

A Sermon.

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(Taken down by a Hearer, at Oban.)

“Behold, a greater than Jonas is here” – Matthew 12:41.

These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ in response to a request made by certain of the Scribes and Pharisees for a sign. The Scribes and Pharisees came to Him and said, “Master, we would see a sign from thee.” The Lord Jesus, in His reply, told them their true character as a people and a generation. He said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas.” The Scribes and Pharisees were seeking some display of His wonder-working power that would produce a strong impression upon their natural senses and imaginations. They were not satisfied with the many signs that He had already given in those beneficent miracles that He wrought on behalf of the poor children of men. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead. These were signs sufficient to convince any truly sincere and honest seeker that Jesus of Nazareth spoke the truth when He claimed to be the Messiah. The unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees, however, were not satisfied, and so they sought some new sign from Him, which He clearly tells them He would not give. They would receive a sign, but not such a sign as they desired, namely, “the sign of the prophet Jonas.” Jonas was sent, in a mysterious manner, three days and three nights into the fish's belly; and the Son of Man was to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He was to give the sign of His death and resurrection – a sign that would not be understood by many. It would prove a stumbling-block to the unbelieving Jews and foolishness to the worldly-wise Greeks. It was only unto them who were called by the power of the Spirit of God that it would be the wisdom and power of God unto salvation. Now, we find that when He makes mention of the experience of Jonah, He proceeds to bring forward, as witnesses who would rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, the men of Nineveh unto whom Jonah was sent to preach. These Ninevites were heathen Gentiles; they were a wicked and idolatrous people; they knew little or nothing about the one living and true God; but no sooner did Jonah appear among them with a solemn message of warning concerning the destruction of Nineveh, than immediately they repented. “They repented at the preaching of Jonas.” They repented at the preaching of this comparatively humble prophet who was sent from the land of Israel. But Christ goes on to tell them that a much greater prophet than Jonas had appeared in the land, and that the people of this present generation had refused to repent at His preaching. “Behold,” He says, “a greater than Jonas is here.” Although a greater than Jonas had appeared in their midst, and had already given such remarkable proofs of His Messiahship, they had obstinately despised His message. These words, then, were spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees and to the people of that generation, with the view of bringing home to them their solemn responsibilities and the ill use they were making of the remarkable privileges that they enjoyed. They enjoyed the greatest possible privilege in having the Son of God, the true Messiah, in their midst, speaking to them concerning the things of God and eternity, and yet they repented not.

I desire, then, in dependence upon the Spirit of truth, to look for a little at certain things brought before us in these brief but suggestive words: “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” Let us observe –

I. – The superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ unto Jonas;

- II. – The assertion that “a greater than Jonas is here,” in its abiding significance; and
- III. – The call to “behold,” or consider, the truth thus declared concerning the Lord Jesus.

I. – First, then, let us observe the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ to the prophet Jonas.

I observe, in the first place, in this connection that the Lord Jesus was greater than Jonas as to His person. The Lord Jesus Christ was perfect man. He assumed into union with Himself a true and real humanity, yet that humanity was without sin. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, from the womb. In Him was no sin. In Him as man there appeared all the graces of the Spirit in perfect degree and in perfect proportion. He came up to the perfect standard of God’s law, and fulfilled its precepts in everything. He never came short in the least degree of that standard in thoughts, in affections, in words, and in actions. In one word, He left a perfect pattern to His people to follow. But Jonas was, at best, an imperfect man. Although a servant of God – highly honoured to be a prophet – he was manifestly imperfect, and showed this in the actions of his life. When the Lord called upon him to go to Nineveh and to deliver His message, he disobeyed the call of the Most High. He fled from the presence of the Lord, and took ship at Joppa, with a view to go to Tarshish. Jonas, long after this, and notwithstanding the discipline he passed through, showed himself to be an imperfect man. The Lord Jesus Christ, then, was greater than Jonas in respect of His manhood.

I observe, further, that the Lord Jesus was incomparably greater than Jonas in respect of His Godhead. He was the Son of Man, but He was also the Son of God. He was the Second Person in the glorious Trinity, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the undivided Godhead. He possessed in Himself all the immeasurable perfections of Deity – “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power.” He was the personal Word who was with God and was God from all eternity, and by Him, as the personal Word, all things were made that were made. He continued also to uphold all things that He had made. He was the upholder of the universe at the very moment that He appeared as an infant of days in Bethlehem’s manger. The Lord Jesus, then, was greater – incomparably greater – than Jonas in respect of His person. He was a marvellous combination of the infinite perfections of the Godhead joined to all the finite perfections of humanity. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

In the second place, I would observe that the Lord Jesus was greater than Jonas in respect of His office. Jonas was one of the prophets whom the Lord called, under the old dispensation, to make known His mind and message unto the children of men, but his prophetic office was discharged on a lower platform, so to speak, than that on which Christ discharged His. He was the personal Word that was with the Father from everlasting, and He was sent forth from the immediate presence of the Father to make known the will of God for salvation. He was the Divine Prophet concerning whom Moses spake unto the children of Israel. “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up from among your brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; and whoso will not hear that prophet, the Lord will require it of him.” He came forth from the immediate presence of the Father in heaven to make known the mind of God concerning salvation. We find Him saying, “The words which thou gavest me, I have given them.” He received those words immediately from the Father, and He gave those words unto poor sinners upon earth with all the authority that the Divine Prophet possessed. He was, therefore, greater in that respect as a prophet than it was possible for Jonas or any of the ancient prophets to be. And then, my friends, it is to be observed that the Lord Jesus, as the Divine Prophet of the Church, had power given Him to open the understandings of the

children of men to receive the truth that He proclaimed. The ancient prophets could only deliver their message. They had no power to give a capacity to the hearers to receive the message that was entrusted to their charge. But it is written concerning the Lord Jesus, that He opened the understandings of His disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures. He was “the light of the world,” and He was able to impart divine light – saving light – unto the souls of the children of men. Such Jonas could not do. Further, I observe in this connection that Jonas and the ancient prophets only sustained the prophetic office for a season. When they died, their work as prophets came to an end. They passed into eternity; they entered heaven; and death put a period to the discharge of their prophetic office. But this is not so with regard to Christ. He still exercises His prophetic office at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and you, as a poor sinner, can go to Him at a throne of grace with your darkness, difficulties, and perplexities. He is able, in the exercise of His omniscience, to understand your case, and by the power of the Almighty Spirit of God, to take away your darkness and to remove all your difficulties and perplexities. “The fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?” The merely human prophets had their day, and you cannot now go to Isaiah or Ezekiel or Jonas personally, in order to get instruction in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But you may go now, upon earth, and pour out your case before this Divine Prophet, and He is able to help you to the uttermost. He can guide your footsteps into the ways of truth and peace, and cause you to go on your way rejoicing. The Lord Jesus, then, is greater in respect of His office as prophet than Jonas.

I proceed, in the third place, to observe that the Lord Jesus is greater than Jonas in respect of those outstanding experiences through which He passed, that were designed for usefulness. Jonas went through remarkable experiences. I remarked already that he was disobedient to the voice of the Most High. He refused at first to go to Nineveh, and took ship to Tarshish, but the Lord followed after him. He sent a storm upon the sea, and the ship in which Jonah was sailing was like to be overwhelmed in the raging waters. The mariners at last cast lots in order to see who was the cause of this great storm that had come upon them, and the lot fell upon Jonah, and Jonah himself suggested – yea, declared his willingness – that he should be thrown into the raging billows, in order that calm might be restored. Such was done. But the Lord prepared a great fish, and when Jonah was cast into the waters this fish opened its mouth and swallowed him; and Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish’s belly. Jonas passed through great sufferings of mind and body in the fish’s belly, owing to his own sin of disobedience. He tells us in his wonderful book that out of the belly of hell he cried, and the Lord heard his voice. He was in the belly of hell in his own conscience, sensible that he was under divine displeasure on account of his disobedience. He looked towards God’s holy temple when he felt cast out of God’s sight. The Lord heard him, and at the end of the appointed period, caused the fish to vomit out Jonah upon the dry land. Now, these were very remarkable experiences through which Jonah passed, and the actual truth of them is here confirmed by the Son of God, against all the objections of “the higher critics.”

These experiences of the prophet, as recorded in the Scriptures, have been useful to the sons of men – to the people of God – in subsequent generations. They are, *in a certain sense*, passed through by others – even by those who are brought under a deep sense of their sinfulness and guilt. Such persons are brought down into the depths of soul distress under a sense of their sins against the Most High, but the Lord hears their cries in the depths, and He raises them up again. He causes them, like Jonah, to sing of deliverance: “Salvation is of the Lord.”

We find, further, that the Lord Jesus Himself here makes comparison of His own sufferings and death and resurrection to the experience through which Jonah passed in the fish’s belly; but although this experience was made useful as a sign to the Ninevites, as a sign to the children of Israel, and has certainly been beneficial to exercised souls – to the people of

God – in subsequent ages, as a source of direction and encouragement, yet we are not saved by the sufferings of Jonah. We are saved only and exclusively by the sufferings and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father laid upon Him the iniquity of others, the iniquity of a company of our race which no man can number. He was made sin in their room and stead. He was made to experience in His holy soul the just wrath of an offended God against guilty sinners, and the waves and billows of God's displeasure passed over Him. He went down into the uttermost depths of God's holy displeasure, but He was not left there. He went down also into the grave – His body was laid in Joseph's tomb – but the Lord did not leave Him there. He raised Him from the dead on the third day; and the death and resurrection of Christ are the sources of peace and life unto the children of men. The apostles preached Jesus Christ and Him Crucified – Jesus Christ, as a suffering Redeemer, enduring God's wrath in room and stead of the guilty. They preached also Jesus Christ risen again from the dead on the third day by the power of God. His resurrection from the dead is the pledge of the resurrection of all His people from the grave of spiritual death. The Lord Jesus is greater than Jonas in respect of those outstanding experiences through which He passed for the benefit of poor sinners upon earth, and it is of the very greatest importance that we should know this for ourselves. It is of the greatest importance that we should know Christ as the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation. He is such unto everyone that believeth.

But I observe, in the fourth place, that He is greater than Jonas in respect of the message that he came to proclaim. Jonas was sent with a very solemn and weighty message to the Ninevites. He was told by the Most High to say that in forty days Nineveh would be overthrown. It was a message of solemn warning concerning impending judgment upon the people and city of Nineveh, if they continued in their wickedness.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as the great Prophet of the Church, also proclaimed a message of solemn warning, but His message was greater. His message was more tremendous, more solemn and awful, than that which Jonas was commissioned to proclaim. Jonas had commission to speak principally concerning a temporal judgment that would fall upon the Ninevites as the consequence of their sins, but the Lord Jesus Christ was commissioned to speak concerning a judgment that is eternal. What does He say? He says: – “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” He declared to the people of that generation, particularly to certain cities, that the woes of the Most High were upon them. He said to Capernaum, which had been so highly exalted with privileges, that it would be cast down to hell. He told the people of His own generation that, if they continued in their sins, if they continued to despise the message of the gospel, they would fall into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

But it is to be observed further that Christ's message presents a greater exhibition of the wondrous mercy and love of God than the message of Jonas, or any of the ancient prophets. “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” The Father sent Him forth to proclaim more fully than had hitherto been done by any of the ancient prophets the love which He cherished from all eternity towards poor, perishing sinners of Adam's race. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son,” and the Apostle John further expresses it in these words, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The Lord Jesus Christ spoke much concerning the matchless, sovereign love of God towards perishing sinners. He spoke much concerning the ransom which He Himself was to give on behalf of many. Do not think for a moment that I mean that Jonas or the ancient prophets knew nothing about the mercy or the love of God as in connection with the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel. If you study the Old Testament carefully, you will see that they thought about His loving-kindness oftentimes in His temple (Psalm 48:9). The Scriptures of the Old Testament contain a distinct revelation of

the mercy and love of God unto sinners of the human race and of the Messiah or Christ who was to come in the fulness of the times to accomplish the redemption of a countless multitude. At the same time, we must see most plainly that the Lord Jesus Christ did unfold more richly and fully in his public ministry the wondrous love of God unto perishing sinners, than Jonas or any of the ancient prophets had done, and, my friends, was not His message much greater on that account, and does His message not imply far greater responsibility? We shall have to give all the greater account, all the more solemn account, of our responsibility in view of the fulness of the message of mercy as proclaimed by Christ, and as afterwards made known also by His apostles. The “greater than Jonas is here.”

