, if ordinances cannot satisfy without Christ. He is the pearl of great price. The field is only barren sand, of no value without Him. He is the bread of life that supports life. The finest language is but empty dishes without Him. They are hungry, and empty dishes will not serve. They are thirsty and need drink to quench their thirst. Is sin lying on your conscience? What will cleanse your guilt but His blood? Is duty neglected? What will meet the law's demands but His righteousness? Have you no light? What will meet your case but "the light of the world?" Are you ignorant, guilty and rebellious? He is a prophet, priest, and king. If any other can heal your wound but Christ, you are not truly sick.

III. A feeling of the need of the Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Now where the creature is divorced from his own faith, he needs the continuance of the Spirit. But as all pretend to seek the Spirit, observe (1) where the Spirit is, sin becomes truly black, for He convinces of sin. Now since all men sin daily, if you be not a sinner, and do not find sin daily more bitter and loathsome, then you have not the Spirit or faith. He is light and makes sin manifest, discovering new heart abominations and new aggravations of old sins instead of extenuations of them. The cry is not, "Oh, only a temptation which I feared!" Ah! Job found the sins of his youth bitter things. So did David. "Remember not the sins of my youth" (Psalm 25:7). It needs clear ground to show a charge of guilt to be only a temptation. (2) Where the Spirit is, He mortifies sin. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). Formerly you could think of a sin, meditate whether you would do it or not, but now when the Word shows the sin and it arises, the sin is slain. Is this the case with some sin or sins? (3) Where the Spirit is, there is liberty. There is liberty to pour out requests, to take hold of Christ. There is liberty, not of words only, nor affections, but of heart. The heart is loosed by the hands of Christ Himself, I mean, by something seen in Him to suit the case. (4) Where the Spirit is, there is love. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha" (1 Corinthians 16:22). "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). The Spirit shows the things of Christ, and then He is made lovely to the soul, yea altogether lovely. He has nothing but what is lovely in His natures, offices, relations, and dispensations. Even His cross is lovely. They seek to glory in the cross of Christ. "Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). (5) Being precious He is worth a price, and for His sake they will part with husband, wife, children, lands, or life. They enter into covenant and make a full surrender of themselves and all theirs to Him. They surrender sin to be slain, themselves to serve Him, and are willing to take from Him any lot He chooses. The soul closes with Christ freely and fully on His own terms. "Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jeremiah 50:5). All this they are often renewing, and all this is often renewed.

Application.

1. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Proverbs 11:21). 2. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Galatians 3:10). (3) "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). (4) "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Amen.

[September 1897]

A Sermon.

By Rev JAMES S. SINCLAIR, John Knox's Tabernacle, Glasgow.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" – Matthew 11:28.

These are the words of Him who has the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to the weary. The Lord Jesus was anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. He was the great Prophet of the Church, and left an example to preachers in all ages. His sermons abound with precepts and promises, warnings and invitations, doctrine and experience, law and gospel. Observe in a previous part of this chapter that He preaches the law in all its righteous terrors, pronounces woes unto Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and declares that it will be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom than for them in the day of judgment. Observe also, in the verses which precede our text, that He there teaches the divine sovereignty and man's ignorance and need of spiritual illumination. He thanks the Father that the things of the Gospel were hid from the wise and prudent and were revealed unto babes. "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." He then declares His exalted commission as mediator between God and men, and the impossibility of any man knowing the Father or the Son except by special revelation. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither any man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." It is in immediate succession to this declaration in regard to divine sovereignty and man's need of divine illumination that the Lord Jesus sends forth the gracious invitation of our text to burdened souls. Each of these truths has its own place in Gospel preaching, and it is the work of the messenger of Christ to declare the whole counsel of God. In the meantime we direct attention to the words – "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let us, in dependence upon divine grace, consider: –

I. – The persons invited: "All ye that labour and are heavy laden."

II. – The invitation: "Come unto me;" and

III. – The promise: "I will give you rest."

I. – The persons invited. These persons are described as "all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Labouring persons are such as toil with difficulty and fatigue, while heavy laden persons are such as carry heavy burdens. The words are to be taken figuratively, and therefore wherever we see persons toiling with burdens, mental or spiritual, there we see the persons addressed by Christ in the text. We think these words apply to three classes: persons burdened with temporal concerns, awakened sinners, and tried believers.

1. Persons burdened with temporal concerns. We know that the words have a very important meaning for persons burdened with spiritual concerns, and are frequently applied exclusively to these persons, but we think they embrace a still wider class, and that for three reasons.

(1) The Lord Jesus does not specify spiritual concerns exclusively. He addresses all that labour and are heavy laden, no matter what their toils and burdens are.

(2) Many persons, unconcerned about their souls, are burdened with the troubles of this present life. They seek rest, but run to false refuges. They stand in unspeakable need of the rest Christ is able and willing to bestow.

(3) Believers themselves are frequently bowed down with the cares of this life. Christ offers them rest from these cares as well as from soul troubles, and therefore they gladly make use of the invitation and promise contained in the text in the hour of earthly tribulation.

We now enumerate some of the things with which persons under temporal concerns are burdened with: –

(1) Bodily troubles. Multitudes, both young and old, labour under bodily affliction. The young sometimes at an unexpected moment find disease taking hold of their frames that disables them from all active work. Their worldly prospects are blighted, and, living for no higher end than this life, they lose all their happiness and lie down under a burden of despondency. Others again, in riper years, are constantly racked with pain, and groan heavily under the frailties of a decaying body. Many such persons are destitute of all true consolation. The present life with its pleasures is fleeting away, and they have no real hope for eternity. It would be well for such to seek rest in Christ. He says to all these miserable persons – “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”

(2) Family troubles. Some have lost by death their right hand or their right eye, and feel the world empty and life not worth living. Others find their families to be a source of grief and not of comfort. They have much to burden them in the family circle and outside of it, and are frequently bowed down with sorrow, even unto the gates of death. There is only One who can help in such cases, even He that is a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless, the help of the helpless, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who says – “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”

