

A Sermon.

By the late REV. JOHN LOVE, D.D., Glasgow.

“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that
Jesus is the Son of God?” – 1 John 5:5.

After we have emerged from non-existence, – when, by and by, the dawnings of reason begin to appear in the breast, Satan is at hand; and his first secret whispers in the ears of the soul are to this amount, “All is well; thou art an excellent and happy creature. All is fair and friendly around thee. See how thy parents and friends caress and admire thee. Fear not, thou art come into a good world – a world richly furnished to make thee happy.” Such as these are the early sentiments suggested to the unwary soul by the artificer of destruction. They suit the taste and the bias of the corrupted spirit of man. So that fatal, pernicious dream is begun, which, as to some, is hardly ever disturbed, till they pass into another world.

By different means, and in various degrees, many are a little roused up. Experience of the disappointing vanity of the world, cool reflection, the stings of conscience, the powers of the world to come – these, and similar causes disturb the sinner’s repose. He sees that this is an evil world; that he is fallen into the hands of enemies; that he must struggle for the life of his soul. But what is the issue? Often these strugglings have a dismal issue. The captive of Satan rattles his chains, frets himself a little, looks round the walls of his prison, falls asleep again. Perhaps he is terrified into quietness. Perhaps he too soon imagines himself set at liberty, and that the great conflict has come to a happy crisis. Why? He hath been alarmed; he hath heard the Word with joy; Satan hath retired, as though he were discomfited. And now the sinner’s dream is sweeter, and his sleep more deep than ever before.

In the midst of these things, the Spirit of the Lord utters His still but awakening voice. With a mixture of triumph and of defiance, the inspired apostle cries out, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” Triumph, ye children of God, for yours is that victory in which others have no share. Tremble, ye philosophers, ye moralists, ye notional Christians; your imagined victories will be your confusion. Your enemies are yet in full power, and will not fail to ruin you, if you continue afar from the only Deliverer.

That we may enter more exactly into the meaning of the important words of this text, it will be useful to attend to the train of the inspired writer’s reasoning. He is inculcating on Christians the practice of a very important duty, that of mutual love. He holds up to view this excellent grace, in a variety of postures; as a large and splendid precious stone is turned round in the hand of the artificer that, by beams of light falling on it in different ways, its diversified lustre may delight the beholder’s eye. The apostle represents the peculiar love of Christians to each other as inseparably connected with regeneration, with the saving knowledge of God, with faith in Him through the Mediator, and with a sense of His sovereign and incomparable love towards us. At the second verse of this fifth chapter he excludes those profane counterfeits of Christian affection which are sometimes exhibited by unbelieving men, whereby the love of the creature is exalted on the ruins of love to God Himself. His words are these (verse 2nd), “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments.” That is, not only may we discover the genuine sincerity of our love to God by its influence to kindle in our breasts a supernatural warmth of affection towards His children, but we may reverse the trial – we may judge of the soundness of our affection towards God’s children by observing whether it springs from the right source, namely, love to God Himself, and whether it is excited and regulated by His authority and precepts concerning it. For he adds (verse 3rd), “This is the love of God, that we keep his

commandments.” That is, here lies the evidence and the native effect of sincere love to the great and glorious God; that love brings the soul to a willing subjection to His sacred authority in all things, and particularly in those just and sweet precepts of God which respect our temper and conduct towards one another. Having advanced thus far, the inspired writer adverts to the difficulties and obstacles which lie in the way of an unreserved and continual observation of God’s commandments. These difficulties he anticipates by appealing, in general, to the equitable and excellent nature of the precepts themselves: “His commandments are not grievous.” But it might be objected, “Though we grant the general truth of that assertion, yet in such a world as this it is no easy matter to adhere inflexibly to the divine rule of conduct.” The apostle answers (verse 4th), “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” Still an objector might say, “I grant the new life infused in regeneration tends toward such victory. But is not that new life very feeble and imperfect in its degrees? How is it then capable of encountering so mighty an adversary?” The apostle replies – by taking hold of the infinite strength of Jesus Christ, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Then follow the words of the text, in which exclamation the apostle is to be considered as at once filled with a sense of the vast worth of the Christian faith, and fired with just indignation against the empty pretences of philosophers, Pharisees, and all others who attempt to rival the Redeemer of the world by promising their disciples that victory over evil which none but He can bestow. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

For the illustration of this subject it is necessary to make an inquiry into two things, namely: In what respects the world is a Christian’s enemy? and, How faith in Jesus Christ is a sufficient cause – the only sufficient cause – of victory over this formidable enemy?

To these two points of inquiry let us, my brethren, bend our most serious attention, looking upwards to the God of all grace, that while we meditate on this grand victory, each of us may feel it in himself; may even now triumph over the world as a conquered enemy; may inwardly bless the great Deliverer of our souls; and may be prepared for every succeeding circumstance of conflict in the spiritual warfare.

I. – In the first place let us look a little in the face of this enemy, “the world.” That which derives its existence, furniture, and powers from an infinitely good God – that which the generality of men hug in their bosoms as something consummately fair and delicious – must, by a Christian, be treated with jealousy, with fear, with distance, with hatred, with indignation, with mortal opposition. The world must be dealt with as an insidious and deadly adversary, and that for the following reasons: I see thy fatal aim, thou glistening, thou ever-eloquent serpent; it is thy aim to blind and deceive my understanding, to entangle and ensnare my heart, to irritate the corruptions of my nature, to decoy me into evil by the charm of example, or to compel me by thy menaces, by thy punishments.

Let me speak coolly, and in plain terms.

I. The world is our enemy, by its influence to enfeeble and corrupt our views of the most important and salutary truths.

Divine truth, that is, the truth concerning God and the spiritual system of things, is the life and nourishment of the immortal soul. Those things, therefore, are to be accounted hostile and destructive in the highest sense which rob the soul of spiritual ideas and sink it down into the regions of matter. “That which is born of the flesh,” says the Redeemer, “is flesh.” “To be carnally minded is death,” says the inspired apostle. Such is the strange influence of our original corruption, that it diffuses poison through the whole of nature. The system of material objects which meets our bodily senses, is the work of God, and proclaims His infinite perfections. But even here Satan entrenches himself, and he gains access to the soul by every one of the senses of the body, and by all the objects which correspond thereto. Satan

teaches us to think of sensible objects detachedly from God; then to stick fast in these objects, so as to account them more real and substantial than things divine and spiritual. Then we loathe and recoil from the direct contemplation of God. Then we adulterate and transform the invisible things of God, mixing them with sense, and sinking them in the mire of matter. Is not every one of us conscious of this process? I speak to true converts. Can you not remember the time when the circle of the visible heavens, which confines your senses, was the prison which confined all your thoughts; when you had hardly any steady or vivid idea of any thing immaterial; when all beyond the visible things of nature appeared as a huge void and chaos, without beauty or delight? At that time you lived “without God in the world.” When the eye of God then looked into your souls, instead of their being full of the fair and powerful idea of His divine excellency, He saw them in a state like that of the ancient temple when abused by the idolatrous Israelites, as the prophet Ezekiel describes it (8:10), “So I went in and saw, and behold, every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed on the wall round about.” Such is the present situation of the multitude around us. Were we to go into the streets and houses of this city – were we capable to look into the inmost souls of the people whom we meet – we should, in general, find all summed up in this, No God. The idea of God and spiritual things we should see lurking ignominiously in chains in a secret corner of the soul, but, expanded and bustling through the heart, the strong ideas of whatever can strike the eye, the ear, the taste, the touch, or smell – money, goods, houses, honour, pleasure, and a countless train of such things. These are the gods which possess the temple of the heart in its corrupt state.

Such is what the apostle calls “the darkness of this world.” It is the darkness, not of this or that monster, but of mankind; and because it is so general it forms a kind of impetuous torrent, which bears down all that comes in its way. In which view the apostle speaks of the unregenerate as walking “according to the course of this world.” And hence human society becomes more corrupt in proportion to the multitude of men who are collected together. It is in great cities as though ten thousand pestilential vapours should meet together and condense into one vast cloud of destruction. “I myself,” may each individual say, “am a mass of darkness, error, and delusion. I live in a world crowded with creatures of like blindness. Let me go from house to house, from city to city, from continent to continent, my trifling sentiments of divine and eternal things, and my fiery rage for the world, gather confirmation from every person I meet with. For these are the sentiments which I find inscribed on the countenances, conversation, and decisive conduct of mankind – ‘There is no God, or if there is, His favour is not worth courting – His anger not worth fearing – in comparison of the big, the solid, the substantial things which we are all well assured of in this world.’” Such, my brethren, is the state of things in the world, *as the world*, and exclusively of that victory of faith which the text presents to view. And is there not an enemy here? What is the consequence of these things? It is that the generality of men have no ideas of God and of divine truth but such as are feeble, ineffectual, and, in an endless variety of ways, tainted with destructive error and delusion.

Thus the way is opened for all the other hostile operations of the world. For when the understanding is thus distempered and robbed of those lively views of God and divine things which should govern the whole man – when this is the case it is no difficult matter for the objects of the world to steal into the heart and to take possession of that sacred place which belongs to the infinite God, who is to be confided in and supremely esteemed, desired, and loved.

Then follows a dreadful irritation of that corruption of nature which consists mainly in rebellious enmity against God and hostile malevolence against man. For whether men’s worldly lusts are gratified or disappointed their hearts become more alienated from God and from each other. If divine sovereignty gives them, for a season, their request, such indulgence

strengthens that flame of pride, self-sufficiency, and self-complacency which burns in opposition to God and our fellow-creatures. Or if God walks contrary to men in their lusts, and the selfish schemes of others succeed against them, then all the powers of the soul are rankled with virulence against God and against mankind.

In this darkened and debased state of the soul the examples of the world, its frowns and its terrors, are abundantly sufficient to suppress every rising of conscience, and to check every aspiring effort of the soul towards deliverance.

Such is the hostile influence of the world where it fully prevails. And in a way somewhat similar, doth it operate in those molestations and assaults which respect believers in the Son of God. Here, indeed, a mighty arm opposes itself and crushes that evil influence. But still the aim and tendency of the world is to bring believers into darkness and error, to catch away their affections from God, to irritate them against God and man, to draw them into evil by example, or to drive them into it by terror.

We now see this Goliath – the world – stalking forth into the valley to defy the armies of the living God; we see his fierce aspect, and hear the clattering of his brazen armour. Is this enemy conquerable? Can any mortal being stand up to this contest? Yes, it is possible to overcome the world. It is possible in one way, namely, that mentioned in the text. Faith in Jesus, the Son of God, will do this business.

II. – Let us now inquire, as was proposed, in the second place, How faith in Jesus Christ is the sufficient cause of so important a victory – the alone, exclusive cause?

A whole discourse might be very usefully employed in illustrating the description of faith contained in these words, “He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.” This, however, is not my present object. The nature of genuine faith will be somewhat unfolded in some of the following observations. As to this particular account of the Christian’s faith it may be at present sufficient to take notice that a part of the exercise of true faith is here put for the whole. For though one article of truth is here mentioned, true faith hath respect to a variety of other truths. And that something vastly higher than a notional assent to the truth is intended by the faith spoken of in the text is manifest from the effect here ascribed to faith, and likewise by the first verse of the chapter, where regeneration and faith are connected together: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.”

But I pass on to exhibit faith as the conqueror of the world. It is so –

1. Because the believer realises and rests on the testimony of God Himself, opposing that testimony to every other, whether from sense, carnal reason, mankind, or infernal spirits. That this idea was full in the apostle’s mind appears from several verses immediately following the text (verses 6-10). In these verses the apostle lays open the firm foundations in divine testimony of that faith which overcomes every enemy. Let us think for a moment what is implied in taking hold of this testimony of God. It supposes a discovery made of God Himself to the soul, as possessing the attribute of infinite veracity, resulting from the infinite perfection of His understanding, rectitude of His will, and majesty of His government. He appears to the soul as God who “cannot lie.” To take hold of the testimony of God respecting the truths of the Scripture implies this farther – that the soul is illuminated to discern the stamp of divine perfection impressed on those truths, to see the glory of Godhead itself shining forth in them. Where now is the world’s testimony? What is the believer’s language concerning it? “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” For in this respect, as in all others, “Before him the nations are as a drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.”

“Whom say men that I am?” Some, a mere man; some, a superior angel. “But whom say ye that I am?” “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.” “Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee. On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell

shall not prevail against it." Such is the triumphant evidence which attends the whole system of divine truth.

But what are the things which, on this high authority of "Thus saith Jehovah," are brought to the believer's view? Let it be considered –

2. That faith brings to view an infinity of moral and of penal evil, indissolubly connected with the ways and courses of the world. Under the cover of harmless entertainment, a little liberty of thinking, necessary attention to lawful affairs, a little inordinate fondness and irregularity of enjoyment, a little lingering and negligence – under the cover of these and such like things faith sees the astonishing deformity and malignity of sin, calling forth the infinitely good and holy God to prepare the abode of misery, to rivet the chains of everlasting darkness, and to kindle those flames which, by no artifice, by no force, by no entreaties, shall ever be quenched. Bring forth now thy vanities, thou gaudy world, or thy boasting terrors! The charm is broken, "for what portion is there of God from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?"

On the other hand –

3. Faith brings to the view of the trembling and humbled soul an infinity of good, of felicity, and glory; for it opens a crevice through which the soul looks into the inner shrines of the loveliness and love of God; and when this is done, talk no more to that man of the poor world. Wonder not at his seeming apathy. It is not from want of feeling that he is dead to inferior impressions. His higher powers are otherwise engaged; they are carried aloft. He dwells in God, and God dwells in him. He is gone into the holiest of all; only his earthly tabernacle remains for a little in the view of mortals.

4. But thou smilest, O world, thou fawnest, thou professest kindness and love! Go, thou believer, "Behold the Lamb of God." I see the sparklings of love in His infant eyes. O, let that suppressed understanding be quickly expanded; let that wonderful heart of purity and compassion diffuse abroad its perfumes! It is done. Look down, ye bright angels, and see your glories eclipsed, your wisdom charged with folly, your flaming affections accused of coldness, your tender compassions of indifference! Who is this King of glory? What voice do I hear? It is the voice of my Beloved! Behold, He cometh leaping on the mountains and skipping upon the hills! But what is now in His heart? His body is on the cross, His soul in the furnace of wrath, burning with unknown fierceness against my sins. My heart and ways are now His torment. But how does He look at me? His faith grasps the supporting Omnipotence of Godhead; His love grasps a world of sinners. He will bear them through these flames and floods. Now the conflict is over He is got to the midst of the throne. What sweetness is now in heaven! What new lustre glistens in the countenances of saints and angels! But whom have I in heaven but thee, O thou adorable Jesus? What have I to do any more with idols? Smile, smile thou upon me to eternity!

5. But perhaps the present frame and fervour is not to be trusted. It is not. What, then, are the believer's resources? Here I introduce the last particular which is now to be mentioned. Faith overcomes the world because, in connexion with those views of divine truth already attained, it takes hold of that everlasting, divine strength, which is able to preserve, to confirm, to renew, and to increase these precious discoveries, so as to secure and complete the begun victory. A believer knows the deceitfulness of his heart, even in its best frames. He knows also that new and astonishing trials may overtake him, and that at length he must go the way which he hath not formerly gone with his feet, even through the valley of the shadow of death. The world's malice may add to his death some shocking circumstances. But Jesus says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. I am the First and the Last. Fear not, I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Such is the influence of Christian faith to overcome the world. Suffer me, my brethren, to employ a few moments more in pointing out the –

Application of this subject. How exalted and powerful a thing is the true faith of the Gospel! Surely that faith which overcomes the world is of the operation of God; – “It is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.”

How dignified is the present state of true believers! They are the people who, in God’s infallible estimation, dwell on high. The highest earthly things are far beneath their feet. Their thoughts, pursuits, and delights, savour of victory and of heaven.

But they are destined to more sublime honours and to more public exaltation than they experience in their present pilgrimage. Yet a little while and the world shall see its conquerors, with the Prince of Glory at their head. The upright shall have dominion in the morning. They shall stand with the Lamb, with crowns of immortality on their heads, and palms of complete victory and joy in their hands.

Let us, therefore, put ourselves to the trial, whether our faith is indeed of this quality to overcome the world. Have you seen the world as an enemy, or are you secretly in friendship with it? Has your bondage under this and other spiritual enemies become intolerable? What were your designs yesterday at the Lord’s table? What are your feelings now? Do you feel this victory, or do you heartily groan after it? I dare administer no present comfort to any who are not included in those words of Christ, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

If we have found a true beginning of such victory, let us follow it out, and exhibit it in its true lustre to the view of the deluded world. “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Thy indulged carnality, O Christian, grieves the Spirit and hurts thy soul. But it does more. Perhaps some poor unbeliever, who knows thy profession, is secretly watching thee, that he may form a judgment whether there is any reality in those truths which thou professest. But when he finds little else about thee besides the stench of a carnal worldly spirit like his own, what is likely to follow? He may stumble over thee into hell, though thou shouldst scramble into heaven by means of that little sincerity which was but little cherished and manifested on thy part.

