**The Key of Death!**

James Buchanan, 1837

"Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last, the Ever-living One! I died — but see, I am alive forevermore! And **I hold the keys of death** and Hades (the realm of the dead)." Revelation 1:17-18

The Bible affords a solid ground of comfort, by the cheering light which it throws over the valley of death, and, across that dark valley, on the fields of immortality beyond it.

To every thoughtful mind, *death*and the grave will suggest many serious reflections — reflections which must ever be of a pensive nature, and which, but for the cheering information conveyed by the Gospel — might even induce a feeling of despair. Look to the deathbed of man — and what do you behold? An intelligent creature, in the spring of life, when hope is brightest — or in the prime of manhood, when activity is greatest — or in the maturity of old age, when the fruit of a long experience was ripening for usefulness — laid prostrate by the derangement of some organ or function of his material frame. He is deprived at once, and forever, of all that hope had anticipated, or activity pursued, or experience gathered — and given over as a captive to death, and a prisoner to the grave!

Look to the grave — and what do you behold? Multitudes which no man can number, of human bodies, once as vigorous and active as our own — now buried in deep forgetfulness, and a prey to corruption and the worm — nothing remaining to attest their previous existence save a few bones beneath, and, perhaps, some fading epitaph above!

Go into every land, the same scene appears — however different in climate and scenery, however dissimilar in their institutions and customs, in this, all regions are the same — every land is the sepulcher of the dead. When musing on the earth as the vast repository of the dead, who does not feel that the grave is a melancholy scene — and yet a scene in which more than in any other he is personally interested, since it contains a large portion of his dearest kindred, and will soon receive into its bosom his own mortal remains! Dark, indeed, would be the end of man, were the grave his final resting-place! And over the wreck of the human family, we might have wept with unavailing anguish, had we not known and heard the Savior's voice, "I am the resurrection and the life! If any man believes in me, though he were dead — yet shall he live again!"

The Bible gives us some consoling views of this melancholy theme, in connection with that grand and universal scheme of grace, which gilds with the rays of peace and hope even the gloomiest prospects of man. It represents death and the grave as being under the jurisdiction and superintendence of the same divine person, who, as the Redeemer of his people, exercises a sovereign dominion over all the events of the present world. *Time*, with its solemn events — *eternity*, with its awful issues — and *death*, the passage which leads from the one into the other — are all equally under his control! So that, into whatever state of untried existence any of his people may be brought — they cannot, by any change in their circumstances, be placed beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction, or the reach of his guardian care.

*Death*, which severs them from every other connection, and the *grave*, which shuts them up from all other help — cannot separate them from his tender love, nor exclude them from his watchful eye — for he presides over death not less than over life. To him the sepulchers of the dead are as accessible as the abodes of the living; and go where they may, after death he meets with them, and cares for them in the state of disembodied spirits, and will ultimately bring them into the general assembly of the just in Heaven.

Both worlds are equally subject to his authority, and the dark pathway between the one and the other is also under his special care. So that, whether we live in the body — it is because he sustains us; or whether we die — it is because he summons us; or whether we enter into the invisible world — it is because he admits us. And everywhere, and at all times, on earth, or in the grave, or in the separate state — we are equally under the protection of One who, possessed of *infinite power*, *unerring wisdom*, and *unquenchable love* — will order all things that concern us, so as to fulfill his own gracious purpose in dying for our redemption, and to promote our present progress and our eternal perfection in holiness and bliss. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

These views are strikingly presented in the sublime prologue to the book of the Apocalypse, where, appearing to the beloved disciple in the magnificent, yet amiable character of God-man, the Redeemer declares, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell!" Every clause of this sublime declaration, coming as it does from our glorified Redeemer, is pregnant with assurance and consolation to his believing people, and is specially fitted to banish those fearful and anxious forebodings which oppress their minds in the prospect of death and the grave.