(3) Troubles in worldly estate. Some have a life and death struggle with poverty all their days. Others, richly provided with this world’s goods, lose all their possessions. Such are burdened with their responsibilities, and fears of debt and disgrace constantly cloud and darken their pathway through life. There is something in Christ that will help even such if they only come to Him. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.” The Lord Jesus says – “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”

These constitute some of the more familiar forms of temporal trouble. Christ invites all that labour and are heavy laden to come to Him for rest. It does not affect the freeness of the invitation that many of the persons mentioned are unconcerned about their souls. As far as the invitation is concerned, the greatest sinner and the most eminent saint are equally invited. The invitation is addressed to all, unreservedly, that answer the description. Persons unconcerned about the salvation of their souls have all the more need to come to Christ. He will teach them the value of the soul, the depravity of their nature, and their need of a Saviour from sin and wrath. The rest that He gives is spiritual in its nature, and no one will attain it without learning the need of a Saviour. When we invite such to come to Christ, we do not ask them to come for simply a temporal rest. That will do them very little good. Christ offers a spiritual and eternal rest, and it is only at His feet that we can learn our need of it. By His Spirit, through law and gospel, He teaches sinners their spiritual wants. He shows them the burden of sin and guilt that lies upon their shoulders. Temporal troubles will be out-weighed by spiritual concerns, and both will make errands to Christ. They are truly to be pitied who are burdened with the concerns of this present life and are insensible to the concerns of eternity. A felt burden of temporal trouble weighs them to the earth. An unfelt burden of sin, if not removed, will yet weigh them down to hell. They are now miserable in time, and they shall one day enter upon a miserable eternity, unless through grace they come to Christ for the promised rest.

2. Awakened sinners. Men by nature are asleep to the things of eternity. They do not realise their true position in the sight of God. They are unconscious of the being and operation of sin in their hearts. They are insensible to the fact that countless sins are reckoned against them in the book of God’s remembrance, and that they will yet have to render an account for these sins

before the judgment seat of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who awakens men to see where they stand before God. They then cry out, as many did on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" They begin to feel burdens they were formerly insensible of, burdens of immeasurably greater weight than any they ever felt before.

(1) They labour under soul concern. At one time the soul gave them no anxiety. They scarcely believed that they had a soul. Their chief concern was – "What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" If they got their bodily wants satisfied, they did not care what became of their souls. If the flesh was served, the soul might go to hell. Now the case is changed. The great question presses home upon their consciences – "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:35,36). Their chief concern now is their souls, and their bodies get a very subordinate place.

(2) They labour under a sense of sin. "When he [the Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin" (John 16:8). Sin was at one time a mere name, now it is a great reality. It used to give them very little concern. They regretted open sins because of reproach in the sight of men, but sin in general gave them no trouble. They, in fact, found pleasure in secret sins. Again, they only charged themselves with a few sins, and esteemed themselves no worse than their neighbours. Now they see their sins to be innumerable. They feel their iniquity to be very great, and acknowledge themselves the chief of sinners. They come to the conclusion that none ever cherished such vile sins as they have done, and are weighed to the dust with the burden of them. The cloud of their iniquities darkens the heavens, and makes their prospects of the blackest and most hopeless description. They cry with the psalmist – "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:4).

(3) They labour under the guilt of sin. The Lord said to Adam when he was in a state of innocency and came under the covenant of works for himself and his posterity, "In the day thou eatest of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt surely die." The apostle Paul also by the Holy Ghost affirms, "The wages of sin is death." God is righteous and can by no means clear the guilty breakers of His law. "The law is holy, just, and good." It righteously claims perfect obedience from all that are under it. Now the Spirit of God brings home to the conscience of the awakened sinner the righteous and reasonable claims of God's law, and the guilt of disobedience in heart and life is fastened upon his conscience. The natural heart may raise many excuses for sin, but all these palliations of guilt vanish before the entrance of the law. What is more reasonable than that creatures originally created in the image of God should love and serve their Creator, and what is more vile and deserving of punishment than deliberate disobedience to and enmity against Him? The soul that is truly alive to its sin is sensible that it deserves punishment. It therefore labours under a sense of the curse of the law. It formerly thought the curse had to do only with notorious transgressors. Now, there is not a curse or threatening within the Bible from beginning to end, but to which it feels it has exposed itself. Souls in this condition are heavily burdened. It is not the curse of the law alone that crushes them down, but the wrath of God therein revealed. "The Lord is angry with the wicked every day." Their sense of guilt is intensified by the thought that their glorious Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth, infinite in holiness and infinite in goodness, is angry with them. He is "a consuming fire" to the workers of iniquity. Guilty souls labour under a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries. The truth declares that "the wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God." An accusing conscience predicts coming judgment, and the awakened soul is afraid he may some morning open his eyes in hell. Such are the effects of a

sense of guilt upon the conscience. To sinners that are burdened with an accusing conscience, the curse of the holy law and the wrath of a righteous God, the Saviour addresses the gracious invitation, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

(4) They labour under the yoke of sin. "Whoso committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). Men by nature are in bondage to sin. They imagine themselves to be free, but when they are awakened by the Holy Spirit they find themselves under the dominion of sin. They discover that sin reigns in their hearts. The apostle says, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Sin has a mighty power. It darkens our understandings, hardens our consciences, enslaves our wills, and corrupts our affections. The whole man is depraved by sin, and awakened souls learn this by bitter but wholesome experience. They can no more free themselves from the yoke of sin than from the guilt of sin. Wherein lies the power of sin? It lies in the heart itself. Sin has power over us not by any external pressure, but in virtue of our inward love of it. Awakened souls realise this, and their burden becomes heavier. They feel themselves bound hand and foot with the cords of their own iniquities. They become sensibly helpless as well as guilty sinners. The Lord Jesus says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