Let us be solemnly concerned for those miserable beings who, either with or without a profession, are overcome by the world, and helping forward each other to the place of woe. Are there any such in this assembly? Are there any of those who halt between God and the world, who, for one morsel of meat, like Esau, sell their title to eternal blessedness? If there are, I give them warning to flee from the wrath to come, and invite them to receive deliverance from unbelief and all its dreary effects, from Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Let those who truly fight against the world, and have begun to conquer it, confide still more in Jesus Christ, and bless the Author of their deliverance. Let Him inhabit your praises. Observe that signal passage (Galatians 1:3-5), with which I now conclude, “Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

[May 1902]

A Sermon

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Raasay.

Prayer for God’s Presence.

“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” – Exodus 33:14.

The children of Israel were now encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses was on the top of the mount receiving the law from the mouth of the Lord. During his absence the people committed a great sin, by which they provoked the Lord to anger, so that He refused His presence with them during the rest of the way to the land of Canaan. But at the special intercession of Moses, and on the people repenting of their sin, the Lord promises that His presence shall go with them: “My presence shall go with thee.”

The promise must be considered in connection with the circumstances in which it was given, which are set forth in detail in the context. We shall therefore have to consider four particulars, viz.: –

- I. – The sin of the people;
- II. – Their repentance;
- III. – The ground on which they received the promise; and
- IV. – The promise itself.

I. – The sin of the people. The particular sin of which they were guilty on this occasion was the sin of idolatry. They made a false god in the shape of a golden calf, and worshipped that idol. This was “a great sin.” Every sin is against the great God, and is a violation of His holy law; but of all other sins that of idolatry is more directly against Him, and more dishonouring to Him. It is a breach of the first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” It strikes at the being and attributes of the one living and true God, and seeks to rob Him of the glory, honour, and worship due to Him alone as the Creator, Law-Giver, and Redeemer of men. Except the unpardonable sin this was the greatest that could have been committed. And it did not in the least palliate their sin that they thought they would worship the true God by means of the image they had made, for that was a violation of the second commandment, which forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His Word. All who worship God by images are idolaters as sure as the heathen who worship the gods which their own hands have formed. The people set up a false god, and they did not stop there. One false step leads to another. They also adopted a false creed, they began to preach false doctrine: “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” – Exodus 32:4. Having changed their God, they would require, in order to be consistent, to change their doctrine. And we see that their new doctrine is as false as their new god. It was not true that it was that dead idol that delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. It was the living God, whom they had so soon forsaken and forgotten, that delivered them. He reminds them of this: “I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” – Exodus 20:2. Why is it that so many in our day have changed their creed? Is it not because they have, like Israel, changed their God? It is not at all the God of the Bible that is preached and worshipped by many in this generation, but a god of their own imagination, an image set up in place of the living God. Hence the change in doctrine.

The occasion on which this departure was made was when Moses was up on the mount with God. It is when God’s faithful witnesses are taken home to heaven the enemy takes the opportunity of corrupting the Church, and of turning men from the truth. It was during Paul’s absence the false teachers introduced the “other gospel,” which was “no gospel,” into the Church in Galatia, which caused many to be removed from Him that called them. When Moses was in the congregation he was a check against idolatry, however much inclined some of them might have been to that sin; but when he was away the restraint was removed, and the people sinned. One reason they adduced for this departure was that Moses left them, and that they did not know what became of him – chapter 22:1. Moses, they thought, served his

time, and was good enough in his own day, but now they must take the lead into their own hands, make a new departure, and set up strange gods. But was not Aaron with them? Was he not a good man? Yes, Aaron was with them, and he was undoubtedly a good man. But he was not so faithful and steadfast as Moses, and the fact that he was a good man only gave a better opportunity to the enemy to turn away the people from the fountain of living waters to broken cisterns that could hold no water, and to embolden them in their sin. Satan prefers one good man to yield to his temptations to thousands of bad men. For he knows the people will say, "A good man did this, and it must be right because it was done by a good man." And this is an argument that is widely used in our day. If you speak against the errors that are brought into the Church, you are asked, Do you take upon yourself to say that the men at the head of these things, or the men who are associated with them in the church, are not good men? But there is a fallacy in that argument. They would require first to prove that good men have license to do wrong because they are good, which cannot be proved. There is no licence to sin given in the Word of God. "These things I write unto you that ye sin not" – 1 John 2:1. On the contrary, they are under greater obligations to do what is right, because they even profess to be good. Aaron was a good man, but he did wrong when he made the golden calf. His sin, however, was not a pure matter of choice; he was overcome by "the fear of man that bringeth a snare," which for a time eclipsed the fear of his God; and his sin is a warning to all, and particularly to those who connive at the idolatrous practices of our day. God, who is a jealous God, and who will not give His glory to another, nor His praise to graven images, chastised the people for this "great sin." He gave tokens of His displeasure against them for it.

(1) He refused to accompany them the rest of the journey: "I will not go up in the midst of thee" – verse 3. Sin is the great cause why God denies His presence to individuals and churches: "I will now return to my place, and hide myself from them till they confess their sin and seek my face." When they depart from Him He departs from them. And what is the good of a church when God departs from her? She is of no use – she can only go from bad to worse, and be an instrument for evil in the world.

(2) He threatened the destruction of the whole congregation – chapter 32:10, and three thousand of them were slain at the command of the Lord. "The wages of sin is death." And if death is the desert of every sin, surely the sin of idolatry, which seeks not only to dethrone the Most High, but, if it were possible, to put Him out of existence, deserves the death that is the wages of sin in the highest degree.

(3) The tabernacle was removed, and "pitched without the camp, far off from the camp" – verse 7. The Lord was not to be found in the camp – the people provoked Him to leave them – and those who sought His face would require now to go outside the camp, before they could find Him. There were some who could not be satisfied without Him, and these went out to seek Him where He was. History repeats itself. There have been times in Christian lands when the Lord's people had to go outside the camp, because their God had left the camp, and could not be found there. Referring to the Jewish Church, who crucified the Lord of Glory, Paul says: "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore without the camp bearing His reproach." – Hebrews 13:12,13. Jesus left the Jewish Church, and set up the New Testament Church. His people followed His example – they too went without the camp. The tabernacle is now pitched without the Jewish Church; it is in the Christian Church, and all who are awakened by the Spirit to see their sinful and lost state, and their need of Christ to save and bless them, must seek Him where He is now to be found. In the time of the Covenanters this had to be done. The Lord was not to be found in the camp, and His people had to seek Him whom their souls loved in "the fields of the wood." At the time of the Disruption in 1843, those who sought the Lord had to go outside the camp. And even before the great crisis came there were many who had to do this. In parishes where there was a dead ministry the people of God had

to hold separate meetings of their own outside the church, because they could not find the bread of life ministered from the pulpit. There was a disruption on a small scale before the general Disruption took place. In some places the people “came out” before the ministers “came out.” And is it not a fact that another disruption was pressed upon us in 1893 by the errors introduced into the church? – a disruption for which there were graver reasons than those which caused the Disruption in 1843. The tabernacle of the testimony left the camp, and we followed it in order to have the Lord’s presence with us, and that “the truth as it is in Jesus” might be continued in our land, kept pure and entire, and perpetuated to coming generations. In doing so we have to bear the reproach of Christ. But we are willing, by grace, to bear the reproach of Him who bare our iniquities in His own body on the tree. “The love of Christ constraineth us.”

II. – Their repentance. Repentance was necessary ere they could get back the blessing they had lost by their sin. It is necessary in the case of all who would escape the wrath which is to come: “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” That they were brought to repentance we have evidence of in the context.

(1) We are told that they “wept.” There is sorrow, godly sorrow, for sin in repentance. But before they mourned for their sin they were convinced of it. Conviction of sin precedes repentance. The Spirit of God convinces of sin, and works repentance in all that are saved. The Spirit convinces by means of the word of truth. And in the case of the people of Israel on this occasion their sin was brought home upon them by the word of the Lord through His servant Moses. When Moses came down from the mount he charged them with their sin: “Ye have sinned a great sin.” And when they were convinced of their sin, and heard that the Lord’s presence was not to go with them, they “wept.”

(2) Besides their weeping, they stripped themselves of their ornaments. They were commanded to do so. They, in their folly, stripped themselves to make a false god, which was made of gold, to make their religion more attractive to carnal eyes and carnal hearts, but now they strip themselves as a mark of their shame and sorrow for their sin, for following their own devices, instead of following the dictates of Him who leads His people in the way they should go. When individuals and churches that have forsaken the Lord, and changed their God and their creed, are brought to repentance, they shall strip themselves of their ornaments. They shall cast off and cast out those things which they had introduced into the churches to make the service of God more attractive to the carnal mind, things which have no warrant from the word of truth, and they shall return to the simplicity of the gospel. They shall cast out human hymns and organs, and other corruptions that defile instead of beautifying the service of Him who is a spirit, and is to be “worshipped in spirit and in truth.” There shall be no hymns of human invention or organs of man’s making in the church, we believe, during the glorious days of the millennium. These innovations have a place in the church when men are “on the down grade.” But when the church “arises and shines,” as we are sure she shall do, she shall strip herself of these “filthy rags,” and put on her “beautiful garments.” Then, through the power of the Spirit from on high, and the gracious presence of the Lord in the midst of her, all nations shall flow into her and abide in her, for there shall be no reason then for any to go outside the camp. The Lord shall dwell in her, and where He dwells His people who love His name delight to dwell.

(3) Their sin was made very bitter to them. Sin is a bitter thing, the bitterest thing in the world, and the children of Israel found out in their experience that it was so. Moses took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, ground it to powder, strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it – chapter 32:20. Each and all had to drink of it, Aaron as well as the people. So the carnal joy they had when they danced before their new god was now turned into the gall of bitterness. Thus it must be with those who truly repent. They shall drink of the cup of their sins all their days in this world, and their sins after their

conversion are made more bitter, as they are more dishonouring to God than the sins they committed in the days of their ignorance. They mourn bitterly for their sins. Though God forgave all their sins they cannot forgive themselves. The sin of Israel was the sin of backsliding, and it was therefore made very bitter to them.

III. – The ground on which they received the promise. What was that ground? Some may say, “The people repented, and they received the blessing on that ground.” Repentance is necessary to salvation, but it cannot be the ground of it. “If righteousness came by the law then Christ died in vain.” Repentance only prepared the people for the promised blessing, but they did not receive it on the ground of their repentance, nor can we receive the Lord’s favour on that ground. What, then, was the ground? It was the mediation of Moses. The ground was not in themselves, it was in another. It was in Moses. Moses, you are to bear in mind, was a type of Christ. Behold, there is a greater than Moses here! Moses acted as mediator between God and the people, and through his mediation, as a type, they received God’s favour. Christ is the one mediator between God and man, and it is on the ground of His mediatorial work, and that ground alone, that sinners obtain the blessings of salvation, and not on the ground of anything in themselves, either in a state of nature, as they are the children of wrath, or in a state of grace, as they are the children of God. They “are saved by grace through faith, and that not of themselves: it is the gift of God.” Were it not so, none of our fallen race could have any hope of salvation. We must be indebted to Christ for salvation; the people of Israel were indebted to Moses as a type for the Lord’s presence. Moses was in this instance a type of Christ in several respects:

(1) He had no hand in the sin of the people. He was perfectly innocent so far as that sin was concerned. Christ had no hand in the sin of the people whom He came to seek and save. “He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” He “knew no sin.” He is “a Lamb without blemish.”

(2) Moses transacted with God on behalf of the people, with the view to making atonement for their sin – verse 30. Christ made a real atonement for the sins of His people. He did this when He offered Himself in their room and stead to satisfy the law of God which they transgressed, and under whose curse they came by their sins. “He is the propitiation for our sins.”

(3) Moses made intercession with God on behalf of the people, and obtained the blessing. Christ ever lives to make intercession for His people, and obtains the blessing for them. He pleads on the ground of His own merit. He suffered and died on their behalf to secure salvation, and by His intercession He receives the blessings of salvation from the Father, and bestows them freely, “without money and without price.” “He restores that which He took not away.”

(4) Moses in his mediation had a special regard for the glory of God, while at the same time he sought the good of the people. Christ in mediation had a special regard for the glory of the Father, while at the same time He manifested His wondrous love to His people in laying down His life for them. “Father, glorify thy name.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

(5) Moses, out of his love to the people committed to him, asked God to blot him out of His book rather than that they should perish for their sin. Christ was willing to be blotted out of God’s book, so to speak, to be made a curse rather than that the people given Him in an everlasting covenant should perish under the curse of the law. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Moses was great, and acted nobly for the guilty people of Israel, but oh, there is a greater than Moses here, the Son of God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet without sin, except by imputation, humbling Himself, and becoming obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross, that His guilty people might not perish but have eternal life!

(6) Moses found favour in the sight of God, and he makes that a plea in his intercession for the people. Christ has been, and always is, in favour with God. “The Father loveth the Son.” He loves Him even when He is pleased to bruise Him, and to give Him the awful cup of wrath to drink, the cup which His people would be drinking to all eternity had Christ not drunk it in their stead. And the blessed Mediator makes the Father’s love a plea in His intercession on behalf of those whom He redeemed by His blood, that He might have them with Him where He is now, sitting on the right hand of the majesty in heaven: “Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” – John 17:24. Let us then seek to know Christ, and to love and serve Him; and in all our approaches to God to have our eye, the eye of faith, fixed upon Him for the pardon of our sins and the acceptance of our persons and services. He is the mediator between God and men, “the way, the truth, and the life.” No man cometh to the Father but by Him.

IV. – The promise: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” This is a great and precious promise. It was given to the people of Israel in the time of need. It was not, however, peculiar to them; it belongs to the Lord’s people now, and they need it as much as the people to whom it was originally given. You in this large congregation, who are His people, need this promise, and it belongs to you. You are, this last day of the feast, going down from the mount of ordinances, and you need the Lord’s presence with you. You are weak and helpless in yourselves; without Christ you can do nothing; but here is a staff He puts in your hand to lean upon, and to support you in your wilderness journey to the rest that remains to the people of God. When Israel was old and weak he needed support to enable him to follow the Lord in the path of duty, and we read that he worshipped leaning on the top of a staff. This promise is a staff to strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees, and to encourage the fearful hearts. But that we may derive benefit from it, it must be mixed with faith, and in order to receive it, we need to understand it. We need, therefore, the Spirit of truth to teach and guide us.

There are two great things in the promise – *First*, God’s presence; *Second*, Rest. We need both. Without the presence of God we cannot enjoy the rest, and if we have His presence with us, we shall most assuredly attain the promised rest. Both are inseparably connected in the promise. The promise is one, but there are two precious streams flowing out of it to refresh God’s heritage as they travel through the parched wilderness of this world.

First – The first part of the promise is in these words: “My presence shall go with thee.” There are two things to be noticed here –

- (1) The blessing promised;
- (2) the promise of that blessing.

(1) The blessing – God’s presence. “My presence.” What are we to understand by God’s presence? There are two senses in which it is spoken of in Scripture, His omnipresence and His gracious presence. By His omnipresence He is present everywhere; by His gracious presence He is present with His own people. In the former sense He is present with the wicked as well as with the righteous – Psalm 139:7-12; in the latter He is present with the righteous, while He is far away from the wicked. It is in the latter sense we are to understand the Lord’s presence as spoken of in the text. It is His *gracious* presence that is promised. One may ask, “What is meant by His gracious presence?” If it is a natural man that asks the question, we must confess that we cannot explain it in such a way as that he can understand it: “For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” – 1 Corinthians 2:14. All we can say to such is this: “Come and see.” Seek to know it by divine teaching. “They

shall all be taught of God.” It is the Spirit of God alone that can impart this knowledge. “Flesh and blood” cannot give it. “Ye must be born again.” It is those that are born again, and that have tasted that the Lord is gracious that can know what it is. “The spiritual man knoweth all things.” The gracious presence of the Lord need only be mentioned to such a man, and he knows what is meant by it. It means the favour of the Lord in which there is life, and His loving-kindness which is better than life. When the Lord lifts the light of His countenance upon His people, then they enjoy His presence. The psalmist knew what it was when he said, “Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved” – Psalm 80:3. Again, “Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled” – Psalm 30:7. Job knew what it was when he said, “O that I knew where I might find Him!” Peter knew what it was by happy experience, when he said on the mount: “Master, it is good for us to be here.” And we who have been waiting upon the Lord on the mount of ordinances, and commemorating the death of Christ in these days have to acknowledge to the praise of the glory of His grace, on this last day of the feast, that His presence has been with us. O, let us seek that His presence may go with us as we now go down from the mount! And this leads us to notice,

(2) The promise of that blessing, viz. – “My presence shall go with thee.” The form in which this blessing is set before us is by way of promise. All the blessings which the Lord has provided in the covenant of grace, for the salvation of sinners, for the comforting of His people, and the perfecting of their salvation, are set before them in the form of promises, and all these promises are yea and amen in Christ to the glory of God the Father. This teaches us in our transacting with the Father for salvation that we are to do so by means of His own Word; and that if we are saved and obtain His favour, it is necessary to act faith in His word of promise. This faith is His own gift, and is wrought in us by the Spirit through the Word. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,” and not otherwise, whatever some, who are wise beyond what is written, may and do say. But to proceed to further consideration of the promise, two things are to be noticed, viz. – the party to whom the promise is given, and the need there is of the promise.

