

A Sermon.

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

In the first part of this chapter we have a discourse by our Lord arising out of the message sent by John the Baptist. In verse 20th He upbraids the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done because they repented not. In the 25th verse He addresses His Father: “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Then follows the invitation given in our text.

I shall divide this text as follows: –

I. – The Invitation: “Come.”

II. – The Inviter: “Me.”

III. – The Invited: “All ye that labour and are heavy laden.”

IV. – *Conclusion.*

Salvation is entirely of God. He provided it in the past eternity, and He reveals it in His word: the Holy Spirit applies it to believers, and maintains it throughout. Salvation is provided for all those set apart in the covenant of grace. The gospel is the means set up by God for the accomplishing of all His glorious purposes regarding the sheep of His pasture.

I. – The Invitation: “Come unto me.” Here Emmanuel manifests His tender care towards the toiling masses of our fallen race. He always went about doing good to the souls and bodies of men, women, and children. Had He Himself not come to invite sinners to Himself, no sinner would come to Him. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ never did, and never will, save but lost, undone sinners. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The invitation issued by the Sent of the Father is free, full, and clear. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely;” “and the Spirit and the bride say Come, and let him that heareth say, Come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

As it proceeds from the lips of the Saviour to a lost sinner, the word “Come” is very precious. It is not only “Come,” but “Come unto me:” every other coming is useless. All who in truth come to Jesus testify that it is not only profitable, but pleasant and joyous. A sinner led by the Spirit to the only Saviour of lost sinners, enters upon a life of everlasting bliss and happiness. “It is good for me that I draw near to God.” Come, then, just as you are, to the only Redeemer of God’s elect. Do not linger, do not delay, do not hold back, in order that you may make yourself better, that you may make yourself more acceptable to the thrice Holy One. Delaying in order to improve yourself will only make you worse, for you cannot make yourself one iota better in a spiritual sense. Clothing yourself in the filthy rags of your own righteousness is not only profitless work, but it is highly offensive to the Most High. It is really a despising of God’s way of saving sinners, for no sinner was ever saved, nor can any sinner be saved, by his own efforts to make himself more acceptable to God. The invitation is “Come unto me,” and not “Tarry till you make yourself better than you now are.” Certainly, Satan does not object to sinners doing their level best to commend themselves self-righteously to the Lord Jesus. Satan instigates poor sinners to engage in such delusive and

destructive work, for all the time he is urging on his army to despise the only way of salvation from sin.

Thoughtless sinner, what are you doing? You are offering to the Most High the filthy rags of your own righteousness, and refusing the spotless righteousness of Emmanuel. Do not insult your Maker afresh; you have been long enough at that insulting work. "O, ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame!" If salvation is to be yours, your own filthy rags must go. What does your conduct declare? You really say to the thrice Holy One, the inhabitant of eternity, "Here I am: I offer you my own works, my own righteousness, for I value my own righteousness far more than the righteousness you are offering to me." What base conduct! Who could bear with such conduct? No creature could do it. The wonder is that the Most High does it. Let us not presume on the Lord's forbearance and long-suffering. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way when his wrath is kindled but a little." Ye that are far off from righteousness, listen to the word of the Lord: "I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Unless you are clothed in that raiment, all the rags that our fallen race possess will never cover the shame of your nakedness. Unless the Lord, whom you are despising, have mercy upon you, the shame of your nakedness will yet be made so bare that it will be an eternal disgust to yourself and to others. Hearken, then, to the voice of the Saviour "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Come now; come as you are. He hates putting away. By your own doings you can never commend yourself to the Most High. Nothing of yours stands in the court of God. Christ Jesus the Lord alone has given satisfaction to outraged justice and transgressed law. It is on the ground of the satisfaction rendered by Christ that Heaven proceeds to offer salvation to lost, perishing sinners. O do, then, come unto the Lord Jesus. Do not come with your own deeds; but come to Him, that He may strip you of them. "God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

Come and see for yourself the greatest of all sights ever witnessed in this world. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." That's the sight that ever cheers the hearts of poor, lost sinners. Come, see, and hear. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." This is the great sight and attraction in glory. It is the only soul-satisfying sight in the world. "Hear, and your soul shall live." "Where dwellest thou?" was asked of Jesus long ago. "Come and see," was the answer given. The inquirers went, and they never regretted that they did go with the Redeemer. The sight they saw captivated their whole being, and the possessions they received, and the honours conferred upon them, were so rich and precious that Christ Jesus and they never parted. They were bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord their God. Happy is that people whose God is the Lord. May it be so with us! Caesar said, "I came, I saw, I conquered," but all who, in truth, have obeyed the invitations of the Lord Jesus, have had to say, "I came, I saw, and was conquered." Come, for all things are now ready. It is only waste of time, health, and strength, to feed on your own provisions. You have nothing that can give health of soul. Your only provision is the husks that the swine eat, and these husks only tend to the famishing of the soul. You have nothing that the only appointed of the Father can accept. He has food, drink, and clothing; He has eternal salvation, and all you stand in need of for time and eternity. Come, then, and accept now of the gospel invitation, lest it be withdrawn from you. It is not in yourself, or in any created being, you have salvation. Salvation is entirely of God. There is nothing in the creature but destruction. "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." Come along then, poor helpless sinner, for all things are ready. Everything you need here and hereafter is in Christ. Cease at once from yourself: look away from yourself, for there is not the shadow of relief there. "Look unto me, all the ends of the earth, and be ye saved, for I am God, and there is none else." Why stand aloof? Why stand in the cold? Why stand in doubt? Do you

not hear the Lord Jesus saying to you, "Come near unto Me, I pray you"? It is He Himself that speaks to you. Though you have so often turned a deaf ear to Him, He yet says to you, "Come unto Me; come near unto Me."

What have you then, fellow-sinner, to say to the invitation of Jesus; "Come unto me?" Answer you must one way or another. Is it a refusal? It is a matter between the Lord and you. Settle it then with Him now. It must be done in judgment or in mercy. Which is it to be? Are you really proof against the invitation of Christ? "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Come, that He may have some plain and pointed talk with you about your state and character. May the Lord send forth the rod of His strength out of Zion, that sinners be converted unto Him, for the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul that lies in sin!

What is it, then, to come to Christ? It is very evident that more than bringing our bodies to Him is implied: more than mere curiosity is embraced in it. In the days of Christ's humiliation many came to Him, and they failed to comply with this invitation. Even in our own day many come to church, and it may well be said that they bring only their bodies, for their mind and heart are not fixed on the things that belong to their eternal well-being, but on the fleeting vanities of this present life. They come and go without transacting any business with the Lord of glory. Jehovah Tsidkenu is nothing to them. They are still strangers to God and to grace. It is very sad that so many spiritual idlers are found at the market of free grace. Persons may attend church, and yet be, all the time they are there, only serving sin and Satan, instead of serving the Most High. Instead of seeking the Lord, and pleading with Him to have mercy upon them, they are more taken up with their fellow-sinners around them than with the message of eternal salvation. Many present themselves at the market of free grace, but all the time they are at the market of free will. This is setting up an opposition market. Salvation is entirely of God's free and sovereign grace not of man's free will. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Many come to see and be seen instead of coming to see the Lord of glory!

Searcher of hearts and trier of reins, visit our congregations and dispose of them in such a way that they become, like others who said, "We would see Jesus." Coming to Him, or following Him, for ulterior ends, is not a compliance with this invitation. Many came to Christ in the days of His flesh, and followed Him, not because they had any saving dealings with Him. They were satisfied with the loaves and fishes, and not with Christ Himself. In our day their representatives are legion. The Lord Jesus pointed out to them their fatal error: "Ye seek me, not because ye have seen the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." But He also gave them a friendly and faithful advice. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you, for Him hath God the Father sealed." Did they act upon that advice? It is to be feared the majority of them did not. There are many, even in our own time, who attach themselves to the professed cause of God, not from true love to God Himself, but with a view to some social position or kindred advantage. But those who obey the gospel invitation do so entirely on account of the person who issues it, for they have been captivated by Him. Hopeless, helpless sinners are thrice welcome to the Saviour of sinners. Many professed to be followers of God, and were loud in their profession, but completely failed to give obedience to this invitation. These were numerous in the days of Christ. The Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees, the prominent religious leaders of that day, were avowed enemies of Christ and His cause. They treated Christ and His followers with contempt, yet they were quite shocked when told by the Lord that they did not know God. Who but they, the religious possessors of everything sacred, never in bondage to any man, yet the persistent, active bond slaves of the evil one! They prided themselves on their ancestry, their high privileges, and their traditions.

They had far more respect for their own tradition than for the Scriptures. They had God's Word, but did not know it savingly. They knew not the Saviour therein offered to sinners.

Those who add to or subtract from the Word of the Lord reject the invitation of Christ. Those who approach the Most High with their mouth and honour Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him, are only insulting the great I AM. Mouth-and-lip worshippers have only a name to live, while they are dead, and even that name will be taken from them. "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." To the religious leaders of that day, who gloried in themselves and in their Temple, the Lord said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." It is very sad when a land is studded with churches void of spiritual life and occupied by graceless ministers. Those who are wise and prudent in their own estimation raise a dark cloud between themselves and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus they despise the invitation, "Come unto me." Those who appear before the Most High sounding their own praises and applauding their own works, know nothing rightly of this invitation or of the Inviter. Such was the proud Pharisee, who looked with disdain upon the poor publican. Coming to Christ means coming with the sentence of death in ourselves – condemned by the law and by the Gospel, for both have been abused by the sinner. One cannot utter one word in one's own behalf, for even our best actions deserve eternal destruction. The only Mediator between God and men gives relief in such cases. A mere intellectual assent to the truth comes short of this invitation. The evil spirits themselves believe that there is a God. Nothing short of believing with the heart unto righteousness, and confessing with the mouth unto salvation, will avail us. Professing to come to Christ, and at the same time rolling sin under the tongue as a sweet morsel, is really an attempt to cheat one's Maker, like others who, even when God's hand was against them, flattered Him with their mouth and lied unto Him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant. Coming to Christ means that the individual understands something of his own apostacy from God, the depravity and corruption of his nature, the holiness of the Most High, and the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ. Prior to this, sin caused little or no trouble, but now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, sin is seen in its true colours. The dishonour to the Most High and the filthy, putrifying nature of sin itself, are the causes of no small grief to the soul. Sin is known as an abominable and loathsome disease – an heart-plague – incurable by all created skill.

"For a disease that loathsome is
So fills my loins with pain,
That in my weak and weary flesh
No soundness doth remain."

It is a disease that God alone can remove. The soul is lovingly persuaded of the ability and willingness of the Lord to afford relief.

Coming to Christ with a knowledge of one's own helplessness and hopelessness and unworthiness – relying wholly on the authority of Jehovah, who cannot lie – renouncing all confidence in the flesh – complies with this invitation. Those who come to themselves, as did the prodigal son, fall in with the royal invitation of heaven. "I will arise and go to my Father." Coming to Christ as the woman who had the issue of blood came, is a true acknowledgment and acceptance of the Inviter and the invitation. "If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." In accepting the invitation we accept the Inviter. The publican who smote upon his breast, and could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, exclaiming, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," did embrace the offer here made. He went down to his house justified. Coming to Christ is taking no refusal, as did the Syrophenician woman, and as Ruth did. "Entreat me not to leave thee." Orpah, at the outset, had many promising features, but she went back to her gods and her idolatrous people, and she sinks into obscurity, but Ruth shines forth brightly in history. Coming to Jesus is receiving Him by faith, as He is freely

offered in the Gospel. Coming unto Jesus means that the Father is drawing the soul to Christ. "No man can come unto me except the Father who sent me draw him." Coming to Jesus implies that He is the only way of access to the Father. By Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. All who come to Jesus as babes give due heed to the Gospel message: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God."

II. – The Inviter. – He is none other than the Second Person of the glorious Trinity: Emmanuel; the glorious Prophet, the Great High Priest, Sacrifice, Altar, Reconciler, and Intercessor; the King of Glory; the King of Saints; the High and the Lofty One; the Inhabitant of Eternity; the Lamb of God; the Messenger of the Covenant; the Prince of Peace; the Christ of God. Those names bespeak an eternity of blessing to every one to whom they are made known by the Holy Spirit.

III. – The Invited: "All who labour and are heavy laden." All labour more or less. Labour and sorrow are universal, but if our labour and toil do not lead us to realise that it is an evil and bitter thing that we have forsaken the Lord our God, we really do not value the invitations given by the Lord of glory.

Sin has so stupified us spiritually that we do not really know how far gone we are, and how dreadfully dangerous is our state. "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" This precious invitation of Christ – "Come unto me," fragrant with heavenly music, part of the glad tidings of great joy – is to the majority only a discordant sound, and that because of the discordant state of their own senses. While all within the hearing of the Gospel are invited by the Saviour, yet the majority treat the invitation with criminal indifference. Others were so rich and increased with goods that they had need of nothing. Graceless church workers – zealous and devout in their own way – are proud and self-satisfied.

Who are the labourers and the heavy laden?

1. Those who realise they are deeply stung by the old Serpent, by themselves, and by the law of the Most High. These cry out for the only Physician who heals and gives life. This is not an experience confined to one solitary period in one's history.

2. Those who find out how insatiable the law is in all its righteous demands. After long and protracted periods of futile and fruitless attempts to give the law its own, it appears more merciless than ever; and then the burdened and worn-out sinner gives up in despair. The sinner has died to all hope of relief from himself, from the law, and from all mortals. Then comes relief from heaven. "Thou hast delivered my soul out of the lowest hell." "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

3. Those who have the fountains of their hearts opened to such an extent that they are brought into deep waters, and ready to perish, and hear in power the voice of the Lord Jesus saying "Come unto me." After the Lord opens the fountains of corruption in their hearts, He shows them the fountain of love in His heart. He cleanses them from their sins and corruption, and sheds His love abroad in their hearts. Then they sing of their Redeemer's righteousness and holiness.

4. Those in whom Satan lets fly his fiery darts, causing such furious storms within, as if the pit itself were let loose there. Such soul agony! "Woe is me now, for my soul is wearied because of murderers." Then follows a storm of fears, dread, faintings, weaknesses, strugglings for life, calling upon God for relief. "Carest thou not that we perish." Then by and by the soul hears the music of the Spirit from the lips of the Sent of the Father, "Come unto me," and the storm is, at once, changed into a calm. Holy peace takes possession of the soul.

5. Those burdened with a guilty conscience. The burden overwhelms soul and body. Sins, like regiments in regular order, march before the eye of the soul, each sin thundering

home the guilt connected with it, causing deep bitterness of soul. The distressed sinner is led to apply to the only Advocate appointed to meet such cases, and he is not disappointed. He tastes that the Lord is gracious. "O taste and see that God is good:"

"God hath heard my weeping cries:
God hath my supplication heard,
My prayer received graciously."

"The storm is changed into a calm
At his command and will,
So that the waves which raged before
Now quiet are and still."

"O thou, my soul, do thou return
Unto thy quiet rest;
For largely, lo, the Lord to thee
His bounty hath exprest."

6. All who renounce their own righteousness and accept of Jesus Christ and His righteousness. "In the Lord have we righteousness and strength."

There are certain diseases Adam's race got by the Fall, and the heavy load now felt by the soul is caused by the work of the Holy Spirit in making known these Fall diseases. The sinner now sees his own likeness, as portrayed by the Holy Spirit in the Truth. A few of the Fall diseases are: –

(1) *Blindness*. – "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." Blind they were to their own lost condition; blind to the rich provision of God in Christ Jesus for sinners; but God, who is rich in mercy, commanded the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ to shine into them. "Blessed are the eyes that see what ye see."

(2) *Death*. – There was no spiritual move in the soul till power from on high came. Every one in a state of nature is dead in trespasses and in sins. "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and in sins." "The time is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Jehovah-Jesus is the only Deliverer from death.

(3) *Deafness*. – Sin has brought on spiritual deafness. We have no ear for the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are many sinful agencies at work that deafen us more and more to the glad tidings of great joy that are unto all people that a Saviour, Christ the Lord, has been born in the city of David. The concert and the dance, and the theatre, drunkenness, uncleanness, filthy communication, gambling and many other sins increase spiritual deafness. Beware of that which keeps you from listening to and obeying the gospel of God. The majority are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and they bring forth no fruit unto perfection. The Lord of glory doeth wonders. He doeth all things well. He quickens the dead, He makes the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the lame to walk. If our ears are not open to Christ, they are open to all the vanities of this life. The vanities of life drown one in perdition, but Christ gives a life of everlasting bliss. "Blessed are the ears that hear what ye hear."