(5) They labour under the bondage of the world and the devil. The world has a mighty power over fallen man. None can overcome it, but "he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). Man at first got dominion over the creatures, but now the creatures have dominion over him. Men are taken up with the things that are created to forgetfulness of the Creator. By nature we worship and serve "the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Romans 1:25). The scholar, the scientist, the man of business, each worships his respective occupation. His thoughts and affections are wholly devoted to it. If we give ourselves wholly to our lawful callings and forget God, we put the creature in place of the Creator. Awakened sinners find that the ties and occupations of this world bind their souls, so that it is with the greatest difficulty they can raise them to the contemplation of spiritual things. Again, they realise themselves to be in bondage to the devil. The apostle says in Ephesians 2:2, "In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." It is this great enemy that carries souls captive at his will. When sinners begin to flee from his bondage he uses all his powers and devices to hold them fast. Awakened souls find that they have a mighty adversary to contend with, and that nothing will enable them to overcome the wicked one but the power of God. The Son of God took flesh and blood "that, through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

(6) They labour to get rid of their burdens. Some wildly rush to the vanities and pleasures of the world that they may get ease to their consciences. Some labour to shake off their burdens of sin and guilt by engrossment in the business of life. It is one thing to be awakened to a sense of sin and another to be enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, and so there is great danger of ignorant souls, more anxious for comfort than saving grace, committing spiritual suicide when troubled with their sins. It is the work of the devil to quench convictions, and they who deliberately quench the Spirit of God in their consciences are guilty of soul suicide. They are in danger of sinning against the Holy Ghost. Again, others resort to spiritual methods to get rid of the burden of guilt and bondage of sin. They go to good resolutions. They resolve to do better in time to come. They go to prayer and religious duties, they begin to weep and cry over their sins. They may even renounce open sin if they have been guilty of it, or if not, they may apply more rigid rules to their daily life and conversation. They secretly conclude that these duties will take away their burdens and secure for them rest in the favour of God. But they find out that their best

duties are defiled with sin and self, and so their efforts for deliverance prove a failure. They will, however, try a still better way. They read in the Scriptures that it is by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works, sinners can obtain freedom from sin and peace with God. Faith is commanded, and they will do their utmost to obey. In the strength of natural convictions they will exercise faith, and they for a time rest their hope for eternity on a natural intellectual faith in Christ. This also proves a failure. It produces no holiness of heart or life, and so the floods of their lusts and corruptions break forth again and sweep away the natural faith in which they depended. To all who have learned that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God, to all who have been taught that their own faith cannot give them rest and salvation, Christ says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

3. Tried believers. We now touch briefly upon the third class to which apply the words "all ye that labour and are heavy laden." This class is found among the people of God. Christ did not promise His disciples much ease or comfort in this life. He said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." In fact, believers are not exempt from any of the troubles already enumerated that are common to all men. There is this difference, however, that they have a sure and certain interest in the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel, so that all things will work together for their good, whilst others have only offers of mercy, forgiveness, and rest, and may, notwithstanding, perish in their sins. Again, believers have frequently the same burdens as awakened souls have. Past and present sins frequently becloud their sky and make them go sore bowed down, and they require to come time after time to a throne of grace for deliverance from the guilt and bondage of sin, and from the snares of the world and the devil. The psalmist was often in the depths, crying, "Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins" (Psalm 25:18).

The following are some of the burdens of believers: – (1) Indwelling corruption. The dominion of sin has been broken, yet the being of sin is still in their souls. Sin in all its various workings lusts against the work of the Spirit of God. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). Sometimes the flesh gains a victory, and they are constrained to cry, "Iniquities prevail against me." At all times, they have to carry about with them the body of sin and corruption. The apostle longed for deliverance, and cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

(2) Temptations. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The saints of God have undergone severe temptations in all ages. They have temptations from *the world*. The pleasures, riches, and honours of the world are so alluring, that they prove traps and snares even to the true people of God. They have temptations from *the flesh*. The carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and which still remains in them, is active enough in seeking to lead them astray from the paths of righteousness. It constantly represents sin in the most pleasing colours. It constantly minimises the guilt of sin, and says "It is a little thing." They have temptations from *the devil*. Their great adversary takes advantage of the sin that remaineth in them to make it the fuel for the fiery sparks that he casts into their souls. He frequently injects into their minds foul, wicked, and blasphemous thoughts and desires. They are sometimes in deep waters where standing they have none. They are tempted to regard all their past experience of the power of the truth to be a delusion. They are tempted to disbelieve the Word of God. They are tempted to deny the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. They are tempted to atheism. There is no evil that has mastery over the human race but to which they may be tempted. "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;

but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

(3) The hidings of God's countenance. They have frequently to endure the withdrawal of the divine countenance. "Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:7). The Lord sometimes withdraws His countenance in sovereignty. The soul is not able to find out any immediate cause in itself for the withdrawal. This is the experience of those who live in close communion with God. In the case of most Christians, the divine withdrawal is easily traceable to some particular sin or sins. The Lord chastises His people for going after other lovers. He will not allow them to rest at ease in the lap of any carnal lust. He will let them know that He is angry. When they seek Him, He will not be found of them for many days. They then begin to groan under this dispensation, fearing that the Lord will never return again. His word, however, still remains in their hands, and the voice of love is still to be heard in the Gospel, saying, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

II. The invitation: "Come unto me." A word by way of verbal exposition. The word "Come" here used is in the original a particle of incitement or exhortation, and we have seen it deduced from this fact that the exhortation "Come" does not imply a call to motion towards the person who invites. This is a mistake. The particle is similar to the word "Hither," and consists of an exclamatory invitation or command to motion, as if the speaker addressed, with a wave of the hand, a number of wearied persons, "Hither unto me, and I will give you rest." The fact also that the word "unto" is in the text a proposition of "motion towards" irrefutably confirms this view.

1. The person to whom the labouring and heavy laden are invited.

(1) This person is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the undivided Godhead. He is the Word that was with God, and was God (John 1:1). If anyone can give rest to the labouring and heavy laden, surely He that is God can. If He cannot, no other can give rest. He is also the Son of Man. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians 4:4,5). The Son has all the resources of the Godhead at His disposal, for it pleased the Father that in Him should dwell the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He has all the qualities of a perfect humanity, for He took flesh and blood yet without sin. If such a remarkable Person cannot meet our case as burdened souls, there is no hope for us elsewhere.

