

# Notes of a Sermon

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Preached at Shildaig, Ross-shire, on Sabbath, 25th August, 1901.

[This sermon was preached on the occasion of the lamented death of the Rev. DONALD MACDONALD, Shildaig, which took place, as intimated in last issue, on Tuesday, the 20th August. – ED.]

“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” – 2 Timothy 4:7,8.

The Apostle Paul, who was a prisoner at Rome when he wrote this Epistle, begins this chapter by giving a most solemn charge to Timothy concerning his work as an evangelist. There are two things in the exhortation he gives –

(1) “Preach the word” (verse 2). The Word of God was to be the matter of his preaching, and not the word of man. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

(2) “Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of thy ministry” (verse 5).

The apostle enforces his exhortation by *three* strong arguments or reasons.

The *first* reason is Timothy’s accountability to God at the great day of judgment for the discharge of his duty in the office of the ministry of the Gospel. “I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (verse 1). The consideration of their responsibility to God at the last day ought to make ministers faithful in the discharge of the duties of their office.

The *second* reason is that Paul foresaw that heresies were to be introduced into the Church by false teachers. These teachers would preach *fables* instead of *the Word of God*, and when the people would be brought under the influence of their teaching they would not endure sound doctrine. There would be plenty of men in the office of the ministry, but the great majority of them would not be the ministers of Jesus Christ. Congregations, in electing pastors, would make choice of those who taught “fables” in place of the Word of the Lord. All congregations, therefore, that forsook the faith once delivered to the saints, would be supplied with heretical ministers – no vacant congregation among them – and so numerous would be the false teachers that a number of them might be got for each congregation. The people, having itching ears, would heap them up to themselves. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (verses 3, 4). For this reason it became Timothy to watch in all things, to endure afflictions, to do the work of an evangelist, to make full proof of his ministry.

The *third* reason of the exhortation is that Paul was soon to be removed from the Church on earth. “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” Timothy was to be left behind; the burden of the Lord’s cause was to lie the more on him. When some of the ministers of Christ, who were faithful in their day, are taken away from His work on earth, those still left ought the more to take the burden of the Lord’s cause upon them, and to prove faithful to the trust committed to them.

In the words of the text the apostle, both for his own consolation and for the encouragement of Timothy, gives a review of his past life as an apostle and a minister of Jesus Christ, and his prospect of everlasting happiness after death.

In speaking from the text let us consider four things: –

- I. – Paul’s review of his past life – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”;
- II. – His prospect in view of death – “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness”;
- III. – The time when he expected to receive the crown – “At that day”; and
- IV. – That the crown is not peculiar to Paul, but is the common privilege of all believers – “And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

I. – Paul’s review of his past life. He was now on the brink of eternity, and he looks back on his Christian course in the world. When men come to the end of their days in the world, it well becomes them to review their past life; for they are soon to render an account of the things done in the body, whether these be good or evil. Many shrink from this task because they have spent their whole life in sin; and in forgetfulness of God and of the things that belong to their everlasting peace. But the apostle could look back on much of his past life with pleasure and a great measure of satisfaction. He was not yet perfect, but he was faithful to the end in the work to which he was divinely called. Of course, his only ground of hope for salvation was the finished work of Christ – His atoning sacrifice – but his own work, the fruit of the Spirit, as a Christian and an apostle of Jesus Christ, was to be taken into account, as he was responsible to God at the day of judgment for the trust committed to him. As to this he could speak with great satisfaction, his conscience bearing witness with him. He could say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” In the review the apostle makes he mentions three things which comprise the whole work of his past life from the time of his conversion to Christianity to the close of his course, to which he now draws near.

1. “I have fought a good fight.” The apostle was a good soldier of Jesus Christ. His life was a spiritual warfare. He began that warfare as soon as he was made a new creature and believed in Christ. He spent all his time before his conversion in the service of Satan, although he thought he was serving God. Many who are diligent and zealous in religion are serving the devil as much as those who live in open transgression of the law of God. But when it pleased God to reveal His Son in Paul, he forsook his old master, and enlisted in the service of Christ – the Captain of salvation. He was hitherto a faithful servant of Satan; he is now a faithful servant of Christ. What a great change grace can make! He is now preaching the faith which once he tried to destroy. Paul is now on Christ’s side, and has to fight. Before his conversion he fought *against* Christ, His people, and cause in the world; but now he begins to fight *for* Christ and His kingdom. In this warfare he has to contend with three formidable adversaries – “the world, the devil, and the flesh.” These three work in combination, the devil acting as the commanding general of the world and the flesh. But we may speak of them separately.

(1) The world. The world here signifies the men of the world, or worldly men. Christ speaking of His own people, says, “Ye are not of the world; I have chosen you out of the world.” No sooner was Paul converted than the world turned against him – the world in the Church and the world outside the Church. The Jews were on friendly terms with him till he became a Christian and an apostle of Jesus Christ, but now they become his bitterest enemies. But the cause of the apostle’s contention with the men of the world, whether Jews or Gentiles, was not their attacks upon himself personally, but their attacks on Christ and His cause in the Church. He pitied them, prayed for them, preached the Gospel to them, and earnestly desired their salvation. But so long as they fight against Christ and His kingdom he must, as a faithful servant of Christ, fight against them. They are the aggressors; he is on the defence. He is defending the cause of his Lord and Master. If he is on the offensive side it is only for the purpose of overthrowing the strongholds of sin and Satan in the hearts of men.

He was sent by Christ “to turn sinners from darkness unto light, and the power of Satan unto God.” The fight in which the apostle is engaged against the world is “a good fight.”

(2) He has to fight against “the devil.” There are some men who do not believe in the existence of the devil, but this is because they are spiritually dead. When sinners are quickened by the Spirit of God they soon discover that this evil spirit exists. When they leave his camp and service he makes himself known. He awakens up with renewed energy, and uses every means in his power to make them return to their natural allegiance to him. And when he finds that his efforts in this respect are in vain, he adopts another method of dealing with them – he persecutes them. He uses the men of the world as his willing instruments, and very often men who profess to be the people of God. Paul suffered more from the Jews than from the heathen. So it is still. The people of God suffer more from graceless men in the church than from those who make no profession of the religion of Christ. These are the best servants of the old serpent to do his work. And what men cannot do he employs his host of fallen angels to accomplish. The apostle felt this. He says, “We are not ignorant of his devices.” “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” All God’s people who are left long in the world suffer from the devil, and have to fight against him, but the ministers of Christ suffer more from him than others. As in times of war between earthly kingdoms, the enemies aim more at the generals, captains, and other prominent officers in the army for the purpose of killing them than they do at the common soldiers, so Satan assails ministers more than others. As they are set up as watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, they are more exposed to his assaults, and he hits more at them. They are ruinous to his kingdom, and the evil one hates them with perfect hatred. There are, however, some men in the office of the ministry whom he does not annoy, for the simple reason that they serve him better in that capacity than in any other. But such shall suffer from him in eternity.

There are various ways by which the prince of darkness inflicts sufferings on the people of God – by manifold temptations, persecutions, heresies in the church, &c., &c., but they are not left to contend against him in their own strength. Christ is with them in the conflict. They are weak and helpless in themselves, but He says, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, I will help thee.” “My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.” He provides them with an armour whereby they are to fight. They are commanded to put on that armour – the whole armour. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand to the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” This is the armour whereby Paul fought the good fight of faith; it is the armour by which all the ministers of Christ fight; it is the armour by which all the people of God fight. It is of God’s making; it is therefore complete. It is stored up in the Bible that the soldiers of Christ in every age and place in the world may put it on, and fight the good fight of faith under the banner of the glorious Captain of their salvation – Jesus Christ. The devil has an armour for his own soldiers, and, alas! many in this age who profess to be the servants of Christ have put on that armour. They fight against Christ while they profess to be for Him; they are fed and clothed

in body by King Jesus, but they serve the devil! They are in the office of the ministry, like some of old, for a piece of bread.

(3) The flesh. Flesh here means sinful nature. Believers are not in the flesh – they are not in a state of nature – but as long as they are in this world the flesh is in them. The Spirit of God wrought in them a new nature, but sinful nature is in them also. Although they are perfectly justified, yet they are not perfectly sanctified. There are thus in them two principles – the Spirit and the flesh, or, in other words, grace and sin. Hence the conflict between these two opposite principles. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” The Lord might, if He willed, make His people perfect in their sanctification in the day of their justification; but for wise ends He leaves them to struggle with indwelling sin till death, when they shall be made perfect in holiness, and shall immediately pass into glory. The image of God was lost entirely and at once when man sinned, but its restoration is by a gradual process. Believers “are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.” “He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” But during their sojourn in the wilderness of this world the Lord’s people have the flesh to contend with. The flesh warreth against them, and they must war against the flesh. The apostle Paul found the flesh his worst enemy; it made him groan, bleed, and cry bitterly, “Oh, wretched than that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The world and the devil could not injure him were it not for the flesh. His contest with the flesh, however, had a higher end than this. He loved God, he earnestly desired to be delivered from sin, which God hates, and to be perfectly conformed to His holy image. He had a hard struggle with these three enemies, but now at the end he shouts the shout of victory, “I have fought a good fight.”

2. “I have finished my course.” Believers have to run a race, as well as to fight a fight. The apostle here calls it a *course*. It is the journey of the Lord’s people from the date of their new birth to the day of their departure out of this world. The course of some is long; the course of others is short. As the Lord has fixed the bounds of our habitation, so He has fixed the space of time we are to live in this world. Paul’s course, like that of other Christians, was from the time of his conversion to the time of his death. It was within that space he did all his fighting as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; performed all his labours as an apostle and minister of the Gospel, and endured all his sufferings. He has now come to the end of his course, and says, “I have finished my course.” He was at that time a prisoner, and he knew that his end was near. The Lord made this known to him. His work on earth was done, or his enemies could not put him to death. He was now ready to be offered, and the time of his departure from the church militant to the church triumphant was at hand.

3. “I have kept the faith.” What is meant by the word *faith*? In some parts of Scripture this word means the grace of faith – the faith whereby we receive Christ in the offer of the Gospel, and rest on Him alone for salvation; in other parts it means the word of faith, which is our warrant to believe in Christ, or the doctrine of the Gospel – including all the counsel of God revealed in His Word. It is in the latter sense we are to understand faith here. This is the faith which was once delivered to the saints. The word of reconciliation was committed to the apostles, and they kept it.

