

A Sermon.

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(Third 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.

The Psalmist (as ye have heard) being in distress, is put to wrestle in the first six verses of this Psalm, partly with the difficulties and plunging perplexities in his case (1,2); partly, with the sense of guilt, that might hinder his access, or hope of audience (3,4); and partly, with God’s delaying to answer him, and give him an issue (5,6).

For the first, contained in the first and second verses, ye may remember that I took it up in these four.

1. That which he wrestles with, which he expresseth under the name of “depths.”
2. His way of wrestling with these depths, viz., by prayer. He cried out of the depths.
3. He reflects on this his exercise, and avows it before God, “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.” And lastly,
4. He prosecutes his exercise of prayer, presses for audience in a new suit (verse 2): “Lord, hear my voice, let,” etc.

For the first of these, what he wrestled with, the depths, I spake to it, and insisted to explain that metaphor of depth, or depths, and to shew what affinity there may be betwixt that and the distresses and perplexities of the people of God, and spoke somewhat to the use of it.

For the second, of his crying out of the depths, I have spoken also to that, and deduced the point a little, and shewn you how distresses and perplexities put the saints to prayer, and what is imported by crying in prayer. Ye may remember that I was cut off by time at a word of use, which was a sad regrave [complaint], that distresses should be upon the people of God, and yet prayer restrained; that there should be so much trouble, and so little crying. Several Scriptures I laid before you, wherein the people of God, as in a glass, may read their foul spots in this matter.

I proceed to some more uses.

The second in order shall be this: if it be sad to see the people of God in distress and yet not praying, it must be yet more sad to see them in distress, and instead of praying, taking sinful shifts to extricate themselves out of the depths, wherein they are. That the trouble which is sent to call them to God, should be so improved as if it had a commission to drive them from God. That if there be a sinful shift to be had they will try that before they think on prayer, before they stoop to think on calling on God. It’s a sad complaint of a wicked generation that ye have, Jeremiah 2:30, “In vain have I smitten your children.” It’s to no purpose that I have taken pains upon them, for they received not correction; they will not stoop to it, they will not improve it as a correction from God for sin. And would ye know how ye shall ponder these Scriptures, which will lay before you what I would say further on this use? One is, Hosea 5:13, “When that people saw their wound, what did they with it? They went to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb.” They were so far from calling on God, that they took a sinful shift, to bring them out of the present trouble. Another is, Isaiah 1:5, “Why should ye be stricken any more?” It’s to no purpose, for smite you as I will, ye will

revolt more and more; to smite you, that's the high gate, if ye were ill before, to make you worse; if you were far from God, to drive you further from Him.

A third Scripture is that spoken of Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:22), who in the time of his distress, instead of turning to God, did trespass yet more and more against the Lord. This is that King Ahaz who in his distress would not pray, but would worship the gods of the Syrians, who, he pretended, had helped them against him. I shall say no more to this use, but look to it; it's a dreadful thing when trouble makes folk worse, than they were before trouble came on them; and I shall add, that a people, taken pains upon by trouble, and not crying out of the depths unto God, are in the nearest capacity of any, to increase their trespass under it. A prayerless trouble will be a singularly plagued trouble, to them that are under it."

But a third word of use shall be by way of prevention of a cavillation or objection. It may be said, that there may be a great deal of din made of crying and turning to God in trouble, but are there not many who never own God in their trouble, and who, if they can have a sinful shift, take them to it, and yet these come through when praying folk stick in the mire? To prevent this cavillation or objection, I say, take this word of use, that if it be a duty to cry out of the depths to God, then it is a plague for folks to be brought out of trouble, and not sent to God by prayer; when they are brought through their trouble, and are never sent to God to make earnest of their turning to Him. Job 36:13, when Elihu is pressing upon folk, the right improving of affliction, he adds, "But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not when he bindeth them." They heap up wrath; why? They cry not when he bindeth them. If we will believe the Spirit of God speaking in Scripture, a person, not crying to God, when God binds him, heaps up wrath against himself. And I shall desire such as swatter [dash quickly] through their trouble mickenning [mistaking] God, to consider these three things.

1. That it must be God that gives them any delivery, though they do not acknowledge Him in it, nor for it, and, consequently, it is not given in love, but in wrath. There may be much wrath in delivery from trouble in a sad way, as well as in sending wrath upon a wicked person by trouble.

2. Consider, that any delivery thou meetest with, who are not crying to God in thy trouble, it's but a snare to thee. Thou lovest not prayer in order to an issue, and God in His holy providence lets that outgate out of trouble come as a snare in thy way, that thou seest not the necessity of prayer unto Him. And it's the saddest of snares to be put out of prayer's mister [need], to be like these spoken of, Job 21:15, who are brought in, saying, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we should pray unto him?" We get our turn done without Him, and therefore we need not pray.

3. Such as in trouble restrain prayer, should consider that all that is owing them is but fristed [delayed], it is not forgiven. Thou gettest a proof of God's riches, forbearance, and long-suffering; and that should lead thee to repentance, but it doth it not, and thou considerest not, "That after thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of his righteous judgment" (Romans 2:4,5). I can give it no better nor apposite term than what ye have, 2 Kings 13:23, "The Lord was gracious to them, and had compassion on them, and had respect to them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor cast them out of his presence." As yet, there was a reserve in that mercy, the judgment was to come upon them, but not yet. Look to it, then, ye who, in your trouble, get your turn done without God, that what is fristed is not forgiven.

But the fourth and last word of use, I shall give you from this note, shall be this. Ye that are put to pray in trouble, I intreat you, look that ye be at crying with it. I shall not resume what I said upon this the last day, as that ye would be affected with your case, that ye would be in earnest, that ye would have a sense of your distance, get confidence to come speed, and withal a raised fervency of affection after that you cry for to God. Only let your prayers look like your need of God, and the greatness of your distress. Ponder that word, Isaiah 29:13, a

word which I have often cited to you, "This people draweth near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but they have removed their heart far from me." Mark the phrase: He doth not say, they draw near me with their mouth, while their heart is far from me, but "they have removed their heart far from me," which imports, that there is no more effectual mean of estranging a soul from God, than a trade of formal worship; it is an active removing of the heart from God. I shall only add this word, that as I have spoken to them that in trouble neglect the duty of prayer, that their outgates speak no good to them, but wrath, and a snare; so I would have folks cautious in judging of their liveliness, or seriousness in prayer by their outgates out of trouble. Ponder that place, Psalm 78:34, etc. There ye will find a praying people and seemingly serious; they seek God and return, and enquire early after Him; they remember He is their Rock and Redeemer; "Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant; but he being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not." There is a people spared and delivered when they cried to God, when the Lord approves not of their prayer. We must therefore get another testimony to prove our not being formal in prayer, than outgate or delivery out of trouble. A proof of love and compassion in delivery may be God's call to us to mourn over our formality, in prayer, and for our other sins, which He came over to do us good.

But I proceed to a third head in this first part of the words, and that is his reflecting on his exercise, and his avowing it before God, "O Lord" (saith he), "I have cried unto thee." He looks back and considers what he hath been doing in distress, and finding he hath been wrestling, he lays it out and avows it before God. The general which I mark from it shall be this, that reflection on ourselves, and on our way what we have done, or are doing, is very necessary in all them that would approve themselves to God. Such was the psalmist's practice here; he looks back and finds the depths put him to crying, and is able to give an account of it. There is a twofold reflection on that God calls for from the children of men. One is a reflection upon their case what it is, that they be not stupid and senseless without consideration what their lot is. Ye have that quarrelled, Isaiah 42:25, "He hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle; and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart;" and Hosea 7:9, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." That argues dreadful stupidity and senselessness, when folks are in a low condition, and do not consider, and do not mind it, do not lay it to heart. But there is another reflection beside that of our case called for, and that is a reflection on our carriage under our case; when we have considered our case, we would reflect what we are doing in such a case, or under such lots as providence makes our portion. This is it the psalmist expresses, Psalm 4:4, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed;" and it is that the Lord presses upon His people. Haggai 1:5, "Now, therefore, consider your ways," set your heart on your ways. This reflection self-searching or examination is most necessary in ordinary; a man wots not where he is, nor what he is doing in religion, if he neglect this part of it. If he be a stranger to self-examination, he is a stranger to his progress or decay in religion, his convictions and challenges are confused, and without fruit. His prayers cannot be but confused; if he pray any, it must be at random. Only the man that is distinct in examination can distinctly lay out his case before God; and this examination, as it's necessary in ordinary, so specially in trouble. If a man in distress neglect examination, he may be carried headlong in stupidity, in passion, quarrelling, fretting, or other sinful improvements of his trouble, and as it is, Ecclesiastes 5:1, he may do all this, and not consider that he is doing evil. He is quite out, and knows not of it; and ye have an idea of that man that is not in reflection on his case and carriage under it in trouble, Jeremiah 8:6, "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned

to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.” He goes hand over head, like a wild horse in his course; why? he reflects not upon his carriage under trouble.

Not to dip on this, let me in short from it recommend self-examination to you, especially in trouble. If ye would haunt it in ordinary, it would be more easy to you in a distress. If ye be in ordinary reflecting upon your weaknesses, and examining your wants, upon your predominant [chief faults], your temptations, what are your suits that are most binding on you and your success, ye will the more readily (as we use to speak) hit the nail upon the head, when ye come to pray. And these your prayers that come from self-examination, though they be less busked [adorned], they will be to better purpose, than when a man with all the oratory he can reach, vents his gift in prayer. Particularly look what ye are doing as to this duty, when ye come in any distress; I gave you before some Scriptures that speak to them that neglect prayer in trouble. Now, let me mind you of some words, whereby to try your self-examination in trouble. One is, Leviticus 26:41, “If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity;” that were a blessed reflection that did produce this effect; but, on the contrary, look that your reflection be not like that, Jeremiah 44:10, “They are not humbled even unto this day.” And like that, Daniel 9:13, “All this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth;” and Ezekiel 24:13, “Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.” Ye would make use of these, and the like Scriptures, in your reflection upon your way, and what ye are doing when ye are in the depths. And further, when ye are reflecting upon your carriage under trouble, ye had need of tenderness of conscience; passion will give you a blind guess of yourselves, or of your case or carriage under it. When the Lord says to Jonah 4:4, “Doest thou well to be angry, Jonah?” the passionate man says, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” They that would reflect on their case and carriage under trouble, would seek a composed frame of spirit and tender conscience from God.

But to come a little nearer unto this reflection, taking the words in the bypast time, “Lord, I have cried unto thee.” They will import, that God had kept him long at that trade, and to this purpose we have a word, Psalm 69, after that he hath complained in the two first verses, that “the waters are come in into his soul, that he sinks in deep mire, where there is no standing, that he was come into deep waters, where the floods did overflow him;” he adds, verse 3, “I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God;” and Psalm 119:82, “Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” but this I may pass, because it will occur in verses 2, 5, and 6, and because the Hebrews expressed things present in the bypast time, because their verbs have not a present time. That which I shall speak to from the words considered as a reflecting on his bygone wrestling, I reduce to these two.

1. That he owns it as a thing that hath been, and is his practice, to be crying to God out of the depths.
2. Because folks may be ready to say, What is he the better of that? He hath not got an answer of his prayers; I shall add this, that his supplication out of the depths affords him a testimony.

For the first, ye may take up the note thus, that no distress, no dispensation of providence warrants the saints to cast all that they have been doing as unsound. Though he be put to the deeps, he owns it that he is a cryer out of the deeps unto God. “Out of the deeps have I cried unto thee, O Lord.” Thus the Church owns her integrity, Psalm 44:17-19, “All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant; our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons,” etc. Smite us as thou wilt, we avow it that

we are in thy way. And Job 13:15, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him,” that is, my integrity. And Job 27:5, “I will not remove mine integrity from me;” and so Heman, Psalm 88:13, “Unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.” Do what thou wilt with me, I avow it that I have been at prayer, and I will continue in it. It is true, men should be humble in this matter of avowing their integrity, they should mainly be studying their wants, and short-comings, and the iniquity of their holy things; and it is true also, that, when they are in the deeps of distress, and these tryst [meet] them with God’s seeming not to notice them, but rather His anger smokes against their prayers (Psalm 80:4), it should humble them yet more, and make them search their imperfections in their best things. It’s also true, that the people of God in reflecting on their diligence and prayers, should be far from that quarrelsome humour in hypocrites, Isaiah 58:3, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?” etc. As readily the greatest hypocrites are the greatest quarrellers, when they want success. Yet all this, notwithstanding, it is our duty to stick by what is right in our way, while we are in the deeps. Men must not be baffled out of their integrity, because they are under the cross, and have the wind in their teeth; they must not cast their prayers, because God holds them in the deeps. It’s no small part of the saints’ service to stick by, and to avow their integrity, that white robes are allowed them, though their prayers be not answered (Revelation 6:10,11). And, therefore, they have silly spirits, who, when they meet with a torrent of cross providences, are baffled from avowing their integrity, and lie by, and dare not face the storm upon that account.