"I am the Living One," the first and the last; without beginning of days or end of years; self-existent, and therefore, independent of every outward condition; and incapable of change. He asserts his supreme divinity as a reason why his disciples should "not fear." And, surely, to every Christian mind, the fact that the Son of Man, in whom they have trusted as their Savior, is "the Living One," may well furnish a ground of unshaken confidence, since it assures us, that, happen what may — our trust is reposed on one, whose existence, and whose power to affect our welfare, cannot be destroyed by any event whatever, and that our interests for eternity are absolutely safe, being placed in his omnipotent hands!

But how much greater ought to be our confidence in him, and how much sweeter the consolation which his words impart, when he adds, "I *was*dead." He appears to the apostle not simply as "the Living One," the self-existent Son of God — but as God manifested in the flesh, the Son of God in human nature, and even in his glorified state, "like unto the Son of Man," whom the beloved disciple had often seen and followed as the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Let us attempt to conceive of the feelings with which the beloved disciple must have looked on his glorified Master; let us remember that he had accompanied him on earth, that he had leaned upon his bosom, and that he knew the sad history of his crucifixion — and we cannot fail to perceive how the mere fact, that the same divine Redeemer now stood before him, and spoke with him of the death which he had accomplished at Jerusalem, must have served to annihilate in the mind of the apostle the fear of death, and to open up to his view such a glorious prospect into the invisible world, as would strip death, the pathway that led to Heaven, of its terrors, however dark and dismal it might otherwise be.

And to every Christian, the words of our Lord, "I *was*dead," will suggest reflections that should serve to fortify the mind against the fear of death; or, at all events, to rebuke and mitigate the aversion with which it is usually contemplated.

Did the Redeemer die — a Being who claims to himself the dignity of "the Living One" — a Being not only of infinite dignity — but of spotless purity, and who, from the beginning until the end of his existence on earth, was the object of God's supreme delight and approbation? And shall *we*complain that death is allotted as our portion also? We, who, as created beings, are insignificant by our mortality; and by actual guilt — polluted and debased? To us, death comes as wages earned by guilt; but even were it otherwise — did death come to us as an accident of our being — how could we complain of the hardness of our lot, when Christ himself declares, "I *was*dead?"

Did the Redeemer die — he in whose sympathy and care we are commanded to confide, and to whom we are taught to look, in every hour of danger or distress, for needful support and consolation? And is it no encouragement to reflect, that he, into whose hands we commit our care, when in the extremity of mortal agony, and when vain is the help of man, has himself *drank the cruel cup*before us and felt its bitterness — that every inch of that dark valley was trod by him, and that, from his own experience, he knows what strength and support we need in that dreadful hour?

Did the Redeemer die — as the surety and representative of sinners — was his death a solemn expiation of our guilt, and an adequate satisfaction to God for the penalty which we had incurred? Is there no reason, then, to suppose, that dying, as he did, in the place, and on behalf of the guilty — death met him in a more formidable shape, and put into his hands a *bitterer cup*than can now fall to the lot of any of his people; and that their death will be greatly less terrible than it would have been by reason of his enduring in their place, the heaviest part of it?

For what is it that mainly embitters death, and surrounds it, even when viewed at a distance, with innumerable terrors? Not surely the mere pain with which it is accompanied — for equal or greater pain we have often endured — not the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body — for if that were all, however our sensitive nature might shrink from the shock — our rational nature might enable us to regard it with composure. Not the mere separation from the society and business of the present world — for that, however it may awaken a feeling of melancholy regret, can hardly account for the forebodings and terrors of which every mind is more or less conscious when it contemplates death. No; it is something more than the mere pain of dying, or the mere dissolving of the elements of our being, or the mere separation from this world — that *embitters the cup of death*.

"The sting of death is sin" — the same sin which gave us over as a prey to death, makes us also *slaves to the fear of death*. For, by the unvarying law of conscience, *sin and fear are bound up together*. And it is a conscience burdened with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment, which, in our case, arrows death with terrors unknown to the inferior and irresponsible creation.