"O greatly blessed the people are,
The joyful sound that know,
In brightness of Thy face, O Lord,
They ever on shall go."

(4) *Dumbness.* – Sin has paralysed our vocal organs. While sin has possession of our tongues we cannot render acceptable praise to God. Only the forgiven praise the Most High. We need that our hearts be made the abode of the Eternal, and when Jehovah dwells there our tongues will be under the power of grace. Then shall we, in our daily life, show forth the praises of Him who calls out of darkness into His marvellous light; and with joy we shall draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Those made conscious by the Holy Spirit that they are suffering from these various diseases, and by the same Spirit convinced that from the womb they are estranged from God, cheerfully accept of this blessed invitation of Jesus Christ.

The Most High has for long been saying to our Empire, “Come unto me,” but our ears are deaf to all His most loving entreaties. We are acting most shamefully towards the Governor of the nations. Therefore the heavy scourge of this gigantic European War is upon us. It is very deplorable that we have become so brutish that we do not acknowledge that the Most High has a controversy with us. The grace of God, and not judgments, changes our natures. Righteousness alone exalteth a nation. We are now, for more than eighteen months, fighting for our very existence, still going along the razor-edge of danger – thousands of the flower of the land hurled into eternity, and as many, if not more, maimed for life – and yet, neither as nation nor empire, have we acknowledged the Most High. In fact, since the War began more money is spent on intoxicating liquors and pleasures than formerly. Total abolition of the liquor traffic would not only prove a rich revenue to the whole empire, but would be a great boon and blessing. Sabbath desecration has increased by leaps and bounds. The Sunday newspaper is a public scandal to this professing Christian nation. The Sunday newspaper is more honoured than the Word of God. In addition to our other manifold transgressions, the peace of the Lord’s Day is broken by the cries of the newsboys in our streets. Thus we are not only refusing to come to the Lord Jesus, but we are perpetually defying Him. This is very cruel conduct towards the Creator and Upholder of heaven and earth. A day of reckoning is in store. Idolatry is financed and legalised by the land. For many years we have been drinking in German heterodoxy, and to-day we are paying the penalty for our disloyalty to the Almighty. Because we refuse to receive from the King of kings the sword of the Spirit and wield the same, strong nations are smiting us with the edge of the sword. The Lord speaks to disobedient nations by the sword. It behoves kings to be wise and judges of the earth to be taught, and to join trembling with their mirth. Nations that refuse to obey the King of Glory will ultimately be ruled by a rod of iron, and be dashed in pieces. If we refuse to drink the wine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ we shall be made to drink the wine of the wrath of God. Without repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ we shall perish. O, highly-favoured Britain! break off by righteousness thy sinful works, surrender to the King of kings and Lord of lords, lest thou be driven from thy dwelling “till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

“O that my people had me heard,
Israel my ways had chose;
I had their enemies soon subdued,
My hand turned on their foes.”

IV. – *Conclusion.* – The invitation of Christ the Lord is left with you. If you refuse it, no small sin lies at the door of your heart.

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” There is then a quarrel between you and your Maker. You are the aggressor. You have rebelled against the only Saviour of sinners; but, yet, after all you have done against Him, He says, “Come unto me.” Why then, perish, when such a Saviour, and such an invitation, are presented to you? Know the day of Thy merciful visitation lest those precious possessions be forever hid from Thine eyes. Accept the Saviour now. To-morrow may be too late. You have been for years despising the gospel

invitations. To-day, He says, "Come unto me;" but if your ear is deaf to His voice, He will yet say to you, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Will you then have Christ Jesus the Lord as your righteousness, Christ's righteousness instead of your own filthy rags? Your rags will bring you to everlasting destruction. Christ's righteousness frees from everlasting condemnation, and brings to everlasting salvation, and to eternal glory.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

May the Lord add His blessing, and His name shall have all the glory. Amen.

[May 1916]

A Sermon.

By the REV. NEIL CAMERON, St. Jude's, Glasgow.

(Taken down by a hearer at Oban.)

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." – Ecclesiastes 12:1.

Let us endeavour to consider for a short time, as we may be enabled, a passage of God's Word in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the twelfth chapter and first verse.

You will notice in the concluding verses of the preceding chapter that God speaks to young men. Young men, generally, are strong-headed, and they persist – not all, but the most – in going on in a way that will not be to their benefit at the end, and God speaks ironically here when He says at the ninth verse, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes,” but he gives a young man one thing that he should always have before his mind, and that is, “but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” We believe that, if men kept before their minds, always, that they have to render an account at last for every vain word and every sinful action unto God, it would have a very salutary effect on their conduct in the world. Then in the tenth verse He goes on to show that He meant the words in the ninth verse in a way of irony, for He says: “Therefore remove sorrow” – that means the cause of sorrow, which is sin, and which is strong in the hearts of the young – “from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.” Of course, the chapters are divisions made by men and were not in the original text, and so He goes on without a break, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”

In meditating upon these words briefly, we shall notice three things: –

- I. – The Person whom we are enjoined here to remember, – our Creator.
- II. – The duty which we are enjoined to attend to towards our Creator, – to “remember” Him.
- III. – The seasonable time God sets forth in which we are to attend to this duty of remembering our Creator, – “the days of our youth.”

I. – Now, we are to consider who the Person is that is brought before us here as the object whom we are to remember: He is set before us here as our Creator. And when you speak, my friends, about a Creator, you go beyond anything that any creature can do. Men can do many things; angels can do much more. We read of one angel who slew in one night in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. Well, it would take a great host of men to do such a terrible piece of execution as that, but one angel was sufficient to do that or more. But though men and angels would combine, they could not create the smallest fly. That is entirely beyond their power, but we are enjoined here to remember One who is the Creator of all creatures – angels, men, and all creatures down to the smallest fly which you can see. If you look up the beginning of Genesis, you will find there how God created all things. God himself gives a history of it – a very brief but comprehensive history, in which really the wisdom of God appears, and, if we were not so ruined, we would see how extraordinarily the Bible is written. Men would require volumes to write a history of the creation. God gives it amply in three short chapters so that any man can see clearly how things were made. We are told that He created the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the creatures that are in the visible heavens, on the earth and in the sea, and everything that grows out of the earth. The way in which He created them was by speaking the word, and it was done immediately. He spoke a word, “and done it was without delay.” As you see about the creation of light, taking that as one instance, God had nothing to do but say, “Let there be light,” and there was light immediately. The words came out of the mouth of God. And that was the way He created all creatures, that is, birds, creeping things and four-footed beasts, and all such upon the earth. But you will notice that, when He came to create man, there was an extraordinary consultation. We do not hear one word till then about any consultation. God went forth and just said, “Let there be such and such,” and such was immediately; but when He was going to make man, you find the words used are, “Let us make man,” and you have the history there

of how God created man, Adam and Eve. He gives us not at all a hypothetical history, or a history that a man desiring to his utmost to write down truth should give us, but you have it there infallibly, in such a way that you might give your oath that this was the way God created all things, and, finally, man. Man was created in the image of God. That does not mean at all that God is like man or that man is like God as to his body. Though the Son of God took human nature, we are told distinctly that God is a Spirit, and that He is infinite and eternal and unchangeable in His being; that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, much less any house that may be built in this world. "Heaven is my throne," He says, "and the earth my footstool." But the image of God was on the soul of man. It was upon the faculties that God gave to man, the very faculties which you realise you have even as a fallen sinner. These faculties, to begin with, bore the image of God, and that image consisted in knowledge, in righteousness and in holiness. Man had knowledge; something resembling God; he had righteousness; he was pure in his nature; innocent as to his actions; and he was perfectly holy in all the faculties of his soul.

God then, being the Creator, had an absolute right to the creature. See, men claim that they have a right to the thing which they form by their own efforts and labour, and still they are only making use of the material that God brought out of nothing and that belongs to Him by absolute right, as He lays claim to "the cattle on a thousand hills," and such things as are in the world. But you will notice, my friends, that God's claim upon man was extraordinary. He made him a rational being, an accountable being. He made him a being that was to continue in existence as long as God will continue in existence. And remember this, my friend, that you may be able to state the place and the day of the month of the year on which you were born into the world; but you can never state when that existence which began then to be will come to an end. You are a being that was created for eternity. We remember having read, more than once perhaps, in sermons that have been published which were preached by that eminent servant of God, the Rev. Archibald Cook of Daviot, Inverness-shire, how he appealed to the sinners of Strathnairn: Did they ever think that they had to exist as long as God exists? We would desire to impress upon sinners here that twenty years, forty years, a thousand years, a million years, or calculate as far as you can go, you will only be at the very beginning of your existence.

Now, as being the Creator, you see that God has absolute lordship over you. The most careless must realise that. You know perfectly well that your life is not your own. God may call you hence to eternity at any moment. No one can stand up here and say that he or she can continue his or her existence for one moment, for when God withdraws the breath He has given you, you fall back to the dust from which you came and the spirit to God who gave it. It is in Him we live and move and have our being. He sustains us, and has absolute right to us, to do with us as He thinks proper. No man has a right to say, "This man or that man belongs to me," for we are God's. We are His creatures, and there is no power in existence that can remove this lordship over us. God very often expresses this. He shews parents and others also how His right is absolute. You will notice God-fearing men in Old Testament Scriptures had much wisdom. Take, for instance, Job. When he lost all his family, what did he say? He said: "It was God who gave and He has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord," thereby acknowledging that God had an absolute right to take away what He had given. The most careless must feel that when God claims what belongs to Him, there is no power that can, for a moment, prevent Him from taking a sinner from time to eternity. While He closes the door, there is no power in the universe that can send one sinner to eternity. The keys of hell and of death are in the hands of Christ. God has absolute sovereignty over us as His creatures and no man can say, "My eyes are mine; my lips are mine; my ears are mine; my hands or my feet are mine; my soul is mine." God claims all these as His. And if you, my friends, will make bad use of them, God will bring you to an account for it. You see, there were other

men who said their lips were their own and who was lord over them, but God made very soon manifest that they were not speaking the truth, but that He was sovereign Lord who might do what He liked with them.

Now, in the second place, I desire to notice that, as things are so, we are absolutely dependent upon Him, not upon any creature. We depend upon God for every breath we draw; for the power to move; for food and drink and everything we have in the world. And as sure as it is said that when He withdraws His breath, we go back to the earth, it is said that when He withdraws the mercies which He bestows upon us, no man can bestow the least. We, as a generation, have become fools, in boasting of what we can do and what we are as men of understanding and wisdom. Indeed, we got so wise, at least in our own conceit, that we began to criticise God's own Book, and we see now the result of it in Germany, where this began. But remember, my friends, that no power of man could create one mouthful of bread although men should die lacking it. If God will not give fruitful seasons, we must perish for anything the creature can do. You see we cannot create rain. This comes from God. Isaiah asks this question most emphatically of idolaters in his own day, when he says: "Which of the vanities (that is the name he gives to idols of the Gentiles) of the heathen can give rain?" We are absolutely dependent then upon God for water to drink, food to eat, and air to breathe; for the health of our bodies and of our minds. You see yourself, my friend, if you think at all, that it is not only that He has an absolute authority over us and a right to us, but we are absolutely dependent upon Him for everything.

The third thing I desire to notice along with these two things which I mentioned – and I am only taking these from among many other things which might be stated – is that we are absolutely accountable to God. I may pass into eternity without having to give an account unto any man, and I may say just now to any man that I am under no obligation to give an account of my actions to him, and you can do the same. Because we can say this, we think this will continue for ever, but, my friends, remember this, that we must render an account to our Creator, our moral Governor and our Judge, for every thought and every word and every action, and none of them shall be forgotten. No: you may forget them, but God will not. They will all meet you at the end, for God writes all these things down in His book, and the books are to be opened at the great day, and men are to be judged according to the things that are written infallibly in His books. We shall all give an account of ourselves unto God; we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ in order that everyone may receive according to that he hath done. Now, these are not my thoughts, nor am I making much use of my own words. I am stating these things as nearly as possible in Scriptural language, for I feel these are truths which you will have to realise. You must bow your head and acknowledge them some day, even that you are God's creatures, that you depend upon Him for everything and that you must render an account unto Him for every thought, word and action, and receive according to them. Now, this much on the first head. Before I leave this, I desire to mention just one thing. You see, my friends, the Scriptures make it also very clear who our Creator is, for we are told that it was by the Son that the Father created the worlds. It was the Son of God, who afterwards became the Son of Man, and who came into the world to save sinners, who spoke the words which you find at the beginning of Genesis, "Let there be" this and that, and "Let us make man." Our Creator is certainly God – the Three Persons – but very specially is this the work of the Son.

II. – Let us notice, in the second place, the duty which is enjoined here, and the duty is, "Remember, therefore, thy Creator." The reason why I referred to the things I mentioned above was to show the force of that word "therefore," because it gives reasons why a poor sinner should remember his Creator. I have given some reasons which I think – not that I ever

think I have given what I should or that I can do what I would – should cause you to consider your relationship to God, who is invisible but who views all that you think and say and do.

I desire to notice three things that you ought to remember as you are related to your Creator.

The first thing is that God is everywhere present. Although you may get into places where no eye of man can see you, and where you may expect, so far as creatures are concerned, that you will never hear in time what you are going to do or to say now, you ought to remember that God's eye is on you. As Joseph remembered in Egypt, "How then can I," he said, "do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He remembered that God was omniscient and omnipresent, and that though there were no persons there but a wicked woman and a God-fearing young man, yet that God was there; that He was seeing him; thus causing him to be an example to young men to the end of time. It is left on record for that very purpose.

Again, He is not only omniscient, that is, He knows all things, but He is everywhere present. As the Spirit of God in David says: –

"From thy Spirit whither shall I go?
Or from thy presence fly?
Ascend I heav'n, lo, thou art there;
There, if in hell I lie."

You see, my friends, that the saints of God right down through the history of the Church believed in hell, though infidels in our day professing Christianity deny the existence of such a place. But the Bible says that God is in heaven; and that He is also in hell as to His presence in His justice and holiness, and that God is in the ends of the earth. It does not matter where you may go, He is there. Darkness hides not from Him. The darkness and the light are both alike unto Him.

Now, it is not only that these two things are true, namely, that God sees everything and that He is everywhere, but it is true that He is omnipotent, all-powerful. There is nothing that can resist His power. No. See, my friends, what power God has over the material creation! When He commanded the Red Sea, it split up and opened a passage with walls of water on either side – because God could make water if He chose as solid as the face of rocks – until His people passed over. You find the same thing true at Jordan. When it was going over its banks, a way was made for the people. God made it "stand upon an heap," and the waters which came down towards the Dead Sea were cut off, until they all went across. The power of God, the very power that brought these elements out of nothing and into existence, can now command them and make them do exactly what God desires them to do. You see again, my friends, that at the prayer of Joshua, God made the sun and moon to stand still for twenty-four hours without moving. By this it was made manifest that God has infinite power. Men who are wise in worldly things talk nonsense when they go to speak of such things, and say that miracles could not be. They forget that the Creator who brought these things out of nothing by the word of His power, has got full power to use them as He chooses. I was thinking recently upon this. Knowing a little of how much has been written, especially by these Germans, who are more like fiends in human flesh than men, how just it is on God's part to shew how savage men become when they depart from God's truth! It is to be hoped that their disciples in Scotland will take warning and turn back to God's Word, as otherwise the same result will follow in them. We have now what we call "keyless watches" – I happen to have one of them in my pocket – and you have only to touch a spring in the watch and you can turn the hands back as long as you like. By removing the connection between the hands and the wheels, you can turn this piece of mechanism back without stopping it, and we think if man can make a thing which he can turn and twist as he likes without destroying the

machinery, how can man say that God could not put back for twenty-four hours the sun and the moon, and not spoil the mechanism in the doing of it? But God did it. Although you were to get all the men in the world gathered together to cause the sun to stop one moment in its course, they could never do it. You would only conclude that they were deranged; but you should not conclude that Joshua was deranged should you hear him speak to the sun and moon in God's name to give him a long enough day to gain the victory over his enemies, for God answered him. Now, there are many other proofs given of the omnipotence of God. As Job said: "I know that thou canst do all things"; and our Lord Christ said "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible." Though a man should be dead and lying in the grave, yet Christ, God manifest in the flesh, shewed that He could go to the grave and call that man out as if he were only asleep. We know of nothing so powerful as death. None ever took one individual out of its grasp, but you find that when the Creator, the person brought before us here, came and spoke to Lazarus, saying, "Lazarus, come forth," death had no power to keep Lazarus for one moment. He will yet cause that all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and come forth. These, then, are things you ought to remember – that God is everywhere present, that he knows everything in every place at the same time, and that there is no power that can resist His will, that it is irresistible. To remember these things is very helpful to faith where it is, and it might do a young man or young woman good to remember them so as to restrain them from being so careless and indifferent.