But I proceed to the second observation. It may be said, What is the matter of folks owning their integrity, and crying out of the deeps, when they are not heard, but lie in the deeps for all that? I answer in the second note, that whatever be the seeming success of the saints in the deeps, their supplications out of the deeps afford them a testimony. It’s good news, that the psalmist dare own this, “Lord, thou hast cast me in the deeps, but I have cried to thee out of the deeps.” It’s a good cordial to Heman, while he is in the deeps, Psalm 88:13, “But unto thee, have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. Lord, why casts thou off my soul?” etc. And if ye ask, What riches can be in this testimony, that we have cried, and continue crying out of the deeps? I shall pass it with the time in three words:

1. It’s a token of a blest and sanctified trouble, when folks are led to God by trouble. That’s better than many outgates; they are “blessed whom when God chastens, he teacheth out of his law” (Psalm 94:12). And the first lesson God teacheth them, when He puts them in trouble, is to go to Himself with the trouble. It is a remarkable word that Samson’s mother had, Judges 13:23, “If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering.” So many such folk may say, that if God had a mind to destroy them, He would not turn them unto Himself in their trouble. There is more of the love of God inclining thy heart to cry to Him out of the deeps, than in many out-gates; there is a rich blessing in it.

2. This testimony is rich, because it warrants a man having done his duty, to cast his burden on God and in nothing to be anxious. It’s no wonder a man be crushed with his trouble before he go to God with it, but when he goes to Him, he hath a warrant to cast all his cares and fears on Him; he hath Hannah’s allowance, 1 Samuel 1:18, “Who being a woman of a sorrowful spirit, went and poured out her heart before the Lord in his bosom, and left her anxiety on God, and came away with her countenance no more sad.” This is a practice that few of us attain unto, we seem to carry our cares to God in prayer, but we bring them back with discouragement, rather augmented than diminished.

3. This testimony is rich, because it assures the supplicant, whatever be his present success (whereof, if the Lord will, we may speak a word in the afternoon), that he shall yet come speed; crying out of the deeps *shall* be heard, or Psalm 9:18, “The needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.” Israel might think

God had forgotten them, when they were so long in the deeps in Egypt, and sighed and cried to Him, by reason of their bondage, but at length God heard their groaning, and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:24). And ye know that word, Isaiah 45:19, "I have not said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." He never said it in any age, and He will not begin at us.

Take this word of use from it. Labour to have this testimony, to be crying out of the deeps, so as ye may avow and own it; and to be improving it, labour to read love and a blessing in it, to cast all your burdens on God by so doing, and confidently to expect ye shall see "the end of the Lord." In a word, labour to find *that* by grace, in so doing, which trouble cannot take from you; to find a delivery in trouble, rather than a delivery out of it; to find that which is of more worth than many deliveries, and infinitely of more worth than any delivery can be without it.

(Continued February 1918.)

[October 1917]

A Lecture

By the REV. WILLIAM MATHESON, Glasgow.

(Taken down by a hearer at Edinburgh.)

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God" – Isaiah 40:1.

No doubt all of you will have noticed something that has been remarked upon from the earliest times about this book, that at this 40th chapter, a distinctly marked change comes in, and there is, generally speaking, more like the language of the Gospels in these concluding chapters than in the preceding chapters of this book. That is not to say that there are not portions also in the preceding chapters that are very much like what we find in the chapters from the 40th onward.

Now, I am not to speak of a certain sort of questioning that has arisen from this, but we ought to try to see its meaning. You will notice that in the 39th chapter, we have a certain incident recorded – a very strange thing. The godly Hezekiah, who had been sick unto death, and whom the Lord had restored to health, adding fifteen years unto his life, nevertheless, after such a gracious act of God toward him, had entertained certain messengers from a heathen country, and had shown them favour that displeased God exceedingly – that stirred up His holy jealousy to burn like unto a fire. Now, if you will go back, you will see how the people of Israel were determined to be like the people round about them. They said, “We must have a king, in order to be like the people round about us,” and they would go to idolatry. It is a thing that is remarkable, when you read this divine account by men who belonged to the Jewish people, how it sets forth their naked shame; how they would persist in turning aside to idolatry. Even Aaron did it, and that one step of Aaron’s, ah, how costly it was to Israel, for it was the example that Jeroboam took up when he made the calves! For this, what is associated with his name is, “Jeroboam, that made Israel to sin.” So we see what an awful condition of mind they were in. It is the condition in which man is naturally. It was self-will, because they did not think themselves to depart from the God of Israel. That was not what was in their minds. We must remember that. It was not in their minds that they were going to depart from the worship of Jehovah the God of Israel, but they were going to have a manner of worshipping their God, like the method the heathen had of worshipping their gods. They were going to have idols made. They were persisting in this, although the Most High, who never afflicts willingly, and never grieves the children of man out of his heart, but because of the necessity with which they wring these things from Him, put stroke after stroke upon them. Yet they would do it. Now, here is Hezekiah, and see what he did.

Well, God said He was going to give Israel over, over to centuries, we might put it, of darkness and tribulation. He was going to put them through a fiery furnace, heated seven times, and men, when God will be putting peoples and nations through such a fiery trial, who fear Him, and who are loyal in their hearts, will be scorched, and they will be feeling the heat of the trial; as well as those who are careless and indifferent, and who blaspheme His holy name. They have to taste bitter things exceedingly. There was just one king we read of after this, who did seek the Lord, and that was the godly Josiah, but it was just like a dying flicker, so to speak, as the light seemed to die out in the dark centuries, so that from 400 B.C., onward, we have a blank, as it were, in God’s speaking by His prophets to Israel, and they used to mourn that there was not a prophet among them. God was here then, we may say, when Hezekiah acted like this, going to give them over as a people to those years that have not yet ended for them, because, when the Messiah came, they rejected Him, and so plunged themselves under the curse, when they said, “His blood be on us and on our children,” and to this day they are in that deplorable state.

Now, God spoke after this manner, “I have my people among them, and they are my people, and I will not forget them, though they are going to have troubles many, and not few, and though they are going to pass through a fiery furnace heated seven times.” So He said to Hezekiah, “Behold, the days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon; nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.” Hezekiah had a warning of the terrible days that were to come. But now, when the prophet delivers this message, as it were, God says, “I will not let my people, the heart of my

people sink, sink down under this heavy burden, under this declaration of woeful days that are to come, and so I will give another message unto my servant Isaiah; he will deliver it unto them, but it will be a message of days long forward – centuries shall pass. I will tell what is to come in the latter days.” So far as Israel is concerned, they have postponed the enjoyment of these glorious days by their unbelief in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, but the Word of God stands true yet. They shall yet know the meaning of these words, for we must remember that, in a peculiar way, the Jewish people are yet, “My people.” They stand out by themselves the world over, and, when God says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,” it certainly has first reference to the Jews, but, in holding out this comfort to them under these peculiar circumstances, and so giving the glorious revelation of Christ crucified that is given as the comfort they yet shall enjoy as a people, He also has given it unto the Gentile world.

Now, just a word or two about “My people,” and about their comfort, and the source of their comfort, “saith your God.” As I have said already, there is no doubt the Jewish people are, in a peculiar way, the people of God. He declares that he did not know any other people as He knew them. He did choose the seed of Abraham, His friend, and give them a place in history such as no other people had, or ever shall have, in the world. He separated Shem, even after the flood, and gave him a peculiar place over Japheth, as well as over Ham, and then He separated out Abraham and Abraham’s seed through Jacob, and they are His peculiar people, and the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. He does not do things as men do. They will do a thing and then repent and change their mind, but God does not, and though the Jews are suffering, as they are, yet there is a glorious future held before them in the Word of God, for He will take the veil off their eyes, and they will see Jesus of Nazareth, whom they crucified, as none other than the anointed of the Lord, and they shall say in that day, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

But you see in Israel a type of God’s people. That is a thing that the Apostle Paul emphasises in the Epistle to the Romans, that they were a typical people, for even all the people of Israel were not of Israel. There were many of them lost. There was only, as it were, a remnant, a chosen remnant, even among them, though they were a chosen people, to whom the living oracles of God were given. They represented a chosen people, whom God has in the world, had from the beginning, and shall have to the end; a people concerning whom, it is true, that He is taking some of them home continually by death. Yet He is raising, at one time many, at another time few. Many even in a day, like the 3000 on the day of Pentecost, and thousands on days following and later days as well – sometimes more, sometimes fewer. They are being called and added, each being called according to the great purpose that is running through the history of the human race from its beginning in Adam, until at last this heaven and earth, as it is, shall have passed away. They are those whom He calls “My people.” They are His witnesses. You see, He will sometimes speak to them, “Ye are my witnesses that I am Jehovah.” That word “Jehovah” is mysterious. It is a great sum up of all that God is, the self-existent One from whom all things have their being. When man sinned against God, what did it mean? It was the same as a trying to deny what God is, for who would think to run on the thick bosses of Jehovah’s buckler? When men sin it is to deny Him to be Jehovah, and so He says to them, “Ye are my witnesses that I am Jehovah. You are a people who know the living God, and you have bowed your knee to me, and you have said of me that I am your portion, that I am all in all. You are my witnesses.” That is the very purpose of the Church of God on earth. They are God’s witnesses in the world. “For the fool says in his heart, There is no God.” They are the witnesses in the world that the God of Scripture is Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, over-ruling One.

Well, He says, “My people.” These are not all mankind, though all have come from His hand. These are a peculiar people, chosen from among the great mass of mankind, as it is

said, “called according to God’s purpose.” God had a purpose of grace, a purpose of salvation, when man sinned and fell into ruin. God yet had a purpose, and, as it were, it is like a line running through – it is drawn by the Gospel – and, as it is running through the history of the human race, it is drawing sinners, sometimes a whole family, sometimes only one from a family unto Christ. That purpose of God is drawing them out, through the call of the Gospel; separating them unto Himself, and making them peculiar in the world, as Christ said to His disciples, “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” What fruit? That they would just live to Him like the blessed Apostle Paul. “The things I used to count gain, these I counted loss for Christ.” Some people will say, “What is Christ? He is only as a root out of a dry ground.” But look at the Apostle Paul, though he was getting a great place as a religious man in his day, yet when he got a view of Christ, what took place? Christ captivated his heart, captivated his mind. Christ captivated him wholly, so that from that day till he went to Heaven to be with Christ for ever, he lived only for Christ. He did not care for the comforts of the body; he did not care for luxuries that the natural man delights in; he did not care for the honour that men would give him; he did not care for anything, but that he would win Christ and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness. It was thus Christ had captivated his heart. Christ had captivated his mind. He was separated from the world. He lived altogether differently from the world, for he was separated unto Christ. No passing fancy, my friends, no passing fancy at all! Something had taken possession of him in the great depths of his soul, and that just through a view of Christ in the Gospel. Now, such are “My people.” Just a people of that character are they who will bring forth fruit unto God in the world, proving to the world that God in Christ is all in all unto them.

And now, how are they the people of God? He says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.” They are His first by His *discriminating love*. There you have a family – and it is a solemn thing to think of it, – one may be taken from that family, and will get a view of Christ, so that that person will live henceforth no longer to himself or herself, but unto Christ; and the rest of the family, surrounded with privileges and opportunities most precious, will go on to be lost. What discriminated? Well, it is that love of God which God speaks of when He says, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” And there is, therefore, in this discriminating love, which distinguishes between its object and all other objects, the principle that, although God be good unto all men, as the Psalmist declares, yet here is love that stands by itself toward its object, and is of such a character that it cannot endure the loss of that object. Ah, my friends, we all are recipients of God’s goodness. He opens His hand liberally, and gives us of His bounty, but yet He might do that, and we might be lost. But the love that discriminates “My people” from all others is a love that cannot suffer its object to be lost. No, no; the Son of His love must come in human nature to suffer and die the cursed death of the Cross, rather than that object should be lost; “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him (and these *shall* believe in him), should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And, again, they are His, as I have said already, by *ransom*. They were under the curse of the law; they were as ill-deserving as any in the world. Says the Apostle Paul, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came unto the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” There will be none greater sinners, so far as their original sinfulness is concerned, in the place of the lost than there will be on the right hand in glory. All were unworthy, all were under the curse. All must first be ransomed, if they are to be saved, and He gave the ransom, and the Apostle Paul speaks like this of those who believe in Christ to the saving of their souls: “You are not your own, you are bought with a price.” What price? The ransom price of the blood of Christ. “My people,” because they are ransomed.

Another thing: they are His by *power*. Once if they would hear of the love of God, commended so wondrously in the gift of Christ, they were as dead to it as their next neighbour. They had no interest in it. But another day came when the Word of the truth, that was darkness to them before, became light in their understandings. They came to see the meaning of the law of God, and the meaning of the Gospel of God's grace. They came to see their need of this Christ, of this precious Saviour, and rest they could have none in their souls. "Give me Christ," they would cry, "or else I die," and no soul ever had this cry, "Give me Christ, or else I die," but received Christ. A day of His power came – for there must be the almighty power of God put forth to break the bands of sin and of unbelief that chain us down. That is plain, is it not my friends? For it is a fact that we might sit listening to the Word of the Gospel, listening, even although angel voices declared it to us, though the voice of those who had drunk deepest among men out of the river of the water of life, were declaring this precious truth to us, and we should rest as indifferent to Christ as if it was something pertaining to angels, and not to men, that was being declared to us. Ah, the awful effect of sin and unbelief, the awful darkness of the understanding, must be removed. So they are His by power, His Spirit making them willing in a day of His power, to come unto Christ. You see what a claim He has on them – His own dear Son given for them, and the chains wherewith they have been bound broken by the power of His own Spirit freely given, and all flowing from His own discriminating love.