Paul says, “I have kept the faith.” He not only preached the faith, but he also kept it. This was a great comfort to him at the close of his ministry. Others threw away the Gospel, and began to preach fables in its place, but Paul kept it, so that it came down to us pure and entire. In keeping the faith he had to contend for it; for there were many trying to take it from him and from the church. But he kept it, although he lost his life at last for his faithfulness. He does not grudge that loss because he kept the faith. So pleased he is to lay down his life for the sake of the Gospel that he says, “I am now ready to be offered,” for “I have kept the

faith,” which is to overcome the world. It is the duty of ministers, not only to preach the Word of God, but also to defend and keep it for coming generations. We cannot keep any word but that which we received. God gave us His Word, which is able to make us wise unto salvation. Those that will be faithful in keeping the faith may face death and eternity with joy as the apostle did, but on the other hand, those that will not keep it, after solemnly vowing to do so, may expect terrible accusations of conscience at their dying hour. I would not wish to be present at their death bed.

II. – Paul’s prospect in view of death – “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.”

He told us what he did during his past life as a Christian and an apostle: he fought a good fight, he finished his course, he kept the faith. He now tells us what are his prospects in the eternal world to which he is going. He expects a crown. He has not yet received it, but it is laid up for him. He is still on earth; he shall not receive it until he cross Jordan; when he arrives in the kingdom of glory he will get it. He is on his way to that kingdom; he is on the very borders of it. Another step forward and he is within the kingdom. He will receive the crown then. He is sure of it. God’s word is his warrant; Christ’s merit is the ground of his hope, and his sonship is his title.

What are we to understand by the crown the apostle hoped to receive? It is spoken of in Scripture as “an exceeding weight of glory.” “The Lord will give grace and glory.” He will give grace to His people on earth; He will give them glory in heaven. Grace prepares them, and makes them meet for heaven. Glory is grace ripened to maturity; grace is the seed sown; glory is grace made perfect. Christians are imperfect in grace during their time in this world. They are therefore exhorted to grow in grace. In heaven they are perfect – “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy and without blemish.” The perfection of their nature in the holy image of God is included in the crown. Again, in heaven they shall be made kings, and as kings are crowned, so they shall be crowned. Their exalted state with Christ in heaven is their crown. They are in the most glorious condition which rational creatures are capable of. They are nearer Christ than angels that never sinned! No wonder that the apostle desired to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better. Oh, to die is gain to those who are in Christ! It may therefore be designated “a crown.” The apostle calls it “a crown of righteousness.” In Revelation 2:10, it is called “a crown of life.” “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” In 1 Peter 5:4, it is called “a crown of glory.” “And when the chief shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” And in our text it is called “a crown of righteousness.”

Now, although these three different descriptions are given of it, it is the same crown described in different ways, according to the circumstances of those to whom it is held forth for their comfort and encouragement, as may be gathered from the passages of Scripture referred to.

It may be called “a crown of righteousness” for at least two reasons.

(1) Because it is secured by, and given to the redeemed on the ground of the righteousness of Christ. Salvation from first to last – grace and glory – is given to sinners for the sake of Christ, who secured that blessing for His people by His atoning death.

(2) Because it is a just thing that they should receive this crown. Christ, the giver of the crown, is called the righteous Judge. When He punishes the wicked in hell and crowns the righteous with glory in heaven, He acts justly in doing so. “It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,” etc. – (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7). At the day of judgment it will be as clear as noon-day, when the sun shines in his full brightness, that the punishment of the wicked and the glory of the righteous are according to justice. However unworthy in themselves God’s people are, it is a righteous thing that they should be

crowned with glory. “Worthy is the Lamb,” who was slain for them. “God is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works.”

III. – The time when the apostle expected to receive the crown – “At that day.” There are two days when the crown shall be given.

1. The day when the soul shall enter heaven, immediately after death. Going through the shadow of the valley of death it is still night, except as it is made bright by the presence of Christ. He comes to meet the soul, to convey it safely to the Father’s house, where there are many mansions. When He introduces the soul into that house then there will be a day, an everlasting day, whose sun shall never go down. That is the first day on which the believer shall receive the crown, with respect to his soul. Christ Himself shall put the crown on his head.

2. The second day is the day of the resurrection of the body. The body shall then be raised up in glory, re-united to the soul, and the whole person – soul and body – shall receive the crown of righteousness. It is not the same persons who carry the body to the grave that will carry it from the grave to heaven. Men carry it to the grave; angels will carry it from the grave to glory. It is Christ that will quicken the body. “I will raise it up at the last day.” But He will employ angels – His ministering spirits – to carry it. The body shall leave behind it in the grave all the infirmities that attached to it in the state of imperfection; it shall be made perfect and fit for the state of glory. It shall bear no mark of old age, such as grey hairs, dullness of hearing, dimness of vision, or any weakness whatever. So great the change shall be that you would wonder if it was the same body you saw on earth. Yea, the believer himself shall be in such a mist of wonder as Peter was in when he was in a miraculous manner taken out of prison. He for a time stood in doubt as to whether his release was real. So it shall be in the case of the believer at the resurrection with regard to his body; the change shall be so great. But after all we have said, how little we can say about the state of the saints in glory! “It does not yet appear what we shall be, but when he shall appear, we know we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

IV. – The crown is not peculiar to Paul, but is the common privilege of all believers – “And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Christ redeemed by His blood not only apostles and prophets and ministers of the Gospel, but also all the members of His mystical body. All the redeemed are made the children of God by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit in them. Being children they are heirs, “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” They are therefore entitled to the inheritance of their Father. They shall receive the crown of righteousness. But each person shall participate in the glory that shall be revealed in the measure of his growth in grace and usefulness in the Lord’s vineyard on earth. Although they all receive the crown on the ground of the merit of Christ, yet there will be a difference in their glory, as one star differs from another in glory. There are some stars greater and brighter than others. So it shall be in heaven. They that have turned many to righteousness shall have more glory than others. Paul says of some – he was the instrument of their conversion – “Ye are my crown.” These would be jewels in his crown. They that make more attainment in grace on earth shall have more glory in heaven – (Matthew 25:20, 21). In nature the fruit of the harvest depends on the growth of the seed sown in spring; the more growth the more fruit in harvest. There are, in like manner, degrees of glory in the state of the saints in heaven. Believers are vessels of honour. But all the vessels are not of the same size and capacity; some are large, others are small. The large vessels contain more than the small ones, but both shall be filled with glory; the large vessel cannot keep but its fill, and the small vessel may say, “My cup is overflowing. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.” There will be no jealousy or discontentment among the saints in

heaven; all will be fully satisfied with their lot, and they will praise the Lord for ever and ever.

The apostle gives a characteristic mark of those who shall receive the crown – they “love his appearing.” The appearing of Christ means His second coming. He came the first time to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; He will come the second time without sin, for the final salvation of His people. It is said of these that they look for Him – (Hebrews 9:28). They look for Him, and “love his appearing.” The appearing of Christ at the last day will be most glorious. He shall appear in glory. It is to judge the world – the quick and the dead – He shall come again, to glorify His saints, and to punish the wicked. The mark the apostle gives here is a distinguishing one. It is a text by which we should try ourselves. When you think of the second coming of Christ to judgment, do you love His appearing? Or do you dread and hate it, like the criminal who dreads the sight of the judge who is to pronounce sentence on him? The wicked would wish that Christ should never come again, but His own people love His appearing. They love Himself; they love His first coming, and they love His second coming. They love His appearing, because it is then He shall be glorified in His saints, and admired of all them that believe; they love His appearing, because He comes to raise their bodies and to glorify them with their souls (they now wait for the adoption of the body); they love His appearing, because it is at His second advent vengeance shall be executed on His and their enemies, even “those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Many live as if there were no God, as if there were no distinction between good and evil, as if there were no account to render of the things done in the body. Many trample upon the cause of Christ and persecute His people. This is a grievance to the Lord’s people, but all shall be put right and finally settled when Christ, the righteous Judge; shall come again. They love His appearing, for these among other reasons. Happy are they who, in view of Christ’s second advent, can say at death with the apostle, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

Now, dear friends, you all know the solemn circumstances under which we meet here today. The words of our text can be appropriately applied to your late beloved pastor, who departed this life on Tuesday last, and whose remains you laid in the grave at Applecross on Friday. He fought a good fight, he finished his course, he kept the faith, and he received the crown of righteousness.

Mr. Macdonald’s career as a preacher may be divided into three parts –

- (1) as a schoolmaster;
- (2) as a probationer;
- (3) as an ordained minister.

In the year 1850 he was employed *as a teacher* of one of the schools of the “Ladies’ Society for the Religious Improvement of the remote Highlands and Islands.” That Christian Society planted schools in many necessitous districts in the Highlands. As part of their object was to help godly young men who studied for the ministry, students only were employed as teachers, and Mr. Macdonald having finished his first session at the university, was employed as one of their first teachers. It was that year the Society began their good work. It was also the year in which Mr. Macdonald realised a comforting sense of his interest in Christ. His joy was great, his cup was running over. Besides his work at the school during the week, he began to conduct meetings on the Sabbath. Old and young flocked to hear him; all felt that a man of God had come among them. The fruit of his labours in that district, I believe, met him in heaven on his entrance there. He laboured as a teacher in connection with the Society till he finished his curriculum in the Divinity Hall – teaching the school during the summer months, and attending college in winter. He taught as a schoolmaster in three different districts in South Uist – Uskeva, on the east side of Benbecula, Grinish on the west, and latterly at Stonybridge in the parish of South Uist. In all these places he conducted religious

meetings on Sabbath days, and his services were much appreciated and much in demand by the Lord's people, and were also made effectual by the Spirit to the conversion of sinners. After finishing his course at college he was licensed as a preacher of the Gospel by the Presbytery of Skye, and laboured as a probationer in various parts of the Highlands till he was settled as an ordained minister at Shieldaig in the year 1870. He laboured faithfully in this congregation till the end of his life on earth. Mr. Macdonald had fully completed his jubilee in the service of Christ.

Mr. Macdonald *as a preacher*. His preaching was largely experimental; it was so because he experienced the power of God's Word – law and Gospel – in his own soul as few did. He could say, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you; that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." He preached the doctrines of the Word also. His experience was produced by the Word. He preached with great energy and unction when the Lord gave him liberty. He was dependent on the Lord in declaring His message. Few ministers have understood the words of Christ – "Without me ye can do nothing," – better than Mr. Macdonald. He would require to receive something for his own soul before he could minister the bread of life to others. I often compared him to the prophet who came to the widow who was gathering sticks to prepare the last morsel for herself and her son. He asked her to give him something first (1 Kings 17:13). When Mr. Macdonald received from the Lord, he would then give to the people, and living souls would be fed, refreshed, and comforted. Though he was thus dependent on the Lord for utterance, yet he did not neglect his duty of preparing for the pulpit. The many sermons which he has left behind him in manuscript are an evidence of his diligence in this respect. He always rose early on Sabbath or any other day he had to preach, and read over carefully and prayerfully his note book. Although he would, as he did, preach the same sermons over and over again, he would deliver them with new unction, so that they would be as new and refreshing to the hearers as the first time they were delivered. Such was his nearness to Him who is the fountain of life!

