

A Sermon.

By the late Rev. ARCHIBALD COOK, Daviot, Inverness-shire.

“Not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.” – 2 Timothy 4:8.

There are not very many who believe the preciousness of the day of grace. There are millions to-day in hell that shall be through eternity saying, “O, if I had another day!” They would go on their knees to the utmost ends of the earth for one offer of mercy, and there are many this day on the earth that will yet have this cry, “O, if I had one day more of the means of grace!”

The apostle, after having gone through many severe conflicts, is now speaking with victory; “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” From the day the Lord met with him on the way to Damascus until now he had to set his face to affliction after affliction, to temptation after temptation, to trial after trial; but O, it was he that got the song at last: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day;” and he adds this, and has left it on record for strengthening the Church of God to the end of time, “Not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

When we were speaking formerly on these words we said we would give some marks of those who “love his appearing,” or the second coming of the Lord. And also, that we would mention some of the things that shall be manifested at Christ’s second coming which shall make “his appearing” pleasant and precious to His Church.

In speaking of the marks of those who “love his appearing,” we said that before one could do so he must have given his consent to the way of salvation revealed in the gospel, must have been persuaded that salvation is only in Christ, and must have been brought to apply to Him like the leper, who said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” It was no great faith that was there, but there was a hope, a “who can tell?” Now the soul that comes to that, we must not, according to the Word of God, say that such a soul shall be lost, but we have no warrant to say but that if one comes *no further* he may yet be in hell. Again, they that love His appearing, we said they were concerned to get evidence of their interest in Christ, and were using the means of grace so as to obtain such evidence. But none shall come to be assured of their interest in Christ until other things are made empty to them, for as long as a creature has anything in which his heart rests, he will not concern himself much to find his rest in God.

We shall now take up the second thing proposed – what are some of those things that shall make Christ’s second coming pleasant and precious to His Church?

I. – There will be given “at that day” a wonderful revelation of the glory of creation. All that God did from the beginning of time and from the days of eternity, He had it in His view to glorify Himself in the sight of holy intelligent creatures. There is not any holy creature but has delight in viewing the works of God, but we are so blinded by sin that we can see very little of God in any of His works. And thus the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures compares man to the beasts that perish (Psalm 49). There is a mystery of glory in all that God has created, especially how He has left His own stamp on everything that He created. If we could see the stamp of God on the blades of grass and on the herbs of the field, we would feel it difficult to trample on them. But, by reason of our spiritual blindness, we are stout and strong, and can perceive little of God’s glory in creation, yea, can even abuse His creatures – the common mercies with which we are surrounded. We read

that when God had finished the work of creation the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Why? Because of the revelation God had given of His own glory thereby. But sin has disordered all the works of God in the world, so then the creation in itself is as if corrupted, and so we are told that heaven and earth shall flee from before the presence of the Lord, that the earth and all that is therein shall be burnt up when He appeareth, and this is because sin lies on them. Indeed, when we see the enmity and ferocity of the irrational creatures one to another, we cannot think it was so from the beginning, but that the sin of man took effect on them, so that the very brute beasts witness for God against the sin of man. The misery that sin has brought on the beasts that perish have a cry against man – the sweat and sighs and groans of these creatures have a voice that God understands and which shall yet bring sparks of wrath on unregenerate man.

Also, there shall be a revelation given “at that day” of the glory of the state in which man, the highest creature, was made. Man was made such an excellent and wonderful creature as that we are not able to comprehend the least of that excellency. He was made in the image of God. There is not a person on the earth but that, if he could comprehend the glory of his original state, he would be ashamed to exist. God formed the body of man out of the dust of the ground, and into that body He breathed the breath of God, and man became a living soul; and He formed such an intimate and mysterious connection between body and soul that, let the soul be absent for one moment, and the body becomes as dead and lifeless as the dust from whence it was made. This soul of man God formed in His own image, and the glory of that image shone out through the body in a wonderful way. The soul saw with the eyes of the body, heard with the ears of the body, and the stamp of God upon the soul so manifested itself through the body as that all creation apprehended it and became subject to man. God took delight in man, as His own workmanship, and as bearing His own image, and as the channel of communication between God and all creation; and, as one of the saints said, “God viewed man also as that created form which Eternal Wisdom prepared to take unto Himself.” And this delight man returned, he loved the God who gave him his being, and communed with Him as the fountain of blessedness. Now, something of the glory of that state, and of the glory due to God from man in that state, shall be disclosed “at that day.” Alas, how sin has defaced this glory and brought dishonour on the creation of God, so that even the irrational creatures perceive it, and fail in reverencing man as at the beginning. Yea, the elements of nature frown upon man because of sin, for were it not that Christ stood in as the surety of His people, the sun itself would withhold its light. Thus we read that when Christ was enduring the desert of His people’s sin, the sun was darkened – “there was darkness over all the earth” (Luke 23:44). O, man that thy horse and cow are made subject to thee, it is from the death of Christ that proceeds.

II. – What is implied in man being brought into covenant with God shall be disclosed “at that day.” How wonderful that the Eternal Jehovah should come so near the creature of His hands as to make Himself over to him to be his portion and the fountain of his happiness, and that upon a covenant foundation. What foundation was this? Just obedience to God. God covenanted with man that, if he continued in his present state of love and obedience, he should enjoy the everlasting favour and fellowship of God. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.” Now this belonged to man, should there be no covenant. It belonged to man to give obedience to Him who gave him being, and it belonged to him to love and reverence God because of the excellency that is in Him – an excellency capable of bestowing everlasting blessedness on all His creatures. But there was more than this, also, in the covenant into which God entered with man. There was not only the promise of

everlasting life on his continued obedience, but there was added a threatening of death should he rebel and disobey. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Now, it is here that the nature of sin is truly understood – how man not only disregarded the favour and fellowship of God, but how he despised also the threatening of God, and endangered his eternal happiness for a vile thing; how he brought himself into misery by shutting himself out through his sin from the fellowship and communion of God; and, further, how through his sin he lost the capacity for that enjoyment of God's favour and fellowship which he formerly had. For God is holy, but man is now a sinner; God is love, but man is now enmity; God is light, but man is now in darkness. What was seen in man being driven out from God's presence in the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword turning every way to keep the tree of life, but man's being banished from the favour and fellowship of God, and never more capable of obtaining it on the ground of anything in himself, yea, justly liable to eternal death. O, what a view the saints will get "at that day" of the state into which sin brought all creatures, the distance from God to which it banished them, and that not only on account of its guilt but also on account of its pollution. They will see, as they never could see in this world, how they were defiled and loathsome, cast out like an infant in its blood in the open field, with no eye to pity it and no hand to help it. No, not in all the creation of God is there anything that can help a lost sinner, but everything in the universe has this voice to a sinner – "No help for thee in me." And, when this shall be opened up "at that day," will there not be a song from the redeemed that shall exalt free grace throughout eternity? And you that desire to be happy for ever, see that you be brought to understand something of this in time.

III. – The nature of the mystery of God's electing love shall be disclosed "at that day." The Scriptures reveal to us that there is such a thing as the decrees of God, such a thing as election, but it is very little we can conceive of such a thing in this world. We read of elect angels also. What can we understand of that? But the sovereignty and the omniscience of God shall "at that day" be revealed in a wonderful way. It shall then be seen that the election of all those that are saved was from eternity, that there was nothing in the world but was the opening of the womb of God's eternal purpose – "the womb of the morning." God foresaw from eternity man lying in sin. Every sin of every creature was exposed to His omniscience. Nothing is new with God. You there, sinner – a hard rock – you were thus in His view from eternity, and the sovereignty of God's dealing with sinners shall come to light "at that day;" how He took one from this quarter and another from that, how He took some in one generation and some in another, in whom and by whose salvation all the attributes of His Divine majesty should be glorified. For, had God left all to perish because of sin, the excellency of the state in which man was created would never be perceived; and, on the other hand, if all men were saved, that woe and endless misery which is the fruit and desert of sin would not be known; but, oh, the sight that shall be given "at that day" of the sovereign, free, and undeserved love and mercy of God, as a fountain the depths of which shall not be fathomed throughout eternity. "O," they shall say, "what moved God to this?" "What moved Him to compassionate me?" "Was there anything in me to draw forth His love more than in those who are justly in the place of woe?" May not a soul see, as it were, his own ghost in the spirits now in hell, and say – "O, I was once living in the sins that took these there; what saved me? Just the free love and mercy that is in God." And they shall see what end God had in view towards them in their salvation, that He would save them from sin and make them holy as He is holy. He must have them not only freed from misery, but conformed to His own holy image which they lost by sin, and made meet for communion with Himself through eternity. Jehovah, who is the fountain of all blessedness and happiness, is infinitely holy, and all creatures that shall be perfectly and eternally happy must be perfectly and completely holy, for it is their being unholy that is the cause of all the misery

and wretchedness of sinners. Hast thou the toothache, sinner? Thou hast cause to fear that it is but the earnest of an everlasting sting – the earnest of “the worm that dieth not, and the fire that shall never be quenched.” But God having purposed to save His people from sin and misery, and to make them perfectly and for ever holy and happy, His infinite wisdom devised a way whereby this should be brought about, and this leads us to mention another mystery that shall be disclosed “at that day,” and which is –

IV. – The mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. “Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.” In this world God’s children assent to that mystery by faith, and they also get the benefits flowing from it, but oh, the sight they shall get of it “at that day,” when they shall see all the love, and grace, and wisdom, and power, and holiness, and justice, and truth that is in God, getting a resting-place in Christ as the Mediator, and flowing out to them through that wonderful channel. We learn from Scripture that there are three Persons in the Godhead who are one in nature and equal in power and glory. Now, it shall be disclosed “at that day” that the Second Person of this glorious Trinity undertook the salvation of immortal souls, and for this cause He who was immortality became mortal, He who was eternity became “a child born,” He who was “God over all, blessed for ever,” became “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;” yea, the God against whom man had sinned, and whose holy displeasure man had awakened, freely and willingly condescended, not only to deliver man from his lost condition, but condescended to deliver him in the only way in which he could be delivered, which was by His own humiliation. “God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” The Son of God became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and took upon Himself also all the infirmities of our nature without sin. He was hungry, thirsty, wearied, and grieved. The Holy One was for the space of thirty years in the world, hidden, as it were, from man’s view. It has pleased the Holy Spirit to draw a veil over those years, but they shall be opened up and manifested “at that day” – what He learned of obedience in those years, what He suffered dwelling among sinners in those years, how He grew up despised and dis-esteemed, for we are told that His own brethren did not believe in Him. Moreover, it shall be disclosed “at that day” how, when He came forth on His public ministry, what “contradiction of sinners” He endured, how He was oppressed and afflicted until at length He was rejected and set at nought, and condemned to be crucified. And it shall be seen how the hand of God was in all this, how He was “wounded for his people’s transgressions and bruised for their iniquities, how the chastisement of their peace was upon him, and by his stripes they were healed.” He went forward to suffering, to shame, to agony, to death, and the grave, because without shedding of blood there could be no remission, because the pardoning love of God could not reach His children except the sentence passed upon them as transgressors be righteously removed. And so He delivered Himself for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Yes, the death of Christ, and the merit that was in His death, puts the saints in possession of everything that they shall be enjoying throughout the ages of eternity, and so their song shall be – “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” You that have ever got a taste of this love, it is no wonder you should desire “his appearing.”

Also, in taking the human nature to Himself, and in taking His people’s sins upon Himself, the Saviour constituted between Himself and them an intimate and mysterious union, which He speaks of as that between the vine and the branches, between the head and the other members of the body. Federally it is a union of person that is in it, and also a union of nature – a union that takes place when they are brought to believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins – a union by which His righteousness is made theirs as their sins were made His. Christ is now in glory and His poor people are on the earth, yet there

is a close, a spiritual, a living union between Him and them, His Spirit, as the fruit of His death and intercession, coming to them and forming this union and sustaining it in them by faith till He brings them to be with Him where He is. O you, professor, that know nothing of union to Christ and fellowship with Him, you are no better than a wooden leg destitute of the life of the body! But you that have got, through union to Christ, a drop of the love of God going through your soul, you shall yet drink of the ocean of divine love to your everlasting satisfaction! "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me," Christ says, "may be in them and I in them."

V. – Another matter that shall be disclosed to God's people "at that day" is the providences that they were meeting with in the world, and the mysteries connected with these. Many a providence that was not only dark but mysterious they met with, but all shall be made plain "at that day," so that they shall have to say, "He made all things very good." Indeed, they shall see that were things otherwise, they would still be very good, but as they were, they were working together for their everlasting good. God has in His providence appointed the way and method by which He is pleased to deal with any soul. And when He is coming to arrest a sinner in his career, He causes that sinner to know that he is away from God, and that there are means revealed through which he may return to Him, and that these means he must use if he wishes to find God. Also, the sinner sees that if he continues as he is, and neglects or abuses the means of seeking after God, it shall end in his eternal separation from Him. And so he begins to use the means – to read the Bible, to pray, and to attend public worship. Thus the Lord honours His own appointed means. But the sinner does not usually find in the means what he expected, for God has it in His purpose to teach him that not of himself can he find, even in the means, that which his soul needs, so he is left to weary himself with his own endeavours till he come as a poor helpless creature to the feet of divine grace, confessing his condition, and asking for free sovereign mercy. It is the work of the Holy Spirit now to make known to the poor suppliant the way of salvation by Jesus Christ and through His mediation. Free grace in the Third Person of the Godhead moves Him to this, so He is called the Spirit of grace. The Spirit reveals Christ as the alone Saviour of sinners, and fixes the eye of the soul on Him for salvation. The light of nature cannot do this. The light of nature and of reason cannot bring a sinner so to see Christ in the glory of His person and of His grace as that he will venture all upon Him for time and eternity. This is the work of the Spirit of God. Now, in making known Christ and His salvation, although in one sense His children all get the same teaching, yet in another sense they are not all led by the same steps. Some get in youth tokens of the Spirit manifesting the Saviour within, and giving them a taste of His love, so that they can say in looking back, what the apostle said, "I know in whom I have believed." Others get not so clear a persuasion of Christ as the Saviour, and so are harassed with doubts and fears, being all their life subject to bondage. The Lord is sovereign in this. We read of "weak hands and feeble knees," and although it is not to their comfort to be in this state, yet if their expectation is only upon God for their deliverance, they are as safe as those who are getting freer access to the fountain of love. Again, there are some of God's children, and no sooner do they get a little consolation in the Word of God or in secret prayer, but there is something connected with their earthly state that robs them of it. Perhaps a cross in their lot, perhaps a temptation from the world, perhaps a lust in their nature. Thus it is that infinite wisdom keeps them low, keeps them down so that they are ready to lose hope, and say with Rebecca, "If it be so, why am I thus?" And they will be looking on this as tokens of God's anger against them for, perhaps, their old sins. But whatever be the cause, if it keeps them of broken spirit and tender and watchful, the Lord will yet get glory from them in bringing them through, should they go broken and bruised creatures from day to day. Also, some of God's children are kept poor in the world, living from hand to mouth, and others may have

much worldly comfort. Some may be kept so empty as that there was nothing that they looked for satisfaction from, but a worm was at the root turning it into a cross. And those that have abundance of this world will find that to be so, as sure as the poorest creature, for if they are the Lord's children, He must make the world become a wilderness to them. Yes, my friends, the carnal world was appointed by the Lord from eternity to be a trial to a gracious soul, yea, the devils themselves were appointed for the trial of every creature in whom the life of God is. But let a spark of the love of Christ be seen in thus weaning His children from the love of the world, and fitting them for the enjoyment of Himself, and their murmuring against His providences will be put to silence, and O, will it not be precious at the end of the journey to be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day?"

VI. Another thing that shall be disclosed "at that day" is how the people of God were *exercised under* these providences, how the Lord was dispensing to them grace according to their need. The Saviour, when He was in the world, Himself went through these dark steps. He obtained a fellow-feeling with His children in all their afflictions, and out of the fountain of that fellow-feeling He lets out drops of compassion towards them, and these drops of compassion, coming to them as the fruit of His own sufferings, are very precious. The gracious soul must be broken from the love of sin, and bruised because of sin, and the Lord sends crosses and chastisements on him for this end. The Lord may let loose one sin on a creature to break the power of another sin, one temptation to weaken the strength of another temptation. And O, when it shall be disclosed "at that day," how He thus kept them from destroying themselves, how He thus kept them poor and needy at His own feet, how He thus kept them from utterly grieving away His Holy Spirit by their transgressions, yea, how He kept them from bringing themselves to eternal perdition, O, how they will be lost in praising Him! And also how they were exercised under their afflictions shall be brought to light, that although the stroke was often sharp and severe, yet that they endured it with submission, justifying the Lord and taking shame to themselves, yea, they were brought to say, "He did all things well." Was it well when He took the world from thee? Yes, it was well. Was it well when He took thy child from thee? Yes, it was well. Was it well when He laid His hand upon thy body and took thy health from thee? Yes, it was well. But what when He withdrew His presence from thy soul, and left thee weeping over a hard heart, a corrupt nature, and a proud spirit, was it well then? Yes, it was well, for He was in all these things fulfilling His own word. "I will bring the third part through the fire and will purge them as silver is purged, and try them as gold is tried, they shall call on my name, and I will hear them, I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Therefore all that meets them is working for their good emptying them of themselves, and of all created things, and bringing them nearer to Christ to live only on Him and on His fulness. Yes, my friends, there shall be disclosed "at that day" not only all the troubles and trials that met them in this world, but also the way in which they endured these – the faith, the hope, the patience, the submission which they were enabled to exercise under their trials. And when these graces of the Spirit, dwelling in them but often hidden in this world under the clouds of sin and sorrow, shall be made manifest, all heaven and earth shall put their Amen to the sentence of the righteous Judge, that they get possession of the crown. And, on the other hand, when the enmity to God and to His people that is in the heart of the ungodly shall be opened up "at that day," and when their hidden things of darkness are brought to light, all heaven and earth shall say Amen to the sentence of the righteous Judge, when He shall say "Depart from me." O, you that are haters of God's poor people, such is their union to Christ that when you draw a sigh from one of them you are in

danger of drawing a sigh from the heart of God, and of adding a drop of wrath to your own cup. Man or devil is not capable of touching a gracious soul to their hurt without touching God Himself. Better to have all the powers of Britain pursuing thee than to have a poor child of God complaining against thee at a throne of grace to his Father in heaven.

Lastly, to conclude, let us all remember that this is not our dwelling-place. You, poor believer, the nearer you are to the end of your journey, the nearer you are to your everlasting happiness. Follow on, get the love of sin mortified, cry to the Lord for repentance, for self-denial, for a broken spirit, and eternity will be long enough for God to wipe away all tears from your eyes. Be not content without finding Christ Himself in the Word, in the means of grace, and in His providences toward you, for a moment of His fellowship is the earnest of your enjoying His love throughout the endless ages of eternity.

And oh, sinner, you that are taken up wholly with the things of time, when the grim messenger death lays his hand on you, your doleful cry shall be – “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” You are now wholly taken up about the things of the body, but what comfort shall these afford you in the world of spirits to which you are hastening? You are now wholly taken up with the things of the world, but how will you feel when you see it in flaming fire about you? These are awful words – “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst good things, and Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.” Yes, perhaps just when you have settled down to reap the fruit of your toil in the world, when your nest is warm, then you are summoned to an undone eternity. O eternity, eternity, when millions of years shall have passed, it will be still the same. Now, although you as a sinner are not capable of changing your own nature, yet under the Gospel you have as much light as to see that there is sin cleaving to you, which, as a reasonable creature, you ought to abandon, and it is as a reasonable creature God deals with you. Therefore, cry to Him for grace, to enable you to begin to war with sin and to flee to Christ for salvation. And you, hypocrite, that are living in known sin, and yet keeping family worship, you are only mocking your own soul. Yes, you that are harbouring known sin and yet following the means of grace, you will not, while in that state, experience the Divine power in the means, should you follow them to the day of your death. O, do not trifle with sin. Be sure your sin will find you out, and, if you do not forsake it, it will find you out in the depths of hell and be a sting in your soul, calling down upon you the everlasting wrath of God! O be wise, and do not sell a happy eternity for a vile thing. Be wise, and turn from sin unto God, for the wise shall shine as the sun, and as the brightness of the firmament in their Father’s kingdom for ever and ever. – Amen.

[May 1898]

A Sermon.

By ANDREW GRAY, Glasgow.

“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore yea sons of Jacob are not consumed” – Malachi 3:6.

It is an unchangeable and irrevocable statute of heaven, that cannot be recalled, that as long as we are here below in the land of our exile, being strangers from our Father’s house, we

must live by faith and not by sight. Therefore we must submit unto these dark discoveries of those things that we have that are most precious and excellent, until that day shall be when faith, that is the evidence of things not seen, shall sweetly be changed into an immediate beholding of them. And O what a blessed day shall that be, when faith and hope shall both cease and give way to sight, when these two cardinal graces shall go to take their leave of us, and sense shall go in, and we then shall eternally solace ourselves in beholding of Him that is now invisible, and sense shall solace itself in these sweet fruits and trophies of the victory of faith and hope! O the infinite satisfaction and joy these have, that have their dwelling there! Such new wine as they drink of must not be put into such old bottles as we are, else we would burst asunder. But new wine must be put into new bottles, that both of them may be preserved. And if He would condescend to draw by a lap of that veil wherewith He is now covered from our eyes, and that He should now appear in the glory of His unspeakable majesty, we should all fall dead at His feet, and there should no more strength remain with us. It were a question difficult to determine, whether the most pleasant manifestations that God can give of Himself to His own whilst they are below should provoke more joy than reverence, and more fear than rejoicing? And sure we are, fear of Him who is that unchangeable majesty is more suitable for us whilst we are here than to rejoice and be glad. O that unsuitableness we are under, which renders us so incapable, were once removed and taken out of the way, and we for ever advanced to that unspeakable dignity as to see Him as He is! We must say by the way, O what is that one word, to see God as He is!

We must delay the exposition of it until we have the possession of it. There is more, no doubt, in that word than angels can make language of. If these of the higher house were commanded to write a commentary on this one promise, "That we shall see God as he is," they might close all their expositions of it to us in this, "Come and see," He can best resolve you Himself. Now all that we have been formerly speaking of God and of His blessed attributes, which is the main scope and design that at least we ought to propose in speaking of so divine and profound a name, is that you might be once persuaded to study and exalt Him, before whom all the inhabitants of the world are reputed as nothing, and who rules in the kingdom of men, were many of us, but driven from among men unto beasts, till seven times pass over us, and we made to acknowledge God to be the Most High, we might acknowledge His justice and show forth His praise, which is the supreme end why we had a being. But there are many among us that go from our being, before that we get to know why we had a being. God has given us immortal souls, and made us wiser than the beasts of the field, but there is not one among a thousand that takes up his dignity, and he may take up his lamentation, man being in honour and knoweth it not, is like the beasts that perish.

That which we now shall speak of is that glorious and incomparable attribute of His unchangeableness – a subject more fit for angels to speak of than men – and it is clear in these words, "I am the Lord, I change not." He is that everlasting Rock of Ages, that though all things here below should stagger to and fro as a drunken man, yet He remains the same, to-day, yesterday, and for ever, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of change. Changeableness is the note of all things here below, but He takes here to Himself a more excellent name, and who can debate that which He hath spoken? Though the sun should not give light by day, nor the moon and stars by night, and the sea should pass its bounds, yet He is that immutable and unchangeable Being with whom there is no changeableness. O what can changeable man speak of the unchangeable being of God? No doubt, were our spirits under a more divine impression of this attribute – the unchangeableness of God – we might speak to you with more advantage, and you might likewise hear with more rejoicing. But if each of you that are here were posed

with this question, Who of you have your spirits under an impression of this attribute of God's unchangeableness? we think there should be few or none found to give a positive answer to this question. That which proceeds from the heart affects the man most, and if we did speak, because we knew such, we might often speak less and wonder more. O to be much taken up in a divine reflection and meditation upon this glorious attribute, the unchangeableness of God, which is that pillar of hope to which our faith must lean when sense is lost, and we ready to draw that conclusion that our spots are not like the spots of His people. And likewise, there is none of the saints from which we can expect help, neither would they answer us though we should call upon them. Then we must solace ourselves quietly upon this Rock; often we stir Him up and wake Him before He please. But He is willing, and often passes an act of oblivion of all our former offences, and does condescend to drown all the differences betwixt Him and us in that immense love of His good will. Were God as changeable as we are, how soon should we get a bill of divorcement in our hands, and we should soon dote on other lovers, but when we have lost our grips and let them go these everlasting arms of His do take us up. There is an unchangeableness in His decrees that cannot be altered, as it is spoken of the laws of the Medes and Persians; that love of His admits of no period. He doth so graciously condescend to His own, that when they have been playing the harlot with many lovers, yet His unchangeable love doth embrace them – "Return unto me, O Israel!" O such a blessed accepting, yet "return unto me, O Israel!" And such sometimes have been forced to cry out, "I am not worthy to be called thy son," &c. And some have supposed when their prison doors have been cast open, and when their chains have fallen off their feet, they have supposed with themselves that they had seen a vision; and others, when they were loosed from their captivity, they have been as men that dreamed. O when that challenge shall be proposed to us, that are like a barren wilderness in all these things that He doth to us, when He shall pose us with that question – "For which of these good works that I have done to you, do you take up stones against me?" We may confess and give Him that testimony, when we are at ourselves and have wronged Him, as that word – Luke 15:16,17 – "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger?" It is more for our advantage to remain with Him than to go elsewhere. When He hath been desiring us to return, we have wearied ourselves in pursuing after our idols, and filled ourselves with love until the morning, and with delight until the dawning of the day.