First – The party to whom the promise is given. It is given, in the first place, to Moses: “My presence shall go with thee,” and then through him to the people: “Unless thy presence go with us.” But Moses, as we observed, was a type of Christ. And so the promise of salvation is given by the Father, first to Him and then through Him to His people. All blessings come to us through Christ, the one mediator between God and man. We are to ask in His name that the Father may be glorified in the Son – John 14:13. This is the Father’s will, and all the redeemed acquiesce in His will. It is doubly sweet when it comes to us from the hand of the Father through Him who shed His blood to secure the blessing for us.

Second – The need there was and is of the promise. The people of Israel needed it on many accounts, and so do we.

(1) They needed His presence to *guide* them in the way they should go. They were in a wilderness through which they had never travelled before. They were “strangers in a strange land.” They were on their way to the Land of Promise, but they needed one to show them the way. And none could do this but He who says, “My presence shall go with thee.” An angel was not competent to be their guide, much less any mere man. Moses, who was a leader himself, needed to be led by a higher hand. None was more conscious of this than himself: “If thy presence go not with us carry us not up hence” – verse 15. None would do but the Shepherd of Israel who “leads Joseph like a flock.” It was He who led them in the past, except when they took the lead in their own hands, and He is able to lead them to the end. “This is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death.” When the Lord says, “My presence shall go with thee,” we are to understand thereby that He Himself will go with them. Where His presence is there He is Himself. The presence of the Lord was with Jacob when he slept in the open air on his way to Padan-Aram, and he said, “The Lord is in

this place.” Christ was there. He is the presence of God the Father, “the Angel of His presence.” Every revelation of the Father is through “the Son.” “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” It was Christ then that was with the church, and led her in the wilderness. Oh, what a leader! Let us follow Him. There are many who are followers of men, and not of Jesus Christ, who is the King of His church as well as her Prophet and Priest. Such cry, “There are no leaders.” But the church of God is never without a leader. Jesus Christ, the glorious Head of His church “is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” And He may, according to His sovereign will, make use of the weakest instruments to promote His glory and advance His cause and kingdom in the world. The weaker and more unworthy the instruments are, the more it is seen that the glory of anything He is pleased to accomplish through them is due to Himself alone. “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.” “We are not sufficient of ourselves: our sufficiency is of God.” The people needed not only to be shown the way, they needed also to be led into and kept in it, and enabled to go forward to possess the good land at the end of the journey. The Lord took Israel by the hand out of Egypt, and He “taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms” – Hosea 11:3. There is a union between Christ and His people, and in consequence of that union there is a communion. They, like Enoch, “walk with God.” Christ is with them, He goes before, and they follow Him. He went before His people in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The church has her night as well as her day during her pilgrimage in the wilderness of this world, and Christ accommodates Himself to her various circumstances. The pillar of cloud could not be seen in the night time, and therefore He gives the pillar of fire to shine on their path; and thus, in the night of tribulation and perplexity, He gives them more of His presence. As their tribulation abounds, so their consolation abounds. He makes darkness light before them. The cloudy pillar by which He led Israel was a visible representation of His presence. The Lord was in that cloud, and the people were guided by this visible sign. In all their movements, during their march as well as in their encampments, they were to be regulated by these means of guidance. Where, and how long, they were to rest was indicated by the resting of the cloud, and when they were to resume their march was made known by the moving of the cloud. They would require, therefore, to have their eye always on the cloud. There might have been other clouds, but this was the only sure means of guidance. But some might mistake a common cloud for the special cloud which was to guide the people. How could the one be distinguished from the other? The common cloud was driven by every wind that blew; the special was moved according to the will of the Lord. He was in that cloud, and directed its motions. The one was dependent on the wind, the other on the will of God. It would be dangerous, then, to mistake the one for the other. The church at present is surrounded by this danger. False teachers are compared to clouds, and there is great need of the warning, “Be not carried about with every wind of doctrine.” There are many false teachers occupying high positions in the visible church in this age, who have forsaken the good old way, and have strayed into bye-paths of their own making. Why have they forsaken the good old way? They thought that was too tedious; they tell us they want to make progress. They profess to be “men of progress.” It is quite possible that the cloud driven by the wind would make more progress in one day than the cloud in which the Lord’s presence was would make in a month. But what kind of progress would it be? That depended on what direction the wind blew. All the progress depended on that, and on that alone. We are sure that those who follow the tendency that is not according to God’s Word make progress *backward* and not forward. Such is the progress made by the men who profess to be men of progress in our day. It is said that it is because of the great learning of these men they have adopted their new theology. They may have a learning of a sort. But we read in Scripture of some who were “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” But

that the views which they promulgate are an evidence of their learning none can believe but those who are ignorant of the history of the Church. There are no errors introduced now but a schoolboy might know as well as they by reading Dr. Owen and other great writers, who discussed and refuted them by the Word of God in their own day. The errors that have been buried in the grave by the learned and godly men of the past are now revived in the dark night that has fallen on this generation. There was a time when medical doctors raised dead corpses out of the grave to dissect them so as to acquire skill in their profession, but because the law of the land was against such work they took good care not to do it in the day time – when the sun was up. They did their work in the night, in the dark. So it is now. When errors are revived it is a sign that it is night in the church. But there is this sad difference: while it was unlawful for these men to raise dead bodies, the Church has made a law to enable false teachers to revive and teach erroneous doctrines. That law protects them in doing the work of darkness, and they cannot be stopped until the Lord comes in power and causes that Church to bury her dead. Beware of false teachers. Keep close to the Word of God. It is the only rule of faith and practice. As the Lord was in the cloud, He is in His Word. The Word is the outward means of guidance now; and Christ promises His presence with the Church so long as she continues to “teach the people to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded.” But whenever she ceases to teach what He has commanded, and begins to teach the commandments of men He withdraws His presence, and leaves her to her own devices. The Word is the sure means of guidance, but the blind cannot see. We need, therefore, the inward illumination of the Spirit, that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened in a spiritual knowledge of the outward rule given, and that our hearts may be disposed to follow its guidance.

(2) They needed His presence to *feed* them. The people needed food as well as guidance. They would soon die in the wilderness without food. The wilderness was a wilderness without human inhabitants and without food. But the Lord fed them. He did wonderful things which they looked not for in the desert. “This is a desert place . . . send them away.” No, they can be fed in this barren desert. He gave them bread from heaven. He fed them with manna. Now, had not His presence gone with them, the people would have died in the wilderness for want of food. The people of God are living persons, spiritually alive, and they need Christ to feed as well as guide them. He Himself is their life, the bread of life, “the true bread that came down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall never die” He is “the hidden manna.” “Of His fulness they have all received.” The Word which is given to the church to guide her is also the means whereby she is fed. The church cannot dispense with the Word, either as a means of guiding or as a means of feeding. And those in our day who have abandoned the Word of God as their rule evidence by their so doing that they know not what it is to live on Christ as the bread of life. But Christ will feed His own. “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd” – Isaiah 40:11. He feeds them by His Word and Spirit. The Spirit glorifies Christ by taking of the things that are His and showing them to His people. Though in a wilderness, they are not, after all, so ill off. Christ is with them; their table is furnished daily with provision sent down from heaven; they live at the expense of the King of Glory; and, therefore, though in themselves poor, without money and without price, in either purse or hand, they are welcome to the provision which, of His goodness, the Lord has prepared for the poor – Psalm 68:10.

(3) They needed His presence to *comfort* them. There is no true comfort without the Lord’s presence. Some go to broken cisterns for comfort in the time of trouble, and for happiness in the time of misery. They go to the creature instead of going to the Creator for the blessing which can only be found in Him in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. There were many troubles to be met with in the wilderness which would cause sorrow and sinking of heart. But Christ was present to comfort them. He is a present help in

the time of trouble. He was present with the disciples when He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me." "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

(4) They need His presence to *protect* them from the dangers and the enemies of the wilderness, and to enable them to triumph over them. The children of Israel had to meet with enemies on their way to the good land. These would do their utmost to obstruct their passage, and to keep them from entering the promised rest. But Christ, who knew all the dangers and enemies to which they were exposed, and knew also His own sufficiency to overcome all these difficulties, says, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." "Thou art weak and helpless, but 'in me is thy help.'" If we would enter the rest that remains to God's people, we too shall meet with enemies on the way. We have enemies within and enemies without. The flesh, sin, is an enemy in us, the world and the devil are the enemies without. These three are combined against the people of God in all ages. Those without are formidable, but the enemy within is the more dangerous. One enemy in the camp is more dangerous than many without: he betrays us to those outside. One traitor in the garrison of Khartoum opened the gate to those outside, and was the means of destroying the whole army. Achan, in the camp of Israel, was worse for the people than all the men of Ai. Indwelling sin is more dangerous, hurtful, and more difficult to overcome than all the enemies without. So also are enemies within the church. They do more harm to the cause of God than all outside her pale. But in this promise, "My presence shall go with thee," is our encouragement and our strength. "Thou art my king, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever" – Psalm 44:4-8. When the people of Israel provoked the Lord to withdraw His presence, a few of their enemies would discomfit them, but when they walked in the way of His commandments, one of them would put to flight a thousand. The Lord was with them and fought for them. "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries." It is by the Lord's presence that the church can overcome all her enemies: and the church of believers shall be made more than conquerors through Him who loved and gave Himself for them. "He must reign till all his enemies are made his footstool." The last enemy, death, shall be destroyed. This shall be accomplished at the end of their wilderness journey.

(5) They needed His presence to *carry* them safely across the river Jordan. They got safely across the Red Sea, but now Jordan stands between them and the land of promise. There was no way of reaching that good land but by crossing the river. Ah, friends, the river of death is before us, and we cannot get to heaven but through death. We need Christ with us. All the people of Israel that crossed Jordan landed in Canaan, but all who pass through death to the eternal world shall not land in heaven. "Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." To be born again, to be in Christ, and He in us, to be made holy as He is holy, is the only passport to the heavenly Canaan. If we are thus prepared, Christ's presence shall go with us to carry us safely over death to possess the glorious inheritance beyond the river. But how did the people of Israel get over Jordan to possess the land beyond? It was by Christ's presence. Besides the cloud and the fire that were their guides, there was the ark in the camp. The ark was a symbol of the Lord's presence. The law was in the ark, and the mercy-seat covered the ark, typifying the propitiation of Christ whereby He magnified the law. It was on the ground of His atoning sacrifice, prefigured by the Paschal Lamb, they were brought out of bondage in Egypt, and it is on the same ground they shall now cross Jordan into the Promised Land. We do not mean that all that entered the earthly

Canaan had a saving interest in the atonement of Christ. But the people of Israel were typical of the people of God, His covenant people, given to Christ by the Father in the eternal covenant of grace. All this “Israel shall be saved,” and it is on the same ground that they were saved from a state of sin and wrath, they shall be brought through death to heaven.

But to return to the people we left on the brink of Jordan. Let us see how they passed over the river, and let us learn how we shall pass the river of death if we have Christ’s presence when we come to the brink of eternity. The Lord went before them, and opened up a way. The priests went with the ark to the brink of Jordan, while all the congregation stood still to behold omnipotent power put forth by the Creator of heaven and earth, before whose glorious presence heaven and earth shall one day flee away! What is Jordan before such a power? As soon as the feet of the priests touched the waters, Jordan fled – Psalm 114:5. The river was dried, and the people passed over dry-shod, while the priests that carried the ark stood in the midst of Jordan. Then the priests themselves went over, and Jordan, at the command of Jehovah, overflowed its banks again. All this was done in fulfilment of the promise, “My presence shall go with thee.” And this promise is to God’s people in all ages. He has promised to be with them alway, even unto the end of the world, yea for ever and ever. He will be with them in the valley of the shadow of death, and therefore, they shall fear no evil. When He has prepared them by His grace on earth for His fellowship and service in heaven He “will receive them unto Himself, that where He is they may be also” – John 14:3.

Second – Rest. “I will give thee rest.” This is the second part of the promise. In the wilderness the people had not much rest. But they had one great privilege: Christ’s presence. They found, however, no permanent rest till they were settled in their inheritances. The rest of Canaan is a type of the rest of heaven, and the heirs of glory shall not find permanent rest till they reach heaven. We shall then speak of the promise as it respects them. But before we speak of the nature of the rest, it may be observed that the blessing promised a gift. “I will give.” It is not a thing that is merited by those who obtain, but a thing that is freely given. Eternal life is a free gift – Romans 6:23. It is given for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is given on the terms of the covenant of grace. And those that will not receive the blessing on these terms shall never enjoy it. Let them remember this ere it be too late. God will not change His own terms for any man. This important matter has been finally arranged in an unchangeable covenant that is “ordered in all things and sure.” The promised rest is the gift of God. It has two parts: first, the rest of grace, and second, the rest of glory. “The Lord will give grace and glory” – Psalm 84:11. The former is given in this world; the latter, in the world to come. Both are given for the sake of Jesus Christ.

(1) *The rest of grace.* This includes, among other things –

(1) Peace with God, that is, reconciliation through the blood of Christ, by which He satisfied the justice of the law. It is on the ground of Christ’s satisfaction sinners can be reconciled to God. “Be ye reconciled to God.” “For He hath made Him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” – 2 Corinthians 5:20,21. This blessing is freely bestowed on believers, on their receiving Christ by faith. “Being justified by faith we have peace with God” – Romans 5:1. This is the first great blessing in the rest of grace. They have the rest of reconciliation. “We who have believed do enter into rest” – Hebrews 4:3.

(2) Peace of conscience. This blessing follows reconciliation, and is an effect of it. It can never be had before reconciliation. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit given to those whose sins are pardoned, and is an evidence of their reconciliation. It is the happy effect of the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience, purging it from dead works to serve the living God – Hebrews 9:14. This inward peace of soul is an echo of that outward peace which our blessed Redeemer accomplished when He cried, “It is finished.” And those to whom Christ gives it have rest. It is, however, imperfect in this life; it is subject to changes, while their reconciliation is unchangeable.

(3) Rest of satisfaction, with Christ as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. They rest in Him as the one Mediator between God and men, their Surety, Substitute, and Head in the covenant of Grace, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. They heartily acquiesce in God's way of salvation through Jesus Christ. They are satisfied with Christ as their Saviour and their portion for time and eternity, and well they may. Here they find rest. "This is all my salvation and all my desire" – 2 Samuel 23:5.

(4) Rest of communion with God. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Man, before the fall, enjoyed rest in fellowship with God; but when he sinned he lost that blessing, and man now is without true rest, and goes from one thing to another, crying, "Who will show us any good?" – Psalm 4:6. He cannot find the good he really needs till he returns to God to enjoy His favour and fellowship. Believers find moments of sweet rest in His fellowship. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight" – Song 2:3. "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" – Matthew 17: 4. But they must "arise and go hence," for in this world unbroken fellowship cannot be enjoyed. That is reserved for the state of glory.

(5) Rest in the service of God. We believe that man in the state of innocency enjoyed perfect rest in doing the will of his Creator as well as in the enjoyment of His favour and fellowship. And what is salvation, in the application thereof, but the restoring of man to God, to His image, which he had lost by sin, and to His service, for which he was created? The redeemed, who are "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works," begin to serve God, to do His will, and they find rest in this work. They do not rest on their endeavours to serve the Lord as the ground of their acceptance with Him, but they delight to do His will. They have something of the mind of Christ, who said, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yea, Thy law is within my heart" – Psalm 40:8. They have the rest of delight in the service of their Lord and Master. This service is congenial to the new nature wrought in them by the Spirit in regeneration, and nothing can satisfy the new creature but to be enabled to glorify God, and to enjoy Him. This is the grand work for which we were created. And if we are born again, we shall find rest in doing God's will as revealed in His Word. Those who never found any more delight in the Lord's service than they found in a secular employment have much cause to fear that they are strangers to the blessing promised in the text.

(6) Rest of hope. "Good hope through grace." Those who are without a well-founded hope for eternity are without rest, and whatever other hope they may have, it shall perish at death. Paul, speaking as the mouthpiece of the church, and looking forward to the dissolution of the body, says: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" – 2 Corinthians 5:1. All believers may not be able to express their hope with such confidence and certainty, yea, many of them have not, and the best of them cannot have the same strength of hope always; but they all have the grace of hope in being, and the exercise of it is not in their own power. They are dependent upon the Spirit of all grace for its exercise. Weak hope is hope as sure as strong hope; and the Lord will not cast away His people though they may be afraid that they have not the hope that is saving. But that you may examine yourselves to see if you are in possession of the hope that maketh not ashamed, consider that the Holy Spirit is its author; that it is only those that are regenerated that can have it; that the Word of God is its warrant, and that it leads to holiness. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure" – 1 John 3:3. Hope gives the believer the rest of anticipation. It has respect to those blessings promised, but not yet realised. "For we are saved by hope" – Romans 8:24.