Mr. Macdonald *as a man of prayer*. Prayer was his element; he prayed "without ceasing." In the manse, in the church, in the field, at sea or on land, in company or alone, he breathed out prayer. I never saw a man that prayed so much as he did. He kept up communion with the Lord by prayer and meditation. When he prayed in the closet or at family worship he wrestled in prayer till he enjoyed the presence of the Lord, and when he got that blessing he would continue long in the exercise, rejoicing in His favour, in which there is life. Even when asking a blessing on the food of which he was to partake, or returning thanks, he was the same. The enjoyment of God was the all in all to him. This accounts for his long, but most sweet and savoury exercises. His prayers, however, were not exclusively for himself; they embraced others also. He prayed for the Lord's people; for sinners, that they might be saved; for the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and the coming of the kingdom of God's dear Son. He believed that "the earth shall yet be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea," and he prayed for the fulfilment of that promise. Many a prayer he offered up for the salvation of souls in his own congregation.

Mr. Macdonald was *a most spiritually minded man*, and he, like Enoch, "walked with God." In this respect he was a man in a generation. There have been in this generation greater ministers intellectually, but as for spirituality of mind and nearness to the Lord I knew none that would excel him. Since he first tasted that the Lord was gracious he maintained fellowship (not unbroken) with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ to the end of his pilgrimage in the wilderness. The fire of his first love to Christ kept on blazing to the end. Dr. Kennedy said in the course of a sermon that there were some (who were notable for their love to Christ) whose love to Christ never cooled in their heart. This may be truly said of Mr. Macdonald, though this was by no means his own feeling or opinion. When he enjoyed Christ



the heat of his love was great, and when he went mourning, seeking Him whom he loved, it was as great, though not as comfortable. But it was Christ's love to him that was the cause of his love to Christ. He spoke sparingly of his own love to Christ, but not so of Christ's love to the Church. The descriptions he used often to give of Christ's love to the Church reminded one of those given of it by the great Samuel Rutherford.

Mr. Macdonald had conflicts as well as enjoyments. He, like the apostle, had to fight against the world, the devil, and the flesh. He experienced the enmity of godless men to a large extent; but he fought as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and overcame at last. Though weak in body he had the heart and courage of a soldier. He would yield to no man, whatever his position in the Church or in the world might be, in that which he considered to be right. Some men thought they might twist him as they pleased, but found out in the attempt that he was not a reed to be shaken with the wind. His conflicts with the devil were severe, frequent, and of long continuance, even to the end. He was not ignorant of Satan's devices. So well known these were to him that when the evil one latterly approached him with his temptations, he would say, "I know thy black face; get thee behind me, Satan." As for struggles with the flesh or indwelling sin, few had a deeper experience of them. He had a deep sense of the sinfulness of his nature, which made him often cry, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He had to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, at a time when many were trying to take it away from the Church. He faithfully contended for it, and kept it for this and coming generations.

During Mr. Macdonald's time at Shieldaig – about thirty years – he changed five dwelling houses. When he came to Shieldaig he put up in a small house in the village. Shortly afterwards he got a better house, in which he lived till the manse was built. When he was evicted from the manse by the Presbytery of Lochcarron in 1893, on account of his faithfulness to God's truth, he put up in a small cottage on the south side of the loch. The Free Presbyterian Manse, which was built four years ago, was his last dwelling-place on earth. He is now in "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There he is at rest; there he is truly happy in the enjoyment of God for ever. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

In conclusion, a word to the congregation. The Lord favoured you much by giving you such a godly pastor as Mr. Macdonald. Much was given you, and much shall be required of you. He laboured long among you; preached the Gospel to you in love and faithfulness; and earnestly and sincerely sought your salvation. Though dead, yet he speaketh. Pray that the word spoken to you may be blessed to you. If you die in your sins after all you have heard from the lips that are now closed by the hand of death, he will rise up in judgment as a witness against you at the last day, and add his amen to your everlasting condemnation. You who are the Lord's people, and mourn the removal of your beloved pastor, let the thought comfort you that he has gone before you to heaven. You shall soon follow him; you shall meet him again where there shall be no separation. Follow his teaching and the example he has set before you. Be faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life.

This is the first breach that death has made on the ministry of our Church. I consider myself as the next to be taken away. Younger ministers may be called away before me, but according to the course of nature, I cannot expect to be long in this world. The removal of my brother and companion in labour is a new call to me to be up and doing for the Lord while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. It is with mingled feelings I think of the departure of my dear friend – feelings of sorrow and joy. I deeply mourn his loss on earth, and I rejoice to think of his happiness with Christ in glory. He left a blank behind him – a blank in the manse, a blank in the congregation, a blank in the Church, and a blank in the world. Mr. Archibald Cook used to say when he heard of the death of a godly person, "So

much of heaven has been taken from the world.” I may add that his removal has caused a breach in my own heart. May the Lord raise up other faithful ministers for His work on earth!  
[October 1901]

## Notes of a Sermon

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO, Strathy.  
Preached at Kilmuir, Skye, on 10th May, 1867.

[These notes, hitherto unpublished, are from Mr. Munro's own manuscript. The Rev. Christopher Munro was descended from the famous John Munro, "Caird" of Kiltearn, Ross-shire, and was also nephew of the eminent Rev. John Munro, Halkirk, Caithness. He was born in the parish of Roskeen, Ross-shire, in 1817, was ordained in Tobermory in 1857, was translated to Kilmuir, Skye, in 1864, and thence to Strathy, Sutherlandshire, in 1870, where he died on the 1st October, 1885, aged sixty-eight years. Mr. Munro was an able minister of the New Testament. Possessed of an intellectual and cultured mind, he was also highly esteemed as a man of deep vital piety, and as an impressive preacher of the Gospel of Christ. — ED.]

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” – Titus 3:5,6.

In the preceding verses Paul exhorts, or rather instructs, Titus as to the temper Christians ought to manifest towards all men, which, in general, ought to be gentle and meek. One ground on which he urges this is that they themselves were “sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another”; the other is that, if now they are different, this had happened, not by their own wisdom, nor on account of any merit possessed by them, but from the grace of God, which may be said to be that which the apostle describes in the verses now read as a subject of discourse.

In the text we see the following particulars: –

- I. – The source whence salvation has flowed to sinners.
- II. – The nature of salvation, or in what does it consist.
- III. – The efficient Agent in this work.
- IV. – The meritorious grounds thereof.

I. – We are to consider the source of this salvation, which is laid down here in two ways, first, negatively, and second, positively.

In the *first* he declares what is not the source or cause thereof – “not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Some may ask why does he state that it is not by works of righteousness done by them? There are two obvious reasons for it. The first is that man by nature is disposed to entertain the opinion that God cannot do good to any but to him who deserves it at His hand, and consequently that everyone who receives any benefit from Him must be good; by which view he makes God his debtor, and claims for himself all the glory, so far as merit is concerned, and so robs Him of the glory of His sovereign grace – a view which is very sinful, and therefore very dangerous to man and very dishonouring to the glory of God. Man being thus inclined, and God having purposed to reveal the truth, could not leave him to err in so important and vital a matter. The other reason is, that there is no good in man as a sinner, and therefore that he cannot merit anything at God’s hand. By there being no good in man, I mean that he is wholly corrupt, sinful, or unholy, and therefore, as an unclean thing, no clean thing can come out of him. On these two points Scripture is clear and explicit. “There is none righteous; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” “We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin,” that is, that they are sinners, have transgressed the law, are under its curses, and liable to the death threatened therein against the sinner. “Therefore by the works of the law no flesh can be justified in the sight of God.” No man deserves good; no man merits salvation; no man shall receive pardon; no man shall escape from the just judgment of God on the grounds of any personal merit, or because of anything he does.

Some may say that this is what is taught in Paul’s epistles, but that James, who was an apostle too, says that men are justified by works and not by faith, and that if they both spoke the truth, how are statements so contradictory to be reconciled? Is it possible to reconcile them? They, no doubt, both spoke the truth, and therefore did not contradict each other, for the truth is not contradictory – there is harmony in every part thereof. If they meant the same thing, they must be contradictory, and therefore cannot both be true. But as they *are* both true, they cannot have the same thing in view, but things that differ. Is not justification that of which each of them treats, and must they not then speak of the same thing? It is quite evident that each of them speaks of justification, but justification may be looked upon from two points of view, and it is quite clear that Paul, in the passage quoted, looks at it or considers it

from a different one than James. The former treats of it as an act which takes place in the sight of God as a judge, or in the court of God and of conscience; whilst the latter as evidently treats of it in its external fruits in the sight, no doubt, of God, but especially in the sight of men, and more particularly in the sight of the Church. It is quite clear that the doctrine of Scripture, as to the first aspect thereof, is that it is by faith in Christ, and not by works of law, that man is justified. Supposing then that a man said unto the Church, or to yourself, if you will, that he had faith, and had believed in Christ, and so was justified, what would you think about him? Would you take it for granted that he was justified because he said so? It is not likely. You might perhaps say, "That is a great privilege, a great blessing, which I know to be given by God to sinners, and which He may have given you, but as faith is an exercise of the soul, and therefore hid from the observation of your fellowmen, I cannot for myself conclude, on the ground of your mere statement, that you are justified. Knowing, however, from Scripture that those who are sincere believers bear a certain character and pursue a certain tenour of conduct, I must therefore see you manifesting such a character ere I can have any satisfaction as to the truth of what you allege." This is the very thing that the apostle James demands. He says, "You maintain you have faith; that may be true, but show me by your life or your works that what you state is really the case. It is easy to *say* that you have faith – that you have believed – but as that is an act of the soul which I cannot see directly, therefore I cannot have any proof of its truth till I see you walk in the ways of God and bring forth the fruits of repentance." It is thus that all who profess faith in Christ are tried, and it is according to their walk or their fruits their fellowmen judge whether they are believers or not. "By their fruits ye shall know them." You will not believe that an ignorant or profane man, or one who habitually breaks God's law, is a believer, however strenuously he may maintain the contrary. It is those who lead a life of godliness you take for believers. This, then, is the point of view from which James treats of justification, and you must therefore perceive that there is no variance between what Paul and James teach on this subject, and that both are easily reconciled.

In the *second* place, under this head, we are to consider the positive ground or source of salvation, or that from which salvation comes, and that is God's mercy.