Now, for clearing more of this attribute we would, better for the quality of it, cut off much of the quantity of our discourse about it, that we be not rash with our mouths in the hasty uttering of words. By the multitude of words, a fool's voice is known. When we do seriously reflect on the unchangeableness of God, that He is such an One, notwithstanding of all His infinite works and varieties of dispensations that comes from Him, yet He remains unchangeable. All things remain in a circuit of being and not being, and even such things, when they have a being, remain unchangeable. Now to speak of His unchangeableness, it is so held forth that He is void of all variableness and corruptness, and that He in His blessed purpose of His goodwill is void of any shadow of changeableness; He is unchangeable in His essence, in respect of this, that He is void of and cannot be subject to corruption. The eternity of God doth sufficiently prove His being, that it is impossible for Him not to be, that though all things should not be, yet He is to the fore. He takes to Himself that glorious attribute, first and last; He, taking to Himself in that glorious essence, that He is void of all alteration and infinitely perfect, proves sufficiently His being both sufficient and all-sufficient. Wherein can a man be profitable to God? Neither can His perfection be found

out. He is likewise infinite in His omnipotency; no power can be added to Him nor taken away from Him. He is likewise infinite in His understanding and knowledge; all things are known unto Him from the beginning of the world, He having a most comprehensive and distinct knowledge of all things, and having also a most perfect and sure knowledge without all reach of error. For these things that occasion error are altogether removed from Him. He is so infinite in understanding that all things that are, or have been, or shall be, or may be, are as easy to Him as these things that are most obvious to, or comprehensible by, us. He is likewise unchangeable in His love – John 13:1 – “Whom he loves, he loves unto the end.” We often, through our misconstructions, think that He stands still when He is going, like passengers of a ship under sail think the land moving and they are standing still. He cannot come short of ability. There is a sweet harmony of God’s unchangeableness, in His willing and doing; there is an incapacity of compulsion causing Him to act. There are some expressions held forth, as that – Genesis 6:6 – “It repented the Lord that he had made man.” So in 1 Samuel 15:35 – “And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.” That doth not contradict this, being spoken after the manner of man, as likewise these expressions held out in His breach of promise – Numbers 14:34 – “Ye shall know my breach of promise.” But these promises are only conditional, not absolute; they rather speak of the difference of the several ways He works, but they do not hold forth any changeableness in Him nor of His eternal purposes. We are persuaded these are either the gladdest news or the saddest that ever were proclaimed in your ears – that God is unchangeable: these are like good news from a far country, or as cold waters to a thirsty soul. If it were possible that one of these who are reserved to the day of the Lord’s justice in these everlasting chains were to give their verdict of this attribute of the unchangeableness of God, no doubt they might conduce much to move us to set our seal thereto, He being unchangeable in the exercise of His justice towards them. If their captivity were to endure as long as there are pickles of sand by the sea shore, they would be some way therein comforted, but it is their eternal misery that there is no hope to be freed from that everlasting darkness, but when they have spent many millions of years in that pit of darkness they may say, and cry out, “This is but the beginning of our sorrows.” Now, if that were believed, that God is unchangeable, we would be making more progression, flying from the wrath to come. It is uncertain to many of you how soon you may come to a close of your time, and be made to hearken to that everlasting sentence, than ye would take this warning: God is commanding you, that question. The gates of the new Jerusalem are standing open, that ye would flee thereunto, lest the avenger of blood overtake you; and who can stand before Him, if once He be angry, who makes the mountains to melt at His presence, and who at the voice of His word makes all the pillars of the earth to tremble? We are like to those that sleep upon the top of a mast, we are not afraid of that wrath that shall seize on all them that obey not the Gospel. And those who are begotten unto a lively hope, through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are not these good news unto them, that ere it be long they shall pass into an unchangeableness of life, that these who are taken up now before the throne are in the enjoyment of Him which they longed so much after? Eternity does not produce the losing of their enjoyment. That is the diamond that shines most brightly in their crown, that He is unchangeable. When shall the one and twenty year of our age come, and that our minority shall pass, and that we may be capacitate to enter into the actual possession of these things that our blessed Lord Jesus is now taking possession of in our name? This is matter of consolation, that though the forty years we are to spend in this wilderness should be spent in heaviness, yet that we may rejoice in the hope that is set before us,

that we shall no more hang our harps on the willow trees, for being in a strange land. O what a glorious appearance shall that be, when all these that are given to our blessed Lord from all eternity shall be brought to Him with raiment of needlework! where, then, the blessed difference betwixt Him and us shall clearly appear. Surely it is held forth in that word – Revelation 19:12 – “His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns.” Many crowns shall be on His head, and only one crown shall be on our head.

Now, we shall point a little at these advantages that a Christian may have in this consideration, that God is unchangeable. There is none almost of all the attributes of God that conduces so much for a Christian’s satisfaction, and for establishing that full assurance of hope, as this of unchangeableness does.

The first advantage that we have by the consideration of God’s unchangeableness is this – it is an excellent way to keep the grace of love growing in the Christian, for when a Christian attains to the divine impression of this, that God loveth him and that His love is unchangeable, then the grace of love in the Christian is made to grow stronger. But as long as we conceive there is a possibility or probability for Him to change, love cannot be strong. Then the Christian attains to that pitch thereof which many waters cannot quench. We cannot attain unto that pitch of love until once we get this believed, that God is unchangeable. We confess that a Christian, after he hath attained unto the solid persuasion of this – that his beloved is his, and he is His – yet it is much to persuade them that that which they have once attained shall never be losed. We confess these many debates and questions, after we have beheld the salvation of the Lord and after we have passed from death to life, makes us pass from the first commandment” – “To love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, strength, and mind,” &c. Then doth it produce much misbelief, the debating of God’s unchangeableness. Neither would we have you to take advantage by this of more liberty to yourselves. Be not high minded, but fear; thou bears not the root, but the root thee. Paul giveth this direction for proving their election and assurance of their interest in Christ, the study and blessed pursuit of holiness – 2 Timothy 2:19 – “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” And then ye have this word added, “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” The not knowing what shall be the end of our walking makes us many days to walk under a cloud.

The second advantage that we have by the consideration of God’s unchangeableness is this – it is an immutable and irresistible way to keep life in the exercise of faith. And we have these four things observable in it. *First.* As in the exercise of faith, when He doth exercise us with some strange and extraordinary dispensation, in a manner calling all our terrors about us, as in a solemn assembly, and that He doth wound us with the wounds of an enemy; then we with Gideon cry out, “If the Lord were with us, how could all this evil befall us?” There is much consistency in these two, His love and His dispensations. If we were much in the faith of His unchangeableness we might see much of His love in such a stroke. And having the faith of His doing all things well, we might see it much for our advantage, even the difficultest of dispensations. We confess this is a difficulty for these that call in question their interest in Him. *Second.* Another thing herein observable is, when God in His unsearchable wisdom doth wrap up Himself so that we are not admitted to have access to Him, but are constrained to walk without the sight of the King in His beauty. There are many here, no doubt, might say with Esther – Esther 4:11 – “It is

thirty days since we did behold the king.” Yea, many of us might cry out with Absalom – 2 Samuel 14:28 – “I have been these two years in Jerusalem and have not beheld the king’s face.” This makes us call in question our interest, whereas the faith of His unchangeableness would remove much of this; that though He seem to frown yet He is unchangeable, and though He seem to withdraw yet He still beholdeth us. The *third* thing is the faith of His unchangeableness, would make us say – “My beloved shall yet return, I will yet rejoice in the hope of the God of my salvation.” He shall yet come over the mountain as a young hind, He will be for a door of hope to us notwithstanding of our distance from Him, and our faith is strengthened in His unchangeableness when we have been going abroad after so many lovers and forsaken Him who was the guide of our youth, and making a diligent enquiry after our idols, making us oft to call in question our hope and interest, and to say that there is such a woeful inconsistency between our walk and hope that it makes us call in question our reality. This is strange – a doubt that we are made to call in question our interest, whereas the faith of His unchangeableness would be advantageous to us, that notwithstanding of all our offences He is still unchangeable. O for the faith to believe that God cannot, nor will not, change His immutable purposes. It is contrary to human reason that He should be angry, so as not to change His love, but surely we may say this is not after the manner of man, though we confess many such things as those have been with Him. The *fourth* thing in the exercise of faith which is strengthened in His unchangeableness is the entertaining of the motions of His spirit, and should make us come over all these debates and reasonings whereby we quench His spirit – whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption – and do all that lies in us to break ourselves. These many woeful interruptions whereby we have resisted His spirit have so weakened our hope that it makes us often to draw that conclusion, so to say that there is no more sacrifice for sin. And if our misbelief ascend not to so high a pitch, yet we sit down as those that have no hope, because that after we have tasted of the powers of heaven, and have crucified Christ afresh and put Him to open shame, therefore there is a new entry for having access to Him. I confess, a Christian having his faith thus brangled should not only be under the apprehensions of the unchangeableness of God’s love, but likewise of the freeness of His love, and therefore we should take us to this, if we can say no more – To study to give glory to God, and to hope against hope, and if we perish, let our ruin be under His hand.

The third advantage that we have by the consideration of God’s unchangeableness is this – the attaining to much divine patience and submission under all the sad dispensations, even though in opposition to all that may befall us here. The unchangeableness of God may make us to weep under these things, as though we wept not. What though all things should contradict us, and though our acquaintances and friends should flee away from us and not behold us. O what divine solacing is there in this, “That God is unchangeable” (Psalm 40:47). “I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.” One thought of God towards us showing forth Himself, that He is unchangeable, may richly make up all our advantages that are waiting us while we are here below. If the most excellent choices we have hereaway should be taken from us, yet this is our advantage, that He cannot be taken away, for He is without the reach of being spoiled by the creature. This may make us to be in a holy neutrality and indifferency of all other things, getting once this one thing at a point, that we may subscribe a blank and put it in His hands, and let Him fill it up as He will for those other things, only seek to be at a point of your being owned of Him.

The fourth advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness is – we come to the distinct persuasion of the incoming of our elder sister, the Jews – Romans 11:29 – “The gifts and callings of God are without repentance.” Though your bones should be scattered as about the grave's mouth, yet there is hope of their reviving. Folks cannot attain to any persuasion of themselves without the faith of His unchangeableness, that that which they attain unto be committed to Him, knowing in whom they have believed.

The fifth advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness is – the mortification of all these things here below. If we were much in beholding His unchangeableness, when we behold things here as transient and He alone permanent, O how might we be necessitate to be crucified to a world and to be pressing on towards Him! O what a pitch of mortification to a world, have some win to by the faith of this, that He is unchangeable! All these vanishing things are made quickly to flee away. David saith, in Psalm 39:6, “Man walketh in a vain show: they are disquieted in vain.” That which makes him attain to such a length is the divine apprehension of the unchangeableness of God. In the seventh verse of that Psalm – “And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee” – there he solaces himself in God, after he had taken a look of the vanity of all things beside him.

The sixth advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness is this – much joy and satisfaction, as is clear from Hebrews 6:18, where the immutability of the counsel of God is brought in, to make the heirs of God to have strong consolation. We are exceeding short of our talk when we are out of the exercise of this attribute of God. O but believers might be without the reach of these things that trouble them by the meditation of His unchangeableness! When we might be going up to the top of Mount Pisgah and beholding the promised land, and to get our hope and satisfaction of these things more in fruition, no doubt our misbelief of this makes us walk much in heaviness. The most part of Christians' time is spent in seeking the proof of their interest: I do not condemn their work, but it were a compendious way to study himself, whether for shunning of sin and offences, or walking near unto Him. This is a part of conformity to God, to be exercising holiness, and for restraining of sins, to be in the consideration of His justice and omnipotency. We confess this is a depth, but it is such a depth as a lamb may wade. Here is matter for search and admiration.

Now, to this unchangeable God be everlasting praise, world without end. – Amen.
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A Sermon.

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

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

The apostle in the opening chapter of this epistle points out that the same God who spoke in ancient times unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. He then proceeds in the majestic language of the book of Psalms to enlarge upon the divine glory and mediatorial sovereignty of the Son of God. This glorious person is infinitely

exalted above men and angels, and is destined to reign until all His enemies are made His footstool. After giving expression to these lofty views concerning the dignity and glory of Christ as the Messenger of the Covenant, he is led to speak of the responsibility of those who were privileged to hear the Word of God from Christ's lips or the lips of His servants. "Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." And he impresses this obligation with a powerful argument. "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation." That is to say – If the word spoken by the instrumentality of angels in former ages failed not of fulfilment, and every act of disobedience to that word received in due time just punishment, how shall we, who have heard the word spoken by the Son of God, the King of angels, possibly escape deserved judgment if we neglect so great salvation? These are the weighty considerations which the apostle by the Holy Ghost here presents to the Hebrews, and such are the considerations which require to be impressed upon all who hear the gospel to the end of time. In speaking on these words for a little, we shall, in dependence on the Spirit of God, direct attention to: –

- I. The great salvation.
- II. The neglect of it.
- III. The warning here given to all neglectors.

I. Let us consider the great salvation.

Salvation is the central theme of the gospel message. Salvation is the great need of man's soul. Man in his present condition is far from blessedness. The Scriptures tell us he was created a holy and happy being, who continued for a time in the favour and converse of his Creator, but eventually fell from that high estate by sin. He incurred the righteous curse of God, exposed himself to all the miseries of this present life, and to the pains of hell in the life to come. He is now manifestly in a wretched condition, and it is to proclaim a salvation adequate to meet his case that the gospel of Christ has been sent forth into the world. Not that all men who hear the gospel will inevitably be saved by it, for multitudes, to whom it comes, with amazing blindness reject it against themselves. Nevertheless, God in His eternal purpose has determined that it shall be the means of saving a company which no man can number, a company that shall be made willing in the day of His power. The gospel shall not fail until all the elect of God are gathered in from the north, south, east, and west, and are made partakers of the great salvation procured for them by Jesus Christ.

We now proceed to point out some of the things that exhibit the greatness of this salvation: –

1. The greatness of the Saviour who procured it.

(1) Observe His divine greatness. He is infinitely exalted above all created beings; He is the Son of God; He is co-equal and co-substantial with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the undivided Godhead; in one word, He is God. The apostle dwells at large upon this glorious truth in the preceding chapter. He tells us that the Son is the heir of all things, the creator of the worlds, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His essence, and the upholder of all things. He was once in this world purging away the sins of His people. He is now at the right hand of the majesty on high. The apostle quotes several passages from the book of Psalms wherein the Messiah is set before us as the Son of God, yea, as God Himself. "Unto the Son," He (the Father) saith, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." So great then was the need of sinners that no less exalted a person than the great God required to come into this lower world for their deliverance' sake. Men or angels were insufficient to act the part of a Saviour. But God in

His infinite mercy and wisdom found within Himself the very person that such as we required. The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father came forth to perform the work, and we may well admire the greatness of the gospel salvation in the light of the infinite greatness of Him who procured it. He is “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

(2) Notice His human greatness. The Word who was with God and was God, was made flesh (John 1). He assumed a perfect humanity into union with His divine person. The Son of God became also the Son of man. As the Son of man, He is incomparable among the sons of men. He had no blemish or imperfection. He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. He combined in matchless proportions awe-inspiring majesty and winning meekness, unerring wisdom and purest guilelessness, immovable rectitude and tenderest sympathy, perfect holiness, and richest love. He was great in all the excellencies of perfect manhood. He was perfect man as well as infinitely perfect God. “Thou art fairer than the children of Men” (Psalm 45:2).

(3) Notice He is God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever. All divine and all human greatness subsist together in the one person of the Son of God. No wonder though the Church in the Song of Songs should exclaim, “My beloved is white and ruddy, he is the chiefest among ten thousand,” “Yea, he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:10,16).

2. The greatness of the price the Saviour paid for this salvation.

(1) He paid a life of humiliation and suffering. It was no little thing He did when He condescended to assume our nature, to dwell in this lower world, and to veil His divine glory for a season. He “gave his life a ransom for many.” He lived more than thirty years a life of humiliation. He who was the King eternal became a servant. He who was the sovereign Lawgiver was made “under the law.” He who knew no sin was made sin. He who knew no suffering “suffered the just for the unjust.” He obeyed and suffered in the room of sinners. His whole life was occupied with this work of obedience and suffering. By the latter He satisfied divine justice for the sins of His people; by the former He wrought out a positive righteousness on their behalf. “With his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). And “by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). “Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). He suffered much during His life. He was despised of men, tempted of the devil, and bruised of God. Every groan that came from His lips, every weary step He trod, every pang of suffering He endured, went to make up the ransom price of His people’s salvation. Hear His own words: – “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

(2) He paid the penalty of an accursed death. We have already spoken of His life of suffering, we now speak of His death of suffering. Sin deserved death, justice required death. Nothing less than a death of unspeakable suffering could meet the demands of God’s justice. The guilty cannot go unpunished, and as the Son of God stood as substitute for the guilty, He must needs suffer even unto death. The apostle says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). His people were under the curse of God’s law, and would have suffered that curse throughout eternity, had He not shed His blood for them. When the Bible speaks of the blood of Christ, it intends His suffering both in body and soul. He suffered unspeakable shame and pain in His body. He also “poured out his soul unto death” (Isaiah 53:12). God the Father as a righteous Judge hid His face from Him, and caused His holy wrath to descend upon His soul. Witness the greatness of His heartrending agony upon the cross. Here is holy ground indeed. Men and angels may well tremble in the innermost depths of their being at this awful sight. The eternal Son cries – “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Again He cries – “It is finished,” and gives up the ghost. The full price is paid. It is good measure, pressed down, and running over. “Ye

were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

3. The greatness of the deliverances it brings.

(1) It delivers from sin. Sin is the great root evil. All the other evils that have befallen our race have flowed from it. Sin destroyed the image of God in man’s soul. Sin brought death spiritual, temporal, and eternal upon the human race. Now, this salvation brings deliverance from the guilt, the dominion, and, finally, from the very being of sin. There is nothing that degrades man like sin, nothing in fact that degrades him but sin, and therefore to be freed from this soul-debasing and soul-ruining evil is one of the most precious things in this “great salvation.” “The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

(2) It delivers from Satan. This evil spirit is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience.” The salvation that is in Christ procures deliverance from his mighty grasp. The believing soul passes from under the thralldom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. The Son of God took flesh and blood that “through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” and so everyone who is made a partaker of the redemption purchased by Christ is emancipated from the devil’s yoke. He may molest, but he cannot destroy. He himself shall be in the end completely crushed. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20).

(3) It delivers from the curse of God. All are by nature under His righteous curse. “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” But the apostle says, speaking for the Church, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.” It is an awful thing to be under the curse of God, our Creator. The displeasure and enmity of all wicked men, and all the devils in hell, are nothing to this. Behold, then, the glory of this salvation. There is freedom in it from the curse of the great God of heaven and earth. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

(4) It delivers from the everlasting miseries of hell. The psalmist tells us that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17). The Lord Jesus proclaims the same truth with greater power and vividness than any of His prophets or apostles. Witness His testimony concerning the rich man who lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments, and also the man without the wedding garment who is cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is from the same mouth we hear the words – The wicked “shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 15:46). O my friends, people nowadays seem to have forgotten that there is such a place as hell, but it exists all the same, and multitudes are hastening with ceaseless rapidity to its devouring flames. Surely it is glad tidings to hear of a way of deliverance from this awful danger. How gladly we should welcome the very thought of a salvation such as is offered in the Gospel! Salvation from everlasting woe! Glad tidings of great joy indeed, and truly they are to be pitied who do not realise these tidings to be so. The psalmist knew their value, and sang – “For great is thy mercy toward me; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell” (Psalm 86:13).

4. The greatness of the blessings it confers.

(1) A new spiritual life. We are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, and need a new life. To the soul made sensible of this by God’s spirit, the Gospel salvation, when it comes with power, is life from the dead. The soul feels a new power pulsating through its faculties, is taken up with new objects, and moves in a new world. United to Jesus Christ, the light and life of men, the quickened soul enters upon a life of faith which ends in a life of glory.

“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

(2) A complete justification.

This blessing consists in the pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness. The soul is freed from its filthy garments, and clothed with white raiment. It enjoys peace of conscience, and acceptance before God. It rests its hope for eternity on the finished work of Christ, and glories in His righteousness alone. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

(3) A loving adoption.

The great salvation also holds forth the offer to the sinner of a loving adoption. If he accepts the offer, he is admitted into God’s family. In other words, the criminal who deserves to lie with the devil and his angels throughout eternity is taken from his prison cell and made to sit as a son at the table of the King of kings. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power (or right) to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

(4) A sure sanctification.

Christ is made unto His people sanctification. The new-born soul begins to grow in holiness. Sometimes the growth is retarded by opposing forces, sometimes it is hastened by special effusions of God’s quickening grace. The Spirit of God will eventually complete the work, and at death the soul will be freed from all sin, and perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. The partakers of this salvation will be at the end of the day “a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27).

(5) A glorious inheritance.

We deserve an inheritance of never-ending misery and shame, but here is offered an inheritance of never-ending happiness and glory. You may be at present on the verge of everlasting ruin, but if, as a lost helpless sinner, you accept of the gospel offer, you shall immediately be an heir of everlasting blessedness. This salvation is so great that it raises poor sinners from the lowest hell here to the highest heaven hereafter. Come then, and you are welcome at the free offer of Christ to “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 1:4).

II. – The neglect of it: “if we neglect so great salvation.” The apostle here calls attention to the possibility of neglecting “so great salvation,” notwithstanding its unspeakable greatness. Let us notice: –

1. The special import of the word “neglect.”

(1) What is here pre-supposed in the use of the word.

The apostle gives his readers to understand that the salvation spoken of is not a thing afar off but a thing that is nigh, and that if they fail to embrace it they are, to say the very least, guilty of neglect. The words which succeed our text bring out this view: “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” This salvation was at the first brought near to men in the preaching of the Lord of glory, and was then confirmed at a later date “unto us” – that is, unto the apostle himself and the Hebrews he was addressing – by them that heard Him. The counterpart of this exists in the Church, and shall exist to the end of time. We have the written record of salvation in the Scriptures. There the great salvation, in all its fulness, is made nigh, and if we have ears to hear we may hear the voice of Christ there speaking of it unto us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Again, we have this salvation made nigh in the words of living ambassadors of Christ, of all true preachers of the Gospel. Christ said to His

apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” and He gives the same commission now to all whom He has appointed for the work. Salvation is therefore brought to our very doors by the messengers of Christ. “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:8,9). All, therefore, who fail to appropriate the great salvation show conspicuous neglect of it, and that under the most favourable circumstances. They show themselves “a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Romans 10:21).

(2) The precise meaning of “neglect.”

“Neglect” is one of the mildest terms that can be used in this connection. It is employed, however, with a wise purpose – that is, so as to include in its compass the widest circle possible of those who refuse to make choice of the great salvation. “Despise” and “hate” are stronger terms, and it is true that all who neglect this salvation in heart despise and hate it, but the use of this word proves that it is not necessary deliberately to despise and hate it in order to expose oneself to just condemnation; all that is necessary is simply to neglect it, to pass it by without acceptance. This as surely seals the final destruction of the sinner as if he were to display the most manifest and open hatred of it. The foolish virgins neglected to get oil in their vessels with their lamps, and were as certainly shut out of the kingdom at last as if they never had set out to meet the bridegroom at all (Matthew 25:1-12).