(2) *The rest of glory.* This rest is given to believers in the world of eternity. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." Their souls shall enter this rest at death;

their bodies, re-united to their souls, shall enjoy full possession of it at the resurrection. What is this rest? It is

(1) Rest from sin, perfect and everlasting deliverance from that evil. They were, at their conversion, in a sense delivered from sin. They were delivered from its guilt in their justification; they were delivered from its reigning power in their regeneration, but the work of sanctification is not perfected till death. At death they are delivered from the very being of sin. They are “made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.” In the state of grace on earth they carried a body of sin which made them groan and cry for deliverance: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But in heaven they are never troubled with sin; a vain thought never passes through their minds. They are as free from sin as Adam was when God created him in His own holy image. And a great element in the happiness of the redeemed in glory is the assurance that they shall never fall again into a state of sin. “Because I live,” says Christ, “ye shall live also” – John 14:19.

(2) Rest from all the evils which sin brought, and to which it made them liable. When the cause has been removed the effect must cease. Whatever troubles may afflict the just on earth, from the devil, the world, or their own evil hearts, they cannot follow them to the rest of glory. There is no room for them there. They may and shall follow them to the brink of Jordan, but no further are they allowed to come. “In the world,” Christ says, “Ye shall have tribulation.” Their tribulation is limited by the bounds of time, “the world.” Christ promised to give them rest from sin and all evil, and He will give it. Satan, knowing that all the trouble he can give them must be done in this world, does his utmost while he has the opportunity; and the nearer they are to their Father’s house, the keener he is to molest them, knowing that his time is short. But in glory they are for ever set free from all that caused them sorrow on earth: “The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” – Isaiah 35:10.

(3) Rest of enjoyment. They shall have the enjoyment of God, and that for ever. They enjoyed Him on earth, but their enjoyment was neither full nor lasting. It was often interrupted by sin in themselves, sin in the world around them, and the temptations of Satan; but in glory their enjoyment shall be full, uninterrupted, and everlasting. Who can in this world comprehend the full import of this? The redeemed have foretastes on earth, but it doth not yet appear what they shall be. They shall also have the communion of saints. They loved and desired this communion on earth, and if it was so precious and desirable in the state of imperfection, how much more so in the state of perfection! They shall enjoy the company of holy angels, which shall contribute to their happiness. They are all of one family in Christ, a holy and happy family.

(4) Rest in due appreciation of their deliverance from sin and misery, and of the unspeakable obligations they are under to Christ for His great mercy: “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” – Revelation 1: 5,6.

(5) What may be called *active rest*. The redeemed shall enjoy such rest in heaven. They were never on earth so active in serving the Lord as they shall be in heaven. The idea generally attached to the term rest is inaction; but when we speak of the rest of glory it has no such meaning. It means, among other things, the employment of the saints as they surround the throne above. God created them for the manifestation of His glory, as well as for their enjoyment of Him. Eternity shall be an everlasting Sabbath, and the redeemed shall be employed in the worship and service of God without ceasing, for ever and ever. But do they not need some rest from work? Their work is their rest; and if their work could be interrupted even for one moment, their rest in heaven would be disturbed. But we are assured that no

such interruption shall mar their happiness: “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” – Revelation 7:15. The body at the resurrection, reunited to the soul, shall be put in possession of the rest of glory. Death separated between soul and body, but did not separate either from Christ. At the resurrection they shall meet again to part no more. The whole man was created for the glory and enjoyment of God; the whole man was redeemed by Christ, and regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit; and now soul and body shall be glorified together, that they may glorify Him whose they are: “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” – 1 Corinthians 6:20.

In conclusion, there are several lessons that we ought to learn from the portion of Scripture which we have been considering:

(1) The proneness of all men to sin in general, and the sin of idolatry in particular. Some are professedly worshippers of idols; all, in their natural state, are practical idolaters. Whatever object takes up the place of God in the hearts and minds of men is their God.

(2) A warning to the visible church in our day. The sin committed in the camp of Israel was not the sin of individuals only, but the sin of the whole congregation; and when we bear in mind that the whole visible church of God was gathered together there, we see that the whole visible church, excepting a few persons, was guilty of forsaking the Lord, guilty of idolatry. The visible church in our day is divided into several denominations, and is it not patent to all whose eyes are open, that these denominations, with very few exceptions, are guilty of forsaking the Lord? The sin of this generation, so far as the cause of the Lord is concerned, is the sin of the professing church as a whole.

(3) The duty of repentance. The people of Israel repented, and it is the duty of professing churches now to repent. The Lord calls as He did to Israel of old: “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity” – Hoses 14:1. But alas! the only response as yet to be heard from backsliding churches is: “No, for I have loved strangers, and after them I will go” – Jeremiah 2: 25.)

(4) That God, according to His eternal purpose, will bring His own people into the glorious inheritance which He prepared for them before the foundation of the world, notwithstanding their sins and their unworthiness. They are “saved by grace,” and “accepted in the Beloved.”

(5) A call to the Lord’s remnant to faithfulness in following Him according to His Word, in testifying against sin, sin in themselves, sin in the church, and sin in the nation. Let them be like Moses when he came down from the mount with a message from God. Let them declare, without the fear of man, the awful denunciations pronounced by God against men for their sins.

(6) That *now* is the time to labour for the Lord and for the good of precious souls; and that there is work to be done on earth which cannot be done in heaven. Let those who labour in the Word be up and doing, for “the night cometh when no man can work.”

(7) Lastly, when God’s people shall have finished their course they shall receive a crown of righteousness, as Paul tells us: “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 4:8. Then they shall understand the full meaning of the precious promise, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

[June 1902]

A Sermon

By the late REV. LACHLAN MACKENZIE, Lochcarron.

Preached at an Ordination in Applecross Church, 1st July, 1793.

“But no man taketh this honour to himself, but he that was called of God,
as was Aaron,” – Hebrews 5:4.

If people go to perdition in these days it is not for want of ministers. The clergy are likely to become soon as plentiful as the locusts in Egypt; and which of them is the greater plague of the two, time and the experience of the Church will discover. It was the language of one of the greatest pillars of the Church – “Who is sufficient for these things?” The primitive rulers of the Church were struck with such a sense of the importance and difficulty of the charge, that the people of God had often the greatest struggle before they could prevail upon them to take the charge of souls. Clergymen in those days did not run without being sent; and if they were animated with a desire of preaching the Gospel they did not, by their after conduct, give room to others to suspect that they wished to be ordained in order to get a “piece of bread.” They did not take this honour to themselves till they were called of God. They did not intrude into the Church, or obtrude themselves upon a Presbytery for ordination, till they were persuaded, from the infallible oracles of truth, that God Himself had qualified them for His own work. In one word, they had a concern for their own salvation before they pretended to show the way of salvation to others.

In speaking further upon this subject –

I. – I shall, in the first place, show what it is to be called of God to the work of the ministry. That is, the qualifications necessary for the person whom God is preparing for that work.

II. – That no man should usurp this honour without that call.

III. – Make some practical improvement.

I. – I shall show what it is to be called of God to the work of the ministry, or the qualifications necessary for the person whom God is preparing for that work. The apostle in this chapter assures us that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not assume the honour of being our High Priest till He was called of God, as was Aaron. Paul insists very often upon his call to the ministry; and though we are not to expect such an extraordinary call to the ministry as he had, yet notwithstanding, every true minister of Christ will not rest satisfied till he has a call, not only from the Church, but likewise from God Himself. That this call is thought necessary by the Protestant Church is evident, for in England the Bishop puts the question to the man whom he means to ordain – is he moved by the Holy Ghost to the work of the ministry? And in our form of Church government the Presbytery are to examine him not only touching his learning, but likewise touching the evidences of his calling to the holy ministry, as well as his fair and direct calling to that particular place.

(1) The first part of this call I take to be a serious and wholesome concern for his own salvation. How can a man who never had as much soul exercise as to put him from a diet of meat, pretend to advise others to be serious and to take salvation to heart as the one thing needful? There is something very absurd in advising others to be serious when a man is not serious himself. Without taking salvation to heart can the minister honestly say what the apostle said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”? Can a sinner come to Christ without some degree of terror? If he does not feel terror before he comes he will taste some after he comes, for even the love of Christ will make sin bitter to the soul. The ordinary and stated method of grace is to give conviction of sin in the first place, and then the comforts of the gospel. The minister must speak from the heart to the heart. If he writes in his sermon what he finds in a book, he gives the experience of another and not his own. When a man does not give his own experience, but what he finds in a book, what he repeats in that way no more deserves the name of preaching than the prating of a parrot, who is taught to repeat the Lord’s prayer, deserves the name of devotion. He may, like the bird, amuse people, but he can never reach the heart. Borrowed preachings and borrowed prayers are little better than sacrilege. If a man *feels*, he can the more easily pray and preach.

But in this polite age of the Church many ministers have got an easy way of eluding the force of such reasoning by calling all the experiences of the heart *enthusiasm*. Graceless clergymen have often found this word of very great service to them, because it answers their purpose. If a man happens to have the grace of God, and to speak of it and preach it, the short way to overthrow what he says is to allege that there was a great deal of enthusiasm in his discourse. Nay, it is well known that good men have often been called enthusiasts because they would not drink in company more than their consciences or constitutions could bear. Enthusiasm can have twenty meanings. When a clergyman therefore supposes that a man is in the clouds who speaks of the work of the Spirit of God upon the soul, does he not give the strongest proof that he can give that he himself is a stranger to that work? He surely does. An honest mind will rather ingeniously deplore his want of God’s grace than say that it is only imagination work which others speak of because he himself is a stranger to it. The minister of Christ, on the contrary, will pray to God that he may experience in his soul a saving change from sin to righteousness, that he may be able to comfort others with the comforts with which he himself is comforted of God. He endeavours to believe, that he may be able to speak; and, like the apostle, when he is converted he strengthens his brethren. He mentions his own experience of God’s goodness, and thus recommends the mercy of God to others. Our

Saviour tells us that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch; that is, in plain language, when blind ministers lead blind congregations they both fall into perdition. It is an awful sight to see a minister take the lead of a congregation, who never took concern about his own soul. Can he say, "Good people, I shall show you the way to heaven," when his people might observe that his only concern is how to manage his farm and provide for his family? If that be the road to heaven they can know it without the help of a minister. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, the true foundation, and the stone which God has laid in Zion. Now if the minister, instead of preaching free grace through a Redeemer, should deny this doctrine altogether, or – which is nearly as dangerous – should mix the endeavours of the creature with the perfect merits of Christ, he lays a false foundation, and substitutes something else instead of the Saviour. The man, who expects justification and the pardon of sin by the obedience of Christ and a mixture of his own performances, acts as reasonable a part as the Papist, who prays to Christ and to the saints and angels likewise. We think the poor Papist very blind who does not trust in the prayers of Christ alone, but must have recourse to other advocates; and is not the half Protestant equally blind who is not satisfied with the complete obedience of Christ, but together with this will mix his own performances to render him acceptable to God. Is not trusting in our own endeavours in order to recommend us to God, or to procure His favour, robbing Christ of His glory as a complete Saviour, as sure as praying to a saint is robbing Him of His glory as a complete intercessor? The apostle assures us in the epistle to the Galatians that such as are justified by the law are fallen from grace, and that Christ is of no effect to them. He tells us that such as expect salvation by the law of their own endeavours of obedience are under the curse, because the law requires perfect obedience, "and they continue not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." The law requires perfect obedience. When we expect salvation by a mangled obedience we become obnoxious to the threatening, and are exposed to the curse of the law. But if we expect to mix our own mangled obedience with the complete obedience of Christ, the apostle tells us they will not mix for us. Such an attempt will make Christ of no effect to us. If we obtain salvation, it must be either as a debt owing to our own obedience, or as a free gift owing to the obedience of Christ. When we have done all that we can possibly do our Saviour teaches us to call ourselves unprofitable servants. And when the minister of Christ gets a view of sin as it really is in itself, he can freely venture the salvation of his soul upon this bottom, the complete obedience of the righteousness of Christ, and dares not venture upon any other. And when he has found rest to his soul he can recommend the way of salvation to others.

(2) Another part of the call necessary for a minister is, that he is furnished with those talents which are necessary for a minister of the New Testament. If a person should be a good antiquarian and a complete linguist, yet all this would not qualify him for teaching geometry. A man may have a fund of knowledge, but if he has not the faculty of communicating it, although he should deserve the character of a good man, he cannot properly be called a good clergyman. It is a common expression that a man must be born a poet and not made one. It is equally certain that a man's genius must lead him to the pulpit before he can be useful in that particular line. It is often a complaint with thousands and thousands of the common people that they cannot carry home a word of what such or such a minister said. They are as little edified when he leaves off as when he begins. This is altogether owing to his manner of speaking; and should the matter be good, it may be spoiled by an awkward, ungracious delivery. When the matter is bad and the doctrine unsound, it is little odds though it should be mangled in the delivery; but what a pity it is that the wholesome food of the gospel should be spoiled in the dressing, and this sometimes happens.

Many other agreeable accomplishments in a clergyman will not make up for the want of this absolutely necessary one. I mean the faculty of communicating his knowledge. If a

gentleman wishes to get a person to serve him in the quality of an overseer, though he could do twenty other things, yet, if he tells his master that he has no skill in handling a plough or managing a farm, his master will tell him that he is unfit for what he undertakes. In like manner, when a good Christian is told that a minister can translate a piece of Greek or Latin, that he understands country business and has great insight into the laws and constitution of his country, he can readily answer that he would much rather him to have skill to handle a text, and preach Christ to his perishing soul. But what peculiarly constitutes a man a minister of the New Testament, is an humble sense of his own insufficiency, and an entire dependence upon the assistance of God's Spirit. The Spirit is promised, and we may look for His assistance in study and composition. He is the Author of every good and holy thought, and He will give the particular doctrines that are fittest for such and such sinners to hear. He can and He will direct our minds in such a way as that we shall fall upon the most useful and most seasonable truths. If there are people who stand in need of comfort, why should we not believe that a minister's mind may be directed to a text that would give him room to preach comfort, and in like manner to other texts suitable to the other different classes that hear him? It is, however, in experimental Divinity as it is in experimental philosophy. If the philosopher is cautious in admitting no principles but such as are founded in experiment; the Christian minister cannot call any doctrine his own, but what he has from experience. If the philosopher is resolute in adopting every such principle, the clergyman has the utmost freedom in preaching those doctrines which he has felt and believed, and to which of consequence he can set his seal. We are only scholars in the school of Christ, and no man can preach properly but from experience. The more the minister's mind is exercised about his everlasting state, the better able he is to speak of this exercise to another, and to give him comfort.

(3) Again, the person who has this call is excited by a strong desire in his mind to preach the Gospel. If a man desires the office of a bishop, that is a pastor, or overseer, he desires a good work. This desire in the mind of a good man, we may believe, is from God. Actuated by the purest motives, the glory of God and the good of souls, he is cautious in admitting the suggestion of self-conceit and self-love. At the same time that he wishes to preach the Gospel, he sees the difficulty of the charge, and, as he believes, he does not make haste. He examines himself by the Word of God to see if he finds himself qualified. When such a man as Paul asks the question "Who is sufficient for these things?" it costs him some searchings of heart, and many prayers, whether or not he will engage in the work. Moses' prayer shall often be used upon such an occasion. "If thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence." He knows that the ministry is the work of God, and not of man, and that the Lord never sends any man a warfare upon His own charges. He knows, likewise, that the strong walls of Jericho will not fall by any other means than the trumpets, which are made by Divine appointment. He is conscious that human learning, reasoning, argument, moral suasion, good advices, promises, and threatenings avail nothing without the great Spirit of prayer. The sinner is like the monster mentioned in the book of Job, "he esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee, sling stones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble, he laugheth at the shaking of a spear." The Saviour knew perfectly well what he said when he assures us that "no man can come unto him except the Father draw him." "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain." "Paul may plant, Apollos may water, it is only God who giveth the increase." Young men are generally very sanguine in their expectations in regard to the good which they hope they shall do to souls. They promise themselves they shall be of great service to the Church. It was said of that amiable reformer Melancthon, that however great his expectations were of doing good to souls, and healing the divisions and breaches of the Church, that he acknowledged at last that old Adam

was too strong for young Melancthon. The complaints likewise of old divines make the young soldier afraid. If his object is to gain souls to Christ, he hears with men of experience, who have been in the heat of the battle, that nothing can do this but the power that created heaven and earth. The man then, who wishes to gain souls will not make use of carnal weapons in the spiritual warfare.

(4) In the next place the person who has this call from God is actuated by pure and disinterested motives. This is the single eye which the Scripture so often mentions. A person's whole aim is to please God and to gain souls. Such as enter the ministry are in a peculiar manner the servants of God. Now, the great duty of a servant is to do everything to please his master, and for his interest. Should the servant of an earthly master have his own little interest at stake, if he is an honest man, he will take care of his master's interest; but if his own constantly engross his thoughts, he cannot be honest to his master. The clergy all consecrate themselves to the service of God, and call themselves the servants of Christ. Our Lord tells us that a man cannot serve two masters. When a man becomes a minister, he should be *that and that only*. But if his heart is engrossed with thoughts about a manse, a glebe, a stipend, and a farm, he serves another master, and cannot attend to the one thing needful. If the heart is full of these things it cannot be full of the love of God at the same time. The apostles, as we find in the sixth chapter of the Acts, could not attend to the daily division of the poor's money. It is not a difficult thing for a man to know whether the gospel or the world take up his thoughts and attention. The chief end of every man is to glorify God, but the minister is called upon in a peculiar manner to glorify God, and to do nothing else. Accordingly, in every Christian country, the State has allowed them a portion yearly, in order to keep them from the world. Now, if it be for the sake of this miserable portion that he preacheth the gospel – "*Woe to him.*" That portion shall be given him, and nothing else. The minister of Christ has God for his portion and he uses the world as not abusing it.