The last thing I desire to notice in connection with your remembering your Creator in the days of your youth is this: You ought to remember that your actions now will fix your destiny for an endless eternity. I stated several Scriptures already to prove that God shall give to men as their actions may have been. Your actions now, if you continue to go on according to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye and the pride of life, will fix your destiny, my friend, for ever beyond death and the grave. It will fix it in a way that there can be no change, as the Holy Spirit points out in the preceding chapter: "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." And remember, my friend, to you as an individual, what extraordinary force there is in this sentence, "There shall it be." If you die in a Christless condition, without repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall lie down in sorrow and there you shall be for ever and ever. I beseech you, my friend, to lay it seriously to heart. But time will not allow me to enlarge on this second head.

III. – Now, let us notice in conclusion two or three things as to the time which God, the Holy Spirit, who is Wisdom, specifies here when man is to remember his Creator and He says that it is in the days of his youth. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

And first of all, my friend, you see there is no limit laid to the time. It does not say a day of youth. That might mean a certain period. It says "days of youth," and we understand by that that it takes up all the stages from the time that reason appears to make distinction between the one hand and the other. He follows men up till the days of youth are over. You will notice that God's promises are specially to the young. He says, "They that seek me early shall find me." We understand that to mean not only – though that is not excluded – that men should seek God early in the morning, but it means early in life. And I desire to notice in connection with this that we read in history, not at all of one or two, but of several who remembered their Creator to their everlasting benefit before they came up to four years of age, and we question if there be one child in the house under four years of age. Remember you, my dear young friend, who may not be five years of age, that there will be children at the great day of judgment who can stand at Christ's side and say: "I did not get more time in the world than four years, but I remembered God and was wise,

and I am reaping the benefit to-day.” Most people think that children ought to have nothing to do but to play, and that nothing serious should be put into their minds. We read in the history of the Waldenses in the valleys of the Alps and the Piedmontese also, where God kept His Church alive when the nations of the world went after the beast or anti-Christ, and we read that the godly mothers who lived there sang the psalms of David to their infants to send them off to sleep, and it was noticeable that the most of these children became serious at a very early age. You see, my friends, God’s Word can make the sinner wise unto salvation, and you have no right to say that God the Spirit cannot bless His own Word to a child before that child comes to the age of four years, and ought not the Word of God be put into the minds of little children? As Christ says: “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.” We remember once, many years ago, calling on a family where there was a little boy who would be perhaps about three-and-a-half years. We took a hold of the boy and began to teach him a verse of a Psalm which he might use as a prayer, and his grandmother rebuked us and said she did not approve of putting into the mouths of little children, like parrots, what they did not understand. We asked her who told her that this child would live to see old age, and she just laughed at the thing, but that child, my friends, was in eternity in six months’ time. I was reading recently about a little boy, the son of a wealthy man, who had a tutor for his boy. One day the boy went away and came back after being away for a while. Next morning he said to the tutor: “Teach me the Bible.” “Oh!” the tutor said, “I must teach you this first, and when you grow older I will teach you the Bible.” “Well,” the boy replied, “I was down yesterday at the churchyard and I measured the graves there and there were many graves shorter than myself.” God’s advice to you is to remember Him and to be wise in the days of youth, and He encourages children to do this by telling them most tenderly that those that seek Him early shall find Him. You see, my friends, whenever the winter passes and the spring comes, we set out to plough the ground and to sow our seed, and youth is the springtime of human life and ought we not to have a little wisdom in endeavouring to sow the seed of God’s truth in the spring of life in the hearts of our children? If you were to see one sowing in the middle of summer, you would not expect a very good crop there; if you saw a man sowing in the beginning of harvest in this country you would say: “Surely you are behind, you are out of season.” Well, that is how it is spiritually. Men ought to take the springtime of life and endeavour to sow the seed of God’s Word in the mind, in the heart of the child, for you see that as the season goes on the thing is not so promising at all and it is very little crop you would expect to have if you were to begin sowing in September; and that is the way with old age. God forbid that I should say that God has closed the door upon any sinner until he comes to death and eternity, but we see that very few of the aged are changed savingly. It is from among the young that God takes His people and in some cases calls them very early. If you will not sow the seed of God’s Word in the spring of life in the head of your son and daughter, Satan will diligently sow the seed of sin there and will get many to do it, so that if you will not do it, Satan will get some other one that will sow a seed that will bring forth fruit unto corruption, that will bring perhaps disgrace upon you and also upon your child. When we are speaking about the young, I may say there never was perhaps at any period in the history of this island of ours so many young men who have become absolutely useless for time, and unless an extraordinary change will come, they are lost. They are good neither for time nor for eternity, and we account for a great deal of that just by the way in which they were brought up by godless parents who never endeavoured to sow the seed of God’s truth in their minds in their youth. See, in the case of Timothy, God says by the Apostle that since he was a child he knew the Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, and He tells us that it was his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, who taught Timothy when he

was a child those things that made him a remarkable man in the history of the world for the good of the Church of God and also an example to others till the end of time. Now, I desire to notice that if you look back or if you were to go and search out the past lives of the few that are left yet in our midst who are truly converted, you would find that in the case of almost everyone of them God began with them in the days of their youth. In the midst of their vanities and carelessness, God, the Holy Ghost, convinced them that they were sinners, that they were lost and going to eternity, and that alarmed them and caused them to begin – if in the country – to go to the back of stones and rocks to pray to God for mercy as sinners. And you see that it was from such beginnings as these that men – some of them who used to be sitting in these seats but who are now in glory – became the witnesses for God, they were faithful to their fellows and, most of all, to their own souls – by just being brought to attend to this duty of remembering God, their Creator, in the days of their youth. This has been taken notice of by men who were used of God to the conversion of sinners above many others, such as that eminent servant of Christ, Jonathan Edwards of America, than whom very few have been so useful to the Church of God and to the souls of men. That man took notice of this, that almost all – though not all – who were brought to the saving knowledge of the truth, were converted before they reached thirty years and the most of those before they reached twenty-five. He noticed that God began with some even in infancy, and with a great many between twelve and fourteen years of age – that convictions began then – and they began to go to their knees as sinners to pray before God. “Remember therefore thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” Why does He bring this in? The devil will say, the heart of the sinner that loves sin, the pleasures of sin, the fellowship of sinners, will say, “Not just now, I will attend to that in after days”; but God warns the sinner, in the days of youth, that the days which he expects to be more suitable are “evil days.”

I desire to notice this one thing before I stop in connection with this admonition of God, which for all my speaking will be of no avail to any sinner, unless God will make use of it. He can make it of avail to perishing men. You see, my friend, although there are only a few who come to repentance in old age, there are a few. We saw one man – and we do not mean at all that he was the only man whom we saw – in Gairloch in Ross-shire, who lived eighty years in carelessness, prayerless and without a thought as to eternity or the salvation of his soul, whom when he was eighty years, God’s Spirit awoke to a realisation of the truth. He lived five years to prove in the world that it was a real change that came over him, and that is, along with a great many other cases, a great encouragement even to old age to begin to seek God immediately. If a man had a great work to do and had only one day in which it was to be done, and that he should allow the sun almost to go down in the west before he began it, if he were a wise man, you would see him stripping off his coat and going at it with all his might. So with the aged; they should remember that their sun is almost down, that it is time for them to be up and doing, and to leave the mark of their knees on God’s earth pleading for mercy before their sun will go down, never, never to rise again. We are told in the Scriptures of the Old Testament that when men go to their graves, they shall not be awakened out of their sleep until the heavens be no more, but they shall be awakened then.

May God bless to us anything consistent with His mind!

[July 1916]

A S e r m o n .

By the REV. DONALD MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

*Preached by him as Retiring Moderator before the Opening of Synod at Inverness,
on Tuesday evening, 16th May, 1916.*

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts” – 2 Peter 1:19.

In this Second Epistle the Apostle Peter exhorts those to whom he writes to grow in grace, to add one virtue to another, as the fruits of the Spirit, and thus to manifest in their practice that they were true Christians. By their fruit they were to be known. He exhorts them especially to give diligence to make their calling and election sure. By doing so he assures them that they shall never fall away from the faith, as many nominal Christians did, but persevere to the end, when an entrance would be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They would enter heaven with light and liberty, while others of the Lord's people, who neglected to give the same diligence

to make their calling and election sure, would enter heaven in darkness, doubts, and fears, and escape as a man escapes with his life when his house is burning.

The apostle is more earnest in pressing his exhortations by the consideration that he is soon to put off the tabernacle of the body, as the Lord Jesus Christ had shown him. He reminds them of the truth of the doctrines of the Christian religion, which he and the other apostles taught. Those doctrines were not cunningly devised fables, as some said they were, but doctrines which could be proved to be of divine origin. Christ, the author of Christianity, was the principal subject of their preaching. His power and coming they made known to their hearers. The Jews denied that He was the Messiah promised. But they declared, on the strongest evidence, His Godhead, humanity, death, resurrection, and ascension, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The Messiah came and finished the work the Father gave Him to do, and He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead. The evidence the apostle adduces in proof of this was the testimony of his own eyes and the eyes of others who saw Christ; the testimony of God the Father, who spake from heaven, saying, "This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him"; and the testimony of Old Testament prophets, who foretold His coming.

In speaking from the text, as the Lord may enable me, I shall notice four things, viz.: –

- I. – The word of prophecy;
- II. – That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was the chief subject of prophecy;
- III. – That the word of prophecy is more sure than what is seen by the eye or heard by the ear; and
- IV. – Our duty in regard to the word of prophecy.

I. – The word of prophecy. –

The apostle here refers to Old Testament prophecy. There were many prophets under the Old Testament dispensation. Their work was chiefly to reveal the mind of God concerning future events. We have a great deal of prophecy recorded in Scripture. When prophecy was fulfilled – as much of it has been fulfilled – it passed into history. The New Testament is a history of Old Testament prophecy fulfilled. For instance, Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of Christ in the flesh. This is now a matter of history. The Messiah, who was to come, came, and we are not to look for another. John the Baptist pointed Him out to his disciples, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In speaking further on this head I wish to call attention to two points:

- (1) the *divine origin* of prophecy, and
- (2) the *interpretation* of prophecy.

(1) The divine origin of prophecy.

In the 21st verse of this chapter it is written: "For 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."

The first thing to be noticed here is that the prophets whom the Lord employed to reveal His mind to men were holy men. They were subjects of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Sanctification as well as the Spirit of Inspiration. Some men, as Balaam and others, spoke what was true, but they had not the Spirit as the Spirit of Sanctification.

Second, the prophets themselves were inspired as well as the revelation they gave of the mind of the Lord. They were "moved by the Holy Ghost." It was not

their own will they declared, but the will of God, and in order to that they were under the control and guidance of the Spirit in such a manner as that their message was infallible and inerrant.

Third, their words by which they expressed the matter which the Spirit revealed to them were inspired. There are some who deny verbal inspiration, but the Apostle Peter tells us that the prophets “*spake* as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The Apostle Paul speaks to the same effect: – “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13). If the words were not inspired we could not depend upon Scripture as our warrant of faith. But the Psalmist said, “My hope is in thy word.” We believe in verbal inspiration, and our hope is in God’s word, which is our warrant to come to Christ, as the only way to the Father. And I cannot understand what warrant those who deny verbal inspiration can have to come to Christ. We have now the canon of Scripture completed, and there are not any inspired men now. This is denied by many in our day. They say that, inasmuch as Christians are taught by the Spirit, they are *inspired*. But they say this in ignorance of the distinction between *inspiration* and *spiritual illumination*. All Christians, who are effectually taught by the Spirit, are illuminated in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, but no Christian now is inspired. No Christian now can justly presume to receive a new revelation from heaven, which is implied in being inspired. That Christians now are inspired has been held, and is still held, by men of whom better things might be expected. When the new Creed, contained in the Declaratory Act of 1892, was being framed, a minister, who was a class fellow of mine in Divinity, wrote a book in support of the change, in which he stated something to the effect that Christians now were inspired in the same sense as the Apostle Paul was. I was at Kilmallie then, and the late Dr. Ross Taylor, who spent his holidays at Kilmallie for several years, had a copy of the book, and gave me a reading of it. When I returned the book, Dr. Taylor asked me what I thought of the book. I said that the writer of the book made one great mistake, that he made no distinction between inspiration and spiritual illumination. Dr. Taylor said nothing. Having studied theology, he must have known that there was a difference between the two things, though he did not seem to have observed the mistake in the book. At a meeting of the General Assembly I met the writer of the book, and I pointed out the error he made. When professing Christians forsake the Word of God and adopt in its place their own carnal notions, they are given up to spiritual blindness, so that they cannot see their error, unless they are brought to repentance.

(2) The *interpretation* of prophecy.

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation” (verse 20). We have spoken of the divine origin of Scripture; we are now to consider the interpretation of Scripture. All who have the Scriptures have a right to read them, and it is their duty to seek divine guidance to understand them; and it is the duty of ministers of the Gospel to expound the Scriptures to their congregations. Christ expounded the Scriptures to His disciples, and opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:27,45). The key to open Scripture is Scripture itself. Scripture is its own interpreter. That readers of the Bible might understand the Word of God, there are texts of Scripture put on the margin of the Book for reference – one passage of Scripture throwing light on another passage. No other key can open the Word of God. Christ charged the lawyers – those whose duty was to interpret the law or Word of God – with having taken away the key of knowledge. They took another key – the tradition of men – to open the Scriptures, but they could never ascertain the meaning of Scripture in that way; and they excluded themselves, and those who received their false teaching, from the kingdom of heaven. They have many followers in this backsliding age.

II. – That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was the chief subject of prophecy. –

If there were no Saviour provided for sinners of the human race we would have no prophecy, no Bible, and no Gospel. Jesus Christ is the very heart and soul of the Scriptures. Take away Christ from the Bible, and it is an empty Book – like a dead body without a soul. A Popish clergyman said that the religion of Protestants was without a soul because they had no Mass in it. What is the Christ they have in the Mass? A wafer! Away with the wafer-Christ; we will have nothing to do with it. We welcome the personal and real Christ, the only-begotten Son of God the Father, and Saviour of the world, to our poor and needy souls. All our hope for salvation, grace, and glory is in Him. “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Peter had no wafer-Christ. The prophets foretold and made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was powerful as God, healing by word of mouth all manner of sickness among the people, calming the tempest, casting out devils, and raising the dead to life. He had only to say to Lazarus, dead in the grave, “Come forth,” and he that was dead came forth, alive again. The two disciples, going to Emmaus on the day of Christ’s resurrection, said that He was “a prophet, mighty in deed and word.” The officers sent by the priests and Pharisees to apprehend Him said, “Never man spake like this man”; that is, Jesus of Nazareth must be more than a mere man; He is God.

The first account we have in the Old Testament of our blessed Saviour is in the third chapter of Genesis and fifteenth verse, where it is foretold that He, as the seed of the woman, would bruise the head of the serpent, the devil, and that in doing so the devil would bruise His heel. It is to be observed that in the first revelation given of Him He is spoken of as in human nature “God manifest in the flesh.” His heel implies a body, though He did not actually assume human nature till four thousand years after the first promise. It was by His death in human nature He bruised the head of the devil (Hebrews 2:14). It is remarkable that the higher critics say that the first three chapters of Genesis are a myth. By this they would overthrow the doctrine of sin and the fall of man; and they would overthrow a greater doctrine – that of salvation; for both doctrines are taught in the third chapter. Great is the guilt of these men, and if they die without repentance they shall be lower in hell than the devil and his angels. And those they were the means of bringing to hell by their error shall be cursing them throughout eternity!