2. The prevalence of neglect among Gospel hearers. “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1). This has been the cry of the preacher in most ages of the Church’s history. The tendency to neglect the Gospel salvation is a universal one. Strange and sad, but true it is, that the very thing which should be most readily welcomed and attended to by the sons of men is that which they are most disposed to neglect and despise. The greater number of those who listened to Christ’s words, in the days of His flesh, heeded them not, and He had to declare – “Ye will not come to me that ye might have life” (John 5:40). Again, the apostles were treated by Jews and Gentiles in a similar manner. The Jews – from whom, of all people, better things might have been expected – especially showed an inveterate hatred to the Gospel, and the way of salvation set forth in it. Stephen told them to their faces: “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). The Gentiles, also, frequently turned a deaf ear to the Gospel. They persecuted and killed many of Christ’s ambassadors. “But,” someone says, “did not many of the Jews, and especially of the Gentiles, gladly receive the tidings of salvation?” Yes, but the main tendency was to reject them, and if it were not for the intervention of a higher power, even the Holy Spirit of God, this tendency would have held the day, and not one soul would have been saved. Such has been the case in subsequent ages, down to the present day. The universal course of mankind is against the Gospel, and it is only when the power of God accompanies it that souls receive it with joy. All true revivals of religion have had their origin, not in the natural inclinations of men, but in the mighty manifested energy of the Holy Ghost. Never was this truth more clearly proven than by what we see around us in the present day. We are now living in the closing years of the nineteenth century, and, after all that has been seen and heard of the Gospel of Christ for so many centuries, one might have expected that the tendency to neglect it would have been perceptibly checked. But the case is far otherwise. Never was there a more prevalent disposition to despise Christ and His salvation than at the present time. Multitudes, in this Christian country, are to-day showing not only neglect but utter contempt of Him who should be their most welcome friend, and of His salvation, which should be their chiefest joy and

treasure. My hearer, are you among them? Such persons “count themselves unworthy of eternal life” (Acts 13:46).

3. Some marks of those who “neglect so great salvation.” These are inward and outward.

(1) Some inward marks. One of these is spiritual blindness. The understandings of men are by nature darkened. Sin has blinded them to their miserable condition before God, and therefore they see no necessity for a way of salvation. All in their natural estate are, in fact, “darkness” itself (Ephesians 5:8). Sin also blinds them to the glory of the great salvation. They see not the excellency of its marvellous provision, nor its unspeakable suitability to meet their case as lost sinners. Yea, they do not perceive the matchless glory of Christ Himself, who is the crown and head of it all. The reason is “the blindness of their heart.” A second mark is self-righteousness. It is a characteristic of our fallen nature to delude us into the supposition – “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17). We imagine we are good enough, and therefore we are not prepared to admit any need of improvement, far less of a complete renewal. The self-righteous spirit is also wholly unwilling to submit to the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. This was a feature of the Jews, and this is a feature of the unregenerate heart still. Men prefer their own filthy rags to the glorious righteousness of Immanuel. “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Proverbs 30:12). A third mark is unbelief. “The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). Perverse unbelief refuses to believe the testimony of God Himself concerning our lost estate and the way of recovery through Jesus Christ. It has the bold and awful effrontery to make God a liar. Multitudes are perishing under its fell influence. They will believe anything and everything the world, the flesh, and the devil tell them, but they have no ear whatsoever for the voice of God or the good news of salvation. The consequence is that they perish for ever. “For if ye believe not that I am he,” saith Christ, “ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). A fourth mark is the love of sin. Not a few who appear to see something of their own need, and give credit, at least in an intellectual way, to God’s Word, yet come short of the great salvation. The cause is undoubtedly the love of sin. They prefer sin to holiness, the world to Christ. Very often there is some darling lust which holds their affections, and which they will not let go. Sin has debased them to such a degree that, though all the terrors of hell and comforts of heaven are pressed upon their consideration, they continue quite obdurate and unimpressed. The love of sin has won their hearts, and the glorious salvation of the Gospel has no attraction for them. Such persons are “holden with the cords” of their own iniquity, and if they do not give up their carnal pleasure they shall be lost. They shall yet lift up their eyes, “being in torments” (Luke 16:23). A fifth mark is the spirit of procrastination. “To-morrow,” says the soul, “I will attend to the things of religion, the things of eternity. I am at present too busy with other matters, and I need time and close reflection in order to study such high things.” The young are disposed to exclaim – “It is time enough when I get older, when I begin to be more serious and settled in mind, to think of such a great and overwhelming thing as the salvation of the soul.” The old are ready to say – “We have put off so long, and have become so hard and insensible with the occupations of the world, that it is now no use whatsoever to try to get up any concern for eternal things. We cannot do it, and we must therefore just move on as formerly, and perhaps we may obtain mercy at last.” Some persons, who have anxieties as to eternity, are disposed to procrastinate owing to the difficulties in the way. “Oh,” say they, “it is not an easy thing to attain salvation. There is so much sin in us that it is ten to one if ever we get victory over it. Besides, what is the use of all our attention to our souls if we are not among the elect, or the Spirit of God doesn’t work in us? We must wait, at least, until we are in a better frame.” Thus the spirit of delay, working sometimes even in a spiritual form, lets the precious moments of time to pass without improvement, and the soul hastens on towards a lost eternity. We would warn our hearers

with our whole soul against such a spirit as this. The devil likes nothing better than to see it having the mastery over mankind. He thus lulls vast numbers of young and old into a sleep out of which they are not awakened until they hear the cry – “This night thy soul is required of thee.” Never forget the warning and encouragement conveyed in the words: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

(2) Some outward marks. The internal evils of which we have been speaking are not confined, in their effects, to the heart; they influence the outward life and pursuits of men. One of these marks is engagement in unlawful occupations. To be engaged in any business that involves a breach of God’s commandments is one of the direct roads to destruction. The pursuit of anything whatsoever that is sinful hardens the soul in neglect of the great salvation. A second mark is excessive engrossment in lawful occupations. Many things that are perfectly lawful in themselves are a great snare. Some imagine that if they attend to their natural duties with diligence and conscientiousness that they have nothing more to be concerned about. But the truth is, if we give our hearts and lives exclusively to any object – however good – outside God, we make that thing an idol, and it proves a mighty barrier between us and eternal salvation. The lawful occupations of life form a greater trap to multitudes than the unlawful. The latter lead plainly away from God, and a natural conscience tells us they are wrong, but the former, being right enough in themselves, have – owing to the blindness of our hearts – a strong tendency to delude us for ever. They lead us to “neglect so great salvation,” and we know it not. The Apostle John speaks, however, in language we need not mistake – “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). A third mark is a life of worldly pleasure. There are unlawful pleasures that drown souls without fail in perdition. Such are the pleasures of drunkenness and sensuality, the pleasures of the theatre, the ballroom, the concert. They steep souls in ever-deepening spiritual insensibility. If there is the least concern about salvation in the heart of any, they could not take a better means of quenching it than by indulging in the pleasures we have enumerated. These are the ways of death. There are other pleasures, lawful in themselves, that, if not kept in their own place, will lead to the same end. The pleasures of home, and family, and friends have their own value and preciousness, but if they are made the end of life they prove a sweet drug to poison the soul for eternity. Many highly respectable people feel no want if they have these pleasures. They are quite satisfied, and have no greater happiness to look forward to. Their heaven is in this world, and therefore they neglect the great salvation. Being lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, they need expect no entrance into the eternal inheritance. They “shall lie down in sorrow” (Psalm 50:11). A fourth mark is undue fear of the reproach and persecution of the world. Many Gospel hearers are afraid of exposing themselves to these things. Some say to themselves – “My friends and companions will make a mock and ridicule of me if I begin to be concerned about religion. They will cast at me every disagreeable name, and call me a hypocrite or a fool, and I can’t stand these things.” Others say – “Oh, I have to make my way in the world; I must push forward to a good position; I have to live and get on. What if I begin to attend to salvation now? I will only damage my prospects, and make the men who would help me mine enemies.” Others, again, are ready to say – “I like to be in with that which is popular and fashionable. What is the use of beginning to be gloomy and discontented with one’s state? That will only spoil one’s chances of the favour and applause of respectable society. I can’t bear to be excluded from the pleasant companionship of the world, and to be viewed as a mere companion for old wives.” Thus many a poor ignorant soul reasons. Young men and women, especially, are led astray with such vain thoughts. They shrink from reproach and persecution. But what a fearful thing it is to sell a happy eternity for the smile of an ungodly world, to prefer the wretched applause of dying men to the everlasting love of the eternal God? Infinitely better it is to follow the example of Moses, who, when he had all the riches, pleasures, and honours of the world at his feet, chose

“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:25,26).

III. The warning here given to all neglectors: “How shall we escape?” This warning was addressed, in the first place, to the Hebrews. The apostle reminds them in the preceding verse of the consequences of disobedience under the old dispensation, and now assures them that the same, if not more terrible consequences, will follow neglect of salvation under a more glorious dispensation. He says “we,” not “you,” identifying himself as a Hebrew with them, and humbly admitting that he is not beyond deriving benefit from the warning he conveys to others. This warning sets forth the impossibility of the neglectors of so great salvation escaping just punishment.

1. God’s character requires that they shall be punished. He is holy and righteous, and cannot but punish sin. These neglectors of His salvation have despised His law and trampled on His Gospel. They have lightly esteemed the most glorious manifestations He has given of Himself. They have cast dishonour upon His great name. His name and perfections are seen in the great salvation. Love, wisdom, righteousness, and holiness shine forth in their supreme excellency in the face of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. God’s justice, therefore, demands that the despisers of His glory, as it is so abundantly revealed in the person and work of His dear Son, should be punished. It is impossible, in consistency with the rectitude of the divine character, that such should escape. Again, those who neglect “so great salvation” ruin their own souls and bodies. These were originally created in the image of God, and were not intended to be the slaves of sin and Satan. The soul is exceedingly precious – the most precious thing under the sun. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36,37). They, then, who ruin their souls and bodies by neglecting the very means of salvation, which God has graciously sent to their doors, cannot escape His righteous judgment. They have sold His precious property to the devil, and they must suffer for it throughout eternity. Lastly, all God’s perfections are against the final neglectors of His salvation. Goodness, love, and mercy have been contemned, as well righteousness and holiness have been offended. God will judge the world by His Son, and the wrath of the Lamb will be unspeakably more terrible in that day than the curses of a broken law. His wrath is the expression of the divine, holy indignation against salvation neglectors, the abusers and despisers of rich mercy and grace. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also, which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

2. God’s arm shall inflict the punishment. “How shall we escape?” There is no escaping the arm of Jehovah, when it is stretched forth. It will be vain to flee to the mountains and the hills for safety when the Lord rises up to take vengeance upon His enemies. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). No creature, small or great, shall be absent. It will be of no avail to cry “to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:16,17). The Lord’s hand will find out all fleeing sinners, and “they shall not escape.” The length of His arm is infinite, and there shall be no corner of the earth that He cannot reach. Again, the power of His arm is infinite. His arm is full of power. The same arm which is now mighty to save every poor soul that puts his trust in it will then be mighty to destroy. Capernaum sinners, who have been exalted to heaven, shall be cast down to hell. They shall have a doubly deeper hell than the heathen who never heard of Christ or salvation.

O, you that have been brought up in pious families and have heard the words of the Gospel from your infancy – but are still outside Christ, remember, if you continue so, your condemnation will be terrible at the last day. Your godly friends, the nearest and dearest in this world, will then declare their acquiescence in the righteous sentence of the Judge. You will have then no one to pray or to speak a word for you. Every good and holy being in heaven and earth will be against you. Yea, your own mouth will be stopped, and you will hear the awful voice of the glorious Judge saying – “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his Angels” (Matthew 25:40).

3. The punishment itself. “How shall we escape” from it? It is everlasting. It is fire, the most terrible and penetrating of all agents that inflict pain. O, my dear friends, you that are still neglecting the great salvation, let the following words of the apostle ring in your ears, enter into your hearts, and have their due effect upon you, if so be that the Spirit of God may bless them to the awakening of your poor souls: – “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” May these words, if it be according to the will of God, prove the forerunner of mercy and not of doom to some of your souls, and to His name shall be the praise.

[July and August 1898]

A Sermon on the Last Judgment.

By the Rev. JOHN WELCH, Ayr (1570-1622).

“And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away” – Revelation 20:11.

The security of all flesh is wondrous great, for there is a fearful sleep fallen both upon the good and the evil. The foolish virgins are sound asleep, and the wise are asleep also. And suppose the Lord be at the door; and the hour of judgment at hand, and the seventh angel ready to blow the last trumpet, when time shall be no more; yet scarcely one of a thousand, yea, one of ten thousand, is to be found that is prepared, and busying themselves to meet the Lord, who is making speed to come in the clouds: and how soon that fire shall break forth, which shall kindle the heavens above your head, and the earth under your feet, and shall set all on fire; how soon the trumpet shall blow, and the shout shall cry, “Rise, dead, and come to judgment,” is only known to God, and to no mortal man. Will ye not then be wakened till this trumpet waken you? And will none of you take pains to look over the leaves of your conscience, and read what sins are written there, since ye came into the world, before that day of doom come upon you? O that ye knew that eternity, and that

terror of the day of the Lord, when the heavens above you, and the earth beneath you, shall not be able to stand before the face of Him that sits on the throne! Therefore I hope the Lord has made choice to me of this text, at this time, to give you warning before the judgment come. Ye know the watchman that the Lord takes from among the people, that He sets over the city or house concredit to them, "If ye see the sword and pestilence coming, and warn them not, the blood of them that perish under the judgment for lack of warning, will be required at his hand," that is, the watchman's; therefore it is time for me to be making warning to you, and, in the measure of strength that God will give me, I am to make warning, not of a temporal judgment, but of an everlasting judgment that is coming on (God waken you and warn you in time!) that when ye shall see the Judge sit on His throne, your hearts may not tremble at His awful countenance, having gotten your souls washed in His blood. But, to come to the purpose, there are many visions in this book, and there are many things done here, that the Son shows to his servant John. He shows him, *first*, The present state of the kirk at that time in the world, under the name of seven stars, and he tells, "they are suffering, and had patience; and they laboured for his name's sake, and fainted not; but yet he had somewhat against them, because they had forsaken their first love." Some were in tribulation and poverty, but yet rich in God; some kept the name of Jesus, and denied not the faith, suppose they should have given their blood for it, as the faithful martyr Antipas did; but yet he had a few things against them, because they maintained the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing He hated. Some had love, service, faith, and patience, and their work was more at the last than at the first; but yet they suffered the false prophetess Jezebel to be among them, to whom He threatens He will cast her into a bed of affliction, and them that commit fornication with her, except they repent them of their works. There were some whose works were not found perfect before God; therefore he exhorts them to remember how they had heard, and received; He bids them hold fast and repent, otherwise, He tells, that He will come shortly against them. Some had a little strength, and kept His word, and denied not His name; therefore He promises to deliver them in the hour of temptation that shall come upon all the world to try the whole earth. Some were neither cold nor hot; and therefore, because they were lukewarm, He tells them that it would come to pass, that He would spew them out of His mouth. They thought they were rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing; but they knew not that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked; and then He counsels them to buy of Him gold tried in the fire, that they might be rich, and white raiment, that they might be clothed, and eye-salve, that they might see. So what is your case this day? Have ye not forsaken your first love? But as for tribulation, it is not yet come; for our days have been days of peace, of light, liberty, and glory; but as for tribulation it is not yet come; but as the Lord lives, the days of tribulation are not far off. As for false doctrine, God be praised, it is not among us yet, or, at least, if it be, it dare not be avowed yet; but I fear, that, who lives to see it, they shall see heresy and corruption in doctrine and religion creep in piece and piece in this kirk; and if our works be found perfect before God or not, the Lord knows the contrary, and your own consciences bear witness to it; and if your life be answerable to your name, I leave it to your consciences to judge, if we have not a name that we are living, and yet are dead; and whether this be not the doleful state of the generation that is neither cold nor hot. It is clear, the zeal of the glory of God, being so worn out of the hearts of all, plainly declares the same. But I leave this. After he had showed him the present state of the kirk, at that time, then he tells him what shall be the state of the kirk unto the end of the world.

And first, in a vision of a sealed book, containing these acts concerning the kirk, which none could open but the Lion of the tribe of Judah, for it was sealed with seven seals. Now,

what was contained in these seven seals? This will take a larger time to declare than now is meet to wear upon it.

Mark always of these things spoken, there are three consolations to the kirk of God; howsoever it be that she be in tribulation, or poverty, and affliction; and albeit it come to pass, that the devil cast some of them in prison, that they may be tried, and some have tribulation ten days, which is but a short time; and howsoever it be, that our adversary goes about continually like “a roaring lion, seeking whom to devour;” but yet “He that rides on the white horse,” with the badge at His belt, and the arrows at His side, He shall get the victory at the end of the world; and to them that are faithful to the death He shall give them a crown of life.

Mark next, suppose the sword, the famine, the pestilence, these temporal judgments, be common to the godly as well as to the wicked, yet there is consolation to the “souls of them that are slain for the testimony of Jesus, they are lying under the altar, and they cry with a loud voice, Lord, how long, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood upon them that dwell on the earth?” Then it was said unto them, “that they should rest for a little season, until their fellow-servants and brethren should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled.”

Mark, thirdly, the sixth seal is opened, “and there was a great earthquake, and the sun was as black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon was like blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, and heaven departed away as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places and then the kings of the earth, and the great men, and rich men, and the captains, and the mighty men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in dens and rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the presence of Him that sits on the throne, and from the face of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” Then shall the kirk of God be avenged on her enemies; then she shall have power over the nations, and shall rule them with a rod of iron, and as the vessels of a potter they shall be broken; then shall the saints of God be brought out of great tribulation, and have their long robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb; they shall be in the presence of the throne of God, and serve Him both day and night in His temple; and He that sits on the throne shall live among them, and He that is in the midst of the throne shall govern them, and shall lead them to the lively fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Now, I go forward. After this, He tells them, before this day the gospel shall be wonderfully restrained; “And the bottomless pit shall be opened, and the smoke of that pit shall arise as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air shall be made dark with that smoke: and out of that smoke shall come locusts upon the earth, and they shall have power as the scorpions of the earth have, and the pain of them shall be as the pain of a scorpion, when they have stung a man. And in these days men shall seek death, and shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them.” Then he tells two woes that shall come upon the earth, the one of the Antichrist, the other of the Turk, “who shall run through the world and slay the third part of men, and shall lead their great army of twenty times ten thousand horsemen of war, and there shall be two witnesses raised up, and power shall be given them to prophesy so many days clothed in sackcloth; and if any man should hurt them, fire should proceed out of their mouth and devour their enemies; and when they have fulfilled their testimonies, they should be slain by the beast that came out of the bottomless pit, but they should rise again; and the spirit of life coming up from God, should enter into them, and they should stand upon their feet, and great fear fell upon them that seized them, and then shall they ascend up to heaven in a cloud in the sight of their enemies.”

And at last, "The seventh angel shall blow his trumpet, and the dead shall rise, and every man shall receive according to his works." This he does till he comes to the twelfth chapter; then he tells him, "The fights of the dragon with the woman, and her seed that kept the commands of her God, and kept the testimony of Jesus Christ." Then he tells him, "the two empires of the two beasts, Antichrist and the Turk, and the manner of every one of them." Then he tells, "The noble company of the Lamb that stands in mount Zion, even the hundred and forty and four thousand, having their Father's name written on their fore-heads; and how he heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and as the sound of a great thunder; and he heard the noise of harpers harping with their harps; they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were brought from the earth." He tells what they were saying, "These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes, and these were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits to God and to the Lamb: and in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without spot before the throne of God." Then he tells, "That another angel flew in the midst of heaven, with the everlasting gospel to preach unto them which dwell on the earth;" and that is the same gospel which I preach unto you, even this, "Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Then he tells, "that another angel cried, It is fallen, it is fallen, Babylon that great city, she made all the nations to drink of the wine of her fornication. Ay, Rome, thou shalt be taken and burnt in a furnace of fire, and a mill-stone shall be bound about thy neck, and thou shalt be cast into the midst of the sea, and shalt be drowned; there thou shalt fall, and thy fall shall make heaven and earth, and all the angels and saints to rejoice at thy fall. Ay, God shall put it into the hearts of the kings to do it; we know not what kings they are; and then the bride shall prepare her for the bridegroom's coming in the clouds."

Next again, of *seven vials* he sets down again almost the same things that he prophesied before; and now here, last of all, he lets him see the last judgment. Would you know then what is here? See ye yon great throne? Ye shall see the Judge, standing on the throne; ye shall all see both heaven and earth flee away from His face; ye shall all see the dead, great and small, and yourselves among the rest, standing before God; and ye shall all see the books opened, and the dead judged according to their works, and death and hell cast into the lake of fire, even those that had their hands in His heart's blood, and those that pierced His side with a spear, and those that riveted Him with nails, both hands and feet, they shall see it also. The elect shall see it, as Job says, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the last day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet I shall see God in my flesh whom myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins were consumed in me." And this was his consolation: even so these very eyes of yours, and no other, shall see with terror or with joy, either to your endless comfort, or to your endless condemnation. Now, what sees he? First, he sees a throne; ye know a throne is set for a judge to sit on; so he sees a throne whereon the Judge of the whole earth is to sit on; therefore he shall come to be a judge. He came before, at His first coming, not to sit on a throne, nor to be a judge, but to be judged before thrones and tribunals of men; for John says, "That he sent not his Son that he should condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Christ himself says, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" And in another place, "The Son of man came not to judge, but be judged himself." In His first coming, He comes from high majesty to baseness and humility; He came from His Father's glory to shame and ignominy; He came from a palace to a crib; from the seat of His majesty to a tree; He came like a Lamb to be slain, and as a Saviour to save sinners: as the apostle

says, it was a true saying, "That Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief." Christ Himself says, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;" and therefore that is the name that the angel gives Him, when he appears to Joseph in a dream, saying, and "thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins; and they shall call his name Emmanuel, that is, God with us," our God made flesh, our God manifested in the flesh. So I say, in His first testimony, He comes as a Saviour and Mediator between God and man; but in His last coming, He shall not come as a Lamb, but as a Judge, convoyed with all His angels and saints in heaven; He shall come in flaming fire, kindling the heavens before Him, in melting the elements and earth beneath Him; He shall come with a blast of the trumpet, with the archangel, to gather all people from the four corners of the earth; and He shall come with a peremptory sentence, from the which there shall be no appeal, and of which there shall be no revocation, ever again or again calling; and He shall come with His reward in His hand, to every man according to his works which he has done in this world, be they evil, be they good. Now, ye see He has a throne, He has a throne of grace; as the apostle to the Hebrews says; "Let us go boldly to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace in time of need." Now He is sitting on a throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace in time of need; and now He holds the door of mercy open, and lets in every penitent sinner that comes: therefore I testify unto you, if ye will flee from your sins, if ye will cast away the works of darkness, if ye will hate and detest all sort of iniquity, and if thou wilt run to the throne of grace now, I will assure thee thou shalt find mercy and grace in the time of need; so now is the throne of grace and mercy, but afterwards thou shalt see the throne of glory and justice. Now is the good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, and finding them, to drink of the wells of the water of life, and to eat of the fat things of His own house; but afterwards, such as would not be gathered of Him, He shall bind them hand and foot, and cast them into outer darkness. Now He pities them that will not come home, as He said to Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee, as a hen doth her birds under her wings, but thou wouldst not: behold, your habitation shall be made desolate." So woe to the souls that repine and refuse to be fetched within the sweet and loving arms of the Son of God, even those bloody arms which were stretched out upon a tree. Now, discern, I pray you, betwixt His first coming and His last coming; for now is the time of grace, and now is the Spirit of grace offered, and now is the throne of grace set up, and now is the rainbow, which is the sign of the covenant of life, round about the throne, and now the twelve ports of that new Jerusalem are standing open, that all may come in; therefore, Woe to the soul that "shall sit till this time of grace pass over, and will not come in in time.

But I will go forward: Now ye see two things in that throne, the one is a *great* throne, the other is a *white* throne. Let kings keep silence of their thrones, and speak of this throne. O ye kings, will ye look to the heavens above you, and see that white cloud, and upon the cloud one standing like the Son of man, having upon His head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle, who thrusts His sharp sickle in the earth, and cuts down the vine of the vineyards of the earth, and casts them into the great wine-press of the wrath of God; so He calls it a *great* throne. Solomon's throne was great which he made of ivory, and had six steps, and twelve lions, two on every step, and the queen of the South was astonished when she saw it; and it is said in the Song, "Come forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his marriage, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." But will ye come out, ye daughters of Zion, and see here another throne nor Solomon's, another crown nor his crown? It is a *great* throne, so that all the monarchs' thrones under heaven, what are they in comparison with this throne? Nothing. Therefore no wonder, that the twenty-four elders take

their own crowns, and cast them down before His throne; and it is no wonder that they fall down before Him that sits on the throne, and worship Him that lives for evermore, saying, "Thou art worthy to receive glory, honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy will's sake they are created." O that the men of the world saw this throne! And, O that ye did see the greatness of the majesty of His throne.