But Christ died to expiate and cancel the guilt of his people; he has already endured, and by enduring, has taken away the penalty of their transgression. Death remains — but its *sting*is taken away; so that we may "thank God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," and may exclaim with the apostle, "Oh! death where is now your sting — Oh! grave, where is your victory?"

Did the Redeemer die — that he might show us an example of suffering affliction with patience, and be to us a pattern of faith and hope in our last extremity? And is there no consolation in the thought, that when we reach *the shore of that dark water which divides time and eternity* — we can fix our eye on one who, for our sakes, crossed it in triumph before us; and think of the love of our Redeemer, who, in compassion to our fears, became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," that, by his own example, he might teach us how to die? Had he returned from earth to Heaven in triumph — had he avoided the *dark valley*himself, and, summoning his legions of angels, left the world by a direct ascension to glory — then, whatever lessons he might have taught, and whatever commands and encouragements he might have addressed to his followers, respecting their conduct in that last hour of darkness and distress — his instructions would have had little effect in comparison with the charm of his example, when, placing himself in their circumstances, and submitting to their fate, he "bowed his head and gave up the spirit;" and met death, as he commands his people to meet it, in the *exercise of an unshaken confidence in God, and humble submission to his will.*Where shall we find such another example of holy fortitude for our imitation? Where shall we find such another instance of success for our encouragement?

Did the Redeemer die — that he might not only deprive death of its sting — but overcome him that had the power of death, and take it into his own hands? Let us, then, rejoice in his success; for once Satan had the power of death — but Christ has "carried captivity captive," and "Satan has fallen before him as lightning from Heaven." In that hour, which he himself emphatically called "the hour and the power of darkness," when he was in more than mortal agony, travailing in the greatness of his strength, he vanquished death and Hell, and he wrested from the hands of our greatest enemy, and took into his own possession — the *keys of death*and of the invisible world. Death still reigns — but Christ has now the dominion over death!

In token of his victory, the Redeemer adds, "I am alive for evermore!" The grave *received* — but it could not *retain*him. And while the fact of his interment may well serve to reconcile us to the peaceful grave, with all its loneliness and darkness, since it was embalmed by the presence of our Lord himself — the fact of his *resurrection*from the grave should enkindle the bright hope of a glorious morning, after that dark night has passed away.

For, did the Redeemer arise from the tomb? Then here, at least, is one example of restoration to life, after the agony of death was past — one case in which the spell of death was broken, and the cerements of the tomb burst, and the power of Satan vanquished — one living monument of the immortality of man — one incontestible proof, that the same body which died, and the same spirit which departed, may meet again after that fearful separation. Christ has risen, and in his resurrection we find the ground of an eternal hope!

Did the Redeemer arise from the grave in the same character in which he died — as the head and representative of his people? Then is his resurrection not only the *proof* — but the *pledge*; not only the *evidence* — but the *assurance*of our own. For if the *head*is risen — shall not the *members*of his body rise also? If, as our representative, he has passed into the heavens — then shall not we, in whose name, and for whose behalf, he undertook and accomplished his mediatorial work — follow him in our order and time? Did we *die*with him, and shall we not *rise*with him? "If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Because I live, you shall live also."

Did the Redeemer not only rise from the grave — but does he *live for evermore*? Is he the same yesterday, today, and forever? Not only *eternal*in his being — but *unchangeable*in his character, as our Redeemer? What, then, should cause us to despond, or make us afraid? "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Since Christ has died, yes, also, and has risen again, and is now and forever at the right hand of God, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing — will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

True, we know not what may yet befall us, nor into what untried circumstances, or state of being, that we may hereafter be brought. But we are sure that one day we must die and enter the invisible world; and we may well be concerned for an event which will have an everlasting outcome for good or for evil; but placing our trust in the efficacy of the Redeemer's death. And believing in the fact of his resurrection, we may take his own word as the rock of our confidence and hope, "I am alive for evermore, Amen;" and "because I live — you shall live also!"