It would take up too much time to refer to all the passages of Scripture where Christ is spoken of in the Old Testament. But all the prophets spoke of Him, as Christ himself reminded two of His disciples when he said, “O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). The prophet Isaiah, in the fifty-third chapter of his prophecy, speaks of the sufferings of Christ as if he had been an eye-witness of His crucifixion: – “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (5th verse). He speaks of His sufferings as past, though Christ did not suffer till about six hundred years after the prophet spoke these solemn words, to show the certainty of the fulfilment of prophecy. Christ referred the Jews, who denied that he was the promised Messiah, to the Scriptures (of the Old Testament), saying, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the chief subject of prophecy. He is all in all in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. He is all in all in the preaching of the prophets and apostles, and He is all in all in the preaching of His ministering servants in all ages. “We preach not ourselves, but

Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Where Christ is not preached, the Gospel is not preached.

Peter and the other apostles made known the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came first in human nature to work out everlasting redemption for His people. He shall come again the second time at the end of the world to judge the quick and the dead. "He shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). He shall also glorify the bodies of His redeemed in union with their souls in heaven, where they shall be for ever with the Lord. The state of the lost in hell shall be as everlasting as the state of the saved in heaven. In the original it is the same word that is used in both cases.

III. – That the word of prophecy is "more sure" than what is seen by the eye or heard by the ear. –

Peter, James, and John saw a glorious sight of Christ on the mount of transfiguration. "Christ was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). The glory of His Godhead broke forth through His human body, and even through His raiment, to show that in His state of humiliation, when He veiled the glory of His Divine person, He was the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. It was also an earnest of the glorification of His human nature after His ascension to heaven, to be glorified with the Father with the glory which He had with Him before the world was (John 17:5). They also heard a voice from heaven which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." But, notwithstanding what they saw and heard on the mount, Peter says that the word of prophecy is "more sure." It is not more sure as to the truth of what they saw and heard. But the word of prophecy is more sure, as it is more lasting – written in the Bible for the benefit of coming generations to the end of time – whereas what was seen and heard on the mount was transient and confined to a few individuals, Peter, James, and John. What they saw and heard is past, but we *have* the word of prophecy present with us always. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:25).

IV. – Our duty in regard to the Word of God. –

Our duty is to take heed to it. "Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." We are not now to expect to see Christ by the bodily eye, or to hear a voice from heaven. The days of extraordinary visions and voices from heaven are past. God now speaks to us, in His written word, in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is our duty therefore to read and search the Scriptures, which "principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."

All we need to know in order to be saved and to serve the Lord is clearly set forth in the Scriptures. The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice. We need not ascend to heaven to know what we ought to do. "The word is nigh unto us." It is our duty to take heed to this Word of the Lord, because it is a light – the only true light – to guide us to Christ, the Saviour, and to God the Father, through Christ, the only Mediator between God and men. The Word of God in the Scriptures is "a light that shineth in a dark place." The world would be a dark place without the Word of God. Scotland was a very dark place under the reign of Druidism before the Word of the Lord came to our land, but when it pleased the Lord to send us this light it exposed and dispelled the darkness. Druidism was banished from our coasts, and the light of the Gospel shined in our country. Heathen countries that are still without the Bible are dark places, and our fellow-creatures in these dark places are dying in their sins, and are lost for ever. We who have the Bible ought to send it to the heathen.

The heart of man by nature is a dark place – very dark indeed – without the least ray of the knowledge of God which man had at his creation. So great is this darkness that the fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” But God, in His infinite love, mercy, and grace, gave us His Word as the means of enlightening the dark heart of man; so that those who were not only dark, but darkness itself, were made light in the Lord. The Word of God is a light to show the state of all men, by nature, as sinful and lost. It shows, also, the inability of man to satisfy God’s law for his sins by anything he can do or suffer, and it reveals the way of salvation by the obedience unto death of Jesus Christ – the only but all-sufficient ground on which sinners can be saved from sin and its penalty. The Word is the means of salvation; it is the Spirit that makes the Word effectual unto salvation. To those to whom the Word is blessed as the means of their salvation, it continues to enlighten them more and more during their time on earth, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in their hearts.

I understand by the *day* here the day of glory in heaven, where there is no night or shadow of darkness of any kind. Our text speaks of the dawn of that day, and also of the day-star arising in the heart. In nature the day-star or morning star rises before the sun rises, and when one sees the morning star the light of day is not far away. The day-star arises inwardly in the hearts of believers before they pass from time to eternity, to give them light going through the valley of the shadow of death, and to dispel their doubts and fears, by which they had often been harassed in the wilderness, and to enable them to say in the full assurance of faith, “We are going home to behold the glory of Christ, and to sing, ‘Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen’” (Revelation 1:5,6). When the Lord manifests Himself graciously to the believer, when hearing the Gospel or preaching the Gospel, and pours abundantly the comforts of the Spirit into his soul, he does not dread to enter eternity that moment, though he is willing to wait the Lord’s time.

In conclusion, I wish to make the following practical remarks: –

1. As we as a Church took up a separate position in defence of the doctrines of the Word of God, twenty-three years ago, when the great majority of ministers and other office-bearers in the Free Church repudiated these doctrines, as they are contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and adopted an unscriptural creed instead, let us adhere faithfully to that position to the end. Some called us *seceders*; but we are not *seceders*. The word “secede,” according to its literal meaning, is to step aside from the position in which one is. But we refused to step aside from the position of the Church of Christ in Scotland for centuries. It is those who left that position that are *seceders*.

2. The Lord has been sifting our Church for some years, with the result that a number of students and ministers left our Church from selfish motives; but we are getting on with our work better without them.

3. Like Peter, we, ministers, should put our congregations in remembrance of the doctrines of God’s Word, though the Lord’s people know them, and are established in them. We need precept upon precept, and line upon line, in order to persevere in the faith to the end, that each of us may be able to say, “I have kept the faith.” We should keep the faith so as to hand it down pure and entire to coming generations, as others handed it to us. If we do so, as we resolve by grace to do, we shall go to eternity with a clear conscience.

4. Although the Lord did not make known to me as He did to Peter, that I must soon put off the tabernacle of the body, yet at my time of life I cannot expect, according to the course of nature, to live many more years in the world. It will be a wonder to me if I shall be at a meeting of Synod again at Inverness, and it is not at all likely that I shall ever be Moderator of Synod again. This thought should make me more earnest in pressing on all present here this evening the duty of adhering steadfastly to the “more sure word of

prophecy.” And I should be more diligent in serving the Lord while it is day, remembering that the night of death cometh when no man can work. One of the reasons of regret which Christ’s ministers shall have when they are about to leave the world is that they have to give up preaching the glorious Gospel. But when they get to heaven they shall be fully satisfied to be among the hearers of the only Preacher there – the Lord Jesus Christ – who shall feed them, and lead them to fountains of living waters, for ever. May the Lord add His blessing, and to His name be the praise for ever and ever! Amen.
[August 1916]

A S e r m o n .

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

“In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” – Isaiah 4:2.

In meditating upon this portion of God’s Word we shall, as the Holy Spirit may be pleased to enable us, consider: –

- I. – The escaped of Israel;
- II. – God’s Messiah;
- III. – What He was to be for “the escaped.”

I. – The escaped of Israel. –

The description, “the escaped,” may be taken by us in a more restricted or in a wider sense, according as we interpret the expression in connection with the immediate context, or in connection with the general teaching of God’s Word concerning man’s natural misery. If we take the expression and interpret it in the light of the immediate context, we have to notice the following steps in the movement of the prophet’s thoughts:

(a) In the third chapter he brings an indictment against the people because of sin, especially emphasising the oppression wherewith one class oppressed another, and also the luxuriousness and want of modesty in their apparel which marked their women.

(b) Because of all this they are threatened with the judgments of God: “Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war” (3:25). Yea, so terrible should be the outcome

of this judgment that in the end there should be found living seven marriageable women for every man of a corresponding age. "In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach" (4:1).

(c) Yet in connection with this fearful visitation it was promised for the survivors that the branch of the Lord should be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth excellent and comely. The escaped – when the expression is interpreted in the light of the immediate context – mean those who should survive this exhibition of the sword, this terrible judgment of war.

Now, I am not saying that here there is a prophecy of the present, the most devastating war that the world has seen, and of this visitation alone. True it is that among the forms in which moral degeneration had been manifesting itself before this War began, the want of modesty in women was a very noticeable feature of a general corruption, and just as, in a general sense, God ordains that punishment should be in keeping with the sin that caused it, so in this case, because the women were largely the cause of God's wrath, so the punishment in the cutting down of the young men, is felt as intensely painful by the procurers of God's wrath. True it is also that ere this War shall have come to an end there will be parts of Europe not a few in which it will be literally true that not one young man will be left for every seven young women. Still, one feels more prepared to say that in the present context we have not so much a direct prophecy of the present War as the exhibition of a principle of the divine government which was frequently exemplified in the past, and which we hope will be exemplified in the present case. I mean, that it has been God's method of government to follow the outpouring of the vials of His wrath against peoples having His Word, with showers of spiritual blessings.

It may, for instance, be pointed out that some one hundred years ago and more – I mean in the time of the French Revolution and in the time of the troubles caused through Napoleon Bonaparte's ambition – God did pour vials of wrath upon Europe, and it is well known that that outpouring of wrath was followed by a remarkable revival of religion, both in Europe and in America. It was then that the Protestant Churches awoke to a sense of their duty towards the heathen lying in the darkness of ignorance. It was then that Missionary Societies – such as the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Northern Missionary Society, to mention only a few such societies – were for the first time formed. In those days the Gospel was preached in the north of Scotland with a power and success scarcely equalled at any other time in the history of the Highlands. In connection with the preaching of such eminent heralds as the MacIntoshes, the Stewarts, the MacDonalds, the Kennedys, the Frasers, and the Cooks, did not the wilderness come to blossom as the rose?

Well, we have been visited with vials of God's wrath more awful than those of the Napoleonic troubles, and it ought now to be our prayer that these present calamities should be followed by spiritual blessings richer than those we have just now spoken of and that in proportion as our afflictions have been greater. That He should do so would seem to be in accordance with a principle of the divine method of governing His visible Church, for as Jeremiah says: "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Lamentations 3:32,33). And our present text speaking as it does of the branch of the Lord being beautiful and glorious even in the day in which there should be such a fearful slaughter, is also another instance of the same principle at work. In any case, the people of God ought to plead this argument now, and say:

"According as the days have been
Wherein we grief have had,
And years wherein we ill have seen,

So do Thou make us glad.”

The escaped, as interpreted in the light of the preceding context, are the survivors of God’s fearful visitation in judgment. And in the present case it will cause no difficulty if we add – the escaped of Israel, taking Israel also literally; for it is certain that no people feel the present devastation more terribly than do the Jews themselves. Their home may be said to be the borderland which lies between Russia on the one hand, and Germany and Austria on the other. The tremendous armies of those several empires have been these two years, like heavy rollers, passing and repassing over that devoted people, crushing them to the ground, and one cannot but wish and even hope that this may prove to be the finishing of God’s wrath, in a temporal sense, against that nation. If Israel be taken here in a literal sense, and the sword awakened against them a literal sword, we are certainly justified in understanding this visitation in judgment as referring to times later than anything connected with either the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, or Grecian Empires, for beyond doubt our text and its context brings us down to the days of the Messiah, and even to days when Israel shall be greatly blessed in that Messiah. Furthermore, the greatest spiritual blessings ever to visit this earth shall not come until the Jews get repentance and faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The Apostle Paul distinctly teaches that they were for a season rejected, in order to the enriching of the Gentiles, but that this rejection was to be only temporary, and that when they shall be received back again, their reception will be fitly described and regarded as life from the dead to the rest of mankind.

Hitherto, we have been interpreting the term “escaped” in the light of the immediate context. But it is also legitimate for us to interpret the expression in connection with what is generally taught in God’s word regarding the misery of man’s estate by nature; and if we so interpret the expression, the term’s connotation will be ampler and in a sense more profound. For when mention is made of the escaped of Israel, that is of the Israel of God, the implication is that it is a marvel that any should escape, and, of course, that it is a greater marvel still that a company which no man can number should escape. To such as have but carnal and superficial views of the misery of man’s estate by nature, it appears strange that any should fail to escape, but to those who so far think their thoughts with God, the marvel seems to be that it should be a case of so much as one escaping.

What is it that renders it such a marvel? Well, to begin with, guilt – and the whole world is brought in guilty before God – is a load so heavy that the mountains are light in comparison with it. Many are the forms which efforts, having in view the removal of this load, have taken in the history of religion in the world. Some have gone the length of offering in sacrifice the fruit of their own body in order to propitiate the anger of deity. But it was all to no avail. There is only one way in which guilt can be removed, and that is by casting ourselves upon the great burden-bearer Jesus Christ. But what a load He had to carry! The material universe was light as a load in comparison with the load He bore, when, as the Apostle Peter puts it, “He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” But was it not a marvellous thing, that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should have laid such a burden upon Him, that He should have put Him to grief as He did? Seeing then that it was only by the Son of God becoming the bearer of the intolerable load of guilt that any could escape from the wrath of God, is not the escape of any a marvel?

Nor was the guilt of wrath the only obstacle. There was the obstacle of the creature’s own unwillingness. Now the teaching of the New Testament is that in order to the removal of this unwillingness, it is necessary that there should be a forth-putting of power more marvellous than that exhibited in the creation of the world. It was “the exceeding greatness” of God’s power that achieved that men who had become incapable of fulfilling the end of their creation, should begin to realise that end in some measure, or that a naturally unwilling people should be rendered willing. If, then, there must be the exercise of this exceeding

greatness of God's power in order that any should escape from the wrath and curse due to us for our sins, may we not well say that the marvel is that any escape? Time would fail me to speak of other obstacles which make the escaping of any an impossibility if the grace of God should not intervene – such obstacles are the power and craftiness of the devil and his angels, and the allurements of the present evil world – but what has already been said may suffice to show that God's saved people may very properly be described as the escaped of Israel, the suggestion being that their escaping is a marvel of marvels.

II. – I proceed to draw attention to the striking way in which the great deliverer, the author of this escaping, the Messiah, is brought before us in the words of our text. By “the Branch of the Lord” we should certainly understand the Messiah. I give two reasons for this identification: –

To begin with, this is the first of a remarkable series of Prophecies in which Messiah is called “the Branch.” In this very Prophecy of Isaiah there occurs a remarkable allusion to the Branch that should grow out of the roots of Jesse (11:1), and the Personality and Messiahship of this Branch are put beyond question, when in the next breath the Prophet adds: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” In His days, we are told, “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” Furthermore, “this root of Jesse shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious.” Furthermore, the Prophet Jeremiah repeatedly alludes to the Messiah under the figure of the Branch, as in 23:5,6: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and the King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.” And again in 33:15,16: “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.” When we reach down the course of prophecy as far as the return from the Babylonian captivity, we find that by that time the Church of God had become so familiar with the Branch as the designation of Messiah, that it came to be used as equivalent to His proper name. Of this, we have evidence in the prophecies of Zechariah, as in 3:8: “Behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch,” and again in 6:12: “Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord.” To this series of prophecies the evangelist Matthew would seem to refer when he avers that in the fact of the upbringing of Jesus in Nazareth was fulfilled “that which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene,” for the root, from which the adjective Nazarene is derived, signifies a branch, and I take it that to the evangelist it seemed impossible that there should not be some circumstance or condition attaching to the true Messiah, Jesus, which should lead one to connect Him with that remarkable series of prophetic utterances to which we have been drawing attention, and in which Messiah is foretold as, the Branch.