Now he calls it *great*, because of Him that sits on it; *great*, because of them that stand about it; *great*, because of them that shall be judged there; and last of all, *great*, because of the judgment itself. Now, who sits on it? O! the Judge of the whole world, God Himself, that infinite Essence that men and angels have borrowed their being from, even He whose glorious face the seraphims and cherubims cannot behold for the brightness thereof; and therefore they have wings to cover their faces, because they cannot bear to see Him, much less so then can any mortal man see His face and live; He that rides on His white horse, and tramples under foot all His enemies, and treads them in the winepress of His wrath without the city: therefore rejoice, all ye whose garments are made white in the blood of the Lamb, for His throne shall not terrify you, because of the Judge that sits thereon: for He is thy brother, thy advocate, and thy Saviour. O blessed for evermore is the soul of the righteous, and of such as are reconciled with the great God, before He come to sit on His throne.

Now, I said, it was *great* in respect of Him that sits thereon; *next* in respect of them that stand about it. Ye see a judge has his assizers that sit in judgment with him, and consent to his sentence; so this great judge has His assizers, for there is not one of His angels shall be left in heaven, but all shall stand about His throne, and all the saints on earth shall be caught up in the air, and they shall all have thrones set about His throne. O the fairest parliament that ever was in the world! O! behold the King crowned with many crowns, standing in the midst, and all the King's servants with their crowns on their heads, and also the saints with palms in their hands, sitting on thrones about that throne.

Thirdly, Great is this throne, because great is the number of persons that shall be there. All men and women in the world must be judged here; there is never a reprobate that ever took life, but they shall be judged here, and all the elect and saints of God shall be judged here also (so fair is this parliament), six thousand years' generations shall all stand there, waiting to receive an eternal and final judgment.

Last of all, *Great* is this throne, because great shall be the judgment that shall come forth from this throne. Lords of the Session think their judgments great; but come out here, and see to whom the new city Jerusalem in heaven shall be given, and who shall be cast into the lake of fire. Now, compare all these together, and see if this throne be not great; great is He that sits on the throne, even the Prince of life, and God of glory, and the Judge of all the world; great is His synod, even all the elect angels and saints, from the beginning of the world to the end of the world; for ye that are in Christ shall be glorified in the clouds, and the sight of your glory shall aggravate the torment of the reprobates, because they might have had it, and would not take it; and then you shall rule them with a rod of iron, and as a potter's vessel they shall be broken. And great is the number of them that shall be judged; for let all flesh prepare them for it, even kings and emperors, those that wore many crowns on the earth, must appear mother-naked before the throne. Alexander, thou worest many crowns, conquered many nations; but yet thou must stand up naked as thou wast born, and thou must render a reckoning of thy conquests.

But I leave this. Again, you see this throne is *white*. What means this whiteness? It is innocency or righteousness, and full of shining brightness, of an unspeakable joy. Innocent and righteous; how so? Because the Judge is white, innocent and righteous; all His assizers that shall sit round about Him, they are white, innocent, white and righteous; all His citations, summonses and convictions, sentences and executions, are innocent and

righteous. So all is white, the Judge, the unspotted innocent and undefiled Lamb of God, sitting on His throne of justice, and ordained deputy of His Father, to judge both the quick and the dead, He in whose heart was never found guile: therefore Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of the world judge righteously?" So this Judge is white, innocent, and He is bright and glorious. Peter, James, and John, saw Him white on the mount Tabor when he was transfigured, "and his face shined as the sun, and His raiment white as the light; and when Peter said, Master, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matthew 17:1-3). Ay, Peter, but this shall be a whiter appearing, and thou shalt think it better to be with Him here. Ay, Lord, it is true, *white* wast Thou upon mount Tabor, but whiter shalt Thou be in the clouds.

He is white again, in respect of His citations. O that our hearts were ravished with the consideration of Thy righteous and just citing and summoning of all men, when Thou shalt cause the earth, grave, hell, and the sea, and all places, thrust out of them all their dead; just shalt Thou be in glorifying the souls and bodies of them that glorify Thee on earth; and just shalt Thou be in glorifying Thyself, by tormenting the souls and bodies of them that dishonoured Thee on earth.

He is *white* in respect of His accusations, for there shall be nothing read in thy ditty, but that which shall be found written either in one leaf of thy conscience or other; there the sins of thy conception, there the sins of thy youth, there the sins of thy ignorance, there the sins against the light of thy conscience, and there the sins against the law, and there the sins against the gospel, and all shall be presented to thy conscience. O! well is the soul and conscience that dare lift up the head with rejoicing, and can say, "Thou Lamb of God, thou takest away the sins of the world," Thou tookest away my sins when Thou wast on the tree. And can any body tell how ye will compear before this throne that was never cleansed with the blood of Jesus? O that blackness and darkness which is abiding that soul which never yet ran to the blood of the Lamb, to make itself white in it! So the raising of all, the compearing of all, the accusation of all, the conviction of all, shall be just, and God shall be glorified in all.

There is also the absolution of the righteous, and the condemnation of the wicked; and therefore the throne is called white, because of the innocency and righteousness of the Judge. Now, brethren, I will go no further at this time than this that follows or remains to be spoken of, the majesty and terror of the Judge sitting on His throne, "and him that sat on it." Many shall sit on thrones in that day, but one shall sit above all the rest; for the saints shall be caught up in the air, and shall all sit on thrones, and give out sentence both of absolution and condemnation, and they shall say, "Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power be to the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments." I could never yet rightly consider the majesty of this Judge. O heavens! what aileth thee to flee from the face of this Judge? O earth! what aileth thee to flee, and why art thou chased away, and never seen again? What ails thee, O heavens, that never sinned, and O earth, that never sinned neither, for they had never understanding to be capable of a law, nor to be subject to keep a law? What means this? O but I must leave this! for who can but wonder at this? Yet I will tell you the cause, you and I, and the generations before that this firmament has seen, and this earth seen or born, since the first day that God made the earth, and established this heaven and earth, and since that day that Adam eat of the forbidden tree, since that day heaven and earth have been eye-witnesses of our sins, and subject to vanity, and since that day they have been defiled with our iniquities, and since that time they have been subject to bondage and corruption, and therefore they groan with us also, and travel

with pain together until this present: and therefore, in that great day, they cannot abide the face of the Judge.

Now, what is the fruit ye should make of this? I thank my God that I preach unto you so sure a gospel, even the oracles of the eternal God; the earth and the heavens shall pass away, but this word and oracle shall never pass away; therefore it is not a doubtful message that I carry unto you, for it is surer than the heavens, and surer than the earth; and these eyes of yours, that have seen both the heavens and the earth, shall see the truth of this spoken here. O that the Lord would fill my heart, my belly, with this verity, that I might eat it and drink it, and feed upon it continually, and that He would fill me with the spirit of exhortation, that I might exhort you to meditate on this truth both day and night, that the remembrance of that day might never go out of your hearts. O that you would do it, even for His sake that left you His heart's blood to slacken that fire which will burn both the heavens and the earth: therefore hear, hear! What should you hear? things of the last importance. Is hell, is heaven, is the terror of that day of any importance? And this is not the blessing of mount Gerizim, but that everlasting blessing which the Judge of all the world shall pronounce out of his mouth, saying, "Ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world." And it is nothing to the curse of the mount Ebal, but it is that everlasting curse and malediction which the Son of God shall pronounce, saying, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (And what shall I say to you?) This day is coming, and the Lord is preparing Himself to come down through the clouds, to sit on a great white throne, and the archangel is putting the trumpet to his mouth, and he is near to the blowing of it, and the rest of the angels are but waiting when they shall give the last shout, "Rise, dead, and come to judgment;" the Bridegroom is coming, and the heaven and the earth are waiting when the Lord shall come in His glory, in flaming fire, to burn them up.

Now, brethren, what should ye do then? It is but this one thing that I will charge you with, hear what I am to say to you, I bear the message of God, and I preach the gospel that shall judge you; and I am here sent of God to tell you what is His will towards you; therefore I charge you all before God, and His Son Christ Jesus, every man and woman, let this be your occupation this day, turn over the leaves of your conscience, and see there what is the ditty that thou hast pinned up against thyself, since the day that thou wast born, and look on thy sins before the Lord, and come and spread them before the Judge, and crave pardon of them, now in the day of grace; for He is ready to forgive thee and thy sins, were they never so great; for aye the redder that thy soul has been, the virtue of His blood shall appear the greater in cleansing thee from thy sins: therefore let none of you scare at the greatness of your sins; for here I testify unto you, that if any of you be condemned, it shall not be for your sins, but it shall be for contempt of that blood which shall condemn you. O God! full of mercy and goodness, and of fatherly care and providence, and never a greater providence found I in my lifetime, than I found this last time in my journey, I thank my God for it; and here I avow, if this blood of mine should go for it, it was acceptable service to God we did that day. I know there were many that sent up their prayers to God for the maintenance of his liberty, I am sure the Lord heard you; for I say to you, the room was never that I came to, but I found the Lord meeting me there, and confirming me that all was well and acceptable to Him; so that I never found sweeter providence since I was born. I see the Lord's hand is not shortened. O Scotland! O that thou wouldest repent, and mourn for the contempt of this so great a light that has shined in thee; then thou shouldst see as glorious a day on God's poor kirk within this land, as ever was seen in any kirk before from the beginning; then the Lord should be strong, and glorious, and wonderful in all the hearts of His own. What is it for him to run sixteen or eighteen score of miles to London, and

then run to the hearts of kings, princes, and nobles of the land, and humble them, and subject them to the crown and kingdom of Jesus Christ? But let them think of it what they will, I know who has approved of us, for it is the running of the gospel through the whole land, and it is that the net of Christ may be spread over all, that if it were possible we may fang in a world in it, that they might not perish; it is that which we seek, and when I look to the eternity of wrath that is abiding the wicked of this world; then I may say, who would not pity a world of sinners? But I leave this, and I will give God the praise of His own glory, that He can begin and He can perfect His own work in you: therefore this is my petition to God, that ye may all be presented blameless before Him in that great day. Therefore I beseech you all, for Christ's sake, that every one of you would come in time, by speedy repentance, and that you would take up Christ in the arms of your souls, and that ye would take a fill of His flesh and blood, that ye may never hunger nor thirst any more; and, in like manner, He may know you in that great day to be His own sheep, marked with His own blood. Will ye have any pleasure at His coming, when ye have eaten and drunken, and taken your pleasures here, and then shall be flung into hell hereafter? So I would beseech you, in all lenity and meekness of mind, for Christ's cause, ye would not delay at least to mint at repentance; and if ye cannot get your hearts melted as ye would, yet run to God, and say, "Father, have mercy upon me; Father, forgive me," and cause me to repent; Father send down Thy Spirit to soften my heart. Now, if ye would do this, ye should be welcome to Him; for I assure you He delights to show mercy on poor penitent sinners, that would "repent and hunger, and thirst for righteousness." Now, I say no more now, but I commend you all to Him that is able to give you repentance and remission of sins in the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, and with the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

[November 1898]

A Sermon.

By the Rev. JOHN OWEN, D.D.

Preached before The House of Commons, 29th April, 1646,
on a day of Public Humiliation.

A vision of unchangeable, free mercy, in sending the means of grace
to undeserving sinners.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night There stood a man of Macedonia,
and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” – Acts 16:9.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is frequently in the Scripture compared to growing things; small in the beginning and first appearance, but increasing by degrees unto glory and perfection. The shapeless stone cut out without hands, having neither form nor desirable beauty given unto it, becomes a great mountain, filling the whole earth (Daniel 2:35). The small vine brought out of Egypt, quickly covers the hills with her shadow, her boughs reach unto the sea, and her branches unto the rivers (Psalm 80:8). The tender plant becomes as the cedars of God; and the grain of mustard seed to be a tree for the fowls of the air to make their nests in the branches thereof. Mountains are made plains before it, every valley is filled, and the crooked paths made straight, that it may have a passage to its appointed period: and all this, not only not supported by outward advantages, but in direct opposition to the combined power of this whole creation, as fallen, and in subjection to the “god of this world,” the head thereof. As Christ was “a tender plant,” seemingly easy to be broken, and “a root out of a dry ground,” not easily flourishing, yet liveth for ever; so his people and kingdom, though as a “lily among thorns,” as “sheep among wolves,” as a “turtle dove among a multitude of devourers,” yet stands unshaken, at least unshivered.

The main ground and foundation of all this is laid out in verses 6-9 of this chapter, containing a rich discovery how all things here below, especially such as concern the

gospel and church of Christ, are carried along through innumerable varieties, and a world of contingencies, according to the regular motions and goings forth of a free, eternal, unchangeable decree: as all inferior orbs, notwithstanding the eccentrics and irregularities of their own inhabitants, are orderly carried about by the first mover. In verse 6 the planters of the gospel are “forbid to preach the word in Asia (that part of it peculiarly so called), and in verse 7, assaying to go with the same message into Bithynia, they are crossed by the Spirit in their attempts; but in my text, are called to a place on which their thoughts were not at all fixed: which calling, and which forbidding, were both subservient to his free determination, who “worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11). And no doubt but in the dispensation of the gospel throughout the world, unto this day, there is the like conformity to be found to the pattern of God’s eternal decrees; though to the messengers not made known aforehand by revelation, but discovered in the effects, by the mighty working of Providence. Amongst other nations, this is the day of England’s visitation, “the day-spring from on high having visited this people,” and “the Sun of righteousness arising upon us, with healing in his wings,” a man of England hath prevailed for assistance, and the free grace of God hath wrought us help by the gospel.

Now, in this day, three things are to be done to keep up our spirits unto this duty of bringing down our souls by humiliation.

First, to take us off the pride of our own performances, endeavours, or any adherent worth of our own. “Not for your sakes do I this, said the Lord; be it known unto you, be ye ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel” [O house of England]. – (Ezekiel 36:32).

Secondly, to root out that atheistical corruption, which depresses the thoughts of men, not permitting them, in the highest products of Providence, to look above contingencies and secondary causes; though God “hath wrought all our works for us” (Isaiah 26:12); and “known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18).

Thirdly, to shew that the bulk of this people are as yet in the wilderness, far from their resting place, like sheep upon the mountains, as once Israel (Jeremiah 1:6), as yet wanting help by the gospel.

The two first of these will be cleared by discovering how that all revolutions here below, especially everything that concerns the dispensation of the gospel and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, are carried along, according to the eternally-fixed purpose of God, free in itself, taking neither rise, growth, cause, nor occasion, from anything amongst the sons of men. The third, by laying open the helpless condition of gospel-wanting souls, with some particular application, to all which my text directly leads me. The words in general are the relation of a message from heaven unto Paul, to direct him in the publishing of the gospel, as to the place, and persons wherein, and to whom he was to preach. And in them you have these four things; –

1. The manner of it; it was by vision. “A vision appeared.”
2. The time of it. “In the night.”
3. The bringer of it. “A man of Macedonia.”
4. The matter of it. Help for the Macedonians, interpreted (verse 10), to be by preaching of the gospel. A little clearing of the words will make way for observations.

I. For the manner of the delivery of this message; it was by vision. Of all the ways that God used of old to reveal Himself unto any in an extraordinary manner, which were sundry and various (Hebrews 1:1), there was no one so frequent as this of vision. Wherein this did properly consist, and whereby it was distinguished from other ways of the discovery of the secrets of the Lord, I shall not now discuss. In general, visions are revelations of the mind of

the Lord concerning some hidden things, present or future, and not otherwise to be known. And they were of two sorts; – 1. Revelations merely by word, or some other more internal species, without any outward sensible appearance, which, for the most part, was the Lord's way of proceeding with the prophets; which transient light, or discovery of things before unknown, they called a vision. 2. Revelations accompanied with some sensible apparitions, and that either – (1.) Of things, as usually among the prophets, rods and pots, wheels and trees, lamps, axes, vessels, rams, goats, and the like, were presented unto them. (2.) Of persons, and those, according to the variety of them, of three sorts. 1st. Of the second person of the Trinity: and this either, Firstly, in respect of some glorious beams of His deity as to Isaiah (6:1), with John (12:41); to Daniel (10:5,6) as afterwards to John (Revelation (1:13-15), to which you may add the apparitions of the glory of God, not immediately designing the second person, as Ezekiel (chapter 1). Secondly, with reference to His humanity to be assumed, as to Abraham (Genesis 18:1,2), to Joshua (5:13-15), &c. 2nd. Of angels, as unto Peter (Acts 12:7), to the woman (Matthew 28:2), to John (Revelation 22:8), &c.. 3rd. Of men, as in my text.

Now, the several advancements of all these ways in dignity and pre-eminence, according as they clearly make out intellectual verity, or according to the honour and exaltation of that whereof apparition is made, is too fruitless a speculation for this day's exercise. Our vision is of the latter sort, accompanied with a sensible appearance, and is called *horama*. There be two words in the New Testament signifying vision, *horama* and *optasia*, coming from different verbs, but both signifying to see. Some distinguish them, and say that *optasia* is a vision, *kath' hupar*, an appearance to a man awake; *horama kath' onar*, an appearance to a man asleep, called sometimes a dream (Job 33:15), like that which was made to Joseph (Matthew 2:19). But this distinction will not hold, our Saviour calling that vision which His disciples had at His transfiguration, when doubtless they were waking, *horama* (Matthew 17:9). So that I conceive Paul had his vision waking; and the night is specified as the time thereof, not to intimate his being asleep, but rather his watchfulness, seeking counsel of God in the night, which way he should apply himself in the preaching of the gospel. And such, I suppose, was that of latter days, whereby God revealed to Zuinglius a strong confirmation of the doctrine of the Lord's supper, from Exodus 12:11, against the factors for that monstrous figment of transubstantiation.

II. For the second, or time of this vision, I need say no more than what before I intimated.

III. The bringer of the message – he was a man of Macedonia in a vision: the Lord made an appearance unto him, as of a man of Macedonia, discovering even to his bodily eyes a man, and to his mind, that he was to be conceived as a man of Macedonia. This was, say some, an angel; the tutelar angel of the place, say the popish expositors, or the genius of the place, according to the phrase of the heathens, of whom they learned their demonology; perhaps him, or his antagonist, that not long before appeared to Brutus at Philippi. But these are pleasing dreams: us it may suffice, that it was the appearance of a man, the mind of Paul being enlightened to apprehend him as a man of Macedonia; and that with infallible assurance, such as usually accompanieth divine revelations in them to whom they are made, as Jeremiah 23:28, for upon it Luke affirmeth, verse 10, they assuredly concluded that the Lord called them into Macedonia.

IV. The message itself is a discovery of the want of the Macedonians, and the assistance they required, which the Lord was willing should be imparted unto them. Their want is not expressed, but included in the assistance desired, and the person unto whom for it they were directed. Had it been to help them in their estates, they should scarcely have been sent to Paul, who, I believe, might for the most part say with Peter, "Silver and gold have I none." Or

had it been with a complaint, that they, who from a province of Greece, in a corner of Europe, had on a sudden been exalted into the empire of the eastern world, were now enslaved to the Roman power and oppression, they might better have gone to the Parthians, then the only state in the world formidable to the Romans. Paul, though a military man, yet fought not with Nero's legions, the then visible devil of the upper world; but with legions of hell, of whom the earth was now to be cleared. It must be a soul-want, if he be intrusted with the supplying of it. And such this was, help from death, hell, Satan, from the jaws of that devouring lion. Of this the Lord makes them here to speak what everyone in that condition ought to speak, Help for the Lord's sake. It was a call to preach the gospel.

The words being opened, we must remember what was said before of their connection with the verses foregoing; wherein the preachers of the gospel are expressly hindered, from above, from going to other places, and called hither. Whereof no reason is assigned, but only the will of Him that did employ them; and that no other can be rendered, I am farther convinced, by considering the empty conjectures of attempters. God foresaw that they would oppose the gospel, says our Beda. So, say I, might He of all nations in the world, had not He determined to send His effectual grace for the removal of that opposition; besides, He grants the means of grace to despisers (Matthew 11:21). They were not prepared for the gospel, says Oecumenius. As well, say I, as the Corinthians, whose preparations you may see (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), or any other nation, as we shall afterward declare: yet to this foolish conjecture adhere the Papists and Arminians. God would have those places left for to be converted by John, says Sedulius; yet the church at Ephesus, the chief city of those parts, was planted by Paul, say Ignatius and Irenaeus. He foresaw a famine to come upon those places, says Origen, from which He would deliver His own, and therefore, it seems, left them to the power of the devil. More such fancies might we recount, of men unwilling to submit to the will of God; but upon that, as the sole discriminating cause of these things, we rest, and draw these three observations: –

I. The rule whereby all things are dispensed here below, especially in the making out of the means of grace, is the determinate will and counsel of God. Stay not in Asia, go not into Bithynia, but come to Macedonia, “even so, O Father, for so,” &c.

II. The sending of the gospel to any nation, place, or persons, rather than others, as the means of life and salvation, is of the mere free grace and good pleasure of God. “Stay not in Asia,” &c.

III. No men in the world want help like them that want the gospel. “Come and help us.”

I. Begin we with the first of these: The rule whereby, &c. All events and effects, especially concerning the propagation of the gospel and the church of Christ, are, in their greatest variety, regulated by the eternal purpose and counsel of God. All things below, in their events, are but the wax whereon the eternal seal of God's purpose hath left its own impression; and they every way answer unto it. It is not my mind to extend this to the generality of things in the world, nor to shew how the creature can by no means deviate from that eternal rule of providence whereby it is guided; no more than an arrow can avoid the mark after it hath received the impression of an unerring hand; or well-ordered wheels not turn according to the motion given them by the master-spring; or the wheels in Ezekiel's vision move irregularly to the spirit of life that was in them. Nor yet, secondly, how that, on the other side, doth no way prejudice the liberty of second causes, in their actions agreeable to the natures they are indued withal. He who made and preserves the fire, and yet hinders not but that it should burn, or act necessarily agreeable to its nature; by His making, preserving, and guiding of men, hindereth not, yea, effectually causeth, that they work freely,

agreeable to their nature. Nor yet, thirdly, to clear up what a strait line runs through all the darkness, confusion, and disorder in the world, how absolutely, in respect of the first fountain, and last tendency of things, there is neither deformity, fault, nor deviation, every thing that is amiss consisting in the transgression of a moral rule, which is the sin of the creature, the first cause being free; as he that causeth a lame man to go is the cause of his going, but not of his going lame; or the sun exhaling a smell from the kennel is the cause of the smell, but not of its noisomeness, for from a garden his beams raise a sweet savour. Nothing is amiss but what goeth off from its own rule; which he cannot do who will do all his pleasure, and knows no other rule. But omitting these things, I shall tie my discourse to that which I chiefly aimed at in my proposition, viz., to discover how the great variety which we see in the dispensation of the means of grace, proceedeth from, and is regulated by, some eternal purpose of God, unfolded in His word. To make out this, we must lay down three things. 1. The wonderful variety in dispensing of the outward means of salvation, in respect of them unto whom they were granted, used by the Lord since the fall; I say, since the fall, for the grace of preserving from sin, and continuing with God, had been general, universally extended to every creature; but for the grace of rising from sin, and coming again unto God, that is made exceeding various, by some distinguishing purpose. 2. That this outward dispensation being presupposed, yet in effectual working upon particular persons, there is no less variety, for "he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy." 3. Discover the rules of this whole administration.

1. For the first, the promise was at first made unto Adam, and by him doubtless conveyed to his issue, and preached to the several generations, which his eyes beheld, proceeding from his own loins; but yet the wickedness of the old world, all flesh corrupting their ways, we may easily collect, that the knowledge of it quickly departed from the most, sin, banishing the love of God from their hearts, hindered the knowledge of God from continuing in their minds. After many revivings, by visions, revelations, and covenants, it was at length called in from the wide world, and wholly restrained to the house, family, and seed of Abraham, with whom alone all the means of grace continued for thrice fourteen generations; they alone were in Goshen, and all the world besides in thick darkness; the dew of heaven was on them as the fleece, when else all the earth was dry. "God shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel, he hath not dealt so with any nation" (Psalm 141:19,20). The prerogative of the Jews was chiefly in this, that to them were committed the oracles of God (Romans 3). "To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, the covenants, and the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:4). But when the fulness of time came, the Son of God being sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, drew all men unto Him; and God, who had before winked at the time of their ignorance, then called them everywhere to repent, commanding the gospel to be preached to the universality of reasonable creatures, and the way of salvation to be proclaimed unto all; upon which, in few years, the sound of the gospel went out into all nations, and the Sun of righteousness displayed His beams upon the habitable parts of the earth. But yet once more this light, by Satan and his agents, persecutors, and seducers, is almost extinguished, as was foretold (2 Thessalonians 2), remaining but in few places, and burning dim where it was, the kingdom of the beast being full of darkness (Revelation 16:10). Yet God again raiseth up reformers, and by them kindles a light, we hope, never to be put out. But alas, what a spot of ground doth this shine on, in comparison of the former vast extents, and bounds of the Christian world! Now is all this variety, think you, to be ascribed unto chance, as the

philosopher thought the world was made by a casual concurrence of atoms? Or hath the idol free will, with the new goddess contingency, ruled in these dispensations? Truly neither the one nor the other, no more than the fly raised the dust by sitting on the chariot wheel; but all these things have come to pass, according to a certain unerring rule given them by God's determinate purpose and counsel.