And then, lastly, I observe in this connection that the Lord Jesus was greater than Jonas in respect of the fruits of His ministry. The preaching of Jonas certainly did produce a general or outward repentance among the Ninevites. We are not very clear as to whether any of those Ninevites were really saved with an everlasting salvation. But, although it is true that many listened to the voice of Christ when He was upon earth and did not profit by His ministry, still some did in a saving measure. Such were the Apostles themselves, and they expressed their thoughts in such words as these: – “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Zacchæus, the publican, and Matthew, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and others, were brought out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. A considerable number were plucked as brands from the fire through the preaching of the great Prophet of the Church, and, if we consider the thousands who were afterwards gathered in by Him through the instrumentality of His Apostles, and other servants, we must say that the fruits of His abiding ministry are immeasurably greater than those of the ministry of Jonas. “A greater than Jonas is here.”

II. – This leads me now, in the second general place, to call attention to Christ’s assertion that “a greater than Jonas is here,” in its abiding significance. Now, my friends, I need hardly say further, for I have already to a certain extent anticipated this, that this is a very striking assertion on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning Himself. This form of expression seems to suggest something more than that He was in a comparative degree greater than Jonas. The expression suggests that He was more than man. We find in a subsequent verse that He says: – “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” This is a parallel expression, and these expressions seem to convey this, that there was One standing among them who was greater than the greatest of the sons of men that had appeared before Him. He suggests, in fact, His divinity, His Godhead. He was incomparably greater than any of the children of men, than the greatest of the kings, or the most eminent of the prophets that preceded Him. “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” I desire, however, to consider this statement on the part of Christ as having in some sense a perpetual meaning and significance unto the end of time. These words uttered by Christ may be still applied to Him, to His office and to His work until the very end of the world. A greater than Jonas is still present. He has, no doubt, personally ascended on high, and entered into the immediate presence of God. He has passed into the heavens; but it is also true that He still abides with us. He still abides upon earth.

(1) Let me notice, then, some particulars as to *the manner of His presence* still upon earth.

He still remains upon earth, *as represented by His Word*. He has given us the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and it is within the confines of this inspired Word that we alone can meet with Christ. Take away the Word of God; take away the Bible; and you may say, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” It is impossible, in the nature of things, that you can find Christ apart from this Word of Truth, in which the things concerning Him and His work are infallibly recorded for the benefit of all generations to the end of time. He said Himself, in the days of His flesh, “Search the

Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.” I say, then, Christ is still with us, as represented by His holy and blessed Word. There we may seek and find Him as the light and life and salvation of our never-dying souls.

But I observe further, in the second place, that Christ abides with us *by His Spirit* as well as by His Word. Did He not say to His disciples, when He was about to leave them, “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”? And how is Christ with His disciples unto the end of the world? Just by the Holy Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of truth has been promised and has been given to those who fear His name and who proclaim His word in accordance with the mind of God. I do not say, my friends, that we observe the Spirit of God working with the same measure of power that He wrought in the days of the apostles, or even in subsequent centuries – such as the times of the glorious Reformation – but still the Spirit of God has not wholly left His Church or His people. The word of Christ is pledged for it: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” And He said also that “He would send the Spirit of truth, who would abide with them for ever.” Christ, the greater than Jonas, is still here, as represented by His Spirit.

I observe, thirdly, that Christ is still here, as *represented by His messengers or ambassadors*. The apostle said, “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” Such are the character and work of all true preachers of the Gospel. And although they be few and humble in the present day that seek to proclaim the Gospel in its purity, yet at the same time that does not take away from the authority of their message, if it is proclaimed in accordance with the mind of Christ expressed in the Word of God. Christ is still here, then, as represented by His ministering servants. The treasure is in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of men. It is theirs to say to the righteous that it shall be well with him, and to the wicked that it shall be ill with him.

I observe in this connection, lastly, that He is here, as *represented by His people* – by the members of His mystical body. You will recollect that when the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, He said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul was persecuting the servants and disciples of Jesus. He was not persecuting Jesus immediately, because Jesus was in heaven and Saul was upon earth, but what was done against His servants and disciples, the Lord Jesus regarded as done against Himself. He regarded them as parts of Himself. They were members of that mystical body which the Father gave Him, in the counsels of eternity, to be redeemed and saved. And so, my friends, we may say that wherever there is a real servant of Christ – a real child of God – to be found, there in a measure Christ Himself is. That is a representative of Christ, although a representative most imperfect. None was perfect but the glorious Pattern Himself. Still, at the same time, we have reason to bless the Most High that He has yet left a few members of Christ upon earth. He has still a remnant “according to the election of grace,” and where they are, Christ is. He is still here, as represented by His mystical body. “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

(2) I shall next point out a few of *the places of His presence*.

Well, it is an encouraging thought to us that the “greater than Jonas” is still *in this earth*, in this fallen world of ours. Oh! my friends, He came from heaven to earth that He might redeem His Church by His own blood. He came from heaven to earth that he might procure a title to take possession of the whole world. “Ask of me,” said the Father, “and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Although in some generations it is only a very few scattered here and there over the face of the earth who truly fear God and live by the faith of Jesus Christ, yet the Son of

God came from heaven that He might secure a title in righteousness to reign from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world;" and, oh! my friends, He is still in the world by His Word and Spirit, by His ministering servants and people, in order that He may gain ultimately all nations to His sceptre. These are the instruments or means that He is to employ for this great and glorious purpose. He shall reign until all His enemies be made His footstool –

"Yea, all the mighty kings on earth
Before Him down shall fall;
And all the nations of the world
Do service to Him shall."

He is still here representatively in this sinful, fallen world.

He is still here, let me further remark, *in His Church*. Christ said, in the days of His flesh, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." That is the promise bearing upon the assemblies of the saints, bearing upon the gathering together of God's people in the way of worship and service. He is still here in His Church. I do not say that He is everywhere in what are known or denominated as Churches. It is to be feared that many organisations that are called by the name of Churches have no proper right to the name at all. They have no proper right, because they deny fundamental truths; they set aside the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word. Some of them, in fact, deny the Godhead of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ that they hold forth to their fellow-creatures is not "the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God;" He is a mere man possessed of human sympathy, and nothing more. But, my friends, the true Christ of God is still present in His true Church, with those who hold fast the fundamental doctrines of the faith in the Spirit. He is still present, then, in His Church.

Lastly, I observe He is still here *in respect of the souls of His people*. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." When Christ comes in a day of mercy to save a soul from going down to the pit, when He puts him among the justified, He takes possession of that soul. Christ becomes in that soul "the hope of glory." He enters it in the exercise of His enlightening, cleansing and renewing influences. He takes up His abode in that soul, and He will go no more out. Perhaps, to the feelings of His people at certain times, He may seem as if He had taken His departure, and their cry may be like that of Job, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him." But that does not imply that He is actually absent. He is absent as far as their conscious feeling or comfortable sense is concerned, but He is not absent in deep reality. Once He takes possession of the citadel of a poor sinner's heart, He keeps fast His hold. He says: "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." "Behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

Oh! my friends, consider the privilege and responsibility connected with this great and precious truth that a greater than Jonas, even the Son of God, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and express image of His person, is still present in the world, still present with His Church, still present with His people, and shall so remain unto the very end of time.

III. – The third and last thing is the call to "behold" or consider this – that "a greater than Jonas is here." Oh! my friends, it is to be feared that many do not consider it. They do not believe the truth concerning Jesus Christ, the Divine Redeemer, the Almighty Saviour. They do not believe that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. They disregard His claims and despise His works. He calls the children of men to consider the valuable truth concerning His presence.

Consider this, then, with a view to anxiety and alarm. Remember that you have seen and heard, through the medium of the Word of Truth and through the proclamation of the Gospel, this Person who is greater than Jonas. You have had testimony upon testimony from your childhood concerning the truth as it is in Jesus, and you are called upon to consider the truth that you have heard. You are called upon to consider this, with a view to fleeing from the wrath to come, unto the city of refuge that He points you to in the Gospel; and if you refuse to consider it – if you refuse to hear the solemn truth concerning the person and work and word of Christ – you will have an awful account to give at death and the judgment-seat. You will have a deeper hell than the Ninevites; yea, you will have a deeper hell than the Jews who were personally present when Christ thus spake. For we have had additional testimonies to the truth. We have the testimonies of the apostles after the day of Pentecost. We have the testimonies of God’s servants and saints all down the ages and generations concerning this Divine Redeemer and Almighty Saviour. We have an accumulated mass of testimonies concerning the glory of Christ and the excellency of His work and the preciousness of His Word, and if we despise those testimonies and go on in the way of indifference and carelessness, we shall have to give a most solemn and awful account at the day of judgment. “Consider this, and be afraid, ye that forget the Lord.” Consider this, and be afraid, ye that spend your days and nights in disregard of the concerns of your soul and of your prospects in view of an endless eternity. Consider this, and be afraid, for there is an awful day in front of you, if you will not become alarmed now and flee for refuge unto this “greater than Jonas,” who stands before you in the Gospel.

And consider this, let me say lastly, with a view to encouragement. The “greater than Jonas is here.” Sometimes unbelief will suggest that He has departed, and has forsaken the world altogether. Unbelief will suggest that He has given up the reins wholly into the hands of Satan that Satan may do as he pleases with the nations of the world. But, my friends, yield not to the suggestions of unbelief. “Behold, a greater than Jonas *is here.*” We are sometimes afraid that He will not shine again, that He will not manifest His power again in any measure corresponding to what He has done in the past, but His great and precious promises completely forbid the thought. A greater than Jonas is still present in this evil world of ours; He is still present in His Church and in the souls of His people. He is still present with a view to take possession of the earth as His ultimate portion and inheritance. He will have His witnesses while sun and moon endure, and there is a day coming when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory (Psalm 72).

Oh! then, are you thinking of these things? “Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” You who are still without God and without Christ, delay not, tarry not. “Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain (of God’s grace in Christ), lest thou be consumed.” And are you thinking of this, you who desire to walk in the fear of God and by the faith of Jesus Christ? He has not forgotten us altogether; He has promised never to leave or forsake His true Church and people, and, if in some generations He gives great outward signs of His displeasure, as He is doing at present, yet He is oftentimes working out the most gracious purposes in connection with these awful and desolating judgments. We trust that He is opening up the way, even in this dreadful time of bloodshed and destruction, for the ultimate extension of His cause and kingdom to the ends of the earth. He will pull down the strongholds of iniquity; He will burn down Satan’s citadel upon earth; He will make a large place in the wounded hearts of poor sinners for the entrance of the word of the truth of the gospel. He will make, we hope, a deep and large place for Himself in the hearts of the nations whence He has been excluded for many, many years. We are fully convinced, then, that Christ is still here, that He is still in the earth working out His gracious purposes, even when He is sending desolating calamities upon the nations. “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” May the Lord bless unto us His truth!