Mercy, according to some, is not an inherent attribute of God. And if by mercy be meant only an affection of pity such as moves man to feel for the misery of a fellow-creature and causes him pain, an uneasiness till it is removed, or that blindly impels him to attempt his deliverance, I suppose few will venture to say that there is mercy of this kind in God. But that mercy is an essential attribute of God is, I think, clearly revealed in Scripture. In declaring His name to Moses, He calls Himself "the Lord God merciful and gracious," etc. This He calls His name, which must signify either His essential nature, or the manifestation He gives of Himself in His works, or what is called His declarative glory; and should we take it in the latter sense, it leads, in my opinion, to the same conclusion, namely, that mercy is an essential attribute of God. I suppose there can be no two opinions on what is meant when God is said to glorify Himself, and if it be His revealing Himself, not only in His Word but in His works, and especially in His work of redemption, where He not only makes Himself known objectively, but communicates unto the poor and needy soul out of His infinite fulness what renders it unspeakably and eternally happy; it is evident that all His works are indications of what He is in Himself, or the result of some property or attribute that is essentially in Him. The creation of the world is an indication of power and the result of omnipotency, which no one doubts to be an essential attribute in the Creator. The laws, according to which it is sustained which are so manifold and intricate in their operation are the result and indications of infinite wisdom, another attribute of His being, so that in the creation and in sustaining it, He reveals what is essential to Him, viz., power and wisdom. We may, it appears to me, safely say then, that God does nothing contrary to His essential being, but all things in

accordance with it. There must be then a property in God agreeably to which He shews mercy, and which therefore is in Scripture called mercy. And so we read that He delighteth in mercy. Those who say that mercy is not an inherent attribute seem to think that the legitimate consequence of this would be that He must shew mercy unto all. But with all deference, I cannot see how this consequence could follow when it is the independent, eternal and sovereign God of whom it is said. To say or maintain that God, absolutely considered, is under a necessity of doing anything external to Himself, is virtually to deprive Him of Godhead, of His eternal independence and sovereignty. It was not necessary for Him to create the world. It was of His mere good pleasure He purposed to create it; and it is because He was omnipotent He was able to accomplish His purpose; and are we to conclude that because He did not create it from a necessity of nature, omnipotency is not an inherent attribute? To say that if mercy were an inherent attribute of God, that would lead to its necessary exercise, would be the same as to say that His omnipotency laid Him under the necessity of creating the world, which no one if right minded can for a moment maintain.

What then is this mercy? It is that attribute, according to which He does good to the unworthy; saves sinners from death; and makes them heirs of life; which He has purposed to do, not from any necessity arising from this attribute, but in the exercise of that sovereignty which is an essential part of His glory. This sovereignty is that which is meant when He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." It is then in God Himself we are to enquire for the source of salvation; it is in Him, and not in the sinner. God might justly execute the sentence of death upon each one of them, but of his own free will, according to the counsel of His will, He purposed to shew mercy to some sinners, but not unto all. For had He shewn mercy unto all, men might say that He could not do otherwise, and so feel little grateful to Him, and deny Him the glory which is His as a merciful and sovereign God. This mercy is then not only sovereign, but eternal, and unchangeable, as we frequently see in the Word of God.

II. – I am to direct your attention to the nature of the salvation with which He saves sinners. It is a salvation that consists in "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Regeneration is the making of a thing again, and when applied to a sinner, it means the same as to be born again or made a new creature. Man by nature is impure, guilty, and unholy, and so this salvation is represented as a washing, which is a well-known process adapted to cleanse anything that has been soiled. We often speak of a sickly and decayed constitution as requiring fresh blood, which is called the life of the body. The humours of the body are become diseased so that instead of being life the blood is turned into poison. Could we suppose pure and healthy blood infused into a constitution of this habit, it might be said to be renovated. So it is with the sinner whose soul has been corrupted and defiled, and is therefore dead spiritually, when spiritual life is imparted or communicated unto him. He is no longer the same dead diseased person he had been heretofore, but is re-animated by new life from the pure, unadulterated fountain of life, that diffuses new vigour and spiritual health through his whole nature.

He is likewise washed from the guilt of sin; the curse under which he had lain is removed; his sins are pardoned and the filthy rags of his own righteousness removed, and he is clothed with the robe of righteousness and the garments of salvation; so that in a certain sense there is no iniquity nor transgression seen in him by Him who is of purer eyes than to behold sin. He is renewed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which I think means his sanctification, a process commenced in the day of his new birth, and that continues to be carried on in him till the period of death, and which consists in the growth of the new man till he comes to the full stature of man, or till he is made perfect in holiness. This is a work rendered necessary by the dwelling of sin in him, which seems good to God to be the case as long as man tabernacles in the body. It consists in man being renewed after the image of God,

which change evinces itself by men dying unto sin as to its love and power over them, and living unto righteousness; growing in love to God and in delight in His law; growing in resolution and strength to obey His will in all things; increasing in knowledge of sin, of its deceitfulness, strength, and vileness; and so they not only see their need more clearly but are become more earnest in contending against sin, and rely more on the grace that is in Christ for obtaining the mastery over it, or for being made more than conquerors in the warfare against it.

III. – Under this head I shall only remark that the agent is the Holy Ghost, the third person of the adorable Trinity, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory with the Father and the Son, and whose love and grace towards the elect is also equal to that of the other persons. The Spirit then who comes forth from the Father and the Son, and who in fulfilment of Christ's promise has come and dwells in the Church, is the agent whose work is to apply the redemption purchased by Christ. This work is such as cannot be executed by any other than one who is God, and being committed to the Third Person, the work cannot fail of accomplishment. When the sinner lays to heart how depraved he is, how impossible for him to do any good, and when, under divine teaching, he apprehends in some measure the nature of holiness, and when in trial he utterly fails in reforming himself, he is ready to exclaim, "Who can be saved?" To which question the words of Christ may be stated as a reply, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." As it is God's work to regenerate and renew, it is possible with him to change and make a new creature of the most obdurate, most sinful and vile. When He has commenced this work, shall He not carry it on? Submit to Him then; beware of grieving Him, of quenching Him. He has given you His word, and promises to lead you in your endeavours to walk in the way of His commandments.

IV. – There is to be noticed, in the fourth place, the Second Person's work. Paul says that God the Father poured out the Spirit abundantly on them "through Jesus Christ our Saviour." He is then the way through which the Spirit comes forth. Sin erected a barrier between the divine mercy and the sinner, which had to be removed ere mercy could flow forth to him. There was no way of removing this but by fulfilling the law, by obeying the law in all its extent, and by satisfying justice that demanded the sinner's life. This Christ did by becoming the head of the covenant of grace, for whom, in this capacity, a human body and soul were prepared, which nature He assumed to Himself. His person as mediator being thus constituted, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, who was given Him without measure, and who rests in Him for ever. Having, under this anointing, magnified the law and made it honourable, the Spirit found a way to come forth to each of His people to apply the redemption purchased by Christ. Christ's work did not purchase the Spirit, as some say, if by purchasing Him they mean the gaining the love of the Spirit to objects towards which it did not formally exist, or the rendering Him willing towards a work to which He was not till then inclined; for this could not take place, since the love and will of God as three-in-one were eternally the same, and moved together in loving and electing the saved, and required in regard to the Godhead, considered personally, only the removal of the obstacles in the way of truth and justice, to come forth freely towards them. The love and goodwill of God was not the result of Christ's death, but the giving of Christ and delivering Him for our offences was the result of God's eternal and sovereign love to His people. Christ therefore, having been given and constituted mediator, and having finished the work given Him to do, is the only channel through which this love reaches the elect, and through which all the blessings of the new covenant are bestowed on them. And as the gift of the Holy Ghost is a principal one of those blessings, it is then, according to our text, through Christ He is poured forth abundantly as water upon him that is thirsty, and as floods on the dry ground.

We have thus set before us here the source of salvation, which is God's sovereign mercy; the manner in which it is applied; and the way in which it was purchased. We have the work of each person of the Trinity declared in few words, and we see that all is of God, and depends not in any sense on man himself, and as it comes altogether from Him, so to Him must belong the glory. Here, then, boasting is excluded, and God appears as the most glorious author and finisher. If it be of Him, how certain it is that it cannot and must not fail. See here the rock of salvation; see here the ground of trust, of hope, and steadfast expectation.

We see here also the nature of salvation. It is not what some would desire, viz., a mere deliverance from hell or from wrath. Many at times are very anxious to escape what God threatens against sin, and what their own consciences tell them they deserve, who are quite at ease in their state of spiritual death, ignorance, and distance from God, and rebellion against Him, who are contented with the world and pleased with the pleasures of sin. But there is no salvation as long as anyone is in this condition. No sooner does the Spirit of God quicken the soul than sin is felt, not only as a burden of guilt on the conscience, but as a loathsome disease that renders him abominable in the sight of God. It is felt in its contrariety to God's authority, law, truth, justice, and holiness, and therefore as an evil that is highly dishonouring to Him, and that must separate them from Him as the fountain of living water. Hence the necessity of such a salvation, as is described here, is seen and acknowledged, and earnestly sought after as most precious and desirable. This was the salvation David sought after, and in which he said he would greatly rejoice, and for which at another time he waited with failing eyes.

Is this the salvation you need to-day? Can you call God to witness that it is, and that you must die without it; that on this point you have no doubt whatever, and as little that it is God who must save you? Do you see, then, in the three persons of the Godhead, and in their respective parts in the great salvation, what suits your state as a sinner, or as one needy and poor? Cast yourself on Him, wait on Him, give Him no rest till He appear unto you as your God. Do you desire some motive to stir you up to praise and glorify Him? Look to Him as revealed here, and then you shall be lightened, and be not put to shame, and then you shall magnify Him. Let the consideration of this salvation lead the careless to think of their state and their need of the Holy Spirit. How sad to see people who need Him more than anything else, passing their time absorbed in the events of this life, while there is no thought about this.

[October 1901]

## ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL.

A Sermon by REV. J. KENNEDY, D. D.,

Preached at Inverness, 30th January, 1853.

1 Kings 18.

The inspired story of Elijah's life and labours may be divided into two parts – the first terminating and having its climax in the scene before us in this chapter, and the second closing and culminating in his translation. And there is a striking parallelism between these two portions of his biography. The first step of his ministry is taken in a stern threatening of coming judgment because of Israel's sins, followed by his retirement to Cherith – the second

begins with the infliction of judgment on the prophets of Baal, followed by his flight to Beersheba. Out of his retirement at Cherith he comes to the widow of Zarephath, while out of his hiding-place at Beersheba he comes to find and anoint Elisha. As the next event in both portions of his life, we have a meeting with ungodly Ahab. He next appears in both, wielding the thunders of divine judgment, in the one period confronting the priests of Baal, and in the other inflicting judgment on the messengers of Ahaziah. And his triumph on Mount Carmel, at the close of the first portion of his biography, has its corresponding and overtowering climax in his translation to heaven.