2. Presupposing this variety in the outward means, how is it that thereupon one is taken, another left? The promise is made known to Cain and Abel; one the first murderer, the other the first martyr. Jacob and Esau had the same outward advantages, but the one becomes Israel, the other Edom – the one inherits the promises, the other sells his right for a mess of pottage. At the preaching of our Saviour some believed, some blasphemed; some said He was "a good man, others said, nay, but he deceived the people." Have we not the word in its power this day, and do we not see the like various effects; some continuing in impenitency, others in sincerity closing with Jesus Christ? Now, what shall we say to these things? What guides these wheels? Who thus steers His word for the good of souls? Why, this also, as I said before, is from some peculiarly distinguishing purpose of the will of God.

3. To open the third thing proposed, I shall shew (1) That all this variety is according to God's determinate purpose, and answereth thereunto; (2) The particular purposes from whence this variety proceedeth.

(1.) "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). As a man may be said to erect a fabric according to the counsel of his will, when he frameth it before in his mind, and maketh all things in event answer his preconceived platform. All things (especially all those things of which the apostle there treateth, gospel things) have their futurity, and manner of being, from His eternal purpose; whence also is the idea in the mind of God, of all things with their circumstances, that shall be: that is the first mover, continuing itself immoveable, giving to everything a regular motion, according to the impression which from that it doth receive. "For known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). If any attendants of actions might free and exempt them from the regular dependance we insist upon, they must be either contingency or sin; but yet for both these we have, besides general rules, clear, particular instances. What seems more contingent and casual than the unadvised slaying of a man with the fall of the head of an axe from the helve, as a man was cutting wood by the wayside? (Deuteronomy 19:5). Yet God assumes this as His own work (Exodus 23:13). The same may be said of free agents and their actions. And for the other, see Acts 4:27,28, in the crucifying of the Son of God's love, all things came to pass according as His counsel had before determined that it should be done. Now, how in the one of these liberty is not abridged, the nature of things not changed in the other, sin is not countenanced, belongs not to this discourse. "The counsel of the Lord then standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart are unto all generations" (Psalm 33:12). "His counsel standeth, and he will do all his pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). "For he is the Lord, and he changeth not" (Malachi 3:6). "With him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning" (James 1:17). All things that are, come to pass in that unchangeable method in which He hath laid them down from all eternity.

(2.) Let us look peculiarly upon the purposes according to which the dispensations of the gospel, both in sending and withholding it, do proceed.

[1.] For the not sending of the means of grace unto any people, whereby they hear not the joyful sound of the gospel, but have in all ages followed dumb idols, as many do unto this day. In this chapter of which we treat, the gospel is forbidden to be preached in Asia and Bithynia, which restraint the Lord by His providence as yet continues to many parts of

the world. Now, the purpose from whence this proceedeth, and whereby it is regulated, you have, “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of his wrath fitted to destruction” (Romans 9:22), compared with, “Thou hast hid these things from the prudent and wise. Even so, O Father, for so it seemed good before thee” (Matthew 11:25,26), and with, “He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). Now, God’s not sending the truth hath the same design and aim with His sending the efficacy of error, viz, “That they all may be damned” who have it not, “there being no other name under heaven whereby they may be saved,” but only that which is not revealed unto them; God, in the meantime, being no more the cause of their sins, for which they incur damnation, than the sun is the cause of cold and darkness which follow the absence thereof, or he is the cause of a man’s imprisonment for debt, who will not pay his debt for him, though he be no way obliged so to do. So then the not sending of the gospel to any people is an act regulated by that eternal purpose of God, whereby He determineth to advance the glory of His justice, by permitting some men to sin, to continue in their sin, and for sin to send them to their own place: as a king’s not sending a pardon to condemned malefactors is an issue of his purpose, that they shall die for their faults. When you see the gospel strangely, and through wonderful varieties and unexpected providences, carried away from a people, know that the spirit which moves in those wheels is that purpose of God which we have recounted.

[2.] To some people, to some nations, the gospel is sent: God calls them to repentance and acknowledgment of the truth – as in my text, Macedonia; and England, the day wherein we breathe. Now there is in this a twofold aim: 1. Peculiar, towards some in their conversion; 2. General, towards all for conviction. And therefore it is acted according to a twofold purpose, which carries it along and is fulfilled thereby.

1st. His purpose of saving some in and by Jesus Christ, effectually to bring them unto Himself, for the praise of His glorious grace. Upon whomsoever the seal of the Lord is stamped, that God knows them, and owns them as His, to them He will cause His gospel to be revealed. In Acts 18:10, Paul is commanded to abide at Corinth, and to preach there, because God had much people in that city: though the devil had them in present possession yet they were God’s in His eternal counsel. And such as these they were, for whose sake the man of Macedonia is sent on his message. Have you never seen the gospel hover about a nation, now and then about to settle, and anon scared and upon wing again; yet working through difficulties, making plains of mountains, and filling valleys, overthrowing armies, putting aliens to flight, and at length taking firm root like the cedars of God? Truly, if you have not, you are strangers to the place wherein you live. Now, what is all this but the working of the purpose of God to attain its proposed end of gathering His saints to Himself? In effectual working of grace also for conversion and salvation, whence do you think it takes its rule and determination, in respect of particular objects, that it should be directed to John, not Judas; Simon Peter, not Simon Magus? Why, only from this discriminating counsel of God from eternity, to bring the one and not the other to Himself by Christ. “The Lord added to the church such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). The purpose of saving is the rule of adding to the church of believers. And, “As many believed as were ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48). Their fore-ordaining to life eternal gives them right to faith and belief. The purpose of God’s election is the rule of dispensing saving grace.

2nd. His purpose of leaving some inexcusable in their sins for the farther manifestation of His glorious justice, is the rule of dispensing the word unto them. Did you never see the gospel sent or continued to an unthankful people, bringing forth no fruits meet for it? Wherefore it is so sent (see Isaiah 6:9,10), which prophecy you have fulfilled (John 12:41,42), in men described (Jude 4; 1 Peter 2:8). But here we must strike sail; the waves swell, and it

is no easy task to sail in this gulf. The righteousness of God is a great mountain, easy to be seen; but His judgments like the great deep; who can search into the bottom thereof? (Psalm 36:6). And so I have, I hope, discovered how all things here below, concerning the promulgation of the gospel, are, in their greatest variety, straightly regulated by the eternal purposes and counsel of God. The uses of it follow.

Use 1. To discover whence it is that the work of reforming the worship of God, and settling the almost departing gospel, hath so powerfully been carried along in this nation; that a beautiful fabric is seen to arise in the midst of all oppositions, with the confusion of axes and hammers sounding about it, though the builders have been forced oftentimes, not only with one hand but with both, to hold the weapons of war; that although the wheels of our chariots have been knocked off, and they driven heavily, yet the regular motions of the superior wheels of providence have carried on the design towards the resting-place aimed at; that the ship hath been directed to the port, though the storm had quite puzzled the pilots and mariners: even from hence, that all this great variety was but to work out one certain, fore-appointed end, proceeding in the tracts and paths which were traced out for it from eternity; which, though they have seemed to us a maze or labyrinth, such a world of contingencies and various chances hath the work passed through, yet, indeed, all the passages thereof have been regular and straight, answering the platform laid down for the whole in the counsel of God. Daniel, chapter 9, makes his supplication for the restoration of Jerusalem; in verse 23, an angel is sent to tell him that “at the beginning of his supplication the commandment came forth,” viz. that it should be accomplished; it was before determined, and is now set on work: but yet what mountains of opposition, what hindrances, lay in the way! Cyrus must come to the crown, by the death or slaughter of Darius; his heart be moved to send some to the work. In a short time Cyrus is cut off. Now difficulties arise from the following kings. What their flattering counsellors, what the malignant nations about them conspired, the books of Nehemiah and Ezra sufficiently declare. Whence, in verse 25, the angel tells Daniel that from “the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall in troublesome times.” That is, it shall be seven weeks to the finishing of Jerusalem, and thence to Messiah the prince, sixty-two weeks seven weeks, that is, forty-nine years, for so much it was, from the decree of Cyrus to the finishing of the wall by Nehemiah; of which time the temple, as the Jews affirmed, was all but three years in building (John 2:20). During which space, how often did the hearts of the people of God faint in their troubles, as though they should never have seen an end? And therefore, ever and anon, they were ready to give over, as in Haggai 1:2. But yet we see the decree was fixed, and all those varieties did but orderly work in an exact method for the glorious accomplishment of it.

England’s troubles have not yet endured above half the odd years of those reformers’ task; yet, how short breathed are men! What fainting is there! What repining, what grudging against the ways of the Lord! But let me tell you, that as the water in the stream will not go higher than the head of the fountain, no more will the work in hand be carried one step higher, or beyond the aim of its fountain, the counsel of God, from whence it hath its rise. And yet, as a river will break through all oppositions, and swell to the height of mountains, to go to the sea from whence it came; so will the stream of the gospel, when it comes out from God, break down all mountains of opposition, and not be hindered from resting in its appointed place. It were an easy thing to recall your minds to some trembling periods of time, when there was trembling in our armies, and trembling in our councils; trembling to be ashamed, to be repented of; trembling in the city, and in the country; and men were almost at their wits’ end for the sorrows and fears of those days; and yet we see how the

unchangeable purpose of God hath wrought strongly through all these straits, from one end to another, that nothing might fall to the ground of what He had determined. If a man in those days had gone about to persuade us that all our pressures were good omens, that they all wrought together for our good, we could have been ready to cry with the woman who, when she had recounted her griefs to the physician, and he still replied they were good signs, “good signs have undone me,” these good signs will be our ruin: yet, behold, we hope the contrary. Our day hath been like that mentioned (Zechariah 14:6,7), a day whose light is neither clear nor dark, a day known only to the Lord, seeming to us to be neither day nor night. But God knew all this while that it was a day, He saw how it all wrought for the appointed end, and in the evening, in the close, it will be light – so light as to be to us discernible. In the meantime we are like unskilful men going to the house of some curious artist, so long as he is about his work, despise it as confused, but when it is finished admire it as excellent. Whilst the passages of providence are on us, all is confusion, but when the fabric is reared, glorious.

Use 2. Learn to look upon the wisdom of God in carrying all things through this wonderful variety, exactly to answer His own eternal purpose; suffering so many mountains to lie in the way of reforming His churches and settling the gospel, that His spirit may have the glory, and His people the comfort, in their removal. It is a high and noble contemplation to consider the purposes of God, so far as by the event revealed, and to see what impressions His wisdom and power do leave upon things accomplished here below, to read in them a temporary history of His eternal counsels. Some men may deem it strange that His determinate will, which gives rule to these things, and could in a word have reached its own appointment, should carry His people so many journeys in the wilderness, and keep us thus long in so low estate. I say, not to speak of His own glory, which hath sparkled forth of this flinty opposition, there be divers things – things of light, for our good – which He hath brought forth out of all that darkness wherewith we have been overclouded. Take a few instances. (1.) If there had been no difficulties, there had been no deliverances. And did we never find our hearts so enlarged towards God upon such advantages, as to say, Well, this day’s temper of spirit was cheaply purchased by yesterday’s anguish and fear? That was but a being sick at sea. (2.) Had there been no tempests and storms, we had not made out for shelter. Did you never run to a tree for shelter in a storm, and find fruit which you expected not? Did you never go to God for safeguard in these times, driven by outward storms, and there find unexpected fruit, the “peaceable fruit of righteousness,” that made you say, Happy tempest, which cast me into such a harbour? It was a storm that occasioned the discovery of the golden mines of India. Hath not a storm driven some to the discovery of the richer mines of the love of God in Christ? (3.) Had not Esau come against him with four hundred men, Jacob had not been called Israel; he had not been put to it to try his strength with God, and so to prevail. Who would not purchase with the greatest distress that heavenly comfort which is in the return of prayers? The strength of God’s Jacobs in this kingdom had not been known, if the Esaus had not come against them. Some say this war hath made a discovery of England’s strength, what it is able to do. I think so also, not what armies it can raise against men, but with what armies of prayers and tears it is able to deal with God. Had not the brethren strove in the womb, Rebekah had not asked, “Why am I thus?” Nor received that answer, “The elder shall serve the younger,” Had not two sorts of people struggled in the womb of this kingdom, we had not sought, nor received, such gracious answers. Thus do all the various motions of the lower wheels serve for our good, and exactly answer the impression they receive from the master-spring, the eternal purpose of God. Of this hitherto.

II. The sending of the gospel to any one nation rather than another, as the means of life and salvation, is of the *mere free grace and good pleasure of God*.

Now, before I come to make out the absolute independency and freedom of this distinguishing mercy, I shall premise three things.

1. That the not sending of the gospel to any person or people is of God's mere good pleasure, and not of any peculiar distinguishing demerit in that person or people. No man or nation doth "majorem ponere obicem," lay more or greater obstacles against the gospel than another. There is nothing imaginable to lay a block in the passage thereof but only sin. Now, these sins are, or may be, of two sorts; either, first, Against the gospel itself, which may possibly hinder the receiving of the gospel, but not the sending of it, which it presupposeth; secondly, Against the covenant they are under, and the light they are guided by, before the beams of the gospel shine upon them. Now, in these generally all are equal, all having sinned and come short of the glory of God: and in particular sins against the law and light of nature, no nations have gone further than they which were soonest enlightened with the word, as afterward will appear: so that the sole cause of this is the good pleasure of God, as our Saviour affirmeth (Matthew 11:25,26).

2. That sins against the covenant of works, which men are under before the gospel comes unto them, cannot have any general demerit, that the means of life and salvation by free grace should not be imparted to them. It is true, all nations have deserved to be turned into hell, and a people that have had the truth, and detained it in ungodliness, deserve to be deprived of it; the first, by virtue of the sanction of the first broken covenant; the other, by sinning against that which they had of the second. But that men in a fallen condition, and not able to rise, should hereby deserve not to be helped up, needeth some distinction to clear it.

There is, then, a twofold demerit and indignity; – one merely negative, or a not deserving to have good done unto us; the other positive, deserving that good should not be done unto us. The first of these is found in all the world, in respect of the dispensation of the gospel. If the Lord should bestow it only on those who deserve it, He must for ever keep it closed up in the eternal treasure of His own bosom. The second is found directly in none, in respect of that peculiar way which is discovered in the gospel, because they had not sinned against it; which, rightly considered, gives no small lustre to the freedom of grace.

3. That there is a right in the gospel, and a fitness in that gracious dispensation to be made known to all people in the world; that no singular portion of the earth should be any longer a holy land, or any mountain of the world lift up its head above its fellows. And this right hath a double foundation.

(1.) The infinite value and worth of the blood of Christ, giving fulness and fitness to the promises founded thereon to be propounded to all mankind; for through His blood remission of sins is preached to whosoever believes on Him (Acts 10:43), – "to every creature" (Mark 16:15). God would have a price of that infinite value for sin laid down, as might justly give advantage to proclaim a pardon infinitely to all that will come in and accept of it, – there being in it no defect at all (though intentionally only a ransom for some), but that by it the world might know that He had done whatsoever the Father commanded Him (John 14:31),

(2.) In that economy and dispensation of the grace of the new covenant, breaking forth in these latter days, whereby all external distinction of places and persons, people and nations, being removed, Jesus Christ taketh all nations to be His inheritance, dispensing to all men the grace of the gospel, bringing salvation, as seemeth best to Him (Titus 2:11,12). For being lifted up, He drew all men unto Him, having redeemed us with His blood, "out of every kindred and tongue, people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). And on these two grounds it is that the gospel hath in itself a right and fitness to be preached to all, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

These things being premised, I come to the proof of the assertion.

Deuteronomy 7:7,8: Moses is very careful in sundry places to get this to take an impression upon their spirits, that it was mere free grace that exalted them into that condition and dignity wherein they stood, by their approach unto God, in the enjoyment of his ordinances; – in this most clearly rendering the cause of God’s love in choosing them, mentioned, in verse 7, to be only His love. In verse 8, His love towards them is the cause of His love, – His free love eternally determining, His free love actually conferring, those distinguishing mercies upon them. It was not for their righteousness, for they were a stiffnecked people (Deuteronomy 9:6).

Matthew 11:25,26: Our Saviour laying both these things together, the hiding of the mysteries of salvation from some, and revealing them to others, renders the same reason and supreme cause of both, of which no account can be rendered, only the good pleasure of God: “I thank thee, O Father.” And if any will proceed higher, and say, Where is the justice of this, that men equally obnoxious should be thus unequally accepted? we say, with Paul, “That he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. And who art thou, O man, that disputest against God?” “Si tu es homo, et ego homo, audiamus dicentem, O homo, Tu quis?” To send a pardon to some that are condemned, suffering the rest to suffer, hath no injustice. If this will not satisfy, let us say, with the same apostle, in Romans 11:33, “O the depth,” &c.

Yea, so far is it from truth, that God should dispense and grant His word and means of grace by any other rule, or upon any other motive, than His own will and good pleasure, that we find in Scripture the direct contrary to what we would suppose, – even mercy showed to the more unworthy, and the more worthy passed by; reckoning worthiness and unworthiness by less or greater sin, with less or more endeavours. Christ preaches to Chorazin and Bethsaida, which would not repent; and at the same time denies the word to Tyre and Sidon, which would have gotten on sackcloth and ashes, when the other continued delicate despisers (Matthew 11:21). Ezekiel (3:5) is sent to them that would not hear him, passing by them that would have hearkened, which is most clear, “The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness” (Romans 9:30,31). If, in the dispensation of the gospel, the Lord had had any respect to the desert of people, Corinth, that famous place of sinning, had not so soon enjoyed it, – the people whereof, for *worship*, were led away with dumb idols (1 Corinthians 12:2); and for their *lives*, you have them drawn to the life, “Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers; effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). – Some of you were fornicators, some idolaters; “but ye are sanctified.” Seem not these to the eye of flesh goodly qualifications for the gospel of Jesus Christ? Had these men been dealt withal according as they had disposed themselves, not fitter fuel for hell could the justice of God require; but yet ye see to these the gospel comes with the first, “a light shines to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

If God send or grant the gospel, which is the means of grace, upon any other ground but his mere good pleasure, then it must be an act of remunerative justice. Now, there is no such justice in God towards the creature, but what is founded upon some preceding covenant, or promise of God to the creature, – which is the only foundation of all relation between God and man, – but only those that attend creation and sovereignty. Now, what promise do you find made to, or covenant with, a people as yet without the gospel – I mean conditional promises, inferring any good to be bestowed on any required performance on their part? Free, absolute promises there are innumerable, that light should shine to them that were in

darkness, and those be called God's people which were not His people; but such as depend on any condition on their part to be fulfilled, we find none. God bargains not with the creature about the gospel, knowing how unable he is to be merchant for such pearls. If a man had all that goodness which may be found in man without Jesus Christ, they would not in the least measure procure a discovery of him.

I deny not but God may, and perhaps sometimes doth, reveal himself to some in a peculiar and extraordinary manner. Whereunto tends that story in Aquinas, of a corpse taken up in the days of Constantine and Irene, with a plate of gold, and this inscription on it, "Christus nascetur ex virgine, ego credo in illum. O sol sub Irenae et Constantini temporibus iterum me videbis." But that this should be regular unto men living, or using their naturals aright (which is impossible they should, the right use of naturals depending on supernaturals), is wide from the word.

If there be any outward motive of granting the gospel unto any, it is some acceptable performances of theirs, holding up to the rule and will of God. Now, this will and rule having no saving revelation but by the gospel, which should thus be procured by acts agreeable unto it, make up a flat contradiction, – supposing the revelation of the gospel before it be revealed. Doubtless, according to all rules of justice to us made known, it is an easier thing to deserve heaven by obedience now under the covenant of works, than being under that covenant, to do any thing that might cause a new way of salvation; such as the gospel is, to be revealed.

With some observations I descend to application.

[1.] There is the same reason of continuing the gospel unto a people as of sending it; especially if oppositions rise high, apt and able in themselves for its removal. Never nation as yet enjoyed the word that deserved the continuance of the word. God hath always something against a people, to make the continuing of His grace to be of grace, the not removing of His love to be merely of love, and the preaching of the gospel to be a mercy of the gospel, free and undeserved. Though there be work, and labour, and patience for Christ's sake at Ephesus; yet there is somewhat against Ephesus (Revelation 2:4,5), for which He might justly remove His candlestick; and if He doth it not, it is of the same mercy that first set it there. As God lays out goodness and grace in the entrance; so patience, long-suffering, and forbearance in the continuance. He bears with our manners, whilst we grieve His Spirit. Look upon the face of this kingdom, and view the body of the people; think of the profaneness, villany, trampling upon the blood of Jesus, ignorance, contempt of God and His ways, despising His ordinances, reviling His servants, branding and defaming the power of godliness, persecuting and tearing one another, – and yet hear the joyful sound of the word in every corner; and you will quickly conclude, that you see a great fight of God's love against our sins, and not of our goodness for His love.

[2.] There is the same reason of the reformation and the doctrine of the gospel corrupted with error, and of the worship of God collapsed with superstition, as of the first implantation of the gospel. God, in His just judgment of late ages, had sent upon the western world the efficacy of error, that they should believe lies, because they received not the love of the truth; as He foretold (2 Thessalonians 2). Now, whence is it that we see some of the nations thereof as yet suffered to walk in their own ways, others called to repentance, some wildernesses turned into green pastures for the flock of God, and some places made barren wildernesses for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? How comes it that this island glories in a reformation, and Spain sits still in darkness? Is it because we were better than they, or less engaged in antichristian delusions? Doubtless no. No nation in the world drank deeper of that cup of abomination. It was a proverbial speech amongst all, "England was our good ass" (a beast of burden) for (Antichrist whom they called) the Pope. Nothing but

the good pleasure of God and Christ, freely coming to refine us (Malachi 3:1,4), caused this distinction.

[3.] Though men can do nothing towards the procuring of the gospel, yet men may do much for the expulsion of the gospel. If the husbandmen prove idle or self-seekers, the vineyard will be let to others; and if the people love darkness more than light, the candlestick will be removed. Let England beware! Now this men may do, either upon the first entrance of the gospel, or after some continuance of it. The gospel spreading itself over the earth, finds entertainment, like that of men's seeking plantations amongst the barbarous nations; sometimes kept out with hideous outcries at the shore, – sometimes suffered to enter with admiration, and a little after violently assaulted.

1st. In the first way, how do we find the Jews putting far from them the word of life, and rejecting the counsel of God *at its first entrance*, – calling for night at the rising of the sun! Hence, in Acts 13:41, Paul concludes his sermon to them with, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;” – and in verse 46, it was necessary the word should be preached to them; but seeing they judged themselves unworthy, they were forsaken; – and in verse 51, they shake off the dust of their feet against them, – a common symbol in those days of the highest indignation and deepest curse. The like stubbornness we find in them (Acts 28); whereupon the apostle wholly turned himself to the Gentiles, in verse 28. How many nations of Europe, at the beginning of the Reformation, rejected the gospel of God, and procured Christ, with the Gardarenes, to depart as soon as He was entered, will be found at the last day written with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus that suffered amongst them!