[May 1917]

The Fourth Commandment.

A Sermon Preached by the REV. D. MACFARLANE in the
Free Presbyterian Church, Dingwall.

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“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” – Exodus 20:8-11.

In this chapter we have an account of the giving of the law by God at Mount Sinai. The thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain on fire, which attended the giving of the law, indicated the holiness of God and the dreadful judgments that would befall the transgressors of the law. Although the ceremonial law was abolished at the death of Christ, the moral law is of perpetual obligation – binding on men to the end of time. The moral law was not given as a covenant of works but as a rule of life.

The Fourth Commandment is in the very heart of the moral law, and is as binding as the other commandments. God knew that men would be apt to forget to keep the Sabbath day holy, and therefore He says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” There were two ordinances instituted by God at the creation of man – the Sabbath and marriage – to be continued to the end of time. It would be as unreasonable to abolish the ordinance of the Sabbath as to abolish the ordinance of marriage. The question concerning observing the sanctity of the Sabbath is not to be decided by the opinions of men, but by the Word of God. When the people of Israel were in Egypt it is not likely that the Sabbath was generally observed by them, but we think that the Lord’s people among them observed it as much as they could; but when they were brought out of Egypt the Sabbath was revived, and the keeping of it holy was inculcated by the Lord of the Sabbath. This was done when the manna was given to the people in the wilderness. God forbade the people to go out to gather the manna on the Sabbath day; but there were rebels then as now who went out to gather it, but they found none, and God expressed His displeasure at them for their disobedience to His command. There was no excuse for their going out on Sabbath to gather the manna, for the Giver of it gave them a double supply on Saturday.

The Sabbath is the day of rest from our worldly employments and recreations that are lawful on other days. By “recreations” is meant not sinful recreations, but such as are necessary for the body. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified? The Shorter Catechism, which is founded upon the Word of God, supplies the answer – “The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.” The whole of the Sabbath day, from beginning to end, is to be spent in the exercise of public and private worship of God. The only works allowable on that day are works of necessity and mercy. If your house were on fire, it would be a work of necessity and a duty to do your utmost to extinguish the fire; and as for works of mercy, Christ healed the sick on the Sabbath day, and it is a work of mercy for doctors to attend the sick on that day. But many make a work of necessity of many things they do on the Lord’s Day which are not works of necessity at all. There was a young girl from the West Highlands on service in a family in the South. Her work was to nurse the children. On a Sabbath, when putting on the boots on one of the children, a button on the boot came off. Her mistress asked her to sew on the button, and she asked her mistress – “Have you the Fourth Commandment?” – and refused to sew the button on the Lord’s Day. The master of the house heard the conversation, and clapped the girl on the shoulder for the stand she had made for the Sabbath. It would be a good thing if there were in our day many servant girls like that. With the exception of works of necessity and mercy, the only work that is lawful on the Sabbath is the worshipping of God in public and private. If you were to examine the conduct of those who advocate ploughing on Sabbath, it is very likely that you would find that they do not worship God in their families daily. It is to be borne in mind that there are two classes of people in every age – God’s friends and His enemies – and while the former obey His commandments, the latter manifest their enmity by trampling upon His commandments, and are excusing themselves in their rebellion against divine authority. In the Fourth Commandment there are reasons given for keeping the Sabbath day holy.

(1) God gives us six days for our own work, but the seventh is not ours, but His; and to do our own work on the day that is not ours, but His, is a stealing – a sacrilege. So that it may be said that Sabbath-breakers are spiritual thieves. There was a godly catechist in Skye, named Donald Macqueen, who on his way to church on a certain Sabbath met boys playing. The catechist was a wise man, and took a wise way of rebuking the Sabbath-breakers. When he came where they were he sat down and said to the boys that he would tell them a story. The boys, as all boys are, were delighted to listen to the story. The catechist said that there was once a man on a journey who had £7 in his pocket. Robbers met him on the way and demanded his purse. He said to them – “I have seven pounds in my purse, and I will give you six, but I need the seventh myself.” But the robbers would not be satisfied with the six pounds, and demanded the seventh also, or they would have his life. The catechist asked the boys – “What do you think of the robbers?” They answered that they were most cruel and wicked. The catechist said to them – “You are the robbers. God gave you six days for your worldly work, and you may play on these days, but you rob God of the seventh.” The boys went home and henceforth gave up playing on the Lord’s Day.

(2) The second reason is that God rested on the seventh day, and hallowed it, or set it apart for His own worship. The seventh day was to be kept holy, in commemoration of His finishing the work of creation, as the Christian Sabbath is to be kept holy in commemoration of the finishing of a greater work – that of redemption by Christ; so that we have a greater reason for keeping the Christian Sabbath holy than there was for keeping holy the seventh-day Sabbath. Those who desecrate the Christian Sabbath despise and hate Christ our Redeemer. The keeping of His commandments is a mark given by Himself of those who love Him. He said, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.”

There are many forms of Sabbath-breaking in our day, such as the running of trains on the Lord’s Day; but railway companies who are guilty of this sin lose by accidents and disasters what they gain on the day that is not theirs, and it is clear to any unbiassed observer that God manifests His displeasure at them in this way. It has been observed by some that Sabbath-breakers do not prosper in their business in the world as those who observe the sanctity of that day. Another form of Sabbath-breaking, which is very common in this age, is the taking of long walks on the Sabbath after having been at church, and in this way bidding defiance to God. Members, and even office-bearers, in some churches are guilty of this sin, and in this way show that their profession of religion is a mere sham.

There is a new form of Sabbath-breaking threatening to appear in our midst which was not heard of in the past, at least in Scotland, and especially in the Highlands. I mean the proposal to begin ploughing on the Lord’s Day, but this proposal is made by the enemies of God, His people, and cause in the world. This is lamentable when we are in the midst of a terrible war, which is evidently a judgment by the Most High on our nation and other nations for our sins, and among other sins that of Sabbath-breaking. It would be expected that when God’s judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world would learn righteousness; but instead of that we as a nation are getting more hardened and more wicked. It is not by sinning against God that we can expect victory over our enemies, for so long as we continue in that evil course, it is not only the Germans and their allies that fight against us, but God Himself is fighting against us, and will continue to do so till we are brought to repentance and reformation. It is not by sinning against God that we are to get plenty of the fruits of the earth, but by obeying Him. God brought famine upon people in the past for their iniquities, and especially for their Sabbath-breaking. He punished the Israelites for Sabbath-desecration by giving them over to the hands of their enemies, who brought them into captivity, and during their long absence from their own land, the land enjoyed her Sabbaths: God is the same holy God still, and as He punished the Israelites for their sins, He is now punishing us as a nation. Some quote Scripture in support of Sabbath-breaking – “The

Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” It was not to break the Sabbath, but to keep it holy that the Sabbath was made for man. The Eighth Commandment, which forbids stealing, was made for man, not to give him licence to steal, but to prevent him from that sin. The law of our country was made for its subjects, but anyone that transgresses that law shall be punished according to the degree of his offence.

Who are addressed in the Fourth Commandment?

(1) The individual – “Thou.” The individual is bound to keep the Sabbath day holy, and shall be responsible at the day of judgment for his conduct on that holy day.

(2) The family – “Thou and thy son and thy daughter.” The head of the family is bound by this commandment to see to it, not only that he himself keeps the Sabbath day holy, but also that all the members of his family keep it holy too.

(3) The master who has servants to his employment is also addressed – “Thy manservant and thy maidservant.” There are many masters who do not keep the Sabbath day holy, and who never command their servants to keep it holy. Not only are servants not to be employed in doing their own worldly work, but their cattle are not to work on that day. Horses are not to be used in ploughing on the Sabbath, nor is an instrument propelled by motor power to be used either.

(4) The magistrate of a town or city is addressed. This we infer from the mention of “gates.” The Town Council are bound to see to it, so far as they can, that those whom they represent should keep the Sabbath day holy. It is deplorable that there are Provosts in Scotland who advocate ploughing on the Lord’s Day, but we are thankful that the Provost of the town of Dingwall is strongly opposed to this innovation.

(5) The King is addressed. He is bound by this Commandment, not only to keep the Sabbath day holy himself, but to do his utmost, by precept and example, to see that his subjects keep it holy too. This was done by godly kings in the past, and if there were godly kings now, it would be done in our day. As we mentioned magistrates, we may refer to the godly Nehemiah, who was a magistrate, and who put a stop to Sabbath-breaking within his gates, as we have recorded in his book at 13:19,21 – “And it came to pass that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath, and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should be no burden brought in on the Sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath.”

In the 56th chapter of Isaiah there are promises of blessings given to those who keep the Sabbath day holy – “Blessed is the man that doeth this and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.” “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Again, anyone who reads the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, where promises of blessing for obedience and curses and penalties for disobedience are most plainly stated in reference to the Sabbath law as well as other commandments, will find the most solemn encouragements and warnings that should make the stout-hearted to consider and turn.

Let us take to heart what has been said on this important subject, as individuals, families, communities, and nation, and act up to the command given in our text. This is the way to prosper spiritually and temporally. Then we shall be like the blessed man spoken of in the First Psalm – “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his

fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away” (verses 3 and 4). Sabbath-breakers are like the chaff, and shall be burnt in the fire of God’s wrath unless they repent of their evil ways. It is the duty of ministers who profess to seek the welfare of immortal souls to keep the Sabbath holy themselves and to warn their congregations to do this also. Christ’s ministers do this, but Satan’s ministers neglect to do their duty in this respect. Some are asking when will this war in which we are involved come to an end. I am not a prophet, but I can tell from God’s Word that it shall not come to an end till we begin to hearken to and obey the Word of the Lord. “Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee” (Psalm 81:13,16). If we were brought to obedience to the Word of the Lord, not only would the war come to an end but He would give us the victory over our enemies and supply us with all good things, spiritually and temporally. Those who advocate ploughing on Sabbath think that it is by disobeying the Word of the Lord they shall have plenty of the fruits of the earth, but they shall be sorely disappointed, as they deserve. There were some men who were hanged for murder, and they confessed before their death that their wicked career began by Sabbath-breaking. This should be a warning to others who are transgressing God’s Commandments. Every sin you commit without repentance hardens your heart and blunts your conscience, so that at last it is seared, so that you can sin more easily. But your conscience will awaken at death and assert its power as a witness for God within you, and without repentance you will find it as a worm that dieth not in condemning you for ever and ever. Ah, Sabbath-breaker, take warning, turn from your evil ways in a day of mercy and all your sins shall be forgiven. “Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). Amen.

[June 1917]

Sermons on the One Hundred and Thirtieth Psalm.

