

# Notes of a Sermon

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER Munro, Strathy.  
Preached at Kilmuir, Skye, on 30th October, 1868.

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us,  
and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” – 1 John 1:3.

It is supposed, and not without reason, that in the opening of his epistle the apostle John had in view a heresy with which the Church began to be troubled in his day, which heresy consisted in the denial of the Saviour’s human nature, and which affected the foundations of Christianity. For Scripture clearly declares that there was an indispensable necessity for the Son of God becoming man; for without this nature He could not become a real surety for His people, He could not obey the law and satisfy justice in their room; and without this it was impossible that they could be saved.

John in the first verse declares that in Christ there were two natures, the one he designates by “that which was from the beginning,” the other by “that which” he and the other apostles “had seen and handled.” He could not say of His human nature that it had been from the beginning. Therefore he must mean by that expression that Christ existed before coming in the flesh, even from all eternity; for he does not say that He had a beginning, but that He was from the beginning – that He had an independent and absolute existence at the period when the first act of creation was accomplished. And to make this statement more explicit he says in another passage that the Son was the maker of all things. He that made all things must have of necessity existed previous to the creation, and as He made all things ever created, He Himself must have been uncreated. His human nature he declares to have been real, by saying that they had heard Him speak with their ears, that they had seen Him with their eyes, that they had looked upon Him and handled Him. Here he gives proofs of Christ’s possessing a true body and soul. The first is that they heard Him speak. To speak belongs to man; no other creature is capable of speaking. To speak is not natural to angels, and those recorded in Scripture as speaking and singing did it in a miraculous manner. But to man it is natural, and speaking not only intimates the possession of body but also of soul. It is a soul that can think the thoughts spoken through the bodily organs; and when one is heard speaking rationally and with understanding, this proves that he has a soul as well as a body. The next is that they had seen Him with their eyes. A spirit cannot be seen in its normal state. Here, then, the apostle argues that Jesus must have had a body of flesh, blood, and bones like other men, whom we see from time to time. They had not only seen Him for a moment or for a short time, but they had looked upon Him. They had for the space of three years and a half been in His society; they not only heard Him during this period, but saw Him, and had time to examine by sight every feature of His countenance, and were witness to the changes which a change of feeling causes in the countenance. They sometimes saw Him sad, at other times rejoicing in spirit; sometimes they saw Him weeping, other times sorrowful even unto death; sometimes they heard Him administering stern rebukes, and at other times speaking with the greatest tenderness and love; in all which circumstances His features would assume an aspect corresponding to the various states of His mind. They saw Him sometimes thirsty, again hungry, and at times weary and worn-out with the fatigue of travelling, and with the labour of preaching to the immense multitudes that attended on His ministry. They also handled Him, touched Him, and had the evidences of the sense of touch that He had flesh and bones like any other man. They saw Him wounded on the Cross, and after His resurrection they again saw the print of the nails and the mark of the spear that pierced His side. John by these was

fully convinced of the reality of Christ's human nature, and besides having the evidence of His senses, was enlightened by the Spirit to believe and understand the reasons why it behoved Him to become man, reasons which are stated at large in the Old and New Testaments. And this last, added to the evidence of sense, must have amounted in his case to a demonstration of the truth of what he here states.

In directing your attention to the passage, I shall endeavour to state a little more minutely these things which he says they had heard and seen;  
and in the *second* place, call your attention to the end why he declared those things unto them, namely, that they might have fellowship with them whose fellowship was with the Father and the Son Jesus Christ;  
and in the *third* place make some application of the whole doctrine contained in the passage selected for a text.

I. – First, we are to consider what the apostle had declared unto them. They were the things which he and the other apostles had seen and heard. They had seen Jesus of Nazareth, and for the first time, when He had been walking along the shores of the sea of Galilee, a total stranger unto them. So retired did the incarnate Son of God live in Nazareth, and so little of a remarkable nature had been noticed about Him, that He was unknown when first seen to any of them.

We must make some exception. For two of them heard John the Baptist pointing Him out as “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” and as He passed by they followed Him, and when He spoke to them, and said, “What seek ye?” they replied, “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” wherefore He said, “Come and see.” They went and saw, and abode with Him that night, and returned next day. One of the two was Andrew, and as the other is not named, it is not improbable but he was John himself. There is nothing recorded of what the Saviour said unto them on this occasion. But as He never said anything but at the appointed time, it is not likely He gave them any intimation of His purposes regarding them. They must, however, have felt that He was the most remarkable person they had ever met. They could not but have been struck with His wisdom and understanding, with His elevation of mind above all that is frivolous, base, and savouring of a worldly and selfish spirit. They addressed Him at first as a teacher, and as it was under that name they wished to get acquainted with Him, we may conclude that He did not suffer the time to pass without making some profitable remarks, and perhaps answering some questions which John's declaration regarding Him might have suggested, some questions about sin and about the manner in which it could be taken away. We are not informed, however, as to what passed between them, but we know they left Him with the belief that He was the Messiah. We are told that Andrew next day found his brother Simon, and communicated unto him the good news of himself and his companion finding the Messiah, and without delay he brought him to Jesus, that is, led him to the dwelling where they had passed the night with Him. As soon as He saw Simon who had been a perfect stranger to Him, He said unto him, “Thou art Simon the son of Jonas, but thou shalt be known yet by a different name even Cephas or Peter.” The next day Jesus went out “and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.” Andrew, Peter, and John (if he was the other disciple who followed Him with Andrew) returned to their homes and their ordinary occupations ere He called them to follow Him in a special way. For from the other gospels we learn that as Jesus was walking along the shores of the sea of Galilee, He saw Peter, and Andrew his brother, in their ship, and then after teaching from their ship, He ordered them to launch forth and cast their nets into the sea for a draught, which direction they obeyed, after Peter had stated that they had toiled all night and had caught nothing. The result was that so many fishes got into their net that they were not able to haul it into land, and were obliged to call for help from their neighbours, who in all likelihood

were John and James, with their father, Zebedee, who were in their ship at no great distance, mending their nets. They came out and helped them, and after bringing the net unto land, they likely left them to dispose of the fish, and returned unto their own ship and resumed their work. Jesus, having remained where He was till Peter and Andrew laid up the fish, either in their boat or in some other safe place, then called them and bade them follow Him, which they did immediately. Passing on till He arrived at the place where John and James were with their father, Jesus called them also, and they followed Him immediately.

They thus saw Him and looked upon Him when He was pointed out as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, and also when He taught in Peter's vessel, and when He directed them to cast their nets, as well as when He called them to follow Him. They saw Him at the marriage feast in Nazareth, and in the miracle performed they beheld His glory as the only begotten of the Father; they saw Him also whenever He taught and wrought miracles; they saw Him healing all manner of diseases, and casting out devils, and raising the dead; they saw Him transfigured in the mount; they saw Him in agony in the garden, and apprehended by a band of men, sent for that purpose by the high priest and the council of the Jews; they saw Him led out and crucified; they saw Him dying and His side pierced with a spear so that water and blood came forth; they saw Him laid in the grave; they saw Him several times after His resurrection; they saw Him finally ascending unto heaven from Mount Olivet and gazed on Him till a cloud hid Him from their view, and then returned to Jerusalem. During all this time they had every opportunity, as has been said above, of satisfying themselves that He was a real man, and yet more than a man. They heard not only Himself speak, but they heard John bearing witness unto Him, declaring that he was not worthy to unloose His shoelatchet, that He was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and that He was the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

They heard Himself preach the gospel of the kingdom, declaring that He was the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Messiah; that He came forth from the Father, that He was equal to the Father and one with Him, that He knew the Father as the Father knew Him; that He was without sin; that He came to seek and save the lost, to lay down His life a ransom for many; that it behoved Him, according to the Scriptures, to die and rise again; that whosoever believeth in the Son, hath life, and shall never perish; that He, according to the Father's command, gives eternal life unto His sheep, of which He is the one Shepherd, and that He will not lose any of them. They heard Him teach the necessity of regeneration, of repentance, and faith, without which none can be saved. They heard Him condemning all self-righteousness, formality, and hypocrisy. They heard Him calling and inviting the weary and heavy laden to come unto Him that He might give them rest, and the thirsty that He might give them living waters. They heard Him declare that all power on earth and heaven was given Him, that all judgment was committed unto Him, and that the day is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and come to judgment; that He is to come in the glory of His Father, with His holy angels, and that then all shall be judged and rewarded by Him according to their doings. They heard a voice from heaven on the holy mount saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." They heard Him pray again and again, and understood that His prayers had been answered. They heard Him saying on the Cross, "It is finished." They heard Him say after His resurrection, "Handle me and see that it is I myself." And when He was about to part with them, they heard Him say, "Go ye forth and preach the gospel to all nations, and lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." And after He had disappeared, they saw an angel who said unto them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Thus they heard Him preach the gospel, the sum of which is as follows: – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The gospel contained in this passage is that which John preached, the things which he declared unto men, that they might have fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. There is no other way to attain to this blessedness but by believing these things. Some may say that they are wearied of hearing them, and may have a craze for something new, but those who are unbelievers, however much they dislike the constant preaching of these truths, can benefit from nothing else. Learn then your need of faith to receive them in the love of the truth.

II. – We are, in the next place, to consider the end why John declared what He saw and heard.

The declaration in question, or the preaching of the gospel, was his business, his chief employment, to which he was called by Christ, and in which he was able to continue by the powerful operation of the Spirit, constrained by the love of Christ and love to perishing men. No one engages in a work without some end in view. The end why men engage in ordinary avocations is to earn their bread: this is one end of every worldly calling. This, however, was not the end of John’s employment; he was a fellow-worker with Christ in saving men. This is, properly speaking, Christ’s work and end, but John, being of the same mind with Christ, had his heart fixed on this end too, and used all diligence and put forth all efforts to attain it. And it were well that all engaged in our day in the work of preaching the gospel had the same end in view, and were animated with the same zeal for its attainment as John was.

But to pass from this train of thought, I must come to my principal subject here, which is to explain the nature of the fellowship which results from a saving belief in the gospel of Christ.

Fellowship implies two or more individuals bound together by some bond of union, and drawn together by similar views, ends, purposes, and dispositions. There must be thus agreement and harmony of views and feelings between them; and a delight in each other’s society that draws them together and induces them to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and desires to each other. The communion meant here is that which one has first with the Church and then with God and His Son Jesus Christ: “that your fellowship may be with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” John knew that he and his fellow-apostles were of the true Church; that they had the truth of God, the Spirit of God, and the ordinances of salvation, and therefore that they had fellowship with God. What, therefore, he means by fellowship with them is to have the same Gospel, the same Spirit, the same Church ordinances, the same form of worship; and to love one another like brethren, to help one another in their difficulties, to sympathise with one another when in distress, to comfort one another with the comfort with which they themselves had been comforted, to instruct, warn, and exhort each other with all patience, meekness, and love, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. This is something of the communion which exists in the Church, or that is commanded by the Head to be entertained and cherished in her; for the maintaining of which there is abundance of grace in Him, and infinite power with the Spirit to beget and sustain in her. This communion has its foundation and spring in the Church’s Head, and without faith in Him it is impossible that it can take place, while without profession in Him no one was admitted into her society or into the Church. If a person does not bring this doctrine with him, receive him not into your houses; and if one called a brother did not walk according to the law of Christ, they were commanded not so much as to eat bread with him. Does not the purity of Christ’s truth and the holiness and glory of His person demand all this? Surely it does.