But they are His in another way – by *their willing gift*. They gave themselves to Him. He never has any of them, but they gave themselves to Him. May He not say, "My people," when they gave themselves to Him? Who can deny His right to say, "My people," when this is so? And, oh my friends, the willingness wherewith these people gave themselves unto Him in the day of His power can't be described. It is such a willingness that the human heart can know nothing else equal to it. In the Scriptures it is set forth under the figure of marriage, true marriage, wherein the true and living bond of honest and sincere love exists. How willingly, in such a case, one party gives himself or herself to the other! That is only a faint representation of the soul's free willingness, when a soul sees Christ in the love that He reveals, as the Apostle says, "He gave Himself for me." Ah, well, that makes a willing heart, in giving oneself to Christ, that cannot be described, that can only be understood by those who taste it. And I will point again to that blessed Apostle when he gave up everything for Christ. Was that not a willing giving? Did he begin to say, "Could I not have Christ at less cost?" No, no; he says: "I count all things but dung that I might win Christ."

Now, do you think He will ever forget them? Do you think He will ever forget them? Do you think it? "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." They have hard things to pass through. They are going to have many difficulties, many pains, and many troubles, but has He forgotten them? No, do not let their hearts sink. If they have to go through fire and water, like holy Job of old, or like blessed David, they will come out like pure gold at the end, and eternity will swallow up the little blink of time that they had here in trouble. What is time in the view of eternity? It is nothing. It will look long to us here, but ah, my friends, when you will stand at the border line of time and bid good-bye, will it not be only as a moment? So, where is their comfort? It is in the Lord. He claims them and He will have them, and, as He will have them, do you think He will let any evil befall them? No, no; none.

Who is the source of their comfort? (We must draw to a close.) It is He. Read the rest of the chapter. He is the incomparable God; He has power; He does not get faint; He does not grow weary. Never. When they are in trouble and difficulty, as He is the source of their comfort, He will open to them thoughts of the vast scope of His dominions, for every thing that being hath His kingdom doth command. What are you, what am I, among even the myriad thousands of mankind? Nothing! And yet when we will not get our way, how readily we complain against God! But think of the vast scope of His dominions; and then the purpose

of God that brings everything within that scope. He has numbered the hairs of the head of His people, and they may think of the purpose that runs through all His vast dominions and controls all; and, as they are His, in that purpose, all things must be working together for their good, though they cannot see it now. How little we can see of things! And then the comfort is not a passing comfort of this world. It is for eternity. Oh, that God would teach us to think in terms of eternity! May He grant us to get a view of the meaning of such a word as this, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Oh, to get a view of this! He will never forget them; never, never lose sight of their interests. They only are truly blessed among men who are in such a case as this – whom God calls "my people." They are His for eternity. To get any understanding of this is to be won unto the Lord, for "they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee."

[November 1917]

A Sermon.

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACKAY, Oban.

[This discourse was taken down by a hearer on the Sabbath before a Communion.]

"Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious" – 1 Peter 2:7 (first clause).

Some of us are looking forward, if that is the Lord's will, on the next Sabbath to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we have any conception whatever of what that means, it will be a question with us whether we are rightly exercised in connection with that solemn duty that lies before us. There can be no doubt but all God's people realise, and that very deeply, how utterly far short they come of what God's Word demands of them

when they endeavour to perform any duty, and more especially when they are looking forward to this solemn duty – even the commemoration of the dying love of the Redeemer. It is true about the most in this generation, that they go to the Lord's Table as if they were just going to an ordinary meal – as if they were doing something that was common; whereas the commemorating of the death of the Lord Jesus is a solemn thing, for it is written in God's Word, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation unto himself, not discerning the Lord's body." There is, however, on the other hand, a danger of our coming to the conclusion that the Lord's Table is for special Christians. Now, the Lord's Table is not at all for special Christians, but is for the family of God, which, as you know, consists of "children, young men, and fathers." "I write unto you, little children." "I write unto you, young men." "I write unto you, fathers." Some people have got the idea in their minds that no one has a right to go to the Lord's Table until they are long in Christ; but if it is true about us that we belong to the family, then we are warranted to come to the Lord's Table; we are called upon to profess that Jesus in whom we have believed, and to whom we have committed the keeping of our souls in view of time and eternity. Who, then, have a right to go to the Lord's Table? Believers.

The text brings before us –

I. – Believers; and

II. – What is true about believers, or how we may know them.

"Unto you therefore which believe, He is precious."

I. – Believers. –

Is it a question with yourself whether you are a true believer or not? The most seem to take it for granted that everything is all right for eternity, and that they have nothing to do but just to be absolutely indifferent about this matter, and that they will be in heaven as soon as they draw their last breath in the world. Well, friends, that is a delusion from hell, and it is a delusion that is drunk in by the people of this generation, and they are going down to eternity just in the mass, thinking it will be all well with them at last, while at the same time they are as ignorant of the new birth, of regeneration, and of holiness, as the blacks who never heard the name of Christ.

Let us now notice what it is to be a believer. And it is in the hope of giving to the poor remnant that God has left in our midst some light with regard to this matter that I have taken these words to-night as the basis of a few remarks. I know that, however clearly I might put this matter, I cannot open the eyes of the blind to see what is really seen by the eye of faith, what is really known only by the regenerate heart. Well, believing is brought before us in God's Word under various figures, and why are these figures used? Because believing is on the one hand such a simple thing, that it is difficult to describe it, and, on the other hand, it is such a profound thing that it is difficult to make it intelligible to men, and, consequently, figures are used which men are acquainted with. For instance, it is compared to the hearing ear; "Hear and your soul shall live." The Psalmist also says, "I will hear what God the Lord (Isaiah 55) will speak," and it is written, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Faith is then compared to an ear, and believing is compared to hearing. And what does the soul hear? The soul hears the description which God's Word gives of Jesus Christ and His finished work. Faith is again compared to an eye, and believing compared to looking. "I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come mine aid." It is true that believing is also compared to tasting, "Oh; taste and see that God is good"; and to hands, "My hands to Thee I stretch"; and to feet, "I will run in the way of Thy precepts when Thou my heart enlarged hast."

Faith in Jesus Christ is, then, just the ear that hears about Him; the eye that beholds Him; the hand that lays hold of him; the mouth that tastes Him; and the feet that follow Him. Is it

true of you that you have heard the glad tidings of great joy with the ear of your soul? Is it true of you that the eyes of your understanding have been enlightened in the knowledge of your Redeemer, and that you have seen His greatness and His attractiveness? Is it true of you that you have laid hold of Him for yourself, and that you have tasted something of the sweetness of His redeeming love, and that your heart has been constrained to cleave to Him, and to go out after Him in following Him in the world? This, then, brings before us what we are to understand by believing.

II. – The second thing to which I desire to direct your attention is what is here said concerning believers; to them Christ is precious. Christ is precious only to believers, for the Word says, that to others “He is as a root out of the dry ground; He has no form nor comeliness that they should desire Him; He is despised and rejected of men”; but “unto them which believe He is precious.”

Who is the Christ who is so precious to the Church? Well, the Christ of the Church is a Divine Person, the co-equal of God the Father, and, if you are a true believer, the Christ that you know must be divine as to His personality. You see there were some who crept into the Church very early in its history, and they would allow that Christ was the greatest person who ever lived in the world, that He was the holiest Son God ever had, but they would not allow that, as to His personality, He was the Father’s co-equal, and these heresies have had a resurrection in modern times. There are many in Scotland to-day, even in the pulpits, and they do not believe in the Divine personality of the Lord of Glory; but the Christ of the believer is equal with the Father, and equal with the Spirit, as to His Person. I believe myself that no one but a believer comprehends, in a way to appreciate it, the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity, and that through the teaching of the Holy Ghost alone, for, to a man as he is by nature, the Godhead consists just of one personality. You will hear men quote that great text, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” and it is to be feared that they have no conception whatsoever of the meaning of the Son that is brought before us there – the Son who, in regard to His personality, is equal with the Father, and who came forth from God, because the Father loved sinners equal with the Son, and did not withhold the Son of His love, but freely “gave Him up for us all.” Has Christ then become precious to yourself as to His personality, so that your soul is satisfied with nothing less than a Divine Saviour? Do you embrace Him by faith? Do you lay hold of His personality?

Christ is precious again to believers with regard to His natures. You see Christ as to His Divine nature is equal with the Father, as the Catechism says, “the same in substance, equal in power and glory”; but the Lord Jesus Christ has a human nature also, and He is precious to believers as to His human nature as well as to His divine nature. It is said, “Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh.” For we must bear in mind that, although Christ has a human nature – a true body and a reasonable soul, and that constitutes human nature – yet the personality which pervades this human nature is not at all a human personality, but a divine personality. It is God in our nature; and although humanity is united to divinity in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet the natures are distinct, but the Person is one, and when it is written in God’s Word that “Christ died,” the person that died was not a human person, but a Divine Person in a nature that was capable of dying. If you are right for eternity, this mystery has been opened up to your understanding, and you have seen the necessity of the arrangement of heaven; you have seen the wisdom of God as that is manifested in the human nature of the Lord of Glory, for “Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God.”

I would say this to you to-night, on the authority of God’s Word, that, if you have apprehended this glorious reality, namely, the personality and the natures of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have rejoiced in apprehending this and seen the necessity of it, then you

cannot but be a true believer, for “Flesh and blood,” said the Lord to Peter, “hath not revealed these things unto you, but my Father, which is in heaven.” You see some people seem to think that man, by learning, can arrive at these things, so as to distinguish and appreciate them. Well, I ask you, can man, by learning or by any power of his own, give sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf? No. Neither can man apprehend the personality and the natures of the Lord of Glory, so as to make his own of this great Person, except by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Christ is precious, then, as to His natures, for you see a Saviour with a human nature alone would not do, and a Saviour with a divine nature alone could not do. A Saviour with only a human nature would do for the men of this generation, for all that they require is a Christ that would set a good example before them, but the Christ of the Church is a Christ that must die for them. He must suffer the whole that they found due to themselves, and one with a human nature alone could not endure this. He would need to have a divine as well as a human nature, and the Christ of the Church has these two natures. He has a divine nature which He had from everlasting; He has a human nature which He assumed, when the fulness of time came.

Christ is precious also to believers in all His offices, and there are three offices which are brought before us in God’s Word – 1. the office of a prophet; 2. the office of a priest; and 3. the office of a king. God’s people require a prophet, they require a priest, and they require a king; and they find all their wants met in the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners.

1. They find in Him a Prophet to reveal to them the will of God for their salvation. They are darkness itself; they cannot understand the Scriptures, and they need the Divine Prophet to open their understandings so that they would understand the Scriptures, and Christ, by His Word and by His Spirit, as the Prophet of the Church, has revealed to them the will of God for their salvation, and when did He do so? Well, to begin with, He brought before their minds, and that in a very clear way, that it was not at all by works of righteousness which they could do that they could be saved, but that it was by embracing Himself as the Saviour of the lost, and that that was the will of God for their salvation. He brought before them that God was well pleased with them, that they met all that law and justice had against them, in embracing Christ as He was freely offered in the gospel.

2. He is precious to them also as a Priest. There is no such office in the New Testament as the office of a priest apart from the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one official priest in the New Testament, the Priest that God raised up, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchisedec, and that Priest is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Christ’s work as a Priest is twofold. It is first of all the offering up of a sacrifice to take away sin, and Christ as a Priest offered up Himself to satisfy Divine Justice and reconcile His people to God. But the other work of a Priest is to intercede. “He ever liveth;” it is written, “to make intercession for us,” and it is in virtue of His offering that their guilt is removed, that they are accepted as righteous in God’s sight, and it is in virtue of His intercession that they are kept; for it is written that “the righteous are scarcely saved,” and they would not be saved at all if it were not for this intercession. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.”

3. Christ again executeth the office of a King, and we might say that the office of a king is twofold also. This King Jesus exercises His power in connection with His people, and He exercises His power in connection with His enemies. “I will sing,” said the Psalmist, “of mercy and of judgment.” And you see Christ exercises His office as king in subduing His people to Himself, in making them willing, in a day of His power, and He exercises His office as king also in ruling and restraining them, and in conquering all His and their enemies. If it were not for this King of Zion, there would not be such a thing as a Church of Christ in the world at all; but He says, “Because I live ye shall live also,” and it is written that “He must reign until all His foes be made His footstool.” And when we, in this benighted

generation in which we live, see the hand of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords stretched out against the nations, what are we to understand by it? We are to understand that the Lord Jesus, as King of the Church, is exercising His kingly power, and that in connection with His enemies, for there will be no such things as kingdoms at the last day, but the human race will be gathered before the great white throne as individuals. There is, however, such a thing as the sin of nations, and where are these nations to be judged? They are to be judged in this world, and Christ is calling the nations to judgment at this present time, but He has an eye on His own people, on His own Church, and when He arises to shake terribly the earth, as He has arisen at this time, He will “turn His hand upon the little ones.”