By the late REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, A.M., *One of the old Scottish Divines.*

The Rev. George Hutcheson, A.M., was one of the ministers of Edinburgh during the stirring times of the Second Reformation. He was an able, learned, and godly divine, and took a prominent part in the deliberations and activities of the Church of Scotland of that period. He was one of the ministers who attended the noble and pious Marquis of Argyle during his last days prior to his execution upon the scaffold, where he died, in 1661, as a martyr for the principles of the Reformation. Mr. Hutcheson and Mr. Robert Douglas preached before the Marquis in the Tolbooth Church on the last Sabbath which he spent on earth, and “the Marquis had a sweet time as to his soul’s case” (see *The Scots Worthies*). On the following day Mr. Hutcheson was one of those who accompanied him to the scaffold, and as he was going to the block, Mr. Hutcheson said, “My Lord, now hold your grip siccar” (grip of Christ sure), when the Marquis replied, “You know, Mr. Hutcheson, that I said to you in the church I am not afraid to be surprised with fear.”

During his time in Edinburgh, Mr. Hutcheson wrote several valuable commentaries which are useful to this day. These were on the Book of Job, the Twelve Minor Prophets, and the Gospel according to John. The Exposition of the Minor Prophets came out in parts. Dr. Edmund Calamy, a worthy divine, was “the licencer” of

books during this period, and in his epistle to the reader at the beginning of one of these parts, published in 1653, he highly commends Mr. Hutcheson and his works. Among other things, he says: "The truth is, the Book itself represents him to the world in a very fair and beautiful character; for it comprehends much in little, and breathes out much of God and godliness." Mr. C. H. Spurgeon, in modern times, in his very instructive and interesting book, entitled "Commenting and Commentaries," writes of Mr. Hutcheson's works in highly commendatory terms. Of his Exposition of John, Mr. Spurgeon says: "Excellent; beyond all praise. It is a full-stored treasury of sound theology, holy thoughts, and marrowy doctrine." Personally we are familiar with Hutcheson on John and the Minor Prophets, and can endorse the high commendation.

Mr. Hutcheson spent the closing years of his life as minister in the town of Irvine, where he died in 1674. It may be mentioned, by the way, that Mr. Hutcheson's wife was the widow of the famous Mr. Andrew Gray, of Glasgow, who died in early manhood after a brief but very bright ministry, and of whom Mr. Hutcheson himself often spoke as "a spark of glory." It appears that, during Mr. Hutcheson's ministry at Irvine, he delivered a series of forty-five Sermons on the 130th Psalm, a notable one in the inspired Psalter, of which the eminent Dr. John Owen has also written an excellent exposition. It would appear that one of Mr. Hutcheson's hearers took down these sermons, and they were published in 1691, seventeen years after his decease, by one who signs only his initials, "G. L." We came across the volume a number of years ago, and read it with much interest and appreciation. The style is homely yet taking, while the matter is sound and edifying, and very encouraging in many places to those who are in a low spiritual case. It is our intention to publish the sermons by degrees from time to time, and we trust our readers may appreciate them, and benefit by the perusal. We may mention, in conclusion, that the book begins with a dedication to "the Right Honourable and truly Noble Lady, Lady Margaret Leslie, Countess of Rothes, etc.," who was known and respected by Mr. Hutcheson in his lifetime. Then, there is an "Epistle to the Reader," which we give in full, as follows: –

TO THE READER.

I shall speak nothing of the author of this work. He was far above my commendation. He exercised his ministry, first, at Camanell (*Colmonell*), afterwards at Edinburgh, and lastly at Irvine, where he preached these sermons and finished his course; in all which places, for his piety, parts, and particularly his eminent gift in preaching, his memory is very savoury, and will be to all who will seriously read those discourses of his, which, had he lived to publish himself, they had certainly appeared in a far more advantageous address. But you have them here, as they were received from his mouth, when preached, by the pen of a hearer. And if at any time you meet with anything less clear in them, it is hoped you will attribute it to this or to some inadvertency at the press, and not to the author, who was known to be no ways involved or obscure, but most accurate, most exact, and distinct in all that he did. And to add this, in the by, which is remarked of him by one most pertinently (*Dr. Calamy*), in all his observations and purposes ye shall find him, though always native, yet frequently very surprising. But the serious perusal of them will say more – both for their vindication and commendation – than I possibly can, which, if you set about, as you ought, they will prove, through the Lord's blessing, as they were at first and now are intended for thy spiritual benefit, which is the sincere desire of

G. L.

SERMON I.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications" – Psalm 130:1,2.

Having a purpose (if the Lord will) to go through this Psalm, I shall speak somewhat in a brief word to the title of it. It is called a Song of Degrees, a title that is common to fifteen Psalms in this book, from the 120th to the 134th inclusive, and the importance of this title is not easily condescended upon. Popish writers would from this make up fifteen degrees of virtues, each of them still above another, whereby a sinner breathes for redemption by Christ, from a state of sin and misery, and ascendeth to heaven. But this necessitates them to strain their wits, and to put these Psalms on a rack, to find out the distinction of these virtues, and therefore we shall leave it.

The Hebrew word, rendered "degrees," leads us to somewhat more certain, yet not demonstrative: That these Psalms may be called Songs of Degrees.

1. Upon the account of the way of singing them, the voice in singing them being raised to an high key, as 2 Chronicles 20, where it is said, the Levites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel, with a loud voice on high. It is the same word used here for degrees.

2. There is a reason why these Psalms were to be sung with a loud voice. A Song of Degrees may signify a most excellent song, or a song which in excellency surmounts other songs, and so the word is rendered when it is applied to a man of excellency, 1 Chronicles 17:17, "Thou hast regarded me according to a man of high degree, or a man of excellency, O Lord;" and so these Psalms may be called Songs of Degrees, because they are most excellent, for the sweet, grave, and pithy sentences they contain.

3. They may be called Songs of Degrees, upon the account of the place where these excellent songs were to be sung with an high voice. The Chaldee paraphrast says, upon the degrees, or stairs, whereby they went up to the temple, or rather, whereby they went up to Mount Sion, the city of David; one of which fifteen Psalms was to be sung on every step of these stairs. And others will have them to be sung in the several mansions of the people that came from the Babylonish captivity, for so we find the word rendered (Ezra 7:9). These things I only name, and pass them; and I might add one conjecture more, when I consider the affinity that is betwixt the word degrees rendered, and the original that signifies burnt-offering or sacrifice. I incline to think that these songs were sung by the priests and Levites about the altar, while they offered these burnt-offerings or sacrifices.

Having thus briefly spoken to the title, there are other general notes common to this with other Psalms that might be insisted on, which I also pass.

For the penman of the Psalm, he is not defined, nor is it needful to enquire who he was, since the Psalm hath its authority from the Spirit of God, and not from man. It is most like to be a Psalm of David, or that David was the penman, for these doubled expressions, verse 2 of this Psalm, are used by him in Psalms 54, 55 and 61 and many others.

For the particular difficulty to which this Psalm relates, it is not needful to determine what it was. It may suffice us for taking up the scope of the Psalm in general, that the psalmist is in a distress, and being in a distress, ye will find him first, wrestling, and then secondly, victorious.

For the first, his *wrestling*; ye shall take it up in three branches:

1. Ye will find him wrestling with plunging difficulties and perplexities, and these he expresseth under the name of depths, and the way he takes to win out of them is wrestling by prayer (verses 1,2).

2. Ye will find him wrestling with the sense and conscience of guilt, putting back his prayer, and offering to crush his hopes; and this he wrestleth with by claiming to pardon (verses 3,4).

3. Ye will find him wrestling with delays to his answer of prayers, or delays of the outgate prayed for; and this he wrestles with by patience and hope (verses 5,6).

Again, in the last two verses, ye have him *victorious*; for having gotten an issue, he hoards it not up, he does not conceal it, but he brings it forth and improves it for the use of the people of God, whom he encourageth to hope in God, upon the account of mercy, and pardon, and plenteous redemption; and on the account of his redeeming Israel from all his iniquities.

So much for the scope and partition of the Psalm.

To return to the first two verses, upon which I may be the more brief, that I had occasion to speak to you before of the troubles and trials of God's people, of prayer and God's answering prayer; yet we shall not pass this part, but we shall endeavour to gather some things useful from it.

In this his wrestling then, take notice of these four things:

1. Ye have that that the Psalmist is put to wrestle with, which is expressed under the name of depths.

2. The way of his wrestling therewith, out of the depths he cried, "Out of the depths have I cried."

3. Ye have him reflecting on this his practice, he takes a back-look of it, and he avows it before God, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord."

4. Ye have the prosecution of this his wrestling, or his pleading for audience in a new and doubled suit (verse 2): "Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

For the first of these, the depths out of which he cried: I cannot accord to understand it thus, that he prayed from the depths or bottom of his heart. So the commentators I spoke of before understand it of that degree of virtue which is profound prayer from the inward parts or bottom of the heart. There is a truth in that I confess that prayer should come from the bottom of the heart, and in prayer we should write our hearts on our tongues; but I find it not a Scripture phrase, that people are said to pray from the heart when they cry out of the depths. Neither can I understand it of the conscience of sin only, that (as some would understand it) he is under a deep of despair upon the account of guilt that he speaks of (verses 3,4), and hath a promise of redemption from verse 8. The word is depths in the plural number, and therefore it is safest to understand it more generally of plunging and sinking difficulties, both outward trouble and inward perplexity resulting thereon, and of the conscience of guilt wakened up in trouble that may come in under these depths; and this interpretation agrees best with the current of Scripture where we find the horrible pit, the miry clay, depths, deep waters, water floods, made use of to hold out great troubles, as Psalms 40:2; 42:7; 69:2,14,15.

I shall here touch upon one observation that not only the visible Church, but even the truly godly, may be brought under plunging difficulties and perplexities, both inward and outward, to their great sinking, or at least their apparent sinking. They may be, and are very often in the depths, and put to their prayers in the depths, so it was with the psalmist here, and in these Psalms formerly cited. And in prosecution of this point:

1. I shall first speak a little to the metaphor of deep or depths.
2. How it comes to pass that the Lord's people are brought to these depths.
3. To a word of use.

First – for the metaphor of deep or depths – I shall shortly offer what I conceive is the import thereof in these four.

1. That which is a deep is a thing very dark. Dig a pit and make it deep, the light of the day cannot penetrate into it. Thus the unintelligible mysteries of seducers are called depths, as Revelation 2:24, the depths of Satan spoken of. Thus also the wise counsels of God that men cannot indagate [fathom] are called depths, Psalm 92:5, "Thy thoughts are very deep", and 1 Corinthians 2:10, "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And thus also Ezekiel 3:6, a people of a strange speech, and of a hard language, whose words the people could not understand, are spoken of; in the original it is a people of a deep lip. Deepness then imports darkness, unintelligibleness, that which is mysterious. And that this notion is not strained even in this case of trouble, is clear from Heman's lament, Psalm 88:6, "Thou hast laid me (saith he) in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps;" where to be in darkness and in the deeps are expressed as synonymous, or one and the same. And truly this is ordinarily incident to the people of God, their deep trials are in themselves so dark, and in their effects so astonishing, that they are often at a stand to know what God says to them by them, and hence are these wherefores and whys as to this or that which is come upon them; as also in reference to their duty, as Jehoshaphat expresseth his distress, 2 Corinthians 20:12, "Lord, we know not what to do."

But 2. This metaphor of a deep or depths, as it imports that which is dark and unintelligible, so it imports that, out of which it is not easy to get up. Cast a man upon the ground he may easily get up, but cast him in a deep pit he can hardly get up out of it without help. Some emblem we have of this in Jeremiah 38, where he is put into the dungeon, where there was no water, but mire, and he sunk in the mire; Ebedmelech had a hard task to get him up: and the people of God their troubles may be depths upon that account; refuge may fail them, no man caring for their soul (Psalm 142:4). All hope that they shall be saved taken away, as it is said by Paul in that voyage (Acts 27:20). All their expectations of an outgate may be crushed, as Jeremiah 14:19, "Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold, trouble!" yea, all their endeavours to extricate themselves out of trouble may be frustrated, Jeremiah 8:18, "When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me;" and Job 9:27,28, "If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort myself: I am afraid of all my sorrows."