The fellowship with the Father and the Son is also founded on Christ, and flows from union to Him, and from the indwelling of the Spirit in them. There is, *first*, in this fellowship

a reconciliation with God, peace with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. Two cannot walk together except they agree. As a sinner, man is at variance, strife, and enmity to God, and God is angry with the sinner all the day. This state of mutual variance must be changed into peace and reconciliation ere there can be fellowship between man and his Creator. In Christ Jesus there is no condemnation, no wrath; whoever believes in Him has peace with God; he has access unto Him; the way is opened up; he that believes has full liberty to enter in and approach God. He obtains the Spirit of adoption, who teaches him to cry, Abba, Father, and gives him the disposition or the heart of a child or son. In consequence of this they are enlightened to know the Son, and through Him to know the Father; and this knowledge gains love that enables them to delight in God, in the greatness and glory of His being, and the perfection of His attributes, knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, goodness, and truth, and in the manifestations given of these in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. In these works, as revealed in Scripture, they see all these attributes shining forth, and in them all they see God, almighty, just, good, and holy. It is in Scripture God speaks unto them, reveals His mind unto them, opens up before them the riches of His wisdom, of His power, grace, and love; and it is by applying this word effectually unto them that they realise God holding converse with them. When He speaks there is power in the word, power to heal, to humble, and sanctify, as well as to enlighten their minds, and enlarge their hearts, and impart peace and confidence to their souls. They hear it as the voice of His lovingkindness, in which He assures them of peace, of love, and of His favour. He thus speaks, and fellowship with Him consists at such times in giving ear to what He says. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

There is also a place of meeting, and this place is the throne of grace or Christ Jesus, the Mediator. At this place much fellowship or all their fellowship is carried on. Of Christ the Father says, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"; and "Behold, I have anointed my king on my holy hill"; "Kiss ye the Son"; and to this they reply by believing what the Father declares. Again the Father says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." And they look unto Him and are enlightened and changed into the same image. And all who look unto Him whom the Father thus recommends, cordially consent to the testimony given Him. "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips." "He is my beloved. Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? He is altogether lovely." When the Father says of Him, "This is my only begotten Son and well-beloved," they say "We know that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." When they have fellowship of this nature they are filled with reverential fear, and see themselves unholy and unfit for such fellowship, and are compelled to cry out, "I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell among them that are unclean. What am I that thou hast brought me hitherto?" And yet the language that is ready to come from their hearts is, "It is good to be here; it is good for me to draw near to God; O taste and see that God is good." It also raises their soul and heart from the love and contemplation of earthly things; it purifies their minds, imparting to them a disrelish for what is sinful, impure, and degrading, and gives a keen relish for what is true, pure, lovely, and of good report. It soothes their jaded spirits and hearts; it gives courage in view of external dangers and trials, and engenders hope of good to come, and begets a hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This fellowship consists here – for I speak of it as enjoyed on earth – in approaching God as a father, that is, with the confidence of children, with the love of children, and encouragement to pour out their hearts and make known all their wants unto Him. They are poor and needy here, subject to many wants; they need pardon and peace, and must go to Him and wait on Him to bestow these upon them. They need knowledge, and can obtain it from no other. "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." They need guidance, and so they are heard going unto Him pleading, "Lead us by thy good Spirit unto

the land of uprightness.” They need protection from evil, and then they flee unto Him to cover them, saying, “Hide us under the shadow of thy wings; keep us as the apple of the eye; set me as a seal on thy heart and on thy arm.” O what confidence and faith and love are manifested here when we think who *were* they that thus speak, and what are the blessings for which they plead so earnestly and confidently! And what is the grace and goodness that bestows on them more than they are able to ask or think? The gospel, however, is not only preached in order to bring men into fellowship with God and His Son here on earth, but also to bring them unto fellowship with Him in heaven, where they shall have perfect fellowship with Him for ever; where there shall be nothing in the shape of sin or in the shape of an enemy to mar it for ever; where they shall ever look on the Father’s Beloved and in Him see the Father, and forever bask in the light of His gracious countenance, beaming on them as the Sun of Righteousness, which shall never more go down, and which shall completely put an end to their night of sorrow here and chase away all the darkness that ever surrounded them in the Vale of Baca.

We see here what companions they have who believe the gospel. Are they your companions? Are God’s people your companions? Are they those to whom you frequently speak, as Scripture testifies; “they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.” And more than this, are the Father and the Son your companions? Are you in the habit of daily meditating on God’s Word, endeavouring to understand, believe and obey it? Do you endeavour to endure “as seeing him who is invisible?” Does it give you joy, does it afford you delight to think of Him as your God, as Him who is everywhere present, as Him who is holy, just, and good, and does your delight and confidence arise from believing in Christ as the way, as the mediator? Is it your meat and drink to do His will? Or is it a daily cause of sorrow unto you that you are ignorant of Him, that you are far off, that you have no love unto Him, that you are earthly and carnally disposed, and from under the burden of these, do you cry in bitterness of heart, yet with some confidence, “Quicken me, draw me, be not silent, shine in me, give me Christ or I shall die.” If so, you are not destitute of that principle, necessary to enjoy communion with Him. O think more earnestly and prayerfully than ever into whose fellowship you are called by the gospel. Consider this high privilege and blessed condition, that you may be more intent on attaining to it and more careful to retain it, when in some measure enjoyed, O what manner of men ought we to be who profess to have received the gospel! What a loss is it, to have only a name, a form of godliness!

There are some here who make no such profession and who are the companions of fools, with whom they walk in their folly, and in whose sins they partake. This is the fellowship for which you have any relish and in which you find all the enjoyment felt by you here, but the end of this folly is sad; “the companions of fools shall be destroyed.” Consider then whether or not you will forsake this company. There are but two alternatives; either continuing with them and then everlasting destruction, or forsaking them and obeying the gospel and being admitted into fellowship with saints and angels, yea more, with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I have then again to call you to choose the latter. No more blessed call can be given you, no greater wisdom is there than to choose this fellowship; no greater folly than to reject it.

Let all remember that it is by believing the things declared in the gospel that this fellowship is attained; without this, then, is no reconciliation, no peace, no nearness to God, no union to Jesus, no indwelling of the Spirit as the Spirit of adoption. Let unbelievers remember that no holiness is necessary to come to the Saviour for salvation, but that they, if ever, must come as they are. But let professors remember that without this principle of holiness there is no fellowship with God here, and that without perfection in holiness, none shall enjoy it in heaven. Follow holiness then, and it is by fellowship that this is attained.

[November 1902]

# A Sermon

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON,  
an Eminent Divine of the Covenanting Period.

[This sermon is the first of a series of forty-five on the cxxx. Psalm preached by Mr. Hutcheson at Irvine, where he died in 1674. The sermons are from the pen of a hearer. Mr. Hutcheson was a truly able and savoury divine, and his works are still much sought after.]

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord” – Psalm 130:1.

Having a purpose (if the Lord will) to go through this Psalm, I shall speak somewhat in a brief word to the title of it. It is called “A Song of Degrees,” a title that is common to fifteen Psalms in this Book, from the 120th to the 134th inclusive, and the importance of this title is not easily condescended upon. Popish writers would from this make up fifteen degrees of virtues, each of them still above another, whereby a sinner breathes for redemption by Christ, from a state of sin and misery, and ascendeth to heaven; but this necessitates them to strain their wits, and to put these Psalms on a rack, to find out the distinction of these virtues, and therefore we shall leave it. The Hebrew word rendered “degrees” leads us to somewhat more certain, yet not demonstrative: that these Psalms may be called songs of degrees –

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So much for the scope and partition of the Psalm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Firstly, that which is a deep is a thing very dark. Dig a pit and make it deep, the light of the day cannot penetrate into it. Thus the unintelligible mysteries of seducers are called depths, as in Revelation 2:24, the depths of Satan spoken of. Thus also the wise counsels of

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

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

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

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

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

Firstly. Their outward trouble may be attended with other visible disadvantages; for when a man is under trouble, then ordinarily he is in contempt (Job 12:5): "He that is ready to slip with his feet is a lamp despised," as a dying-out snuff in the thought of him that is at ease. Hence (Hebrews 12:2) it is said, "Christ endured the cross, despising the shame." The cross and shame, the cross and ignominy, go hand in hand. It is not enough to be in affliction,

but thou must be content to be reproached and counted a fool; yea, not only doth outward trouble and contempt go ordinarily together, but outward affliction and slighting from near relations, which is a load above a burden (Psalm 31:11): “My lovers and friends stood aloof from my sore, and my kinsmen stood afar off”; (Psalm 88:8,18): “Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness.”

Secondly. It comes to the depths with the people of God on this account: that great outward trouble readily wakens the conscience of guilt, as we see of Joseph’s brethren when they were put into prison (Genesis 42:41): “They said one to another; We are very guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us.” Yea, outward trouble, and conscience of guilt under it wakened, may break the peace of the mind, and that adds to these depths. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?” That is deep upon deep; trouble and guilt, trouble and broken mind, turns to be the greatest burden.

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

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

And 1. Take this consideration in general: the folly of the people of God puts them to this posture. That is one (Psalm 38:8): “There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin”; and verse 5, “My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness.” Whatsoever there may be of a trial of faith in their trouble, sin is at the door at which their troubles, particularly their overwhelming troubles, enter in.

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

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

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

And 3. Whereas it might be thought that such faults as these, and grosser, are passed in many others, I shall add, that the Lord’s near relation with his people will not let them win away with their faults, win away who will (Amos 3:2): “You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities”; or, as it is in the

original, "I will visit upon you your sins." His people will not want the rod when their faults call for it, want who will.

4. Consider there is this to be looked upon as a cause of putting His people in the depths, to wit, His purposes of love to His people. And His allowances upon His people are so rich that there is need of preparations, by trial and afflictions, to make them capable of them; for were they not put into the depths they could not be capable of them. Hence it is Paul's remark in the forecited place (2 Corinthians 1:4,5). God "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." We might not want these depths of tribulation, because without them we could not be capable of the consolations we receive from Christ.

And 5. To add no more, we may take notice of somewhat in the saints' tenderness above others that occasion these depths. Many folks may be under as great trouble that are not so plunged and perplexed with it as they are. Many a man has been tossed as David was by Saul who have not expressed their resentments as he did. How is that? The tender-spiritedness that is in the people of God occasions their trouble of mind; they see God in their afflictions, and they would fain see more of Him and of His mind as to their duty; and this makes affliction take a deeper stamp and impression on them, and to draw blood of them more than it doth on an unsubdued spirit, who hath no mind of God or Providence, but hath only the outward trouble to grapple with. Thus we see how it comes to pass that the people of God are put in the depths.

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

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

2. From this ye would be cautioned not to mistake the sad exercises of the people of God, whose lot in ordinar is outward troubles; they get ordinarily the stakes to keep. And to mark it in the by, I wonder what a mistake is befallen us, or rather a distraction is come upon us, that we should stumble at the people of God their want of prosperity. Look to the frame of the people of God; they are in ordinary broken folk. Others can bear their afflictions with a sort of gallantry; they can drink them down, rant them down. But they are broken with their affliction, as if they had no spirit at all to bear them. But I say ye would not mistake, for it is a token of God's love and care, who douks them in the depths, to put them, out of the depths to cry unto Him; and it is a more blessed posture to be put, out of the depths to cry, than to be in a palace with neglect of prayer. And therefore I call it no better than a distraction to stumble at their want of prosperity; they are the folk that faint and have no might, and yet they will lay

by the young men and the youths for all their ranting; because they wait upon the Lord, “they shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:29). This I speak, not to foster discouragement in any, but to caution them that are ready to stumble at the people of God their being in trouble, and broken in that condition.

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

[December 1902]

## A Sermon.

By the late REV. JOHN KENNEDY, D.D., Dingwall.

*Preached at a Meeting of the Synod of Ross, in Tain, in the year 1879.*

[This sermon does not appear in the large volume of sermons by Dr. Kennedy.  
It was printed shortly after delivery in pamphlet form. – Ed.]

“In wrath remember mercy” – Habakkuk 3:2.

How solemn the position of a prophet was, when the veil between him and the future was drawn aside, and he looked in on a scene on which no eye but God’s had ever looked before. Standing in the presence of God, with the Spirit resting on him, what was never seen before but by God is seen by him; and how can he but tremble, be he an Habakkuk, or an Isaiah, an Ezekiel by the river of Chebar, or a John in the Isle of Patmos? And if the disclosure be of

coming judgment – if the scene before him is invested with the awful glory that appeareth on a day of wrath – how can his spirit fail to be overawed? The man who comes forth from such a position must find the message, which he bears to men, to be a “burden of the Lord.” When, with a voice as of thunder, the Lord describes what He reveals to him by the lightning flashes of threatened judgments, how can he be ought else than overwhelmed! “I heard thy voice,” the seer saith to the Lord in prayer, “and was afraid.” After the prayer with which the chapter opens, he portrays the scene presented in vision before him. The feelings excited by the scene he describes in the sixteenth verse. And in presence of the awful glory, and in view of the coming trouble, his faith triumphs in a victory of hope and love, when from his heart bursts forth the marvellous song with which the chapter closes.

The days of prophecy have ended, but the teaching of prophecy remains. The veil which hides the future has fallen, not to be raised again; but on its outside inspired prophets have written what they saw when the Lord uplifted it to them; and in front of this, prayerful dependence for instruction on the Spirit of truth is our dutiful attitude, and that of the Church to the end of time.

But it is to a *prayer*, rather than to a *prophecy*, the text directs our attention. In the Book of Habakkuk we have rather more of the feeling excited in the prophet’s heart by what he saw than we have of express prediction – of what he saw around him when the light of vision shone on the present, than of what he saw in the future of the details of impending judgments, and of the blessedness of the time when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Stirred into earnest wakefulness by the one, and encouraged –by the other, he looks on his surroundings, and he cries, “O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.” He observes signs of decay in the condition of the Lord’s work; he sees no traces of the manifestation of the power and glory of the God of Israel; and his heart is saddened by tokens of divine wrath appearing in the present aspect of providence.