Of all the servants of God, there is none whose *history* is more *strange*, and whose *character* is more *unearthly*. He is admitted on the stage of history quite prepared for his work, and enters at once into service, just as if he had dropped down into his place from heaven. No sooner is he introduced than his stern voice is heard threatening direful judgments. We are startled by the suddenness of his appearance. We know indeed that he is a man – for he is called “Elijah the Tishbite.” We know, too, that he had a home on earth before he appeared as the prophet of the Lord, for he is said to be “of the inhabitants of Gilead.” But this is all the private history of the man Elijah. We know, too, that he was a sinner saved by grace. But with these exceptions, and the instances of his bodily infirmities recorded, the man is shrouded by the mantle of the prophet, and the sinner is hid beneath the heavenliness of the saint.

How strange, too, are, the incidents of his life! Any one of them would suffice to signalise a biography. Some of them are altogether peculiar, and the part which he acted on Mount Carmel seems to be without a parallel. And how strange was the close of his life on earth! If he seemed to have been dropped down from heaven when he first appeared on earth as a prophet, he was actually raised up, without having passed through death, when his work on earth was finished. But strange as was his removal, we almost cease to wonder when we connect it with his marvellous life and labours. His life on earth ends consistently when it ends very strangely. Elijah’s translation seems to be the fitting close of such a life as his.

His life-work cannot but remind us of John the Baptist, and his end of Enoch. We cannot refrain from comparing him with both these men of God. Of Enoch we thrice read that he “walked with God;” yea, the singular testimony is recorded that he did so for at least three hundred years on earth. This strange life ended, as did Elijah’s, in a translation to heaven. In such a removal, peculiar heavenliness, in the life of both, finds a signal attestation in their being taken over death to glory. John the Baptist, in his life, ministry, and character, was Elijah the Second; but how different the close of his life on earth from that of him who ascended in chariots of fire to heaven! But even John’s life, with a translation like Elijah’s at its close, would not present to us so remarkable a history as Elijah’s, though the Baptist’s was the more important ministry.

How peculiarly *unearthly* is the *character* of Elijah! Knowing nothing of him, till he is introduced as a prophet, the Lord thereafter keeps him so much with Himself – He allows him to mingle so little with society – that there seems to be no opportunity for the ordinary development of the character of a saint. It is true that God sends him to the home of a widow to dwell there for a season – He allows him to have stated intercourse, during a period of his life, with a fellow-creature; but how strange, how scarcely human, is all that is told us of their fellowship! He finds indeed an opportunity of expressing his love towards one who was journeying with him on the way to heaven, but how altogether unusual is the manner in which his affection is expressed. Divine power seems to be at his command, to perform miracles for her benefit, but how little of the tenderness of human affection appears in all his benefaction. The hand of the prophet seems as if it were unconnected with the heart of a man – it would seem as if it were immediately wielded by the power of God. How little, too, of what is earthly do we find in his intercourse with Elisha. Even to him how seemingly stern is



the prophet. Only, as a prophet, does he seem to care to have any intercourse with him. The *man* seems unapproachable even to Elisha, his anointed successor. And in his intercourse with ungodly men how studded with spear-points was the mail in which he was clad. How stern and repulsive the world judged him to be!

But why does Elijah seem so *stern*? Because we know him only as a prophet in degenerate times, and as a prophet peculiarly holy. He lived in days of rampant ungodliness, when provocations countless, and tokens not a few, of divine anger appeared to him. He would not be in sympathy with the mind of God, at such a time, without being sad and stern. His appointed work was to testify against abounding sin, and to be the minister of God in the infliction of terrible judgment. How could a man of God, in such circumstances, be less stern than was Elijah, or less sad? Only one who was disposed to be a trimmer could present a more benign aspect in the days of Ahab in Israel. All tenderness was repelled by the bold iniquity and the rampant idolatry of the time. Ungodly men compelled him to be severe, and then censured him for being so. They assumed an attitude of defiance towards his God, while trampling under foot His law. He, in the name and strength of Jehovah, assumes an attitude of firm and fearless protest against the views and practices which, under the shade of court favour, were now rising into fashion. He was not, because of this, the “troubler of Israel,” though he was charged with being so. He is Israel’s best friend, among all her sons, as he is the one outstanding witness on Jehovah’s side. He Israel’s troubler! No; it is his work to repel the troubles which Ahab, and his court and his priests, are bringing on the land. He is the great peace-maker of the time, and just because he is so he is decried as a troubler. He desires *purity and peace*, while the trimming halters in Israel desired peace in impurity – the stillness of death, which is but quiet in the midst of corruption.

And what is the sternness of Elijah? It is the vehemence of his zeal for the glory of his God, and the fervour of his love to Israel. It is the bright flame of his holy love to God and to Israel that is so repulsive to ungodly worldlings, to lying prophets, and to false worshippers. He appears severe, and is decried as intolerant, because he cannot have any compromise with sin, and will not divide his favour between truth and error. He is uncompromising, because he is so like “the Holy One of Israel.” “But surely,” some will be disposed to say, “his sternness was carried to an extreme when he slew the priests of Baal.” But why should that action of his be so regarded? Does it bear an aspect of relentless cruelty? If to your mind it appears in that light, it is because you know not Elijah’s God. It is His beauty, His glory, to be holy, and he never acts in a way that more becomes Him than when he is “a consuming fire” to the workers of iniquity. God is glorified in a work of judgment. “Yes,” it may be said, “but Elijah was a man, and therefore to him vengeance did not belong. ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,’ therefore he ought to have withheld himself from slaughter.” But you forget that the prophet was called to the work of vengeance by the Lord of Hosts. In carrying out a purpose of God, it is dutiful to act the part which the Lord assigns to his servants – yea, it is honourable as well as dutiful to do so. He was acting as a minister of God in bringing into view the glory of his holiness. Such a work unbecoming to a prophet! Why even angels took part in such a work, and are they to be charged on that account with being unloving and stern? Did they not act a part in the awful destruction of Sodom and of the hosts of Assyria? And is work done by angels to be regarded as such, that *men*, called to do so, ought not to take part in it? If there was naturally a lack of tenderness in Elijah’s disposition, all the more fitted was he for the place which he was destined to fill. Such a man, when renewed by the grace of God, was developed into the prophet, whose lot was to be cast in degenerate times, and whose work was to announce the coming of God’s righteous judgments.

The only objection to the character of Elijah on the part of the ungodly is founded on their dislike to the character of God Himself. Utterly repulsive to the world are the holiness and righteousness of Jehovah. It is because of this they form for themselves a deity invested

with no attribute but love, that will wink at sin, and will allow them with impunity to walk in the way of their heart. The more His people resemble the true God, the more will they be repulsive to the ungodly; and if true godliness is flourishing in a time of growing impiety, whether it be in an individual or in a Church, its aspect must be severe, for it cannot but frown on the ungodliness around it, while those who are careful to walk in the fear of the Lord must have persecution to endure. Just as the frown of God is darkening the firmament of providence over a land that is ripening for judgment, the aspect of a faithful witness for God must be becoming more stern, his attitude more unyielding, his sorrow more profound, and his rebukes more severe.

Elijah was the representative of true godliness in degenerate times – a representative of Bible religion in a time of spiritual barrenness and growing error. He was a witness for the truth when the power of the world was against it. It is as such we must view him on Mount Carmel. And how well fitted did the Lord make him for the part which he had then to act. Undaunted, unyielding, and holy, he finds his proper place, in the scene before us, as the one outstanding witness for God and for His truth, against the abused power of an ungodly king, the idolatrous rites of superstition, and the vacillations of an ignorant people.

Which is true, the religion of the Bible or the religion of the world? was the question to be decided on Mount Carmel. The religion of the world, or the worship of Baal, is the popular religion in Israel. All the power of the King is on its side, and the nobles of Israel take side with the King. The overwhelming majority of the people, attracted by the imposing spectacles of the worship favoured by the court, follow the King and the nobles. So widespread is the degeneracy that Elijah accounts himself alone in witnessing against the prevailing iniquity. Let no one rashly rebuke him for thinking himself alone. True, there were seven thousand in Israel who bowed not their knees to Baal; but these were known only to the Lord. They should have been known to the church and to the world as well. Had they been fired with Elijah's zeal they had not been so hidden as they actually were. If Elijah's judgment was a hasty one, he lacked materials for a more favourable one. If he was faulty, it was because he formed any judgment at all, not because it was not more charitable.

He meets Ahab, the King having come at his summons when a sense of judgment had made him a coward. It is in a time of trial the difference between one man and another appears. How the righteous man rises over the billows by which the wicked are overwhelmed! Look to Ahab, bewildered and afraid, and then look to the prophet undaunted even in a time of "wrath" issuing his summons to the King to come to confer with him. And the cruel, cringing Ahab comes. Through lips quivering with fear comes out the malignant feeling of his wicked heart in the question: – "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" This charge Elijah regards as a reproach cast upon him as the servant of Jehovah. For the sake of his God's glorious name he demands a trial to decide whose claims should be respected, those of God or those of Baal – an occasion on which the truth and cause of God might be vindicated in presence of His enemies.

With what boldness he submits the question to a conclusive test! He has no doubt as to his being a witness for God, and as to the worship which he opposed being false. He was no halter, he was no trimmer. The expedient had not, in his mind, swallowed up the true. He knew the truth, he loved it, he was quite ready to die for it. And he knew what the issue of the trial would be. He did not suggest it to Ahab till the Lord had first suggested it to himself. He had acted rashly in making such a proposal to the King, unless he knew that he was acting under divine direction, but knowing this, he could have no fear bearing on the issue of the trial.

With what authority he is invested when, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, he stands before the King! He commands him to gather to Carmel his priests and his people. He acts, in issuing this demand, in the name of his God, and he knows that He can secure the

obedience even of Ahab. He speaks as the Lord directs him, and his words tell on the conscience of the King, and as the result of Ahab's cowardice, a royal edict goes forth in terms of the prophet's demands; while Elijah, with unshaken confidence, awaits the issue of the trial, knowing that Jehovah would manifest His glory to the confusion of His enemies.

On an early morning, soon after Elijah's meeting with Ahab, crowds from all parts of the land might be seen journeying to Mount Carmel. They reach it, and form a large assembly on the mountain. Ahab the King is there with a group of his courtiers around him. Four hundred and fifty of "the prophets of Baal" are there, and four hundred of "the prophets of the groves." A crowd of the people of Israel is there. Confronting the host of false prophets, in presence of the King and people, is Elijah, the prophet of the Lord.