But 3. This metaphor of a deep or depths imports not only that which is dark and hard to get out of, but that which appears ruining. Put a man into a deep pit, if he get none to help him out of it, he must starve and ruin, as Ebed-melech said to the King, they have put Jeremiah in the dungeon, and he will die for hunger in the place where he is (Jeremiah 38:9). Put a man in a pit where there is deep water, he will drown, if he be not taken out. So the people of God, their trouble may be such, as not only all ground of hope of outgate may be taken away, but all hope of issue may be accompanied with apparent present ruin. David is put to a humbling posture, when he is put to that, Psalm 69:15, "Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth on me."

But 4. The metaphor of depths in the plural number imports a plurality of them, a multitude of these depths, dark, hard, hopeless, ruining pressures, trysting all together on a child of God, that his sad lot may be like that of the Church, Lamentations 2:22, "Thou hast called as in a solemn day, my terrors round about." There is a convocation of them, one trouble seldom comes its alone upon the people of God; as one wave uses not to come its alone to beat upon the shore, but trial upon trial, wave upon wave, one depth calling upon another depth, till their trial be perfected.

More particularly, the plurality of these depths may be taken up in these steps.

1. Their outward trouble may be attended with other visible disadvantages; for when a man is under trouble, then ordinarily he is in contempt, Job 12:5, "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised" – as a dying out snuff – "in the thought of him that is at ease:" hence, Hebrews 12:2, it is said, "Christ endured the cross, despising the shame," the cross and shame, the cross and ignominy go hand in hand. It is not enough to be in affliction, but thou must be content to be reproached, and counted a fool: yea, not only doth outward trouble and contempt go ordinarily together, but outward affliction and flighting from nearest relations, which is a load above a burden, Psalm 31:11, "My lovers and friends stood aloof from my sore, and my kinsmen stood afar off." Psalm 88:8,18, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness."

2. It comes to the depths with the people of God upon this account. That great outward trouble readily wakens the conscience of guilt, as we see of Joseph's brethren, when they were put into prison, Genesis 42:21, "They said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear. Therefore is this distress come upon us." Yea, outward trouble, and conscience of guilt under it wakened, may break the peace of the mind, and that adds to these depths. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" That is deep upon deep, trouble and guilt, trouble and broken mind turn to be the greatest burden.

3. It may come to depths with the people of God on this account, that when once the mind is broken, there is no need of many real crosses. The imagination can no sooner hatch an apprehension, but the broken mind will make it a cross; and then so many apprehensions, so many depths are created. And thus ye have some sort of account of the importance of this metaphor, a depth or depths.

I proceed to the second thing, being to name a few considerations for clearing how it comes to be thus with the people of God, that they are brought into these depths. I shall name but a few, having been long in breaking in upon this purpose, which will save me a labour afterward.

And 1. Take this consideration in general, the folly of the people of God puts them to this posture. That is one, Psalm 38:3, "There is no soundness to my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin." And verse 5, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." Whatsoever there may be of a trial of faith in their trouble, sin is the door at which their troubles, particularly their overwhelming troubles, enter in.

But 2. Because the people of God may sometime through mercy be kept from gross outbreaks; therefore consider that even the ordinary and habitual faults of the people of God will provoke Him to put them in these depths. I shall instance but in these two faults.

First, the ordinary fault of negligence in doing duty. I do not say of neglecting duty, custom and conscience may keep them at duty, but ordinary negligence in doing duty hath need of a rousing douk in a depth to set them to their feet: if the psalmist cried out of the depths, and the poor speaks supplications as he doth (verse 2), it intimates there is little crying, little humiliation in ordinary diligence, therefore he sends to the depths to put an edge upon folk's diligence, and to teach them to say their prayers in earnest.

A second fault in ordinary is, the neglect of ordinary needy dependence upon God in all things; the neglect of going through the wilderness leaning on the Beloved, a small fault as ye would think, but sad in a Christian life to live in this neglect. Hence the Apostle (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9) saith, "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life; but we had the sentence of death in ourselves." And for what end? To learn us dependence that we should not trust in ourselves, "but in God, who raiseth the dead."

And 3. Whereas it might be thought that such faults as these and grosser are passed in many others, I shall add, that the Lord's near relation with His people will not let them win away with their faults, win away who will, Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities": or as it is in the original, "I will visit upon you your sins." His people will not want the rod when their faults call for it, want who will.

4. Consider there is this to be looked upon, as a cause of His putting His people in the depths, to wit, His purposes of love to His people. And His allowances upon His people are so rich, that there is need of preparations by trial and afflictions to make them capable of them; for were they not put into the depths, they could not be capable of them. Hence, it is Paul's remark in the forecited place, 1 Corinthians 1:4,5, "God comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them, who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." We might not want these depths of tribulation, because without them, we could not be capable of the consolations we receive from Christ.

And 5. To add no more, we may take notice of somewhat in the saint's tenderness above others that occasions these depths. Many folks may be under as great outward trouble that are not so plunged and perplexed with it as they are. Many a man has been tossed as David was by Saul who has not so expressed his resentments as he did. How is this? The tender-spiritedness that is in the people of God occasions their trouble of mind, they see God

in their afflictions, and they would fain see more of Him and of His mind as to their duty, and this makes affliction take a deeper stamp and impression on them, and to draw blood of them more than it doth on an unsubdued spirit who hath no mind of God or providence, but hath only the outward trouble to grapple with. Thus we see how it comes to pass that the people of God are put in the depths.

For the third thing I proposed to be spoken to, that is, the use of the doctrine, the whole observations to be gathered from the two following verses are instructions how to improve such a lot, and, consequently, uses of the point in hand. Therefore I shall content myself to hint briefly at three general words here.

1. From what hath been said, ye would learn to be more jealous of a crossless life, of a life without trouble and exercise. Why? It speaks little of a soul thriving in the life of God. Take notice of that word (Psalm 55:19) spoken of the wicked, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." And that spoken of Moab (Jeremiah 48:11), "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed," and he rots on his lees. And as a crossless life speaks little thriving in the life of grace, so it speaks to very many, little of God's love and care. There is a sort of indignation kythed [shown] against sinners that they little notice, and wherein there is a snare, when they get leave to go on in sin and meet not with a cross, when a person will not deince [condescend to give] one that is going wrong with a reproof, it speaks hatred so that is a sad word from God (Ezekiel 3:26), "Thou shalt not be a reprover to them, for they are a rebellious house"; and that word (Hosea 4:17), "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." That is a sad dispensation; a douk to the hazard of drowning in the depths is better company.

2. From this ye would be cautioned not to mistake the sad exercises of the people of God, whose lot in ordinary is outward troubles; they get ordinarily the stakes to keep [the hardest or poorest lot]. And to mark it in the by, I wonder what a mistake is befallen us, or rather a distraction is come upon us, that we should stumble at the people of God their want of prosperity; look to the frame of the people of God, they are in ordinary broken folk. Others can bear their afflictions with a sort of gallantry, they can drink them down, rant them down [swallow them with noisy mirth]. But they are broken with their affliction as if they had no spirit at all to bear them; but I say, ye would not mistake, for it is a token of God's love and care who douks them in the depths, to put them out of the depths to cry unto Him; and it is a more blessed posture to be put out of the depths to cry, than to be in a palace with neglect of prayer. And, therefore, I can call it no better than a distraction to stumble at their want of prosperity; they are the folk that faint and have no might, and yet they will lay by the young men and the youths for all their ranting; because they wait upon the Lord, "they shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:29). This I speak, not to foster discouragement in any, but to caution them that are ready to stumble at the people of God their being in trouble and broken in that condition.

3. And a third word of use shall be, that every one that is in the depths would try how they improve that lot, and this use is the key to open the door to the following purpose, which I shall not now break in upon; only remember, "The Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth." Therefore there must be something that in affliction, when we are in the depths, he is calling us to, and which we would ply to in earnest; and, therefore, we would take heed that the bellows be not burnt, that the founder do not melt in vain, and that we provoke not God to call us reprobate silver, whom he hath rejected (Jeremiah 6:29,30).

[June 1917]

[Continued in September 1917]

A Sermon.

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACKAY, Oban.

*Preached by him as Retiring Moderator before the Synod, met at St. Jude's Hall,
Glasgow, on Tuesday evening, 22nd May, 1917.*

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;
for he is faithful that promised” – Hebrews 10:23.

You will notice that the human author of this epistle does not mention his own name, although the Hebrews, to whom he originally wrote, knew him well. It was not an unusual thing for writers of the Holy Scriptures to refrain from mentioning their own names, when circumstances did not demand that they should do otherwise. It is my belief, however, that the author of this epistle was none other than the Apostle Paul, and that for the two following reasons: (1) his own reference to Timothy; and (2) Peter's particular reference to a special epistle which Paul sent to the circumcision (2 Peter 3:15). But I shall not enter further into the question of the human authorship of this epistle, as it is evident that it has a divine author, even the Holy Spirit.

The contents of the epistle are largely taken up with a comparison between Christ and creatures – both angels and men – and also between His sacrifice and the blood of ceremonial sacrifices. The Apostle proves that Christ infinitely excels all created beings; that His blood made a complete atonement for sins, which that of beasts could never do, and that the very fact that their blood had to be shed year by year continually was itself a proof that sin remained to be taken away by a higher sacrifice, namely, the blood of Christ. The Apostle shows that all those sacrifices were only shadows of good things to come – even the great sacrifice of Calvary. In our text it is not the term “faith” that we find in the Greek in the words, “the profession of our faith,” but the term “hope,” and the Gaelic version follows the original here. Since faith, however, is the foundation of hope, and since, also, the profession is a public one, “hope” here includes faith. We are told to give a reason for “the hope” that is

in us, that is, to profess publicly our faith when called upon to do so. Then Paul says, “I have kept the faith,” which means, the doctrines of salvation.

In seeking to direct your attention briefly, as the Lord may enable me, to this portion of God’s Word, I shall consider three things: –

I. – The profession of our faith.

II. – How we ought to act with regard to our profession.

We are to hold it fast, “without wavering.”

III. – The encouragement given to us to act in this manner.

“He is faithful that promised.”

I. – The profession is a public profession, and is founded upon the Word of God. God has revealed Himself in the works of creation and providence, but in His Word He has revealed Himself as the God of redemption. The profession of the Church of Christ embraces three things:

(1) *doctrines*;

(2) *mode of worship*; and

(3) *practice*.

(1) With regard to *doctrines* – and I can only, in the brief time at my disposal, allude to some of these – we have, at the outset, the Being of God and the plurality of Persons in the adorable Godhead. The Church believes in a Trinity in unity: three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost – the same in substance, equal in power and glory, and yet one God. The Trinity is beyond the comprehension of any finite creature; yet these distinctions are apprehended when that word is fulfilled “And no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:21). It is impossible for any one to apprehend the Trinity, so as to embrace the Trinity as one’s own God, without being savingly taught of God.