It is a great encouragement and consolation to God’s people that Christ is ruling as King among the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and that this turmoil which has arisen in the world is part of His going, and we have no doubt but that He will bring nations to follow Himself, so that it will be true that the whole earth will be filled with His glory, according to the prayer of the Church of old:

“The whole earth let His glory fill,
Amen, so let it be.” (Psalm 72.)

Christ is then precious to His people as their King.

But He is also precious to His people in the Word, and we might say that it was in the Word they met Him first. It was in the Truth they found this great Saviour, this great Prophet, Priest, and King, and what is the secret of the love of God’s people for the Truth? Because that Christ is the Truth. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” You see the identity of Christ and the Bible is very close. He calls Himself the Word of God.

Christ is again precious to God’s people in His Ordinances. He is precious to them in the Supper, and what is the Supper? It is just sensible signs and these sensible signs are bread and wine, which show forth Christ, even the broken body and the shed blood of this great Person, this glorious Redeemer.

Christ is precious to them also in His people in the world. You see every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth also those that are begotten of Him, and, if you are a believer, when you see Christ in your fellow-creatures, as He is to be seen in those who are believers, then Christ is precious to you in these.

But now, in conclusion, let me ask you this question – Has Christ become precious to your own soul? It is a matter of personal experience, and if you can honestly say this night, notwithstanding everything about you which is a discouragement to you, that Christ is precious to you as to His personality, as to His two natures, as to His offices, as to His Word, His Ordinances and His people; then, let me tell you this, that you have no ground whatever to conclude that you are not a believer, for this is an infallible mark of a believer. And your duty is obvious, and that with regard to professing Christ publicly in the world. Some people seem to have the idea that God’s people are people who think that they are great persons, who are so pious and so advanced in the Christian life, and who have made great attainments in holiness. Well, it is true that “God’s people are a holy nation,” but it is also true that “they are a peculiar people,” and the longer they live in the world, the more conscious they become of their own backwardness, their own sinfulness, their own nothingness; and you may be here to-night and you may be saying, “Well, when I look back to the last communion, and when I think of what has been transpiring in my life since then, how can I have the audacity to think that I will go again to the Lord’s Table?” Let me ask you this question, “Is Christ as precious to you as ever He was?” But you say, “He is more precious to me than ever He was; I feel that I am more dependent upon Him than ever I was.” Well, if you can honestly say that you

feel that, you may rest assured of this – that your consciousness of unfitness, sinfulness and backwardness is not at all an indication that it is not your duty to pay your vows before the people and to commemorate the dying love of that Saviour who saves, and that independent of your works altogether.

If you are here to-night, and you cannot deny that Christ is precious to you in the way I have described, then it is your duty to declare that publicly, for what do God's people declare when they profess Christ publicly? They declare that they are themselves the chief of sinners in the world, but that they have laid hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that as lost sinners, and that they are going through this wilderness depending, not upon their own piety, but upon the grace "that reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." And, if that is your life and your state, then you are bound to declare that before your fellow creatures, you are bound to make a good profession. If you have found Christ to be a great Saviour, it ill becomes you to be denying Him before your fellows. I believe that God hath a controversy with many of His people because of how they neglect this duty, and that their own consciences are telling them, and that through God's dealings with them, that they are not doing their duty with regard to this solemn matter, even professing the Lord Jesus before their fellow creatures. But you say, "There were many good people in the Church, and they never professed the Lord Jesus at the Communion Table." That was true, but did that say that they were doing their duty? "Do this in remembrance of me." That is the command, and we take it to be equal to this command, "Thou shalt not kill," or "Thou shalt not bear false witness;" and it is a serious thing to be going contrary to God's revealed will. Let those then who cannot deny, as I said already, that Christ is precious to them seriously consider this matter.

But is it not true about the most of you that Christ is not precious to you at all? You never saw His beauty; you never saw His greatness; you never saw His attractiveness; you never tasted of His love; you never found refuge in the shelter of His wings; you never felt the benefit of His blood in your conscience, His love in your heart, His life in your understanding, and still you are thinking you are going to heaven, and that it will be well with you at last. Well, you have no ground to think that. God's Word says, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" and, you who are unbelievers, and who are going down to meet the Lord of Glory as the Judge of all the earth, take good heed to yourselves this night that it will not be true of you that you will land on the other side of time – in eternity – ignorant of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, see that you will be found redeeming the time; see that you will be found resorting to Jesus, while it is called to-day; see that you will be found calling upon Him when He is near, seeking Him while He is to be found, for the day will come in the case of many when He will say to them, "Because I called and ye refused," when that awful word will be fulfilled, "I will laugh at their calamity, I will mock when their fear cometh." These words, friends, are not idle tales: they are not meaningless terms, but they are terrible descriptions of terrible realities. Flee then to the refuge which God hath provided, even to the Man who is the refuge from the storm and the covert from the tempest. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "If ye shall be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Some of us will be in eternity in a very little time, and oh! friend, where will your eternity be? If you go from this congregation to a lost eternity, it would be better for you never to have had a being in the world. Take heed then while it is called to-day.

May God bless our consideration of His own Word!

[December 1917]

A Sermon.

By Rev. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen” – Romans 16:25-27.

Although the Apostle Paul was in the fullest sense the human author of all those epistles of the New Testament into which his name is inscribed, yet we learn from those epistles themselves that it was not his usual habit to write his epistles with his own hand, that in writing his epistles he made use of an amanuensis, or one that wrote to his dictation. In this method, Paul was not singular among inspired writers. We know that Jeremiah made use in this way of Baruch, a man like-minded with himself. Peter similarly made use of Silvanus, a man like-minded with him, and Paul, so far as this particular Epistle to the Romans is concerned, made use of Tertius, evidently a man like-minded with himself. But although that

was the Apostle's general method – the Epistle to the Galatians, which, he says, he wrote with his own hand, is the only certain exception – we have reason to think that no letter issued from him to any of the Churches without his writing the closing words of the letter with his own easily-identified hand, and this became the token of authenticity and genuineness in all the epistles. That is what is meant by what one reads at the seventeenth verse of the third chapter of second Thessalonians: “The salutation of Paul with *mine own hand*, which is the token in every epistle.” Doubtless the same token of authenticity was given in the case of this great Epistle to the Romans, and we are not speaking without warrant when we conclude that just at the twenty-fifth verse of the last chapter of Romans, where our text begins, the Apostle Paul did take the pen in his own hand, and, as the remainder of the epistle to the end forms from this commencement but one sentence altogether, that just the words of our text, the fitting conclusion to the epistle as a whole, were the actual words written by the Apostle in his own hand – a token of the authenticity of the epistle as a whole. Now, this one great sentence which constitutes our present text is extremely rich in content, and we may hope that, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, an examination of its contents may serve us a useful purpose.

This striking conclusion to the Epistle to the Romans is easily seen to be essentially of the nature of an offering of thanksgivings unto God, for so the construction runs: “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you . . . be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen;” and, indeed, it is hard to think of any gracious soul, who with some measure of intelligence had followed the Apostle Paul closely in the powerful statement on behalf of the gospel which he submits to his readers in this great epistle, who would not at its close be disposed to join with the Apostle in offering unto God a similar offering of thanksgiving for His works of wonder done in virtue of the gospel dispensation unto the sons of men. The act of thanksgiving may be said to move outwards in ever-extending concentric circles, with the gospel itself as centre.

When in our text the Apostle speaks of the gospel as “my gospel,” he does not of course mean that the gospel is his in the sense of his being the author of it, or of his having invented it. The gospel to Paul has none other for its author but God. It is in that sense the gospel of God; but Paul was an accredited herald of it, and, as an Apostle, had an infallible understanding of what the gospel of the grace of God means, and it was given to him besides to set forth that understanding which he had of the gospel to others infallibly, and on this account he speaks of it as “my gospel.”

He adds, “and the preaching of Jesus Christ”; which we should take to intimate to us that these two words, Jesus Christ, constituted for Paul the sum of the glad tidings. That Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, who was crucified between two robbers on the cross of Calvary, was the very Messiah for whom the Church of God had been looking those four thousand years, the Son of God in whom all the promises of the Old Testament were yea and amen – this was to Paul the sum of the glad tidings, and the thought is, in the present case, the centre about which the action in this offering of thanksgiving moves. There was a time, indeed, when Paul or Saul stumbled at the thought that Jesus of Nazareth, whom His disciples said was the Messiah, met with such an ignominious death; but that was before he really knew himself to be a guilty sinner that had incurred the intolerable wrath of God. When he did come to know that he was a sinner by nature and practice, he was the more ready to appreciate one that would make atonement for him, and when in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth upon the cross of Calvary he, through grace, identified the God-man who, by His self-sacrifice, turned away for him the wrath of that God whose displeasure as of his Judge he had incurred – well, he would henceforth glory only in the cross of Christ. That was the heart of hearts of the Gospel to Paul.

Now, there were certain aspects of this gospel which were of the profoundest interest to Paul, and upon these aspects he touches with exquisite beauty and taste when, at the close of this great epistle, he offers this offering of thanksgiving unto God, and to these aspects – they are the ever-enlarging rings or circles of which we have spoken – would we now seek to draw attention. The gospel, then, which in briefest form means the preaching of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul loved to think of: –

- I. – As a mystery which had been kept secret from the beginning of the world.
- II. – As manifested fully in His own time.
- III. – As being now made known to all the nations.
- IV. – As laying a certain obligation upon every one that hears it.
- V. – As being, after all, but an instrument in the hands of God.

I. – The gospel is the revelation of a mystery which had been kept secret or silent from the beginning of the world, that is, from eternal ages, for so the words, “from the beginning of the world,” are more literally rendered. The same thought is conveyed when, in 1 Corinthians 2:7, the Apostle speaks of the gospel as “the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory,” or, in Ephesians 3:9, he speaks of “the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.” To speak of the gospel as a mystery is not to say that from its very nature it must for ever be altogether unintelligible to finite beings, and so to man; for then no man could be saved. But it does mean that the gospel is a great deep which can only in part be ever understood of finite beings, that from all eternity it formed the counsel of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that this counsel or divine purpose was not discoverable by human reason, and that, even after in an objective sense it has been revealed, fallen men are not, apart from the unction which comes from the Holy One, capable of appreciating it so as to be saved by it. This purpose, then, these counsels, these inter-communications between the Persons of the Godhead concerning the way in which God was to be glorified in the salvation of sinful men was kept silent so far as a creaturely audience were concerned for ages which were measurable to the eternal God only. Now that thought suggests to us that the gospel must have meant much to God Himself. The gospel as it means pardon of sin and renewal of the nature in time, and as it means a hope of never-ending blessedness treasured up for believers in heaven, is a magnificent thought or scheme. But not, even so, if we restricted our conception to these precious aspects of it, would the gospel have that comprehensiveness which characterised Paul’s gospel. He thought of it as in the present, he thought of it as in the future, but he thought of it also as in the past – and such a past, ages immeasurable to man. And the fact that he so thought of it with great delight suggests to us that the gospel should be regarded, not merely from the point of view of what it is fitted to be to sinful men who are appointed to die, and after that to come to the judgment, but also from the point of view of what it has ever been to God Himself. Sometimes the question is put by men sceptically inclined, What was God doing before He created the world? Calvin, following Augustine, quotes with apparent approval the somewhat tart answer which an ancient disciple gave to a sceptic, who pressed him with that very question, in the form that He was preparing a hell for the inquisitive. To us it seems an ample reply to say that, from eternal ages the heart and mind of the Trinal-God was occupied with a purpose, the presuppositions of which were the manifesting of Himself as Creator and as Lawgiver, but a purpose which in the main meant the glorifying of every perfection of the divine nature in connection with the revelation of Himself as the Saviour of an innumerable company of natural rebels of the human race. God is the all-sufficient One, and it was from no sense of want within Himself that He purposed salvation; yet it was the good pleasure of His will in some way to identify the blessedness

that appertained to His Trinal life with the manifestation of His love, of His wisdom, of His power to sinful men. I reckon that what the Wisdom of God, who is none other than the Word, the Son of God, says in the eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs, bears one out in this: "From everlasting I was set up, from the beginning, or ever, the earth was . . . Then I was by Him as one brought up with: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" – which is as much as to say that the Father's eternal blessedness was in the fellowship of the Son, and that the Son's blessedness in turn was in the fellowship of the Father. But when He takes up those two words ("delight" and "rejoicing"), in which the inter-penetrating mutual blessedness of the Persons of the Godhead finds expression in human speech, and uses them to set forth His interest in sinful creatures, as when He goes on to say: "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men" – does He not in some manner identify His own blessedness with His purpose to reveal Himself as the Saviour? It is in the direction of the doctrine that we are at present handling that those wonderful words which occur in Christ's intercessory prayer also look – "For Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." And the same interpretation fits well to many other passages of holy writ which might be instanced, but time would fail us. Let me repeat, however, that the gospel was a mystery that was kept silent, or it had no audience beyond the Three Persons of Godhead, from eternal ages, and in that very circumstance we are taught that it is not of the nature of an afterthought with God, that it was not as something suddenly sprung upon man with the rising of an emergency; on the contrary, it was long and well weighed in all its innumerable aspects, applications and ramifications, it is, in a word, as David put it long ago, a covenant well ordered in all things and sure. Let none of the people of God, therefore, in any extremity of circumstances into which they may have fallen, imagine that they were not well provided for by their God in the provisions and arrangements of this mystery hid for ages with God Himself. And let not any one whose heart the gospel, that meant so much to God, never filled, think that he is taught of God.