2ndly, After some continuance. So the Church of Laodicea, having for a while enjoyed the word, fell into such a tepid condition, – so little moved with that fire that Christ came to send upon the earth (Revelation 3:15,16), – that the Lord was even sick and weary with hearing them. The Church of Rome, famous at the first, yet quickly, by the advantage of outward supportments and glorious fancies, became head of that fatal rebellion against Jesus Christ, which spread itself over most of the churches in the world; God hereupon sending upon them the “efficacy of error to believe a lie, that they all might be damned that believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2) – suffering them to retain the empty names of Church and Gospel; which, because they usurp only for their advantage here, to appear glorious, the Lord will use for the advancing of His justice hereafter, to show them inexcusable. O Lord, how was England of late, by Thy mercy, delivered from this snare! A captain being chosen for the return of this people into Egypt, O how hath Thy grace fought against our backsliding! And let none seek to extenuate this mercy, by catalogues of errors still amongst us: there is more danger of apostasy against Christ, and rebellion against the truth, in one Babylonish error, owned by men pretending to power and jurisdiction over others, than in five hundred scattered amongst inconsiderable, disunited individuals. I would to God we could all speak and think the same things, – that we were all of one mind, even in the most minute differences that are now amongst us. But yet the truth is, the kingdom of Jesus Christ never shakes amongst a people until men, pretending to act with a combined mixed power of heaven and earth, unto which all sheaves must bow or be thrashed, do, by virtue of this trust, set up and impose things or opinions deviating from the rule. As it was in the Papacy, errors owned by mixed associations, civil and ecclesiastical, are for the most part incurable, be they never so absurd and foolish; of which the Lutheran ubiquities and consubstantiation are a tremendous example. These things being presupposed, –

Use 1. Let no flesh glory in themselves, but let every mouth be stopped; for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Who hath made the possessors of the gospel to differ

from others? or what have they that they have not received? (1 Corinthians 4:7). Why are these things hidden from the great and wise of the world, and revealed to babes and children, but because, O Father, so it pleased Thee? (Matthew 11:26). "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Romans 9:18). Ah, Lord, if the *glory and pomp of the world* might prevail with Thee to send Thy gospel, it would supply the room of the cursed Alkoran, and spread itself in the palaces of that strong lion of the east who sets his throne upon the necks of kings; but, alas! Jesus Christ is not there. If *wisdom, learning, pretended gravity, counterfeit holiness, real policy*, were of any value in thine eyes to procure the word of life, it would be as free and glorious at Rome as ever; but, alas! Antichrist hath his throne there. Jesus Christ is not there. If *will worship and humilities, neglect of the body, maceration, superstitions, beads, and vainly-repeated prayers*, had any efficacy before the Lord, the gospel, perhaps, might be in the cells of some recluses and monks; but, alas! Jesus Christ is not there. If *moral virtues* to an amazement, exact civil honesty and justice, that soul of human society, could have prevailed aught, the heathen worthies in the days of old had had the promises; but, alas! Jesus Christ was far away. Now, if all these be passed by, to whom is the report of the Lord made known? to "whom is his arm revealed?" Why, to a handful of poor sinners amongst the nations formerly counted fierce and barbarous. And what shall we say to these things? "O the depth," &c.

Use 2. Let England consider with fear and trembling the *dispensation that it is now under*; – I say, with fear and trembling, for this day is the Lord's day, wherein He will purge us or burn us, according as we shall be found silver or dross: – it is our day, wherein we must mend or end. Let us look to the rock from whence we were hewed, and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged. Was not our father an Amorite, and our mother an Hittite? Are we not the posterity of idolatrous progenitors? – of those who worshipped them who by nature were no gods? How often, also, hath this land forfeited the gospel! God having taken it twice away, who is not forward to seize upon the forfeiture. In the very morning of the gospel, the Sun of righteousness shone upon this land; and they say the first potentate on the earth that owned it was in Britain. But as it was here soon professed, so it was here soon abused; that part of this island which is called England being the first place I read of which was totally bereaved of the gospel, – the sword of the then pagan Saxons fattening the land with the blood of the Christian inhabitants, and in the close wholly subverting the worship of God. Long it was not ere this cloud was blown over: and those men who had been instruments to root out others submitted their own necks to the yoke of the Lord; and, under exceeding variety in civil affairs, enjoyed the word of grace, until, by insensible degrees, like summer unto winter, or light unto darkness, it gives place to antichristian superstition, and left the land in little less than a paganish darkness, drinking deep of the cup of abominations mingled for it by the Roman harlot. And is there mercy yet in God to recover a twice over lost backsliding people? Might not the Lord have said unto us, What shall I do unto thee, O island? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? But His heart is turned within Him, His repentings are kindled together: the dry bones shall live, and the fleece shall be wet, though all the earth be dry. God will again water His garden, once more purge His vineyard, – once more of His own accord He will take England upon liking, though He had twice deservedly turned it out of His service. So that, "coming as a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap, to purify the sons of Levi, to purge them as gold and silver, to offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness," to reform His Churches, England, as soon as any, hath the benefit and comfort thereof. Nay, the reformation of England shall be more glorious than of any nation in the world, being carried on neither by might nor power, but only by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. But is this the utmost period of England's sinning, and God's showing mercy, in continuing and restoring of the gospel? No, truly: we again in our days have made forfeiture of the purity of

His worship, by an almost universal treacherous apostasy; from which the free grace and good pleasure of God hath made a great progress again towards recovery.

There are two sorts of men that I find exceedingly ready to extenuate and lessen the superstition and popish tyranny of the former days, into which we were falling.

(1.) Such as were industriously instrumental in it, whose suffrages had been loud for the choice of a captain to return into Egypt, – men tainted with the errors and loaded with the preferments of the times; with all those who blindly adhere to that faction of men who as yet covertly drive on that design: – to such as these all was nothing, and to them it is no mercy to be delivered. And the truth is, it is a favour to the lamb, and not the wolf, to have him taken out of his mouth; but these men have interest by those things which have no ears, against which there is no contending.

(2.) Such as are disturbed in their optics, or have gotten false glasses, representing all things unto them in dubious colours. Which way soever they look, they can see nothing but errors, – errors of all sizes, sorts, sects, and sexes, – errors and heresies from the beginning to the end; which have deceived some men, not of the worst, and made them think that all before was nothing, in comparison of the present confusion. A great sign they felt it not, or were not troubled at it; as if men should come into a field, and seeing some red weeds and cockle among the corn, should instantly affirm there is no corn there, but all weeds, and that it were much better the hedges were down, and the whole field laid open to the boars of the forest: but the harvest will one day show the truth of these things. But that these apprehensions may not too much prevail, to the vilifying and extenuating of God's mercy, in restoring to us the purity and liberty of the gospel, give me leave in a few words, to set out the danger of that apostasy from which the good pleasure of God hath given us a deliverance. I shall instance only in a few things. Observe then, that, –

[1.] The darling errors of late years were all of them stones of the old Babel, closing and coupling with that tremendous fabric which the man of sin had erected to dethrone Jesus Christ, – came out of the belly of that Trojan horse, that fatal engine, which was framed to betray the city of God. They were popish errors, such as whereof that apostasy did consist which only is to be looked upon as the great adverse state of the kingdom of the Lord Christ. For a man to be disorderly in a civil state, yea, oftentimes through turbulency to break the peace, is nothing to an underhand combination with some formidable enemy for the utter subversion of it. Heedless and headless errors may breed disturbance enough, in scattered individuals, unto the people of God; but such as tend to a peace and association “cum ecclesia malignantium,” tending to a total subversion of the sacred state, are far more dangerous. Now, such were the innovations of the late hierarchists. In worship, their paintings, crossings, crucifixes, bowings, cringings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany, rails, images, copes, vestments, – what were they but Roman varnish, an Italian dress for our devotion, to draw on conformity with that enemy of the Lord Jesus? In doctrine, the divinity of Episcopacy, auricular confession, free-will, predestination on faith, yea, works foreseen, “limbus patrum,” justification by works, falling from grace, authority of a church, which none knew what it was, canonical obedience, holiness of churches, and the like innumerable, – what were they but helps to Sancta Clara, to make all our articles of religion speak good Roman Catholic? How did their old father of Rome refresh his spirit, to see such chariots as those provided to bring England again unto him! This closing with Popery was the sting in the errors of those days, which cause pining, if not death, in the episcopal pot.

[2.] They were such as raked up the ashes of the ancient worthies, whose spirits God stirred up to reform his church, and rendered them contemptible before all, especially those of England, the most whereof died in giving their witness against the blind figment of the real presence, and that abominable blasphemy of the cursed mass. In especial, how did

England, heretofore termed ass, turn ape to the pope, having set up a stage, and furnished it with all things necessary for an unbloody sacrifice, ready to set up the abomination of a desolation, and close with the god Maozim (god of forces) (Daniel 11:38), who hath all their peculiar devotion at Rome?

[3.] They were in the management of men which had divers dangerous and pernicious qualifications: as, –

1st, A false repute of learning; I say, a false repute for the greater part, especially of the greatest. And yet, taking advantage of vulgar esteem, they bare out as though they had engrossed a monopoly of it, – though I presume the world was never deceived by more empty pretenders, especially in respect of any solid knowledge in divinity or antiquity: but yet their great preferments had got them a great repute of great deservings, – enough to blind the eyes of poor mortals adoring them at a distance, and to persuade them, that all was not only law, but gospel too, which they broached: and this rendered the infection dangerous.

2ndly, A great hatred of godliness in the power thereof, or any thing beyond a form, in whomsoever it was found; yea, how many odious appellations were invented for bare profession, to render it contemptible! – especially in the exercise of their jurisdiction, thundering their censures against all appearance of zeal, and closing with all profane impieties; for were a man a drunkard, a swearer, a Sabbath-breaker, an unclean person, so he were no Puritan, and had money, – “patet atri janua ditis,” the Episcopal heaven was open for them all. Now, this was a dangerous and destructive qualification, which, I believe, is not professedly found in any party amongst us.

3dly, Which was worst of all, they had centred in their bosoms an unfathomable depth of power, civil and ecclesiastical, to stamp their apostatical errors with authority, – giving them not only the countenance of greatness, but the strength of power, violently urging obedience; and to me the sword of error never cuts dangerously but when it is managed with such a hand. This I am sure, that errors in such are not recoverable, without the utmost danger of the civil state.

Let now, I beseech you, these and the like things be considered, especially the strong combination that was throughout the papal world for the seducing of this poor nation (that I say nothing how this vial was poured out upon the very throne), and then let us all be ashamed and confounded in ourselves, that we should so undervalue and slight the free mercy of God in breaking such a snare, and setting the gospel at liberty in England. My intent was, having before asserted this restoration of Jerusalem to the good pleasure of God, to have stirred you up to thankfulness unto him, and self-humiliation in consideration of our great undeserving of such mercy; but, alas! as far as I can see, it will scarce pass for a mercy; and unless every man’s persuasion may be a Joseph’s sheaf, the goodness of God shall scarce be acknowledged. But yet let all the world know, and let the house of England know this day, that we lie unthankfully under as full a dispensation of mercy and grace as ever nation in the world enjoyed, and that without a lively acknowledgment thereof, with our own unworthiness of it, we shall one day know what it is (being taught with briers and thorns) to undervalue the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus. What would helpless Macedonians give for one enjoyment? O that Wales! O that Ireland! O that France! – where shall I stop? I would offend none, but give me leave to say, O that every, I had almost said, O that any part of the world had such helps and means of grace as these parts of England have, which will scarce acknowledge any mercy in it! The Lord break the pride of our spirits before it break the staff of our bread and the help of our salvation. O that the bread of heaven and the blood of Christ might be accounted good nourishment, though every one hath not the sauce he desireth! I am persuaded that if every Absalom in the land, that would

be a judge for the ending of our differences, were enthroned (he spoke the people's good, though he intended his own power), the case would not be much better than it is. Well, the Lord make England, make this honourable audience, make us all, to know these three things: –

First, That we have received such a blessing, in setting at liberty the truths of the gospel, as is the crown of all other mercies, yea, without which they were not valuable, yea, were to be despised; for success without the gospel is nothing but a prosperous conspiracy against Jesus Christ.

Secondly, That this mercy is of mercy; this love, of free love; and the grace that appeareth, of the eternal, hidden, free grace of God. He hath showed his love unto us because he loved us, and for no other reason in the world; – this people being guilty of blood and murder of soul and body, adultery, and idolatry, and oppression, with a long catalogue of sins and iniquities.

Thirdly, That the height of rebellion against God is the despising of spiritual gospel mercies. Should Mordecai have trodden the robes under his feet that were brought him from the king, would it not have been severely revenged? Doth the King of heaven lay open the treasures of his wisdom, knowledge, and goodness for us, and we despise them? What shall I say? I had almost said, hell punishes no greater sin: the Lord lay it not to our charge! O that we might be solemnly humbled for it this day, before it be too late!

Use 3. To discover unto us the freedom of that effectual grace which is dispensed towards the elect, under and with the preaching of the word; for if the sending of the outward means be of free, undeserved love, surely the working of the Spirit under that dispensation for the saving of souls is no less free; for “who hath made us differ from others? and what have we that we have not received?” O that God should say unto us in our blood, Live; – that he should breathe upon us when we were as dry bones, dead in trespasses and sins! Let us remember, I beseech you, the frame of our hearts and the temper of our spirits, in the days wherein we knew not God and his goodness, but went on in a swift course of rebellion. Can none of you look back upon any particular days or nights, and say, Ah, Lord, that thou shouldst be so patient and so full of forbearance, as not to send me to hell at such an instant! But, O Lord, that thou shouldst go farther, and blot out mine iniquities, for thine own sake, “when I made thee serve with my sins!” – Lord, what shall I say it is? It is the free grace of my God! What expression transcendeth that, I know not.

Use 4. Of caution. England received the gospel of mere mercy; let it take heed lest it lose it by justice; – the placer of the candlestick can remove it. The truth is, it will not be removed unless it be abused; and woe to them from whom mercies are taken for being abused, – from whom the gospel is removed for being despised! It had been better for the husbandmen never to have had the vineyard, than to be slain for their ill using of it: there is nothing left to do them good who are forsaken for forsaking the gospel.

The glory of God was of late by many degrees departing from the temple in our land. That was gone to the threshold, yea, to the mount. If now at the return thereof, it find again cause to depart, it will not go by steps, but all at once. This island, or at least the greatest part thereof, as I formerly intimated, hath twice lost the gospel – once, when the Saxons wrested it from the Britons, when, if we may believe their own doleful, moaning historian, they were given over to all wickedness, oppression, and villany of life; which doubtless was accompanied with contempt of the word; though for faith and persuasion we do not find that they were corrupted, and do find that they were tenacious enough of antique discipline, as appeared in their following oppositions to the Roman tyranny, as in Beda. Secondly, It was lost in regard of the purity and power thereof, by blind superstition and antichristian impiety, accompanied also with abominable lewdness, oppression, and all

manner of sin, in the face of the sun; so that first profaneness working a despising of the gospel, then superstition ushering in profaneness, have in this land showed their power for the extirpation of the gospel. Oh, that we could remember the days of old, that we could “consider the goodness and severity of God; – on them which fell severity, but towards us goodness, if we continue in that goodness; for otherwise even we also shall be cut of!” Yet here we may observe, that though both these times there was a forsaking in the midst of the land, yet there was in it a tenth for to return “as a teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves;” so was the holy seed the substance thereof (Isaiah 6:13). As in the dereliction of the Jews, so of this nation, there was a remnant that quickly took root, and brought forth fruit, both in the one devastation and the other. Though the watcher and the holy one from heaven had called to cut down the tree of this nation, and to scatter its branches from flourishing before him; yet the stump and root was to be left in the earth with a band of iron, that it might spring again. Thus twice did the Lord come seeking fruit of this vine, doing little more than pruning and dressing it, although it brought forth wild grapes; but if he come the third time and find no fruit, the sentence will be, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” Now, to prevent this, I shall not follow all those gospel-supplanting sins we find in holy writ, only I desire to cautionate you and us all in these three things.

(1.) Take heed of pretending or holding out the gospel for a covert or shadow for other things. God will not have his gospel made a stalking-horse for carnal designs. Put not in that glorious name, where the thing itself is not clearly intended. If in any thing it be, let it have no compeer; if not, let it not be named. If that you aim at be just, it needs no varnish; if it be not, it is the worse for it. Gilded pills lose not their bitterness, and painted faces are thought to have no native beauty. All things in the world should serve the gospel; and if that be made to serve other things, God will quickly vindicate it into liberty.

From the beginning of these troubles, right honourable, you have held forth religion and the gospel, as whose preservation and restoration was principally in your aims; and I presume malice itself is not able to discover any insincerity in this. The fruits we behold proclaim to all the conformity of your words and hearts. Now, the God of heaven grant that the same mind be in you still, in every particular member of this honourable assembly, in the whole nation, especially in the magistracy and ministry of it; – that we be not like the boatmen – look one way and row another; – cry “Gospel,” and mean the other thing, – “Lord, Lord,” and advance our own ends; – that the Lord may not stir up the staff of his anger and the rod of his indignation against us, as a hypocritical people.

(2.) Take heed of resting upon and trusting to the privilege, however excellent and glorious, of the outward enjoyment of the gospel. When the Jews cried, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,” the time was at hand that they should be destroyed. Look only upon the grace that did bestow, and the mercy that doth continue it. God will have none of his blessings rob him of his glory; and if we rest at the cistern, he will stop at the fountain.

(3.) Let us all take heed of barrenness under it: “For the earth that drinks in the rain that cometh upon it, and beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned” (Hebrews 6:7,8). Now, what fruits doth it require! Even those reckoned (Galatians 5:22,23), “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” O that we had not cause to grieve for a scarcity of these fruits, and the abundant plenty of those works of the flesh recounted (verses 19-21)! O that that wisdom which is an eminent fruit of the gospel might flourish amongst us! – it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated;” – that we might have less writing, and more praying! – less envy, and more charity! – that all evil

surmisings, which are works of the flesh, might have no toleration in our hearts, but be banished for nonconformity to the golden rule of love and peace! (James 3:17). Come we now to the last proposition.

III. No men in the world want help like them that want the gospel; or, of all distresses, want of the gospel cries the loudest for relief.

Rachel wanted children, and she cries, "Give me children, or I die;" – but that was her impatience; she might have lived, and have had no children; yea, see the justice of God, – she dies so soon as ever she hath children. Hagar wants water for Ishmael, and she will go far from him, that she may not see him die; – a heavy distress; and yet if he had died, it had been but an early paying of that debt which in a few years was to be satisfied. But they that want the gospel may truly cry, Give us the gospel, or we die; and that not temporally with Ishmael, for want of water, but eternally in flames of fire.

A man may want liberty, and yet be happy, as Joseph was; a man may want peace, and yet be happy, as David was; a man may want children, and yet be blessed, as Job was; a man may want plenty, and yet be full of comfort as Micaiah was; – but he that wants the gospel, wants everything that should do him good. A throne without the gospel is but the devil's dungeon. Wealth without the gospel is fuel for hell. Advancement without the gospel is but a going high to have the greater fall.

Abraham wanting a child, complains, "What will the Lord do for me, seeing I go childless, and this Eliezer of Damascus must be my heir?" Much more may a man without the means of grace complain, What shall be done unto me, seeing I go gospelless; and all that I have is but a short inheritance for this lump of clay, my body?

When Elisha was minded to do something for the Shunammite who had so kindly entertained him, he asks her whether he should speak for her to the king or the captain of the host. She replies, she dwelt in the midst of her own people, she needeth not those things; but when he finds her to want a child, and tells her of that, she is almost transported. Ah! how many poor souls are there who need not our word to the king or the captain of the host; but yet being gospelless, if you could tell them of that, would be even ravished with joy!

Think of Adam after his fall, before the promise, hiding himself from God, and you have a perfect portraiture of a poor creature without the gospel. Now this appeareth, –

1. *From the description we have of the people that are in this state and condition* – without the gospel. They are a people that sit in darkness, yea, in the region and shadow of death (Matthew 4:16,17); they are even darkness itself (John 1:5), – within the dominion and dreadful darkness of death. Darkness was one of Egypt's plagues, but yet that was a darkness of the body, a darkness wherein men lived; – but this is a darkness of the soul, a darkness of death; for these men, though they live, yet are they dead. They are fully described (Ephesians 2:12), "Without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Christless men, and Godless men, and hopeless men, – and what greater distress in the world? Yea, they are called dogs, and unclean beasts. The wrath of God is upon them; they are the people of his curse and indignation. In the extreme north, one day and one night divide the year; but with a people without the gospel it is all night, – the Sun of righteousness shines not upon them; it is night whilst they are here, and they go to eternal night hereafter. What the men of China say concerning themselves and others, that they have two eyes, the men of Europe one, and all the world besides is blind, may be inverted too. The Jews had one eye, sufficient to guide them; they who enjoy the gospel have two eyes; but the men of

China, with the rest of the nations that want it, are stark blind, and reserved for the chains of everlasting darkness.

2. *By laying forth what the men that want the gospel do want with it.*

(1.) They want Jesus Christ, for he is revealed only by the gospel. Austin refused to delight in Cicero's "Hortensius," because there was not in it the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is all, and in all; and where he is wanting there can be no good. Hunger cannot truly be satisfied without manna, the bread of life, which is Jesus Christ; – and what shall a hungry man do that hath no bread? Thirst cannot be quenched without that water or living spring, which is Jesus Christ; – and what shall a thirsty soul do without water? A captive, as we are all, cannot be delivered without redemption, which is Jesus Christ; and what shall the prisoner do without his ransom? Fools, as we are all, cannot be instructed without wisdom, which is Jesus Christ; – without him we perish in our folly. All building without him is on the sand, which will surely fall. All working without him is in the fire, where it will be consumed. All riches without him have wings, and will away. "Mallem ruere cum Christo, quam regnare cum Caesare," ["I would rather to perish with Christ than to reign with Caesar."] said Luther. A dungeon with Christ, is a throne; and a throne without Christ, a hell. Nothing so ill, but Christ will compensate. The greatest evil in the world is sin, and the greatest sin was the first; and yet Gregory feared not to cry, "O felix culpa, quae talem meruit redemptorem!" – "O happy fault, which found such a Redeemer!" All mercies without Christ are bitter; and every cup is sweet that is seasoned but with a drop of his blood; – he truly is "amor et deliciae humani generis," – the love and delight of the sons of men, – without whom they must perish eternally; "for there is no other name given unto them, whereby they maybe saved" (Acts 4:12). He is the way; men without him are Cains, wanderers, vagabonds: – he is the Truth; men without him are liars, like the devil, who was so of old: – he is the Life; without him men are dead, dead in trespasses and sins: – he is the Light; without him men are in darkness, and go they know not whither: – he is the Vine; those that are not grafted in him are withered branches, prepared for the fire: – he is the Rock; men not built on him are carried away with a flood: – he is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the author and the ender, the founder and the finisher of our salvation. He that hath not him, hath neither beginning of good, nor shall have end of misery. O blessed Jesus! how much better were it not to be, than to be without thee! – never to be born, than not to die in thee! A thousand hells come short of this, eternally to want Jesus Christ, as men do that want the gospel.

(2.) They all want holy communion with God, wherein the only happiness of the soul doth consist. He is the life, light, joy, and blessedness of the soul; – without him the soul in the body is but a dead soul in a living sepulchre. It is true, there be many that say, "Who will show us any good?" but unless the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, we perish for evermore. "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord; and our heart is unquiet until it come to thee." You who have tasted how gracious the Lord is, who have had any converse and communion with him in the issues and goings forth of his grace, those delights of his soul with the children of men, would you live – would not life itself, with a confluence of all earthly endearments, be a very hell – without him? Is it not the daily language of your hearts, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and on earth there is nothing in comparison of thee?" The soul of man is of a vast, boundless comprehension; so that if all created good were centred into one enjoyment, and that bestowed upon one soul, because it must needs be finite and limited, as created, it would give no solid contentment to his affections, nor satisfaction to his desires. In the presence and fruition of God alone there is joy for evermore; at his right hand are rivers of pleasure, the wellsprings of life and blessedness. Now, if to be without communion with God in this life, wherein the soul

hath so many avocations from the contemplation of its own misery, (for earthly things are nothing else), is so unsupportable a calamity; ah! what shall that poor soul do that must want him for eternity? – as all they must do who want the gospel.

(3.) They want all the ordinances of God, the joy of our hearts and comfort of our souls. Oh! the sweetness of a Sabbath! the heavenly raptures of prayer! – oh! the glorious communion of saints, which such men are deprived of! If they knew the value of the hidden pearl, and these things were to be purchased, what would such poor souls not part with for them?

(4.) They will at last want heaven and salvation. They shall never come to the presence of God in glory, never inhabit a glorious mansion; – they shall never behold Jesus Christ, but when they shall call for rocks and mountains to fall upon them, to hide them from his presence; – they shall want light in utter darkness, want life under the second death, want refreshment in the midst of flames, want healing under gnawing of conscience, want grace continuing to blaspheme, want glory in full misery; – and, which is the sum of all this, they shall want an end of all this; for “their worm dieth not, neither is their fire quenched.”