If these views of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord are fitted to banish, or mitigate, the fear of death and the grave, and to inspire the hope of a glorious immortality — how much should their impression be aided by the sublime statement in the last clause of the passage, "I have the keys of death and of Hell!"

The power of *the keys*is an absolute power — a royal prerogative. Christ's authority is not confined to the visible Church on earth; it extends to the invisible world, and embraces under its jurisdiction all the disembodied spirits, of whatever character. Although they have left this world, they are still under the dominion of him, of whom it is said, that "at his name every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is as the Redeemer, that he asserts his claim to the keys; that claim is founded on the fact, that "he overcame death and him that had the power of death, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And it is expressly declared by the apostle, that, "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living!" Romans 14:9

That he is the Lord of the dead, is here asserted, "I have the keys of HELL." In the original there are two terms, each of which is rendered by the word "Hell" in the English version. The one, however, literally imports the invisible world at large; while the other denotes that department of the invisible world which is specially appropriated to the punishment of the wicked. In the passage before us, the more comprehensive term is used; and here, as elsewhere, it is to be regarded as signifying not merely the place of future punishment, although that is unquestionably included in it, but, more generally, *the world of spirits* — the entire state of retribution, whether of reward or punishment.

We learn from Scripture, that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two — Heaven and Hell; and that between the two, a great gulf is fixed — an impassable gulf of separation. But separated as they are, Christ reigns over both; and when he says, "I have the keys of the invisible world," he asserts his *dominion*over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into Heaven or Hell; and his absolute *control*over them in their final destination of happiness or woe.

When it is affirmed, that he has also "the key of DEATH," it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without his appointment; and, more generally, that he is lord of the living not less than of the dead, and has a thorough control over everything that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power over *death*necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over *life*and its affairs. And it is by the exercise of his providence in sustaining life — that he fulfills his purpose as to the time and mode of their departure hence.

So that, combining these several views, we arrive at this grand and comprehensive result: that *the Redeemer is possessed of absolute power over the course of our lives on earth; over the time and manner of our departure out of the world; and over that invisible state, in each of its great departments, on which our spirits enter when they quit their mortal tabernacles*.

And this noble testimony to the universal power and everlasting presence of Christ with his disciples, is fitted to suggest several reflections, which may be useful in dissipating their anxieties, and in fortifying their courage, when they contemplate either the future course of their pilgrimage here, or the solemn prospect of its termination, or the still more solemn, because untried and eternal, state on which they shall enter hereafter.

Has the Redeemer the keys of death? Then this consideration ought to relieve our minds both of the anxieties and the regrets which we are too apt to feel, in reference to the changes of the present life.

It should mitigate the anxiety which often preys upon the mind when we look forward into futurity, and contemplate the prospect of our own death. We should remember, that as the Redeemer alone has the keys of death — nothing can happen to send us forth from the world before the time which he has appointed for our departure. Neither man nor devils can abridge the term of probation assigned to us by our gracious Master. Nor, until he is pleased to call us away, shall any power on earth or in Hell prevail against us. No accident, no hostile violence, no insidious snare, no dark conspiracy, can touch our life — but by his command. And surely, when we reflect on the numerous dangers to which human life is, in its greatest security, exposed — the frailty of our frame — the diseases to which it is subject — our constant exposure to fatal accidents — the malice of open or concealed enemies — it must be consolatory to know, that the key of death is in the Savior's hands, and that, come what may, we cannot be forced out of the world, until he opens the door and bids us to come to Him.