(5) In the last place, the minister who is called by God has an exemplary life and conversation – 1 Timothy 3. If a man's behaviour be such as that men would not naturally pitch upon him for a spiritual guide, common sense will not permit us to believe that God would choose him at all. A presbytery may lay their hands upon his head, but cannot convey the Holy Ghost to him. If all the canonical hands, from the Pope down to the poorest curate or clergyman, were to be laid upon him at once, they cannot bestow grace upon a man who does not see his need of it, or seriously ask it himself.

The Scripture observes that if a man eats and drinks unworthily at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he eats and drinks damnation to himself. In like manner, I firmly believe that ordination, instead of benefiting an unworthy clergyman, makes him sevenfold more the child of the devil than he was before. But on the other hand, if a man is sincere in his transactions with God, and has been honestly asking grace, he may plead the promise made to the ministers of God, and to the faithful followers of Christ. He will be with them to the end of the world. He will give them His Spirit, and bind in heaven what they have bound upon earth. When a man impartially examines by the Word of God and finds the qualifications which I have been mentioning, he may humbly believe that he has a call from God to preach the gospel. He has taken salvation to heart – he has talents for the pulpit – he has a strong desire excited in his mind to preach the gospel – he has pure motives, and he has a holy life. To such a character I would address myself – Rise and be doing, for God is with thee. Go and preach the everlasting gospel of peace to lost sinners. Such a man needs not ask a voice from heaven, he has a more sure word of prophecy, as the Apostle Peter informs us. The Spirit of God will apply and bring the Word of God to his mind. There is an agreement between both. And when this is the case, a man will not be in a hurry to run before God's appointed time. He shall patiently wait till the pillar and cloud go before him, till the providence of God open a door to him. He knows that if God has use for him, He shall employ him; he knows, likewise,

that no mere man can have such love to the gospel as the Saviour Himself. This consideration will check the impatience of his spirit; it will likewise give him comfort in time coming. In things belonging to God, the more we put in His own hands, and the less we put in our own, the better we are sure to succeed. Whenever our will is brought to the will of God – Himself will do for us then.

II. – The second thing proposed was, that no man should usurp the honour without the call. The design of the ministry is to bring souls to God, but how can this be the design of the minister who is himself far from God? When God and the minister have two different, and perhaps two contrary objects in view, how can they agree? When God calls any man to the ministry, it is to make him an instrument in calling and converting men from sin to righteousness. But when the young divine has no other object in becoming a minister than to get a good living, and perhaps a good farm, to become rich and lay by money, will his doctrine do good? I believe not. I shall suppose such a man settled in a parish – can it reasonably be said that himself, and the master whom he pretends to serve, are of one mind. Can he pursue his own little interest and His master's great interest at the same time? No! Can a covetous minister preach upon that text, "Love not the world," any more than a drunken minister can preach upon these words, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess?" Will not people see the absurdity of such doctrine from such men? And if they conceal such doctrines, are they not unfaithful shepherds? These self-evident truths being taken for granted by all, I think it can easily be proved that when a man has not a call from God, as I have endeavoured to explain it, he should not obtrude himself upon a *people*, nor should he take the honour, for,

(1) He cannot be useful or do good to souls.

(2) Consequently he will hurt the people and at last hurt himself, unless he repent.

(1) He cannot be useful or do good to souls. If he cannot communicate his knowledge, the people go home without instruction. If he himself is destitute of the grace of God, and has no desire to obtain it, he will be impatient till he gets out of the pulpit, and whenever that *wearisome* piece of service is over he can laugh at religion and ridicule every canting hypocrite that pretends to go a step beyond himself. If he has any engagements, or if he longs for his *dinner*, he looks at his watch oftener than at his Bible. When out of the pulpit his behaviour does not, in the smallest degree, recommend his doctrine. He is as worldly, as trifling, and sometimes – for fear of being *unsocial* – he is as irregular as another man. That there are some such men – I might have said many such men – in the whole Christian Church cannot be denied. How, then, can their doctrine be useful or do good? Is it not cause of regret that people give scarce measure of the gospel? A man, it may be, receives so many scores of merks or of pounds in the year, and what has the poor parish for that? These clergymen might make the confession which an English cook made to a Scotch gentleman. He was turned off at the end of twelve months, and received twenty guineas for wages. He kept the purse a long time in his hand with the money. He was asked if he was satisfied with what he got. "Alas! sir," said he, "I have a check of conscience for receiving it. I got twenty guineas for my wages, and did not dress five pounds' worth of meat all the time I was in your family." If the minister longs to be out of the Church, is it not natural to suppose that the people will wish to be out likewise? He cannot preach faithfully, because he would condemn himself. His doctrine is not calculated to gain converts. He does not wish them to be over-religious, he might find them a little troublesome in that event. They would press him to do his duty, and, if he was a little negligent, might pretend to advise the minister himself. It is not likely, nor do I believe it is possible, that the Holy Ghost would employ himself or his doctrine as a means to convert souls. Will He employ a man's doctrine, who laughs at the work of the Spirit as whimsical notions, to carry on that very work? There is not an instance in all the

Book of God of a man converted to God by the ministry of a bad man. It may be said, indeed, that God spoke to Balaam. I would think this argument conclusive if I did not read likewise in Scripture that God spoke repeatedly to the devil – but not with any view to employ him as an instrument in doing good. But should a bad man convert a sinner to God, he could have no comfort from it, any more than the men who fixed the Lord Jesus Christ to the Cross could have from his death. It was not their own salvation, nor the salvation of the Church, they had in view. A man who is not in earnest about his own salvation, cannot earnestly promote the salvation of another.

(2) Such a man will consequently hurt the people, and at last hurt himself, unless he repent. He hurts the people – His doctrine is very often dry, and his example is still worse. If he happens sometimes to give a *random* shot, and to preach some animating truths, he spoils the convictions his doctrines raised by his conduct through the week. He destroys with the one hand what he built with the other. And if he lives and dies in this condition, the consequences to him must be awful. But, I have added, unless he repent; and let us make this comfortable supposition, that the Holy Ghost, to whom nothing is impossible, quickens him from on high. When this event takes place, he shall preach the faith which he once destroyed. *And would to God I saw this day in many and many instances.*

I conclude with some practical improvements.

First, as to those who intend the ministry. It is their duty to examine themselves and be often assiduous at a throne of grace, lest they get a curse instead of a blessing. Let them beg of God to fit them for the work. I would not be very ready to advise a young man to engage. If he is an honest man, he shall sometimes find it hard work. However if he be the friend of Christ, I shall wish him success in the name of the Lord.

Lastly, some of the ministers of Christ are afraid about their call. One thing, however, may give them comfort, viz.: – if they seriously wish to promote true religion, and constantly depend upon the Saviour, let them pray to God to clear up their call. If a man faithfully improves his talent, whoever hath, to him shall be given. If he is conscious of any want, or if he wish to possess any grace or any spiritual gift, let him ask in faith, and he shall receive. It will give a man comfort at last to find that God has fitted him for the work, and that he made it his business to promote His glory. May God bless His word. Amen.

Exhortation. – It is customary to give a long advice to a minister after he is ordained. It must be likewise owned that it is very ordinary for a minister to *forget* the advice. I shall therefore make it short. You are now a minister. Never recommend a duty till you first endeavour to reduce it to practice yourself. Do not mix the two covenants – they shall not mix for you. Preach your own experience, if you have any; and if you have not, beg of God to give you experience. Read the Scriptures, preach Christ *fully*, and deal much in prayer. As the office you have undertaken is great, the danger is equally great if you do not do your duty. A rotten clergyman is a bad member of society; he gives a handle to infidels to laugh at religion; he destroys his flock and damns his own soul. If a man be honest, God will give him his soul at death; and if he be not, his stipends will be a bitter morsel to him in that hour. The people should obey the minister, and the minister should obey God.

If you be a bad minister y'ill go to hell, and if you be a good minister y'ill go to heaven. Remember you heard that. You got a good advice, whether you will follow it or not.

[July 1902]

A Sermon

By the late REV. JOHN LOVE, D.D., Glasgow.
[Dated Hoxton, July 19, 1790.]

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” – John 15: 12.

That solemn form of expression, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” may be applied with peculiar force to the consolatory speeches of the dying Saviour. Much sweetness is laid up here; but it is a sweetness sealed up from the unbelieving world. None can intermeddle with these consolations, but the broken-hearted disciples of Christ. Happy is that man, whose ears have been opened to catch the vital sound of the compassionate, holy voice of Jesus, in these discourses with which the text stands connected.

The springs of consolation, here opened to the disciples of Christ, are principally these three: –

- i. The prospect of being with Christ eternally, in the immediate presence of God:
- ii. The superior excellence of Christ’s presence, by the abundant influences of His Spirit, after His glorification, above whatever comfort could be derived from His bodily presence, in a humbled state:
- iii. And the glorious victory of His cause, and enlargement of His spiritual kingdom, by the thorough conversion of many souls.

In subserviency to all these joyful prospects, we find the holy Redeemer, in the preceding chapter, insisting much on the importance of obedience to His commandments, as the genuine proof of sincere love to His Person. But, that the disciples might not hesitate, from consideration of the difficulty of the service of Christ; and might not take occasion, from these exhortations, to entertain high imaginations of their own strength, He turns His discourse into another channel; and, in the first seven verses of this chapter, gives them very clear and solemn instruction, as to the mysterious way of their attaining to that pure obedience which He so much inculcates. Having done this, He returns to His former strain of pressing exhortations on this subject. And, that their humble endeavours might take a particular aim, He selects one particular precept, which, in the text, He impresses with all that dignity, authority, and force of persuasion, which the lips of such a Master, in such circumstances, could give it: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” As though He had spoken thus: “My dear disciples and friends, I have dealt very familiarly with you. These years past, you have been admitted to intimate acquaintance with

me. Much you have seen of what I am, and of what is in my heart towards you. Now I am going to the cross to die, and to heaven to plead for you. I have been healing your sorrows, and showing you the consolations which shall flow from my departure. I have also warned you of the necessity of your aspiring after higher degrees of love to me, and obedience to my words, than hitherto you have attained. Are you not willing to comply with my counsels? Here, then, is one injunction, which it will be your wisdom specially to regard. I am leaving you behind me; and you are to be exalted to situations of high trust in my kingdom. This is my dying charge to you, my bereaved family, 'Love one another:' Be closely cemented together: Beware of divisions: Let the whole extent of my expanded kingdom be knit together in your persons: Let your union be of a superior nature to the combinations of worldly men: Love one another, not as the world loveth, but 'as I have loved you:' Transmit the example of love like mine, to all after generations of my people."

Such, my brethren, is the general sense of the passage. But, I hope, you are desirous to enter more minutely and fully into this subject. Come, then, and let us be at some pains about the following things: –

First – Let us inquire into the peculiar nature of that mutual love, which unites true Christians together.

Second – Let us consider how this love should be influenced by the authority and example of Jesus Himself.

Third – Let us endeavour to make a practical improvement of the truths which shall here present themselves to our view.

I. – Let us begin with an inquiry into the nature – the peculiar nature – of that mutual love which is the bond of union among sincere Christians.

Will it be accounted strange, if I say that there is a mystery here, – a mystery, into which the unbelieving world cannot penetrate? Yes, my friends, it is so: Those ligaments, those ties, which connect the members of Christ's mystical body, are of a mysterious nature. But why should this seem strange, when we are baffled, if we attempt to explain how the various parts of the human body, in union with the same soul, are united with one another, so that they cannot be separated without exquisite pain?

"Are you going, then, to preach mysteries?" Yes; I cannot preach a word of the Gospel – I cannot preach of what some reckon the low, trite subject of brotherly love among Christians – without attempting to unfold a mystery which angels look into with wonder.

My brethren, our chief difficulty on this subject is at the very entry of it. Here is the difficulty, – to ascend to the Source and Spring of this Divine affection. Are you acquainted with God? Can you climb up into the secret of His presence, into the holiest of all? Then you will be enabled to understand the origin, the nature, the symptoms, and the properties of Christian love.

Let me borrow a similitude from a subject which has lately excited some public attention. We have heard a great deal about the source of the river Nile. I will compare Christian love to this glorious river. It was known long ago, that the source of that river lay far remote, in a country seldom visited – a country not to be explored without difficulty and danger. There, secreted from ordinary eyes, in a high-seated plain, burst forth the springs of the Nile. Gradually fed from the earth and skies, it pursues a long, winding, intricate, and sometimes dreadful course, through mountains, rocks, and vallies. At length, though guarded by many ridges of mountains, it finds a little gradually-extending plain, over which, as far as nature will permit it, at proper seasons, it diffuses it's fertilizing overflow of waters. Then, as if conscious of its beneficence, it rides on in calm triumph, till, by a number of magnificent mouths, it reaches its parent ocean. Like to this river, is that holy stream of Christian affection, of which we now speak. *Its* source is high and secret, in those regions of celestial

truth, which are seldom really visited, and which the eye of the mere philosophical vulture never saw. Springing from this high source, the stream of Christian love holds on its course, through many intricacies of temptation; sometimes through dreadful cataracts, till it reaches the valley of deep humiliation. Then, the ridges of worldly lusts, which confined its course, gradually retire; and the Christian's benevolence, swelled by floods of heavenly influence, overflows, and enriches a neighbourhood, more or less extensive according to the disposal of the sovereign God. At last, having finished its beneficent course, with calm triumph, and with many acclamations of praise, it rests in the bosom of that God, who is the ocean of love.

But, let me speak in more plain language.

1. The love of true Christians, to each other, originates in their peculiar knowledge of God.

It originates in such a knowledge of the glorious God, and in such a faith towards Him, as at once delights, humbles, and purifies the heart. To this view of the subject, the following passages direct us: 1 John 4:7, "Love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God:" Verse 16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." 1 Peter 1:22, 23, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren: see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born again . . ." Colossians 3:12, "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering."

The love of Christians rises in their breasts in a Godlike manner. Think a moment of the love of the blessed God. The primary idea of the Godhead is self-existence. What is next? The possession of an unbounded beauty, glory, and felicity within itself. Here is the fountain of that holy benevolence which belongs to God. God, being infinitely rich in spiritual glory, and full of just admiration of Himself and delight in His own beauty, is gloriously inclined to make an eternal display of His own excellence, to impart to other beings a likeness of His own purity and felicity, and to delight therein. This is the origin of all that love, which shines in the works of creation and redemption. The goodness of God is the rich overflowing of infinite perfection, and infinite happiness.

But, can the love of mean, dependant beings spring forth in so exalted a manner? Yes, my friends: according to the state, measure, and capacities of a creature, the benevolence of every true Christian is like that of God; for it springs up thus: – His mind is enlightened to look into the transcendent glories of the Divine Being; with these glories his heart is deeply enamoured: He seeks for a way of access to God; and he finds it in the Gospel: The love of God in Christ emboldens him to draw near: On the footing of the blood and righteousness of Jesus, he appropriates – what? The Godhead; the vast treasures, the all-sufficiency of Jehovah. God is now his. Can his heart remain any longer little and contracted? No, surely: His spirit now acquires a prince-like, or rather a God-like dignity. Do worldly objects appear great in his eyes? No; their lustre is gone; and with it all the mad lusts of the flesh and of the eye. But, doth this exalted creature look big in its own eyes? No. "What am I?" "Whence is this to me?" "I am a man of unclean lips;" "I am the chief of sinners: I, as a sinner, have no dignity to descend from, like that from whence God hath come down to me. But let the deepest humility show that I have known His majesty and His condescension: Let me meet with transport every shadow of His glory in my brethren around me."

Do you, my friends, understand and believe these things? I hope you do: If so, you will not be surprised, that I ascribe to the love, whose origin I have marked out –

2. The following properties: – A peculiar delicacy, purity, sweetness, expansion, strength, and permanency.

Let me explain a little these terms.

I say of Christian love, It hath a peculiar *delicacy*. It is not a promiscuous fondness. There is in a Christian's heart, a good-will which takes a very wide range. But I now speak of the mutual affection of Christians to each other as Christians. And of this I say, it is delicate. There must be more in its object, than a mere saying, "Lord, Lord." There must be probable symptoms of real grace. "Grace," said Paul, "be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "When Barnabas came to Antioch, and had seen," says the historian, "the grace of God, he was glad."

This love hath in its nature a heavenly *purity*. Worldly men sometimes love one another. But their love is carnal, it is sordid, it grovels in the dust. They can wish others to be happy in no higher way than they make choice of for themselves. The worldly man, when in a good humour, wishes well to his neighbours; that is, he wishes them good health, riches, honours, pleasures of this life. But what is the breath of Christian love, in reference to its objects? Let the public benedictions of the Old and New Testament declare it. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." "Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied unto you."