Fixing our attention on the last petition of the prophet’s prayer, let us consider, *first*, whether *we* have any reasons for thinking that our own is a time of wrath, and, *thereafter*, the prayer of one who is rightly affected at such a time.

I. We propose to inquire – “Are there any *tokens* by which God, *presently*, and *to us*, indicates that He is angry?”

How awful an object of contemplation divine wrath is! How can I direct my thoughts to this, who am a weak dependent creature, by whom most certainly the full expression of divine wrath in punishment is deserved, on whom verily a divine sentence of death was passed, and to whom from death there is no escape, but through the only exhaustive expression of that wrath that ever has been given! How, even with my hope of deliverance solemn awe must mingle, when the only escape, to me, from divine wrath is through divine blood! How “*trembling*” must be joined “with *mirth*” in the heart of him who by such a way fleeth from the wrath to come!

Who can tell, who can bear to know, what divine wrath is, as the aspect the divine Being presents to us, in relation to sin, when He deals with it on His throne of judgment? It is the necessary disposition of God, as Judge, because of His infinite and immutable love of righteousness, towards one who is a criminal at the bar. Jehovah ariseth out of His place, in all the perfectness of His moral character, and in the omnipotence of His power, to oppose, by the effectiveness of His administration of justice, all rebellion against His government. The unimpassioned calm of Him who is “over all and blessed for ever,” behind all the awfulness of His righteous government bearing on the guilty, is something which, when I think of it, only adds to my trembling. There is no malignity, no passion, no excitement behind the cloud whose awful darkness is charged with the fire of judgment. “Fury is not in Me,” saith the Lord; but, oh, how awful is the majestic calm – the calm majesty – of the

divine movement in a course of judicial action bearing on the guilty! If this were all I had before my mind in contemplating God, never could I dare to utter the prayer of the text. But it is not to the aspect God presents to me, but to the aspect presented by His providence, the text directly refers. I am looking *around* when thinking of the wrath here spoken of. True, I cannot think of the tokens of the wrath without considering what these do indicate. But were I only looking up, and were the gaze of my eyes fixed *exclusively* on wrath, I could not pray. Yet, looking on tokens of wrath *around*, and even when seeing nought besides in the aspect of providence, my mind may still be free to think of another aspect of God's character than that which wrath presents, and my prayer yet may be, "In wrath remember mercy."

It is to the evidences, which the dealings of His providence furnish, of God's being angry with us that the text directs our attention. Now, these are presented in the more hidden form of *spiritual* judgments, and in the more palpable form of *temporal* judgments. The former usually precedes, and its effect is to render more easy and impenitent those towards whom the latter is approaching. There is judgment in being allowed to provoke, and to ripen for, judgment. *We* have to do with what may appear in the providence bearing on ourselves – with what we, in our generation, or land, or district, or Church, or individual lot, may be called to regard as tokens of the Lord's being angry.

To some of these I now propose briefly to direct attention. And,

I. Surely, in a very marked way and measure, has the Lord given us a token of his displeasure, in *the removal of so many from among us, who were His faithful witnesses*. At whatever time, and in whatever place, the Lord makes this *a marked feature of His providence*, we must regard it as a token of His anger – a premonition or an omen of coming evil. These were "the righteous," who were "faithful" as the Lord's witnesses, and who were wont to wrestle with Him for His blessing. With them the Lord was graciously present, and by them the Lord graciously wrought. Their removal, in course of time, to their home rest in heaven, is indispensable. One by one, they must go hence, at the time for each appointed. But when the Lord gathers them in *groups*, and leaves their places unsupplied, then, verily, He indicates His displeasure with the generation out of which He takes them. And has not this been a marked dealing, in the course of God's providence, bearing upon us in this land of ours? By those outside such a providence may not have been observed. To some within the Church it may have been a relief. A restraint, under which they chafed, was removed, or a place to which they aspired became accessible. And to those who have "the unction from the Holy One" this series of events presents, on one side, a bright aspect. The righteous, in dying, passed into their rest, and through their death shines light from heaven, which brightens the event of their removal in the view of surviving brethren. But this providence, towards those who are left behind, wears a frowning aspect. So it seemed to the Psalmist, when he cried –

"Help, Lord, because the godly man  
Doth daily fade away,  
And from among the sons of men  
The faithful do decay."

And so it seemed to Isaiah, when he said, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." And he regarded it thus, though he added, "he shall enter into peace." "It is well for him," as if he said, "but is ill for us." As righteous he was faithful to God while he was here, and he could not be so without being a man of mercy to us. His removal was the *withdrawal* of mercy *from* us, though it was the *bestowal* of mercy *on* him. He was "taken from the evil to come," and this to *him* was *peace*, but because he is gone, *evil is coming to us*. The "fir trees" must "howl" when the "cedar" is "fallen," for their shelter from the storm has gone.

And thus too, was Micah affected by such a providence as this. “Woe is me!” he crieth, “for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit.” Why was it that he was thus affected? Why felt he like one in a vineyard at the close of autumn, when but the grape-gleanings were left, and the desolation of the vineyard was saddening him, because it told him that winter was nigh? The good days of the past in memory only, and the evil looming out of the immediate future, his heart was chilled. With a thrill of sadness, produced by his memories of the past, there mingled in his consciousness the shiver caused by the dread of coming evil. Why was this his state of feeling? “The good man is perished out of the earth,” is the reason he assigns for his sorrow.

And have we no reason to mourn, as mourned those men of God, who saw in the removal of the righteous a premonition of coming evil? If we look up to the high places of our Church, how many are the blanks which we observe – positions still empty where men eminent for gifts and grace once stood. If we look around us, within our own province as a Synod, how many have we to miss who once were honoured witnesses for God – men of godliness and men of power. From each of our congregations how many have been taken whose places have not yet been filled. Near us, all around us, and in all parts of our land, breaches have been made through which “the evil to come” has opportunity to enter. Winter is setting in, for there are only grape-gleanings in the vineyard. The Lord is angry with us, for He will not leave His loved ones among us.

2. The withholding of His Spirit, as a feature of present providence, is a token of wrath to our land. If it were not for this it were far easier to think of the gathering of His saints by the Lord from the midst of us. One could even sing as he saw the clusters being taken from the vineyard below, if the vine were “putting forth its tender grapes,” to supply the blanks which the gathering of “the first ripe fruits” had left upon its branches. But if He withholds His Spirit while He withdraws His people, the result can be “for a lamentation” only.

How unspeakably great is the Lord’s opportunity of expressing His anger in connection with the dispensation of His Spirit! To the Spirit belongs the glory of being the agent in fulfilling all the purposes of the Godhead. “By His Spirit He garnished the heavens” as well as formed the earth. By His power all is sustained, which by creation He produced. Into a body which He created He breathed the spirit of man at first, and by Him God is the Father of the spirits of all flesh. By Him divine strivings with men are conducted. He it is who restrains the power of evil in hearts which renewing grace has never touched. It is He by whom the provision of the Father’s love, according to the covenant which the blood of the Son has sealed, is revealed and applied to those for whom it was destined. It is His work to bring sinners unto Christ, that in Him they may have life for ever. It is His to carry on a work of grace in all whom He hath sealed in Christ, till, in perfect likeness to the Firstborn, they are ready to pass with Him into the Father’s house. It is His to prepare believers for vineyard work on earth, and by His power alone can the labour of these be made fruitful unto God. All this work being His, how unspeakably great is the power which God, through that work, has of giving expression to His grace; and unutterably awful is His power of expressing His anger in the cessation or intermission of that work! How fearful the judgment if amidst a people the Spirit ceaseth to put forth His converting power, allows the quickened to decay and be unfruitful, and withdraws the checks by which the ungodly are restrained!

Have we, in our day and in our land any reason to conclude that a judgment, such as this, has to any extent already come upon us? If there is good ground for thinking that it hath, then verily ours is a time of “wrath from the Lord,” and we ourselves are a “generation of His wrath.” If, on the other hand, there is no reason for thinking that such a token of His anger hath been given by the Lord, we are surely called to rejoice and give thanks.

To the minds of some, it appears altogether certain that the Lord is withholding His Spirit to an extent which indicates that He hath a controversy with us. This appears to them, in its effect upon the Church in general, in so far as they observe, that true godliness is discredited and substitutes for it readily accepted; that there is unfaithfulness to ascertained and avowed truth on the part of those who are under vow to maintain and defend it; that the integrity and perfectness of the inspired record is being openly impugned within the Church; that growing conformity to the spirit and ways of the world is to be seen in the lives of those who profess to be the Lord's; and that the ungodly are becoming more shameless and defiant.

But there are some who think that this token of the Lord's anger appears only to a jaundiced eye. These are rather disposed to rejoice that, with those godly fathers who have been removed, there has passed away a type of religion which, because of its alleged gloom and austerity, is well supplanted by something brighter and more genial. But, whatever estimate may be formed of it, that there has been a change no one will deny. So marked is it that one sometimes feels quite as startled, when he realises it, as if he had slept through the period of transition, and had only awoke when the ripened result had come. There is a danger in instituting comparison between the past and present state of religion in our land, of a blind partiality for the past, of refusing to acknowledge the measure in which the Lord still pleads His cause and advances His work, and of forgetting that, even in a dark and cloudy day, such as was that of Elijah, the Lord may have a reserve of seven thousand who bow not the knee to Baal. But there is another danger. In an age of marvellous progress in other departments, it is difficult for some minds to come to the conclusion that religion and the Church can possibly be falling behind. These are prone to an unreasonable facility of accepting any semblances as evidences of the divine favour. They are ready to make the most of all that would help to cover out of sight any signs of decay which the aspect of the Church presents. It is palpable to all that there have been, in our day, stirrings repeated and widespread, which have been generally regarded as indications of the presence and operation of the Spirit of grace. Under the influence of these a great amount of religious activity has been generated, and a type of religion developed, which differs in a marked degree from that with which those who knew the fathers were in other days familiar. The difference appears to them in the measure in which the new is superficial, undiscerning, and unsteadfast. These, having tasted the old wine, do not desire the new, being very decidedly of the opinion that the old is better. But the new satisfies those who wish to think that no day could be brighter than that in which they shine – no vineyard more fruitful than that in which they labour.

How thin spread is gospel truth over the pages which give us samples of the teaching of the times! How little of deep digging for a solid foundation, how little sifting in order to separate wheat from chaff, how little probing for heart-sores or for heart-troubles are brought to bear on souls! And how undiscerning, as well as superficial, is the spirit which prevails. Almost any religious change is accepted as conversion, and almost any form of doctrine is accepted as the Gospel. Charity seems to be the idol of the hour, and like every other idol it has but eyes that see not. But true love is not blind. The apostle of love was of all the most uncompromising to all error, and the most unsparing in his rebukes of profession that was not genuine, and of all practices that were not according to the law of Christ. The Spirit of the Lord in Zion is a "Spirit of judgment" and "of burning," as certainly as He is a "Spirit of grace." And surely unsteadfastness is a feature of the religious activity of the times. One's mind, when directed to the various movements, away from former positions of thought and former lines of practice, is conscious of a bewilderment, somewhat like the brain-dizziness which a constant motion produces through the eye that is directed to it.

There are some who feel persuaded that the Lord is giving us, in our land and in these days, a token of His anger by withholding His Spirit of grace and supplication. But how many there are who, never the subjects of the Spirit's work themselves, have in their hearts no

desire for an experience of His gracious power, and care not though the bones around them should be drying, in their deadness, into fuel for the fire that never shall be quenched. How many, too, lacking spiritual discernment, and ignorant of Satan's devices, are made glad by semblances of the Spirit's work, and by means of accepted counterfeits are hiding from their eyes the need there is of the Spirit's fruitful work of grace. A people accustomed to hear of the Spirit's work cannot at once pass into quiescence, without something that looks like evidence of the operation of His hand. But how easily are they satisfied! The deceiver is ready to gratify the desire of these, and how easily he can do his work! He need be at no great pains in constructing the counterfeit when a spirit of blindness has come upon the people. Those, thus for a season quieted, shall soon weary even of the semblance, and subside into a deadness more insensate than that out of which they were awakened. This is the great danger connected with soul-stirrings which produce no saving, lasting fruit. If there be a danger, and there is, of denying what the Lord is doing, and of refusing to cherish the fruits of His work, is there not a danger of ascribing to Him work to which He never applied His holy and His gracious hand, of encouraging souls to rest on that which, in the day of trial, shall be overthrown, of being deceived in forming an estimate of the Church's strength in presence of the foes by whom she is assailed, and of being decoyed by the results of a deceiver's work from looking, in harmony with the mind of God, on the real aspect presented by His providence? The wine of a false hopefulness may intoxicate a generation, just as surely as that which the pleasures of the world supply. This, in a time of wrath, may be as deadly in its effects as an impiety which is defiant. It may be the fruit of spiritual judgment, resulting, in the first instance, in the dreamer's cry of "peace and safety," and ultimately in the sudden destruction which is sure to follow a generation's slumber.