II. – We proceed to another aspect of the gospel which was of such consummate interest to the inspired Apostle. What was hidden or kept silent for eternal ages was at length manifested, and were it not that it was manifested it had availed nothing for any of us. When he says that the mystery is now manifested, the sense obviously is that he is referring to that ultimate and perfect dispensation of the gospel which was vouchsafed to the children of men in the Apostle's own days. Yet we are by no means to infer from that that up to the days of the Apostles there had been absolute silence concerning this mystery in the world. The whole context of our text makes it very plain that rather we should say that the meaning is that a process of revelation which began with the first promise of a Saviour in Eden reached its culmination in the Incarnation, obedience unto death, resurrection, glorification, of the Son of God, and in the giving of the Holy Spirit, as the fruit of Christ's entering heaven with His own blood, as on the day of Pentecost, and in other remarkable evidences of His presence. Those things of which we have the record, from the historical standpoint, in the four Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, are the manifestation of that mystery which was kept secret from eternal ages which the Apostle Paul here in the main intends, but those very things stand related to the promise of a Saviour in the Old Testament Scriptures as a key does to a lock. Well, this manifestation ought to be regarded by us as really not less wonderful in itself than was the purpose of which we have already said so much. That "eternal life which was with the Father" was none other than the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom He made the worlds, the brightness of His glory, the express image of His Person, who held up all things by the word of His power, considered as set apart from all eternity in the purpose to be a sacrifice, and this eternal life was manifested in the Person of the Living One, who became dead, and is alive for evermore, and who has implemented His promise concerning the giving of another Comforter who should abide with His Church as Christ's vicar until

Christ the second time come for His bride. In this wonderful manifestation there is given us the saving knowledge of God. We do not know God savingly except we know Him in His love, neither can we know Him in His love, except we know Him in His gifts, or rather, one would say, in His two-fold gift, the gift, the unspeakable gift, of His own Son, and the gift, the immeasurable gift, of the Spirit of that same Son. But this is the knowledge which is vouchsafed to sinful creatures in virtue of the gospel. This is the manifestation of which Paul writes.

III. – Although the mystery was manifested after a perfect manner with the coming of the day of Pentecost, yet up to and at that time the gospel audience, so to put it, were comparatively few. But it was not God's purpose that the audiences should, for long after the perfect manifestation had been given, remain few, and to this circumstance concerning the making known of the mystery, a circumstance also full of profoundest interest to Paul, we would now in the third place seek to draw your attention. In the matter of publicity, and, so far as human audience is concerned, the gospel mystery is considered by Paul as given us at three stages. In the first stage, which is coterminous with eternal ages, there was no human audience; at the second stage, it had a comparatively small nation for audience; but at the third stage, the stage at which the middle wall of partition was brought down, the gospel has potentially the whole world as its audience. "It is," says our text, "made known by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God to all the nations." It was a great wonder to Paul that the Messiah should have come to His ancient Church. But it was a still greater wonder that he himself should be the chosen vessel to bring the unsearchable riches of Christ to the door of the Gentiles. He, in fact, spent his whole strength in order that the manifested mystery might be heard tell of by the whole world. In this effort of his he met much opposition. But there were two things that sustained him. In the first place, the same Old Testament scriptures which had foretold the coming of the Son of God into the world, foretold that, with the coming of Messiah, a process would be set agoing whereby the law of the Lord from Mount Sion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, should ultimately embrace the whole earth. And in the next place, there was the direct order of the King of kings, of the Lord of lords, the commandment of the everlasting God, directly given, that the Gentiles, without becoming Judaised, should be made partakers of the gospel. Had not the Lord of glory Himself given His marching orders to the eleven in these words: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations"? Had not the Apostle Paul himself his commission, in the same sense, from the same Lord, when it was said to him: "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles"? This process, although there be now no living infallible preachers, is still going on, and it will go on until the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the channels of the deep, and so at length Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Of this gospel, for the making known of which he used all his gifts and graces, Paul was not ashamed. He knew that there was not that human being upon the earth that could afford to do without it, that could escape everlasting destruction apart from it. That on the one hand. On the other hand, he believed that there was not a man or woman so abandoned, so heavily loaded with the wrath of God upon this earth, if he or she embraced the Christ of God, brought near to sinners in the preached gospel, but would by this be infallibly saved, delivered from that death which means so much more than temporal death in order to enter upon and enjoy a life that is so much more than temporal life, life that shall never end. As, then, he had regard to the glory of God, and to the well-being of his fellow-sinners, he found it his meat and drink to make this mystery which had been kept silent from eternal ages, but which was perfectly manifested in the Apostle's own days, fully known to every creature that is under heaven. In doing this his activities were in unison with God's plan and programme touching the gospel. But he knew that God would raise up many other heralds to enter in a sense into his labours, and this thought, which was so full of interest to

Paul, ought also to be full of interest to us, and, in fact, will be so, if the grace we have be of the same quality as his.

IV. – But that brings us to speak briefly concerning the gospel as laying an obligation upon every one to whom it comes as read or preached. The mystery manifested is made known to sinners for the obedience of faith. You see the covenant of grace no less than the covenant of works, the gospel no less than the law comes to us demanding obedience. But it is with a difference. The obedience which the gospel demands is called here the obedience of faith. What is that? Well, it may be put in this way. The law as covenant demands works of our own as the condition of our obtaining life. In fact, if we had been able to render such works, life would have been ours by the covenant of works, and in no other way. But works involve strength to perform them, and so, as under the curse of God's law and naturally without His Spirit, we are without strength. Of course, not every one has that conviction; in fact, no one that thinks it would be wrong of God to give him his everlasting portion with the Murderer and the Father of lies has that conviction. Hence is it necessary that the genuine and now impossible claims of God's law should be pressed upon us, that we might learn our hopeless helplessness under the law as a covenant. What then? Is there no hope? None by the way of getting a reward for works done by us. But there is by the way of receiving a gift, an absolutely free gift. The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, this receiving of this gift is that obedience of faith to which in the first instance the gospel invites us sinners. What is a gift? A gift is of such a nature that, when offered to you, there is no condition attaching to it in order that it should be your own, but that you would receive it as it was offered to you. If you add any other condition save this, you begin to buy the gift, that is to make it not a gift at all. But it must be received. It matters not however precious the thing offered be, nor how suited to your needs the thing offered is, if you refuse it, if you will not receive it, you are nothing the better for the gift; it may be, from your insulting the person offering, that you may be very much the worse for it. And here we would observe that great wrath is incurred within the gospel audience, as I may call sinners hearing the gospel, because of the doubting and contemptuous way in which God's most precious gift of His own Son, together with pardon and an inalienable title to life in and through Him, is despised and refused by many. There are many, and the language of their heart is: "Oh, I don't know what mind God has towards me, although I hear that this gift is being urged upon me that I might accept it, and therefore I'll have nothing to do with this gift." If even a fellow-creature like myself were sincerely to offer to another fellow-creature such a trifling matter as an orange or an apple, and that other fellow-creature would assume the attitude of one saying, "I don't know what mind you have towards me, although you are making me this offer, and I'll have none of it," would I not feel wronged? I certainly would. And will not God feel wronged if, when He sincerely offers, yea, rather urges you to take His Son, brought nigh to you in virtue of the gospel, as a gift in which He should be doing infinite good against your evil, you, instead of welcoming that gift, turn round and say, "Oh, I don't know what mind He has towards me, and I'll have none of His gift." By Himself he hath sworn that what is naturally pleasing to Him is to see men accept His Son and live! But the gift, to enrich us, must be received by us. Not upon the palm of the hand, as, say, a florin might be received, but into the heart, with our understanding, intellectual and moral, with our will we must receive Him. And, if we do so receive the gift as He is sincerely offered to us, we shall find that with the Son we have pardon, and a sense of love made ours with which our eternal destruction shall stand for ever incompatible, impossible. Let us never then forget that the gospel demands obedience. But it is not an obedience of the ordinary run. In order to our rendering it, as reasonable beings, we must have our false confidence of strength, of life and of hope taken from us. So shall we be made glad as beggars to receive a gift, and such a gift! And the longer we shall live receiving it, the more deeply we shall understand that every time we

appropriate this gift as our own, God is manifesting Himself to us as One that does us infinite good against our, in a sense, infinite evil. But the gift must be received. Christ in the gospel comes to none in order that He should be despised, trampled under foot, but, instead of that, that He might be a prophet in our understanding, a priest in our conscience, a king in our will and affections, that He might be to us an Head, a Shepherd, an Husband, our all in all. He that so receives Him just in His own Word will be saved; he that will not so receive Him will be damned.

V. – And yet, finally, the gospel is but an instrument in the hands of God, the Holy Spirit. Doubtless the term, “gospel,” is often used in a wider sense, so as to include its own application. But in our text the Apostle distinguishes the glorious instrument, which is the mystery made known unto all the nations for the obedience of faith, from the agent who really makes that gospel the power of God unto salvation, that agent being God, the Holy Spirit. This is, in a sense, the ring that embraces under it all the other rings which, as we have said, form the concentric circles which have the gospel – the preaching of Jesus Christ – as their centre. “Unto Him who is of power to stablish you according to my gospel,” does Paul offer this offering of thanksgiving. The gospel, considered exclusively as an instrument, does not strengthen any believer, much less – may we say – quicken the dead. It is God, by His Spirit, that is of power to strengthen the living and of power to quicken the dead. But God, as an agent, connects Himself with an instrument, and the agent uses but the one instrument, both when we pass from death to life and when we are preserved from re-passing from that life to death again; yea, when we are enabled to enjoy life – life more abundantly. And that instrument is the gospel. The Apostle Paul had always a deep consciousness of his dependence upon the Spirit of God, in order that the gospel, of which he was so distinguished a herald, might be the power of God in reality even unto salvation to so much as one of his hearers. He gives emphatic utterance to this conviction and this sense of dependence when, in writing to the Corinthians, he says, although it should be a Paul that planted and an Apollos that watered, it is God alone that gave the increase. Yea, he says that, if looked at apart from the effective agency of the Holy Spirit, the planter and the waterer – be they whom they may – are simply nothing. The increase is from God.

Now, this is not said to take away from the responsibility which Christ in the gospel lays upon every soul, nor from the warrant and freedom which the gospel bestows upon each and all to receive Christ, and pardon and life through Him. Yet it has to be said, in order that we should make bare the misery of the condition in which the Fall and actual sin left us – a condition according to which we are naturally incapable of appreciating Jesus Christ so as to welcome Him in our hearts. It has also to be said in order that we might ascribe praise to God, who not only sent His Son to save us with the infinite price of His own precious blood, but also sends His Holy Spirit to save us with the infinite power which is His. And this power does attend a preached gospel. He promised, saying, “Lo, I am with you always.” It is, in fact, the glory of the gospel that it should not merely be the ministry of righteousness, but also the ministry of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit who is life-giving to the dead because of the righteousness which is brought near to us in the gospel, so that duty and grace are seen here to go hand in hand.

We have thus touched upon some aspects of the dispensation of the gospel which had a peculiar interest to the Apostle Paul. We have room only to ask, in conclusion, Are you yourself now disposed to say of this mystery, which was kept silent from eternal ages, and was fully manifested in the fulness of time, and is being now made known to you in a preached gospel, “It is all my salvation and all my desire”? In so affirmatively answering, you manifest yourself to be a fellow-sharer with Paul himself in the great salvation.

[January 1918]

A Sermon.

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, M.A., of Edinburgh and Irvine.

(Fourth Sermon of Series on Psalm 130.)

“Lord hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities: O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee: that thou mayest be feared” – Psalm 10:2-4.

From the first branch of the psalmist’s wrestling and exercise, I have spoken to these three:

- (1) The deeps, wherewith he was put to wrestle;
- (2) his cries whereby he wrestles with these deeps;
- (3) his reflecting upon this his practice, and avowing it before God, as that which afforded him a testimony, that out of the deeps he had cried unto God.

Now, there remains the prosecution of this wrestling and his pleading for audience, in a new and doubled suit, verse 2, “Lord, hear my voice,” etc. While he pleads for the hearing of his voice, the meaning is not, that the voice is all that should be given to God. I confess we should give Him the voice when we can give Him no more, and lament that we have no more to give Him but the voice; but the voice that the psalmist would have heard here, is the voice of his crying out of the deeps, the voice of his most fervent and earnest supplication. Ye see the expressions here are doubled (as frequently in the Book of Psalm) to evidence, how earnest he was in this suit, that he is not complimenting with God, when he is seeking access and audience to his prayers. The expressions also are metaphorical, and borrowed from the carriage of a parent to a child; and upon the matter, his suit is this, “Lord, notice me when I

pray,” as the parent will notice the distressed child’s cry when he is like to ruin; “and let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications;” that goes a little further. As a parent, knowing a child to be in hazard, will listen and hearken attentively if he can hear him cry, and notice and ponder that cry, and what he cries for; so he pleads with God, that He would be waiting on and attentive, to see and hear if a cry should come from him, and that He would affectionately ponder and notice it when He hears it. For this hearing of prayer, it hath so frequently occurred before, that I shall pass it and the whole verse in three words, that I may come to other things in the Psalm, which I mainly designed to speak unto, when I broke in upon it.