That is one reason why we take “the Branch of the Lord” in our text in a Messianic sense. But, again, according to the common usage in what are called parallel utterances, one is, in the absence of any good reason to the contrary, bound to take “the fruit of the earth” as also a designation of the Messiah, and when one combines these two designations – “the Branch of the Lord,” and “the fruit of the earth” – there results a view of the Person of Messiah, the only key to which is the Christian doctrine of the two natures in the one Person. For “the Branch of the Lord,” as placed in apposition with “the fruit of the earth,” should be taken as

equivalent to “the offspring of Jehovah,” and that offspring of Jehovah can be none other than the only begotten of the Father, the co-equal, co-eternal Son of God. When, again, Messiah is designated “the fruit of the earth,” He is designated from His human nature, just as when He is called “the Branch” or offspring of Jehovah, He is designated from His divine nature. And this Immanuel is also the fruit of the earth. Dr. John Duncan stated a plainly-revealed truth when he said that the dust of the earth is upon the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. For we must believe that, in order to fulfil God’s promise – confirmed with an oath to David – the Holy Spirit, in preparing the human nature of our Lord, did take of the very substance of the Virgin, and in the nature thus taken up into His own Person by the Son of God, the Son of God lived in this world, in it He died, in it He rose from the dead, and in it He is exalted to the throne of the universe. And if the question be put, “How can the offspring of Jehovah and the fruit of the earth constitute one person?” no better answer can be offered than that one with which we have been familiar from childhood: “Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived, by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her, yet without sin,” and thus: “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person, for ever.”

III. – I pass on, therefore, to consider, in the third place, what, according to this prophecy, Messiah would be for “the escaped.” The Branch of the Lord, we are told, would be beautiful and glorious, the fruit of the earth, excellent and comely. Beautiful, glorious, excellent, comely – these are epithets which describe or characterise this mysterious Person, and we need not wonder if equally significant epithets are used whether He be designated from His divine or from His human nature, because it is the one Person that, in either case, is intended, and the one nature is as essential to Him as the other in order to His being a Saviour, Messiah. Jesus then is: –

(a) Beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely as He is in Himself, considered, that is, as one in whom Godhead and manhood have met. This strikingly beautiful combination of qualities and perfection, is painstakingly, one might say, brought out over and over again in the narrative of Him wherewith the Gospels speaking of the days of His flesh, supply us. What a beautiful representation of one in whom eternity and time met, in whom heaven and earth met, is given us in such an incident as that one (Mark 4:38,41), in which we read now of His being in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow, so that the disciples must needs awake Him; but next, on His being awakened, of His rebuking the wind, and saying to the sea “Be still,” and the immediate result was that the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. It is no wonder that the disciples should immediately fall into a virtual syllogism: The wind and the sea are the servants of God. The wind and the sea are the servants of Jesus of Nazareth. Who can Jesus of Nazareth be but God Himself in our nature? (cf. 5:41). But many another similar example will occur to the thoughtful.

I should like briefly to point out how His satisfaction to divine justice by virtue of which the garment of sinners’ salvation was wrought out derives beauty and comeliness from the union of the two natures in One Person. Take His obedience. Obedience is competent only to a servant. But in order to the Son of God’s becoming a servant it was necessary that He should become what He was not. In this circumstance we have one of the clearest and strongest proofs of His essential deity. The highest created being, whether angel or archangel, is by the very nature of the case bound to serve and to obey God. But it was otherwise with the Son of God, when He is considered in respect of His essential nature; He was in the form of God, He thought it not robbery to be on an equality with God Himself. It would not appear so strange, if we were simply taught that in order to His being a servant of men He should

have to become what He was not. But the remarkable thing is that in order to being the servant of God Himself He had to become what He was not. The Son of God is not, as He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the servant of the Father, and, indeed, could not be. But if He did not become the servant of the Father He could not render an infinitely meritorious obedience. Therefore does He become what He was not. He that was in the form of God, and who as such could not be the servant of God Himself, takes upon Him the form of a servant – in the likeness of men it became possible to the Son of God to be the servant of God – and so, in fact, He became the servant of God. In other words, Messiah, the offspring of Jehovah, must become the fruit of the earth in order to its being possible for Him to stand in the relation of a servant to Jehovah. His obedience must derive colour and quality from the earth. But yet consider other qualities of this obedience. We may consider that His obedience, partly at least, consisted in His going about doing good in the days of His humiliation. But what manner of good achieved He? There is something supernatural characterising it all. He raised the dead; He healed all manner of diseases. But was not all this the work of a supernatural Person? Could a mere man with authority give commandments to the unruly elements of wind and stormy sea? Could a mere man have shewn himself master of the world of evil spirits? Could a mere man have revealed what is virtually creative power, as in the feeding of five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, or of four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fishes? A negative answer is inevitable. These acts of obedience are the works of a supernatural Person, and if they have the qualities of excellence and comeliness as having been wrought by the fruit of the earth, they have the qualities of beauty and glory as having been wrought by the branch of Jehovah.

It was a common form of speech among the preachers of this country to speak of Christ's righteousness, which is imputed to believing sinners, as a garment, and to esteem that that garment had in it the warp of His obedience and the woof of His sufferings, and as long as we do not regard the obedience and sufferings as separable things we, in this, make use of a form of words which is both interesting and instructive. We have seen that the warp of this garment takes colour, so to say, from heaven and from earth. A like observation falls to be made regarding the woof thereof. It is evident that the Messiah must needs be the fruit of the earth in order to His being capable of suffering. It was just in order that the Son of God might be capable of suffering and dying that He assumed our nature. But if those sufferings had been but the sufferings of a mere creature, could they have been infinitely meritorious, as Messiah's sufferings must be? They could not; and besides, a mere man would have been incapable of bearing up under the tremendous load of the wrath of God, as Christ Jesus did actually bear up under such a burden until, after He had drank the cup to the bitterest dregs, He cried out, "It is finished," and "he bowed his head and gave up the ghost." The obedience and sufferings, then, of the Branch of the Lord, of the fruit of the earth, have their colour and qualities from the two natures which constitute His Person as the God-man, and they have a beauty and glory, an excellence, and comeliness, which are owing to this mysterious constitution of His Person.

(b) But not only is the branch of the Lord, the fruit of the earth beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely as He is in His own Person, in His own blood and righteousness, but so His Person and satisfaction appear in the eyes of all those that are counted to be "the escaped of the Israel of God." In a word, this apprehension of Messiah's worth is the very mark of their having escaped, escaped from the blindness and prejudice of unbelief, escaped in order to be united to Christ, the altogether lovely One, and thus escaped from the curse of the law, from the terrors of avenging justice, as well as from the present evil world. We have met with some who spoke of their having been converted, but Christ's word as a prophet seemed to have no finality for them, Christ's atoning death as a priest or sacrifice seemed to have no finality for them, Christ's precepts as a king seemed to have no finality for them, and we,

therefore, could not regard their conversion as genuine at all. It is a poor conversion that leaves Christ as much a root out of a dry ground to one after as before conversion. The language of the escaped is: "We know that the Son of God hath come, and that He hath given to us an understanding that we might know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true." What a token Paul had of his being in the number of escaped! Ere Jesus met him on the way to Damascus, the true Messiah was to him but an object of aversion, but after that, his memorable meeting with Jesus Christ, he was willing for His sake to suffer the loss of all things, yea, to count them as dung that he might win Christ! And so in some measure is it with regard to all the escaped, all that are saved. God opens blind eyes just in order that they may truly appreciate the divine glory and beauty of Jesus Christ. And the faith which, to begin with, is to them as eyes to see His matchless beauty and suitableness, becomes at length to them also hands to lay hold upon Him, yea, a mouth to feed upon Him, that He may dwell in their hearts by faith.

(c) But those to whom Messiah is thus beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely, will experience that He is all this first for their benefit. His beauty and glory, His excellence and comeliness are imputed unto themselves, and in fact God regards the escaped only as seen bathed in these transcendent excellencies of Messiah. We never see the moon save as bathed in the light of the sun. The moon is in itself a dark object, and of itself would, at its actual distance from this earth, be invisible always. But when it is bathed in the flood of the sun's rays, and these rays are again reflected to us from the moon, not only may we see the moon, but the moon itself appears fair, deriving beauty and a certain similarity from the sun. So is it with regard to the escaped from Israel. God, as judge, never looks upon them but as bathed in the greater flood of the rays, the beauty and glory, the excellence and comeliness of the Sun of righteousness. Therefore does He say that the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Surely they are happy that are in such a case as this! Even the ruggedest and what may naturally be the least lovely part of creation, will, sometimes, glitter as diamonds when the light of the sun strikes upon it. And so it is with regard to those whose eyes are opened to the unspeakable loveliness of Jesus Christ. They have Christ's beauty and glory, excellence and comeliness put upon them, and when God, the Judge of all, looks upon them, He beholds in creatures naturally uncomely and depraved only beauty and glory, excellence and comeliness. And as they are thus seen from the moment of their union to death as to relative grace, so ere the day is over, they shall be also in respect of real or inward grace.

Application

We read in the Scriptures of two classes of persons. One class is described by Moses when he complains of Israel that, until the day of his addressing them, God had not given them eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor hearts to understand the meaning of what God had wrought for Israel. The other class is described by Jesus Christ when addressing His disciples, He says: But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." To which of these two classes do you belong? Does the prophet Isaiah only give expression to what you have apprehended in your heart, that Jesus of Nazareth is beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely in His own Person and satisfaction, and that He is all this for the benefit of as many as do not remain in their natural blindness? If that is your case, you may, indeed, reckon yourself as happy born! But is it, on the other hand, the testimony of your conscience that you have not yet been thus ravished with the divine beauty of Jesus? Ah, then, will you not learn a lesson from one who, conscious of his physical blindness, and hearing that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, cried out unto Him, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me, let me receive my sight," and had the experience of all those who came to Jesus for physical cure? He was healed; he received his sight. Well, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by in a

preached gospel, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and like as none came to Him in the days of His flesh for bodily health and was refused, so none now cry to Him for spiritual eyes to see, but they will have their petition answered. Will you not avail yourself of what may be your last opportunity? The Lord bless His word.

[September 1916]

A Sermon.

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

(Taken down by a Hearer.)

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” – 2 Corinthians 3:3.

You will find the portion of God’s Word to which I desire to direct your attention for some time this evening, as the Spirit of God may be pleased on the present occasion to enable me, in the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, third chapter, and third verse: “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

There was scarcely, dear friends, a place where the Apostle Paul was honoured to plant a Church of Christ but he was shortly afterwards harassed with errorists of one kind or another, trying to lead the people away from the simplicity of the Gospel, and Corinth was no exception. It would seem, besides, that stranger errorists, coming to turn away the people from the purity of the faith, were in the habit of coming to the Church in Corinth with recommendations – testimonials, that is – from professed Christians in some other parts of the Church of Christ, and that, coming with testimonials of that kind, they the more easily gained the attention of unsuspecting people. Not only so; but when they left Corinth they seem to have made it a rule to ask a testimonial of some professing Christians there also, that they might thus get the readier access to the next place visited by them. But now the Apostle says here that, for his own part and for the part of those that worked in unison of spirit with him, there was no need of letters of commendation to the Corinthians or from the Corinthians. “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?” The answer is, of course, a negative, and the reason for this negative – the reason that he assigns for saying that he did not need these testimonials – was that the Corinthians themselves were a sufficient testimonial to him. Yea, he speaks of them as an epistle, and as, in a sense, a testimonial to him. “Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men.” Then he goes on to say, in the words of our text, “Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” And, therefore, we are warranted to say that this is one of the ways in which the Holy Ghost sets before us the nature and character of the true Church of God – that they are a remarkable epistle or letter. Epistle just means a larger letter.

And you see that he not simply speaks of them as an epistle, but he condescends to great details, so that the idea is, as it were, fastened upon the mind of the thoughtful reader that we are entirely – if we would understand the nature of the work of God in the souls of His people – warranted to look at the matter from this point of view, that they are an epistle, a letter. And you will find that just the very same questions that would naturally occur in connection with the writing of any letter occur in connection with this letter, and answers are given to these questions. Nowadays, no doubt, every one is adept at letter-writing, and letter material is so ready to hand, that perhaps we do not analyse, as it were, all the questions that have to be answered before we send off a letter to our friends. Perhaps analysis would come home to our grandfathers more readily than to ourselves, for then not every one could write a letter, and writing material was not so easily got as it is now-a-days; but as to the essence of the matter, it remains now just as it was in the days of our grandfathers.

I. – Well, the first question of all, then, that is to be put by us with regard to letter-writing in a literal sense, and with regard to this letter-writing, is – Who is it that writes the letter? When education was not compulsory it was oftentimes a thought to people – if they intended to send a letter to a friend – who they could get to write the letter for them. And that is the first question that arises here: Who is it that will write this letter?

II. – The next question that arises is – Have we writing material, have we paper to write upon? And the same question is to be considered with regard to this letter: What is the material on which the letter must be written?

III. – Then the next question would be whether there was any ink in the house. And so, although it is not ink that is used in this case, there is something that we may say is corresponding to it, and in a very glorious manner does for these letters what ink does in the matter of a letter such as you or I might write.

IV. – The fourth question is – Is there a pen to hand? And the same question arises here: Is this epistle written with a pen or pens, and if this epistle is written with a pen or pens, what are they?

V. – And then comes the question – the most important in a manner, perhaps, of any of them, although from other points of view perhaps not so marvellous as some other of the questions that are raised – What shall be the contents of the letter; what shall be written in the letter?

These, then, are the questions that, as we dwell for a little time this evening on the work of God in the souls of men, as it is represented to us under the figure of an epistle, we should like to answer, and to conclude with a word of exhortation and application.

I. – Well, then, the first question is about the letter writer. Although the Apostle Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers as, in a sense, his epistle, he does not mean by that that he is the writer of that epistle which believers are. He takes a subordinate place – a very essential place, indeed, but a subordinate place. He does not assume to himself, or to any that work in sympathy with him, the place of being the real writer of the letter, for he tells us distinctly that in this case the writer is Christ Himself. “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ,” “ministered,” no doubt, “by us,” but yet we are not the author, he says. The real author is Christ. And the Lord’s people are spoken of in another place as “epistles that may be read of all men.” Now, Christ did not write much, in the ordinary sense of writing, and the only writing that we hear Him do in the days of His flesh was at the time that the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him, and He wrote upon the ground; and it would seem – as a worthy minister in the north of Scotland once put it – that He was just writing guilt on the consciences of her accusers and writing pardon on the poor creature’s

own conscience. And so far as the writing of the inspired Word of God is concerned, He left that, in a manner, to others; and thus He had Matthew and Mark and Luke and John and the Apostle Paul and others – or if we speak of them as the penmen, the Holy Ghost may be said to have been the author of those letters. But here you find that Christ Himself is mentioned as the one who writes this letter which believers are. They are Christ's epistle, and one's handwriting is almost like one's photograph. That is to say, there are few things that one learns more readily than to identify a friend's handwriting. If you are wont to hear from any person, whenever you see that person's handwriting you are as satisfied that that letter is from some known friend to you as you are after you read his name over which the letter is written, and you at once think of the person. A person's handwriting will just bring the person before you almost as vividly as if his photograph were shown you. And this may be said with regard to Christ as a letter writer: His letters, his workmanship, remind one at once of Himself.

There was once a pious although somewhat weak-minded man from Wales, Timothy Nathan, to name, who wandered a good deal about the Highlands of Scotland, and he had a very great admiration for the late Mr. M'Coll of Lochalsh. As I was told, he would speak of him in this way: "Oh, it is Jesus Himself that is good; but Mr. M'Coll has some likeness to him." No doubt, that was a great recommendation of Mr. M'Coll, that a spiritually-minded man should recognise in him a likeness to Christ Himself. And I believe that in the case of all God's people – as He brings His own image upon them, and as they shall meet one another in the countless ages of eternity – they cannot refrain from addressing one another in this manner: "Oh, how like you are to Jesus Christ! I think I see Jesus Christ Himself in you." "For he will appear glorious in his saints, wonderful in them that believe." Christ is a pretty letter writer. There are some men and their penmanship is so beautiful that it attracts your attention at once. Well, Christ is such a letter writer, such a scribe, as it is written, "All that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the Lord's workmanship; that they are the people whom he hath blessed."

