LAMENTATIONS

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Lamentations 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%201.9)

DISCOURSE 1090

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT REMEMBERING OUR LATTER END

[Lamentations 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%201.9). She remembers It should rather be, remembered. not her lost end; therefore she came down wonderfully.

TO men in general nothing appears sinful but that which violates in the grossest manner some positive command, and interrupts in a very high degree the welfare of society. But God considers an unprofitable servant as meriting the same doom as the dishonest; and informs us, that an unmindfulness of our latter end will bring his judgments upon us, no less than a determined commission of everything that is evil.

The Prophet Jeremiah is lamenting the sore bondage under which his country groaned in Babylon, and is assigning the reasons for which God had thus rejected her. But in doing this, he does not fix on any one particular sin, however great; but on that which had pervaded all ranks of people, their unmindfulness of their latter end.

In his words we read,

I. Their sin—

This is the common sin of all mankind—

Moses had forewarned the Jews of the things that should come upon them in the latter days: but they had never duly considered his predictions, nor labored to avert the threatened calamities. Thus has God warned us also of the miseries which the wicked shall endure in another world: but we will not regard his admonitions. The mirthful, the worldly, the ambitious, are intent on their several pursuits; but none says "Where is God my Maker [Job 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2035.10). [Psalm 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2014.2-3)." Even those who profess some regard for religion, are yet, for the most part, very little engaged in a preparation for eternity: their zeal, in the pursuit of heavenly things, bears no proportion to the importance of their object, or even to the labors which others use for the attainment of worldly vanities.

Nor let this be thought a trivial matter—

This it was, which brought down Jerusalem: and it will involve us also in the heaviest calamities. And well it may: for it is a contempt of God our Maker. In this view he himself complains of it [Psalm 10:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2010.4-6); [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2010.11); [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2010.13); and he represents all his attributes and perfections as dishonored by it His majesty, [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2012.4); his omniscience, [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2022.13-14); his justice, [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2094.7); his goodness and forbearance, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%202.4). It is also a contempt of Christ our Savior. He had even "died, to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" but, by our indifference, we make light of his mercies [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2010.16), and trample on his blood [Acts 13:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.38-41). [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2010.28-29). Finally, it is a contempt of our own souls. The most avowed enemies of God and his Christ profess to have some regard for their immortal souls: but God, who will not put a wrong construction upon our actions, tells us, that "he who refuses instruction, despises his own soul [Proverbs 15:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%2015.32)." Indeed this is but too manifest; since the man who remembers not his latter end, practically says, 'Give me the things which my body most affects; and, as for my soul, I care not for it: if my soul can be saved, notwithstanding my indulgence of the body, it is well: but if their interests clash, I will gratify my body, though at the peril, yes, to the certain destruction, of my soul.'

Can that then be light and trivial, which involves in it such awful consequences? Surely, though no flagrant crime were ever committed, this alone would be sufficient to bring upon us God's eternal wrath and indignation.

The evil of such conduct will abundantly appear, if we notice,

II. Their punishment—

The downfall of Jerusalem was a fit emblem of that which awaits impenitent transgressors—

Let us only compare the departure of Israel out of Egypt, guided, protected, and supported by God himself, and their establishment and increase in the land of Canaan, with, their miserable condition when they were carried captive to Babylon: "How was the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!" Thus wonderful will be our destruction also, if we continue to forget our latter end.

God himself warns us that our destruction will be great if we neglect our souls—

It will be sudden [Psalm 73:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2073.17-20). [1 Thessalonians. 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess.%205.3); tremendous [Jeremiah 23:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2023.17-20); irremediable [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%2029.1); and eternal 2 Thessalonians. 1:7-9.

Let us reflect on the change experienced by the Rich Man in the parable [Luke 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2016.19); [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2016.23); and we may conceive a little of that surprise and horror that will seize on us in the instant of our departure from the body.

Let us also, if we would escape this doom, regard the solemn warning, and the compassionate advice, which God himself has recorded for our instruction [Deuteronomy 32:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%2032.18); [Deuteronomy 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%2032.20); [Deuteronomy 32:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%2032.29).

We may improve this subject yet further,

1. For the warning even of real Christians—

We will suppose that your concern for your souls is such as to secure eternal happiness: yet a declension in holy zeal will produce a proportionable declension both in your graces and your comforts [Psalm 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2030.7). Son. 5:2-6. Let those who have ever experienced the blessedness of living near to God, and of being on the wing for Heaven, compare it with the darkness and misery of a drooping and deserted state; and they will see enough to make them watchful against spiritual decays, and increasingly mindful of their eternal interests.

2. For their comfort and encouragement—

There is a truth, not expressed indeed, but evidently implied in the text, namely, That all who remember their latter end, shall be wonderfully exalted. And what an encouraging truth is this. Let any one view Lazarus at the Rich Man's gate, and in Abraham's bosom [Luke 16:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2016.20-22), and he will see what a wonderful exaltation awaits the righteous at their departure hence. Even here the children of the devil, as soon as ever they believe in Christ, become "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty 2 Corinthians 6:18;" but hereafter they shall reign with him as partners of his glory [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.17). Let this hope then animate the Christian in his difficulties, and stimulate us all to more abundant diligence in our heavenly calling [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%203.3).