How remarkable a scene this is! What a contrast Elijah presents, all alone as he appears to be, to the group of prophets whom the king delights to honour because they feed his pride and his love of ease with lies, appearing in the pomp and pageantry by which royal favourites are usually invested. Rude in his attire, perhaps emaciated and careworn, stern and undaunted, stands Elijah as the solitary witness for Jehovah. Into what relief are thrown the loneliness, the austerity, and the meanness of the man of God by the number, the proud mien, and the glitter of the minions of the king! These are the types of two religions – the one of God, the other of the world.

"And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." Two feelings strove for utterance in the souls of these halters in answering the prophet's question – one arising from the action of conscience, and another from the worldliness of their hearts – and they smother both and are dumb. Then he describes to them the trial to which the claims of Jehovah and those of Ahab are to be subjected, "and all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

Elijah then addresses the prophets of Baal, and directs them what to do to vindicate the claims of their god. They do as they are bidden, and in the presence of assembled Israel the worship of Baal by sacrifice begins. They take a bullock, "and dress it first," and then begin to invoke the idol to send fire to burn it. "From morning even until noon" they cry "O, Baal, hear us." It required no small measure of faith to enable these men to face the test in presence of all Israel, and to preserve them from abandoning their worship soon after it had begun. But it is far from unusual to find much faith of a certain kind in alliance with much error, and acting as a stimulus in false worship.

"At noon" "Elijah mocked them." How could he refrain from doing so? He was standing in the light of Jehovah's glory. In his view, therefore, infinitely despicable seemed all competitors for the homage due to Him, as well as the folly of all who turned aside from Him to "the vanities of the heathen." In mockery, therefore, of the worship and of the worshippers of Baal his holy zeal was most fitly developed. He but expresses his sense of the absurdity of idol worship. A company of fools are before him, for they have substituted an idol for Jehovah. And their folly is wickedness, and his sense of their folly and his indignation because of their iniquity are becomingly expressed in mockery of their worship and of their god. He stood on an elevation and in a light, through the knowledge and faith of his God, from which he saw in all its absurdity the drivelling folly of idolatry.

By his stinging sarcasm the prophets of Baal are driven desperate. "They leaped upon the altar which was made," "they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them;" but "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." How affecting are these last words as they tell us of the vanity of all false worship, and of the full proof of this, which shall be the issue of a conclusive trial! They gave up their vain service, for their cause was found to be desperate, their worship false, their hope unfounded, their prayers vain, and their god a lie.

The time has now come for the worship of the true God, and there is none but Elijah to take part in it. It is now evening. All day long lasted the worship of Baal. There was no stint of opportunity to his worshippers. Till the close of the hopeless service the crowd looked on, and listened to the frantic cries of the idolators. The long and anxious waiting, of all whose god was Baal, ended in utter disappointment. It was then, and not till then, that Elijah came forward to worship and invoke his God.

He is quite confident. "Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him." He then "repaired the altar of the Lord," taking "twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." He thus associates Jehovah with Israel, and it is as the Covenant God of Israel he proceeds, in presence of the people, to worship him. "He built an altar in the name of the Lord." And in order that there might be no excuse left to the sceptic, "he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time, and they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." How careful in all this was he to cut himself off from every resource apart from the power of God! A belt of water around the altar separated it from all earthly fire, and the soaked victim and wood could be burnt only by fire from heaven. This was seen by all the people; and to all it was evident that only as God "answereth by fire" could the sacrifice be consumed.

Not till all this was done, and when "the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice" had come, did "Elijah, the prophet, come near" to worship and to pray to "Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel." He appeals to Him as the Covenant God of His peculiar people, for His name's sake, in his own behalf as his servant, in order to the confusion of His enemies, and in order to the confirmation of wavering Israel.

In instant response to his appeal "*the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*" The demonstration was complete. Jehovah, the God of Israel, was the true God, for He alone answered by fire. The people are satisfied, for when they "saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The LORD, He IS THE GOD; the LORD, He is THE GOD."

The trial scene on Mount Carmel closes with the arrest of the prophets of Baal; and when Elijah had "brought them down to the brook Kishon," he "slew them there." These wicked men died by divine appointment. They deserved to die. An accursed death fitly closed their course; and in connection with it, Elijah acted as the minister of God.

#### APPLICATION.

It is now time to take up and to enforce the lessons of this passage of the word of God.

1. Do not forget that the question decided on Mount Carmel was, who is the true God, or which is the true religion. That is a question which each one of you ought to desire instantly to decide. Israel were constrained to make a choice between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal, while Elijah, representing true godliness, and the witness of the true God, on the one side, and the many prophets of Baal, representing false religion, and the worshippers of an idol, on the other, were before them. There was a choice very palpably presented to them, and they were very urgently pressed there and then to decide. But not less surely are you called to make your final choice. To them neutrality was impossible, and is just as much so to you. They tried to refrain from a deliberate choice, and they succeeded only in being halters, and if you follow their example you will be just as lame as they.

True, you have not, to aid you in your choice, such a proof as they had of the God of Israel being the true God. But it is not needed, for a much more glorious manifestation of God is before you. If not on Mount Carmel does he actually give to you a palpable proof of His being the God “that answereth by fire,” has He not given the highest possible evidence of this on Mount Calvary? Did He not there answer by fire the cry of all His people during Old Testament times, when His wrath descended on the sacrifice for sin provided by Himself – on His own Son, who was His own Lamb, as the substitute of a guilty people? That grand proof of His being the living God is before you in the clear light of the gospel. “Yes,” you say, “but I have the *record*, and not the *vision* of that.” True, the scene on Calvary cannot be a palpable spectacle as was that on Moriah. But it is just as really exhibited, though it is to your spirit, and not to your senses. Dare not to ask that God would supplement this revelation by some such display as your carnality requires. Even if the sign you seek were given what would it benefit you? You would still require the illumination of the Spirit in order that you might profit by it, and all that the Holy Ghost requires, in order to your enlightenment, is furnished in the *record* of the scene on Calvary. And with the light of that record shining on you, surely it is a fitting thing that you should be pressed to look on this manifestation of God in Christ crucified, and be urged, with that wonder of wonders before you, to make instant choice of Jehovah as your God. He is there as nowhere else – there in the fire that descended on the sacrifice, there in the sacrifice on which the fire came down, and there in the altar on which the sacrifice was laid; and, therefore, though the fire was “consuming,” you see Him, on whom it took full effect, rising through death to “the power of an endless life.” Is not this Jehovah, the God that answereth by fire – a fire that expressed His infinite aversion to sin, and that consumed all that prevented the free and full outflow of His love in salvation?

Is “this God” *your* God? How are you affected towards him? What think you of His holiness, of His justice, of His truth, of His wisdom, and of His love? Are you reconciled to His character as He appears in the glory of those attributes, in the cross of his Son? Is it because His name is thus revealed you adore, and trust, and love Him? Do you really so know His name that you actually trust in Him? Or is it your affliction that, because of your ignorance, you are such a stranger to faith in God? Would you prefer a believing acquaintance with Him to all that the world can give you? Is it really your desire to discover how God can be glorified in the salvation of sinners, ere you with confidence can appeal to His mercy? Does the light which discovers that God may be trusted by you humble you in His presence? Does a desire to do His will accompany your faith? Have you any zeal for the glory of His name? Does your sin grieve you because it dishonours Him? Are you afflicted by the iniquity which abounds around you in the world? Have you aught of Elijah’s trust, of his faithfulness, of his dependence on communion with His God, as the one solace of his life, and of the contempt and indignation with which all idols were regarded by him?

Or is yours the god of *the worldling*? He lives “without” the true “God in the world,” but he cannot dispense with leaving his idol. He must have an idol, and he himself must make it. He cannot endure to have as his deity one whose majesty would overawe him, to whose authority he must defer, whose holiness would make him shrink from sin, whose justice would invest with terror the judgment to come, and to whose sovereign grace he must as a sinner be a debtor for salvation. He therefore imagines a god all mercy, a universal father, from whom all may expect the treatment of children. Such a god as this does not require to be treated with honour. He is not so respectable as the world. He need not be thought of except under constraint. He is one of whom advantage may be taken. He has no eye to see, no ears to listen to the prayers of the needy, no power to smite, and no power to save. How many there are who have no other god than this – nothing more respectable than the idol worshipped on Mount Carmel by the prophets of Baal! Is this *your* god? If so, there is a trial coming, in which your idol will fail you, and as the result of which, with despair instead of hope in your

heart, you shall miserably perish, unless you shall be “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.”

Or is yours *the Pharisee’s* God? Of him only hard thoughts can be cherished. He is one to be appeased by toil and penance. He has no mercy, and therefore one who is a sinner can have no hope before him. Only as he contrives to keep a sense of sin out of his heart can he have any hope bearing on this god. But what can all one’s labour and earnestness profit in serving such a deity? What can all your knowledge of God as Lawgiver and Judge avail you? What can He avail you, of whom you can only have such views as tend to drive you away from His presence? No knowledge of God can be profitable which is attained apart from Christ crucified. There is no saving knowledge of the true God in your mind if you are not acquainted with Him as He is revealed in Christ Jesus. “This is life eternal,” Jesus says to His Father, “that they might know Thee, the only true God, *and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*” O, what if the veil is still on your heart, which hides, as the doctrine of the cross is before you, the sight which made the Psalmist’s heart to sing – “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other!” And what can you be but a child of darkness, unless “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in” your heart “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?”

Or is yours the new god of *the dreaming sentimentalist*? Once a day men hopefully thought of God’s universal mercy, now it is the fashion to think of His universal love. Those of the olden time did not care to associate the mercy of which they dreamed with the gospel of Christ at all; but these imagine that their hopes are directed towards the love commended in the cross. They care not to recognise in the revelation of the gospel the God of Sinai. They prefer to ignore Him. They refuse to associate ideas of truth, righteousness, and holiness with the God which they elect. The one idea which they connect with his character is that of love. A vague universal benevolence is the one attribute of their deity. Professing to desire a new testament, they really desire a new God. With “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and of Moses, of Elijah, and of David they will have nothing to do. They must have a new God for themselves. With a God who claims as His the whole work of salvation, and who declares that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” they will not deal. They refuse to be to that extent debtors to divine grace. They think of faith as that which is demanded in the gospel in order to an interest in the love of God. Thinking of the gospel in this aspect alone, they apply themselves to the work of meeting its requirements in their own strength, and the doctrine of universal love, because it is a lie, they find it not difficult to believe. Exercising this faith with the power of an old heart, they regain the ease which thoughts of danger had disturbed, and a new sensation of relief works itself out in the selfish bustle of carnally earnest service. Of their new god and of their religion these men are enamoured, and their zeal may not wane, nor their service cease, till, like the foolish virgins, they are knocking at the door of heaven only to find it for ever shut against them. Is this your god? If so, he is not Jehovah, the God of the fathers, nor is he the God who is revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. You have not found him in either Testament of the Bible – he appears in the light neither of law nor of gospel.