3. The aggressive action of "the man of sin" is another token of wrath, and not less, but rather more so, is the facility with which this has been endured in this land of ours. The enemy has formed his estimate of our spiritual condition as a country. He found that we could endure a Popish aggression, and the result has proved that he did not miscalculate. Protestant Scotland has been too unruffled under this invasion. The hierarchy of the Church of Rome is again set up in this land. The soil of Scotland has again been partitioned into dioceses for bishops and sees for archbishops; and a cardinal will in due time complete the organisation. Were it only the presence of these officials of Antichrist Scotland had to endure, there has been surely some sad change of sentiment when this would be so quietly borne. But there is far more than this implied. To our face Antichrist has shown his ambition of winning back our country again. On soil reddened once by the blood shed by this fell power, all its organisation is again set up in order to regain the influence which proved to be so deadly. And all this is permitted, though all the restored appliances are to be worked in opposition to the truth and in the delusion and destruction of precious souls. And still further, all these officers have been appointed in Scotland as the Pope's executive to bring the canon law, as far as possible, to bear as a galling yoke on the neck of Scotland. Another civil law than that of our statute-book is introduced into our country, and these archbishops and bishops, with all the ecelesiastico-civil police of priests and friars and monks, are here to execute that law. And this is endured. The *vox populi* raises but a feeble protest, and the power of rulers offers no resistance.

To some there appears in all this nothing formidable. There is no reason to fear, they say, that Popery will ever win Scotland back again. And why not? Oh, there is too much enlightenment and too much love of liberty to allow of such a thing being possible. But what is all enlightenment, and love of liberty the most ardent, against the power of a "strong delusion" when God is provoked to send it? There is no security against Popery except where the love of the truth has been received. And even those who have this in their hearts need

besides the unction from the Holy One to keep them. False is the hope that rests on other security than this.

And there are who think that it is the right thing to tolerate all that has been done. If civil rulers have nothing to do with religion, then they ought to lay no arrest on the advance of Antichrist. But Popish power is civil as well as religious. Canon law is State law as well as Church law, and opposition to its being set up in this country would surely seem to be legitimate action on the part of the civil magistrate. Yes, but it is part of the religious claim to demand liberty to use the sword as well as the keys. The Pope claims a right to have his belted knights as well as his surpliced clergy. And he claims this as the Church's head. He demands toleration of all that he regards, or represents, as essential to the extension and establishment of his religious system. If the civil magistrate has nothing to do with religion, he can have therefore nothing to do in opposition to all the demands put forth by him who claims to be the vicar of Christ on earth. And so the civil power of the country must lie idly by when all this is attempted in invasion by a foreign power of our beloved land! Alas, that on the year of this aggression our own Church should have asked the civil rulers to withdraw their hand from the support of that which it is the avowed ambition of Antichrist to banish from this country.

Surely this is judgment, and it is ominous of more. The Lord has in His providence branded the year of the Popish aggression by His dealings with Scotland. There are not a few who can see in the removal of the righteous no token of wrath. There are outside the Church who can discern, as a token of wrath, nought that may be done by the Lord in the withholding of His Spirit; and within the Church there are who do not regard the state of religion as indicating that the Lord hath a controversy with us. And there are, too, who see nothing to alarm them in the Popish aggression. But the year of that event has been made a marked one by calamities, which the most worldly and unbelieving have been compelled to feel. For –

4. Recent commercial disasters are surely to be regarded as a token of the Lord's anger. The Lord would have us to know that He was angry with us, and this itself is mercy in the midst of wrath. Knowing our insensateness to judgments merely spiritual, He has visited us in a way by which the most carnal must be made conscious of trouble. Hundreds have been deprived of their only means of support, and thousands, yea, tens of thousands, have to some extent felt the effects of the disaster. Through their love of the world many have been wounded. This was their only sensitiveness, and on this the stroke has fallen, and those who cared least for God were compelled to feel that they were smitten. The very sin that provoked the judgment makes the pain of the judgment to be sorely felt. And to some extent the judgment was the means of discovering the sin by which it was provoked. Ungodly haste to be rich caused men to rush to the object of their ambition, over all the fences which divine authority had set up in their way. But the Lord's power touched them, and their wealth has perished, their crime has been exposed, their reputation blasted, and their hearts made sad. And

5. As if all these things might happen and still some remain unaffected by these tokens of His wrath, the Lord has added a winter of unexampled severity. So extreme and so protracted has been the rigour of this season that no one could fail to observe it. And yet how few have really connected this with the hand of the Lord, and been affected by the anger it indicates! The very beasts have felt the rigour of the season; the sheep shivered on the hillside, and weak from want of food could no more move in search of it; the deer that used to roam in search of food over a wide expanse of forest could but creep to the roadside, and lie down there to die; the birds, out of which hunger drove all their wildness, hovered around the homes of men with the courage born of famine, and with no strength to fly away. These have been touched by the effects of the Lord's anger provoked by our sins, and are we among those sufferers to hold high our heads, and to keep our hearts at ease, ignoring the anger of

the Lord and indisposed to think of, and to confess, the sins by which He was dishonoured and provoked?

II. But we must now shortly consider the prophet's prayer, or rather the last petition of it – "In wrath remember mercy."

He was drawn thus to cry by the view he had of the awfulness of divine wrath. Tokens of that wrath abounded. There seemed to him to be a widespread work of judgment covering the whole area on which he looked. He felt as if the Lord, in His zeal to make His anger felt, had "forgotten to be gracious." How prone to this is every mind that is directed to the aspect of a frowning providence! What is keenly felt interposes between one's consciousness and all besides. The pain rivets the attention to that which produced it, and all besides is apt to be ignored. Wrath was seen, and the expression of it was felt, and it was as if on the field of providence there were nought besides. It was as if the Lord had "forgotten to be gracious." Therefore the prophet cries, "O Lord, in wrath remember mercy."

It was "mercy" for which he cried. If he had not realised that the Lord was angry – if he had not looked at, and trembled before, the tokens of His wrath, he had not cared to cry. And if he had not known enough of sin to be assured that the wrath was merited, it would not be mercy for which he would have cried. But he can only appeal to a justly offended God for His sovereign and unmerited favour, for he is pleading for sinners who deserved to die.

And what invests, to his view, the wrath with such awfulness, is a help so to think of the mercy that he cannot but cry for it. It was the measure in which he realised the infinite majesty of Jehovah, His wrath seemed awful; but that was just the measure in which it seemed to him a priceless boon that the Lord should "remember mercy." To have to look on infinite majesty benignant with mercy towards the land, oh, how desirable!

But does not the awfulness of the wrath intervene as a boundless ocean of fire between the sinner and mercy? How, then, can he at all send his cry for mercy winged with hope across it? How can the mind constrained to think of wrath be free to think of mercy? Does not the one so overwhelm the mind that it cannot rise to any conception of the other? So at first sight it would seem. But the life of God, in its aspiration rises to all that God is in His matchless glory, and specially to His mercy, for only when this is the aspect of the divine character to it can it, in a sinful soul, move towards Him in hope, and reach Him so as to taste and see that He is good. And as it is only the life of God that is disposed to cry for mercy, so only one who has learned about a divinely provided atonement can cry for it in a time of wrath. He has been in faith at the cross of Christ. The time was when at Sinai each thunder-peal that told of wrath, with each lightning-flash of awful glory, combined to make impossible a hope of mercy. The infliction of the sentence of death was seen to be an immovable necessity. All God's words, all God's glory, as heard and seen at the base of the mount that "burned with fire," assured him of this. For he was there alone in his sins. He saw the awfulness of divine wrath bearing on him in his weakness, while his guilt exposed him to its consuming fire. But now, at the cross, he is where wrath has been poured out to the uttermost, and yet he has survived. For another was charged with the sin, and endured the wrath. And now even the light of the consuming fire is shining on the beaming face of mercy; and the full expression given of God's holy and awful wrath has opened up a way by which mercy, accompanied with truth, can come forth to sinners, bringing to them a peace which has been kissed by righteousness. Yes, he saw there and then how God can remember mercy in the midst of wrath, and it is because he learned this message there that he can hopefully send up the cry, "In wrath remember mercy."

As he thus prays he is lifting up his eyes to God as He is revealed in His Word. He ceases to look exclusively on the aspect He presents through a frowning providence. He looks on His name and memorial as given in His Word. He thinks of Him as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for

thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” He finds there three-fold encouragement to cry for mercy. He has before him an exhibition of His character as “merciful and gracious” given by God Himself. Thus God introduces Himself to sinful men. It must be quite safe to reckon on God’s being and acting according to His name. It is His delight and His glory so to act. And He has a reserve of mercy for thousands who have not yet been partakers of it. And, besides, the Lord in revealing His mercy speaks of wrath, and declares that He “will by no means clear the guilty.”

And his eye is resting on the exceeding great and precious promises of God to Israel. All these are fraught with mercy, and all these must be fulfilled. The work of fulfilling these cannot surely be forgotten, even in a day when tokens of His wrath abound. At any rate He cannot make a full end of Israel. There must be mercy that the sons of Jacob may not be consumed. And has He not to bring out of Zion a Deliverer – a rod from the stem of Jesse, to be a Branch of Righteousness and a Tree of Life? Has not One to arise who shall be the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” who shall secure to Israel a triumph over all their foes? Has He not through Him to fulfil many a promise of mercy to the Israel of Israel, who are to be saved with an everlasting salvation? Can the prophet look on all those promises of grace and glory pertaining to the chosen people without being encouraged to cry for mercy? And has he not good ground in the infinite wisdom and power of God for feeling quite assured that, even at the same time, He can do as He hath said, in a work of judgment and in a work of grace? The necessary fulfilment of His threat cannot make impossible the quite as necessary fulfilment of His promise.

And even if he must think of the great mass of the generation, in the midst of which he mourns and prays, as fuel which sin has ripened for the fire of judgment, and if he cannot but tremble and be sad when constrained thus to think of the multitude, can he forget that there is “a remnant according to the election of grace?” Remembering them how can he refrain from asking mercy for them. If not for others, yet surely for them, he may ask for mercy even in a time of wrath. For as in the heart of God, as in the mystical body of Christ, as temples of the Holy Ghost, and as witnesses for God on the earth, they are far apart from all besides. And they have been set apart for mercy, and the wrath cannot intercept it from them. Yea, in the very fire of a generation judgment these shall be preserved, by means of it they shall be refined and tried, through it they shall be brought, and beyond it they shall reach a rest which never can be broken. Yea, even that which is wrath to others can be mercy to them.

And may he not think of some even among those who are exposed to, and are still provoking, the wrath of God, as objects of His everlasting love, whom He has yet to visit with His salvation? Are there not “other sheep” on that field over which the fire of divine judgment is spreading, whom the Good Shepherd hath promised to bring in? That mercy the prophet may surely pray for. And is there not a response to this pleading in the heart of God? Yea, it is the love of the Most High to His chosen which touched his heart to stir it thus to plead, and that warmed it into the fervency of earnest prayer.

And, taking the generations of the future into his view, may he not rest the eye of hope on a brightness, beaming from the bosom of gracious promise, beyond the dread and darkness of a time of wrath? Even if this generation should pass unpitied off the face of the earth, is there not a season coming when the Lord shall make all the earth, so long a wilderness, to be as a garden of the Lord? Nothing in a time of wrath can prevent the coming of that time of mercy. Even looking out of present gloom and darkness, across the fumes of a fire of wrath, the eye may kindle with hopefulness and joy, as the promised grace is seen brightening into glory the Church of God upon earth.

And even beyond all this appears a light still brighter shining through the resurrection, and from beyond the awful glory of a judgment day, out of the home into which “the

ransomed of the Lord” shall at last be gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb. While there are mansions in the Father’s house, and the Lord is preparing a people to occupy them, let none who prays at all cease to pray for mercy.