(2) This person has procured rest for the labouring and heavy laden. Every creature of Adam's sinful race deserved to suffer the miseries of this life and that which is to come as the righteous reward of sin. But God in His infinite mercy and unspeakable grace laid the help of an innumerable company of hell-deserving creatures upon His own eternal Son. Sin was the cause of all the toils and burdens to which sinners were exposed, and unless sin was taken away none of these toils or burdens could cease to be. The Lord therefore laid upon Christ the iniquity of all the elect. He became their surety to the Father, and He promised to do all that was necessary for their salvation. The Father therefore made Him sin, imputed their sins to Him. As a consequence, He required to bear the curse due to these sins. He was made a curse. The apostle, speaking for the Church, says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). He laboured and was heavy laden during the days of His humiliation. He bore the full weight of the curse of God upon the Cross. He suffered and died under the burden of the wrath of God that poor, sinful, burdened souls might escape the deserts of their sins. He laboured and was heavy laden that they might obtain rest in a way consistent with the claims of righteousness. He has now entered into everlasting rest as the forerunner of His people, and He

will bring all His children into the enjoyment of that rest. He is now exalted to give rest, the rest of deliverance from sin, and the rest of forgiveness. He is exalted “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). It is this glorious Person, the exalted Redeemer of God’s elect, to whom the weary and heavy laden are invited to come.

2. What is implied in coming unto Jesus Christ?

(1) The renunciation of every other source of rest. All other resting places are inadequate and temporary at the best. The soul must renounce every other person or thing under heaven as either a ground of hope for eternity or as an object of supreme affection. We were made originally for God, and nothing less than rest in Him will give the soul permanent and solid satisfaction. God is in Christ reconciling sinners to Himself, and in Christ there is to be found all that satisfies both God Himself in His holy perfections and the awakened soul in all its longing desires. Sinners must be shut up to Jesus Christ as their only hope of rest and salvation, otherwise they will not come to Him. The soul that is found at the feet of Christ, saying, “Lord, to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,” is not far from the kingdom of heaven.

(2) The persuasion of Christ’s ability and willingness to save sinners. It is one thing to have a notional belief in Christ’s ability to save, it is another thing to believe in it under a real sense of one’s condition and necessities as a sinner. Every thing in the soul itself conspires to produce the conclusion that no power can save. The unspeakable depravity of the heart, its deliberate opposition to God and Christ and the things of the Gospel, and the awful guilt of this wickedness, make the poor soul think there is no one that can deal effectually with his case. Unbelief cherishes harsh uncharitable thoughts of God even as revealed in His Son. Unbelief will cast doubts upon the divinity and power of Christ. In such circumstances it is not a little thing when the soul has a firm persuasion that Christ is able to take away the burden of guilt and reigning corruption and give rest. Another step is to come to a firm persuasion of Christ’s willingness to save. The awakened sinner is apt to conclude that Christ is not willing to save. He believes Christ is willing to save men, viewing them as elect, but he is slow to believe Christ is willing to save men, viewing them as sinners. This does not proceed from any jealousy for the sovereignty of the Son who quickeneth whom He will. It proceeds from dark unbelieving views of the gracious character of Christ and of the declarations He has given of His purposes in His Word. When the light of the Gospel begins to shine into the soul with greater power and clearness it comes to the conclusion Christ is willing to receive sinners, even the very chief. “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 18:10).

(3) An actual approach to Christ. When does this take place? It takes place at that moment when the soul, renouncing all hope in any other, sensible of its guilt and helplessness, and persuaded of Christ’s ability and willingness to give rest and salvation, is enabled by the Spirit to embrace Him as He is freely offered in the Gospel. It is then that the sinner comes to Christ. It was, however, Christ who first came by His Spirit into the sinner’s soul, and then drew the sinner unto Himself. They who desire to come to Christ will ask the Spirit to reveal Christ unto them, and enable them to come to Christ. Souls truly coming to Him are deeply sensible of their need both of Christ and of the Spirit. We cannot dispense with either, and must have both, if ever we find rest and salvation.

3. The authority with which the invitation is given.

It is not human authority. A man may be the ambassador of the message, but it is Christ Himself who invites. He is God, and they who refuse the invitation cast contempt on the authority of God. If you refuse to come to Christ, you not only ensure your own everlasting misery, but you dishonour your Creator, and treat with contempt the highest manifestation He

has given of His glory. Some one may object and say he is unable to obey the command. That is true. But this also is true. He who gives the command is able to give you power to obey it. "Ask and it shall be given you." He gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. But you say you cannot ask in faith. Come then, totally destitute, to a throne of grace, and wait – not in idleness but in urgency – until He give you faith and bring you nigh to Himself. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lamentations 3:26).

II I. – The promise: "I will give you rest."

Let us notice, first, the rest Christ gives.

1. A present rest. No sooner does the labouring and heavy laden soul come to Christ than it obtains rest. This rest is comparative in degree and interrupted in experience. Not so from any deficiency in Christ, but from the soul's imperfection in this present life. Absolute and uninterrupted rest will be enjoyed when the soul, made perfect in holiness, enters into glory. The present rest, however, is of unspeakable value. It consists in the following things: –

(1) Rest of justification. The awakened soul labours under a sense of sin and of the curse of the holy law. But at the moment it is enabled to come to Jesus Christ for salvation, it enters upon the rest of justification. "Being justified freely by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The Lord Jesus wrought out everlasting righteousness for the guilty and the unrighteous. When such come to Him they are made partakers of freedom from the curse, and of a perfect imputed righteousness. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

(2) Rest of conscience. The conscience, when awakened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, becomes a heavy burden to the sinner. It calls for the vindication of God's justice and the condemnation of the guilty. Nothing will give rest to this conscience now but that which is just and righteous. Nothing will meet the case but Jesus Christ and the blood of His atonement. The blood of Christ gave infinite satisfaction to the justice of God, and so the sinner who comes in all his guilt to Christ and has this precious blood applied by the Holy Spirit to his conscience, finds rest. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Hebrews 9:14).