The Church believes that the “worlds” were framed by the Word of God, in other words, created out of nothing. Man was the crown of all that God created in this world, and the Church believes that man as he came out from the hand of his maker was holy. Philosophers view man differently from the Church. According to philosophers, man is ascending from a lower to a higher state – a state to which he has hitherto not attained. Well, one would think that philosophers who have adopted such a theory would feel very much disheartened by the slow progress man is making upwards, for we find in our own day that nation, which philosophers considered a few years ago as almost within reach of the goal they had set before man, turning out to be so low in the moral scale as to deserve the epithet “Huns.” The Church views man as a fallen being. He lost God, and therefore he lost all. He has no claim upon God, apart from the claims which the free and sovereign love of God makes over to him, no more than the devils. In our day men teach that man is the child of God, in the sense that he has by his creation claims upon God, and that God will prove unjust if He does not acknowledge these natural claims; but, apart from the Covenant of Grace, as far as man is concerned, he has no claim upon the favour of God. Man is so ruined morally that he cannot bring about in the least degree his own redemption. The Church believes in the redemption of sinners – not of all men, but of an elect number. These elect sinners God loved from everlasting with a peculiar love, and He gave them to His Son to redeem. This leads us to consider the great doctrine of the person and natures of the Son of God, but time would fail, except to say this much, that the Church holds, as I have already pointed out in connection with the Trinity, that the Son is a divine person, the only eternally begotten Son of the eternal Father. It was to the Son that the redemption of the elect was entrusted, and He had to become incarnate to redeem them, for there were two things that had to be done before they could be redeemed – (1) Their sins had to be atoned for; and (2) their state and nature had to

be changed. In becoming incarnate, that is, in taking human nature, Christ did not take a human *person* into union with His divine person, nor did He lay aside His divine nature when “He took upon Him the form of a servant.” The Son of God could not cease to be God; He could not lay aside His divine nature. What He did lay aside was the glory and the dignity which He had with the Father before the world was, and which adequately showed forth the glory of His eternal Sonship – just as a king does not cease to be a king, although he should lay aside his royal robes and don a beggar’s apparel. We may say that Christ left His glory for those who were given Him by the Father, and He took their nature, “a true body and a reasonable soul,” into union with His divine nature, and by His incarnation, life, and sufferings, He bought the Church with His own blood. But, although He did all this, and although it is brought before us in the Scriptures as the fruit of God’s love to lost men, yet men will not come unto Christ unless they are drawn by the Holy Ghost. The Church believes in an effectual calling by the Spirit and Word of God. In our day the most of the people of this land might say with regard to the teaching given them: “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” The new birth is as great a mystery to the Pharisees of this age as it was to Nicodemus when he asked, how a man could be born when he was old? But the Church of Christ holds this fundamental doctrine as absolutely as the glorious Head Himself held it. I can only refer under this head to the doctrine of justification by faith. Faith, and “the works of the law,” are so diametrically opposed that the one excludes the other. Sinners are justified as sinners without having done anything but sin, and faith is a work only in the sense that it is an act of the mind; it is not a meritorious work or act; it is merely the empty hand stretched out, and taking hold of the fulness of Jesus. It is “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” Now, the Church holds that this faith is itself a *gift*. We may look at it in this way. The man with the withered hand had a *hand*, but it was withered: it needed the strength which God alone could give before it could be stretched out. So with sinners. They have a *heart*, but it is withered by sin and guilt, so that they can never believe until Christ bestows the strength of faith, and when this is given, the renewed, but still empty, heart goes out in a way of appropriating the fountain of life. This is the faith which justifieth, and which at the same time is a work or act of the mind, and yet is the gift of God.

The Church believes in sanctification by the Holy Ghost. God’s people are not made perfect when they are justified. It is only the foundation of holiness that is then laid. Justification is an *act* completed for ever, but sanctification is a progressive *work*. The Church holds the doctrines of the perseverance of the justified – “The righteous also shall hold on his way” – and the resurrection, and final judgment. But I cannot enlarge further on doctrines.

(2) *Mode of Worship*. – The Church under the old economy had its mode of worship direct from God, and in this epistle Moses is commended for his faithfulness as a servant in carrying out all things in connection with that worship according to the pattern shown to him in the Mount. Are we to think that the greater than Moses – the Son over His own house – has left the mode of worshipping the Father to the caprice of men? Verily no. Christ has through His Apostles, guided by the Spirit, who took the place of Christ in the Church on earth, when He went to the Father, set up a new mode of worship in His house, and I can only refer to this subject also. With regard to the office-bearers of His Church, there are no priests in the Church, neither is there a pope, nor cardinals, nor the many other office-bearers which men, led by the devil, have set up. The permanent office-bearers of the Church of Christ are elders or bishops, and deacons. The elders or bishops, which mean overseers, have the teaching and ruling committed to them; the deacons have the secular interests of the Church to look after. The worship of the Church is spiritual. “God is a Spirit,” and they that worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth. The natural man is carnal, and knows not the things of the Spirit of God. Hence, men who come into the Church, not by the door, but by climbing up “some

other way,” set up carnal worship. The Apostle warned the Galatians against such men. Formality is what the natural man wants. Give the natural man forms and ceremonies, and you give him what he finds congenial to his ignorance, and pride, and self-righteousness. But it is to the heart that God looks, and it is to the heart that all who are taught of God look also. Christ has not authorised the use of instrumental accompaniment in the praise of the sanctuary, neither has He permitted the use of uninspired hymns. He has, however, told His Church that He desires “the fruit of the lips,” and the “psalm, hymns, and spiritual songs,” of which the Book of Psalm is made up, as the praise book of His house. He has instituted the preaching of His Word, prayer, and the two sacraments of baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, as means of grace, and He seeks such to worship Him as will in spirit and in truth make use of these means.

(3) *Practice.* – The Church is in the world, but not of it. She must follow the Master and not men, however great. In our day the world and most of the professing Churches are identical. Worldly songs and music are the order of the day, while the preaching of the Word is slighted. The Church of Christ cannot tolerate such practices, not because she is morose and narrow, but because she has no appetite for these superficial joys, having tasted the pleasures which flow out of “the river which makes glad the city of God.”

II. – How this profession is to be maintained. – It is to be *held fast, without wavering.* Some take up a profession very lightly, and they value it so little that they will as readily let it go as they took it up. The profession of the Church will be tried. God tries it, and of this trial we have many instances in the Bible. God tried the patience of Abraham. Abraham received a promise that his seed would inherit the land, and he believed God’s promise; he staggered not, and he was justified by his faith. But God tried this faith, and he and Sarah began to waver, and in their wavering they adopted a method to accomplish the fulfilment of the promise, which was a source of trouble to them ever afterwards. Hezekiah was tried when men from Babylon came to him with a present and smooth words, and he, instead of treating them as suspicious visitors, as he ought to have done, opened his heart and his house to them and showed them all his treasures. No doubt some would commend Hezekiah for his action, and say he was charitable. The prophet of God, however, told him otherwise. Satan tries this profession. Job was tried, but he stood firm, holding “fast” the profession of his faith, when he said, “What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” so that his patience amidst the loss of family, wealth, health, and a good name in the world, became proverbial. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job,” etc. Men try this profession. Jesus was tried by men. He was reviled, slandered, and forsaken by men, which is a trial hard to endure. At one time He had only the twelve disciples left – the multitude had forsaken Him. Jesus said to them, “Will ye also go away?” Peter replied, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” The answer Jesus then gave is noteworthy, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” intimating that He would not flatter any, in order that He should have followers, even although His followers had been reduced to such a little band. The great Apostle Paul was tried by men, and we believe by some who were good men. How pathetic it is to read his Second Epistle to Timothy, sent from the cold, dark dungeon in Rome! He is forsaken by men: “Notwithstanding” says he, “the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.” “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

The profession is not only to be held fast, but it is to be held fast without *wavering.* There must not be any compromising. The individual, if he wavers, falls. So does the Church; if she wavers, she goes backward from that moment and falls, and we have terrible examples in the Churches of this land, and also in the State, of the truth of this. We, as a Protestant nation, have yielded principle after principle for the sake of unity and a false peace, until at last the Coronation Oath was changed, and now we support an ambassador at the court of the “man

of sin.” The result of these departures is misery. We, as a Church, made a good profession, not for “loaves and fishes,” but, like the disciples, we knew the Master, and loved, valued, and followed Him for His own sake and the sake of His cause. We knew the truth, and realised the obligations under which we were to maintain it and hand it down to the generations unborn, without wavering about its inspiration, when so many, to win the applause of the world, wavered and fell.

III. – The encouragement. –

(1) The *promise*;

(2) His *faithfulness* to His promise.

(1) What is the promise? It is, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” This promise, given to the Church under the new dispensation, is equivalent to that given to Israel under the old, namely, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” This promise, includes everything the Church needs. It includes temporal and spiritual blessings. God directed the attention of Israel, after they had spent forty years in the wilderness, to the fact that their clothes and shoes were as good as new. “Thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.” Jesus called His disciples and asked them if they had lacked anything since they had left all and followed Him; and they answered, “Nothing.” No; neither temporal nor spiritual blessings would fail if men would only “observe all things whatsoever he commanded them.”

(2) His *faithfulness* is another encouragement. Did He ever prove unfaithful to His word? Men may do so, but God never. He may – as we have seen already – try His people; but He will “never, never leave them; never, never, never forsake them” (Hebrews 13:4 [original]).

Our duty as a Church is obvious. We may say – not in any spirit of boasting or of self-righteousness; but in amazement that God would use such unworthy, weak creatures to do anything for Him – we may say, with the Apostle, that hitherto we have “kept the faith.” As individuals, we have great need of repentance, but as a branch of the visible Church of Christ, we can say before men and devils that we have been enabled, by God’s grace, to keep “the faith.” We have been accused of making too much of our Free Presbyterianism by those who were making much themselves of another name, which they have yet to prove belongs to them. We can afford to be misunderstood, if we are found faithful to our profession. Let us continue to hold it fast, remembering that “he is faithful that promised,” for the necessity to hold it fast is greater than ever. If we waver in the least, we are undone as a Church, for then we cannot expect His presence; and the spirit of our Church from the beginning has been that of Moses, who said, “If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.” As in the past, so in the future, may love to the truth, dependence on His grace, and an appreciation of His favour, characterise our little Church, “until the day break, and the shadows flee away.” Amen.

[August 1917]

Notes of a Sermon.

Preached by THE REV. D. MACFARLANE at Dingwall,
at the Ordination, by the Northern Presbytery, of the Rev. WILLIAM MATHESON
(with a view to service in Canada), on Monday, 6th August, 1917.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” – 1 Peter 5:2,3.

The Apostle Peter, in this epistle, exhorts several classes of people with regard to their duties to God and to one another. In this chapter he begins to exhort elders or ministers in the Church. These ministers were Presbyterians, for the word in the original, translated “elder,” means “a presbyter,” and Peter tells them that he is a presbyter himself, “who am also an elder.” Peter was not only a Presbyterian, but also, inasmuch as Christ the Son of God made him free, it may justly be said, that he was a *free* Presbyterian. In the days of the Apostles the form of Church government was Presbyterian, and we have good reason to believe that during the Millennium that form of Church government shall be the only form throughout the world in the Christian Church.

In addressing you shortly from the words of our text, I shall call your attention to the following particulars: –

- I. The flock of God.
- II. The duty of pastors in relation to the flock.
- III. The reward – a reward of grace – that shall be given to them for their labours.

I. The flock of God. –

A flock implies more than one individual. It implies several, whether few or many. These are called the flock of God, they are His people.