But what of the present generation? Can I enjoy that bright prospect when I have to think of those around me as laden with sin, and hardened in impenitence, while a frowning providence is casting over them the dark shadow of death? I have seen a bird flying eagerly towards a place which it fain would reach in order to find rest, and food, and fellowship, scared back by something formidable it observed as it cast its eyes downwards in its flight. Often do we thus, Fathers and Brethren, have our enjoyment broken, as we pass on the wings of thought, over a rising generation on our way to rejoice in the brightness of millennial glory. But if we cannot but tremble as we look on present providence, let not this prevent us from rejoicing in promised good. Neither let our souls pass into listless dreamings of the future, forgetful of the claims which our own generation hath upon us. Let us look at the bright prospect, opened up in promise, that we may be more affected by the darkness in which we are now benighted. And let us not hide any tokens of present wrath from our eye, nor keep them away from our heart, lest we cease to care to rejoice in the glory that is yet to be revealed. Let not the darkness and the trouble dispirit us, till we become so faint in heart that we can stretch no vigorous hand to our generation service. And let us not withhold our prayer, any more than our service, from the generation in the midst of which we are. Even for a multitude “laden with iniquity” there is merit enough in the blood through which we may plead in their behalf with God; and divine mercy is infinite in its bounty, as is the blood in its merit, through which that mercy is expressed. Even a generation of sinners can, by the omnipotence of grace, be made broken-hearted penitents. Yes, we collect them all into our pitiful regard, and at the footstool of the Throne of Grace we may, for them all, send up a cry for mercy. But let us not blindly press our suit. Let us not buoy up our hearts with hopes which are unwarranted. We must submit to the sovereignty of Him who will have mercy on whom He will. Let us beware of the rude persistency which refuses to yield to the will of God, and to Scripture limitations of its hopes.

Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, in the Lord’s name and strength, let that work be done. This is our season in the vineyard. The Master has chosen for us our term of service, and let us not murmur because our lot has not fallen on other days than these. Let no wistful longings induce us to forget the aspect of the present time. If we may not ask to be ravished into listlessness before present duty by the joy of hope, nor to be dazzled into blindness to present sin and wrath by the glory on which the eye of hope is resting, let us not be scared back from sweet anticipations of what is promised by the gloomy aspect of the present. Let us be more sensitive to present wrath, let us be more broken-hearted because of present sin, let us be more given to earnest prayer for present mercy, let us be more devoted to the work which the Lord now calls us to do – then there will be a sweeter solace to our hearts in the hope of dwelling at last where “there shall be no more curse” for ever.

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## A Sermon.

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### MANASSEH.

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign,” etc. – 2 Chronicles 33:1-20; 2 Kings 21:1-18.

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our leaning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope” – Romans 15:4.

Much solemn and important instruction is to be learned from the life of Manasseh, and God's dealings with him.

He was the son of a man who was distinguished for personal piety, and who was eminently honoured of God (2 Kings 18:3-6); one who must have been exemplary as a father and as the head of a household (Psalm 101:2; 1 Chronicles 28:9). And it is a high privilege to have such a father, involving in it deep responsibility. But his father was removed when he was but twelve years of age. This, in any circumstances, would have been a terrible blow, but more especially when, at so early an age, he was to occupy the arduous and dangerous station of king of Judah. What particular influences were at work to ensnare and corrupt him, we are not informed. But if Hezekiah had been pre-eminent for piety, the son proved pre-eminent for wickedness. “He did evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel,” and the evil is specified with fearful minuteness (verses 2-10). He began by insulting his father's memory and his father's God, by “building again the high places which Hezekiah had broken down.” And, as though this had been a small matter, he proceeded to establish idolatry, rearing up altars to Baalim,

and worshipping all the host of heaven; experiencing the vanity of his idols, but endeavouring to make up by their number for their vanity. He profaned the name and the house of God, and set God at defiance, building altars in the house of the Lord and in the two courts of the house of the Lord for all the host of heaven, and setting a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God. He was guilty of the most revolting cruelty as a father, causing his children to pass through the fire in honour of the idol Moloch. He made a covenant with hell, abandoning himself to the most degrading superstition. He made Judah and Israel to sin, and he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other. And all this was aggravated by his being the son of such a father, and by his being king of Judah where God was known; by past judgments of God against the wickedness of rulers and people; by his long continuance in sin; and by the solemn warnings which he received and despised, – for “the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken.” This whole description presents the character of an outrageous, hardened sinner, past fear, feeling or shame. And who would expect anything else than that such a heaven-defying sinner, after filling up the measure of his iniquity, would be driven away in his wickedness?

But “the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.” He was afflicted, and his affliction was sanctified. The severest affliction has indeed no power in itself to bring the sinner to his right mind. No doubt there are some things which a sinner *must* see and feel in the time of sore affliction; for example, the vanity of the world, the misery of being without true hope in God, the bitterness of sin; but all this may be seen and felt, and yet the heart be the more hardened and closed up against God. The fetters and the dungeon, the change from outward greatness and power to misery, disgrace, and ruin, might have produced in Manasseh the repentance of a Cain or a Judas; but without grace this would have been all. However, in the Lord’s hand, and in connection with His word, affliction proves efficacious for breaking the stubborn heart and humbling the stoutest sinner. And the Lord often makes precious use of it, and begins a precious work with such painful dealing.

How long he may have remained stupified and sullen under the hand of God, a prey to the workings of tumultuous passions, endeavouring as he could to endure what he could not resist, or brought down and terrified without being humbled; what a hell may have been felt in his breast when he had but his own heart to commune with and a God whom he still strove to forget; or what temptations to self-destruction he may have been visited with in this situation, we know not. But it pleased the Lord in His sovereign mercy to visit him, and, instead of leaving him under the dominion of a reprobate mind, to let in so much light on his dark understanding as made the existence, the presence and the nearness of the one living and true God real to him. It was then a truth that God *is*; the God of the Bible, the Creator, the great and terrible God who had spoken from Mount Sinai – the God of his fathers. He felt His presence; with Him he had to do; against Him he had been sinning and contending for a lifetime. Conscience now awakened from its long sleep: and what a charge had it to bring against him! Sin began to be seen in its true colours. Memory wakened up. His past life was before his view. The instructions received in childhood were remembered by him. The image of his godly father stood before him, and the images of the souls he had slain. What had he been doing on God’s earth till now? Oh! how infatuated had he been! How truly had he approved himself a child of the devil!

Oh, had he but life to live over again, with its precious years to be redeemed for God, its blessed opportunities for glorifying God! But that cannot be. What would he now give to

efface the black catalogue of his sins? But there they were in God's book, and in the book of conscience too, in all their enormity and inexcusableness and aggravations, charged with the wrath of the Almighty. Where shall he look for comfort? The arrows of the Almighty are already within him; he is in the hands of an angry God, a God who has often reprov'd him, while *he* has hardened his neck.

Must he then become a vessel of wrath? Must he spend a never-ending existence in cursing the day of his birth? If, out of the dungeon, he sink into the abyss of hell, he feels that he must carry with him the conviction that he will suffer *justly*. How often has God called and he refused? how often has God stretched out His hand and he has not regarded? May He not then now "laugh at his calamity and mock at his fear?" But oh! if what he apprehends of the wrath of the Almighty and the agonies of a guilty conscience be so insupportable, what will the full experience of that wrath be? – to lie down in everlasting burnings! See the change which the letting in of the truth on the mind (the truth about God and sin) has wrought in the proud, hardened, remorseless man! See how his knees smite together, and how dismay may be read in his countenance, while he expects almost momentarily the execution of the sentence in force against him!

Is there then *no hope*? Is he falling into black despair? and is this the terrible sight that our eyes witness, that we may take warning? Is Satan right when he says, "Faithfully hast thou served me during a lifetime; now thou art mine for ever. Never did I lose at the eleventh hour one who had served me as thou hast done!"

Adored be the grace that kept Manasseh from despair! The Friend of Sinners was in that dungeon, in the exercise of the love which, in the fulness of the time, was to be poured out on the accursed tree. It was written in His Word, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin" (Exodus 34:6). Surely Hezekiah would have sought to imprint these words on the heart of his child: they may have come to his mind now. And it was also written there, "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). There was, then, nothing too hard or too rich for such a God. How wondrous, beyond conception, the patience that had been exercised towards him year after year! If there were such riches in His forbearance, what untold and unsearchable riches must there be in His saving mercy! Might it not then be that even sins like his might be pardoned, a polluted wretch like him be cleansed, and a rebel such as he had ever been be reconciled? Who could tell what such a God could do? And was there not a prayer suited for such a case as his? "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; FOR IT IS GREAT" (Psalm 25:11).

His pent-up feelings give themselves expression in a new way. Rivers of waters run down his eyes, while he prostrates himself before God. "Behold, he prayeth!" Solemn, blessed sight! – the chief sinner making confession; free confession, no longer wrung from him; confession which *must* be made, though the Lord should cast him from His sight; full confession, without any reserve or attempt at self-justification; particular confession – his sins crowding upon him or kept before him as past reckoning, in all their aggravations as against light and privileges and obligations and dealings and warnings, as against God – and such a God. Condemning himself as a beast, a devil – as deserving of the lowest hell; humbling himself before God, the Holy One, in whose sight the heavens are not clean; humbling himself "greatly" before the God of his fathers; crying with groanings that cannot be uttered; yet making supplication for mercy and for a heart to turn to the Lord; and making supplication too, that, if it were consistent with the Divine glory, not only might his sins be pardoned and his nature renewed, but that he might be restored to the place and country where he had so long dishonoured God and been a soul murderer, that he might bring forth

fruits meet for repentance, and weep in sackcloth before his people, and endeavour to awaken them to a sense of the wickedness of the courses to which he had seduced them.

He prayeth: but oh! how little has he confessed! He must pray again. How faint, comparatively, is his sense of sin, how wretchedly inadequate his humiliation! He must pray again. How unspeakably precious the blessings which he seeks! How can he rest one hour without reconciliation to God? And dare he after all hope that God will hear his cry; that he shall ever know Him as the God of peace on earth, or stand in His holy place above? (Psalm 24:3,4). Surely not for his prayers' sake dare he cherish any hope. Yet mercy he will seek, and at His footstool will he now be found.

Behold, then, he prayeth! Amidst temptations and discouragements, he still prayeth; with a deepening sense of sin, of his own sinfulness and desert of wrath, and of the pollution of his prayers, he still prayeth. While there is no present response, while his burden increases and while the hope that had entered his breast is almost ready to expire – for it is hard to pray while there is no present answer – he still waits for God.

And God's time came, whether after days or weeks or months, for making Himself known as the Hearer of his cry. The Lord "was entreated of him." For He delighteth in mercy; there is forgiveness with Him for "all manner of sin and blasphemy" – for all sin confessed in Christ's name; and He is the hearer of prayer. He cannot deny Himself. He delivered him from his fears, spoke peace to his soul, and took him out of the fearful pit. He said, "Deliver from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom." Not only so, but He brought him again to Jerusalem, to his kingdom. This was indeed special mercy – to give him some little time on earth for manifesting the depth of his repentance, and for glorifying God, by making confession and by seeking to turn others from the error of their ways.

"Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God." When in affliction, He had known Him in His power and holiness and jealousy; He now knew Him in His grace, in which His glory specially appears. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). And he brought forth fruits meet for repentance, walking humbly with his God, establishing His true worship, and exercising his authority for the suppression of all idolatry. And these efforts were accepted, and, in some measure, acknowledged by God.

Yet we read, after all the reformation wrought by Josiah, "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there" (2 Kings 23:26). Thus Manasseh had sealed the temporal ruin of the land, while *he* was plucked as a brand from the burning. Thus *may* a hardened sinner obtain mercy, and souls whom he has tempted and led in the way to destruction be left to perish. An awful truth, yet a truth; and unless this were the case, "who could be saved?" for who, by his sins of commission or omission, has not been in God's sight a murderer of the souls of others? But what an overwhelmingly affecting consideration to the child of God, that while he has obtained mercy, others, perhaps far less guilty than he, whom he may have been instrumental in hardening, have been left.

We do not know how many years he lived after his return from Babylon. We cannot doubt that he loved much, and, even while rejoicing in the grace that could gloriously pardon and transform such a sinner, sorrowed much. Nor would he feel it necessary to conceal his sadness; for his case was an extraordinary one; – all the land ought to know what reason he had for being of a sad countenance; and it is probable that it was by his own desire that he was buried, not in the sepulchres of the kings, but in his own garden.

The lessons to be learned from this subject are such as these: –

1. The wickedness of the heart – not of Manasseh’s heart only, but of ours: – no outward means, or privileges, or providences, will of themselves avail to change it. We learn, too, how “one sinner destroyeth much good;” – a lesson specially applicable indeed to one in a station of much influence, but also generally applicable. It is easy to do evil in this evil world: but it is hard to do good; it is a continual working against the stream.