(3) Rest of sanctification. In regeneration when the soul is quickened by the Spirit and united to Christ it is delivered from the reigning power of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; ye are not under the law but under grace." The believer finds rest in deliverance from the grinding yoke of sin, Satan, and the world. Every step in the life of holiness is a step of entrance into rest. Christ is made unto His people sanctification as well as righteousness. They are complete in Him. There is a fulness of holiness in Him that will supply all their defects. The more they seek after holiness the more they draw out of the fulness of sanctification that is in Christ Jesus. They "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psalm 97:12).

(4) Rest in the enjoyment of God's favour and countenance. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 89:15). The divine favour is the source of unspeakable rest and delight to poor souls long tossed upon the sea of God's wrath. Like Jonah, they have been in the belly of hell. The waves of divine wrath passed over them, and they were afraid every moment of being engulfed in these mighty waters. But now in Christ the light of God's countenance shines with its cheering and strengthening beams upon their heads, and they are at rest. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me" (Isaiah 12:1).

(5) Rest of consolation. There is “strong consolation” provided for all “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18). All the promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. There is consolation for every trial, and strength against every temptation. The apostle exclaims in holy rapture – “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation” (2 Corinthians 3:4). In Christ Jesus the holy and righteous God, at whose hands we deserve everlasting wrath, is the God of all comfort. The rest of consolation is in Christ.

(6) Rest of satisfaction. Every thing that the soul needs for time and eternity is in Christ. There is light against darkness, life against death. There is in Him an object worthy of the soul’s supreme affection. God Himself in the fulness and glory of His perfections is revealed in His co-equal Son. Nothing will fill to the very full the immortal soul but God. Here then in Christ is the rest of soul satisfaction. “Delight thyself in the Lord.” He becomes a husband unto poor sinners. Christ as a husband loved the Church and gave himself for it, and He is willing that His people should find their supremest delight and happiness in Him. “Rest in the Lord” (Psalm 37:7).

2. A future rest.

(1) Rest of complete deliverance from sin and sorrow. At death believers are made perfect in holiness. They are freed from “the body of this death.” They are delivered from all sorrow. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4).

(2) Rest of immediate, uninterrupted, and perfect enjoyment of God. Believers shall enter into the new Jerusalem, a city of which it is written, “and there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, nor light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

Let us observe, in the second and last place, that this rest is graciously and freely given by Jesus Christ.

1. It is a gracious gift. “For by grace are ye saved” (Ephesians 2:8). The rest spoken is one of the great blessings of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, and therefore we must be debtors to grace for it. Our best works could not purchase one moment of this rest. Christ required to shed His precious blood in order to secure it for the unworthy. It is of unmerited favour that it is bestowed upon any. The Lord said “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” and in fulfilment of that gracious sovereign decree sent His Son to suffer and die for hell-deserving sinners. The Son quickeneth whom He will, and all who come to Him for rest learn by the teaching of the Spirit that this and all the other blessings of salvation proceed from the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus. “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

2. It is a free gift. Christ does not ask any price. He invites sinners to come “without money and without price.” He upbraids those who heed not His invitation, “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.” He exhorts them to come labouring and heavy laden as they are. This gift is promised to every coming soul, and Christ will be as good as His word.

In conclusion, we invite all weary and heavy laden souls to Christ. We do so in His own name, for it is He that gives the invitation. If you are still in your sins, laden with the burden of God’s wrath, flee for refuge to this hope set before you in the Gospel. Sin will inevitably sink you down to hell except you come to Jesus Christ. In your guiltiness and helplessness look unto His merit and power. “He is able also to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” If you are one who once tasted the sweet rest that is in Christ, but now are tossed about upon the billows of trial and temptation, remember that “He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” Ask Him now to succour you, and you will find that He is a present help in the time of

need. To all burdened souls He says even now in the everlasting Gospel, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

[October 1897]

A Sermon.

By REV. JOHN MACLEOD, M.A., ULLAPOOL, ROSS-SHIRE.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” – Psalm 51:7.

IT is evident that no prayer for cleansing would be offered by one that did not find his need of cleansing. These words are not unmeaning. They are words, it is true, that are often used, and the frequency of their use may make us so familiar with their sound that perhaps we may not pause to consider their sense. This is a danger that we are exposed to in connection with everything that we are familiar with. The thought, half formed perhaps, yet still there, arises, “I know all this, and there is no use waiting to look further into it.” Yet, in connection with the words of God, this thought should not be allowed a place, no, not for a moment. None of His words are meaningless. They convey His thoughts, and these thoughts are a great deep. Their greatness exceeds search. High as the heavens are above the earth so are God’s thoughts above our thoughts. They are His. We are but creatures, and He the Creator. So in length, breadth, depth, and height they are measureless. Yet they are His thoughts in human words, and they have been given us to meditate on. They are ours to search into. Seeing then this is so, the danger of inattention to their sense owing to familiarity with their sound is a very real danger, and one to be at all hazards avoided. To skim over the surface of God’s word is to give it unworthy treatment. This is not what it deserves at our hands. He has in great condescension and grace sent it to us. Let us then give it its own place, and own it as His by meditating on it, and seeking to enquire into those thoughts of His that He would have us learn.