Is it saying too much of love like this, to say that it is *sweet*; that it hath a heavenly sweetness in its bosom, that it hath raptures and ecstasies? Yes, my dear brethren, this holy affection can produce sweeter ecstasies than the voluptuary ever felt. Did Paul feel no rapture, when he said, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open to you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you: great is my glorying of you. I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation?" Felt he no rapture when he thus addressed the Thessalonians: "What thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God?" Felt he no rapture when he wrote thus to the master of a fugitive slave. "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: thou therefore receive him that is mine own bowels?" I pity the man whose heart says: "How can these things be?"

The Christian's love is *capacious*. There is room in his heart for all the saints, and for millions more; yea, for as many worlds of holy beings, as the philosopher can imagine from inspecting the starry heavens, were God pleased to create and to sanctify so many.

The principle which I describe is *strong*; strong, to conquer discouragement, from much unkindness, from many blemishes; strong, to meet the frown of the proud world, and to cleave to God's people, amidst disgrace and danger. "This love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it."

The principle which I describe is *permanent*, "In summer and in winter shall it be." It shall outlast the course of day and night. It shall survive the ruins of nature. It shall rise in fresh lustre from the grave. It shall bloom in the paradise of God, for ever and ever. Such is Christian love; such is its origin; such are its properties! Is it necessary to add,

3. That it is prolific of the noblest fruits?

He who carries about in his breast this sacred fire cannot loiter, he cannot trifle. It will rouse him to beneficent activity. He will not spare his sweat or his money, who is disposed to pour out his blood "for the brethren." Their sorrows and joys he makes his own. Such fruits will spring forth from this well cultivated principle; they will spring forth naturally, with abundant luxuriancy, and with delicious fragrancy. "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard; spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Or, in the plainer, but not less fervid language of the Apostle, "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not

her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

II. – I have given a very imperfect, but, I hope, a true and just representation of the love, which genuine Christians cherish and express towards each other. And now, are you not sensible, my brethren, that it was worthy of the great Redeemer, even in those awful circumstances, to spend some of His precious moments and words on this subject, and to rouse His disciples to the study of this holy affection, by His authority and His example?

What must be the power of the commanding voice of Jesus, and of His attracting pattern, on souls that know Him? For such I have already supposed those souls to be, in which this love of the brethren is seated. They have known the glories of His Person as the Incarnate God; they have felt the charms of His love; how then must they feel the weight and power of these words, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you?”

The school of Christ is the school of love.

But can love be taught; can love be influenced by authority? Is it not an unforced, spontaneous effusion of the heart?

I grant, there is a kind of lawless love, which depends on the wild motions of an ungovernable fancy, which often disdains all control. And miserable are those deformed souls, which are hurried forward by the caprices of love, or rather, lusts of that kind. But the love of Christians to each other is capable of law. And though it is at once an effect of Divine influences, and a spontaneous effusion of the heart, yet it is cherished and exercised suitably to the regular order of the faculties of the soul. Therefore, this, as well as other graces, is not only promised and bestowed, but also enjoined and inculcated on the minds of Christians.

And, among the motives which impel believers to the study of this grace, those pointed out in the text hold a principal place. The law of love is justly denominated the “law of Christ.” Never was such love to men exhibited by created beings, in heaven or earth, as was displayed by the man Christ Jesus.

A gracious sense of this authority and example will promote the exercise of love, in Christian souls:

1. Because it will fire them with a generous ambition to excel and abound in this exercise. Who is the Judge, who is the pattern of excellence? He, who in the text requires Christians to love one another. To whom, O Christian, owest thou thine all? Who, what is it that hath saved thee? Jesus Christ and His love. Away, then, with thy coldness and languor: rest not in thy present attainments; look to this high standard; be ashamed of thyself, and press forward.

2. But, if thou groanest under the pressure of a corrupted nature, and feelest the sentence of death in thyself, in this, as in all other respects, consider the commandment and the example of Christ, as warranting and inviting thee to apply to His inexhaustible fulness of grace. Thy heart is cold, dead, barren, and perverse. But there is in Christ, life and fire enough to transfuse His likeness into thy soul. His command is designed to press thee on, to make application to Himself, as the Author and Finisher of love.

3. But thou feelest not only a want, an indisposition, – thou labourest under the forcible opposition of contrary temptations. The low state of religion among the people of God, their obstinacy in courses of backsliding, perhaps their ingratitude, frowardness, and injurious behaviour towards thyself, together with the subtle influence of the accursed parent *hatred*, concur to damp thy affections, and alienate thy heart from many of thy Christian brethren. Is it so with thee? And wilt thou thus lie down, overcome of evil? Think of thy Redeemer’s patience and free compassion; think of His authority; think of His power. Do violence to the remains of thy corrupted nature. Gain a fresh victory over these oppositions: and then I should be glad to be near thee, to feel the fragrance of that consolation and sweetness, with which Christ will soon perfume thy victorious soul.

4. And when, according to the measure of an imperfect state, thy love begins to be perfect, and to cast out servile dread, and to assure thy heart before Him; then, fear not to indulge a humble self-approbation. The command and example of thy Judge secures His approbation of every step thou advancest in this path. He, the Judge of worlds, the Prince of eternity, will say, "Well done, inasmuch as thou didst it to one of the least of these my brethren, thou didst it to me." Thou shalt receive a full reward, – a reward, in kind, suited to the nature of this holy affection. Thy love itself shall be made perfect in heaven. There, shalt thou feel a warm return of love from Christ Himself, and the assembly of the righteous. There shalt thou see, there shalt thou feel, throughout eternity, the happiness of those excellent ones of the earth, in whom was all thy delight.

III. – And now, ye Christ-like lovers of the brethren, what APPLICATION shall we make of this subject?

1. Will it be improper to take a humbling view of the matter, and to open afresh the springs of godly sorrow? What was each one of us before grace arrested us? Were we not enemies of God, and enemies of His people? The tender heart of Paul was often dissolved in contrition, when he reflected on his cruel opposition to the children of God, whom he afterwards so much esteemed. How moving are those words of his? "Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." I doubt not but his cheeks did run down with tears, in the midst of his enemies, when he repeated these words.

But it may be, this thought is rising in some one's breast: "God be thanked, I never was an enemy to God's people." Sayest thou so? Then I must take up the fan of the sanctuary, and endeavour to make a separation between the precious and the vile.

2. Hear, then, the word of the Lord. There is such a thing as a false, a feigned, a spurious love to the brethren. A man may think he loves the children of God, and yet may be deceiving himself. "Let us not," saith John, "love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." There is, then, a falsely pretended love to the saints. And this flows out very plentifully, while it costs nothing: it is less worth than money, even in the possessor's estimation. But there is a still more alarming view of the subject. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love: – Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love: – Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." Yes, my friends, there may be not only much speculation, but there may be such liberality, and such heroism in the cause of religion, as these last expressions imply, where there is not the least spark of true Christian love. We have heard of a proud Roman holding his hand in the fire till it was burnt off, to impress a foreign king with high ideas of the Roman valour. We have heard of other Romans voluntarily devoting themselves to instant death, for what they called, "the public good." And may not a carnal zeal in the cause of religion, operate as powerfully as in a cause merely worldly?

You will say then, "What shall we do? Is it possible, at this rate, to know sincerity from hypocrisy?" It is possible. It is possible for a Christian to be firmly assured of the sincerity of his love. But it is possible only in one way; in the way of a close and impartial self-examination, attended with earnest cries for the special light of the Spirit of grace. Let us, then, now bring the matter to a trial.

"We know," saith the apostle, "that we have passed, from death to life, because we love the brethren." If, then, thou art a true lover of the children of God, thou hast entered into this, as well as other graces, "by the strait gate:" And it hath cost thee a sharp struggle to get into it. Say, then, didst thou ever feel in thyself an entire want of all good, and a fulness of all evil; and consequently, a real reigning opposition of heart to God, and His people? Feeling thyself

thus, didst thou ever groan as one utterly helpless, in extreme misery? Didst thou ever, with a trembling heart, condemn thyself, as one worthy to be cast forth into the lowest hell? Thus, self-condemned, and unable to move towards Christ, unable to spin faith, like the spider, out of thine own bowels, hast thou waited on the sovereign God for a saving pull of His arm? And hast thou found a new, supernatural power opening thy heart, changing thy inmost powers, and drawing thee with a sweet violence to the glorious Saviour? Having come to Jesus, hast thou received from Him the spirit of love? Hast thou found that spirit kindling in thy breast a new celestial warmth of affection? Dost thou habitually esteem these Divine influences, and the holy affections thereby produced, far above gold and silver, and all the best things of this world? Is thy love to the saints kept alive, cherished, and revived, from time to time, by power not thine own? Dost thou bewail the imperfection of thy love, and humbly renounce all dependance thereon in the matter of justification? Deal faithfully with thyself: and if thou canst give a fair answer to those questions, I will undertake to prove by Scripture, that thou art no hypocrite, but one who doth sincerely love God and His children. For this purpose, I briefly rehearse the following Scripture expressions: “The Lord hath anointed me, – to proclaim liberty to the captives, – to appoint to them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, – that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they who mourn. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, – out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. The fruit of the Spirit is love. Ye are taught of God, to love one another.”

But if, after all, any person here present will deceive himself, “his blood be upon his own head.” I hope the Lord will not require it at my hand.

On the contrary, if any one now begins to fall under a well-founded conviction of hypocrisy, I entreat that person not to resist or stifle that conviction. Consider that you may yet be pulled up out of the horrible pit. The outlines of the way in which an unrenewed sinner may be brought into a gracious state, have been marked out in the questions which I just now proposed.

But I return to those who are indeed the people of God. You have been with Jesus at His table. Let this be manifest in the fresh fervour, sweetness, and spirituality of your affections towards each other. You have seen the dying love of Christ. Are you not ravished with it? Are you not ashamed of your distance from perfect likeness to Him? Are you not longing for that period when you shall feel flames of love like to those which were in the heart of Jesus upon the cross – which are now in His heart in the midst of the throne? Hasten forward, my friends, to your own country. Pity those who are strangers to these matters, and strive for their recovery.

That we may all meet hereafter in the kingdom of perfect light and love, and that, while sojourning on earth, we may exemplify the love of Christ, may God grant; and for this purpose may He bless what hath been now spoken. Amen!

[August 1902]

A Sermon.

By the REV. JAMES S. SINCLAIR, John Knox's, Glasgow.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” – Matthew 13:44.

Jesus, frequently spake unto the people in parables. These parables set forth the things of the Kingdom of God in the form of similitudes, drawn from natural objects or common events, that the people were familiar with in their every day life. They were admirably adapted to convey spiritual instruction, and to make that instruction find a resting place in the memories of the hearers. But the parables, notwithstanding these advantages, were not always the savour of life unto life. The general hearers were satisfied with the figure or illustration; they did not seek to penetrate into its hidden spiritual meaning, and so did not profit in a saving manner by the teaching of the parables. The disciples of Christ, on the other hand, who were true seekers after heavenly learning, were anxious to understand what they heard, and so when any parable was dark to them, they made inquiry at Christ that He might explain it unto them. Thus they attained an acquaintance with the mysteries of the kingdom of God, that others fell short of. In this, however, there are direction and encouragement for all who desire to know in a saving way the things of God. If any part of the Scripture or experience is dark to such persons, let them ask the great Prophet of the Church to teach them by His Spirit, and they shall receive instruction, for He has compassion on “the ignorant and them that are out of the way.”

In this and other parables, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God on earth as the kingdom of heaven. The reasons for this are not far to seek. The kingdom of God in connection with the coming of Christ had entered upon a newer and more heavenly dispensation. Heaven had come down to earth in the person of the Redeemer Himself; and heaven was also about to come down at a not very distant period in a rich and abundant manner in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. But at any time the kingdom of God on earth may be fitly spoken of as “the kingdom of heaven.” It is heavenly in its *origin*; God Himself is the founder of it. It is heavenly in its *character*; it is regulated by principles that are spiritual, divine, and heavenly in their nature. It is also heavenly in its *end*; it leads to heaven; every soul that has the kingdom of God established within it in time shall infallibly enter into the kingdom of heaven in eternity.

Let us now look, in dependence on the teaching of the Spirit of God, at the parable specially before us. We shall notice: –

- I. – The comparison of the kingdom of God to treasure.
- II. – The field in which the treasure is declared to be hid.
- III. – The relation in which the treasure stands to the field.
- IV. – The finder of the treasure, and what he did.

I. – The comparison of the kingdom to treasure.

1. It is very clear that this comparison is designed to set forth the *exceeding preciousness* of the kingdom of God. It is no common good; it is an object unspeakably excellent; something which, when its true value is perceived, is made choice of at the expense of everything else which the world counts dear. It is a treasure of such incalculable worth that, when a man finds it, he is willing to sell all that he possesses in order that he may enjoy it as his own. And truly what earthly thing is to be compared for a moment to the kingdom of God set up in the soul of a sinner by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost? It is a kingdom which consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The soul is emancipated from the power of darkness, the bondage of Satan, and the curse of the law, and gets the earnest of an eternal inheritance of happiness, and holiness beyond the skies. All earthly treasure is nothing to this. “What shall it profit a man though he should gain the whole world, if he lose his soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

2. Our second remark is that, as it is the exceeding preciousness of the kingdom of God that is pointed out in the parable, the word treasure may be fitly taken as referring to *Christ Himself*. He is the most precious object in connection with this kingdom; He is the supreme treasure of the soul. If anyone desires to find God Himself, the most glorious of all beings, who fills heaven and earth with His glory, and the most valuable portion that any finite creature can enjoy, it is in Christ alone that He is to be found. God is in Christ in all the glory of His perfections; He is in Christ, reconciling sinners to Himself. If anyone desires eternal salvation, that salvation is in Christ alone. Deliverance from never-ending misery, justification in the sight of a holy God, renewal in the divine image, and a right and title to eternal life – all these incomparable blessings are treasured up in Christ Jesus. In fact, all that a poor sinner needs for soul and body, in view of time and eternity, is to be found in Him. That rich word – “all things are yours” – is spoken to those that are Christ’s. Who can describe the matchless excellencies of His person as the God-man? He is the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely one. Who can measure the height and depth, length and breadth, of that love which He has shown to sinful men? It passeth knowledge; it is a boundless ocean, without a bottom and without a shore. It will take eternity to show forth all His praise. The ransomed of the Lord will have fellowship with Him, and will sing His praise throughout the endless ages of a holy and a happy eternity. Christ, then, with the blessings of the everlasting covenant in Him, is the chief treasure in the kingdom of God. And happy are those souls who have seen, by the light of the Spirit, the beauty and preciousness of this matchless treasure, and have made an everlasting purchase of it at “the market of free grace.”

II. – Let us notice, in the second place, *the field* in which the treasure is hid. The treasure is in a field. Christ is personally in heaven; but He is declaratively in His Word. We take the field, then, to represent the Bible, the Word of God. Christ is in the Holy Scriptures. This is a blessed commonplace of sound theology. No enlightened mind can read the Bible without observing that Christ is its chief and pervading theme. The book of Genesis speaks of Him, and the book of Revelation is full of Him. He is the beginning of the creation of God, and He is the end of all things; the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last; Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. The Scriptures have certainly been written to exhibit the glory of a Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and it would be presumption to exalt one of these ineffable Persons at the expense of the others. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the Triune God is revealed in Christ for the salvation of sinners, and the Word has been written for the purpose of bringing sinners nigh to God through Him – the love of the Father and the power of the Holy Ghost concurring to this end – it is absolutely necessary that Christ be held forth as the treasure whose presence in the Word is of supreme interest for immortal souls. All the promises, sacrifices, ceremonies of the Old Testament exhibit Him; and every page of the New Testament is replete with His glory. Notice two things concerning the field.

1. The field is *nigh at hand*. It is not at an immeasurable distance from us. No one requires to climb up into heaven, or dig under the earth, to find it. Nor do we in Scotland need to go to the ends of the world, to China or Japan, to discover this precious field. "The word is nigh thee." It is at our very doors. We have heard of it with our ears and seen it with our eyes from our very infancy upwards. It is one of the most familiar objects that we are acquainted with. What a remarkable privilege this, and yet a privilege that, by reason of this very familiarity, is but lightly esteemed by the greater number of young and old. Many persons will go thousands of miles across the seas, will sacrifice the dearest comforts and encounter the greatest risks, expend their most precious energies in order to get a little handful of earth's perishing riches, while most of them forget that in the Word of God, which has been in their hands from childhood, there is a treasure more valuable than all the wealth of all the millionaires in the world. The field in which Christ and eternal life are to be found is very nigh unto us. Great is the privilege; but solemn is the responsibility, and terrible will be the consequences if we neglect this field. If we treat the Word of God as a thing of little value, we despise our own happiness, and choose eternal misery as our portion. The day is coming when we will be removed from all access to this field, and if we do not before then seek and find the matchless treasure, we shall be poor for ever. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" – Romans 10:8,9.

2. The field is *open*. The fields of the natural creation are often walled around by their owners, and only a very few privileged persons are permitted to walk through them. Placards are set up warning the ordinary passers by of the punishment to which they expose themselves if they venture to trespass upon these fields. Now, God has put up no wall around the field of His Word. Far otherwise; all are invited, yea, exhorted to walk through it and survey its beauties; more than this, all are commanded to search for Christ the priceless treasure, in it. Christ Himself says, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." In fact, on the other hand, there are placards put up warning those persons who neglect and despise this field of the fearful consequences of their sin, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" – Hebrews 3: 18.