2. Be anxious to improve the time of affliction. Has it surprised you *in your sins*? Oh! entreat the Lord to have mercy upon you, lest you should be taken away with a stroke, or lest, while outwardly delivered, you be left more hardened than before. On the other hand, is it as a *child* you are corrected? Receive the evil of affliction as from a loving Father, who chastens you for your profit.

3. Let us learn the superabounding character of the grace of God; its power to take away the stoniest heart, its riches to make the guiltiest sinner white as snow. Who would not have said, “What an awful reckoning with his Judge awaits this man!” yet the Lord had mercy on him. The last was made first. Beware, then, of self-righteousness. God saved Manasseh for His name’s sake; and if He saves you, it will be for no other reason. Have you been preserved from open sin? give God the glory: but take care lest you stand on your good character in the presence of your Judge, and it fare with you as with the Pharisee in our Saviour’s parable (Luke 18:14). But turn not His grace into lasciviousness. Manasseh’s case, like that of the dying thief, is an altogether singular one. How few hardened sinners are converted, how few who lose the time of youth are converted! “To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts.” And let us not despair of the salvation of very unlikely characters. Is there one over whom you have been grieving, whose case you have been trying to keep on your spirit at a throne of grace, but of whom you are ready to lose hope altogether? Think of Manasseh. Think of the grace in which there are exceeding riches. Faint not in prayer. “God’s thoughts are not our thoughts.” There are last which shall be first.

4. Let us improve this subject, as a remedy against despairing thoughts in regard to our own salvation.

There may be many of my hearers who have no felt need of such an exhortation, because they have light views of sin, of God, and of salvation. The Lord look down in mercy upon them, and awaken them to a sense of the straitness of the gate ere they be left without for ever. There may be others who have a constant feeling of uneasiness and insecurity arising from an unpurged conscience, while at the same time they cleave to sin and feel as though it were hopeless to expect to be delivered from it. When conscience at any time speaks louder than at other times, the tempter whispers, “There is no hope;” and, loving their idols, they continue to follow them. Oh! this is an awfully dangerous condition. If there is any one of my hearers who realizes it as his own, I would warn him against the snare of the devil. There is no hope if he continue to drown the voice of conscience, and to refuse to know the worst of his case; but there *is* hope in the blood and grace of Christ; and if he perish, it will not be because Christ’s blood could not cleanse him, and because Christ’s grace could not humble and sanctify him, but because he would not prove Christ, and would choose death. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

But the child of God, the Christian, needs this exhortation too. He may now have “peace;” he may come yet to be in deep waters. “When God giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?” (Job 34:29).

There was an eminent saint, an eminent minister of Christ now in glory, who in his dying sickness was sorely exercised in regard to the state of his soul. The enemy thrust sore, and he was brought very low. His sins possessed him, God’s face was hid from him, and hope had well-nigh expired. While in this anguish of spirit, one night he dreamed a dream. He was not

one of those who put any trust in impressions or in dreams apart from the law and the testimony. But God can still make use of this means for instruction and for admonition. He dreamed that he saw heaven opened, and a company approach and go in, and the door was shut. In this company he beheld Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and many of the Old Testament saints, and some whom he himself had known; but he could not get in along with them. There was a pause, and again the door was opened, and again a company approached, and in this company he knew many; but he could not get in along with them, and he began to tremble exceedingly. A third time the door was opened, and another company approached, and they went in one after another; and terror began to seize upon him, and his knees smote one against another; when all at once, looking round, he saw Manasseh – Manasseh who had made Jerusalem stream with blood: “and,” said the dying saint, “I crept in at Manasseh’s back.” Thus he found peace, and thus he died, having nothing to trust to but this – but it was enough – “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” *even the chief*.

[March 1903]

## Outlines of Sermons.

By the late REV. JOHN SINCLAIR, Bruan Caithness,  
Preached on September 1st, 8th, and 22nd, 1839.  
(Continued from volume 6)

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” – John 3:3.

The marks that have been given of those who have been born again are: –

1. They do not commit sin.
2. They have a new principle of life and new strength. There can be no good thought without this. They have a new rule; there is no peace without this. They are made fools in themselves. *A Christian without the Word is the greatest fool ever you met; he knows not what to do in spirituals or temporals; he is a man without eyes.* They have a new end. The divine glory lies near their heart. They are not satisfied with self-praise if God is not glorified in word, or relation, or ordinance. Self is the burden of their soul, instead of being their god.
3. They overcome the world. They are soldiers; Christ is their captain of salvation. Their armour is spiritual – the Word and the Spirit. They are more than conquerors, they are spoilers, they trample the enemy under foot. Their Captain holds their hand; He teaches them to war; to break bows of steel in pieces, and to overleap a wall.

1. They overcome the wicked one. Satan’s armour is taken away.
  - (1) The Lord takes away the lying spirit that is in their hearts, and makes them to believe and receive the love of the truth that they may be saved.
  - (2) He takes away a guilty conscience by the blood of Christ.
  - (3) He takes off Satan’s shoes. These are of iron, to tread on the blood of Christ. He puts on the preparation of the gospel of peace in faith and practice. He takes away a prayerless spirit and puts on concern, never to be put off. The sinner is a concerned, preparing man now.

(4) The Lord takes away unbelief of law and gospel. The unbelief of the former tended to ease; that of the latter, to despair. The threatening is urging on the sinner, the promise is drawing him.

(5) The Lord takes away the “no hope” of those who are fearful. This is a powerful piece of Satan’s armour. “There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them I will go” (Jeremiah 2:25). “There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every man do the imagination of his evil heart” (Jeremiah 18:12). When this hopelessness comes in, it is one of Satan’s masterpieces, whether the person be under concern or not. Satan tries to keep the person in ease, or to drive him to despair. Now, the Lord gives hope, though it may be hardly seen; He keeps up an expectation in the soul, a peradventure, a “Who can tell?” which keeps the soul seeking. O, how poor the creature is when *this* is for a moment out of sight!

(6) The Lord takes away blank deism. He sends the Word, and teaches them to use it. It is the sword of the Spirit. In short, he takes away the stony heart, and then Satan’s armoury is spoiled to him.

When Satan’s armour is spoiled, his power as a prince is gone. He had nothing in Christ, and by that he loses his power in believers. They now disobey his commandments, refuse his tribute-money, and renounce his service and army. They have another Captain now. And then as a god he loses his worship. They do not call on his name. Formerly they would be swearing by his name, and by the name of God at his order. They do not worship the golden image he has set up, the world which he calls his. They need a Saviour for their souls. Their eyes are now so open that the whole world cannot fill them.

(1) Has he had his captivity in you overcome? Does he run away with you in morning and at night? Does he run away with you on the Sabbath from the Church? And does he take you away from the people of God?

(2) Has his armour been taken from him? Have you ceased lying, or is there a lie in your right hand? Have you got on the breastplate of righteousness, faith, and love? Have your feet been shod with the active preparation of the gospel? Have you the shield of faith, the shield of promises and threatenings? Have you for a helmet the hope of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit? Can you work without the latter?

(3) Is Satan, as a friend, cast out of you? Are his law, tribute, service, war abandoned? Or are you on his pension list?

(4) Have you given up his worship as a god? Do you pray to him, and can he say, “I am thy god”? Oh, horrible!

2. They overcome the men of the world. They overcome them in their doctrine. If you are in a religious family, you will be feeling it hard to keep up with them; if in an irreligious family, you will be examining their views. “Try the spirits whether they are of God.” Many children are in danger of being ruined by the doctrine of their parents, and the world, their neighbours. Happy they who are not. They overcome the world in their company. “I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked” (Psalm 26:4,5). God is dishonoured, and their souls are hurt. They overcome the world in their fashions. “Be not conformed to this world.” They do not dress for fashion’s sake, but only are not quite singular. They will not conform a hair of their head to please a person who is after the fashions; when in part they do so they will suffer in soul, and often in body. They overcome the world in their threats. So did Daniel and the three children. This is not easy. They overcome them in their favours. Balaam cannot go beyond his commission, but willingly would to gain the favour of the world; but David says, “The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”

3. They overcome what is in themselves. “The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (John 3: 16).

*Sept. 8th.* – We have mentioned three marks of the new birth.

1. They do not commit sin.
2. They do righteousness.
3. They overcome the world.

In speaking of the last – the overcoming of the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – we made a distinction between sin crucified and sin mortified. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Not shall, but *have* crucified. They are commanded also to mortify sin, to put it to death. This is the evidence of having crucified it. “Mortify, therefore, your members.” “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” This shows that if sin is not being mortified, there is no evidence of its having been crucified by faith in Christ; and that unless sin be mortified, it will mortify us.

Now, if sin has been mortified, several things are true: –

(1) It has been discovered to be a traitor, a malefactor. Many acknowledge, but do not believe they are sinners. But when the Spirit comes He convinces, proves, demonstrates sin to be exceeding sinful. He shows not only that great sins will condemn us, but that all sin is hateful in its very nature. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

(2) Sin has been tried as in a court of justice. The guilty person has been tried by the holy law. The commandment comes; he is found guilty and condemned. The sentence must be executed; either sin must be crucified, or the man must suffer.

(3) Sin is given up. It is given up with the whole heart and soul. Now, “Of Thy mercy, slay my foes.” Then all sin is put on the Cross: sins of omission as well as sins of commission. “One thing thou lackest.” All sins now are burdens. Now, the great aim is to get sin dead, mortified. If it is not slain by the Cross, it will be a mark of reprobation. Temptation will return, but sin is now horrible. It is like a ghost returning which is more dreadful than when the person was alive.

Questions: Has sin been found? Has it been tried? Has it been condemned? Has it been crucified? Is it now mortifying? Is it horrible? Is it terrible to us?

4. The fourth mark is *love*. “Everyone that loveth is born of God” (1 John 4:7). We are told at verses 8 and 16 that “God is love.” It is His very nature to love, as if there was nothing in Him but love. Indeed, He loves in heaven, because all there are holy; He loves on earth what is holy; He loves in hell His justice. He loved from eternity the Son and the Spirit. He hates nothing but sin. He loves holiness and holy persons. They that are born again have the nature of their Father. This love belongs equally to the three Persons of the Godhead. The Father’s love appears in giving the Son to be a propitiation for sins; the Son’s love in dying to take away sins; the Spirit’s love in applying for such a purpose the precious blood of the Son. This love is full of mystery, God giving up His Son for loathsome creatures lying in their blood in the open field of nature.

None have love to God until it is put in them. “Hateful, and hating one another” is the character of all by nature. “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 20:6). Thus, the possession of this love is a sure evidence of the new birth, as none have it but from the Lord. He is one flame of love, and out of that all true love comes. It is in order to bring sinners back to His image that Christ came to save, more than merely to save them from punishment.

(1) Those who are born again love the Father. They are said to “love God and keep His commandments.” Now, in this particular, it is very difficult to attain to proof and to satisfy conscience. God is so exalted. No man hath seen Him at any time. But faith brings a report of Him from the Word, and in this way they come to love Him. Keeping His

commandments is loving His commandments, when it proceeds from love to their holiness as reflecting His image. This is, therefore, an evidence of love to Himself, as if we had seen Him. Examine yourself then on the ten commandments in their spirituality, and see whether you love God or not. The Holy Ghost writes the commandments on every new-born soul, and then the soul begins to love God and keep His commandments.

(2) They love the Son, “Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full, of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). They can get nearer the Son in human nature, yet their apparently greater love to the Son will not offend the Father, for He speaks as if He Himself had additional love to Him in His humanity – “Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.”

(3) They love the Spirit. They show this in weariness of their own spirit, and in grieving for having grieved the Holy Spirit.

(4) They love the Lord’s Day, And this, because it is the most holy day. They call the Sabbath a delight. Why do they not do so always? Because of the lack of holiness. Yet they have drops of grief for their weariness of the Sabbath. Would you love the Sabbath if you got sin mortified, your case cleared, more life in your soul, and the world cast out?

(5) They love the Word. “O, how I love Thy law!” It is the most holy book; therefore, they love it. Do you love the places in the Bible which reprove sin? They read it oftener than other books, for they find life in it. Those who prefer profane books have no mark unless it is that they are of the devil.

(6) They love the people of God. They love them because they are a holy people. They love them according to the proportion of holiness that is seen in them. They love them even when they reprove, when they smite, and when they seem to give no credit to themselves. Notice Paul’s spirit in connection with some of his converts – “And I will very gladly spend, and be spent, for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved” (2 Corinthians 12:15). They lament that the people of God are so few in their own time. They do good to the household of faith, because they belong to Christ.