2. In the light of the description given of Elijah we may see *the kind of witness required in degenerate times – the man whom we need in the times we live in.* In a season of growing declension policy and compromise are the powers which shape the action of those who profess, like Israel, to be on the side of God. Differences between truth and error, and between spiritual and carnal worship are minimised, in order to remove the lines of difference which the word of God requires to be preserved. The views of Israelites and those of Baalites must be mixed up together, and as much must be borrowed from idolatrous worship as will make the worship of Jehovah less severely simple, and therefore less offensive to the carnal.

This is the kind of spirit now at work in determining what shall be the creed and the worship of the rising generation. By those who, in judgment, are allowed to take the lead of an overwhelming majority in the religious revolution now in progress, a man of Elijah's spirit would be regarded as a most intolerant bigot, who had no sympathy with an enlightened advancement, and who was bound to the past by an unreasonable traditionalism. But there is none such to trouble them, and of the few who have a little of his views and of his zeal they will soon be rid. A few years hence they are very likely to have the field to themselves, and can carry out their scheme of removing "the old landmarks" till nought is left of the labours of those men of God who "contended," in other days, "for the faith once delivered to the saints." It is verily high time that all who desire that the word and worship of the true God be not trodden under foot should cry, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

3. To all who hesitate to make a choice the Lord puts the question addressed to Israel on Carmel by Elijah, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

There are two opinions between which you halt. The one is, Jehovah *is* the true God, and the other is, another than He, and one altogether unlike Him, would be more to our liking – or, godliness is safe, but, worldliness is pleasant – your conscience urging you to the one and your heart drawing you to the other.

(1.) There are some of you who have not allowed yourselves to think at all about the two opinions between which you are urged to make a choice. If you yielded to your conscience your heart would be grieved, and if you consciously yielded to your heart your conscience would be troublesome. So you choose to keep aloof from the question altogether. Doubts as to the safety of your course do not disturb you. You will not admit God into your thoughts, and you thus acquire such ease as allows you to enjoy the world. A little fool's sport on the brink of hell is all of which you are ambitious, and with Satan's help you have gained it. Friend, you find it easy to say "peace and safety now," but the conclusive trial is drawing near, and "sudden destruction" shall soon overtake you if you continue as you are.

(2.) Others have an habitual conviction of their ungodliness, though that conviction is not effective in arresting them in their course of sin. They think that there is before them "a more convenient season" for deciding such a question as is pressed upon them. They therefore suppress the workings of conscience, and promising to themselves that there is a good time coming, they pass on to another stage of the journey to hell. What can they possibly gain by a short-lived triumph over conscience? It were far better, in a struggle with conscience, to be defeated than to overcome. Conscience must, sooner or later, have the advantage over you. The time for using lies as your weapons shall right early pass away, and in the might supplied by divine authority, it will arise within you, to scatter all excuses to the winds, and to fasten on your soul a grasp from which you cannot shake yourself free. A neglected conscience is a smothered fire in your breast which must yet break forth. And what right have you to reckon on a moment beyond the present? "Now is the accepted time," saith the Lord, and dare not to say "Nay" to a divine statement so plain and explicit. And, even if you had years of life before you, what reason have you for thinking that these would supply "a more convenient season" than the present? Why is not the present "convenient?" It is not because of aught that is awaiting, on God's side, to complete an opportunity of salvation. It seems not "convenient" to you, just because you dislike to apply your attention to your soul's case, and to make a decided choice for eternity. And think you, will you, by leaving yourself under the power of sin, Satan, and the world, become more disposed, than you now are, to lay to heart "the things which belong to your peace?"

(3.) Others there are who seem sufficiently decided, if they are judged by their profession. There is no stint, in their case, of the cry "Lord, Lord," and this is loud because it is alone, and has to make up all their religion. They boldly do the work of professing, because

they care not to be sincere, and because Satan counts it not worth his pains to stir up persecution against them. He cares not how much there may be of the “sounding brass,” and the “tinkling cymbal,” within the church. The men who have truth in their hearts, and “the sword of the Spirit” in their hand, are the men to make him angry. Those “who live godly in Christ Jesus” are they who “suffer persecution.” But how vain to themselves, as well as fruitless to the church, is the hollow profession of graceless men, and how foolish, as well as sinful, it is, not to be anxious to have, while it can be found, “oil in their vessels with their lamps?” What will a profession, which is but a lie, avail in the day of trial?

(4). Others still there are who think that they have made the right choice already, and who dislike to have their decision called in question or examined. They were conscious of some change, and they can recall it, and be comforted by the remembrance, and the resulting hope fed by a bustling service they cherish in a dark place, into which they allow not the searching light of truth to enter. They never leave “the first principles of the oracles of God,” and neither in knowledge, experience, nor practice does progress indicate the presence and activity of spiritual life. But they have satisfied themselves, because they were both deceitful, and were dealing with fools; and, of all, these are the most difficult to move to a careful examination of their state before God. With supercilious contempt passing into open hostility they are prone to regard those who would urge them to examine themselves.

But let all these, without exception, know *that neutrality is impossible*, and that the *halters* who attempt it *are both foolish and wicked*.

*Neutrality is impossible* on two accounts.

(1) Because there is a conflict for your choice, bearing upon you, between the Lord and the great enemy. Between these opposite and mighty powers, it is impossible for you to be neutral. Either power must gain you. Unless the Lord puts forth the power of His Omnipotent grace to win you to Himself, you must be on the enemy’s side. The whole power of sin, Satan, and the world is at work in the influence which keeps you from yielding yourself up to God.

(2) Because there is a choice implied in the refusal to make a choice of God as your Portion. If you make not that choice, then you choose to abide as you are. You cleave to Baal if you return not to the God of Israel. How *foolish*, therefore, it is to imagine that you can be neutral! And yet how wise you seem, to yourself, to be, in staving off the question, “How long halt ye between two opinions!”

But hesitation is *sinful* as well as foolish, for it foully dishonours God. It implies that you rate Jehovah and the world as of equal value – that their claims are so nearly balanced, when you weigh them, that you find it impossible to choose between them! Think of the dishonour which such an estimate casts upon God! The tinsel of a deceiving world equal to the glory of Jehovah! The vapid pleasures of a vain world equal to the joy of the divine fellowship, and the peace of the Lord’s ways! The short-lived carnal ease, which worldlings enjoy, equal to the eternal rest that remaineth for the people of God! A life spent in the destruction of the soul, equal to a life spent under the healing hand of Christ! A death that is the gate of hell, as the terminus of one’s life on earth, equal to a death that is the gate of heaven! To abide under the power of the murderer just as good as to be a partaker of the saving grace of God in Christ! O what a world of iniquity there is in the halting that is caused by an estimate such as this!

Such a hesitation is, and must be, *dangerous*. It is so because it is a cleaving to that which to you must end in death. For the hesitation is a refusal to make choice of Christ, as your Saviour, and of God in Him, as your portion for ever. Are you to persist in that refusal? Can you venture nearer to eternity on the side on which you are? Can you be strong still further to provoke the anger of God, by still further refusing to choose Him? On the answer which these questions shall receive from you, depends the state of your soul for ever.



[November 1901]

## Notes of Sermon

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO, Strathy.  
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“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him” – John 9:35-38.

In this chapter we have an interesting and instructive narrative of a man on whom a miracle was wrought by Christ, and such a miracle as was never performed previously, among the Jews. There were dead persons restored to life in the time of the prophets. Naaman the Syrian was cured of leprosy in a miraculous manner, and Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was healed in the same manner. Christ himself had restored sight to many who had lost it, but the peculiarity of this miracle was, that the man was born blind. The manner in which the cure was performed is narrated by John, and the discussion of which it was the occasion is also recorded with sufficient minuteness.

Christ's opponents among the Jews did not at first believe the truth of what the man stated concerning his cure. It was considered so great a wonder, that his friends brought him to the Pharisees; what was their motive in doing so is not told. It might be to show them, what was considered by all, a remarkable proof of supernatural power, and to ascertain their opinion, as the leaders of the people, of the miracle and Him who performed it. Or it might be to inform them and prove to them that Christ wrought a miracle on the Sabbath day, which they considered as a breach of the law, and so a circumstance that afforded them an occasion of accusing Him, and gave them grounds to apprehend and condemn Him. For according to the ceremonial law, death was the penalty of breaking the law of the Sabbath, or the fourth

commandment. Some of them said that He was not of God, because He did what they considered a sin against the law. Others of them were not of this mind, and said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? The hostile party, we are told, would not then believe that he was blind and had received his sight, till they called his parents, and examined them as to the truth of the story. And we see that they go about it with prudence and judgment. They asked them: "Is this your son? Was he born blind? And how does he now see? or by what means has his sight been restored?" These were all proper questions, and fitted to bring the truth in the matter to light. They were experts at cross-examination, but they failed in forming an impartial judgment. The parents told them that the person before them was their son, but declined to state how he had received his sight, and referred for information on this point to himself, who was come to years of discretion, and so could give the most satisfactory account of this himself. They call him again, and enjoin him to give God the glory of his cure and to consider Jesus a sinner, and so as one who deserved no credit in the affair. On this he did not directly express his opinion, but maintained the fact of His opening his eyes. They therefore asked him again – perhaps with the view of casting discredit on the cure by finding his testimony now, different from what he gave at the first – like a cunning and skilful lawyer, who by cross-questioning tries to confuse a witness and make him contradict himself. If this were their intention, they failed, for his second account coincides with his first. The result of their interview was that they cast him out, and excommunicated him from the church.