Though God has raised no wall of exclusion around His Word, yet Satan has for centuries, by the instrumentality of men, tried to shut out the common people from the privilege of traversing this noble field. The great enemy has made use of *the Pope of Rome* and his officials for this end. They have declared and are still declaring that it is only the priests who have a right to free access to the Word of God; and they have been successful in deluding multitudes of immortal souls with this pernicious idea. At the glorious Reformation, the Spirit of God moved our forefathers to rise up against this monstrous tyranny, and they threw down the unhallowed barriers that stood between the people and the Word of life. They preached an open Bible, and free access to Jesus Christ, the treasure of the soul, without the intervention of a manmade priesthood. But what do we observe, friends, at the present time but a strong movement in this country back towards that Romish bondage from which God delivered us at the Reformation? It is a movement to drive immortal souls out of the field of God's Word, and to deprive them of the privilege of seeking and finding for themselves Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners. The priests of Rome will give them a false Christ in return for their subjecting themselves to this unspeakable loss. Again, the *Higher Critics* are engaged in no better work than this. They undervalue the field, and declare it is not much better than common ground. They would blot out the marked distinction that exists between it and other fields, and so leave souls uncertain where the precious treasure lies. According to their

theory, it is only the learned who can point out the inspired portions of the Divine Word, and these are divided among themselves on this all-important matter, so that a mist of learned delusion is cast over the field of God's Word, and poor souls are left wandering on in utter darkness to eternity. The Higher Critics are another class of persons who are bent on robbing souls of Christ and eternal life. Let us then prize our present privileges; let us reject with righteous indignation the ideas of both priests and critics. The field is nigh at hand, and is open to every creature under heaven. Let us see to it that we are not satisfied with a mere general survey of its beauties, without attaining to the possession of Christ Himself who is hid in it. This leads us to the third point.

III. – The relation in which the treasure stands to the field.

1. Christ is to be found only in the field of the Word; He is not to be had in other fields. If He is found in any other book than this, it is because He was first found here in this Book of books. It is only through the Word of God that we come to the knowledge of Christ. The Lord may often make use of events in providence for giving an awakening to sinners out of the sleep of indifference as to the interests of their souls; but sooner or later He brings the Word to them or them to the Word, in order to enlighten them by His Spirit in a saving knowledge of Christ. They are born again, not of the corruptible seed of human opinion, but of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

2. Christ is *hid* in the Word. This is to be taken only in a relative sense. We are not to suppose for a moment that the Holy Scriptures are obscure on the subject of Christ. They set Him forth clearly and fully so that he who runneth may read and recognise Christ in them. But there is a very important sense in which the treasure is hid in the field.

(1) Christ cannot be savingly seen by the carnal eye. People may be reading the Bible from childhood to old age, and yet all the time continue ignorant of Christ in any spiritual sense. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are spiritually discerned." It is possible certainly to become acquainted with the doctrine of Christ by the power of the natural intellect, and even to attain by this same power a far-off superficial admiration of Him, but to come to a direct spiritual acquaintance with Him with saving results is not possible to the natural man. All the intellect, learning, and morality in the world will not discover the true Christ of God in His real glory to a soul. This is the reason why many able scholars and preachers are manifestly destitute of a real knowledge of Christ; and their lack of this fundamental requirement shows itself in their erroneous views of the Bible and Christ.

(2) Again, Christ is so hid in the Word that He can only be sought and found in it by the illumination of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who glorifies Christ, who reveals His glory to the souls of men. This teaches us that we stand in absolute need of the Spirit in order to get savingly acquainted with Christ, and we firmly believe that every soul that ever came to the knowledge of the Saviour felt deeply convinced that it was not by any might or power of man that this blessed knowledge was reached, but solely by the supernatural operations of the Holy Ghost. This does not, however, shut out the exercise of seeking on the part of the soul. The prophet Isaiah says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," and Jesus Himself says, "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." The treasure is hid, not for the purpose of preventing souls from the finding of it, but rather with a view to impress upon them its supernatural divine glory and the necessity of making a diligent search for it. "They shall seek me and find me, when they search for me with all the heart."

IV. – The finder of the treasure, and what he did. "The which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field."

1. Our first remark here is that the man was in the field when he found the treasure. We are not expressly told that he was seeking for the treasure at the time he found it; it is possible, even probable, according to the character of the parable that he was otherwise engaged when he came unexpectedly upon the precious spoil. But one thing is absolutely certain, he was in the field; and while this does not relieve any from the positive obligation to search for Christ in the field of the Word, yet it affords strong encouragement to persons to be diligent even in the ordinary exercise of reading the Word. The Spirit of God is sovereign in His operations, and in the time of them. No one knows at what moment He may apply the truth with power to the soul. And, therefore, you who may be engaged in reading the Scriptures daily, and may be tempted by the great adversary to give up the practice because your conscience testifies you are getting no real benefit by it, be encouraged to go on; ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh in the day of grace as well as in the day of death. He may reveal Himself to you at an unexpected moment, and pluck you as a brand out of the burning. Reading the Bible of itself won't save you; but the not-reading of it, if persisted in to the end, will seal your eternal damnation. See to it then that you are daily walking among the green pastures of God's Word; you do not know what glorious discovery may await you at some unexpected moment.

2. The second thing that may be said is that the man was searching below the surface when he found the treasure, for it was hid in the field. Thus, while we may be encouraged to visit the field of God's Word by the thought that the Spirit may sovereignty reveal Christ at any moment to us, yet we have no real warrant that we will find Him unless we seek. Seeking is the divinely appointed path to finding. And surely the treasure is so infinitely precious in itself, that although a lifetime should be spent in seeking it, yet if it be found at last, the reward – not of merit, but of grace – will be glorious. But the Lord does not usually keep seeking souls very long before finding; and so do not be discouraged by delays and disappointments if you are heartily seeking Christ.

3. The finding of the treasure illustrates the soul's first saving discovery of Christ. Christ is found by the seeking soul; the glory of His person with the excellency of His salvation is blessedly opened up to the poor sinner, and he is ravished with the sight. He may not be able to say at this first discovery, "Christ is mine"; he may not have the full assurance of faith; but he is brought to see such an infinite excellency in Christ and salvation that he is made willing to sell all that he has that he may buy the field and the treasure in it. This is the scope of the present parable. It teaches that the soul gets a discovery of the preciousness of the Redeemer before, and in order to making an unreserved choice of Him as its all and in all. The Spirit who convinces of sin, enlightens the soul in the knowledge of Christ, and renews the will and affections with a view to the embrace of Christ as offered in the Gospel.

4. The finder hides the treasure. Fear springs up in his heart, fear lest he should lose his precious prize, fear lest some passer-by should deprive him of it; and so he hides the treasure. Is not there a similar feeling in the soul when it gets the first revelation of Christ? Is not the sinner afraid he will lose the blessed discovery, and be left as poor as ever he was before? He therefore takes precautions to avoid this calamity; he uses means for preserving the experience he has got. For one thing, he hides the treasure within the covert of watchfulness. He guards against every enemy that would steal it from him. He now breaks with his former worldly companions; he feels that their society will not benefit, but injure him. He keeps a jealous watch over his own heart. There are enemies there, carnality, unbelief, evil desires, and gross affections that would take Christ from him if they could. He resists the inroads of the devil. This terrible adversary walketh about seeking whom he may devour; and so the enlightened soul trembles lest Satan should come with a mighty assault and carry off the precious treasure. At this stage of spiritual experience the believer is very tender and watchful, more so it may be than in after years. He hides the treasure in the secret place of

private devotion. He goes apart from his friends and acquaintances to retired spots for meditation and prayer. There he meditates upon the truth as it is in Jesus, and communes with the God of grace. He hides it in the secret place of his heart. "Thy word," says the Psalmist, "have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." The gracious soul buries Christ in the depth of his affections. He hides the treasure in the secret place of God's power. It must be "kept by the power of God." He commits the treasure into the hands of the Lord that He may keep it for him. "Thou maintainest my lot." If it be left to his own keeping, he will soon lose it for ever.

5. The finder joyfully sells all that he has, and buys the field. The soul that finds Christ rejoices with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. There is no joy comparable to this. The happiness of the world is vain and empty at best; it will soon give place to endless misery. The joy of the gracious soul is rich and satisfying, and is the earnest of everlasting bliss.

The finder now goes away and sells all that he has that he may buy the field. He sees that the treasure is so valuable that he is willing to part with all his possessions that he may get it. It is clearly taught here that there is a selling and buying in connection with Christ and salvation. The lesson, however, is not that we buy the field by meritorious works of righteousness; it is not a buying by personal merit at all; but it is a process of exchange whereby the soul renounces everything that comes into competition with Christ, and freely chooses and appropriates Him as its one everlasting portion.

What are some of the things which the finder sells?

(1) He sells all those things that are positively sinful in themselves. If he has been an open transgressor of God's commandments, he gives up his evil practices. He renounces every course of action that is not in harmony with God's revealed will. He begins to hate and mortify his heart evils, his love of sin, self, and the world, his pride and vain glory.

(2) He sells his good things in respect of his former esteem of them. Paul gloried in his birth and privileges as a Hebrew, and in his zeal and righteousness as a Pharisee. These things were not absolutely worthless in themselves, they had a certain value of their own; but he had an undue esteem of them; they formed his foundation for eternity. But when he got a knowledge of Christ Jesus, he counted his former riches to be but loss and dung, and was willing to part with them all that he might win Christ and be found in Him. He was an eminent example of a soul that found the hidden treasure, and sold all that he had and bought it. And everyone that truly comes to the knowledge of Christ and beholds His matchless beauty and preciousness will, in his or her own measure, follow the example of the apostle. There are many at the present day who think they can serve God and mammon, and who imagine they may sell nothing of their own, and have Christ at the same time; but these persons are under a great delusion. The thing is essentially impossible, however people may deceive themselves about it. Sin must be given up, self must be mortified, the world must become little to us, if we are to have Christ seated on the throne of our affections, and His kingdom established in our hearts.

Notice it is the field he proceeds to buy. The field and the treasure go together; they are not to be separated from one another. He knows that when he gets the field he gets the treasure also. And so it is in the spiritual sphere. Christ is in the Word, and it is only by getting the Word in reality as our own that we can get Christ also. And so poor souls, that have seen the glory of Christ as revealed in the Gospel, buy the Word, part with everything else, and venture their all for eternity upon the Word of the living God. Men in our day are telling us that we may have Christ without the Word, but they have not the mind of Christ; they do not hear His voice. The teaching of Christ here is that the soul must buy the whole field in order to get the treasure that is in it. "Buy the truth and sell it not."

The finder buys the field. The merchandise in the present case is of the rarest kind. The buyer is now a poor man; he has sold his riches, and has got poverty instead – poverty of spirit; he has sold his own righteousnesses, and has now a sense of sin and guilt; he has sold his carnal ability, and has now a sense of utter helplessness; and he comes to the market where he may buy the field. This is the market of free grace. The divine Merchant sells His goods only to the poor and the destitute – those without money and without price; and here the poor sinner joyfully makes a bargain with the Merchant. He asks for the field in which the treasure is hid, and seeing that he has come in the right way, the Lord gives him what he asks for. He applies the truth concerning Christ so powerfully to the sinner’s heart, and enables him to embrace the Saviour in such an appropriating exercise of faith, that the poor soul may now say, “The treasure is mine; Christ is mine; I am made rich for eternity; my cup runneth over.” We do not say that all who receive Christ obtain an equally clear assurance of their interest at first or afterwards, but we certainly think that all of them, in their hearts, turn from sin unto God, prefer an interest in Christ to all other things in the world, and look to Him constantly as their prophet, priest, and king, that He, by His Spirit, may teach, cleanse, quicken, and bless them.

Happy, then, are they who have had a saving discovery of Jesus Christ as the Divine Saviour, and who have been constrained by a loving esteem of His infinite excellency, to count all things but loss and dung that they may win Him and be found in Him, accepted in the Beloved.

On the other hand, let us warn with the utmost solemnity those souls who are seeking everything but Christ; who are found in every field but the field of His Word. Many there be who are solely taken up with the field of their worldly occupation, and give but an occasional glance at the Word of God. You of whom this is true are selling your soul and Christ for eternity for the sake of a mess of pottage. Others again find their chief happiness in the field of carnal amusement. The young, for most part, are swallowed up in the pleasures of this field. There is undoubtedly a recreation which is lawful; but supposing our particular recreation be lawful in itself, yet if our hearts are wholly given to it, it will be our eternal destruction at last, unless we turn in a day of mercy. And one other field we may mention, which many people wander in at the present time, is the field of light literature. The novel is a thousand times sweeter to multitudes than the Bible. Many are the false Christs that are to be found in this field. The novel is generally pervaded by wrong views of sin, wrong views of God, and wrong views of salvation. Sin is treated as an error or mistake; God is described as all love and no righteousness; and salvation is handled as not of pure grace but of works. All the pernicious errors that are to be found in modern theology are distilled through the pages of fictitious literature. May the Lord, in infinite mercy, preserve the young of our congregations from the poisonous atmosphere of this ensnaring field! O seek now, in the day of your merciful visitation, Jesus Christ, the most glorious of all treasures, and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Him unto you as your own personal Saviour. This is what will make you happy in time and through eternity. May the Lord bless His own word!

[September 1902]

Notes of a Sermon

By the REV. JOHN MACLEOD, M.A., Kames.

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay” – Matthew 28:6.

There were two companies at the grave of Christ this morning. There were those that had been sent there to keep guard. They were the emissaries of His enemies – their deputies on the spot. The task committed to them was to see that the Jesus who was already got out of the way should be kept under ground. The stone did not keep Him; the seal did not keep Him; death and the grave could not keep Him; much less these poor soldiers. The soldiers were the one company, and we may say that they were there with hostile intent. Personally they might have no lively interest in the special task allotted to them, but all the same, in their official character, they were the servants of this world’s malice – sent to see to it that the Son of God should be kept out of the way. The other company that we find on the scene was a very different one. It consisted of a few poor women who came in their love as friends of their revered Master to pay what they thought to be the last attentions that were called for at their hands. We see in what friendly and encouraging words they are addressed by the heavenly embassy – “Fear not ye.” Be not afraid. Ye have no reason to fear. It is true that these soldiers have fallen as dead men to the earth, but ye have no reason to fear. They have reason and more than they know, but ye have none, for I know that ye seek Jesus of Nazareth that was crucified. Loving devotedness has given you an early errand here; ye have come to find your Lord, but He is not here. He is risen as He said unto you. You might have known that this would be the case, but your eyes were holden, your understandings were but blank, and ye received not as ye might and should the preintimations He Himself gave of how matters would come to pass. But although ye are not altogether uncensurable for not receiving His word, yet fear not, but come, see the place where He lay and satisfy yourselves that now His words have been fulfilled. The grave holds Him no longer. Such were the two companies, and such was the message that Christ’s resurrection conveyed to each company.

We may briefly attend to a few things that present themselves in the words of our text.

- I. – Who it is that lay in the empty grave?
- II. – He did lie there, for it was His place.
- III. – He lay there now no longer, it was His place no more.
- IV. – The message that His resurrection conveys.
- V. – The invitation to see the empty grave, and how this teaches.