3. Because being in all this want, they know not that they want any thing, and so never make out for any supply. Laodicea knew much; but yet because she knew not her wants, she had almost as good have known nothing. Gospelless men know not that they are blind, and seek not for eye-salve; they know not that they are dead, and seek not for life. Whatever they call for, not knowing their wants, is but like a man’s crying for more weight to press him to death; and therefore, when the Lord comes to any with the gospel, he is “found of them that sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him” (Romans 10:20). This is a seal upon their misery, without God’s free mercy, like the stone laid upon the mouth of the cave by Joshua, to keep in the five kings until they might be brought out to be hanged. All that men do in the world is but seeking to supply their wants; either their *natural* wants, that nature may be supplied; or their *sinful* wants, that their lusts may be satisfied; or their *spiritual* wants, that their souls may be saved. For the two first, men without the gospel lay out all their strength; but of the last there is amongst them a deep silence. Now this is all one as for men to cry out that their finger bleeds, whilst a sword is run through their hearts, and they perceive it not; – to desire a wart to be cured, whilst they have a plague-sore upon them. And hence, perhaps, it is that they are said to go to hell “like sheep” (Psalm 49:14), – very quietly, without dread, as a bird hasting to the snare, and not knowing that it is for his life (Proverbs 7:23), – and there lie down in utter disappointment and sorrow for evermore.

4. Because all mercies are bitter judgments to men that want the gospel, – all fuel for hell, – aggravations of condemnation; – all cold drink to a man in a fever, pleasant at the entrance, but increasing its torments in the close; – like the book in the Revelation, sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly. When God shall come to require his bread and wine, his flax and oil, peace and prosperity, liberty and victories of gospelless men, they will curse the day that ever they enjoyed them. So unspiritual are many men’s minds, and so unsavoury their judgments, that they reckon men’s happiness by their possessions, and suppose the catalogue of their titles to be a roll of their felicities, calling the proud happy, and advancing in our conceits “them that work wickedness” (Malachi 3:15); but God will one day come in with another reckoning, and make them know that all things without Christ are but as ciphers without a figure, – of no value. In all their banquets, where Christ is not a guest, “their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the field of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter” (Deuteronomy 32:32,33); – their palaces, where Christ is not, are but habitations of ziim and ochim,

dragons and unclean beasts; – their prosperity is putting them into full pasture, that they may be fatted for the day of slaughter, the day of consumption decreed for all the bulls of Bashan. The gospel bringing Christ, is the salt that makes all other things savoury.

Use 1. To show us the great privilege and pre-eminence which, by the free grace of God, many parts of this island do enjoy. To us that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death a great light is risen, to guide us into the ways of peace. Let others recount the glories, benefits, profits, outward blessings of this nation; let us look only upon that which alone is valuable in itself, and makes other things so to be, – the gospel of Christ. It is reported of the heralds of our neighbour monarchs, that when one of them had repeated the numerous titles of his master of Spain, the other often repeated, France, France, France! intimating that the dominion which came under that one denomination would counterpoise the long catalogue of kingdoms and dukedoms wherewith the other flourished. Were we to contend with the grand seignior of the east about our enjoyments, we might easily bear down his windy, pompous train of titles with this one, – which “*millies repetitum placebit,*” – The gospel, the gospel! Upon all the other things you may put the inscription in Daniel, “*Mene, mene, tekel,*” – they are “*weighed in the balance, and found wanting;*” but proclaim before those that enjoy the gospel, as Haman before Mordecai, “*Lo, thus shall it be done to them whom the Lord will honour!*” The fox in the fable had a thousand wiles to save himself from the hunters; but the cat knew “*unum magnum,*” “*one great thing*” that would surely do it. Earthly supports and contentments are but a thousand failing wiles, which will all vanish in the time of need; the gospel, and Christ in the gospel, is that “*one great thing,*” that “*one thing needful,*” which alone will stand us in any stead. In this, this island is as the mountain of the Lord, – exalted above the mountains of the earth. It is true, many other nations partake with us in the same blessing. Not to advance our own enjoyments in some particulars, – wherein perhaps we might justly do it, – but take all these nations with us, and what a molehill are we to the whole earth, overspread with Paganism, Mohammedanism, Antichristianism, with innumerable foolish heresies! And what is England, that it should be amongst the choice branches of the vineyard, the top-boughs of the cedars of God?

Use 2. Shows that such great mercies, if not esteemed, if not improved, if abused, will end in great judgments. Woe be to that nation, that city, that person, that shall be called to an account for despising the gospel! (Amos 3:2), “*You only have I known of all the families of the, earth.*” What then? surely some great blessing is coming to that people whom God thus knows, so owns, as to make himself known unto them. No; but “*therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities.*” However others may have some ease or mitigation in their punishments, do you expect the utmost of my wrath. Luther said, he thought hell was paved with the bald skulls of friars. I know nothing of that; yet of this sure I am, that none shall have their portion so low in the nethermost hell, none shall drink so deep of the cup of God’s indignation, as they who have refused Christ in the gospel. Men will curse the day to all eternity wherein the blessed name of Jesus Christ was made known unto them, if they continue to despise it. He that abuseth the choicest of mercies, shall have judgment without mercy. What can help them who reject the counsel of God for their good? If now England has received more culture from God than other nations, there is more fruit expected from England than other nations. A barren tree in the Lord’s vineyard must be cut down for cumbering the ground; the sheep of God must “*every one bear twins, and none be barren amongst them*” (Song 4:2). If, after God’s care and husbandry, his vineyard brings forth wild grapes, he will take away the hedge, break down the wall, and lay it waste. For the present, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of England; and if it be as earth which, when the rain falls upon it, brings forth nothing but thorns and briars, it is nigh unto cursing, and the end thereof is to be burned (Hebrews 6:8). Men utterly and for ever neglect that

ground which they have tried their skill about, and laid out much cost upon, if it bring not forth answerable fruits. Now, here give me leave to say, and the Lord avert the evil deserved by it! that England (I mean these cities and those other places which since the beginning of our troubles have enjoyed the gospel in a more free and plentiful manner than heretofore) hath showed itself not much to value it.

(1.) In the time of straits, though the sound of the gospel passed through all our streets, our villages enjoying them who preached peace and brought glad tidings of good things, so that neither we, nor our fathers, nor our fathers' fathers, ever saw the like before us, – though manna fell round about our tents every day; yet, as though all were lost, and we had nothing, manna was loathed as light bread, – the presence of Christ made not recompense for the loss of our swine, – men had rather be again in Egypt, than hazard a pilgrimage in the wilderness. If there be any here that ever entertained thoughts to give up the worship of God to superstition, his churches to tyranny, and the doctrine of the gospel to episcopal corruptions, in the pressing of any troubles, let them now give God the glory, and be ashamed of their own hearts, lest it be bitterness in the end.

(2.) In the time of prosperity, by our fierce contentions about mint and cummin, whilst the weightier things of the gospel have been undervalued, languishing about unprofitable questions, &c.; but I shall not touch this wound, lest it bleed.

Use 3. For exhortation, that every one of us, in whose hand there is any thing, would set in for the help of those parts of this island that as yet sit in darkness, yea, in the shadow of death, and have none to hold out the bread of life to their fainting souls. Doth not Wales cry, and the north cry, yea, and the west cry, Come and help us? – we are yet in a worse bondage than any by your means we have been delivered from; – if you leave us thus, all your protection will but yield us a more free and jovial passage to the chambers of death. Ah! little do the inhabitants of Goshen know, whilst they are contending about the bounds of their pasture, what darkness there is in other places of the land; how their poor starved souls would be glad of the crumbs that fall from our tables! O that God would stir up the hearts, –

(1.) Of ministers, to cast off all by-respects, and to flee to those places where, in all probability, the harvest would be great, and the labourers are few or none at all! I have read of a heretic that swam over a great river in a frost to scatter his errors; the old Jewish, and now popish Pharisees, compass sea and land to make proselytes: the merchants trade not into more countries than the factors of Rome do to gain souls to his holiness. East and west, far and wide, do these locusts spread themselves, not without hazard of their lives as well as the loss of their souls, to scatter their superstitions; – only the preachers of the everlasting gospel seem to have lost their zeal. O that there were the same mind in us that was in Jesus Christ, – who counted it his meat and drink to do his Father's will, in gaining souls!

(2.) Of the magistrates, – I mean, of this honourable assembly, – to turn themselves every lawful way for the help of poor Macedonians. The truth is, in this I could speak more than I intend; for perhaps my zeal and some men's judgments would scarce make good harmony. This only I shall say, that if Jesus Christ might be preached, though with some defects in some circumstances, I should rejoice therein. O that you would labour to let all the parts of the kingdom taste of the sweetness of your successes, in carrying to them the gospel of the Lord Jesus; that the doctrine of the gospel might make way for the discipline of the gospel, without which it will be a very skeleton! When manna fell in the wilderness from the hand of the Lord, every one had an equal share. I would there were not now too great an inequality in the scattering of manna, when secondarily in the hand of men; whereby some have all, and others none; – some sheep daily picking the choice flowers of every

pasture, others wandering upon the barren mountains, without guide or food. I make no doubt but the best ways for the furtherance of this are known full well unto you; and you therefore have as little need to be petitioned in this as other things. What, then, remains, but that for this, and all other necessary blessings, we all set our hearts and hands to petition the throne of grace?

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A Sermon.

By Rev. NEIL CAMERON, St. Jude's, Glasgow.

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine

heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness” – Genesis 15:1-6.

Biographies of godly men have been held of great value by thoughtful men among all nations. The Word of God records infallibly events, trials, and experiences through which some of the saints had to pass on their way to the rest that remains for the people of God. While the church is passing through the valley of Baca, walking by faith and not by sight, they will often have to ask the question, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” The Lord’s answer will always abide the same, “If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids besides the shepherd’s tents” (Song 1:7,8). Where can she find the footsteps of the flock? In the Word of God. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Therefore, it should be helpful and to the comforting of the Lord’s poor people that, in humble dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should endeavour to search out the footsteps of Abraham, and his experiences revealed in this portion of the Word of God. In order to this we shall direct your attention to three things. And

- I. – We shall consider Abraham’s fears.
- II. – We shall consider his complaints.
- III. – We shall consider his victory by faith.

I. – Abraham’s fears. Our text begins, “After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision saying, Fear not Abram.”

1. The context supplies us with a brief account of the things after which the Lord appeared to him in this vision. We read that the Lord had said unto him, in Ur of the Chaldees, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him.” This gives us a most complete description of the effectual and heavenly calling of Abraham. His father, Terah, accompanied him out of Ur of the Chaldees unto Haran where Abraham had to delay his journey for about two years until his aged father died. From this incident we may learn that Abraham did not think that the Lord’s command to him to leave Chaldea and all that was in it, and go to another country, exempted him from the fifth commandment – “Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” After his father’s death he continued his journey to the land of Canaan. The Lord appeared to him there again, and promised, “Unto thy seed will I give this land. There was a sore famine in the land, and he went down to Egypt where he sojourned about two years. On his return from Egypt, Lot, his nephew, who had been with him since he left Chaldea, and he, had to separate from one another, owing to disagreement among their shepherds, and on account of their enormous wealth in cattle. Lot chose the plains of Jordan, and pitched his tent at Sodom. Abraham journeyed to Hebron, built an altar to the Lord, and dwelt there. In about five years thereafter Chedorlaomer and other three kings with him came to fight with the

five kings of the plains of Jordan whom they overcame, carried away everything belonging to them, also Lot with all his goods. When Abraham heard this, he armed his trained servants, pursued them to Dan, vanquished them there, and brought back all the spoil of the plain, and Lot with all his goods. He came to the valley of Shaveh, near Jerusalem. Melchizedek came forth to meet him, brought bread and wine, and blessed Abraham in the name of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham gave him tithes of all the spoil. Next came the king of Sodom who said to Abraham, "Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself." And Abraham said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I shall not take from a thread to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich." These were some of the things "after which the Lord appeared in a vision to Abram." We think the last two things are particularly to be understood, i.e., his victory over the enemies, and his professing the name of the Lord.

2. Let us now consider what Abraham's fears were at this time. We may gather what they were from the promises by which the Lord sought to allay them.

(1) "I am thy shield." This shows that his fears were his felt need of defence from his enemies. Satan harassed his mind with fears that the enemies whom he had vanquished and spoiled would gather a stronger force, come back, and destroy him from off the face of the earth. The Lord does not lay a plaster upon a whole skin. A shield is what one needs to protect one in battle. Abraham in his doubts and fears could see no protection; and, therefore, the Lord comes with the comforting assurance, "I am thy shield." What a protection! Might he not have slept soundly that night! "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in whom I will trust." Who of Abraham's spiritual children are strangers to such fears as these? You child of God may lay it to your account that, should you gain, by faith, a victory over the devil, the world, or the flesh, you shall be harassed with such fears. The Lord gave David many victories over Saul, and left him often at his mercy; but you will find him exclaiming in one of such temptations, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." Did David perish by the hand of Saul? No. Where is the safety of every child of grace? In God's promises. "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." Where lay Abraham's safety? In this, "I am thy shield." Where is thy safety? In this, "I am thy shield." "I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" How often were you afraid that you had no power to resist the least sin, and if that sent you to show the Lord your fears, how often did you find honey in the carcase of that dead lion? But let us consider the other cause.

(2) We may gather from this promise that Abraham was afraid he should be without reward, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Does this mean a reward for the good deed in that he vanquished Chedorlaomer? No; for he declared, by the vow he made with uplifted hand to the Most High God, that he did not desire any such reward. What then could it be? We mentioned before the profession he made of the name of the Lord in the valley of Shaveh, and we think the enemy is now tempting him with doubts and fears; suggesting that though he made such a brave profession, he should be without a reward in eternity. It is quite manifest from the promise that the reward was a purely spiritual one, about which his fears were so great; for says the Lord, "I am thy exceeding great reward." If your profession does any harm to the kingdom of darkness you shall be often tempted to conclude that there shall not be a greater fool at the judgment seat than you, and you

shall often be tempted to conclude that it were better had you never made a public profession at all. The poor people of the Lord are not ignorant of Satan's devices. How often did you say, when the Lord delivered you, "I will not believe Satan again," but to your shame you did, and still do believe him! Elijah stood alone, a prophet of the Lord, on Mount Carmel, and witnessed before all Israel that Jehovah is God and that they should follow Him. He ordered four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal to be taken and slain, and next day fled from one ungodly worm through fear. Why? Because of unbelief and the temptations of the adversary. Abraham witnessed before the whole people of the plain that he worshipped the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, probably the day before he was harassed with these fears. Why did both Melchizedek and Abraham bear this testimony, the one acknowledging God as the author of Abraham's victory over his enemies, and the other holding Him up as the object of real religious worship? We think the reason was that the most glaring sin of that people and of that day, was that men forgot God, and buried themselves in sensuality. Our reason for coming to this conclusion is that the true Church of God, in every generation, endeavoured to bear testimony for the truths that were most directly denied or forgotten in their day. We cannot doubt the faithfulness of these two godly men; and, therefore, we conclude, and that not without direct Scriptural proof, that real Atheism lay at the root of the sins of Sodom then, as it will continue to do till the end of this world. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own heart, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up to vile affections." Such is the dark picture the Holy Ghost sketches of the sins of such men. It will be observed how exactly it fits into the narrative given in the Word of God of the sins of Sodom. These godly men, whose righteous souls were grieved from day to day by the ungodly conversation of the wicked, took this advantage to bear witness for God and His prerogatives.

(3) Abraham had now two strong pillars for his faith. When tempted with fears, from without and from within, about his own weakness, and defencelessness, he could point to God's promise, "I am thy shield." When tormented with fears about the uselessness of his profession, and that it would be like the house built upon the sand; he could appeal to the promise, "I am thy exceeding great reward," and thereby, through faith in it, confound the adversary. But Satan is not so easily non-plussed as not to look out for another place of attack, which seems weak to the eye of sense. He would retort, "If things be so on the Lord's side, look to your own very unpromising condition. Is it likely that thou art ever to have that seed which God promised thee?" This causes Abraham to complain of his lot. This brings us to the second head of our text; therefore

II. – We shall consider Abraham's complaint. As there were two things making up his fears, so there are two things in this complaint.

1. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless." When he left Ur of the Chaldees he was about seventy-three years of age. He sojourned in Haran for the space of two years, until his father died. The promise, "And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," seems to have been given him when he left Haran. This would show that he was about seventy-five years when the Lord promised him a seed. According to the generally received computation, he would be about eighty-three years of age at the time he made this

complaint. His immediate reasons are evident, lying upon the surface of the words of our text, but they were of a deeper concern to Abraham than may strike the mind of the reader without paying attention to their relation unto his spiritual and eternal concerns.

(1) It is very hard for flesh and blood to walk by faith, and not by sight. The question had daily to be faced, “Where is the promised seed?” Abraham could not point at Isaac with his finger and say, “There he is.” No, but quite the reverse – “Seeing I go childless.” Should he look to Sarah and to himself, things were getting less hopeful every day. For whatever he may have thought of the promise ten years before this time, his hope now begins to get cloudy. You will readily grant that it needed strong faith to see Isaac, in the casket of the promise, seventeen years before he was born.

(2) He felt that he was going the way of all the earth, and that he should soon be in eternity – “Seeing I go childless.” His own salvation, and that of the whole church of God, from among his own natural offspring and from among the other nations of the earth, depended upon the fulfilment of this one promise. Speaking with all reverence, if there should be no Isaac, the seed, which is Christ, could not be. Notice the tenor of the promise, “And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Again, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” The Holy Spirit revealed it so to the apostle, and we have scripture for it that so Abraham understood it. “Abraham saw my day and was glad.” Again, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” To possess, in his seed, the land of Canaan was to his faith a type of the eternal inheritance. Were it possible that the one could be lost, through the failing of the fulfilment of the promise, the other should be lost also.

(3) Now, let us briefly ponder over this deep mystery. Abraham lived at the time when God, in His infinite wisdom, taught the church by types and shadows of good things to come. He was so fully convinced that he could have no hand in his own salvation and that of his seed, nor in bringing Christ one step nearer to his or their souls, that he made this the first part of his complaint to the Lord. Instead of his finding that he could do anything towards the accomplishing of the promise, he found that his own deadness stood most directly of all against its being fulfilled. At the same time he was certain that all was lost, both for time and eternity, should the promise fail. And that unless the Lord put His hand to the work, to call the things that are not as though they were, there was no other power that could avail to the least degree to relieve him. Are you not, poor soul, fully persuaded that, if Christ be not in you the hope of glory, your hope shall be put to shame, and you shall have no inheritance among them that are sanctified? You may be afraid that, though you are by public profession like Abraham in the land of promise, if you are without Christ in your soul you are a hypocrite, and shall never come to the rest that remains for the people of God. You may have been called out of the world, and from its idolatry ten, twenty, or forty years ago. You thought the day the first promise of the truth of God dawned upon your soul that there was nothing which possibly could retard its accomplishment. How is it with you now? To lay the whole weight of your guilty soul upon the Saviour freely offered in the Gospel was an easy matter that day. You thought that Christ was revealed to you by the light which the Lord sent forth along with His truth into your heart, and that you rejoiced to see His day. You thought that there was to be no more darkness, or fears, or complaints. Why

should there be such darkness and unbelief now? Ah, you will say, "My folly makes it so. I never thought that day that I should have to pass through such a howling wilderness." You don't find that great change in yourself which the truth of God and your own conscience demand. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Like Abraham, you find that you were far more like having some life in yourself ten, twenty, or forty years ago than you are to-day. When you look within you see no child of promise there; when you look to yourself, you set your seal to God's truth that you are dead; and when you look toward His throne of mercy, all you can say is, "Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?" You are painfully conscious that all things have not become new in your soul. Abraham's experience was typical of all that and much more at the very time he made this complaint.

(4) But you will say, to describe my poverty brings me no relief. No. But it was his poverty, emptiness, and inability that sent Abraham to Him who supplies all the needs of His people according to His own riches in glory by Jesus Christ. The delusion has got a very strong hold upon all the human race, that something good must be in the creature, or that he shall be rejected by the Saviour of sinners. This, like the limpet to the rock, sticks to man's nature to the last. The Word of God describes man as full of iniquity, but empty of all that is good. When the Holy Spirit teaches man, He enables him to learn this lesson, "In me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing." This man finds nothing good in his flesh, but on the contrary, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Many have nothing against this in theory, but they cannot tolerate to be told that this is actually true of themselves. Now the cause of the emptiness, or hunger and thirst, of the Lord's people, is that light and life have entered into their souls, giving them a painful experience of their want of that fulness which man's earthen vessel was created to hold – the inhabitation of God through the Spirit – and of the fulness that is in the soul of all kinds of iniquity. Where He begins the good work He will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ. He begins the good work by convincing of sin and misery, and while sin remains He convinces of it, and causes the sinner taught of Him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Such is the experience of the creature "that thanks God through the Lord Jesus Christ." We are fully aware that this is a painful experience; but such is the nature of the malady, that the Most High does not give a dose of chloroform to the soul whom He cures. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," is the voice of God speaking in His Word to them who are dead in trespasses and sins. You find that you can do nothing but sin; that you were more like a child of God twenty years ago than you are to-day; and that you cannot extricate yourself out of that painful state. Go, spread thy complaints and poverty before the Lord. Poor Hannah had two causes to weep. "Then said Elkanah, her husband, to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. . . . And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child" You will notice that she had an adversary to harass her on the one hand, and barrenness on the other. She took a most effective way to get rid of both by going to the Lord. Go thou also, and say, "Give me Christ, or I die." To the barren soul, Christ says, "From me is thy fruit found." But let us proceed to consider the second cause of his complaint.

2. “And Abram said Lord God, what hast thou given me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? And Abraham said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” Instead of a son he complains that his servant was his heir. This complaint was not literally made against Eliezer as a servant, but as an heir. It is beyond every doubt established as a Scripture truth that Eliezer was a godly man, and a most faithful servant. Why did Abraham bring this matter up at all as a part of his complaint? In order to enter a little into this matter, by the good guidance of the Spirit of truth, we shall consider a few things: – (1) The promise was not given to Abraham with respect to a servant, but in respect of his own seed. Therefore, he could not come into possession of the promise, with all its entailed blessings, except through a son or heir. (2) Abraham saw Christ in the promise, as we have stated above, and that through his own seed He was to come. Then there were two reasons which caused him to complain – (a) If Eliezer were to be the heir of his house his faith would be rendered void as regarding Christ, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed; and (b) he should have nothing real in the promise at all; for, if his servant were to be his heir, he could not possess the promise, through him, even to the extent of the land of Canaan. (3) This shows that he could have nothing at all should God’s’ promise fail in this matter. Therefore, he went to the Giver of the promise to extricate him out of this perplexing difficulty.

These things are left on record in order that we should endeavour, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, to understand them and be encouraged, enlightened, and comforted in this valley of Baca. “Now all these things happened unto them for our ensamples (types): and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come.” Therefore let us endeavour to search a little into the nature of this complaint, as it is left on record for our “ensample and admonition.”

(1) Abraham is declared to be the father of the faithful, and the children always bear some of the lineaments of their father. The servant naturally works with an eye to his wages; but not so the son. Every one of Adam’s posterity naturally look for salvation through the covenant of works. Though that covenant has been broken, still man, while unregenerated, clings to it, and expects that he will come somehow to happiness by the works of the law. In everything man does about religious services, during the days of his ignorance, he does it with a view to save himself thereby. From this state of ignorance Abraham was effectually called by the Most High, and had to pass through these painful experiences to be our type, or to have in carnal things what his spiritual children will have in a spiritual sense. He was afraid of being put off with a servant instead of a son. Are you afraid that you are still looking for salvation through the covenant of works? That in all you do, the servant that looks for his wages as his due is with you? That you have never been broken off from the covenant of works, and that you have no real interest in, or claim upon the covenant of promise? That when you go to worship in private, or in public, you are laying some weight upon your own duties, as having something in them, for which the Lord should reward you? Faith and works, as foundations, are entirely contrary. “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.” No; for this was the cause of his complaint, “the steward of my house is my heir.” Is this your complaint? That that which is born of the flesh, and is flesh, is your heir? If so, you cannot be without a complaint, seeing it is written, that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Faith looks to Christ in the promise, and sees in Him all the fulness of the Godhead. It lays hold of Him in the free offer of the gospel. But this is the work of God, and not the work of man. The Jews said, “What shall we do that we might work the work of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” It is that which is born of the Spirit, and is Spirit, that

believes on Christ. In other words, Christ in the soul is the hope of glory. When you cannot find the heir of promise in the house of your own soul you complain most bitterly.