II. – The next question that comes up for consideration is this: Where is the writing material to be found? What has Christ, the letter writer, for paper? And our text supplies us with the answer to that question also, when it is said that this epistle was not written "in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." It is very likely that, when he speaks about writing in stone, he refers to the writing which the Son of God Himself executed when He wrote with His own fingers the ten commandments upon the two tables of stone, and that was a very wonderful and glorious thing. Yet if we should consider the matter properly, we would reckon that this was a still more wonderful thing in a manner. Of course, in the olden times they did write on the rock. You find Job speaks about his words "being graven in the rock for ever"; and in modern times there have been discovered large inscriptions written in a language that seemed for a long time a language that could not be deciphered, but it is now understood as the writing upon the rock. It is not, however, upon paper in the ordinary sense, nor upon parchment, nor upon clay, nor upon stones, that Christ writes His epistle, but we are told that He writes it upon the fleshy tables of the heart. And thus you may say that believing men and women are what He has for writing paper, and especially He refers to the heart, for if you do not have a person's heart, you do not have the person at all. The heart is, as it were, the very centre of our being. It is the fountain of all the activities for which, as responsible creatures, we are responsible; and it is upon material of this kind that Christ writes His epistle. And there is no question that when he speaks not only about the heart but about the "fleshy tables of the heart," he means us to understand that this heart has undergone a change, so that it should no longer be a "heart of stone" but a "heart of flesh." For the teaching of God's Word is that all mankind without a single exception – not simply very notorious sinners – are under the power of a heart of stone, and reason itself might teach us that there is nothing more unfeeling than the stone, and nothing more hard to melt, in fact, than the stone.

You would find it more easy to melt iron than to melt a stone; and thus it is with regard to men in their natural state. It is not without reason that the Holy Ghost speaks of them as having a heart of stone, and that is brought out in the fact that men will not tremble at God's threatenings, neither will they rejoice at His promises, and least of all are they disposed to fall in with God's way of salvation through a crucified and now exalted Mediator. And, dear friend, if it is the case, with regard to yourself, that you would rather that the armies of Britain, strong as they are to-day, were opposed to you than that God's Word were opposed to you, it indicates that, in a way deeper than you are conscious of, the Spirit of God has indeed visited you and taken away this heart of stone that could not tremble at God's threatenings nor rejoice at God's promises. Are you, as it were, on the lookout for the least intimation of favour from God as you read His Word or as you hear it expounded? It is a token of a heart of flesh – a token that the heart of stone has been removed. You see, it is not without pains that we have writing paper to write our letters on, and neither can we get it without paying something for it; but there was never material got at such a price as was the material Christ uses in writing His epistle. As He says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." And that price is not corruptible things, as silver and gold; but the precious blood of Christ Himself – as of a lamb without spot and without blemish – bought what He uses for paper, and as Christ bought it with His own blood, so He transformed it by the power of His own Spirit, so that it might be susceptible of receiving the contents that He intended should be written there. We are not given to an imaginative way of speaking at all. We are seriously endeavouring to understand what the Spirit of God teaches us when He speaks of believers as an epistle of Christ. We may put it to your own heart and understanding if it is not the truth to say that as Christ is the letter writer, so what He has as material to write upon is a renewed heart, a heart of flesh – that is, an understanding heart – and especially a heart that will tremble at His own word.

III. – But the third question that is to be put is this – What has this Letter-Writer for ink? And in a sense, we may say that of all the answers evoked, by the questions suggested by our text, there is no answer more marvellous than the answer that the Apostle gives to that question, for although Christ does not make use of ink in order to write His epistle, He has something infinitely more excellent than He uses in place of ink, and what is that? "Written not with ink," says our text, "but with the Spirit of the living God."

You have heard about letters of gold. I have seen a sermon of Mr. Spurgeon's printed in letters of gold to signify that his sermons had been published for fifty years without a break, but although it is reckoned to be something very precious to have a letter written in characters of gold, even gold itself shadows into insignificance in comparison with what the Lord Jesus Christ makes use of when He writes an epistle, for He writes "not with ink," we are told, "but with the Spirit of the living God." And this subject of the Spirit of the living God is altogether so mysterious that for the most part we may say He instructs us concerning His own person, nature and office by means of figures and symbols drawn from nature or from art. One of the very commonest figures in which the Holy Spirit in His work is set before us is that of water. For instance, He says, "I will pour water upon the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground," that is, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses, so that one shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord and surname himself by the name of Israel." And it is no wonder that the Spirit of God should be compared to water. In nature, if a shower of rain did not come upon the earth all the year round, it would be in vain that we sowed seed in the fields. That is felt very much in hotter climates when there may be nearly half a year before a drop of rain visits them, and the farmers have to wait for the rainy season before they begin to sow seed, because it is the rain that mollifies the earth and renders it fruitful, and so it is with

regard to the indispensable activities of the Spirit of God. It is, indeed, in vain that the gospel should be preached at all apart from the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is compared, not only to rain, but compared to rivers, because ordinarily you will find that flourishing cities are found built upon rivers, perhaps at the mouth of the river. You see Glasgow owes much, under the hand of God, to the Clyde; New York to the Hudson, and London to the Thames, and so on. And so is it with regard to the Spirit of God, the Comforter. As the Psalmist says, "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." And that is the Holy Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is also compared to wind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." And the Holy Spirit is compared to eyesalve. You know doctors sometimes use drops which they instil into the eye that does not see very well in order to restore sight, and the Holy Ghost is eyesalve to restore vision to the blind. But here you may say that if the Holy Ghost is not compared wholly to ink – for we are told that the letter is not written with ink – yet to this extent we may say that the Holy Ghost *is* compared to ink, inasmuch as the purpose that on a low platform ink serves for an ordinary letter-writer, on the higher platform of Christ's work the Spirit of the living God serves that high purpose even in Christ's hands, and, therefore, these letters are said to be written "not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." And, dear friends, this is a very principal glory of the gospel – that it is the ministration of the Holy Ghost. The gospel gets two names. One name of the gospel is that it is the ministration of righteousness. You see we have lost all righteousness through the fall and through sin. It is said of us that we are a people that are "free from righteousness," as if we were quite strangers to it, and had nothing to do with it, and apart from righteousness there can be no forgiveness, but this was the provision of God, that in virtue of the incarnation and obedience unto death of the Son of God, there should an end be made of sin, finishing of transgressions, reconciliation made for iniquities and an everlasting righteousness brought in, and this is the righteousness which is the ground of a sinner's pardon and acceptance so that God is not simply said to pardon believers in Jesus Christ, but to justify them, and that is as much as to say that God, the Judge of all, should declare His law is magnified in respect of them, His justice is satisfied in respect of them. And this is the reason why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation – that this righteousness that God provided and that God proceeds upon is brought near to us in the gospel. Therefore, the gospel is said to be the "power of God unto every one that believeth," for the righteousness of God is therein revealed, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." But the gospel has another title over and above its being called the ministration of righteousness. It is also called the ministration of the Holy Ghost. And I believe that wheresoever there is the pure gospel, more or less the result is that the Holy Spirit of God does accompany that gospel, for the gospel is the ministration of the Spirit and it has not changed its nature from the days of the Apostles down to the present day. You see Adam in innocence had the Spirit and if Adam had not fallen, we should all have been born in the image of God and we should also, just as our first covenant-head had the Holy Spirit, all have the Holy Spirit. But then Adam lost the Spirit and it was not for himself alone that he lost the Holy Spirit, but he lost the Spirit for the whole race, and the Spirit of God is not given in connection with the covenant of works any more. You see, when man sinned and God drove our first parents out of Eden, that did not mean that God, the unchangeable God, would not bring back any of us any more to nearness to Himself, but it did mean this that on the ground of the covenant of works, or of the law as a covenant, not a single human being would ever return to God any more; neither does God give the Holy Ghost in virtue of the law as a covenant, in virtue of the covenant of works, but He does give the Holy Ghost in virtue of the covenant of grace and in virtue of the gospel and this is the very glory of Christ. As John the

Baptist pointed out, “He it is that baptiseth with the Holy Ghost,” and this Holy Ghost it is who indeed by His infinite power turns the flinty rock to be a pool of water and the ground that was dried up to be springs of water, who takes away the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh. But that is not all that has to be done. The material, so to say, was not prepared without His infinite omnipotent operations, but there is something in addition to this in order that the letter should be written. And one may, without going at least far away from the figure used in our text, make use of an illustration given to us towards the end of this same chapter in order to show how this letter is being written, for it is a marvellous process. Sometimes, if you go into the printing-house of a generous owner, he may shew you some of the marvels about the way that they print their newspaper. Well, the Apostle Paul was led to give at least some indications of the process by which these letters are being written, when he says: – “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” For it just means this – if you were standing before a looking-glass, the first thing of all that you would see is yourself. But then it would be quite possible that one that you never saw in the flesh might come in behind you, and you might see his face reflected in the looking-glass. And thus it is with regard to the way in which these letters are being written. The Word of God, you may say, is the looking-glass, and in that Word we find ourselves, at least first of all, lost – lost in the light of God’s law – but then, what more do we see? Christ the Saviour, as one that we never saw with our fleshly eyes, coming as it were behind us, and shewing Himself to us, as His image is reflected in the looking-glass of His own Word. “We behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.” And what effect has this upon us? It has this effect upon us, “How unlike am I myself to Jesus Christ! How desirable it is that I should be like Jesus Christ! He is fairer than the children of men. My heart’s desire goes out in aspiration that I might use Him for forgiveness; that I might use Him for acceptance, yea, that I might have the boldness to use Him for adoption. Although I deserve to be in the lowest hell, for Christ’s sake I am exalted to the glory of coming to the place of God’s children, as it is written: – ‘To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.’ And not only so, but I desire that I might use Him for holiness, for sanctification – that I might be like Him!” To see Christ as with transforming power is the work of the Holy Ghost. Were it not for the omnipotent, gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, we should have no vision to see the glory of Christ, but even after He has restored vision to us, He must constantly be to us as eyesalve, for there is much with us that tends to blind our vision. Therefore, the Church was praying that “her eyes might be opened to see wonderful things out of His law.” We shall not, however, follow that theme further, but truly it is a most marvellous thing in connection with this letter-writing, that the great Letter-Writer, Jesus Christ, should, instead of ink, have the Spirit of the living God, and this Spirit He gives in measure. He is, as it were, instilled into our very eyes, into our heart, giving us at least glimpses, so that we may be said to “see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off.” The hearts of God’s people go to heaven before they are there actually themselves.

IV. – But then another question is of this nature. If the Letter-Writer in this case is the Lord Jesus Christ; if what He has for paper are believing men and women, with special reference to their hearts; and if that which He has for ink is the Holy Spirit, does He make use of pens in writing this epistle? Well, He does, and that is marvellous. But it is His way to be making use of means where means are available, and even of creatures. You see when He raised Lazarus from the dead, He did not perform a miracle in opening the grave for that could be done by men, but they could not make Lazarus live and He wrought a miracle in that case. Well, Christ makes use of pens, and we may say that He has been using large and small pens. What are the large pens that He uses? You may say that they are the prophets and apostles. This is what the Apostle means when he says: – “Manifestly declared to be the

epistle of Christ ministered by us.” That is to say, we have been as pens. You remember that the Psalmist distinctly compares himself to a pen, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” And these pens were very full of the ink of the Holy Ghost. “The Spirit of God spake by me,” says David, and although he was but a mere man, yet he was as a pen in a sense through which the Holy Spirit flowed, and by means of which these epistles have been written. And, as I have said, He makes use of little pens too. What do we mean by little-pens? Well, we mean this, that Christ has instituted a ministry in the Church, and that ministry may be compared to little pens. As Augustine said: –

“The lofty mountains shall bring forth
Unto the people peace,
Likewise the little hills the same
Shall do by righteousness.”

Augustine, in commenting on this verse, said that as in nature the lofty mountains break the clouds first, and then when they are brought down nearer the earth, the little hills break them next, and thus the fields are watered, so in grace the lofty mountains may be said to be the prophets and apostles, those who were inspired of God to write the Old and New testaments, and the little hills to be Christ’s ministers, to the end of time, by which the blessings of Christ were spread out so as to reach His people. The Lord’s people may have oftentimes been in circumstances when this process of writing was being done entirely by the larger pens, as it were. Perhaps they had no public ministry to wait upon at all, yet they had the Bible, but we are not on that account to disparage the smaller pens. That is a most marvellous thing which the Apostle says to the Galatians: – “He, therefore, that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?” And I believe that he refers there to the miracles, gifts, that were common in the days of the Apostles. You see the Apostles gave the Spirit through the laying on of hands, and they wrought miracles, and it is to that the Apostle refers. Although these extraordinary gifts are not now given to the Church since the canon of inspiration was closed, that does not mean that the Spirit is not given in any sense, for the Spirit is given as a cleansing, sanctifying, and comforting Spirit to the Church of God to the end of time, and there have been times when the Lord’s people felt that this blessing reached themselves, and they became united in one body just through what they felt of the power of God accompanying His word through His ministers. You find the character of those whom Christ made use of as pens and will make use of as pens to the end of time, for there can be no question at all that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, and where the Spirit of God is given, that will be a ministry in which the breath, the life of the preaching will be Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

V. – But, in a word, let me refer to the contents of this letter. What is the end of all this? We have, in substance, told it already, but it is just this – that in some measure believers might become like Jesus Christ Himself. “We are changed into the same image,” especially that we should be like Him. And in what ways will they be like Him? Well, there is no doubt that they will be like Him in holiness, as He says Himself, “Be ye holy, as I am holy.” I remember, although it is many years since, I heard a very judicious and worthy man speak at a fellowship meeting in the north of Scotland, in connection with this portion: “This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” He compared the Lord’s people in process of sanctification to children at school, and when he was at school where he used to be, the teacher himself would write the headline and then the children would try and write as like to that as they could. The headline the teacher wrote on his copy was, “Be ye holy, as I am holy.” And very touching and affecting it was to hear this worthy man speak of the sorrows of the scholars. Those that were careless had to be punished, and even those that did their best came far short.

But even in seeking holiness itself, it is in an evangelical way the people of God seek it. That is to say, they seek it through the Cross of Christ, that as “they are planted in the likeness of his death” for justification, “they should be planted in the likeness of his resurrection” for sanctification. It is not by the works of the law that they expect to be sanctified, although the law is the perfect standard according to which they are to be sanctified; but it is through Christ, and through their being enabled to put off the old man, that they become like Him in holiness. This, then, is the first lesson that they learn from Him – “that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.”

They also become like Him in lowliness of spirit. “Learn of me,” He says, “for I am meek and lowly in heart.” A proud Christian is a great contradiction. And they are like Him also in loveliness of character, as He says, “Be ye ready to forgive one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, forgives you.”

These, then, are some of the traits of the Lord’s people which they are being made to bear, until at last they shall be made quite like Himself, and when they shall be made quite like Himself they shall be immediately raised into glory. And although their bodies will rest in the grave for a little time, the time is not long until they shall be like Him, not only in their souls but also in their bodies.

Now, dear friends, we should consider that it is about ourselves – if we are according to our profession – that we are speaking when we are speaking of the epistles of Christ. One of the ends of the ministry is just to go forth, as it were, among the people, asking for writing material. That is what we are out for, so to speak. The Lord says, “Give me thine heart.” And if you give your heart you give writing material, for Christ never got a heart but He wrote part of His epistle upon that heart. And will you not, then, give Him your heart? You will say, “I do not think my heart is worth His taking.” Well, I will use this homely figure. You know there are men going about whom we call ragmen, and they are asking for rags. And do you know what is the use that is being made of these rags? They are largely used for writing-paper. They are turned into pulp, and the pulp is turned into writing-paper; and there never was a time when there was such a price for rags as there is just now. Well, if you should have the feeling that your own heart and life are but as filthy rags, let not that keep you from giving yourself over to Christ, for He will turn you into the best of paper, and you will be used on the King’s table. He will write what will be to His own glory upon your heart, and you will have reason to thank His blessed Spirit that delivered you from the imaginations of Satan, by which a counterfeit of godly fear and of honouring His law would have kept you from giving your heart, that is but as rags, to Him. This, then, is the one main end of the ministry – asking, as it were, for writing material. Give Him your heart as it is; He will look Himself to the rest of it. He will turn it into good paper; He will write what will be for your good and for His own glory on that heart.

May He bless to us our meditation on His Word!

[October 1916]

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door,
I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” – Revelation 3:20.

In the first part of this book of Revelation there is a message from God sent by the Apostle John to the seven churches in Asia. The seven churches were not seven different denominations, but seven congregations of the one visible Church of Christ. This may be seen by the fact that each church has but one pastor – here called “an angel” or messenger. If they were denominations, there would be several pastors in every denomination according to the number of congregations in it; but it was one pastor that each congregation had.