Jesus heard of this; which lets us know that He did not forget this man, that He kept an eye after him, and felt an interest in him as one of His sheep, and as one who bore witness for Him against His enemies. And when He heard of it, He went in search of him and found him. He knew his case and wished to speak comfort to him, and to carry on the work He had evidently commenced in his soul. Having found him, He asked him if he believed on the Son of God? It is not likely that the man, born blind, had heard before this interview that He who cured him was known by this name. We may infer from his silence when examined by the Pharisees, as well as from the question put by him on this occasion, that his opinions concerning Jesus did not advance beyond what he then confessed, namely, that He was a prophet sent by God, and who spoke and wrought in His name. And as to his convictions, he was so steadfast, that he, a poor ignorant man, was not deterred by the position and learning of the Pharisees from venturing on a discussion with them, and from maintaining his opinion in opposition to their plausible insinuations and violent attacks on the character of Christ. And not only this, but he also was ready to suffer persecution for His sake, and endure the loss of what was reckoned of supreme importance by the Jews, I mean, a place in the commonwealth of Israel. This step they durst not as yet take with regard to Jesus, no doubt from fear of the people, as one cause or motive, but what they were afraid to do to Him, they did without hesitation to the disciple, showing that they wanted not the will, but the courage to deal in the same way with the Master. The man's firmness and faithfulness show that he was now under some more powerful influences than any carnal and worldly motives. He was convinced that Jesus was not a sinner or a bad man, as they alleged, but a man who was a prophet and with whom God was. He was not, then, like any of the nine lepers, that did not seem to care for Christ who healed them, but like many others who had been healed, not only in body but in mind, whose minds were renewed, and whose understandings were opened by Him at the same time, and therefore who were found faithful adherents to His cause and to His doctrine. No doubt the trials he had to endure, deepened his convictions and had been the occasion of expanding his mind and heart in the knowledge of and in love to the truth that was implanted in his soul. Every question asked him made him examine the grounds of his convictions more and more, and so showed him the necessity of adhering at all hazards to the truth. His own prejudices as a Jew, his respect to the leaders of the people had to be overcome

in making the stand recorded, or in bearing the testimony he gave on behalf of Jesus, but conviction of the truth relaxed the hold these might have of his mind, and enabled him to brush them all aside, and to stand forth alone to witness a good confession.

It was not enough, however, to believe that Christ was a prophet. This was true, and that no prophet was equal to Him, not even Moses, Elijah, etc., but it was not the whole truth. There are many in this day who allow His title to be a prophet, but go no further, such as Mahometans and Socinians. But this confession was not sufficient for Christ, and were He nothing more than a prophet, surely this confession would have satisfied Him who was meek and lowly in spirit, who did not cry, and whose voice was not heard in the streets. But it did not satisfy Him, and therefore He must have known Himself to be more than a prophet, and so He asked this man if he believed on the Son of God? This was a more difficult question to answer than any asked of him by the Pharisees. The man did not know who it was that was designated by this name, and believing that Jesus was a prophet, and therefore was likely to be able to give correct information on the matter, he asked who He was that he might believe on Him. The man wanted to know Him, and to obtain proof of His being the Son of God, and on this condition he expressed himself ready to believe on Him. He was thus imbued with honesty and desire after knowledge, and with that simplicity necessary for the reception of the truth in the love thereof.

The Saviour's answer to his question is in the following terms: "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." As soon as he heard this, he said, "Lord, I believe." The statement made by Jesus is to this effect: "Thou knowest me who met thee and gave thee thy sight. I am the person who opened thine eyes. Art not thou satisfied as to this? for although thou couldst not see me when I spread the clay on thine eyes, yet on returning from the pool of Siloam, didst thou not see me then, and wast thou not informed by trustworthy witnesses that I had been he who cured thee?" "Yes, I am perfectly satisfied to thy being the man who cured me." "I then, who talk with thee, am the Son of God." The blind man's answer was not spoken, and his profession of faith was not made from a blind impulse, that is, without any sufficient grounds for his belief. He first believed that Christ was a prophet sent from God; of this he had proof enough in his being healed from blindness by Him in a miraculous manner, which he, like Nicodemus, was persuaded He could not do, except God was with Him. He now declares unto the man, that He is the Son of God, and in Christ's giving this character to Himself the blind man believed He spoke the truth; for it could not be that He, with whom God was so evidently, would deceive any by making an untrue statement, or could be guilty of arrogating to Himself a title that did not belong to Him, and that would be blasphemy in any mere man to do.

This declaration all at once threw light on what was very likely hitherto incomprehensible to him. For, no doubt, he must have been revolving in his own mind many questions concerning Him who healed him, such as His kindness to him, a poor blind beggar whom he passed sitting beside the way seeking alms, and His having, without any solicitation, exerted His extraordinary power to relieve him from a calamity under which he had laboured from his birth, and that had reduced him to poverty, and shut him up in perpetual darkness from which he had never hoped to be relieved. Many a one, who had the ability to bestow alms on him, passed him without giving any, or giving very little, though earnestly pleaded with by one whose lot was peculiarly pitiable. Here he had abundant opportunities to study and know the character of his fellowmen, few of whom he ever found really touched by his lot and ready to express sympathy with him and to endeavour to comfort him by their words as well as relieve him by their means. Some he knew to be selfish and churlish; some were giving him from a desire to be seen of men and so blowing trumpets before them, and notwithstanding all their noise and fuss, giving very little, and that little given not from any pity towards him, but from a desire to get a name among men; others, perhaps, throwing him

a piece of money with a light frivolous spirit, by which they seemed to make a mock of his misery, whom he would no doubt consider a vain, heartless class of people. Others, again, he found to pass by him and pay no attention to his plaintive voice. His experience would, no doubt, lead him to the conclusion that there was very little real love and humanity among men, but abundance of selfishness, coldness, pride, and folly. But now on a certain day some passer-by comes near, who had neither gold nor silver to give, and who spoke to him in accents of tenderness, meekness, and kindness that he never observed in any voice he ever heard, and who proposed to do something for him that would restore his eyes, or rather would impart sight to eyes that never had any. A person who could do this had something better to impart than gold or silver, something that exalted him above the rich and the wise among men; and yet no man ever met him so humble, so kind, so benevolent, and that felt for him as he did. His kind manner, his condescension in making clay and putting it on his eyes, and the precious result thereof must at once have raised him in his estimation above all men he met or heard of. For among all the wonders of which he had heard, he did not hear of any born blind restored to sight. And now what he hears him say clears up the whole mystery; he finds in it what explains the miracle and the whole of his conduct towards him. He believes then that this person is the Son of God, and falls down and worships Him, that is, acknowledges Him as God, as the creator and preserver, acknowledges Him as his own preserver and thanks Him as the author of all his mercies, and expresses his obligations to Him for the mercy shown him in receiving his sight and especially in being blessed with the knowledge of Him which flesh and blood cannot give, in fact, the knowledge of Him as a Saviour come to save the lost, and in whom now he finds salvation, for he that believeth in the Son hath eternal life. No wonder then though he worshipped Him, and looked upon it as a blessed day when Jesus came his way, and dealt mercifully with him. It was to him the beginning of days and years, and a day to be remembered.

In this man's history we have much that is calculated to teach and instruct us. His condition as a poor blind man may be taken to represent the sinner's state. His blindness represents the sinner's ignorance and darkness of mind as to the things that belong to his peace. This ignorance is frequently represented in the Bible under the image of blindness. The blind see nothing; the natural man knows not the things of God's Spirit; they are foolishness unto him. He lives as if there were no God. He consents to His existence, it may be, but he feels no fear, he has no love, and exercises no trust towards God, and never thinks of regulating his conduct according to His revealed will. This man was poor and a beggar. The sinner is poor as to his state before God; he lost his righteousness and holiness, and all title to eternal life. He is like one born to a rich inheritance and noble titles, but who has forfeited all his rights by treason against his sovereign and is come to be a beggar. Shame and disgrace are attached to beggary, especially when it has sprung from one's own imprudence, which is especially true here. And in the sinner's case, there is one element that renders his condition more pitiable, namely, his ignorance thereof. "Thou sayest, I am rich . . . and knowest not that thou art poor, blind, naked, and miserable." Here we also see Christ's grace and power to save. He effectually cured the poor man's blindness, which required divine power for which nothing is too hard. The power that gave this man, who was born blind, his sight, can save the sinner, can change his nature and heal him from all diseases, from all the effects of his sins.

We learn here the necessity of faith, and what one must believe in the first place concerning Jesus of Nazareth, namely, that He is the Son of God. The question put by Christ is one that in a certain sense He asks of all. His asking the question means or implies that man is naturally destitute of this faith. This man was equally destitute with others. He did not know who was the Son of God, and consequently could not have faith in Him till He heard of Him. There were two things which produced faith, Christ's power exerted not only in his

body but in his soul by the Holy Spirit, and Christ's testimony regarding Himself. We have then the exercise and the fruit of faith, the former in receiving Christ, and the latter in worshipping Him.

Have you then believed on the Son of God? Many here have not, and some, I fear, never asked themselves the question, whether they have or not. There are others quite at ease in their state of ignorance; they know not their state; they see not their need of faith; they think not of their sin in being without it, of their sin in not believing, of their guilt and danger in making light of Christ. Consider your need, what you really want, and your state requires. Be not satisfied with head knowledge, however much you may have. Be not satisfied with mere emotional impressions, with a name, with a profession. Remember that you need what Christ taught this man, namely, faith and knowledge. The want of this is the cause, in some sense at least, why many, who begin to profess His name and that with a fair promise, fall away and bring disgrace on their profession and come short of the end of faith. You may say that Peter fell. Yes, but he did not make a shipwreck of his faith; he was soon restored, and then his faith and love shone forth more brightly than ever. Be found in Christ's way, in the use of the appointed means. In these He promises to be till the end of the world; in these He passes by. Follow then the example of another blind man who cried out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He is now passing, He can now hear you, He can now shew mercy to souls blinded by sin, to souls who never saw the light of the Sun of Righteousness, who know not the things that belong to their salvation, and so are in the way that leads to death. If you are sensible of this being your condition, cry to Him daily, give Him no rest, till it may please Him to shew mercy to you.

Did you ever in right earnestness deal with this question, as one on the answer to which you felt your all for eternity depended, depended whether you would be saved or not, whether you would obtain divine favour or not, whether you would be to the glory of His grace or not? If so, it is the most important of all questions with you, if it be yet without an answer. Here you have an example full of instruction to you. You all know this man obtained faith, namely, by Christ revealing Himself to him. If you have been enabled to believe, then you must be a worshipper of Christ. Are you so? Is He your Lord? Does He receive the homage of your heart, of your will and understanding? Is His authority felt by your conscience, and does His love constrain you to obey Him? Are you so convinced of His divinity and supremacy as the Lord of your conscience, as to feel that you are under obligation of sacrificing all for His sake? This man suffered loss for Christ, ere he knew Him fully, and believed on Him as the Son of God. "I fear I am not so enlightened, that I have not such faith, hope and love to Christ, as would enable me to suffer loss." Are you convinced that He is worthy of it, and that to deny Him would be a very aggravated sin, and that you could not do so without being guilty of such a sin? If so, this is a great step towards arriving at that degree of faith and light which would enable you by His grace to go through such a trial. Learn then the need in which you stand of growing in this knowledge, and of grace to follow Him. If you know Him, remember the end of this knowledge, namely, that you commit your soul to Him to be saved, that you may obey and worship Him as your God.

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