(2) You cannot but pray, read the Word of God, attend the ordinances of His house (while you can get ordinances maintained in accordance with the truth of God), and still you may be afraid, because of the legal spirit you find within you, that you are only going about to establish a righteousness of your own. It requires the light of heaven to enable a poor soul to see the spirit of a son in such a habitation of dragons as the heart of man is. There must be works, for "Faith without works dead, being alone." So, you see, there must be works where there is faith; but Abraham had to go through the ordeal of offering Isaac to find out the difference between the works of the flesh and the works of faith. The works which proceed from faith are called in scripture, "Sowing to the spirit, walking in the spirit," &c. Faith hungers and thirsts after the blessings of the covenant of grace; but man's corrupt nature can perceive no beauty in Christ. These two, dwelling together under the same roof, will be like Abraham and his servant. He did not complain of his servant for his good works, but because he was to be his heir on account of these works. Neither do you find fault with yourself for any works that are good in themselves, but for the motive you find lurking in you to draw all the credit of your salvation to your own goodness. That you have some imperfect works, duties, &c., you can always see, but that Christ is formed in you the hope of glory you cannot discern, except in the light of the Sun of Righteousness. But do you feel that the fear of your going Christless is the deepest cause of your complaint? and that the fear of leaning to the covenant of works for salvation comes next? Abraham had these complaints (typically), and they are left on record to point out to the bewildered traveller in this valley of the shadow of death that this is the true way to Zion.

(3) If you look to your own state, spiritually, you may have to exclaim, "Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of the Lord was upon my tabernacle." Little did you know then the depth of iniquity that was in your own heart! It requires much disclosing of the sea of corruption within, to make the sinner understand how evil and bitter a thing it is that we have inherited a sinful nature from our first parents. It is by giving some knowledge of original sin the Holy Spirit causes the sinner to have no confidence in the flesh. Abraham might have some confidence in the flesh the day he left Haran, and even the day he made this complaint, but until he "against hope believed in hope," he did not get possession of the promise. Should he look to himself and to Sarah there was no hope there – the one being a hundred and the other ninety years old; but when he looked to the power, faithfulness, and truthfulness of the God who gave the promise, he concluded that death or life was all one to Him. But we must proceed to consider Abraham's mysterious relief out of this trial.

(1) "And behold the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." We have here the promise renewed and made more clear in its terms. It was made certain to Abraham now that his own son was to be his heir. This he had from the mouth of the God who cannot lie. The mouth of Satan should be closed now, seeing it was put beyond every possibility of a doubt that the Lord would fulfil all that He had promised. But the Lord knew how strong the storms were to be which would blow from hell in poor Abraham's face before Isaac should be born. How often had you to conclude, in the light of God's truth, that you had grace, and that you would never doubt the Spirit's work in your soul again; and before you were aware, your light was gone, your mind was filled with doubts, and you concluded that you never had grace? Because man's instability is such, the Lord gave Abraham a visible seal to confirm his faith in the promise.

(2) “And he brought him forth abroad and said, Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them: and he said to him, So shall thy seed be.” There was not a single word of the Scriptures written in Abraham’s days. What it pleased the Lord to communicate to man of His word, from the first promise in the garden of Eden till the days of Moses, four hundred and thirty years after this time, had to be conveyed from father to son traditionally. We have no doubt that the Lord took care that one iota of His word should not fall to the ground at that time, but we desire to note the difference of our privileges from those of these godly men. Therefore we will notice the Lord dealing with His servants after a very condescending manner. When He made a covenant with Noah, about four hundred and forty years before this time, He gave him a visible seal, i.e., the rainbow in the cloud. So, till this day, the rainbow is the seal of the covenant God made with Noah and with all flesh in whom there is the breath of life, that He would not again destroy the whole earth with a flood for the wickedness of man. It bears testimony, before our eyes, to the faithfulness of the Lord to all His promises. This also is a sign of His mercy. It is related in ancient history that when soldiers, in their passage through a country, held their bows unstrung with both ends to the earth, it indicated to the inhabitants that they intended peace; but when they came with their bows strung, holding them in the inverse order, it meant war. So our gracious God shows, every time the rainbow appears, that He is for peace; but when He will come on the last day, He will reverse His bow against His enemies, and who can describe the anguish that will bring to the ungodly?

He gave Abraham the stars of heaven for the seal of His covenant. Some one may say, “I don’t see how that could help his faith? The Lord gave him the promise three times now, and should that not suffice.” Let me give you an illustration, though it comes infinitely short of the real thing. Suppose that a man gave you a promise, by the word of his mouth, that he would do a certain thing for you, and that upon that one thing your very life depended. If you had every reason to believe that the man was truthful, faithful, and honest, would you be quite satisfied with his bare word? I think there might be room for much doubting. But suppose that this man wrote down his promise, adhibited his signature to the same, and handed it to you, would that not make a great difference? So the Lord did for you and for me. He wrote down in His own Word all that we are to believe concerning Him, and the duties He requires of us; and set the broad seal of heaven upon this Word; adding the most terrible denunciations against those who should add to His written Word, or take from it. We were told of a certain young man, who in great distress of mind, sprang into the bedroom of a godly man about three o’clock in the morning, and said, “You need not speak one word to me now, or try to prevail against the conclusion I have come to; for I am certain I must be lost.” The man rose out of his bed, lighted the candle, and asked him how he was so certain that there was no hope for him. “The Lord,” said he, “has closed out my prayer; so that I must perish.” Upon hearing this the man opened the Bible, and read, “Also when I cry and shout he shutteth out my prayers” (Lamentations 3:8). “Who said that?” the young man said, “Jeremiah, a man that has been certainly saved,” said the man. “Where are the words till I see them?” “Look here they are.” “Put my finger upon them.” “Yes, there.” The poor young man read the words, left the room, and went to his own bedroom. To put his finger upon God’s written word was more than poor Abraham could do. Therefore, the Lord made the visible stars serve the same purpose. It meant that sooner would all the stars of heaven go back to the womb of nothing, than one iota of the promise should fall to the ground. Every time he looked at the visible heavens, he was reminded of the promise, and felt the certainty of God’s purpose. The stars were his seal, and they held forth to his faith how numerous his seed were to be. Do you, when you look at the stars, remember that God promised that Abraham should have a spiritual seed, innumerable, like the stars? Though they may be very few in number to-day upon the

earth, when the glory of the latter days will come the tables will be turned upon Satan's kingdom.

(3) What had Abraham now that he had not before? When he looked at his own fireside there was no change there. Isaac was not there, and Eliezer of Damascus was the steward of his house. To the eye of sense he gained nothing, but to the eye of faith his gain was exceedingly great. He had the promise of God renewed, one jot of which could not fall to the ground. Had he not that promise before that memorable night? Yes. But remember Gideon's fleece. "And Gideon said unto God, if thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand as thou hast said. And it was so; for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once; let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground." The same things appear in many places of the Scriptures. Let us consider one more, and then we must proceed. When godly Hezekiah, king of Judah, was sick, and Isaiah came and told that he was to set his house in order, because he was to die of his trouble. He prayed and wept sore before the Lord. The Lord said to Isaiah, "Turn and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. . . . And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he hath spoken; shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz." The Lord knows that an heart of unbelief, a powerful and crafty adversary, and great ignorance of God keep the consolations of the covenant of grace out of the mouth of faith, and starve the child of God even under the shadow of the tree of life, unless God come to the rescue. It is so natural for us to live by sight, and to doubt the love of God on account of the natural depravity of our mind and heart, that strong proofs are necessary to enable faith to overcome our unbelief and corruption. Elijah had to walk forty days in the strength of the one diet the angel gave him; but poor Abraham had to walk seventeen years in the strength of the Lord's promise after it was thus renewed. He had only, as it were, a taper in his hand walking through abounding darkness, made up of idolatry, sensuality, atheism, and deep ignorance of God, and he bravely overcame by faith. We have the noon day of the gospel, with all its promises, threatenings, injunctions, and invitations, and where can a saint of Abraham's stature in Christ be pointed out? But

III. – We shall consider his victory by faith. "And Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

(1) The veracity of God is held forth in the truth, as an object of faith, in such passages as these: – "God is not a man that he should lie: neither the son of man that he should repent. Again, "The Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent." Again, "Let God be true and every man a liar." And again, "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar." This is the sin of which every one is guilty who believes not all that God hath revealed in His word. Abraham was as certain, by faith, that God could not be the author of a

lie, as he was of his own being. He also believed that He was able to fulfil that which He promised; because nothing could stand between Omnipotence and the accomplishing of His desires. All His promises to Abraham were of grace, freely given.

(2) Christ in the promise was the proper object of Abraham's faith. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Faith in Christ comes by the hearing of the Word of God. The Spirit of God shines into the heart of the sinner, giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. The soul is made both able and willing to embrace Christ, and to rest upon Him alone for salvation. The whole person of Christ as the Mediator is the object of faith, and as such is embraced by true saving faith. But Christ in the office of His priesthood is more directly the object of faith when sin is wounding the conscience. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Christ becomes precious to the soul in His three offices, and is the object of the adoration of the soul. But let us note particularly that as Christ was in the promise to Abraham's faith – "seeing his day and rejoicing" that so He is held forth to our faith both as He who came, and finished the work the Father gave Him to do, and He that is to come again at the last day.

(3) Faith views the everlasting love of God the Father as the fountain of all life, love, and compassion. Reads, that God loved the world so as to give His only begotten Son; that Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for her; that the Spirit, in His infinite love, applies to guilty sinners in their effectual calling the fruits of the love of the Father and of the Son, and the soul says, "Here is my rest, here still I'll stay; for I do like it well." But space will not allow us to say more.

2. "And he counted it to him for righteousness." Was it his own faith that the Lord counted to him for righteousness? No, but Christ embraced by faith as held forth in the promise. He laid hold, by faith, upon things which, to sense, were impossibilities. "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." May all the praise be to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

[January 1899]

Notes of a Sermon

By the late Rev. JOHN DUNCAN, LL.D.

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” – Revelation 1:17,18.

The gentle and loving John, who had so long and so often lain on the bosom of Love incarnate, and to whom had been vouchsafed, by the condescension of Jesus, such familiarity with him in the days when he tabernacled amongst us in the likeness of sinful flesh, – was now, in his old age and in banishment for the cause of Christ, favoured with a visit of his exalted Lord, manifesting himself in those symbols of his resurrection-glory and ascension-majesty, which weighed down the powers even of this the beloved and beloved disciple, and made him fall down at the feet of Jesus as one dead. It was one thing to have known the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, – one thing to have seen, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, the glory of the Godhead shining forth in that

condescension, – and another to behold the marks of effulgent glory, that dignity inconceivable, to which Jesus is now exalted. And we should be taught by this, that though we should have faith in Christ and love to Christ, ardent as John's, we are yet unfitted to bear that weight of glory which is about to be revealed; that without supports to us inconceivable, we should be crushed under the weight of the Redeemer's glory. We should learn to reverence, adore, and love the Saviour; we should cultivate a love, deeper than the deepest human love, but removed from all that is incompatible with the prostration and reverence due to the dignity and glory of the Saviour. If John fell at his feet as one dead, how little are we prepared for such displays as he could easily make, but which we could by no means endure! Jesus loved his servant; he came not to trouble and to destroy his servant, but to show him, as a mark of honour to his apostle, and for the permanent benefit of his church, things that must shortly come to pass. The merciful Saviour laid his right hand upon him, and spake to him, in words full of cheering and consolation, to revive him, making known to him that all this splendour of unsupportable brightness and glory, encircled One who was still his Ancient Friend, – Jesus, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

We have set before us the sources of support which Christ administered to his servant, the causes why John should not fear; and as we ourselves, though not called to see Christ as John saw him in prophetic vision, are called to behold him, and may soon be called to behold him as we never have, in stately steps and majestic goings in providence, calculated to inspire, if not the same degree, the same kind of fear, – it may be well for us to ponder over those supports which Jesus gives as adequate. They are taken from his own character, "I am the first and the last." Jesus is the Eternal One. This is the first ground of support, the first dispelment of our alarm, – *the eternity of Christ*. When we look at the multiplicity of things that exist and of events that take place, at their magnitude and importance, and the apparent disorder and conflict that often takes place in them, our minds are apt to be thrown off their balance, and reduced to trepidation and alarm. But Jesus here directs our view to his unchangeableness "The First," – Jehovah, the self-existent God, the same in nature and perfections with the Eternal Father and the Blessed Spirit, – Jehovah, before all, and by whose commanding word all things came into being: "The Last," – the great final end of all, for whom all things were made, as well as by whom and in whose glory all will terminate. This is a consideration which may well stablish the soul. Jesus is the same through the whole course of time and of events. Ten thousand changes may occur, and some of these we hail with joy, and call them glad and prosperous; others we quail before, and view them as bitter, blasting adversities. But, change what may, *He* is unchangeable. "His throne is fixed of old." "From everlasting to everlasting, he is God." We are in the midst of a changing world, we are changing creatures ourselves, but our God, our Saviour is unchangeable, – "With him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of his people's sanctuary;" and from first to last, his unity of being and of character gives unity and consistency which we are unable to read in itself; nor need we care much; we cannot tell what all things are, and what all things may be, but we know what *He is*, – that he is unchangeably good, wise, holy, gracious, just, – and *that* suffices.

The next ground for confidence is taken from the consideration of *Christ as Mediator*: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." The words in the Greek are very emphatic, "*I am the Living One, and I became dead*; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." In this, we may say, is summed up the whole faith, the whole hope, the whole stability of the Church of God. Jesus directs our attention to himself as true and proper God: "I am the living One." As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. No eye of man, no eye of seraphim can penetrate, indeed,

the mystery of the eternal generation, of the paternal and filial relation of the Godhead; but this we know, that the very life itself which distinguisheth the Father from all that is not God by nature, distinguisheth the Son from all that is not God by nature, – that he is the Eternal Life, who was with the Father and was manifested unto us, – the Word that in the beginning was with God, and was God, in whom is life – *that* life the light of men. Jesus is *the* Living One. He hath life in himself underived. He is the wellspring of all derived life. Life is natural, essentially natural to him. Even in death he lived. He was the Living God, and to him as God, death could never make an approach. He was the Living One when he expired, and all the living beings, living with whatever kind of life, were upheld in life by him, even at that very moment, when, committing his spirit into the hands of the Father, he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. “Jehovah is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting King.” It is the glory of the church that she can now avow, that God hath died and bought the church with his own blood. It is so a new blessedness to know that “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary, there is no searching of his understanding;” that “God over all is blessed for ever;” and that to Eternal Divinity death can never draw nigh. “I am the Living One, and I became dead.” The Eternal Life who was with the Father was manifested to us. He who hath life in himself took to himself a nature, in which he was capable of bodily pain and mental anguish, capable of weariness, and sickness, and death. *He* became dead; the *Living One* became dead. He who then lived and could not die, as regarded his Godhead, *he, he*, as regarded his manhood, *died; he himself*, the Son of God, when he himself “bare our sins on his own body on the tree.” It was thus that God bought the church with his own blood. He became dead. This, then, is the second basis of the church’s faith and hope. The first being Christ’s essential Godhead, the second his death as Mediator, the third is his resurrection life, never to be followed by any death. “And, behold, I am alive for evermore.” *Death* had an apparent, *Jesus* had the real victory. “Through death he destroyed him that had the power of death.” He entered into the domains of death, but it was to grapple and to slay. Death had reigned hitherto, from Adam to Moses, and downward; death assaulted Christ, for death was permitted, because justice found Christ standing in the room of sinners; and death did for a little gnaw through the bands which united the soul and the body of our Lord to one another. But death was unable to effect his real work. Death’s work is to separate, – to separate entirely, not only man’s body from his soul, but to separate man from God. But here death could effect nothing, on the hypostatical union which bound the soul of Christ to the Godhead, and the body of Christ to the Godhead. It was our Lord and our God who was with the pardoned thief that day in paradise. It was our Lord and God who lay in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. Our Lord and God, – that blessed soul, not separated from the Eternal Deity, – that blessed body, not separated from the Eternal Godhead, – this union remained entire, and death was vanquished. It was impossible that he should be holden by the bands of death. Justice was satisfied when he poured out his soul unto the death and soon that body and that soul which, each united hypostatically, still subsisted in the person of the Son of God, came together, and he rose again. He rose victorious: death could not hold him. Thus the church, findeth the last enemy already subdued. We have, in a risen Saviour, the proofs of a power beyond the most dreaded of all hostile powers, – the power of death. “He is alive for evermore.” In that he was crucified, he was crucified in weakness; in that he liveth, he liveth by the power of God; in that he died once, he died for sin; death hath no more dominion over him. “He is therefore able to save unto the uttermost all

who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” He then, who is the First and the Last, is also the Living One who became dead, and is alive again for evermore. We are not called to contemplate abstractly his eternal and unchangeable Godhead, but to consider it as possessed by Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, – the only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. And then, connectedly with this, Jesus hath “the keys of hell and of death.” He hath the keys of the unseen state, for the word involves not only what we call hell, the state of those dying unbelieving and impenitent, but the state of men, of disembodied spirits, both of those who are reserved in chains of darkness and of those who have departed and have gone to be with Christ. He hath the disposal of soul and of body; the disposal of the soul and its state, the disposal of soul and body both at the time of the resurrection. He hath the keys of the unseen state, and thus hath power to dispose of souls, – power to shut the gate of hell, and to open the gate of glory, – power to repel, and to cast from him, and to refuse a place – to cast from his tribunal down to everlasting destruction. “He is the one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.” He hath power to keep in the grave whilst it pleases him; power to bring from this prison-house into glory, to the everlasting mansions; power to raise to dishonour and send back into eternal fire. He is the universal disposer of man’s state – of man’s state here, of man’s state at death and throughout eternity. This then, is another cause why we should not fear. There is One who hath more power than hell, more power than death. What is stronger than death – than the grave – than the pit with her devouring mouth? The most terrible thing about man’s power is, that he hath power to kill the body, but after this he hath no more that he can do. But it is because Jesus hath a power beyond this, – it is because he both died, and revived, and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the quick and dead, – that, trusting in him, there is no cause for fear.

Another reason for confidence is, that Jesus hath intimate *knowledge* of, and right of direction and government in all the proceedings of divine providence. We have no cause to be alarmed because the feebleness of our understandings cannot penetrate very far into the relations of existing events, or at all into the obscurity of coming events; for the whole chain of things, from the beginning to the end, is known to the Lord Jesus. Many and awful are the events which are written down in this book, which is an epitome of the providence of God, from the time of the vision till the time of the consummation of all things, – a dark and mysterious, and originally a sealed book. John did weep much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon; but he was comforted by the announcement, that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” Jesus *knows* all events, – *manages* all events. Were there *ought* beyond his cognizance, or inspection, or control, – were it but the least thing possible, – *then*, indeed, had we cause of trepidation and alarm. But all things that are, and all things that shall be hereafter, *all* are well known to Christ, – all managed by Christ, and managed in a way which, though his poor, silly people do not always sufficiently see, is yet working by his administration, working for his glory, and for their good. The devil and the wicked world are doing, and will do, all in their power against the church; such is their intention, and such the direct nature of their operations, conducted with great cunning, and carried on with awful strength. Yet the operations of devils and wicked men are but part and parcel of that one mystery of “Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” by which his intentions for the highest advancement of his own glory, and the greatest good of his believing people, shall be promoted. It matters not to me, then, that I know not how to trace events, or scan what is

likely to take place, in case of *this* event, or *that* event. Had I the care of myself, did I take care of myself, these things might be my care. But fruitless is it all, and needless; enough to know, that *He* knows all, – that *he governs all*, – and that *his very purposes are in all things being accomplished*.

The last source of support and consolation, to which our attention is here directed, is the *presence of Christ in his church*: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that *holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*” (Revelation 1:20 compared with 2:10). He who is the Eternal God, the Living One, – the Mediator, – who was dead, and is alive again, and who hath at his girdle suspended the keys of hell and of death, opening, and none shutting, and shutting, and none opening, – He who knows all events, and, as Mediator, conducts and manages all events, having the universe at his disposal, – hath his walking place in the midst of the seven candlesticks, supporting the seven stars in his right hand. Christ is universal Lord. He is so as Head of his church, and for his church’s benefit. Would we know why the world is governed? It is for the glory of God in his church. “God hath made him head over all things for his body, the church.” Jesus is present, – present in his church, as he is not in the world. As eternal God, he filleth immensity with his presence; but as Mediator, – the living head of influences to his people, – he is peculiarly, mystically, but really, with his church. According to his word, he hath not left his people orphans; he hath come to us. “He is with us alway, even unto the end of the world.” His candlesticks he hath placed, with the light which is from heaven. With the light of his Spirit and gospel hath he kindled up these to give light unto the world. He who is the Light hath kindled that light, and put it in the candlesticks; and he walks among them. He who is the bright and morning Star, yea, the Sun of righteousness, hath, in the heaven of his church, placed the stars, and his hand upholds them. He who counteth the number of the stars, upholds them by the greatness of his strength – not one faileth – having imparted and maintaining the simple law of gravitation, by which they keep and move in their places. But his own immediate supernatural agency hath placed the evangelic stars in the celestial firmament of his church. It is so that it hath pleased him to communicate light to a dark world, – to shine in their hearts, giving by them, as well as to them, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus, then, the light of the world, walks in the midst of these luminaries, – the seven stars which his right hand upholds, – the seven candlesticks among which he walks. Therefore we are called not to fear.

There are various lessons to be learned from this presence and inspection of Christ. In one point of view arises the inference, that we should fear, for Jesus is present, walking amidst the candlesticks to inspect; and he is displeased when any of these begin to shine dimly, when the light is obscured, and when it is in danger of becoming extinct. Even then he will not put out the candle; but there is still cause of fear, lest he remove the candlestick out of its place. The heavenly Light shall never be extinguished, but its place and position may be changed. And we therefore have cause to fear, not that the kingdom of God should become extinct, but lest it should be taken from us, and given to a nation that would bring forth the fruits of it. But whilst we have thus cause of holy jealousy, we have in his presence cause of confidence against all hostile attacks, – all other sources of fear. He who is in the midst of the candlesticks may remove a candlestick where it is not giving light; but he will not suffer Satan, or all the power of hell, to extinguish a candle which is answering its purpose, and giving light to those around. Sooner may the arm of human violence stretch itself out, and pluck the material stars from the high spheres in which they revolve, than they

shall be able to pluck these stars out of heaven ecclesiastical in which Messiah hath set them. Who shall pluck his stars out of his hand? There is no fear of them, then, – no fear, in this respect, of the humblest and meanest of the people of God. Not merely of the stars, which are the angels of the seven churches, but of each disciple, Christ says, “None is able to pluck them out of my hand.” Let us therefore beware of base timidity. Let us not fear; the fear of man worketh a snare. Let us hear Christ’s encouragement to one of these churches, – “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Fear, believer! what have we to do with fear? “Let us sanctify the Lord God of Israel in our hearts, and let him be our fear, and our dread; and he will be a little sanctuary unto us.” Fear the devil! – fear the world! – I would hold it base scorn to fear. Fear the devil when Christ hath conquered him! Ah, he is much to be feared *if* we depart in aught from Christ. Let us *then* be afraid. And much is the world, ay, and the weakest thing that is in it, to be feared then. But humbly believing in, and faithfully following that One mighty to save, “who hath conquered principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them,” let us *never* fear. We are called to be soldiers, – good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We may fear rebellion, – fear mutiny, – fear provoking the Captain of our salvation, but under his guidance, following him, whom shall we fear? What is our calling? Is it not wrestling, “not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places?” Let us not fear: Jesus hath taught us “in patience to possess our souls.” Let us not be foolish. Let us not say, “There will be no evil days, – no tribulation.” There *will* be tribulation. There will be evil days. The days are yet coming, of which Christ hath warned us, come they soon, come they late, that there have not been such from the foundation of the world. These things are to be counted upon; our minds are to be made up; thus are we in patience to possess our souls. Let us not fear – why should we? What can men do to us? They can kill us; after that they have no more that they can do. We know their worst, and it is not very bad. They cannot touch the “life that is hid with Christ in God.” They cannot send soul and body to hell. They cannot keep us in the grave. They can kill us, but “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Only let us be humble, – let us seek to abound in that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, and in diffidence in our own resolutions, and our own strength; yea, diffident of going to future trials and duties in the strength of grace already imparted, “Let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;” strong in the strength not yet communicated, but wrapt up in the promise, “My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Let us at all times seek to have Jesus much in view; and let us seek in times of difficulty and perplexity to gather *this* from them, that we do the more simply look unto him. Then “out of the eater shall come sweetness;” our afflictions shall be real and exalted blessings, and we shall have to say, “It is good for us that we have been afflicted.”

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