This prayer for cleansing then is not a mere form. It is a heart cry, with the echoes of which God’s living people are familiar all along the ages. The words, it is true, may be used with heartless formality, yet such was not their use when as a living cry they were wrung from the Psalmist’s heart. The burden of this cry God’s children are not ignorant of, for what David knew they know, what David felt they feel, and heart sympathy gives insight. Some know what it means in greater, others in less measure, but all true servants of Christ know in their own measure what the cry means, and what it involves. Different ages of the economy of grace have different measures of light on sin and grace, yet the great outlines have ever been the same as they ever must be the same. Sin is sin, and where the love of God reigns the love of sin is crucified, and where the love of sin is crucified, the soul’s prayer is that sin should be removed and destroyed. Grace is grace, and salvation has ever been of grace, and grace is of God. To the God of all grace revealing Himself in grace the cry and prayer of His living loving subjects has in all ages been that He Himself would cleanse them and save them. In considering then these words let us look at their significance in view of the final revelation of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. And in so considering them let us look at

- I. – What is complained of.
- II. – The cleansing needed.
- III. – The fountain where it is to be had.
- IV. – The instrument.

I. – From the context it is evident that sin is the subject of the Psalmist’s complaints. Sin has rendered him unclean. Cleansing from sin he needs and asks. The aspects in which sin presents itself to him are two. There is its guilt, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned.” There is also its power, “Create within me a clean heart.” There are two aspects in which sin presents itself still, and with each of them in its own place we have to do. They are distinct from one another. But

though distinct they are most intimately connected. Sin is loathsome in the sight of God. It is creature pride. It is rebellion against God and His glory. It cannot pass unpunished. It cannot but deserve His wrath, and that wrath makes itself known. It leaves not itself without witness. And one awful witness of the wrath of God is the power that sin has over its subjects. They are its slaves. The will of the flesh they do. The mind of unrenewed man is wholly under its sway. Thus it dominates his whole being. From the heart are the issues of life. The guilt and the power of sin thus stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect. Because sin brings guilt it brings condemnation, and the first fruits of its condemnation is this that the sinner is dead in trespasses and in sins, is dead to God and the things of God. The law is the strength of sin. Its holy penalty binds over the offender to the power of sin. It delivers him unto spiritual death and bondage. The mind of man is darkened, and this is so because the law is the strength of sin. The affections of man are set on things seen. This is so because the law is the strength of sin. The will of man is rebellious, proud, unsubmitive. Man is intractable and disobedient, and this is so because the law is the strength of sin.

Let it not be objected that such doctrine as this obscures the beauty and the holiness of God's law. Nay, it rather shows it forth. It shows forth its very holiness. Evil cannot be tolerated. The curse must follow in its track, and the weight and awfulness of the curse correspond to the greatness of the offence that brings it down. The greatness of the offence can only be appreciated when the greatness and exceeding loveliness and holiness of God are known. It can be appreciated only when the honour and dignity of man as God's creature in His own image are known. When these things are known, and as they are known, the folly and the malignity of sin come to light. That such a thing then as sin should pass unpunished, unfollowed by the holy indignation of the God of glory, is impossible, and the awfulness of the curse serves but as an index to show the awfulness of holiness and the malignity of sin. Thus then, instead of the curse being a blot on the fair face of God's law, it but shows with increased lustre the exceeding loveliness of that law when the breach of it brings on such dire effects. The power of sin and its guilt are thus related to each other. The guilt brings on the power, and the sinner living under the power of sin as a child of disobedience makes his own case even worse by his continuance in the ways of sin. Further, guilt brings deeper condemnation, and thus deeper and deeper the sinner must sink, further and further he removes from his God, and more and more awful is his plight the longer sin is persisted in and the longer it is indulged. Blank hopelessness is all that the law presents to the offender as his prospects. Nothing else can it give him. Should it give him anything else it would deny itself, and that would mean that the unchanging and unchangeable One should deny Himself and change. Sin is loathsome in His eyes. It is soul destroying. Yet He has revealed Himself as a Saviour from sin. This leads us then to consider the cleansing here felt needful and asked.

II. – What is this cleansing?

God has revealed Himself as the God of salvation. His salvation is no half salvation. The case to be met is difficult, and the provision made in divine wisdom and love is suited, exactly suited, to the requirements. The guilt of sin is to be removed. This is secured by justification. The power of sin is to be broken and subdued. This is to be secured by regeneration and sanctification. Justification and renewal are then to be placed opposite guilt and ruin. As in the case of sin's guilt and power this is the connection of cause and effect, so in connection with its removal there is a similar connection between justification and renewal. Guilt secures the power of sin as its consequence. Justification secures as its inseparable and meritable consequence the renewal of the nature. Sin has reigned to death, and it reigns in death, but grace reigns unto

eternal life, it reigns through righteousness. Sin entailed the curse. Righteousness secures the blessing. In Christ this righteousness is revealed. He came to secure life – life in overflowing abundance – life for the dead. Through death this life must come, through the curse the blessing must come. From the law that gave death life must be won. This the Lord of glory secured. By His one obedience unto death He answered the law's demands. He exhausted its curse. He drank to its dregs the cup of bitter wrath and condemnation. The law that could and did give Him death could now but give Him life. It had nothing more to bestow. In all its breadth and glorious purity and holy severity it had been magnified. A magnified law can give life as a broken law can give death. A broken law can give but death, nought but life can a magnified law bestow. He then, who was delivered because of our offences, was raised again because of our justification. For those for whom He died He rose. For those for whom He rose He lives. He died that they might never die. He lives that they too may live. Life and life-giving power are His, for He is the resurrection and the life. All authority is His. The hearts of the sons of men are in His hands, and He who died to expiate His people's offences lives to secure their final salvation. He lives, and death could no longer hold Him. They live when His sovereign voice bids them live. When He bids them live He but bestows upon them what He has secured for them. His resurrection life and His redeeming glory are for them, and thus willingly His people come to Him, for He draws them effectually by His grace.