(1) They are His as set apart in the covenant of grace, or elected unto salvation. (2) They are His by purchase. “They are bought with a price” – the price is the blood of Christ whom the Father sent into the world to lay down His life for them.

(3) They are His by the effectual work of the Spirit in them, making them able and willing to give themselves to Him in the day of their effectual calling. In these and other senses, they are “the flock of God.”

II. The duty of pastors towards the flock. –

Their duty is to feed them. To feed here includes all that they have to do in connection with the flock. They are not only to feed them by preaching Christ to them for their spiritual nourishment, but they are also to rule them by the Word of the Lord, which is the law of His Church. They are, moreover, to exercise discipline when that is necessary. The flock of God are living persons, and need food to nourish them, and to make them grow up to the full stature of a perfect man in Christ. They live on Christ, who is the bread of life, and the water of life – “The true bread that came down from heaven,” of which if a man eat, he shall never die. Although it is Christ Himself that feeds them – “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd” (Isaiah 40:11) – yet He employs His ministering servants to minister food to them as He did. When He fed the thousands with a few loaves and a few fishes, after He had blessed the small provision which one man carried, it grew and multiplied, and He gave it to the disciples to distribute among the large congregation. In like manner, Christ uses His ministering servants to feed the flock. They are also to rule them by the word of truth. Ministers are spoken of in Hebrews 13:7, as those who have “the rule over them.” They are also to use discipline towards offenders. If communicants break the law of God, if they do not keep the Sabbath day holy, they are to be brought under discipline, and suspended from the Lord’s table till they are brought to repentance.

Another part of their duty is to take the oversight of the flock. In the original the words rendered in English, “taking the oversight” describes the work of a bishop. The pastors were not in the time of the Apostles bishops in the prelatiic sense. There were not then such bishops; even Peter was not a bishop in that sense. Every pastor was a bishop or overseer over his own congregation; but he had no lordship over other pastors. It is in this sense ministers are called bishops in Scripture, and it was not till the Church departed from the rule of Scripture and became corrupt that prelatiic bishops were set up in the Church on mere human authority.

The Apostle Peter points out in our text the manner in which pastors are to perform their duty.

(1) They are not to discharge their duty “by constraint, but willingly.” They are not to do it because they *must*, but because they are willing to do it.

(2) “Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” There are many nowadays in the office of the ministry merely for the salary. The salary of these is filthy lucre, and received in an unworthy manner. The labourer earns his wages in an honourable way, but an unconverted minister’s salary is indeed filthy lucre. The love of money and not the love of God, or the desire to feed the flock, is what actuates many to enter into the ministry of the Church. When I was at college in Glasgow, I lodged for several sessions in a minister’s house. One of his sons (a little boy) said to me one day that he would like to be a minister. I asked him why he wished to be a minister. He said that if he were a minister he would be a rich man, for everyone that came to church put money in the plate at the door. That little boy in his simplicity spoke out what was in his mind, and if many ministers, especially in our day, told the truth as that boy did, they would speak as he did.

(3) “Neither, as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” Christ is the only Lord of His Church. Pastors are only servants, and they are here warned not to act as lords. They are not to enact any laws, or to make any changes in the Church on their own authority. They are in their preaching to teach and command the people to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded them (Matthew 28:20) and they are to set a good example to the flock in their character and life. Ministers who make changes in doctrine and worship do not act according to this rule. They act as if they were lords and not servants. If their own servants made changes in their manses without their authority, they would not tolerate it. Let us suppose that a minister who went to the meeting of the General Assembly left a servant in the manse to look after it, and that during his absence a man came to the

manse and suggested to the servant that the house would be much better if he made such changes in it as he told him, outside and inside. The servant at once began to make the changes proposed to him. The roof of the manse was well covered with slates. He took off the slates and covered the roof with felt. He threw outside the splendid furniture and substituted inferior furniture instead. When the minister returned home he could scarcely know his own house, and was much displeased with the servant for what he had done. He quickly brought him to task, and asked him why he had spoiled his house, which he left in good order when he went to the Assembly, and charged him that he acted not as a servant, but as lord of the house. The servant replied that though he made the change at the suggestion of another man, he himself meant to do it in order to open the minister's eyes to the error of his ways in making changes in the house of God. He reminded the minister that he also was only a servant, and had no right to make any change in the service of the sanctuary without the authority of the Lord of the house. Of course, the minister dismissed his servant at once, but would not believe of any man that Christ would dismiss him as an unfaithful servant.

III. The reward. –

The reward is not a reward of merit, but of grace. The reward is great; it is a crown of glory. It is Christ whose servants they are that shall put this crown on their head. He is in our text the "Chief Shepherd." They are under-shepherds, on an equality – none having the supremacy over the rest, Christ is their Lord and Master, and their only Archbishop. The time, when He shall give them the crown of glory, is when He shall appear at the last day. So far as their souls are concerned, they shall receive the crown of glory immediately after death, but at the resurrection their bodies shall be crowned with glory in union with their souls. Although all believers shall shine in glory, we believe on the authority of Scripture that faithful ministers shall shine more brightly than others of the redeemed, "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

In conclusion, so far as our text is concerned, the congregation to which Peter preached was composed of Presbyterian ministers, and he preached to them not as a bishop or archbishop, but as a Presbyterian minister on the same level with themselves, for he tells them that he is a Presbyter himself. None can claim for him a superiority over the rest, any more than can be claimed for Paul, when he preached to Presbyterian ministers at Miletus, as you may see in Acts – "And from Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them: Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:17-21).

The office of the ministry is the highest, and the most glorious office in the whole world. The Apostle Paul thanked the Lord for enabling him and counting him faithful, putting him into the ministry (1 Timothy 1:12). It is also a most responsible office, and requires faithfulness on the part of ministers. They are stewards in the Church. "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). It is written that Moses was faithful as a servant in all he had to do in God's house. Ministers are to give an account of their stewardship at the day of judgment, but it is to be borne in mind that it is not fear of punishment that prompts them to faithfulness in the discharge of the duties of their office, but the love of Christ, who did the will of the Father, which was His meat and drink. The same disposition is in them, and they may say in their own measure with the Head of the Church, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). They

consider the crown of glory promised infinitely above their desert as the servants of Christ, for, although they did all that was commanded them, they had to reckon themselves, and do reckon themselves as unprofitable servants. Their only ground of hope for eternity is not what they did themselves, however faithful they might have been, but what Christ did for them in the great work of redemption. There is great need in our day of faithful ministers. “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). Amen.
[September 1917]

A Sermon.

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, M.A., of Edinburgh and Irvine.
(Second Sermon of Series on Psalm 130.)

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” – Psalm 130:1,2.

Being so long detained in the morning in breaking in upon this purpose, I shall now the more briefly come to that where I left.

Ye have heard that in these two first verses, the distressed psalmist was wrestling with the difficulties and sinking perplexities in his condition, wherein we have an account of what he had to wrestle with, the depths; the way of his wrestling with these depths, to wit, by prayer; his reflecting on that exercise, and telling God, that he cried unto Him out of the depths; and his prosecution of it, or insisting and pleading with God in a new doubled suit (verse 2).

For the first of these, the depths wherewith he wrestled, somewhat was spoken both for explication, and to a more general application of that purpose, which I shall not now repeat.

That which lies before me in the second place, is, the way of his wrestling with these depths, or difficulties. Others, had they been in the like exercise, might fret and repine, or they might labour to rant them out, or drink them down, so far as they were able to rid themselves of them, or they might crush under them; but he drives another trade; his being in the depths puts him to prayer, and to fervency in prayer. He not only intimates that out of the depths he prayed, but out of the depths he cried to God in prayer, with that earnestness, and fervour, that a drowning man, presently going to sink, cries for relief, if any relief may be had. The general observation which I take from this is, that the kindly [proper] result of sinking and surcharging exercise in the saints, is when it puts them to prayer, and to fervency in prayer, when being in the depths, out of the depths they cry unto God. This is the general doctrine of trouble, Psalm 50, “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, etc.”

And that I may so far, as is necessary, lay the point in broad-band [fully] before you, before I come to a word of use, I shall deduce the importance of it in a few particulars.

And 1. The psalmist’s practice, who is content to be at exercise, doth import, that sleeping and idleness is a very unsuitable posture, when the people of God are in the depths. To be at any time without exercise is very dangerous; for as the animal life is still in motion, so the spiritual life of a Christian must still be in exercise. So in particular, to be without exercise in a distress, and particularly to be without prayer, is yet more dreadful. An idle man in a difficult lot, I can compare him to nothing but to that drunken man, Proverbs 23:33, “That is as one that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast;” he is a desperate man, drunk with some distemper, that is not at exercise in the depths. May I add, the idle man in the depths, is readily the guilty man that draws on the storm and the tempest. Hence we have a sad narration (Jonah 1:5), where Jonah, a godly man, fleeing

from the presence of the Lord, in the storm, is down in the sides of the ship sleeping. And one might think in the case he was in, he might have an unsound sleep there, but the text tells he was fast asleep; and shall I add, that's a sad posture (verse 6) when a pagan shipmaster reproves a prophet: "Jonah, what meanest thou, O sleeper?" saith he, "arise, and call upon thy God." That then is the first thing imported, that it is a dangerous thing to be sleeping and idle in the depths.

2. That the psalmist when he is in the depths cries out unto God, it imports, that kindly [like their kind, proper, true] saints, whenever they come in any distress, have no refuge but God. It's with God and His saints as it's with a parent and a child, in a crowd. As long as nothing ails the child, he will go beside any body, but when he comes in a difficulty he will leave the rest and single out his parent to protect him. So I say it's with the saints when anything ails them, they have no refuge, no shift, no gate to go, but God. Would ye know the character of a child of God in distress, ye have it in that fore-cited place, 2 Chronicles 20:12, "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee." This is the scope of the most part of all the Psalm. A saint is no sooner put to it, but he puts at God: a cross is no sooner laid at his door, but he tells, it's the wrong door, and he goes and lays it at God's door. The reason of this is double; partly the difficulties of the children of God may be so great, that they are left [allenerly] upon God. It is with them as it was with that hypocritical king, when he said to the harlot, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" out of the barnfloor, or out of the wine-press. What will become of the saints in many difficulties and hard cases, if God step not in? David looked to all airts, and could find no relief, Psalm 142:4,5, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me, refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul." What follows? "I cried unto thee, O Lord, I said, thou art my refuge." Kindly [true] saints must therefore look unto God in every distress, partly because whatever right means they have to make use of, they must either begin at God, or they will find they have followed a wrong method. Saul pretended to this (1 Samuel 13:12), "The Philistines will come down upon me, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord;" and I must begin at God, saith he. And as Saul pretended to it, David really practised it (1 Samuel 30:7). Whatever mind he had to pursue the Amalekites that had burnt Ziklag, and taken his wives captive, he will do nothing till he consult with God. That then is the second thing imported, that as the saints are not asleep, are not idle in the depths of trouble, so they have no refuge but God.