More especially, when we are visited with disease, and threatened with a speedy termination of life, the Savior's power over the keys of death should repress or assuage those violent anxieties as to the probahility of death or of recovery, and those disquieting speculations as to the outcome of disease, and the mode of its treatment, in which we are too apt to indulge to an extent which unfits the mind for the serious exercises of religion, appropriate to a season of personal affliction. Who has not felt in the hours of languishing and sickness — that these painful and perplexing thoughts were even more harassing to his mind, than the pressure of disease itself, and that they diverted his attention, in a great measure, from the profitable contemplation of divine things?

Now, besides that they are injurious, as tending to divert the mind from what is certain — to what must necessarily be uncertain until the event shall disclose it — and useless, as being incapable of either ascertaining or altering the future outcome — it is our privilege, as Christians, to know that such anxieties are altogether groundless. *For disease cannot kill, nor can medicine cure — without the appointment of Him who holds in his own hands the keys of life and of death!*And if he has fixed the outcome of this disease, why should we be anxious?

If death is in our cup — that cup has been put into our hands at the time fixed by unerring wisdom and infinite love! And if the door of death is opening for our departure — it is because the tender Savior, whom we love and trust, is summoning us to be forever with Him!

Shall we, then, rebel against His appointment? Shall we doubt the love and wisdom of His determination? Or, as ignorant as we are of what is before us in this world, and of what really concerns our best interests — can we entertain the wish, that the power of determining the time of our death were wrested out of His hands and placed in our own?

True, we may have many ties that attach us to this world. We may be young, and, with the optimistic hope of youth, may cleave to life. We may be prosperous, and surrounded with many comforts. We may have a young and engaging family, whom we are loath to leave behind us to the cold charities of the world. We may have many dependents on our industry or bounty, who will bitterly lament our loss. But do we imagine that these considerations are not known to the Redeemer, or that He has not weighed them all? And if, notwithstanding, it is His will to summon us home — are we not prepared to yield up our faulty judgment to his unerring wisdom?

The same consideration should prevent or repress the anxiety which is too often felt respecting the *mode*and *circumstances*of our death — not less than respecting the *time*of its occurrence. A pensive mind is apt to be oppressed with *melancholy forebodings*as to the situation in which death may overtake it — and to muse on the thousand possibilities which imagination may conjure up in the darkness of the future — until it is overwhelmed with anxieties of its own creation!

We know as little of the *mode*of our death, as we do of the *time*of our departure hence; it may be that we shall leave the world with ease — or with difficulty; by a sudden stroke — or by protracted suffering. We may be, at the time, vividly conscious, or in a state of partial aberration, or totally insensible. We may die alone, or in the midst of friends. We may die by sea — or by land; at home — or abroad; on the highway — or in the solitary desert — or on our own pillow. These possibilities are apt to be converted, by a melancholy temperament, into the food of anxious disquietude and fretting care.

It is a very obvious consideration, that such anxieties, springing, as they do, from all possible forms of death, must, for the greater part, be *groundless*, as death can only meet us in one form at last. And that, even in reference to that form, in respect of which they may be well-founded, they are totally *useless*, as being of no avail to avert or alter it. That such people harass themselves respecting a matter which must be totally unknown, and which, were it known — is, nevertheless, beyond their control. That their present fears respecting it occasion a greater and more protracted suffering than the event itself could occasion, did it really occur in its most formidable shape. That fear is, in its very nature, an anticipation, and, in some measure, a foretaste of all possible evils — whereas in death, one form of that evil only is endured. And that such anxieties have the effect of spreading death, as it were, over the whole extent of life, according to the beautiful language of the apostle, when he speaks of some "who through the fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage."

But, without dwelling on these obvious considerations, what does it matter, after all, *where*, or in *what circumstances*we die? Die *where*we may — we cannot be beyond the reach of the Redeemer's protection! Nay, the fact that he has in his own hand the key of death, is a proof that he is present with us, and that he is thinking of us, in whatever *place*, and at whatever *time*death may overtake us; for there, where we die, he summons us; and it is ours to be ready and willing to depart at his call.