The message was addressed to the angel or pastor of the churches, and was suited to the spiritual condition of the churches respectively. The congregation of Laodicea was in a worse state than any of the rest. On reading their own report of themselves, one would think that they were in the best condition of all the churches in the world. In their own estimation they were “rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing.” But the report that Jesus Christ gives of them is quite different; He says that they are wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. The report of Christ is the true one. Their own good report of themselves was owing to their ignorance of themselves. Some churches that have forsaken “the faith” give a good report of themselves, but when we read Christ’s report of them, we see that they are miserably mistaken in their high opinion of themselves. Christ, after He had told the Laodicean Church their real condition in His sight, counsels them to buy of Him “gold tried in the fire that they might be rich, and white raiment that they might be clothed, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear; and to anoint their eyes with eyesalve that they might see.” They would get all these good things by receiving Him by faith, therefore He stands at their door and knocks for admittance.

In addressing you from the text, I call your attention to the following particulars: –

- I. – The Person that stands at the door;
- II. – The door at which He stands;
- III. – His work there; and
- IV. – The feast that Christ and those who admit Him partake of:
“I will sup with him, and he with me.”

I. – “The Person.” –

The Person is Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God, the Saviour of sinners of mankind. The chariot, in which Christ, the King of glory, comes, is the word of the Gospel. That chariot was made by God Himself. He will take no other chariot. Men deceive themselves when they think that Christ will come to them in a chariot of their own making – the word of man – and they throw aside the word of God as in their opinion antiquated for the twentieth century.

II. – The door at which Christ stands. –

It was at the door of a Church – the Church of Laodicea – He was standing when He spoke the words of our text. Christ was within that Church once, but He is now outside.

How is it that He is outside a Church in which He was before? He was put out. Who put Him out? The congregation that He was now addressing at the door. When the good people in that Church died out, a sort of self-righteous people took their place, and they imagined that they were so rich, so good, that they did not need Christ any longer with them, and virtually said to Christ that He might now leave their company. Pastor and people seemed to be unanimous in dismissing Him, so He left them. Many churches in gospel lands have thus

dealt with Christ. Many churches in Europe have done so. As long as the Lord's people were in these churches, they welcomed Christ with them, and He was willing to remain with them; but when these were removed to the Church in heaven, those who came in their place drove the Saviour away from their midst, and they set up in His place a fictitious Christ, with whom they felt quite pleased. "But their house was left desolate," when the Christ of the Bible and the Saviour of sinners left them. This is true of almost all the Churches of the Reformation in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Christ was once in these churches; but like the Church of Laodicea they put Him away from their company, and yet they say that Christ is with them and that they have the Gospel. They may have a gospel "which is no gospel." What a wonder that Christ would seek admittance to a church that put Him out! But there He is standing at the door. If any man inside open the door, He will go in and sup with that person.

Christ also stands at the door of the individual sinner to whom the Gospel comes: "What is that door?" I shall mention four doors at which He stands: –

1. The door of hearing. – This is one of the doors of entrance into the soul of man. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear the voice of the Saviour in the Gospel. That was the first door to which Satan came to enter the soul of man. It is also the first door to which Christ comes for re-admittance into the souls of ruined men. Satan came as a thief, to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Christ comes that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly than man possessed in the state of innocency. In the case of adults especially, hearing the Gospel is necessary to salvation. Without faith they cannot be saved. He that believeth in the Son of God shall be saved, and faith cometh by hearing. And it must be the hearing of the word of God. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" These are conclusive arguments against the unscriptural notion of those men in our day who assert that the heathen may be saved without the Gospel. These men have reason to doubt their own salvation. In the history of our own country there is no mention of a Christian man or woman till the Gospel was introduced into it, and the reason is that there were none such. The light of nature is not sufficient to give us a saving knowledge of God. We need the Gospel.

2. The second door is the door of the mind. – Knowledge of Christ enters the mind of man by a door. What is that door? It is the *understanding*. When the eunuch was reading about Christ, Philip asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" It is what we understand we may be said to know, and no more. Many read the Scriptures who take a wrong meaning out of them, because they do not understand them. It is not enough to read and repeat the Word of God; we need to understand it. The understanding of man, as he is by nature, is shut, and the mind is full of spiritual darkness; and so long as the door of the mind is shut, saving knowledge of Christ cannot enter in. Christ comes to this door, that He may get into the soul. It is He Himself that opens it. It was He that opened the understanding of His disciples to understand the Scriptures. It is He that opens the understanding of all His people. He came and gave us "an understanding, that we might know him that is true." He does so by His Spirit. The illumination of the mind that is dark by nature is the work of God's Spirit. This knowledge is too high for men to attain to without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that quickens the dead soul. It is He that gives saving knowledge to the ignorant sinner. "Ye were once darkness, but ye are now light in the Lord." Christ, as the prophet, stands at the door of hearing and the door of the understanding. "Behold, I stand at the door." Incline your ear and hear His voice; submit your understanding to Him, that He may enlighten you in order to be saved. You need to hear His voice in the Gospel and to know Him by the teaching of the Spirit. "They shall be all taught of God." It is such that open to Christ and trust in Him for salvation. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee."

3. The door of the will. – In some houses there is a two-leaved door, and if one leaf is open a man can come in. But Christ will not come in unless the two leaves are open, and the two leaves are the *understanding* and the *will*. In opening to Christ and receiving of Him there is, on the one hand, the assent of the understanding, and on the other, the consent of the will. “If any man *will* come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.” “Whosoever *will*, let him take of the water of life freely.” It was unwillingness that caused the Jews not to come to Christ. “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.”

4. The door of the heart. – I take the heart in a limited sense, as the seat of the affections. Christ is an object to be loved as well as to be known, and the heart is the seat of love and desires. Christ is to be loved above all other objects.

III. – His work at the door. – He stands and knocks. “I knock.” He knocks in order to be admitted.

1. He knocks by His Word –

“If any man hear my voice.” He knocks, first, by the word of the law, by which is the knowledge of sin. We find in Christ’s teaching that He preached the law, and He did that to the Church of Laodicea when He told her that she was poor and miserable, blind and naked; of which she was ignorant, which was the reason of her good opinion of herself. The sinner by nature is ignorant of his condition under the broken law and the curse of God, and he is to be told this. He knocks, secondly, by the word of the Gospel, by which is the knowledge of Christ and salvation, and when He knocks by the word of the Gospel He appears as the Crucified One – as He who suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God – and says, as He said to the Church: “Open to me, for my head is filled with the dew and my locks with the drops of the night.” It is a sight of Christ as crucified and dying for sinners that melts the heart, through the effectual work of the Holy Spirit. The law alone hardens the heart; the Gospel melts it.

2. He knocks by His providence – by adverse and prosperous providences. – He gives prosperity in order to lead sinners to Himself. The goodness of God ought to lead us to repentance. He gave manna to the Israelites when they were murmuring, to try thus to see if His goodness would lead them to obey Him. Many instances might be adduced to show that He uses adverse providences to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Himself. Manasseh is a case to point. God was speaking to him, through the prophets, to turn from his evil ways, but he would not hearken to God’s voice, and then God brought him into affliction, and that brought him to his senses. Then he began to cry to the Lord, and he was heard and obtained mercy, the fruit of which was seen in his work of reformation in the Church. Poverty and sickness and other calamities have been blessed to many. We have been told that the disease of consumption has been blessed to many, and good people used to call it the “blessed affliction.”

He is knocking by His providence at our door as a nation by this awful War in which we are involved. But there is no sign yet that our nation hearkens to Christ’s voice; for from the King on the throne to the lowest subject, with few exceptions, all are deaf to the voice of Christ, though He speaks loudly in a terrible manner. But until we as a nation are brought to repentance, He will continue His judgment of cutting down high and low by the sword, and all who harden their heart against Him shall be destroyed in everlasting perdition. There are, however, a few among our soldiers and officers who hearken to the voice of Christ, and these, although they should be killed, shall go to heaven, so that death shall be gain to them. Not only in the army, but among the people in general, especially in large cities, many are frequenting the theatre and other places of pleasure just the same as before Christ began to speak in this terrible manner. Promoters of idolatry in our country are defying the Almighty, but except they repent they shall “all likewise perish.” Although unconverted chaplains tell

the soldiers that if they are killed in this lawful War they are sure of going to heaven, God will send to hell all that are killed without being born again. For “except a man be born again, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God,” and chaplains that are not born again shall be among them in the place of perdition. The death of Christ and not the death of the sinner is the only ground of salvation. Therefore let kings, judges, rulers, and the people in general be wise and be taught. Let them kiss the Son lest they perish (Psalm 2).

3. He knocks by His Spirit. He was striving for a long time with the generation before the flood, but because they grieved the Spirit, and would not yield to His operations, He said, “My Spirit will not always strive with man”; and destruction came upon them. There is a common operation of the Spirit which must be experienced to some extent by the hearers of the word of God, and some may at times begin to pray through this influence, but when the effectual work of the Spirit begins, the sinner is brought to repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. So that in the case of those that open to Christ there is more than a striving of the Spirit, which striving is all that the Declaratory Act of 1892 ascribes to the Holy Spirit in dealing with sinners. The Holy Spirit works effectually through the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit, and results in making the sinner willing to receive Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel.

IV. – The feast of which Christ, and the believer that opens to Him, partake. –

The feast is the provision of the covenant of grace. It is called a *supper* because this is the last dispensation of the Gospel, as supper is the last meal of the day. When Christ comes into the soul, He comes with a feast to a hungry person, and they are both to sit at the same table to partake of this feast. Christ partakes of it, and the believer partakes of it. It is Christ that partakes first, and then the believer.

In what sense does Christ partake of His own provision? In this sense – it is a feast to Christ to save a sinner. When He spoke to the woman of Samaria, he said to his disciples, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of,” and that was that this woman was saved by Him. Then, in the parable of the lost sheep, when He found the sheep, He put it on His shoulder and went on His way rejoicing. It is a feast to Him to do the Father’s will. He said, “My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me.” He delighted so much to do the Father’s will that He reckoned it as a feast, and when He saves a sinner He is doing the will of the Father. It is a feast to Him to see of the travail of His own soul, for then He “shall be satisfied.” He sups with the believer, inasmuch as He rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, where His people were, before the world was.

The believer sups also. Not at a different table, but at the same table with Christ. Here is a wonderful sight – the glorious second Person of the Trinity and the poor sinner so near each other. The sinner that was separate from God by sin brought nigh again through the blood of the cross. But, poor as the believer is in comparison with Christ, Christ is not ashamed of His companion, though the believer is often ashamed of himself. He has fellowship with Christ. Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ. Fellowship is founded upon union. The believer is united to Christ, and therefore he has fellowship with Him. Christ himself is the feast, and the believer feeds upon Him. “Truly, my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”

The feast is not a carnal feast, but a spiritual feast, and there is sufficient food for all the faculties and powers of his soul. There is food for his mind, “To know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, this is life eternal.” There is food for his conscience, for the conscience finds sufficient provision to satisfy it in the death of Christ, and there is nothing that can satisfy an awakened conscience but the death or atonement of Christ. There is food for the will, for there is nothing that will satisfy a renewed will but Christ in His fulness of blessings. “This is all my salvation and all my desire.” There is a feast for the affections, which by nature feed upon the husks which the swine do eat. They are now

set on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. As men need food daily, so does the believer, and although he does not get such a rich diet always, yet there are times in which he receives out of the fulness of Christ to make him truly happy and strong to serve the Lord with the greatest delight. Still, on earth he is often poor and needy, hungry, and thirsty, but when he is brought to the Father's house above, he shall be perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

In conclusion. –

(1) A word to the unconverted sinner. – You have been born and brought up in the land of the Gospel. Christ has been knocking at your door ever since till now. Have you opened to Him? If not, you are guilty of the greatest sin, for all other sins will be forgiven if you come to Christ, and believe in Him. But if you persist in unbelief, it is impossible that you can be saved, “For he that believeth not shall be damned.” You maybe like Agrippa, who said to Paul – “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”; but almost to be a Christian will not do. You must be altogether a Christian if you are to be saved. Remember that Christ has not taken his seat at the door. He is only *standing*, and ready to leave and go to others who will welcome Him to their hearts. This may be the last knock He shall ever give at your door. Be wise, therefore, for your immortal soul, and receive Him now, as He is freely offered in the Gospel to you as a lost sinner. Although it is Christ himself by His Spirit that works the grace of faith, it is you that must exercise that faith in receiving Christ, for it is you that must believe if you are to be saved, and this is the sense in which we understand the sinner opening to Christ. Another said – “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; why standest thou without?”

(2) A word to the awakened sinner. – You have for a long time kept Christ outside the door, and you may be apt to think that it is too late now, but He still says, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” You may be thinking that you have kept Christ waiting at your door so long that He will deal with you as you dealt with Him. But you are to remember that Christ is not like you. He does not recompense evil for evil. Sinners are saved by grace, and not by their own merit; and grace does not look for merit in the sinner, but is fully satisfied with the merit of Christ. Cast yourself, therefore, upon Him as you are, a guilty and unworthy sinner.

(3) A word to the believer. – What a marvel it is that you who were far off from God by nature are brought nigh by the blood of Christ! Give Him the glory. When you sup with Christ, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. You also weep as you partake of the Supper with a weeping that is two-fold. When you look on Him whom you have pierced you mourn; and you weep with joy that He has saved you, sinful as you have been. Although your fellowship with Christ may be broken, the union between you and Him can never be broken. In view of the unspeakable obligations under which Christ has laid you, see that you live not unto yourself but unto Him that died for you and rose again. You can never do on earth what you ought to do for Christ. See, then, that you will be careful to do as the woman, of whom Christ said, “She hath done what she could.” Seek, by prayer and other endeavours, to advance His cause in the world. Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and your work shall not be in vain in the Lord. Live on Christ, and live for Him. For this is your reasonable service.

May God in His infinite mercy bless this sermon to the reader! Amen.

[November 1916]

A S e r m o n .

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACKAY, Oban.

(Taken down by a Hearer.)

“But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” – Amos 6:5 (last clause).

Let us now look for a short time, as the Lord may be pleased to enable us, to the chapter read, the book of the prophet Amos, sixth chapter and the last clause of the sixth verse: – “But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” Although I have taken these words as

the basis of a few remarks, I intend to draw your attention briefly to the contents of this chapter throughout. You may notice that the chapter divides itself into two parts.

The first part is taken up with an accusation against God's ancient people – Israel and Judah – and in that accusation God brings before them the sins of which they had been guilty, and these sins we might say culminate in the sin that is spoken of at the end of the sixth verse, “They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”

And in the second part of the chapter the prophet Amos, in the name of the Lord, brings before God's people what God would bring upon them on account of these manifold transgression's. Now, there is such a thing as ourselves being spoken to by these words. That is to say, if we find that the first part of this chapter – wherein God is bringing before Israel their sins – describes ourselves, we are bound to take that part to ourselves; and if the character belongs to us which God here gives to Israel, then we ought also to remember that just as God dealt with Israel of old, so He will deal with us too.