Their regeneration thus is the fruit of His death. It is the working of His life. He gives them faith, and so unites them to Himself. This is not their desert, yet their curse and their death cannot withstand the conqueror of the grave. This is His desert. This is His reward. They are His redeemed ones. By faith He unites them to Himself, thus they are justified. By faith they embrace and are united to the Lord their righteousness, and thus for themselves they secure a title to life. The title is of grace, but of grace that reigns through righteousness. Christ is their righteousness. The grace is in Him. Eternal life is the reward of His work. It is their inheritance in Him. They need, however, not only the end, the salvation of their souls, but also the means, and the title to eternal life secures this. Eternal life is something present. It begins in regeneration. It is spiritual. But life is what the Psalmist needed, such life as this. This alone can subdue the power of sin. The power of Christ's resurrection is the only power that can secure victory over sin. In His righteousness this power lies. He then who is justified by the faith of Christ lives in the spirit of Christ. These things cannot be separated. If guilt then brings slavery, righteousness brings freedom. Guilt brings hopelessness, righteousness gives a sure and good hope, a hope that will not be put to shame. In Christ then is the cleansing that David needed and that we need.

If the question is "How can I have power to live to God's glory?" the answer is in Christ. What removes guilt breaks the power of sin, what secures acceptance bestows power. The helplessness of fallen man is an element of His guilt. It is his sin that he cannot love God as he should. It is his sin that he does not realise his position. It is his sin that he does not delight in Christ. What then has he first to do with? With the guilt of his sin. Until that is removed wrath and hopelessness must be his, and in Christ full glorious provision is made for the removal of guilt. Submission to the Lord our righteousness is our immediate duty as it is our high privilege. Here is life. Here is hope. Here is victory. Here is power to overcome.

III. – The fountain of this cleansing.

It is nothing else than the love of God. The love of God the Father in Christ His Son reigns unto eternal life. His church partakes of this eternal life. She is justified, she is sanctified, she is saved, all from the love of God. The distinguishing sovereign love of God is sought by the

Psalmist in such words as, "Remember me with the favour thou bearest to thy people, visit me with thy salvation." God's salvation is His favour borne to His people. This secures their cleansing from sin, their deliverance from its guilt and its power. Their cleansing then proceeds from the sovereign will of God, from His sovereign love, and this love and favour is from everlasting. Seeing it is so, it is no wonder though it is to everlasting. God's love to His people is as one broad mighty stream sweeping from the mountains of His gracious eternal purpose on to the glories of a coming eternity. In its course it reaches His beloved, carries them on its bosom, and leaves them not. It carries them on to their eternal glory. This river, however, pursues a hidden course. Its way is known to none but God alone. Yet some traces of its working and existence are shown all along the course of human history. A glimpse of its current is seen in the curse pronounced on the serpent. There a spring, as it were, of living water bubbles up into the light of day. It comes from an inexhaustible fountain, and ever gives forth its living water for the refreshing of God's heritage. In the promise given and fulfilled to Abraham, in the history of Israel, this same river again and again shows itself. Its course is ever onward. Barriers of impossibility give way before it. Eternal power is in the hand of the eternal purpose of love that guides its course. At length, in the death of Christ, the glorious fulness and overwhelming force of this stream shows itself in its glory. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His son to be a propitiation for our sin. The love of the Father in His unspeakable gift is here revealed. He spared not His well-beloved. Here the love of Christ reveals itself. He loved His church, and gave Himself for her. He loved His sheep, and laid down His life for them. He laid it down that He might take it up. For them He laid it down, for them too He took it to Himself again. Life eternal then is His for them, but that life His Spirit imparts. For the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, He hath quickened us together with Christ. The love of the Father reigns to eternal life. The love of the Son reigns to eternal life. The love of the Spirit reigns to eternal life. For this love is one, eternal life is its issue, eternal love is the fountain, and it reigns to eternity. Eternal love prepared the salvation. Eternal love procured the salvation. Eternal love secures the salvation. The fountain has been opened for the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the death of Christ it has been opened. It has been opened for sin and uncleanness. Here let us take notice of the harmonies of the Word of God. David was taught of the good Spirit of Christ to pray, saying, "Purge me, and I shall be clean." He was taught thus to pray, and he was inspired to record his prayer. His prayer and its record were from the working of the Spirit of Christ. Out of Christ's fulness they came, and this prayer did not return to the covenant fulness of Israel's God to come back again empty-handed. It came from Christ's fulness, and it did not come thence without sufficiency being there to meet it to the full. What David prayed for, Zechariah, hundreds of years afterwards, was inspired to promise, saying, "A fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." The prayer came from the covenant fulness. The promise too came from that fulness. The prayer came not without the promise being there. The Spirit-taught prayer has its corresponding promise. That promise may be a written one as in this case or it may not. If it is not it underlies the prayer, because the prayer should never have been taught if there were no promise corresponding to its terms. In this case we have the recorded promise answering to the terms of the prayer, but hundreds of years passed ere that promise, in its exact suitability to the prayer and its request, was recorded. The prayer, however, had equal power before the promise was recorded as it has since, for it was based on that promise. This lets us see the value, the unspeakable value, of the Book of Psalms and the prayers it records. They have all come from the covenant fulness, and that fulness has a sufficiency to meet them all. None of

them is unwarranted, none presumptuous, and thus the soul that is enabled to breathe one of them forth from his heart has not alone the prayer, he has the underlying promise. Some of God's children may be harassed with the thought that no actual promise of His word has, as it were, swallowed up their souls, yet they know what it is to long for the fulfilment of His gracious promises. They know what it is to pray with David, "Purge thou me." Their prayer is the prayer of faith. It will not remain unheeded or unanswered. The promise underlies it, and God will not refuse to acknowledge His children's cry. The underlying promise is theirs, and that promise will not miss its fulfilment. For He will accomplish the desire of them that fear Him. He will deliver them. He will hear their cry. The cry of faith is but the exercise of faith, and faith fails not for its answer. God in His word reveals Himself as the God of salvation, as the Saviour of sinners. His revelation demands a suitable reception at the hands of sinners, and faith crying to the God of salvation, and saying, Bring my soul from prison that I may praise Thy name, will not be unheard, will not be unanswered. The fountain of salvation is in the sovereign will of the living God, and faith or prayer but glorifies Him as the living God who does His own will when it comes to Him, and says, "Do as thou hast said." His royal purpose reigns to its own fulfilment. This is His revealed purpose, that every one that sees the Son and believes on Him shall have everlasting life. The living God is to be approached as He has revealed Himself. He hath revealed Himself in bestowing eternal life on whom He will, but He reveals Himself too in bestowing eternal life on all that believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.