This consideration should repress, not only the anxieties which we feel in regard to the future — but also the regrets which we are too apt to cherish respecting the bereavements with which we have already been visited. It is not less instructive and consoling, when viewed, in reference to the death of relatives and friends, than when it is considered in respect to our own prospect of death. For it teaches us, that *the duration of each man's existence here is determined by the Redeemer;*that it belongs to him to appoint a longer or shorter period to each, as he will; and in doing so, we have reason to be satisfied, that he determines according to the dictates of infallible wisdom, although the reasons of his procedure must necessarily be to us, for the present, inscrutable.

We cannot tell why one dies in infancy, another in boyhood, a third in the prime of manly vigor, and a fourth reserved to the period of old age; and above all, why the most promising in talent and character, and the most useful in their several stations, are taken away — while others of inferior worth are often left behind. But suffice it for us, that this happens not by *chance*, neither is it the result of *caprice*or *carelessness* — but flows from that unerring wisdom, whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to the visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being.

The power of death being in the hands of the Redeemer, the duration of human life is, in every instance, determined by him. And none, therefore, ought to entertain the thought, either that death is, in one case, unduly premature — or, in another, unduly delayed. None live, either for a longer or for a shorter period than infinite wisdom has assigned to them. Reason teaches, that to his appointment we must submit, however unwilling — it being irresistible, and far beyond our control. So, as Christians, we should learn to acquiesce in it cheerfully, as the appointment of one who cannot err. That the *determined hour*had arrived, is a reflection that should serve to banish every useless regret — but that this hour was fixed by one in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance — is a thought which should not only induce resignation — but inspire comfort and peace.

For, when death does seize any of our friends, whether in the ordinary course of disease and decay, or by violence or accident — how consolatory to the mourning relatives is the thought, that it came at the bidding of the Savior, and that it has not arrived without his sanction and appointment! Otherwise, we might be apt to reflect, with unavailing regret — on certain remedies whose virtues might have been tried; certain physicians high in professional reputation, who might have been consulted; or to dwell, with painful self-reproach, on certain accidents that might have been prevented, and injuries which timely care might have cured. The mind will often busy itself with such reflections after the loss of a near and dear friend; but the very intensity of feeling which is thus called forth, is a sufficient proof that any carelessness or negligence that may have been manifested, was far, very far, from being designed or willful.

And although, where criminal negligence has been shown, no doctrine, however consolatory, can prevent regret, or should repress feelings of penitential sorrow. Yet, in other cases, where the heart bears witness to its own interest in the beloved object, the doctrine of *Christ's absolute command over the keys of death*, and the consideration that our friend was summoned away by a deliberate act of his sovereign wisdom — may well assuage the grief which such reflections on the commencement, progress, and treatment of the disease, are accustomed to awaken in the most sensitive and affectionate minds.

While this sublime statement should banish, or at least mitigate, the anxieties and regrets which we sometimes experience, in reference to the events of the present life — inasmuch as Christ's power over death implies a corresponding power over life and its affairs — it is equally fitted to fortify our minds for the *last struggle*, since it assures us that Christ will then be present with us. In the very article of death, it gives us comfort — for the Redeemer has the keys of death! Then he presides over that dark passage which leads from this world to the next; his power does not terminate with our present life — it extends from the world which is smiling in the cheerful light of day, to that mysterious passage which lies amidst the sepulchers of the dead, and which, to our imperfect vision, is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know not the secrets of that passage. We cannot know what it is to die. The mind may then have views and feelings of which it is impossible for us at present to form any conception — for who shall attempt to describe what may be passing in the soul when the tie that binds it to the body is breaking, and nature is undergoing death?

And what renders that scene still more solemn is, that *we die alone* — alone we enter on the dark valley. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of death — but they cannot accompany us, neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone; and in that solemn hour of separation from human fellowship — in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and are ignorant of what may meet us as we advance — Oh! how consolatory to reflect, that death itself is subject to the Redeemer's power — that he watches over the death of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life — but also on the secret mysteries of death.