The first thing that ye shall mark here is, that sanctified affliction not only puts the saints to prayer, but also that they cannot rest upon the work wrought of prayer, but they must have an answer to their prayer; “I have cried out of the deeps unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice;” he must be heard. The sensible man, when God blesses the distress he is in, to put him to prayer, he doth not rest there, but presses for a hearing, for an answer to his prayer. Two things evidence the truth of this. One is, a sensible man in trouble will find it hard to be out of speaking terms with God, hard to have anything of Saul’s case in his lot, that when he sought God in his distress, “he would not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Samuel 28:6). When folk come into trouble, if they have any sense of feeling of their condition, they will know of what worth an intercourse with heaven is, and what it is to have a door open to them from thence, when all doors are shut upon them from earth, and, therefore, they cannot rest on prayer, but will press for audience. Another is, that as it will be hard with sensible saints to be denied audience, so they need and prize the thing they seek. It’s not for a fashion, or for a compliment, or for a trifle, that they cry out of the deeps; but their life (if I may so word it) is lying in pledge of what they would be at; there is nothing betwixt them and ruin, but the answer of their prayers, and, therefore, they cannot rest without it.

For use, it leaves a sad conviction on them, who, if they come the length to worship God, and pray to Him, their task is done; they have prayed, and that’s enough. I confess, by prayer and supplications, folks may cast many events over upon God, but yet they should bide at prayer, till they get an account of that which they are seeking (Psalm 5:3), “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord” (saith David); “in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” It’s an evidence that folks have little pressed upon their hearts the necessity of that they are seeking, when they look not up for an answer. And hence also they have evidence, that (as it is 2 Timothy 2:19), though they name the name of Christ, it is not their care to depart from their iniquity, that they may not bring a reproach upon prayer, nor obstruct the success of their prayer with God. This is the great fault of formal professors, they will keep up a form or fashion of prayer, but they little know, or labour to know, what it is to traffic with heaven by their prayer.

But a second word shall be this, that suppliant in distress may be exercised with delaying of the answers of their prayers; “I have cried out of the deeps unto thee, O Lord,” but he dare not say, that God hath heard him. Therefore he is put to pray over again, “Lord, hear my voice.” The sense of non-acceptation may haunt a suppliant, and he may find the thing that he is seeking is not granted; yea, suplicants may not only be exercised with delays, and seeming denials, as Job 30:20, “I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not.” And Lamentations 3:44, the Church complains, “Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.” Not only I say, may suplicants be exercised with delays and seeming denials, but with very sad dispensations on the back of their prayers, Psalm 80:4, “O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry,” or wilt thou smoke “against the prayers of thy people?” They may have smoking wrath meeting their prayers, and that for a long time, instead of a comfortable answer, which is sad at all

times, but especially in trouble. For clearing what folk should make of this, I shall only name some things that I spoke more largely to at another occasion.

1. Though the psalmist hath a testimony that he is crying indeed to God, when yet he is not heard, we should look when we are not heard, that there be nothing wrong in the supplication, Matthew 20:22, Christ saith to some, "Ye know not what ye ask;" and Matthew 17, when Peter roved upon the mount, it was so with him. There may be a defect in the matter, manner, or end of the supplication. James (4:3) says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

2. When our supplications are not answered, we should look that there be not something wrong in the suppliant. Folks may be praying when there is standing unrepented of guilt, that meets them in a strait (as I may hint on the following verse); there may be some controversy, that God hath with the person, which till it be done away, He will not hear needy and pressing suits; and though the controversy may be done away, as to standing guilt, there may be an habitual ill frame, which the Lord would rectify by keeping the suppliant at his bar. They may in ordinary be formal and carnal, and have an edge in trouble, and He will not let them stick there, and therefore will keep them at the back of the door, till they learn to walk with God in ordinary. And

3. When the supplication is right, and the suppliant in a right frame, there should be the exercise of faith, that God will not deny every suit that He doth not answer, or delays to answer. The exercise of faith, that He is but trying us, if we will go to another door, when He delays to answer; yea, this is the exercise of faith, to believe that many suits are not unanswered, which we think are not answered. God answers the suits of suppliants, when He accepts and approves of them (Psalm 10:17). Though He grant not the thing they seek, He answers, when He strengthens the suppliant with strength in his soul (Psalm 138:3). And there are answers of faith, which should be read from the Word, and made use of.

I have the more briefly passed from this, that this purpose occurred before on another text; and from it take two brief words, and I shall leave it.

One is, that suppliants, crying to God in distress, and not coming speed, should be invited to the reflection that I spoke to in the forenoon, to see how all is, that there be nothing wrong in the supplication, nor in the suppliant, that there be no action of guilt, no controversy that must be removed, before a comfortable answer come. That should be a searching lot, when the bill of the needy suppliant is lying at the footstool without an answer.

Another is, if even suppliants may be humbled and exercised with delays, ere they get an answer to their prayers, what will become of them that pray none at all? "If this be done in the green tree, what will become of the dry?" (as Christ says, speaking of His sufferings, compared with the calamity that was to come upon the Jews).

But I proceed to a third word, and that is to clear what it is that God requires of needy and honest suppliants, when they are put to cry, and cry again in prayer, for an answer, and it is not given. Beside what I spoke before of reflection, I shall shortly from the text point at three things to be done, or that God calls for. And

1, in this case, the Lord is calling folk to pray on, "I have called to thee, O Lord," there is prayer; "Lord, hear my voice," there is a new prayer; "Let thine ears be attentive to my supplications," there is a third suit. Although thy belly should cleave to the earth while thou liest in the dust, thou must continue in supplication; although thine eyes should fail in waiting for God, and His salvation, yet pray on; there is nothing formidable in a suppliant's condition, so long as he is not driven from God's footstool, but prays on.

2. Another direction is, that repulses or delays should promote humility in supplications and suppliants. It's here supplications that he puts up, when he pleads for audience. Now the poor use supplications; supplications are the beggars', are the divours' [bankrupts] language. Many suppliants when they have cried long, and are not heard, may be in

peril to fret, to quarrel, to repine, to bark; but that's a wrong method to come speed with God in prayer. Thou oughtest to be the more humble, the longer thou art delayed; thou oughtest to creep the nearer the dust, and come in among the poor that speak supplications.

3. And a third direction shall be from the phrase and metaphor in the text, as I explained it in the entry, that is, that there be a believing, that the Lord hath an affectionate ear to listen unto, and hear the cry of humble suppliants. This is imported in the very terms of the prayer put up to God, as an affectionate parent, ready to notice the cry of His child, when he is in hazard, and cries for help. And this is a needful direction, when the suppliant is held at the door, that beside diligence and humility, he entertain faith, that bodes [promises] well of God. Faith, when God was seeming to destroy Job, made him say, "These things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee" (Job 10:13). I know that Thou hast a kindness for Job, though Thou appear terrible to me. So must faith reckon, when answers to prayer are delayed; I know He will do me good, though I seem not to be noticed.

Now I come to the third and fourth verses, wherein we have the second branch of the psalmist's wrestling, and that is a wrestling with guilt, that might hinder audience, and to give you a general view of these two verses, ye shall take this branch of his wrestling in these three:

1. Ye have a very sensible and humble acknowledgment of the desert of sin, in the most godly, verse 3, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" That is, iniquities are so heinous a thing, that if Thou wilt mark them as Judge, and, according to the covenant of works proceed with men, none would be justified.
2. Ye have the psalmist's relief being thus humbled, in God's pardoning mercy, on which he lays hold, in the beginning of the fourth verse, "But there is forgiveness with thee."
3. This pardoning mercy in God is amplified from the end He hath before him in letting it forth, "That thou mayest be feared." That is, not only in general, because Thou art a merciful and pardoning God in Christ, men have access to worship and serve Thee, who otherwise art a consuming fire; but in particular, Thy pardoning mercy will excite men to fear and worship so good a God that freely pardons iniquity, under the weight and burden of which they could not stand.

For the first of these, his sensible and humble acknowledgment of the desert of sin in the most godly, I may touch it the more cursorily now, because it will fall in, when afterward I come to speak of the right way of applying pardoning mercy, where I shall take a view of this verse, as it points out the right method of obtaining pardon, and the qualification of the pardoned sinner, calling upon God in trouble; what would I say now upon it, ye shall take up in these three.

1. Ye have the sense of sin and guilt, joined with the sense of trouble.
2. Ye have the sense of guilt meeting a godly man in the teeth, when he is sent to God by prayer in trouble.
3. Ye have guilt meeting him with a terrible aspect, that if God marked it, he nor none is able to stand.

For the first, I shall give it to you in this brief observation, that in right exercise, the sense of sin and guilt should go along with the sense of distress and trouble. The psalmist rests not on his being sensible, that he was in the deeps, but he is also lying under the sense of sin and guilt. A man that hath the mere sense of trouble without the sense of sin, he is no more than a beast that will feel a smart, and so it is a brutish thing to be howling under the sense of trouble, without the sense of sin, Hosea 7:14, "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." They howled for their trouble, but they called not

sincerely unto Me. And verse 16, "They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow:" and hence Micah 6:9, "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." There must be a hearing of the appointer of the rod, as well as the rod itself. To evince the truth of this point, I shall shortly hint at some consequences that readily follow the sense of trouble, without the sense of sin: not to stand upon this that readily they chose a new sin to an outgate, Job 26:1, "This hast thou chosen rather than affliction." I shall name these three:

1. Where the sense of trouble is without the sense of sin, folks expect to win soon out of it; they are readily a world of conceity folk, that think they will win soon and easily out of their trouble; Judah found the weight of trouble, but not the weight of sin, and when they were going to captivity, they were filled with dreams of outgate, Jeremiah 12:4, "They said, He shall not see our last end." And Jeremiah 2:25, "They said, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me." And when they were brought very low, that delusion did not leave them, Ezekiel 11:15, they say, "Get ye far from the Lord, unto us is this land given in possession." And Ezekiel 33:24, "They that inhabit the wastes, said, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many, the land is given us for inheritance." Whence it is clear, that deluded confidence is one of the woeful fruits of the sense of trouble, without sense of sin.

A second is, woeful bitterness, and carnal distempers of spirit, if not when the trouble comes on, because they trust to be soon delivered from it, yet when it continues long. How find ye that people, Jeremiah 5:19, and the parallel places, who are brought in, saying, "Wherefore hath the Lord our God done all these things unto us?" What's our iniquity? And what's our sin? And Isaiah 51:20, ye may take up the temper of such a people: "Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net; they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God." Ye will not tame a wild beast, by putting him in a net, but mad him the more; and so are they who continue long under the sense of trouble, without the sense of sin.

And a third consequence is, a woeful issue, whenever delivery out of trouble comes to folk in such a posture; and I find in this issue these two to concur. One is, their hungry starved lusts, meeting with mercies, do surfeit upon them, as the peeled Jews, when they came from the captivity, and had not quit their covetousness, they no sooner come back, but they eat up one another. And another is, when such folk are delivered out of the strait wherein they were, their delivery ordinarily hath the plague of God with it, Psalm 78:27, etc., when that people cried for flesh, "He rained flesh upon them as dust, and feathered fowl as the sand of the sea; they were filled, he gave them their desire; but while the meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel." This in short would put folk to it in shoring [threatening] times, to see what they are most affected with, whether with trouble, or with sin? If ye be going with your hands on your loins, what ails you? What affects you most? Sin or trouble? Provocation, or trouble, the fruit of your provocation? Mark it, there is much exercise in sad times, when it is not about sin, and the fruit of that exercise will be found wind, Isaiah 26:18, "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind." Sense of sin overweighing sense of trouble, were a blest mean to cure our trouble, Isaiah 27:9, "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones, that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up."

But the second note I proposed to be spoken to was, that sense of guilt meets him in the teeth, when he comes to God. The observation is, that guilt will readily meet the people of God, in their approaches to him under trouble. When he is crying to God out of the deeps,

and is earnest for audience, God's marking of iniquity stares him in the face, to put some stop and demur to his access and audience, and the issue he would have been at.

If time would suffer, I would deduce this point in these four.

1. A tender soul is known by many heart-smittings for sin, which David was well acquaint with in the wilderness, when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment (1 Samuel 24:5). A very innocent thing to vindicate his own integrity, yet his heart smote him; a heart-smiting for sin was no dainty to him then. I confess, when men are at ease, and are not in a tender frame, they may give way to gross sins, and their heart not smite them. What a temper is David in, when he is at ease and secure? What a wide throat hath he to swallow down adultery, and murder, and to betray a part of his army? 2 Samuel 11, "The sword devours one as well as another" (saith he); "It's the fortune (as we call it) and the chance of war, let it not trouble thee." That was not like David when he was tender; but however the general holds true, that heart-smiting from sense of sin is a most infallible sign and evidence of tenderness and nearness to God. O, but the skin of a conscience near God is thin! A little thing will draw blood of it. And as upon the one hand, ye should try your nearness to God by this, so upon the other hand, ye should look upon it as poor gallantry to digest sin, without a heart smiting you for it. There is a generation of men, who are called strong spirits, gallant men, and wherein doth their strength of spirit and gallantry lie? In contemning the law of God, in treading upon His authority, in defying God; they can commit all wickedness, and sleep in a sound skin, and never be troubled with it. These are our gallants, but the day will come, when that will be found poor gallantry, and that he is the brave spirit, that knows what heart-smiting for sin is, and hath tenderness in his walk.