I. – The place where the Lord lay.

Was it not a dead body that had lain in that grave? Yes undoubtedly, but the question is whose body was it? It was no mere every day burial that had taken place in the rock hewn tomb. It was the Lord’s body that had been laid there. He had died and His true body and His true soul had indeed parted company. The veil of His humanity, body and soul, had been rent in twain from the top to the bottom. There was a real separation of soul and body, so that we may say that an inanimate body – a body from which the spirit had fled and the life was gone was laid in Joseph’s grave. Death had come and had done his work. He had cut deeply, but however deep his cut went, we may ask had death so worked as to separate this inanimate body from the Person of the Son of God? We are apt to cherish hazy notions as to the union

effected in the constitution of the Mediator's Person between His essential intrinsic eternal divine nature and the nature of man that He assumed for us men and for our redemption. The humanity He assumed into union with His divinity in the mystery of His mediatorial Person was a true humanity. It was a full humanity. It consisted of a true body as well as of a reasonable soul. The body of Christ was no phantom, no mere appearance, no unsubstantial intangible something, neither body nor spirit. No it was a true body – Jesus Christ came in the flesh. If men are apt on the one hand to lose sight of this truth, they are apt on the other hand to err in imagining that the everlasting person of the Word of God supplied the place of a true reasonable human soul. It did no such thing. He was made in *all* things like unto His brethren, but without sin. The union effected in His incarnation between the true soul and the Eternal Person was real. Equally real was the union effected between the Eternal Person and the true body, and this union is an indissoluble one. Death might and death did sever the tie that united soul and body. The blood in which was the life might be poured out. But neither death nor life could affect injuriously the glorious union that exists between the entire divinity and the entire humanity of the Father's beloved Son. The comparison has been employed to cast light on this thing by what takes place when a soldier holding his scabbard in his left hand draws forth the sword with his right hand. Holding the scabbard in the one hand and the sword in the other he has firm hold of each, yet when the sword is drawn forth from the scabbard, sword and scabbard are sundered, separated from one another. Even so He who came to do the will of the Father that sent Him, had power to lay down His life. This power He put in exercise for such was the Father's will. But when soul and body parted company, neither of them parted company with Himself. Where the holy soul went there went He, where the dead body lay there lay He. The Lord lay in this grave. His presence in that grave was no mere instance of His omnipresence. His presence is omnipresence. But the fact that this body was His, assumed into union with His glorious Person, tells us that He was here in a very special way. Never was the grave honoured as it was by such a guest. The Lord of life, and light, and glory became its tenant. The Lord lay where His body lay. He was brought to the dust of death. Sin imputed reigned unto the death of the sin-bearer, and as the great sin-bearer laid down His life, the grave was His place for a season. Thus we see: –

II. – He *lay* there. Why did He lie there? Ah, it was His place. Had it not been His place He had never lain there. It was His place, for He was numbered with the transgressors. He was numbered with transgressors and so was numbered with the dead. The grave is the place for the dead. His death was a real death, and this was His place while He remained under the key of death. There is an intimate alliance between death and the grave. Death is more than to die, it is also to remain among the dead. Had reviving on His own part, or resurrection on the part of God been the immediate consequent of Christ's death, we might say that He died. Yet though the death were real and the reviving real too, the evidence of death and reviving and resurrection would not be the full evidence that it is. Death lasts so long as life is out of the body. So long as the parting of soul and body endures so long does death, and while death lasts we may say that the grave as death's brother whispers in his ear, "Now that you have done your work let me have my prey." That there might be proof of the reality of death, the lying in the grave must have place. "Thus," said He on one occasion, "it becometh me to fulfil all righteousness." Whatsoever things were written beforehand of Him must now have their fulfilment. They must now come to pass, and that they might come to pass He must go to the grave. If His soul made an offering for sin was not the grave His place? Yes it was. But not only must proof of the reality of death be given, there must be an opportunity of resurrection, and without the lying down there could be no rising up again. The grave then was His place that the reality of His death might be made apparent. The grave too was His place that it might be possible for Him to rise out of it. He was not to be left in the grave, and that meant that He must be in it before it could be possible for Him not to be left in it.

Nothing is left in a place where it never was. No one is left in a town where He never was, and that such language might have its meaning fulfilled and its intention carried out, He who came to be the grave's destruction must need be in the grave as its guest or as its prey.

Sin, we have said, was imputed to Him, and the load of imputed sin brought it about that He must die. When He died then was the grave's opportunity. It had hitherto never said, "I have enough," but now it received in the Person of Immanuel what it had to confess to be, if not enough, at least more than enough. It received in Him what it could not hold, for in the blood of His sacrifice was the power that burst its gates asunder. Its gates were not battered in as of old the walls or gates of a besieged city might be. They were broken from within, for into the confines of the tomb He had come, who had come expressly to bruise the serpent's head. The power of the old serpent was now broken. The power of him who had the power of death was taken away, and as this was done the power of the grave was like the instability of an arch, one side of which has been undermined; a charge has been laid there that shall splinter the arch in pieces. When evidence was afforded of the reality of death, when an opportunity was forthcoming of showing the triumph thus secured, for through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, then was humiliation turned into a triumph. No longer was the grave His place and so He left it, from within its gates were burst open, or from within He who entering into the other world took with Him the key of return in His perfect obedience, He who by His one offering hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified, turned the key in the lock and the door not lothe to do its Master's bidding, turned on its hinges and forth He came. Thus it cannot any longer be said, the place where the Lord lies. He did lie there, but He there lies no longer. It is not His place.

III. – He lies no longer where He lay once. Christ came not that death should overcome Him, but that He might overcome death. He came not that the victory should be with the grave, but that He might be the grave's destruction. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. That death might be deprived of its sting, the sin that occasioned it must be removed. The sin that was to be removed was connected in its very nature with law. The law's penalty must be endured. The law's honour must be vindicated. The curse otherwise must remain in full force. The work undertaken by Christ embraced nothing less than that death should be spoiled of its power and that the curse of the law should be removed by being borne. It was no surprise sprung upon Him that He must needs suffer what was appointed for Him to suffer, and so from the outset of His course the Cross was in view. The Cross was in view of something else. The humiliation was not to be the end of all. Nay, it is but the necessary step to something further. He must needs, as the Father's servant doing the Father's will lay down His life; but the command to lay it down was tied to another, that He should take it to Himself again. There must be provision made in the laying down for the fulfilment of the companion injunction. Nay, the very laying down itself secured the desired result.

Law unbroken said, do and live. Law broken went further, it said, satisfy and live, and these were the terms that the Surety of covenant breakers, the Saviour of sinners had to face. He assumed the liabilities of His people. He came under their burden, and the law that said to them, satisfy and live, addressed Him in the same words. Herein was glorious self-emptying. The lawgiver submitted to the curse of His own law, and this He did that offenders might be set free, that the unjust might be set at liberty, might be delivered from wrath and curse, and death. He satisfied, and the law with all its holiness might be challenged to find a flaw in the perfection of His work. He satisfied the law's demands, He met its claims, He endured its curse, and having been delivered for our offences He was raised again because of our justification.

When the law received the satisfaction it called for at His hands, He who rendered that satisfaction on behalf of His covenant people was as their Head and Representative rewarded. The law said not "satisfy" only. It did not halt there. No. It went on to say "live." When its

demand was met, its kindly command “live,” came forth. It was not meet that the righteousness fulfilled by the second man should pass unrecognised. The righteousness of the divine Surety was such as to call for life. The laying down of His life then was in order to resurrection; Jesus the Saviour of His people from their sins is their Resurrection and their Life. He is this in virtue of His doing and His dying in their stead. So we may say that though He bowed His head to enter the lowly portal of the tomb, He did so, not that sin, or man, or devil, or death, or grave might triumph over Him. Thus it became Him to fulfil all righteousness. In this as in all other things He must needs have the pre-eminence, He must be the first-born from the dead, He must be the first fruits of them that slept, and thus though the grave was His place as He was numbered with the dead, it was not His place of abode. He entered it as a wayfarer to tarry for a season, to tarry for that night that ended in the day of resurrection life. Thus tarrying within its gates He was the way-breaker for His chosen ones who have also to tarry there. Their waiting ends with resurrection life too, and as all the rest of their salvation is of grace in Him, this too is in Him. The waves of victory over the powers of darkness raised by the blast of His trumpet voice as He speaks in righteousness swept over the grave’s dominions when He rose, and this same victory follows on its course. It is seen in the calling, in the keeping, and in the final glorification of one and all of those for whom He undertook.

The grave then was no longer His place, as it ceased to be His place He remained no longer within it. He left it and the empty grave speaks of a guest that it could not entertain, of a prisoner that it could not hold, of a prey that it could not devour. The grave was not the end of His course. The hopes of the Church were not buried for ever in the grave, that enclosed His blessed body. The promise of life given in Him from eternal ages was not to fail. What is from eternity will not fail to be to eternity. The purpose of love was not to be frustrated. The Son of God was not to be vanquished. The creature’s sin could not bear down the Creator’s might, for when that might was exercised in the way of law magnifying righteousness there was power in the blood of the sacrifice that must overcome all adversaries. God set His heart on the redemption of poor sinners, of whom nothing better could be hoped than that they would reap as they had sowed. He determined to glorify His rich grace in redeeming them from death and the grave, and His purpose could not fall to the ground. It was no longer Christ’s place to abide in the tomb, and no longer did He abide. So the word could be uttered – the place where the Lord lay.

IV. – The message that His resurrection conveys is two-fold. That He lives for ever tells of the acceptance of His sacrifice. It tells too of the acceptability of His intercession. It speaks a message of comfort and cheer to His redeemed ones. It tells of assured life and glory. But it speaks to the ungodly, to those that reject the Gospel, to His enemies, and its message to them is a message fraught with terror. At the outset of our discourse we took note of two companies found by the empty grave. There were the stricken soldiers, there were the loving friends. To the friends the angel said, “Fear not.” We do not, however, read that he said this or anything like this to the Roman guard. That Christ was risen was a fountain of joy to His disciples. “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” “The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared unto Simon.” Their love to Him made them rejoice in His victory, and so down all the course of the Church’s history wherever there has been one that loved Him whom he saw not, there there was one that believing rejoiced that God raised Christ from the dead.

The fountain of joy opened on the resurrection morning is a fountain that is still open and still flowing. Where there is love to Christ there will be rejoicing that the day went with Him and that He left the grave as the grave’s conqueror. He died not for Himself but for others. He died as we have seen as head and representative of a people that no man can number. That people were known individually to God, on their behalf as in their stead He died; on their

behalf and as their head He rose. His rising again is the proof publicly afforded of their acceptance in Him. He who as a lover and friend of Jesus takes shelter under His sacrificial death may see here the pledge of his own acceptance. It is no presumption for him to say, "As He was accepted in my behalf so in Him shall I be accepted. No more surely is He raised from the dead than I too shall be raised with Him. No more surely has the proof of His acceptance been given than it is given to me to draw comfort from this source. He, in whose death is my one righteousness, whose blood is my one defence, whose name is my one plea, He is risen for me and herein may I well rejoice. Here is salvation and glory brought to light."

The resurrection is but the first step of His exaltation. It contains within its bosom the whole exaltation. As in the acorn is the sapling and in the sapling the oak, so here is involved Christ's glorious ascension at the right hand, His coming at the last day to judge, and His everlasting glory in and with His inheritance. The judgment is no assize of condemnation to those that receive Himself. There is for them boldness in that day, and of this they may receive the comfort in realising their union with Him in His death and resurrection.

But if there is boldness for them in the day of judgment, if to them it is no day of terror, amazement, confusion, much otherwise will the case be with all that share not in His victory. The fact that He is risen cannot be overturned by any unbelief of unbelievers. They may hate Him and refuse to admit the light. They may resist the proof given of the righteousness of His claims and the perfection of His work, but all the same Christ is risen. The stone set at naught by the builders is made the head of the corner. The malice that set it at naught may still blind sinners to the glory of that Stone, but yet, all the same, Christ is risen. He has put to flight the powers of darkness, He has conquered hell, death, and the grave. We have already seen that His rising again carries with it all His glory, and when the great day comes, that man whom God hath appointed judge of all shall sit in judgment. That judgment shall be executed is undeniable. That judgment shall be executed by Christ is undeniable. Of this proof is given to all in that God has raised Him from the dead. His resurrection is the pledge that His second coming in the glory of the Father will be a day of confusion, amazement, and terror to His adversaries. Then will issue the dread command, "Bring forth these mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." Then will judgment be executed in tribulation and anguish, in indignation and wrath on every soul of man that doeth evil. Jew and Gentile, Christian and Infidel, black and white, all classes, all ranks shall appear in the judgment, and as many as have not their names written in the Lamb's book of life, shall have their part assigned them in the lake of fire that burns for ever and ever.

Can then the message that the resurrection of Christ brings be anything else than a message of terror to those that oppose themselves to Him. Let hand join hand in confederacy against Him, they shall be broken in pieces. To the righteous, He saith, "it shall be well with him." To the wicked, the rebellious, the disobedient, "it shall be ill with him." Christ is able to save. All power is His for this end. He saves to the uttermost a willing people, but He saves only those that come unto God through Him, and as many as refuse to incline their ear and hear, have the assurance given them that the wrath already rests on them, and the wrath that rests on them shall be poured out by Him whom they now refuse in His overtures of mercy. But blessed be God, while yet body and soul are together the word of reconciliation addresses us, and God calls us to yield ourselves unto Him in Christ. He calls on us to give unto the Son the kiss of homage, to take His yoke upon us and to learn of Him. Thus though your provocations have been many, though your rebellion has been stout-hearted, though your enmity has been great, cast away the arms of your rebellion, and He promises to receive, to cleanse, to save. "If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land."

To His enemies the message that Christ's resurrection gives, is one of mingled terror and hope; a message of terror if they abide in unbelief and stout-heartedness, a message of hope seeing that the Christ who is risen is risen to save, is exalted to show mercy, and for Him

nothing is too hard. Rejoice, oh unbeliever in this that Jesus lives to save, to save sinners from their sin, from their unbelief, from themselves. “Wherefore, to-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” Thus to two classes the empty grave speaks. It speaks of sin punished and of sin to be punished. It speaks of wrath inflicted and of wrath to be inflicted. It speaks comfort and it speaks terror. See to it friend that you learn of Christ, that its kindly voice may cheer you.

V. – Come, See. Here we have the invitation to see the empty grave. How does this teach us? One half of the proof of the resurrection was given in the empty grave. The message that called on the women to see for themselves that the grave was empty, assured them that it was so because Jesus was risen. The evidence of His resurrection was more than negative. The negative evidence was required. The grave where the body had gone and that had been watched by the soldiers of Rome must be empty. Here was the negative evidence that Christ was risen. The place that received Him must yield Him up. The grave in which He lay must be empty. This evidence was here given. The other side to the evidence of His resurrection is that He must be seen after rising again. Thus we find in the narrative of the Evangelists that attention is drawn to each aspect of the case. The full orbed evidence shines forth. The grave is empty, and the risen Jesus is beheld. Here were witnesses to testify to after ages what their own senses made them aware of. He had been seen laid there. Those that saw this now saw His place vacant. They were graciously called to come and satisfy themselves – “Come,” said the angel, “see the place where the Lord lay.”

One may say those women had an advantage indeed. They might well be certain that these things were indeed so, but alas for us who live so far away from these events of old. We might go to the very mouth of the grave and see there but an empty tomb, and what could that avail as evidence that the Lord is risen? Friend, be not too hasty. Consider what evidence you have for believing in a risen Lord. You have the Word of God Himself as your warrant. He tells you of it, and better evidence than His you cannot have. When He tells you of it, is not that as satisfactory, as good, as sure, as if you saw it all with your own eyes. “Ah,” you may say, “if I had only seen those who were eye-witnesses of these things that I might hear from their own lips an account of them. “What? have you not their written testimony, their blood-sealed deposition? Are you not as well assured of the certainty of these things as the Word of God can make you? The inspiration of God’s Word brings men of all ranks and classes and ages to one level. We are on a level with the eye-witnesses themselves. The mountains have been levelled, the valleys have been filled, Zaccheus need not climb up into any tree to see for himself Jesus of Nazareth passing by. The Word is nigh us – Christ is in the Word. The verity of these things is attested by Him who cannot lie. And the invitation given to the poor Galilean woman of old is given to us still – Come, let us too see the place that the Lord lay in.

Well nigh two thousand years have passed since He rose from the dead. The grave for ought we know may be in existence still. We might find it and look into it, but what assurance could that give us? It is true, one’s imagination might become active and fill up the details that are wanting to complete a picture of the event, but imagination is not faith. Faith builds on a foundation as divine as itself. It builds on the sure Word, and in the sure Word that testifies that God raised His Son from the grave, we are called to behold the empty grave and to read the lessons that it teaches. All down the ages there have been torchbearers that, in the darkness of the world, have passed on from age to age the light of revelation. There have in each generation been those that recognised the voice of the good Shepherd – that have recognised the stamp of divine authority on the Word that is given by inspiration. They have surely believed, and from first hand acquaintance with the testimony of God, they have been able to testify of the things most surely believed among them. They have been, as it were, a standing witness to the resurrection, and have made age tell to age the wondrous works of the Lord. They have pointed successive generations to the empty grave, and have been Christ’s

witnesses in the world. They have been the salt of the earth. They have been the light of the world.

There is an ordinance that provides similar evidence. Go back all through your life, examine the records of the generations before you, ransack the documents of the now distant past, and you will find the unfailing witness afforded by the Lord's day testifying to the resurrection. This golden chain has lasted without the breaking of one link from the days of the apostles until now. Its voice to us week after week is – "Account for me otherwise than as a standing memorial of the Lord of glory; otherwise than as a monument of His resurrection you cannot explain me. Look at the place where he lay. He lies there no more. Death has been conquered. The grave has been spoiled. Christ has conquered." This invitation is given to the children of God who live by faith in Christ. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Consider that He who lay there was and is the Lord – your Lord – your Redeemer. Consider that your Redeemer lay there, and why He lay there. Consider what your sin deserved. Consider His abounding grace. Consider that He lies there no more: that He has prevailed to unlock the prison door of the grave. He has perfumed the grave. He has lit its darkness: He has warmed it for you. He has left it as victor, and so shall you. What He has done, He has done for you. Were it not for you, your sins, your wretchedness, and His free love, this could never have been, that the Lord should lie there. But that empty grave speaks, and it tells you of the hope of glory. So come, satisfy yourselves at the empty grave, and rejoice in your Redeemer.

Come ye children of the world, behold what the Son of God, has done, consider here the certainty of His coming to judgment. Consider and give up your rebellion, consider that the judge is now holding Himself forth to you as mighty to save, as able to save, unto the uttermost. He has overcome, and if ye but trust Him ye shall find Him as good as His word. See in the empty grave His triumph. He who is risen shall come again. While He is on the throne of grace meet Him in peace, that at His second appearing ye may not be clothed with shame and confusion of face. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

[October 1902]