Yes, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." There he is, where most we need a friend and comforter, standing at the gate of death, with absolute power over every enemy that can assail us, and with unquenchable zeal for our welfare. *Dark*, then, as the passage is, and *unknown*as are its dangers and pains — surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands, and to say with the Psalmist, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil — for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me!" for, says the Apostle, "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life — or death."

But Christ has also the keys of *the invisible world*at large — all, without exception, are under his control. His kingdom on earth is but a small dependency, compared with his universal dominion in the invisible state, where already are congregated, of the human race, ten thousand times ten thousand more than are any where to be found on the earth's surface, besides the hosts of spiritual beings of whom we read in Scripture, as angels, elect or fallen, archangels, principalities, dominions and powers. Not one human spirit that ever lived on the earth's surface has been extinguished — they are all at this moment alive in one or other department of the invisible world — and, holy or unholy, happy or wretched, they are under the dominion of our Savior. And under the same dominion are placed all higher intelligences, fallen or unfallen, of whatever rank and in whatever station they may be.

Could we form an estimate of the multitude of human spirits which must have passed into that vast region from our own world since the period of its creation — of the countless millions which every province of the earth, and every island of the sea, have yielded to swell the host of departed spirits — and could we, moreover, form any conception of the different orders of beings, purely spiritual, and the multitudes belonging to every order, together with their respective rank, and dignity, and power — could we conceive of the extent of that world, which is at once described as Heaven, the third heavens, and yet as stretching far above all heavens — then might we have some materials for forming an estimate of the grandeur and extent of the Redeemer's kingdom. But, unable as we are to comprehend a theme so vast in itself, and of which only a few glimpses are revealed in Scripture — surely it is consolatory to reflect, that whatever may be the extent of the invisible world — whatever the number, the rank, and the character of the various orders of its inhabitants — the whole of that vast region, and all these innumerable hosts, are under the dominion of him who was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," and who, as our Redeemer, has identified our interests with his own, by "dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification," and who is even now "at the right hand of God, making intercession for us."

When we come to enter on that spiritual world over which he presides, what reflection could so well support the mind in the prospect of such a destination as this — that, go where we may, we are still under the watchful eye of one who has given us the strongest assurances of his love? And may we not well believe, that, if we have trusted in him without being disappointed, while we sojourned in this remote province of his empire — then much more may we trust in his care, when we enter that invisible world where he is, and over which he reigns in the full manifestation of his mediatorial power and glory?

As Christ has the key of the *invisible world*at large, so has he the key of each ward or department — the keys of both Heaven and of Hell.

Has he the key of **Hell**? Then, knowing as we do, that there are rebellious spirits of great subtlety, and power, and malice, and that they are sometimes permitted to go about as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour — we might have many an anxious fear, lest, in the dark hour of death, some such should be watching for our spirit, when it ventures alone into the invisible world. But "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" — to that death-bed the watchful eye of the Savior is directed; he can and will restrain the malice of our enemies; and his promise is, that "whoever believes on him shall never come into condemnation," and that "none shall pluck them out of his hand!"

And has the Redeemer the keys of **Heaven** — that blessed asylum of purity and peace, where, in the midst of his redeemed, the Savior himself dwells? Then, in the hands of our best friend, one who is pledged to us by the sacredness of his Word, and by the shedding of his own blood — in his hands is the power of admitting us — and will he shut the door against us? — he who, for the opening of that door, descended from Heaven to earth, and whose prayer was and is, "Father, I will that those who you have given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory?" No, the door of Heaven is thrown open for the reception of his penitent and believing people. Even now is he "preparing a place for them in his Father's house, where there are many mansions." And thus will he receive and welcome them, on their departure hence, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world!" "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"