2. There is in the second place this in particular, that when saints go to God, then their guilt readily meets them. Although they have little sense of guilt in ordinary, yet when they approach to God in earnest, their sin will muster up before them.

3. Although in ordinary addresses, they may be little sensible of sin, yet when a strait comes, and they are sent to God, then their sin will find them out. Though they can walk in ordinary, and be little troubled with guilt, yet in a distress it cross-necks them.

And 4, although wicked men do not readily meet with guilt, because they are plagued with stupidity, yet their guilt will meet with them, and they shall find it marked by God, as if when they came to God in ordinances, they came to proclaim their iniquity.

These are the branches of the point, which now I cannot insist on, to deduce at large. Only if ye have to do with God, and be in earnest, beware of unrepented guilt. The longer it be in meeting with you, it will be the sadder when you and it meet, and the longer it be that ye lay it not to heart, to repent of it, and turn from it, it will be the more sad. God bless what ye have heard.

(Continued in April 1918.)

[February 1918]

A Sermon.

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, M.A., of Edinburgh and Irvine.

(Fifth Sermon of Series on Psalm 130.)

[These excellent Sermons were taken down by a hearer, and the volume is now very rare to be got. Mr. Hutcheson is the author of Expositions of the Book of Job, the Minor Prophets, and the Gospel of John. He died in 1674 at Irvine. – ED.]

“If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” – Psalm 130:3.

You have heard that the psalmist, wrestling by prayer with the difficulties and plunging perplexities that were in his case, doth here come to wrestle more particularly with guilt, which might stop his audience and success; and (as ye heard) he doth:

- (1) make a sensible confession of the undeserving of sin, that if God should mark it as a severe judge, none should be justified; none should be able to stand.
- (2) Ye have his relief and refuge, being thus humbled, in the pardoning mercy of God, upon which he lays holds in the beginning of the fourth verse; “But there is forgiveness with thee.” And
- (3) (as ye heard), in the end of verse 4, this pardoning mercy of God is amplified from His end and design in letting it forth, “That thou mayest be feared.” There is forgiveness with Him, that sinners may draw near Him; who in Himself is a consuming fire; and that pardoned sinners may be excited to fear and worship so good a God, that freely pardons sin.

From the first of these, I spake to a general note: That the sense of trouble, and the exercise about it, should be attended with the sense of sin, and exercise about sin; for the psalmist here is exercised and taken up with both; while he is crying out of the deeps, he is lying under the sense of sin. I confirmed this, and marked some sad consequences that followed sense of trouble, without sense of sin. I hinted also at a second general observation, but was cut short by the time in speaking to it, that is, that godly men will very readily find guilt meeting them, when they are sent to God in trouble; for when the psalmist here is made to cry to God out of the deeps, iniquities interpose and stare him in the face. This point I did

deduce in these four, three of which I could only name, and therefore shall now briefly resume that purpose.

1. That it is the duty of godly persons, and their character, to be acquainted with heart-smittings for sin. Whatever David was while at ease, and in prosperity, in digesting certain sins, yet when he was in trouble, and in the wilderness, and cut off the lap of Saul's garment, his heart smote him. Frequent heart-smittings for sin is a great evidence of nearness to God, and it's a pitiful and woeful gallantry to go on in sin, and digest sin without resentment.

2. The second branch of the note was this, that whatever tenderness and smiting of heart for sin the saints have in ordinary, yet readily it will meet them, when they come to ordinances and duties of worship, especially to be serious with God in prayer; for here when the psalmist is at prayer, guilt steps in, sin musters, and God's marking of iniquity signified much to him. A tender heart, when it is in the view of God and hath its eye upon Him, should, and will, be most observant of its failings. David dare not think of coming to God, till he see what account he gets of doing away his guilt. Psalm 26:6,7, "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord," etc.; because guilt will offer to obstruct audience and success, in what the suppliant would be at. 1 Samuel 14:36, etc., When Saul would consult God about going down after the Philistines, there is a fault found committed; Jonathan had tasted of the honey, and the guilt meets him; he was not answered. And to say no more of this, I shall only mark two words from it, and proceed. One is, that it should and will be a motive to a tender walker to walk tenderly, circumspectly, and accurately, when he considers that he hath God to go unto. He will think with himself, "How circumspectly ought I to walk through the day, that have God to go to at night! How can I, or dare I, loose reins to this or that, and offer to bow a knee to God? Will not my untenderness in this or that step of my way, stare me in the face, when I look God in the face?" If folks knew what it were to have communion with God, and what influence sin hath to obstruct it, they behoved either to quit their prayers, or study a more tender and holy walk. Another word shall be this: if there be any of a loose and untender walk, slipping buckles through the day, and they hear no news of it; at their prayers, their guilt doth not interpose, and raise a cloud betwixt God and them; such persons would look to it, that there be not a lie in their right hand, that they be not under a delusion, and feeding upon ashes. If they were tender, they would no sooner go to God, but they would say, "I remember my faults this day, I have sinned, and now my guilt stares me in the face."

3. But the third branch of the doctrine is, that whatever be saints' tenderness in ordinary, or whatever ills they may digest in ease, a great distress or trouble will readily bring guilt to mind, and obstruct their access, when they are sent to God. When they are made to cry out of the deeps, God's marking of iniquity will say something to them. For distress take notice of that place, Genesis 42:21, etc., where ye have the history of Joseph's brethren, taken with their guilt. It was upwards of twenty years since they sold him, but when they come in distress, it is as recent as if it had been just now committed: "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." Folks would have thought that upwards of twenty years' guilt might have been buried; and, no doubt, the men in that time had prayed often, but in a distress it's recent. And for going to God in trouble, we have an instance of guilt meeting folk (Judges 10:10), where the people in trouble come and cry unto God, and take with their sin. But what answer get they? "I delivered you (saith the Lord) from such and such enemies, when ye cried unto me, but ye have forsaken me, and served other gods, wherefore I will deliver you no more, go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen, let them deliver you in the time of your trouble." Mark also that word of Moses speaking to the two tribes and the half tribe (Numbers 32:23), when he feared they might cheat their brethren, and desert them, he tells them, "If they should do so, they should

sin against the Lord.” There is news (might some stout stomachs among them say), but he adds, “and be sure your sin will find you out.” A man may use many ways to shift guilt, but it will not do with him, his sin will find him out. Ponder that word, Psalm 49:5, “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?” Iniquity is like a sleuth hound, that rambles here and there, following the scent of the prey, and an ignorant spectator wonders what he means, but he follows the prey, and will not give over till he find it. Sin unrepented of will sooner or later meet the sinner, and the longer they be of meeting, it will be to the sinner’s greater disadvantage. May I add further, when sin meets the sinner in trouble, an infirmity will pass for an iniquity (as here the psalmist calls sin), and will not seem so small as when it was committed, or before the trouble came on? Yea, further, pardoned guilt that seemed to be buried, and done away, these green graves may open, and that guilt may waken upon new emergents [occasions]. Hence Job (13:26), says, “Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.” And Psalm 25:7, David prays, “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.” Therefore ye that meet not with sin in ordinary, see what ye can do to hold off trouble, and sins meeting you in trouble; ye now can go on in sin, and have your diversions to put away the thoughts of it, and live strangers to yourselves, and your own condition; but trouble will cross-neck you, and ye will find (as the word is Genesis 4:7) that sin is lying at the door, and will meet you.

4. But I shall add a fourth branch of the doctrine, and then come to the main doctrine which lies before my hand. I have spoken of guilt’s meeting with the godly; now what shall be said of guilt’s meeting with wicked men? I shall say two words to this, and leave the note. One is, let a wicked man live never so long without minding his guilt, let him have ordinances, and keep up a form of worship, this is to be adverted to, that the wicked man never comes into God’s presence to worship or pray to Him, but his iniquity is marked, as if he had made a proclamation of his sin. Ponder that process, Isaiah 1:13, and the foregoing verses, “Bring no more vain oblations (saith the Lord); incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.” Thou that darest come before God, without the sense of thy guilt, God may look upon thee as proclaiming thy guilt. And another word to the wicked shall be this, that, whenever a day of distress and trouble meets them, though all of them will not be honoured with repentance and pardoning mercy, they shall find that they have made a very sad bargain. Take it in that word, Jeremiah 2:19, “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee.”

But I leave this note, and come to the third observation, that is, that when guilt and conscience meet, sin will be otherways looked upon, than men ordinarily do; or if ye will have it more distinctly, take it thus: that the right sense of sin will lead the sensible man to see that in sin, that none, even the most godly, can stand before God, if God deal with them in strict justice, according to the covenant of works. That is the very marrow of this verse, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?” No man, no, not a godly man, nor any other, can stand. And although I may (if the Lord will) have this purpose to resume when I come to speak of pardon, and the application of pardon from the next verse following, yet this being an important truth, a verity of great weight, ye will bear with me, though I dip a little more in it than is my ordinary. What I would say on it, I shall from the text deduce to you in six particulars, which I hope shall give a hint of what at the first view is more material in the words. And:

1. Take notice of something supposed here, that is, God's marking of iniquity, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity," where he makes a supposition of God's marking iniquity. Not that any question or doubt is to be made of God's omniscience, that He sees and knows all things, and particularly men's sins. He hath an exact knowledge of them all, as when one marks things most narrowly. Neither is there any supposition or question to be made of God's seeing of sin in the godly, so as to be displeased at it. Antinomians would be at this, they would have no sin seen in them, but the scope of this Psalm evinces the contrary. God notices the godly man's sin as well as others, till he flee to pardoning mercy through a mediator; and David, though a godly man, acknowledges this, Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." But the meaning of this, the Lord's marking of iniquity, may be taken from the parallel place, Psalm 143:2, where it is thus expressed, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant;" that's the marking of iniquity spoken of, or implied in the text; and in short, the importance of the phrase is, God's marking of sin according to the covenant of works, and in the rules of strict justice, and without looking on the sinner as in a surety. In this respect, God's marking of iniquity being accompanied with absolute holiness, perfect purity, and justice, He cannot away with it, nor with the sinner because of it, as Psalm 5:4,5, "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." And Habakkuk 1:13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." God thus marking iniquity according to the rules of strict justice, and without looking on the sinner as in a cautioner, cannot away with it, and consequently will punish it, Job 11:11, "He seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?" in order to punishment, for so that phrase is expounded, Psalm 10:14, "Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand." And it is Jehu's remark of Ahab, 2 Kings 9:26, "Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat (saith the Lord)." The marking of iniquity this way, is to men dreadful, and ye will find in Scripture, that it is a dreadful sight of trouble that some get, when it represents God thus as marking sin, to pursue and punish it, as in that poor widow, 1 Kings 17:18, "O thou man of God (saith she to the prophet), art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" That was a sad sight of trouble, and of sin in trouble. And Moses in that tragical business in the wilderness, when calamities are falling thick upon that people, it is a sad sight of them that he gets, when they speak. God's marking of sin, Psalm 90:8, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Thy inflicting of calamity tells us, that Thou art marking iniquity. So much for the first thing supposed here, God's marking iniquity.

2. Consider, here somewhat proposed, that, if God mark iniquity as a severe judge, according to the strict rules of justice, to punish it, and accordingly do punish it, the guilty man cannot stand before Him. This phrase is equivalent to that phrase in the parallel place, Psalm 143:2, "If God enter into judgment with men, no man living can be justified in his sight." And a sinner's inability to stand before God is a phrase frequently made use of, to point out the dreadful desert of sin, as Psalm 5:5, "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight." Ezra 9:15, "We are before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this." Psalm 1:5, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." And Psalm 76:7, "Thou, even thou art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" Revelation 6:16,17, "The great day of the Lamb's wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" And to this also that phrase may allude, which the men of Bethshemesh have, when so many are stricken dead, for their curious looking into the ark, 1 Samuel 6:20, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"

But that I may explain this a little more distinctly, I shall take it up with an eye to human judgments, or courts among men in these four.