Let us notice then what God says in the first part of the chapter about His ancient people, Israel and Judah. As we go on endeavouring to find out what God says about them, we are to remember that these things are written for our learning as well as for their learning. Now, what is the first thing that is in this accusation? Well, the first thing in it is this: – “Woe to them that are at ease in Sion.” Sion means here the chief place where God was being worshipped, the chief city of the Church of God. That was Sion, and Sion here includes the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. When He says, “and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came,” we are to understand by Samaria Israel or the ten tribes. You must remember that at this time the Church of God was divided into Israel and Judah, or the ten tribes and Judah and Benjamin, and Sion was the chief town, the chief place of Judah and Benjamin, while Samaria was the chief town, the capital, the city of the kings of Israel. That brings before us that when God is here addressing, through the prophet, Sion and Samaria, He is addressing the whole of His covenant people or His Church. The first thing, then, He brings against them is this, that “they are at ease in Sion, and they trust in the mountain of Samaria.” Now, what did He mean by saying that they were at ease in Sion, and that they were trusting in the mountain of Samaria? Well, what He means by it is just this, – that they were satisfied with outward forms and outward performances, and that as far as vital godliness was concerned, there was scarcely such a thing to be found among them. There was a remnant among them, but, generally speaking, the people of Judah were at ease in Sion, and the people of Israel were trusting in the mountain of Samaria. Now, God here pronounces a woe against them. They were at ease; they were trusting in the work of their own hands; they were indifferent about those things which constitute vital godliness. And then He brings before them that they ought to remember what He had done to other cities which He names here. “Pass ye,” He says, “unto Calneh and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms or their border greater than your border?” That is to say, they were at ease in Sion, they were trusting in the mountain of Samaria; they were thinking they were all right, they were prospering outwardly; but yet they were without God, without His favour, without His Spirit, and they were quite contented with their lot. Now, God tells them to pass on to consider the condition of other cities which He had visited, and which He had destroyed for the very sins of which they were guilty. They were saying that things would be all right with them, since they had the outward forms, since they had the name of Israel and of Judah, since they were the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, since they had the oracles of God, since they were giving a kind of outward respect and worship to God, and thinking that they would stand, but He calls upon them to pass on to consider these towns and what befell them. What befell these towns? Well, God overthrew them, and he asks here the question of Israel: “Be ye better than these kingdoms or their border greater than your border?” In other words, “Do

you think that your Sion and your Samaria will stand for you. Go and behold what my power hath wrought on these towns which I have named! See how I have brought them down to the ground, and do you think that you, who are guilty of the same sins, shall escape?"

Then He goes on to bring before them the sins of which they were actually guilty, and He says, "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near." How were they putting away the evil day? They were just saying, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. That was how they were putting away the evil day. The prophets Hosea and Amos were contemporaries for some time, and these two witnesses were protesting against Israel and Judah, and declaring that God was to overthrow them, and that on account of their idolatry and on account of their wickedness; but they were putting far away the evil day. They were saying, "The evil day may come, but it will not come in our time." And by that very indifference – by that very putting away of the evil day, and concluding that it would not come to their own time – by their very neglecting to observe the threatenings of God through His prophets – they were only hastening the coming of the day.

Now let us notice, before we proceed further, how applicable this is to our own state as a land. We are a land which has been in covenant with God, as Israel and Judah were of old, and we are a land concerning which it has been true that for a great number of years we have been at ease in Sion and we have been trusting in the mountain of Samaria; and although God in His providence has been speaking loudly throughout the whole world against the workers of iniquity; yet we have been going on, and that in the frowardness of our ways, and doing exactly as Israel and Judah were doing. We have been putting far away the evil day, and by that very neglect of the threatenings of God's Word and the admonitions which He was giving to us in His providence, we were causing the seat of violence to draw nigh. We were wringing judgments from the hand of God, and that by our very ease and by our false security and false trust.

But the prophet here goes on to say that "they were lying upon beds of ivory and stretching themselves upon couches, and eating the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the stall." What does that bring before us? It brings before us that the people of Israel and Judah were in a very prosperous condition. They were so rich that they were lying on beds of ivory, and they were so indolent that they were stretching themselves upon couches; and as far as food was concerned, they were living in excessive luxury, and that notwithstanding God's warnings and God's judgments. They were going on putting far away the evil day, and living in this manner, and is not this description very, very applicable to ourselves as a land? Have we not been very rich? Have we not been lying on beds of ivory? Have we not been stretching ourselves upon couches? Have we not been faring like the rich man – sumptuously every day? Oh, yes! This was true of Great Britain before this terrible War broke out, that as far as the people of the land were concerned, from the highest to the lowest, we were faring sumptuously every day, and continuing regardless of the claims of the Almighty. We were doing despite unto the Spirit of grace; we were going on in our own ways and pleasures and there was no word regarding God, and at the same time we were putting away the evil day that was at the door.

Then, He goes on further, and says that "they were chanting to the sound of the viol and inventing to themselves instruments of music, like David," making David, very likely, an excuse. They were given over to the pleasures of sense; they were trying to satisfy their appetites with the most dainty morsels they could procure, and they were endeavouring to satisfy their ears, not with the sound of God's Word, but with the sound of music. Not only that, but they were adding to these instruments of music, and they were taking David as an example and as an excuse for their multiplying of the instruments of music. Now, how do we stand with regard to this verse? Friends, supposing that God had spoken these words to ourselves in the first instance, would it not be true of us that we were given over, and that

altogether, to music and dancing? I ask you if these words are not exactly fitting our own condition as a land? Yes, verily! for music in this land became such a curse that there was hardly any religious exercise whatsoever engaged in without some instrumental accompaniment; they would require to have a musical instrument. I was very much surprised – although I might not have been surprised, I might have looked for it – but when I was in England I had an opportunity of going in to several of the churches there. I was in a Baptist, a Methodist, and a Church of England place of worship, and I was also in a Presbyterian meeting place, and in all those places there was instrumental music. Music was everywhere. But I did not need to go to England in order to see these things. I had only to look about me at home, and what would I find? Music everywhere. There is hardly a religious service held in Oban without instrumental music. Now, what does this mean? It means, friends, that we have departed from the ways of God, and that God has departed from us, and that we are now become so low that we are not able to recognise or to apprehend that things are so terrible as they are. Oh! but it might be said, “Did not David invent instruments of music, and were they not at liberty to follow the example of David?” Many in our day are taking David as an excuse for introducing music into the worship of God. Well, if you read your Bible, you will find that David got strict instructions from the Almighty Himself to introduce music into the worship of the sanctuary. David did not invent them of his own accord, no more than Moses invented the tabernacle, and directed it according to his own pattern and his own wisdom; but David, according to the wisdom that was given him and according to the directions and instructions of the Almighty, introduced music into the worship of the Lord’s House. But does it follow from that that you are to follow the example of David, who was living when the worship of the sanctuary was ritualistic? Oh, no! You do not find in the New Testament the least warrant for the use of instrumental music in the worship of God; but, on the contrary, you have the express declaration of the Apostle that the singing, the praise in the sanctuary is to be “the fruit of the lips” (Hebrews 13:15). And as far as I am myself concerned – perhaps I have not much of an ear for music – but I must say that the most beautiful music that ever I heard was just the human voice, and there is no singing in my estimation, and in the estimation of others, that will come up to “the fruit of the lips.” And why do men, then, go after instruments? The reason is just this, that when the grace of God is absent from the heart they will need to get something else in its place. And if the question were asked: “Why have we gone as a land to the instruments?” Is it an indication that we have grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? Oh, no! But it is an indication that the Spirit of God has left us. It is an indication that we are taken up with our own pleasures and the satisfying of the flesh in the worship of God more than having the true Substance, which is Christ, and His favour in the worship. Now, this “people chant to the sound of the viol and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David.” He brings here still another accusation against them: “That drink wine in bowls”; that is to say, they were drunkards. It was not a *little* wine they were using at all; it was not in common cups or common measures they were taking it at all; they were taking it “in bowls.” And, then, “they were anointing themselves with the chief ointments.” There you have fashion at its height. They were trying to satisfy all their senses – their eyes and their ears, their smell and their taste; they were trying to find satisfaction in the creature, and there was no word about the Creator. Now, how do we stand with regard to these matters ourselves? Oh, friends, are we not a byword among the nations with regard to strong drink; and, as far as pampering our bodies is concerned, as far as following fashion is concerned, are we not guilty in this? Have we not been mad upon our pleasures?

But now the crowning sin is mentioned by the prophet, and it is this – “They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” That is to say, “The true cause of Christ is nothing to them.” They were thinking that everything was going on very smoothly, hence they were

enjoying their pleasures and satisfying their own lusts. They were not remembering that the state of the cause of Christ was very low in the land. That was not a grief to them, and has not this been our crowning sin as a land? Was not this the crowning sin of Europe? Europe, that is now wallowing in its blood, “was not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” Europe was bent on the pleasures of the flesh and on the satisfying of the senses, but, as far as Christ’s cause was concerned, there was not *one* word about it. And this was our own crowning sin as a land. Christ was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” in our midst. We hid, as it were, our faces from Him. We despised Him, and esteemed Him not. We saw no beauty in Him that we should desire Him. We forsook Him and went after our vanities, and we had no word about the low condition of Christ’s cause in the land. “But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”

This is now the first part of this chapter, and it is very evident that, if you apply it to our own state, it is very, very applicable to us. It is so applicable that it might, in the first instance, be spoken to ourselves. Now, this is a rule which you and I would do well to go by with regard to the Scriptures. If the Scriptures describe your character, you are warranted to believe that God is speaking to you. Whether He is describing your condition as a lost sinner, warning you with regard to the result of your sins, you ought to remember to lay to heart that God is speaking to you personally, or whether He is, on the other hand, encouraging you and giving you promises; if these promises are suitable to your condition, you are just as warranted to receive them as you are to receive His threats and His warnings. In fact, if you ask me the question – “What warrant have I got to apply the Word of God to my own condition?” Well, this is your warrant. If the Word of God applies to your state, to your circumstances, you are warranted to apply it to yourself, and we have no hesitation whatever in declaring that the first part of this chapter is applicable to the state of this land. We have been at ease in Sion; we have been putting far away the evil day; we have been causing, by our indifference, the seat of violence to draw near; we have been lying on beds of ivory, stretching ourselves on couches, eating the lambs of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the stalls; we have been inventing instruments of music, and bent altogether on music; we have been drunkards, and we have been indulging ourselves in fashions which will pass away.

Now; let us come to *the second part* of the chapter; for these words, “They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph,” not only look back, but look forward. This is where the division of the chapter comes in. In the next verse and down to the end, we have got the result of what has gone before, or in other words, we have God’s dealings with Israel and Judah brought vividly and most terribly before our notice. If the first part belongs to us, let us remember that we are bound also to apply to ourselves the second part, and what does God say that He will do with Israel and Judah, who have been thus guilty before Him? “Therefore, now,” He says, “shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed. The Lord God hath sworn by Himself, saith the Lord, the God of Hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob and hate his palaces; therefore will I deliver up the city, with all that is therein.” That is what God is going to do. When He will bring upon them the Assyrian, which is His rod, and which destroyed Israel and led them into captivity, the Assyrian will take to do with them at the very outset. “They shall be first that shall go captive,” and God is determined that He will not repent, not regard, but that He will give them over, and that to the hand of the enemy, and that the captivity which is to overtake them is to assuredly come, for He says, “I abhor the excellency of Jacob.”

Then He tells us what a fearful desolation there would be throughout the land when God shall deliver them into the hands of their enemies. “And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die.” Now, ten men in a family is a very large number and you would expect that a good percentage of ten would be left, but He says here that,

although there would be ten in a family, yet in one way or another, everyone of them would die. When it is said, “ten men,” you will remember that these are young men; for you will notice here that it is the uncle – and the uncle is generally older than the nephew – who brings the body out of the house in order to bury it. It is the uncle who looks after the dead, and *that* indicates that the men were young men, and although there should be ten young men in a house, it shall come to pass that they shall die, and when the uncle would bring out the bones out of the house and “say unto him that is by the sides of the house,” that is, to the man who was to bury them along with him, “Is there yet any with thee? And he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue; for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord.” What does that mean? It means, friends, that although this fearful desolation was to overtake this people on account of their sins, that a whole family of ten should die, yet men would be so hard, so impenitent, so blind, that they would not see the hand of God in it, and when one would mention that this was the Lord’s doing, he would be told to hold his tongue, that it was not a thing that was proper in those days to ascribe such a calamity to the Almighty. “For, behold, the Lord commandeth, and He will smite the great house with breaches and the little house with clefts.” Not only would this be true of one house here and there throughout Israel and Judah, and not only would it be true of the rich to the exclusion of the poor, but He says “great houses” and “little houses,” that is to say, every family in the land was to be involved in this awful judgment that was to overtake them. As the first part of this chapter is applicable to our own condition, have we not good cause to fear that the second part – if it has not really been fulfilled already – shall be fulfilled at no late date in our history? For what is true about our families throughout the land, great houses and small houses? What is true of whole families? That they are away at the War. Have you not heard of every man in the family – father and sons in some instances – being taken and are either in the Army or Navy? Now, that is an instance of the terribleness of the present situation, and it is a terrible sign of the times. The most of our families throughout the length and breadth of the Highlands and Lowlands, and England now as well, are at the War. New legislation [This sermon was preached when the last Military Service Act was passed] has been passed that will bring everyone into it that will be able to do anything in connection with Government work. The hand of God has to be recognised in this matter, and you and I are very blind indeed if we do not recognise the hand of God in it. It is a terrible situation indeed, and the end is not in sight, and who can tell what the end will be? We know that already fathers and sons are all at the War. We know that there will not be very many left in the land in a very short time, and we know that already breaches have been made on great houses, and clefts in little houses, for if you consider the number of heirs of estates throughout the land who are already in eternity, and if you consider the number of families that have got someone in the grave or in the sea, it is most appalling already, but we are very much afraid that they are only a few yet in comparison with what will be true before the end of this terrible calamity, for God says at the end of this chapter, “Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.” Now, that is to me at least the most solemn part of the chapter altogether, for what does it mean? It means that God will not repent with regard to this judgment that He is bringing upon Israel. “Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen?” Oh! no. Well, He says, “Ye have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock,” and that just means that notwithstanding God slew them and that His hand would be laid upon them, yet they would not repent; but they would continue to harden their hearts, continue impenitent, continue to reject the overtures of God’s mercy, refuse to come to Him, and refuse to humble themselves,

and, therefore, the wrath was going to come on them to the uttermost, and it did come upon them. Israel did not repent, Judah did not repent, but they hardened themselves in their iniquity, and God raised up the Assyrians against them, and they brought them captive to Babylon.

Friends, these last verses of this chapter ought to be a great warning to ourselves, for we seem as a nation just to be given over of the Almighty. "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen?" "Why will ye be stricken anymore? Ye will revolt more and more." Notwithstanding all that God has done for us, the warnings that He has given us, the calamities that are overtaking us; notwithstanding that there is coming down upon counties throughout Great Britain as it were fire from heaven, great hailstones from heaven, as it is written in the Book of Revelation; notwithstanding these things, we are not repenting, but on the contrary, we are just going on as we formerly were doing and any pleasures that are not being indulged in, in this land, it is not at all because men have a different mind with regard to these things but because God in His providence has put a stop to them. I have brought before you, I think, already the fact that these banquets, which used to be the order of the day at this time of the year, have stopped to a certain extent, but yet men are endeavouring to keep them up and men are endeavouring to bring *children* into them, which is the worst sign of all. The curse of God is upon the parents who are endeavouring to bring their children to the dance and to the ball, to the vain song, and yet we find throughout the land children being taken to concerts which go under the name of a concert for charity. It is just a concert for the devil's work, and men need not think they will deceive God by tacking on the name "charity" to a concert, where the vain song and the dance are the order of the day. Men need not think they will cheat God with regard to this matter. The thing on the face of it is clearly the work of Satan, and the curse of God is lying heavily, as I said already, on parents who lead their children to these vanities, and especially when God is speaking so loudly to this land.

Now, you will say, "What is God going to do with us?" Well, it is very hard to say what He is going to do with us. It seems very probable that the Lord in His judgment will bring us very, very low yet as a land. That seems to be as clearly established from God's Word as that we are here this night, that God has, to a certain extent, given us over to hardness and to indifference. These very verses are just an indication that He is not going to turn to us. There is no doubt at all that if we would turn to God, He would turn to us, but we are not turning to God and, consequently, He is against us. His hand is against us whatever the end of it will be, and it becomes us as creatures, who are living in a terrible hour, in a terrible day, to make sure of this, that we ourselves and our children shall be found under the shelter of the blood of atonement, for it seems that there are terrible days ahead of us. That seems to be very clear, and oh! friends, friends, as long as you have time and opportunity, flee to the Rock of Ages, against which the gates of hell will not prevail. Do not be satisfied with the vanities of the world; do not be satisfied with a name to live while you are dead, but seek to be found in Christ before you will perish, for "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," and "him that cometh to me," says Christ, "I shall in no wise cast out." But go you on with the vain world, and seek worldly enjoyments, forgetting God and turning your back upon Him, and, as sure as you have a being, the day is not far away when you will find out you were the greatest fools on the face of the earth; that you heard God's warnings and God's invitations and despised His counsel, and, that, consequently, you will now have to face the consequences, which will be terrible in the extreme. May the Lord bless to us His own Word!

[December 1916]