3. A third thing imported in this, that the psalmist out of the depths cried unto God, is this, that there is no case of the saints so desperate, wherein prayer is useless. Ye know what was that wicked king's determination, 2 Kings 6:33, "This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" And how many in heart and practice, in difficult cases say so. "It is to little purpose to wait on God, to look to God." The psalmist here was of another temper, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, Lord," saith he; he finds it to good purpose to cry unto God. So Jonah 2:4, "I said, I am cast out of thy sight;" and he had as much to say for his being so as any other; the waters compassed him about, and went into his soul. The weeds were wrapped about his head, he went down to the bottom of the mountains. The earth with her bars were about him, yet even then he sees not prayer to be an useless trade, wherefore he adds, "yet will I look again to thy holy temple." Prayer is to good purpose for all that, and no wonder, for there is no condition of the saints so low, no pit so deep, wherein they can be caught, but an humble suppliant will from thence reach the throne. A David buried quick [alive] in a cave, a Daniel in the lion's den, find that prayer can win up to God, and find audience; for the high and lofty One, who hath the heaven for His throne, and the earth for His footstool, hath an eye also to them who are of a poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at His word (Isaiah 66:1,2). And He who humbleth Himself to behold the things

that are in heaven and in the earth, He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and the needy out of the dunghill, and therefore no desperate case of the people of God renders prayer useless.

But 4. That the psalmist out of the depths cries unto God, it imports, that as there is no case so desperate as it renders prayer useless, so it imports, that it is the property of the saints, when they are right, that be prayer hopeless, or not hopeless, they will not quit it; they will not give it over, put them in the depths. It's a great encouragement to them that they know it is to good purpose to pray; but be it to purpose, or no purpose, they must be about it, they will not quit it. That place cited in Jonah proves it; let God cast him out of his sight, yet will he look to his holy temple and pray; shut him out at the door, he will be in at the door by prayer. Tell him his difficulty is so great (as temptation will be ready to say) that crying to God will do him no good, it's all a matter, to prayer he must, he'll rather sink praying, than be saved without it. Psalm 62:2, "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." That's a notable word from a man in a deep distress. What could a man imagine to be discouraging that he wanted? For his case, he is as far from God as the ends of the earth; for his heart, he is under perplexity, his heart is overwhelmed; and yet in that condition he will cry unto God, if so be He will lead him to the rock that is higher than he; come of it what will, he will pray. And Heman is another notable instance, Psalm 88:13, and verse 14, He says, "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?" and verse 15, "I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted." I am put out of my wits, my wit gets a rack with thy terrors; and yet verse 13, "Unto thee have I cried, O Lord." No hopelessness of my undertaking, no hardship I meet with could put me from crying to thee, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee; I will continue praying, and (to speak after the manner of men) Thou shalt be soon up, but my prayer shall be at thy door to prevent thee. That then is the fourth thing imported here, not to be put from prayer were our case never so desperate, nay, not by the apprehension of drowning in the depths, though at the next bout we should sink to the bottom.

But 5. That he says, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee," it imports, that not only a saint will not be put from prayer, through the greatness of his distress, but his distress will put an edge upon prayer, when he is most fervent, and made to cry out when he is in the depths. And this word, "crying," expressing prayer in the text, suffer me to explicate more particularly what it imports. I intend not to speak of it as it is generally used in Scripture, but as it expresseth prayer. And I shall here offer four or five things to be looked to by them that would continue praying in the depths, or out of the depths.

1. It imports, a man's being affected with that which is his case. The crying man knows what ails him; when a man scricks or cries out, it is an evidence that he feels somewhat that affects him much. Thus crying is used upon the account of grief (Ezekiel 5:4). The marked persons are such as sigh and cry for all the abominations done in the midst of the city. They cry out of sad oppression from grief. And I find crying in prayer made use of, to signify the fears of the supplicant (Hebrews 5:7). Our blessed Lord is said to offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, and He was heard in that He feared. Grief and fear import the sense of our case, the source and fountain of our cries. A stupid man that wots not how it's with himself, or the people of God (who is like Pharaoh that knew not that Egypt was destroyed) will not be a crying man.

2. This crying imports, not only a sense of one's case, but an earnest affection after that, which our cries are employed about. It's not for trifles that a man cries either to obtain or avoid them (at least they are not trifles in his opinion). It's given as an estimation of wisdom, Proverbs 2:3, when a man cries and lifts up his voice for it. And David cries about that which he is affected with, Psalm 84:2, "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." It's a token of raised affections either to be rid of some imminent ill or hazard, or to attain some excellent good, that puts folk

to crying. A slighting of trouble (when a man is like Ephraim, Hosea 7:9, “Gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knows it not”), and a slighting of desirable mercies, will not produce crying for the one, or to avoid the other.

But 3. This crying imports, with sense of need and earnestness of affection to be at the thing cried for, a sense of a distance. We use to cry to folk that are far off, and not within ordinary speaking or rounding; and this follows well upon the former. When folks are put to pray from the depths, they will discern God at a distance from them, and themselves at a distance from God; it is another thing when a man is in the depths to be within speaking terms with God, as when he is at ease. The children of God while they are at ease are like Samson, who thinks he hath no more ado, but go out and shake himself, and have God at his command; but the man in the depths will not find such an easy matter to come near God. He will not only be sensible of his natural distance, but of that distance he is under upon the account of his provocations, and so this crying will take in sense of guilt to be confessed and mourned for before God. But this I shall leave, because it will fall in upon the third and fourth verses following.

A 4th thing imported in this crying is, that, notwithstanding of all that hath been said, a saint should cry out of the depths, with confidence in God, and of relief from Him, hence the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). It doth not prompt a man to mutter, or peep, or whisper his prayer to God; but to cry out with confidence, Abba, Father. And whatever sense we have of our need, or of our distance from God, or of the guilt that hath drawn it on, confidence is needful to usher in prayer, Hebrews 4:16, “Having such a high priest, let us come boldly.” The word in the Greek signifies, let us come with an all-saying, with an open mouth, unto the throne of grace, with confidence, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

5th and last. – This crying out of the depths it imports, as the result of all that I have been speaking to from it, a fervency of affection; when folks are not only sensible of that they need, have an estimation of it, see their distance, come with some measure of confidence, but an edge is put on their affection, and they are fervent, and raised in prayer for it. I do not mean that prayer with the loudest voice is aye the most fervent prayer. When I think upon these tones and voices used by some in prayer, I often mind that word, Ecclesiastes 9:17, “The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.” It’s not the tone (though we owe the voice to God) that makes fervent prayer to Him. Moses (Exodus 14:15) prayed fervently, he cried to God when he spoke not a word; and Lamentations 2:18, “Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion.” But my meaning is, that frequency, fervency, and instancy in prayer from the heart is required in them that talk and cry out of the depths. Ye talk of your saying of your prayers, and among the prayers in the world many of them are but said prayers, but when it comes to crying out of the depths, your said prayers will not do the turn. Our blessed Lord was never superficial in prayer, yet (Luke 22:44) it’s said, “being in an agony he prayed more earnestly.” There is a pattern of prayer out of the depths, and I wish I saw a practical commentary of that among you, which ye find in Psalm 107:12,13, “He brought down their heart with labour, they fell down, and there was none to help (that’s a posture that would put many to pray, and how far ye are from it, if ye were awake ye would discern); then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.”

So ye have heard the import of this crying out of the depths unto God. As for the uses of this, whereof it affords various, though all along the point is practical and applies itself; I know not if I dare break in farther upon it. I suppose to ordinary hearers, all is poison that is spoken after the glass [after *the glass* is run out. A sand glass was used in those days to mark the time of sermons]; but ye shall take a few words from it. If this be the kindly result of blessed trouble, to be put to crying to God out of the depths, then ye may see what a dreadful plague it is, that when

people are cast in the depths, the spirit of prayer is away, and there is no crying out of them to God. Shall I hold up to you a glass to let you see your own soul face in this matter? Read Ezekiel 24:23, And I pray you forget Judah and Israel, and call this Scotland, and yourselves professors in Scotland that are spoken to, "Ye shall not mourn, nor weep, but ye shall pine away for your iniquities." O that is the copestone of a people's calamity, when it is said to them, "Ye shall pine away in your iniquities, and mourn, and roar one towards another." And will ye not get many such up and down the land, folks that are like wild beasts in a net, struggling with their calamity; tattlers and talkers of their troubles, he blaming him, and he him, roaring for the sad case themselves and the land are in, but where is their crying out of the depths to God? Who have added to the weight and measure of their prayers for all that is come over them? Where will ye get a Daniel in all Scotland, that for three full weeks gave himself to fasting and prayer? Will ye have another glass to see your foul spots in? Read Daniel 9:13, "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer to the Lord our God, that we should turn from our iniquities and understand thy truth." We feel well enough all the evil that is on us, and that it is come as it is written in the law, yet there is no prayer to purpose. Will ye yet take another glass? Then read Amos 4:6, etc., where the Lord tells what strokes He had inflicted upon His people, everyone of them heavier than another. I have done this, and this to you, saith the Lord, and still the overword is, "yet ye have not returned unto me." Many folks are blyth when things rise to an height, and then they think God will be seen on the mount, but they forget that continuing them in the depths, is to set them to prayer. It is the sin of the generation, that they look more to their privileges than their provocations, or so to their privileges, as they forget their provocations; and lean so much weight on the righteousness of their cause, as they forget that for which God hath put them in difficulties. I may say on this account, that even fearers of God are self-destroyers, "O tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, that God hath taken such pains to put us to pray and repent," and yet we will do anything, but pray and repent we will not. I see no issue in this, but to put off our ornaments, and see what the Lord will do with us. And will ye yet take another word that may give folk a sight of their foul face? Even that charge unjustly laid by Eliphaz against Job (15:4), which, I doubt, if we can lay so well from our door as he might, "Thou castest off fear (saith he) and restrainest prayer before God." There is a threefold restraint of prayer before God in difficulties. And I wish that one or all of them take not in the generality of the generation we live in.

First, When folk that were wont to pray give it over. And what thousands are there of this stamp in Scotland? and not a few in the west country. How many are there among us, that sometimes have worshipped God in secret, and now do not bow a knee to God? How many have worshipped God in their families, who now have left it off? And among you there are not a few such, as we find by your shifting answers, when you are asked thereanent, a thing that rather might be expected in the barbarous parts of the land than among you, and is not religion and religious duties much clipped where it had much place? A prognostic of little good, when so few families will be found having their posts sprinkled with the blood of sprinkling. Now what shall I say of them that never prayed, when so many have quit prayer that once used it? O? I say it again, "publish it not in Gath, etc." That apostacy hath so far prevailed, that it hath driven many from the very form of godliness.

A second restraint of prayer is in them who have kept up a form, but, alas! they put me in mind of that word spoken of Pharaoh's chariot wheels, "they drive heavily." There was a time when religion was in request, and then folks got borrowed wings that they flew with, or stilts in religious duties; but when a man comes in the depths, he must have divine approbation, or these will not do his turn, or if he hold him by his prayers, he will be looked down upon and lightly esteemed, and then he that was wont to soar in prayer, will do much if he can creep on the ground; but that clipping of prayer, is a restraint of prayer before God.

I shall add thirdly, that many restrain prayer, that neither quit nor clip prayer, of whom if ye judge by their frequent continuance, and the edge they have in prayer, ye will find no difference betwixt what they are now, and what they were formerly. And ye will not easily know their restraining prayer, and yet they restrain it; for, instead of humble supplications, their prayers are made up of murmuring and quarrelling. Ye will get little of the poor man's supplications in their prayers.

Look to these things as glasses, wherein ye may see your shortcomings and guilt, and I entreat the Lord to bless them to you for that end, and for your exciting to more fervency to prayer. And remember when I press upon you crying out of the depths, that I press a peremptory duty on you, and that every neglect of prayer while ye are in the depths, disposes you to apostacy, and is a step to your ruin.

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