1. Whereas a man when he is to compare before a court, he may stand in judgment, and be *rectus in curia* [right in court] (as we use to speak). Why? He is able to plead innocent, and he may come off being found so; but here, a man in whom is iniquity, cannot stand. The sinner cannot plead sinless, as it is, Job 9:2,3, "I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand." There is no pleading sinless before his bar. And in particular, this is to be applied to secret sins; there is no concealing of the most secret sins, when God marks them. Proverbs 30:20, "The way of the adulterous woman is such, that she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness;" but God noticeth it. Gehazi abuses his master's name, and goes to fish from Naaman silver and raiment, and comes and stands before his master, and says, "He went no whither;" but says Elisha, "Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" (2 Kings 5:22, etc.). Men may convey their sins very closely, and hide their contrivances from men, but they consider not they have an omniscient God for their party [opponent], whose spirit is infinitely above the spirit of Elisha, to follow them in all their secret pranks. And that's it that Moses lays to heart, Psalm 90:8, "Thou hast set our sins before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

2. In human courts, when a man is made present, though he cannot stand to plead himself innocent, or free of the debt he is charged with, yet he may stand, because he is able to pay the debt, though the sentence pass against him; but so cannot a man stand before God, when He shall mark iniquity, for He hath nothing to satisfy justice for His fault, and hence the man sensible of sin, will not look upon the debt of sin as a trifling matter, as a matter to be dallied with. Those questions, Acts 16:30, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts 2:37, "What shall we do?" Job 7:20, "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" They import, that the confession of guilt will not be a sufficient exoneration in the sensible man's account. They import also, that it is a concerning case or question, how to be rid of guilt? And further, they import a submitting to any terms that can be exacted, if they be in the sinner's power to perform; and here I confess, hypocrites when they are told of their fault, will offer to make amends, Micah 6:6,7, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" (more than he could have offered, though it had been accepted). "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression? the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" O! but the sensible man will find that he can make no amends; that there is no fend [provision] against guilt, but pardon, Job 7:20, "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?"

3. In human courts, when a man is made present, though he be sentenced for a debt he is unable to pay, or judged guilty of a crime, he can undergo the punishment resolutely, and in that respect he may stand in judgment; but here the sinner cannot stand before God marking iniquity, that is, under the burden of the desert of sin, or the deserved punishment thereof, without succumbing. A man may undergo any punishment inflicted by a human court, and his natural courage may support him under all that man can inflict, but who can stand under everlasting wrath? Who can stand before a sin-revenging God, and not succumb? Who can endure the everlasting torments of hell, and not be everlastingly broken? So there is no standing for the guilty sinner before God, but he must succumb and break.

4. As amongst men, any ingenuous [honourable] person called for debt, and not being able to pay, or being looked upon as a monstrous criminal by the judge, it will make him blush that he cannot stand before the judge with confidence. So here (which should be the result of the former), when sinners are sensible of sin, and are convinced they cannot stand before

God, considered as out of a cautioner, it may be matter of blushing and horror to them, and should be so, when they find they cannot stand before God marking iniquity. This was the posture of the poor publican, who (Luke 18:13), “standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner;” he had not the confidence to stand before God, but he cried out for pardon. And this was the practice of Ezra, when he went to God in behalf of the people, that had corrupted themselves, after God’s kindness towards them, and correcting of them for their sins, Ezra 9:6, “O my God (saith he), I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up to the heaven.” This, I say, should be the result of all the rest, and would be a token for good, that God would find out the way how the sinner might stand before Him in judgment. If a sinner being convinced he is guilty, and that he cannot undergo the punishment without crushing, would blush and be ashamed, if we were delivered from our brazen brow and whore’s forehead, that we could not look up to God without shame and blushing, there were hope of pardon through a Surety.

Thus I have done with the first two of the six particulars I proposed to be spoken to, for finding out what is said in the text. There are three or four more to be battered out, with the application of the whole, which I leave till the afternoon. The Lord bless what ye have been hearing!

[Continued, June 1918]

[March 1918]

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

Preached on Sabbath, 24th February, 1918.

“But as many as received him to them gave be power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name” – John 1:12.

Our text begins with the word “but,” which is a disjunctive term separating two things by way of contrast. In the preceding verse, it is said that Christ came to His own (the Jews), and His own received Him not. “But” there were some among them that did receive Him. The contrast is between those who received Him not, and those who received Him. When Christ comes in the gospel to a people, many do not receive Him, but some do. The Jews looked for the coming of the Messiah, but when He came, they received Him not. They rejected Him, and because of this sin, they are, as a body, under the curse of God. In addressing you from the words of our text, we call your attention to three particulars.

- I. – The Person received;
- II. – The exercise of receiving this Person; and
- III. – The privilege of those who received Him.

I. – The Person received.

The other three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, begin their gospel history by speaking of Christ’s humanity, but John begins his gospel history by speaking of Christ’s Divinity. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.” Here we have the eternity of His personality and His Godhead. He was in the beginning – that is, from all eternity – and His personality is spoken of in the phrase, “He was with God,” as a distinct person. There is but one Godhead, but there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and it is clearly stated that He was God. The Jews denied that He was God; Unitarians deny it also. Should there be no other testimony to His Godhead than what we have in the first verse of this chapter, it ought to be enough to convince any reasonable man who believes the Bible that Jesus of Nazareth was and is God, the same in nature with God the Father, and equal with Him in power and glory. He is called “the Word,” because, among other things, He reveals what was in God’s mind and purpose concerning the salvation of sinners of the human race. Your fellow-creature does not know what is in your mind till you express it by speech or some other sign. No creature, man or angel, knew what was in God’s mind, as the God of salvation, till Christ revealed it. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (verse 18). “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 11:27). None can be our Saviour but He who is God. Christ is God; “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3).

The Apostle speaks also of His human nature. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (verse 14). He took to Himself the nature of man, which consists of soul and body. He took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul. This is stated in the Shorter Catechism to confute certain errors which some held concerning Christ’s human nature. They denied that Christ had a true body, and affirmed that He had only the appearance of a body like that in which angels appeared to men. Others denied that He had a reasonable soul, but that His divine nature supplied the place of a soul. To refute this error the Westminster Divines stated that Christ took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul. It was the Father that prepared human nature for Christ. “A body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5). He prepared a soul for Him too. Christ’s human nature was created by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, “and born of her without sin.” Though there was sin in her, He did not partake of it. As it was the Father that prepared human nature for Him, it was He himself that assumed it or took it into union with His divine person, so that He is God-man in two distinct natures, but one person. His human nature cannot be called a person, because it never existed for a moment apart from His divine person. Besides that it was necessary that He should take to Himself human nature in order to suffer, it was calculated to teach that, although man by sin forsook God, and is by nature afar off from Him, he is to be made nigh again in Christ. The union between human nature and Christ, who is God, teaches this. As Christ never parted with His human nature after uniting it with His divine person, it teaches that those united to Christ by faith shall never be separated from Him. And the fact that He took that nature with Him to heaven, teaches that He will bring all that are united to Him to heaven also.

In other parts of Scripture He is spoken of as to His threefold offices as Prophet, Priest, and King. He was appointed by the Father unto this threefold office to meet our threefold need.

Firstly, we lost the spiritual knowledge of God, and there is not a ray of that knowledge in man in his fallen condition, and it is Christ in His office as Prophet that restores that knowledge by His Word and Spirit. “All thy children shall be taught of God” (Isaiah 54:13), see also John 6:45. The United Free Church, according to her creed, has no need of Christ as Prophet. In that creed it is stated that, notwithstanding the fall of mankind by sin, man has a knowledge of God and his duty. There is, indeed, an innate knowledge of God in every man by which he knows that there is a supreme being to whom he is responsible. The heathen have this kind of knowledge, but the knowledge which is part of the image of God, we lost, and in order that it might be restored, Christ was appointed Prophet.

The second need we have is pardon of sin. We are not only ignorant but also guilty, and we cannot by anything we do or suffer atone for our sins, but Christ was appointed Priest to make atonement. In His office as Priest, He, by the sacrifice of Himself, satisfied divine justice and reconciled us to God.

Lastly, we are by nature, not only ignorant and guilty, but rebellious, and we are not able to subdue our rebellion. Hence our need of Christ as King. He executes the office of a King in subduing us to Himself, in ruling us by the law of His Word, in defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies. Many a rebellious sinner He by His kingly power subdued to Himself.

This, then, is the Person received. He is received in His glorious person as God; in His human nature; and in His threefold offices. In all these aspects the Colossian believers received Him: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6).

II. – The exercise of receiving this Person.

There are several things implied in receiving Him. There is, first, a sense of our need of Christ to save us. None ever received Him without being convinced of their sinful condition. "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31). The sinner that received Christ has been convinced of his sin and misery. This is done by the Holy Spirit. "When he is come, he will convince the world of sin" (John 16:8). So long as you are ignorant of yourself as a sinner, you will not receive Him; and if you received Him, there was a time in your past history when the Holy Spirit convinced you of your sin and misery, so that you had no doubt whatever that you were in a lost condition, and that if you died in that condition, you would be lost forever in eternity.

It implies, also, that those who received Him have heard of Him. Hearing about Christ is necessary to receive Him. The Apostle Paul shows the impossibility of receiving Christ without hearing of Him. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?" "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14,17). In the creed of the U.F. Church, to which we have already referred, it is stated that the heathen, who never heard of Christ, may be saved, but the Apostle Paul knew better than those who framed that creed, and we are to believe him before any man that speaks to the contrary. Receiving Christ implies also that He is offered to those that receive Him. He is freely offered in the gospel to sinners. He is offered by the Father; He offers Himself; and He is offered in the preaching of the gospel to all sinners who come to hear the joyful sound.

There is implied in receiving Him that those who receive Him are regenerated and born again. We have this stated in the context. "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (verse 13). A change of nature is necessary in order to receive Christ. The grace of faith is necessary in order to receive Him. Faith is not to be found in the natural heart, but it is in the new nature created by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit in all His graces dwells there, and faith is the first grace which goes forth to receive Christ in the offer of the Gospel. Faith is like the needle, and Christ is like the lodestone which attracts the needle. When the lodestone is brought to within a certain distance of the needle it is powerfully attracted by the lodestone, and they cannot be kept apart. In like manner, when Christ is set forth in the preaching of the Gospel, those who have faith are powerfully attracted by Him, so that they cordially close with Him as He is freely offered in the Gospel. It is not enough for you to hear of Christ, or that He is offered to you. You must receive Him before you can be saved. To reject Him is the condemning sin, for "He that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). In "Effectual Calling" (Shorter Catechism), receiving Christ is spoken of as "embracing" Him. In embracing a dear friend you use both hands. The two hands by which we receive Christ are the understanding enlightened by the Spirit, and the will renewed. There is the *assent* of the understanding, and the *consent* of the will. He is received not only as a person we need, but also as a person we love.

III. – The privilege of those who receive Him.

Power is given to them to become the sons of God. "To them he gave power to become the sons of God." Some understand this "power" to mean the power of the Spirit in regenerating them, but that is not the meaning; for this is a "power" that is given them after they are regenerated and born again. There are two words in the original meaning 'power', the one means power in the sense of might or strength; the other means power in the sense of right, or privilege. It is the latter that is used here. It is the privilege of adoption, "Whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God" (Shorter Catechism). Among men, adoption means a man's receiving of a child out of another family, with a view to bring it up as his own child. God brings all His children out of the devil's family, and adopts them as His own children. All are by nature of their father the

devil. The privilege of adoption is the greatest privilege in this world. There are several things in this privilege.

(1) God is their Father. In the form of prayer Christ taught His disciples, He teaches them to address God as their Father. "Our Father who art in heaven." Many repeat this form of prayer who have no right to call God their Father; but if we have received Christ, we have a right to call him our Father. He is the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and our Father also. He is His Father by eternal generation, and He is our Father by regeneration and adoption. When about to leave this world, He said to Mary, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John 20:17).

(2) Another thing in the privilege is that Christ is their brother. Though he is infinitely above them in dignity and glory, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). Though they are in the state of imperfection ashamed of themselves, He is their elder brother, and deals tenderly with His little brethren, watches over them, and attends to their comfort; as He said to His disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come again" (John 16:18).

(3) Another thing in the privilege is that the Holy Spirit is theirs. He dwells in them, and abides with them for ever.

(4) It is their privilege that they are heirs. Heirs of what? "They are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). They may say with the Psalmist, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Isaiah 16:5,6). This inheritance belongs to them, because they are God's children. Among men, if a man claimed a share of an inheritance, he would require in certain circumstances to prove that he was a son of the man to whom the inheritance belonged. Failing this, he would not be put in possession of the inheritance.

(5) "All things" are theirs. The Bible is theirs. The means of grace are theirs. The ministers of the gospel are theirs. Life is theirs. Death is theirs, to remove them from a world of sin and sorrow to a world of perfect felicity. Heaven is theirs as the inheritance of saints in light, the earnest of which they receive in this world. And the earnest of a thing is of the same nature as the whole, as a small drop out of the great ocean is of the same nature as the ocean out of which it comes. So that they know on earth what heaven is.

This is a great and glorious subject. The Person received is a glorious person. The work of the Spirit enabling sinners to receive Him is glorious, and the privileges of those that received Him are great and glorious. Christ came to you in the word of the gospel, and He is offered to you every time you hear the gospel preached. Have you received Him? Examine yourselves as to whether you have received Him or not. Self-examination on this important subject is very rare in this evil generation, but the Lord's people examine themselves daily. But whether you have received Him or not, He is offered to you. The time is coming, however, when He shall not be offered any longer, when death shall remove you from this world. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). O the need of the Holy Spirit to awaken dead sinners to a sense of their lost condition that they may see their great need of Christ to save them! He came "to seek and to save" lost sinners. Cast yourself upon Him as a lost sinner. One may say, "I received Him long ago." If so, you will be receiving Him again and again. If you received Christ, He is precious to you. As the Psalmist says, "Whom have I in the heavens but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee," and you seek His glory and the coming of His kingdom, and the destruction of the kingdom of Satan.

[April 1918]