(7) They have love to all. They cry with the woman of Samaria, “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” Would you not wish to see sinners brought to holiness, and then to heaven? Do you like to see grace in others more than in yourself? And do you take shame to yourself for the want of it? Do you warn sinners out of love, praying for a blessing? Or do you curse them to death? Would you be willing to part with anything to save them, or to take any trouble for saving them? This love includes a hatred to everything unholy in self and in others. Are you thinking about your own family, your neighbours, people passing on the road? Are you thinking about the nation? If we profess to love God, do we keep His commandments? If we profess to love Christ, what hatred have we of sin and of self? If we profess to love the Holy Spirit, what about our own spirit? If we profess to love the Sabbath, what of our hearts on that day? If the Bible, what do we think of our breaking the word? If the people of God, what of ourselves beside them? If we profess to love all men, what do we pray for on their behalf?

5. The last mark of the new birth we intend to give is, believing Jesus to be Christ. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). Also, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15). This was the first doctrine Paul preached after Christ appeared to him with power, and was revealed in him – “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). This was the confession of Peter’s faith, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). This was also the confession of Martha, the Ethiopian eunuch, Andrew, and Nathaniel. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Anointed

One is born of God. He said, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins;" and also, "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

It was usual in Old Testament times to anoint prophets, priests, and kings with very precious oil. Elisha, Aaron, David, Solomon, Joash, and others were thus anointed. Christ was never anointed with material oil; He was anointed with the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:38). This is a most precious anointing, showing that He was fully qualified for His great work. The eternal God the Spirit rests on the Mediator. As such, He made a day of Pentecost; and He is still the maker of all true revivals. Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, equal with the Father, the express image of His person, the brightness of His glory, having all the attributes of God, and therefore able to save to the uttermost.

[March 1903]

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## Notes of a Sermon

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO, Strathay.

[From Mr. Munro's own MS. and hitherto unpublished - ED.]

Preached at Kilmuir, Skye, 13th November, 1868.

"And looking round about upon them all He said unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand.  
And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other" - Luke 6:10.

The account of the miracle recorded here is introduced by the writer narrating some of the circumstances connected with it. It happened that the Saviour went on another Sabbath day into the synagogue and taught the people. It seems, though they put others out of the synagogue for acknowledging Him as the Messiah, that they had no courage, at least as yet, to cast Him out, or to prevent His teaching the people. The reason why they did not attempt it was the favour which the common people everywhere showed towards Him; and together with this, there was an authority accompanying His teaching and presence that overawed them and kept them in check or under restraint so far that as yet none ventured to lay violent hands on Him. They, however, spoke against Him, and sought on every opportunity some grounds on which they could accuse Him, and get Him condemned by the law. They were here in the synagogue professing to worship God and to learn out of His law or word, for Moses and the prophets were read there on every Sabbath; but instead of worshipping God in spirit and in truth, they were watching Him who came from God in order to find occasion against Him to arraign Him before their legal tribunals.

It is to be feared these men have representatives in our modern assemblies for worship; that is, persons who come not to worship, not to be instructed, but to find fault, and therefore to have an excuse, according to their own view of matters, for neglecting worship and for condemning all gospel institutions and all who maintain them. Their presence and the sinful motives that actuated them did not prevent Christ from teaching. He knew their need of being instructed, and felt pity towards them and all others under the influence of ignorance and unbelief; and therefore, as one anointed to preach good tidings to the meek and declare the acceptable year of the Lord, He availed Himself of the present opportunity to declare the gospel of the Kingdom. This is the duty to which all ministers are called, namely, to declare the truth, whether men will hear or forbear.

Christ saw one person in the audience that attracted His particular attention; and what was it that drew His attention to him? It was a certain infirmity under which he laboured, which did not affect his whole body, but only one member thereof. But it was one of the most useful members; even the right hand, the use of which is well known to all, and the loss of which must be felt as a great calamity by everyone who labours under that disadvantage. From an expression in one of the Psalms – the 137th, verse 5th – we learn that its loss was counted a heavy calamity among the Jews, as well as it is among other nations and peoples, for one deprived of its use is almost unfit for any work, and so far for earning his bread. On seeing him, Christ no doubt was moved with compassion for him, for He pitied people who laboured under bodily ailments and wants, for we read of His pitying those who had stayed three days with Him and had nothing to eat. He resolved, then, on curing this man; but He knew how His enemies would endeavour to make a handle of this against Himself and His doctrine. He then endeavoured to correct them, and by reasoning with them lead them to entertain right views and cherish a brotherly spirit. He knew they would charge Him with a breach of the fourth commandment, and He addresses them with a view to convince them how groundless these charges were. In effect He says unto them, “Do you not think that ye yourselves observe this command?” To which question no doubt they would have answered, “We do, and have kept it from our youth.” “What would you do in the event of a sheep of yours falling into a ditch on the Lord’s day?” “We would take it out.” “Quite so; and I suppose you would not think that act any transgression of the law?” “No, we would not.” “Now, here is a poor man with a withered hand, who can do nothing to earn bread for himself, and perhaps for a poor, widowed mother or for a wife and helpless, starving children; and is not his case as deserving of attention as that of the sheep?” To this they make no reply. They could not answer Him. They were silenced, but not changed. They allowed works of necessity in the case of a sheep, but would not allow a work of mercy towards a fellow-creature. And by this cold indifference they were guilty of transgressing that very law for which they pretended to have so much holy zeal, for evidently they had no love to their neighbour as to themselves. Thus zeal without knowledge always misleads, for it led them at this time to that which was contrary to the spirit of the law, and therefore to the mind of the lawgiver.

Christ, however, was not to be turned away from His own work by the opposition and cavillings of ignorant and wicked men. His course was like that of the sun, far above all created power and human malice to check or hinder. He calls the man, addressing him by name, or points him out by the circumstance of his right hand being withered. The man, in obedience to Christ stood up. He was not of the same mind as the lawyers and scribes; he heard Christ teaching, and by the time He concluded, formed an opinion of Him very different from that which His enemies entertained concerning Him. He would say of Him, as others did, “No man ever spake like this person.” Christ during His teaching might have fixed His eye upon him, and from that eye that afterwards looked upon Zaccheus, or that cast a glance on Peter, with such effect, there might have gone forth a power that touched his heart, and gained his esteem and love and confidence. His Jewish prejudices were at all events subverted, and so he obeyed Christ. If he were of the same spirit as the opponents, he would not have acted as he did, for he would have looked upon himself as concerned in what he considered sin. He did not, then, conclude that there was any sin in obeying Christ, and so did not believe there was any sin in Christ Himself. And when he stood up, he thus publicly professed Christ to be a teacher sent from God. He knew what sentiments and opinions were entertained regarding Him by the leaders of his nation, by those to whom he used to look up as his teachers and leaders, and that the same would be entertained towards those who should countenance Christ in the least. He knew he would be accused of transgressing the law by them, and regarded as an outcast; but he formed such an opinion of Christ that he resolved to

cast in his lot with Him. Seeing his former teachers, then, and knowing their spirit and conduct and authority, he was not in the least intimidated. He did not fear what this man or that might say regarding him. He did not fear what this scribe or that Pharisee might bring against him, and if indebted to them for help in his disabled condition, he never thought of the loss of their patronage and favour. No sooner did Christ speak than he obeyed.

See him, now standing among the people who were sitting in the synagogue, with his hand hanging at his side withered and powerless, and not in the least afraid of the powers of the lawyers and scribes. And if he were not afraid, He at whose command he rose up was less so. Christ felt the peace of God filling His heart; He felt confident of thinking and acting according to His Father's will. Here was work which it was His meat and drink to do from His bowels of mercy and compassion, work which was calculated to please and satisfy Him, and without being in the least disturbed by the presence of opponents, He proceeds to perform it. From the beginning He knew His enemies, knew their combination and their sayings against Him, but He heeded them not. Satan and his emissaries are always at hand, either when Christ is about to do any work of mercy or afterwards – to try and prevent Him in the former circumstances, or to cast a slur on it after He has performed it. He healed a man that was born blind before they knew that He did it, and also the man that lay at Bethesda; and as soon as both were known to have been healed, they did all they could to mar His work. But He was never moved by all that they did or said.

When the man stood up Christ asked them again, saying, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" To this reasonable question there was no reply. "Then, looking round upon about them all, He said unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand." This look was an appeal to their own consciences as to the reasonableness and justice of the remarks made by Him, and for the time their mouths were stopped; for they could not gainsay what had been said. He then said, "Stretch forth thy hand." To this the man might have objected, and said, "Oh, I cannot do that, for my hand is withered, and I have not been able to move it for many a day; and it is a strange request on Thy part to ask me to do that which everyone knows to be impossible for me, and which Thou Thyself mayest know also to be beyond my power." The rest of the audience also might be of the same mind and look upon the command as unreasonable. Were he to give place to this objection, and sit down with a feeling of displeasure and anger at Him who spoke to him, many people would be ready to say that he did what was right and proper. Perhaps some here would be ready to join them in their views, for I fear that not a few act a similar part when they hear Christ's command to do that for which they have no power. This man, however, did not act in this way. He believed that Jesus was able to cure him, or restore his hand and so enable him to stretch it out. The thoughts that went through his mind most likely were of the following nature: "I am not able to do this of myself, for I have had proof enough that my hand has lost all power; but here is one that can do all things commanding me to stretch it out, and therefore I will endeavour to do what He bids me." And in attempting this he found his hand recovered strength, and that he could stretch it forth. And the consequence was that it was "restored whole as the other." This filled His enemies with madness. How completely has sin perverted and blinded man's mind! The teaching and good deeds of Him who came forth from the Father, instead of producing a salutary effect on these, only filled them with madness. A madman does not care what he does or says. He is ready to perform any work, evil work, and to speak the most awful blasphemies. These men hesitated not to consult about putting the Son of God to death.

What a triumphant argument may be found here against the view of those who maintain that all the power of the gospel is of a moral nature. There were never more persuasive arguments used to prevail on men to turn from error unto the truth than those contained in the teaching and works of Christ, and yet no teacher ever met with greater opposition and

hostility than the blessed Son of God. How clearly may be seen here the truth of what He said on another occasion, "I have not come to send peace on earth but a sword." Christ did not intend that this should be the effect; but He knew man and how he hates the light, even the truth of God, and that even when it shows him what is good and what Jehovah requires of him. Man's low, blind, and miserable state cannot be more clearly seen than by his hatred and indifference to the truth, and opposition to Him who came in the name of Jehovah to bless sinners.

Having gone over in this manner the narrative contained in our text, I shall now endeavour to draw some practical lessons from what has been stated.

I. Christ, who came to the world to heal souls from the disease of sin, is seen here engaged in that blessed and merciful work. He goes from place to place, and loves to frequent those places where men meet in great numbers, thus proving the truth of what had been written of Him, namely, "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth; and His delights were with the sons of men." There was none ever on earth who loved men as men as He did. He showed no regard for those accompaniments of rank and station to which so much importance is attached by men in general. He did not court the society of the honourable and great in the world, He did not frequent the abodes of the great nor the palaces of kings, but He spent His time among the poor, the sick, and distressed. We do not read of His making any journey to pay court to Herod the king or the Roman governor, but we read of His going to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon to relieve a poor woman and her daughter. We do not read of His going to call on the governors of Samaria, but we read of His going there to meet a poor, wretched woman, to call her and convert her to the faith of the gospel. We do not hear of His feasting with the grandees of Israel, but we read of His entering into the house of one Martha, whose sister was Mary and brother Lazarus, and in their society enjoying rest and finding delight in their simple faith in and love to Him, and in the eagerness with which they drank in His heavenly message, the words of the Father which He came to declare. Here we find Him in the synagogue on the Sabbath day teaching the people, and taking notice of one who had need of healing, and exercising His divine favour to restore him. Christ is still present where there are two or three gathered together in His name, and takes notice of any sick soul that may be present, for nothing can escape the piercing glance of that eye that is like a flame of fire. And as He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, His pity for the wretched and helpless has undergone no change since the days of His flesh, since the day He saw this helpless man in one of the synagogues of Judea. Is this believed by all present? If so, wait His time to take notice of you and to heal you.

II. This man's disease may be taken as an illustration of man's helplessness as a sinner. This man lost the use of his right hand by some disease or other that destroyed the nervous energy, which loss, although the hand still lived like a vegetable, deprived it of all power for work. Man by sin lost spiritual life, and therefore, though he lives an animal and rational life, yet he is dead spiritually; he can do no good; he can do nothing to please God; he sins and comes short of God's glory in all that he does. Therefore, instead of meriting life, he heaps up for himself wrath against the day of wrath, and fiery indignation that shall destroy the adversaries.