IV. – The instrumental means.

David's prayer is not alone purge me, but purge me "with hyssop," and these words cannot be without significance. The prayer is cast in the mould of a typical economy. That economy, however, is full of abiding truth, and the place that hyssop occupied in connection with sacrifice and cleansing accounts for the occurrence of the word here, and guides us to understand the part it plays. Hyssop was a small vegetable growth – the hyssop that grows on the wall. It is put at the opposite pole of the vegetable world from the cedar of Lebanon. Solomon wrote of trees from the lordly cedar to the humble hyssop. Bunches of this were used, as we see in the narrative of Israel's departure from Egypt, for the purpose of sprinkling sacrificial blood. The blood of the paschal lamb was received in a basin, and then with a bunch of hyssop was sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of the houses of the Israelites. Wherever the blood was thus sprinkled the angel of death passed by, for the blood was a sign. Not only had the lamb to be slain. Its blood had to be sprinkled, and in connection with this sprinkling we see the part the hyssop plays. It applied the blood or the virtue of the blood. Where the blood was not applied death was certain. What is it then that applies the virtue of Christ's blood and thus answers as antitype to the typical hyssop? The blood of the lamb is the blood of the everlasting covenant, and the blood of the everlasting covenant sealed the redeeming work of Christ. It summed up the efficacy of all He did and suffered. It is His finished righteousness and that righteousness secured eternal life. It secured His resurrection. It is the power of His resurrection, and then the fountain of eternal life to all His people. For this it is that gives them life, and life more abundantly that He is the resurrection and the life. By the blood of the covenant, as the good shepherd, He was brought again from the dead. His eternal glorious reign as God-man mediator flows from His humiliation to death. God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name. Eternal life then flows from the blood of the Lamb. Eternal life He gives to those for whom He died to secure it. But the eternal life He gives them is spiritual. It stands in the knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Eternal life secures deliverance from sin in its curse and its power, for it embraces the full virtue of Jesus' saving name. It is inward and spiritual, but life

must have a beginning. The believer who is alive to God was once dead to God. His life then had a beginning. A birth, a new birth there must be in order to newness of life, and the new birth is not from corruptible seed but incorruptible, even from the Word of God that liveth and abideth for ever. The Word of God proclaimed in a preached Gospel is the ministration of the Spirit. It gives life. Yet though we are brought to conclude that the deliverance from sin that the blood of the Lamb secures is applied by the Word of God, it is not the mere word or the dead letter. The Word of God must be mixed with faith. It must be a powerful word to produce such effects as these. Many hear the word who profit not from it. Others hear and derive profit from it. This difference is of God that sheweth mercy. His Spirit accompanies and applies the word in one case and not in the other. The word thus mixed with faith or the word with power is the instrument by which cleansing from sin is effected. It applies the virtue of the blood of the Lamb, and that bestows eternal life. The cleansing, however, that we have been speaking of has more than one aspect. How can the word mixed with faith be spoken of as the instrument of cleansing by which the guilt of sin is blotted out? The guilt of sin is cleansed away in justification. Justification is by faith and faith rests on the Word of God. The word is received as God's Word, the sinner sees himself in the glass of the word. He sees the Saviour too, and on the Saviour thus revealed he throws himself. Faith unites to Christ. Union to Christ secures life in His righteousness. His righteousness the believer has as his own. He is the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus the word serves as a bunch of hyssop to cleanse away the guilt of sin.

But we saw that not alone did David's cry seek deliverance from the guilt, it also sought deliverance from the power of sin. This the word as a living word gives also. It is the seed of regeneration. By the Word of God the believer is born again. Life is imparted by that word, and such life as secures deliverance from the power of sin. This Christ won for His body, the Church, and in the exercise of His own right He regenerates sinners, and brings them thus to the obedience of faith. Through this faith He unites them to Himself. In Him the justified sinner has a title for himself to deliverance from sin's power, and in praying the Lord to sanctify him wholly, he but asks what is his own in Christ. Thus the word applied cleanses from the power of sin, and the measure in which it dwells richly in the believer is the measure in which the power of sin is subdued. For walking after the Spirit in the exercise of the spiritual mind which is life and peace, is victory over the power of the carnal mind, which is death. Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth we mortify the deeds of the body and so live to God. Thus is the believer freed from the ruling power of sin. This liberty is given in regeneration. The word applies the redemption the blood has secured. Thus it acts as hyssop.

But it may be said, this is David's prayer, and he lived under the Old Testament, what have we under the New Testament to do with such an attitude of spirit? Much in every way. This prayer expresses a frame of mind all suitable to the revelation of God as the justifier of the ungodly, and as the Saviour of the sinner. He alone could purge David. He alone can purge us. David needed this purging. We too need it. The prayer of importunate faith then got its answer. The prayer-hearing God is the same, and still He honours the prayer of faith, and so in every way this prayer suits us in New Testament times. It may, however, be said, David had long known the Lord, and was but expressing the believer's attitude of soul to his Redeemer, what has a poor outside sinner to do with such words? David's prayer and David's faith are expected from the sinner, and nothing less. David, one may say, was now a penitent backslider, what have we to do with his prayer? Every renewed approach of faith to the Lord is a repetition of its first approach. It always brings an empty sinner to a full Saviour. He who knows himself knows what cause he has for repentance, for mourning, for returning to the Lord as he came at first, for abiding in Him

as he has received Him. All such know the value of David's prayer. Again, conscience, boldness, and strength for duty can only be maintained in the continued exercise of faith in the atoning blood, and he who knows himself and his need will not be the last to come with confession and petition saying to his covenant God, "Purge thou me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Faith breathes out in these words, "I shall be clean." Yes, blessed be God – cleansed, purified – God's work. Let this then be our prayerful waiting attitude of spirit. Waiting God's answer in peace, let us ever say, "Purge thou me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

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