Man may think that he does good, as the Pharisees, who esteemed themselves righteous and despised others. One may think that if he be a good neighbour, kind and just in his dealings, that he lives in a way that shall infallibly lead him unto heaven. Another may think that if he performs the external duties of religion that he pleases God. There were some among the Jews who made long prayers, but at the same time swallowed up widows' houses, and thought themselves very good men. Others, who hear of hypocrites, think they are themselves better because they have no form of any religion; and many more flatter

themselves that though they speak and act foolishly to some extent, yet that they have far better hearts than those who pretend to be very religious. Thus many imagine that they are doing good, and will be accepted by God, while they never did any really good work nor thought any really good purpose. They know not nor believe that the imaginations of the heart by nature are only evil continually.

When Christ is to heal any or to save any, He first gives them a true sense of what their state is, shows them by His Spirit and Word how matters really are with them before God. He convinces them that they are sinners without any good and without power or inclination to do any good, and that all they do is sinful, and therefore that they deserve no better than death. This is not a mere opinion, but a matter of conviction and experience. They are to try all their thoughts and deeds by the standard of the divine law, and find that all these are contrary to the spirit and letter of that law. At the same time the conscience testifies clearly and powerfully that the law is good and that every sin deserves, according to the Word, eternal death. Then the sinner may try to do good and think according to the law, but this he finds impossible; for sin, by the light of the law, revives and operates more powerfully in the heart than ever, which deprives the convinced person of all hopes founded on his works of law. He now feels that he is low; all his high thoughts of himself are brought down; he cannot look up to God from this ground with any confidence; he rather fears that God may cut him down suddenly and unexpectedly, and cast him into outer darkness, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. He sees then his need of mercy; he cries for mercy – and has to wait God's time to help, for he now looks for none from any other quarter. He looks on his right hand and left, and lo, there is none to know him; all help fails him. Here is a helpless one, and yet if able to go about he is not idle; what would he not do and where would he not go if he could expect to find help? He cannot but cry and groan, for he is burdened with fear and guilt, and burns within with a vehement desire after salvation, after deliverance from the pit which he seems to see opening to receive him, and from the wrath which he sees revealed from heaven against him, and as if it were ready, like an overwhelming flood, to devour him. If he could find Christ he would think no condition too hard to bear, he would think no labour too heavy; and so he is found diligently using the means of grace. A cold, a windy, or a rainy day would not keep him from going a short distance to the meeting or to the church. Many have travelled miles and miles in every kind of weather, and under many outward disadvantages to hear the gospel, and in hopes to meet Christ. And, oh, how frequently has He spoken a word in season to such when all hopes seemed clean gone!

III. The manner in which He cured this man is a very apt illustration of the manner He applies salvation.

When He does this, or rather when He is about to do it, opposition rises up to prevent this, if possible; sometimes by Satan directly, at other times he gets men to join him in this work so congenial to his nature. Here men were instigators in this work, but they failed. There are men still who are enemies to the cross of Christ, who do all in their power to cast reproach on Christ and His cause, who make a mock of all real earnestness, of all anxiety and sore trouble for salvation and for finding Christ as one's Saviour, and who condemn the diligent and constant use of means. And others do the same work by their carelessness and hardened indifference, setting an example before young and old, and so strengthening their fellowmen by their open indifference to the things of the Spirit. But when Christ begins to apply salvation no power can hinder Him, and no helplessness on man's part can baffle Him.

The gospel of salvation is called good tidings of great joy. The saying or tidings is that Christ Jesus came to save sinners, that He died and rose again to save sinners and such like. But this salvation purchased by Him must be applied to each individual. Christ must speak with power to every soul. In purchasing salvation, Christ had to obey and suffer; in applying it, He has to speak with power, imparting life to the dead, strength to the weak, light to those

in darkness, and health to those sick unto death. This is what renders indeed tidings good. He comes to such a soul in all the fulness that it has pleased the Father to dwell in Him, and supplies that soul's need. His wants are great, so great that none can supply them but one who has all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Him. He sends forth His word and this fulness, this virtue goes forth from Him and terminates on the needy. He says, "Live," and then immediately life is there; He says, "Believe," and then there is faith; He says; "Turn," and then they turn; "Repent," and that grace is both implanted and called into exercise; He says, "Let there be light," and then there is light; "Stretch forth thy hand," and immediately there is power to obey. In this way He saves the dead, the lost, the helpless. He gives them power to believe, to lay hold of Himself; and whosoever believes is saved, is healed, whatever may have been the nature of his disease. If a careless man, he is no longer one indifferent to the interests of his soul or to the realities of eternity. If he was altogether taken up with the world, he now sets his heart on things above; if carried away by carnality, he now crucifies the flesh; if selfish, he now feels an interest in his fellow-creatures, and prays for their salvation and does all in his power to bring them to Christ. He is now animated by a new hope which is that of the glory of God; he has now new desires which are after divine, spiritual, and heavenly things, even after God. He now delights in the exercises of religious duties; formerly they were but dead forms unto him, but now they are means in which he deals with God, hears Him speak to him, and in which he speaks to God. He delights in His word; this is one of the rich pastures in which he feeds, and what a treasure he has in this word; what light he now finds in it on God's name and ways; what light on the path he should go. He delights to meditate on God's laws, and at times enjoys that peace which passeth knowledge. At other times it seems to correct him; it serves as a medicine which in his mouth is bitter but in his belly sweet as honey. Though severe and sharp in accusing of sin and error, yet it is a medicine of sovereign efficacy to heal. He finds the grace that is in Christ sufficient for him. By Christ strengthening him, Paul could do all things. This is the effect of Christ speaking with power.

Here we may find correction for an error into which men are apt to fall concerning the gospel. When they hear that they can do nothing, then they are apt to ask why are they commanded what they cannot, and so convert the gospel into a covenant of works in which all depends on man's own ability. The gospel is not a law, but the word of salvation, a word that brings salvation with it when spoken by Christ Himself. But are not men responsible for their disobedience to the gospel? They are; and one way in which they disobey it is by trying to convert it into a covenant of works, and then imagine that they can and do obey it independently of Christ's grace and Spirit.

If, then, the gospel has come in power unto you, it has found you lost and helpless and put life and strength into your soul. Are you now helpless? None can strengthen you but Christ. He is still in His Church. He still goes about doing good, He comes in due time, He hears prayers, He sees the low state in which you are. Let Him hear your voice, and pray unto Him to send forth His power. There is nothing too hard for Him. Wait for Him, and in waiting for Him be not negligent, forget not your need, plead His promise, plead His love, plead His work, cast yourself at His feet, beseeching Him to have mercy on you. Let not any man scare you away from Him; rise up in the midst and acknowledge Him; in spite of all opposition acknowledge Him as the Son of God, the only Saviour, one in whom there is no sin, one able to save, and one that ought to be obeyed in all that He commands. If challenged and asked either by enemies within or without, Why do you read God's word, why do you pray, why do you use means? Tell them that Christ commands you, and that you dare not disobey Him.

You, who are dead in sins, who can do no good, and who do not obey Him, remember that you are doing all that lies in you to reject Christ and His salvation. Without Him you can

never have life, you can never have peace, pardon, and hope, you can never be healed, never be prevented from going down to eternal death. Let me earnestly ask you, Will you choose this death rather than listen to Christ, rather than forsake your own ways, rather than renounce the world, the devil, and the flesh. He comes in His word to you once more, saying, Wilt thou be made whole, wilt thou be saved from sin and wrath? Without salvation from the former there is no escape from the latter. Let me once more beseech you to be reconciled unto God, to come unto Him who now calls, invites, and welcomes him that cometh.  
[April 1903]

## Brief Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. DR. JOHN KENNEDY, of Dingwall.  
(Taken by a Hearer.)

“My times are in Thy hand” – Psalm 31:15.

I. – The meaning of the words “My times.” By these words must be meant not merely the several parts of the thread or course of life, but the various phases of experience by which that life may be chequered. Birth-time, life-time, death-time are all in the hand of God, so is each several movement of life between birth and death, coming, as it doth, from the Divine hand, as a new token of goodness and a new product of power. We live, move, and have our being in God. But we speak of good times and hard times, of glad times and sad times, and we must reckon on the latter as surely as we desire the former. All these are under the absolute control of God, and let none of us venture into our future without realizing this truth. The sovereign will of God determined the plan of our life down to its minutest details; and as we are taught that every good and perfect gift is from above, so we may ask, “Is there evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?”

All that is determined in the purpose shall infallibly occur in the providence of God, for His will is His power, and He will accomplish all His pleasure. Without either His permission or His direct operation nothing can occur. How absolute, then, is the Divine sway over us, and over all with whom we are associated. One cannot wonder that souls void of faith and love should shrink from the sternness of the truth; for stern to awfulness it verily is to each. How can they, while hopeless of God’s favour, and swayed by enmity to Him, endure to think of their being so entirely in His power? A very prelude of Hell must it yield to such to think of the Omnipotence of Divine control.

Let no one be satisfied till he can so think of his times being in the Lord’s hand that he is helped to hope and stirred to praise.

II. – The feeling expressed in the text. The Psalmist was content that his times should be in the Lord’s hands. His faith as to this encouraged him hopefully to pray in time of trial, and moved his heart to thankfulness.

To the attainment of this resignation and rest three things are essential.

(1.) A broken heart. – The contrite spirit has made acquaintance, at a sinner’s worst, with Divine love. He knows as others cannot, what Divine grace is, and there is an impression of the Divine name in his heart which inclines him to expect what is good from God. He has been at the cross of Christ, and has looked on a love that passeth knowledge, and has discovered it amidst all the awfulness of an exhaustive expression of Divine wrath. He cannot abandon all hope of help from that love, and he cannot expect an expression of it on the earth not attended with some share of trial. He cannot be absorbingly possessed by hard thoughts of

God as others who know Him only as against them. And his sense of unworthiness disposes him to think favourably of the Lord's most trying dealings. He can see mercy where others cannot, and is disposed in the hour of sorest trial to say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed."

(2.) Faith fixing a loving eye on the glory of the Lord. – The believer finds in the Lord's name security for the perfectness of all His ways. Shaped by wisdom, bright with holiness, and fraught with mercy are all the times faith sees coming from the Divine hand. Here, at any rate, is there good ground on which to repose under the efficient government of God. It ought to content us that the way of the Lord must be perfect. He cannot err in judgment. He cannot fail in government. But how rare is peacefulness of heart under such a sway!

(3.) A child's hope in God. – The Divine promise presents to the believer the object of his hope. That promise cannot fail. It declares that all things work together for his good, and that the course all along which the gracious providence of God shall thus take effect is to end in eternal glory. His experience can never furnish any real contradiction of this word of grace. All that God does must be consistent with the great antecedent of the cross, as well as with every word of His mouth. To the Divine eye this harmony is always evident, though, meanwhile, it may be hidden from the child. He may reckon that all things are against him while the current of providence is surely bearing him on to the promised deliverance. But when he can cry, Abba, Father, in faith as he lifts up his eyes to Him who is seated on the throne of grace, he will resign himself without reserve to His wise, holy, and gracious disposal.

III. – The lessons taught by the text.

(1.) Is it true that God has all our times in His hand? Then surely our first care should be to be at peace with Him. How absolute is God's power over us! He has brought that power to bear on us in an expression of wrath, or in a work of grace. Hast thou truly cared to have God on your side. Was there any hour in your past life in which this was your one great anxiety? Your conscience must answer this question though you should refuse to listen to, or to express, the utterance.

(2.) Is it true that our times are in the Lord's hands? Then it is folly to wish to have them in your own. That would be to give to the weakness, folly, injustice and cruelty of a sinful worm the management claimed for Omnipotence, acting according to infinite wisdom, righteousness and love.

(3.) Are our times in God's hand? Then you cannot find fault with them as they come to you without dishonouring God. Think of passing an adverse judgment on the ways of God! Let all who would shrink from presumption and blasphemy seek grace to preserve them from mourning because of the dealings of Providence. Is it not presumption to pass judgment on the ways of God? Is it not blasphemy to charge Him with having erred in counsel and failed in acting according to His Word? Are your ways in the sovereign hand of God? Then seek to be in His gracious hand yourself. There is One in whose hand is all the Father's pleasure, and His name is Jesus. He came to save sinners, and He calls you to come as a sinner to Him for a free and full salvation. O come and yield yourself into His outstretched arms that He may receive and save you. And from Him, who assures the coming sinner of salvation by His grace, can come no times that shall not be found to have been good when the end of all things shall be reached.

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