[Lamentations 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.22-23)

DISCOURSE 1091

THE VIEWS OF A SAINT IN HIS AFFLICTIONS

[Lamentations 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.22-23). It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

IT is in affliction chiefly that the children of God attain to any considerable eminence in religion. By trouble, they are led to realize their principles; and to seek at the fountain-head those consolations which the broken cisterns of this world are no longer able to supply. If David had never been an object of persecution to his enemies, we may well doubt whether he would ever have soared as he did in heavenly contemplations, or evinced such transcendent piety as glows throughout his Psalms. Jeremiah was a man deeply conversant with trouble; as he says: "I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath verse 1." But what sublime lessons does he teach us in the words which we have just read! Truly we may see in these words,

I. The views of a saint under affliction—

A man undisciplined in the school of affliction pores over his troubles, and thereby greatly disquiets his own soul. But a man who is taught of God will have his mind very differently occupied. He will delight rather in contemplating,

1. The lightness of his affliction, in comparison of his deserts—

Who, that calls to mind the multitude of his past transgressions, must not justify God in all his dispensations, however painful they may be to flesh and blood? "Shall a living man complain, (he will say,) a man for the punishment of his sins verse 39." No: he will acknowledge that Hell itself is his proper portion; and that anything short of that is far "less than his iniquities have deserved [Ezra. 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra.%209.13)." Instead, therefore, of complaining, like Cain, that "his punishment is greater than he can bear [Genesis 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%204.13)," he will say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not utterly consumed, even because his compassions fail not."

2. The multitude of the mercies yet continued to him—

An ungodly man, because lie is bereaved of some comforts, will overlook all the others which he is still privileged to possess. But a real saint will think how much worse his state might have been, and how man y blessings are still continued to him. He will say, My troubles are few; but my mercies are greatly multiplied: "they are new every morning." His rest by night, his comforts by day, and, above all, his constant access to God in prayer, and the rich Communications of grace and peace received from him, these things, I say, will fill him with holy gratitude, and turn all his sorrows into joy.

3. The unchangeableness of God under all his dispensations—

The saint will not regard God as an arbitrary Governor, that orders everything from caprice; but as a covenant God, who has engaged to provide for his people whatever may conduce to their best interests. Hence, under the pressure of his troubles, he will call to mind that God has said, He would "correct his people in measure, and not leave them altogether unpunished [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2030.11)." In this view, lie acknowledges that "God in very faithfulness has afflicted him [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.75)." Indeed, the faithfulness of God is that which, in such seasons, he contemplates with peculiar delight: "Why are you cast clown, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God [Psalm 42:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2042.5); [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2042.11); [Psalm 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2043.5). thrice."

In opening to you these views, I wish particularly to mark,

II. The beauty of religion as displayed in them—

Philosophy will do much to produce a resignation to the will of God. Indeed, common sense teaches us that it is in vain to murmur and repine at our troubles, and that the more patiently we bear our trials, the more we diminish their force. But the views which we have been considering, produce far more exalted effects. Behold,

1. How they compose the mind—

You see in this afflicted saint a meek submission, far different from any that philosophy can produce. Behold how he kisses the rod, and blesses the hand that smites him; and sees nothing but mercy, where an ungodly man would have noticed nothing but severity and wrath. Thus "he enjoys a light in the midst of darkness [Micah 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah%207.8-9);" and realizes the parable of Samson; "Out of the eater he brings forth meat, and out of the strong he brings forth sweet."

2. How they elevate the soul—

Behold the prophet, how he soars above self, and rises superior to all the dictates of sense! He forgets, as it were, his trials, in the contemplation of his mercies; and overlooks the chastisement, by reason of the love from whence it proceeds. This is a nobility of mind to which no philosopher ever could attain, and an elevation of sentiment which nothing but divine grace could ever inspire.

3. How they honor God—

Here the darkest dispensations are acknowledged, as the fruits of a wisdom that cannot err, of a love that knows no bounds, of a fidelity that can never change. Methinks, if there were no other end for which afflictions were sent, this were sufficient to reconcile us unto all; for if they lead to such discoveries of God, and such an ascription of praise to him, they more than compensate for all the pain that they occasion during the pressure of them on our minds.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who know but little of affliction—

A slight and superficial religion may satisfy you at present; but you will find it of little service when you come into trouble: nothing but deep piety will support you then. If you would be prepared for trials, you must get a sense of your own exceeding sinfulness, and of the wonderful mercies given to you through the sufferings of the Son of God. Then the heaviest trials will appear light, yes, as nothing in comparison of your deserts, and nothing in comparison of the obligations conferred upon you.

2. To those who have been brought into deep waters—

Look not on your afflictions as tokens of God's wrath, but rather as expressions of his love. There is a need for them, else they never would have been sent; and if they operate to purify your souls from dross, you will have reason to be thankful for them to all eternity. Be not, then, so anxious for the removal of your trials, as for the sanctification of them to your souls. Make but the improvement of them which is suggested in my text, and you will have reason to adore God for them as the richest blessings that could be conferred upon you.

[Lamentations 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.25)

DISCOURSE 1092

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO SUPPLIANTS

[Lamentations 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.25). The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

"THE earth," we are told, "is full of the goodness of the Lord [Psalm 33:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2033.5);" and indeed it is not possible to behold the universe at large, or to inspect with accuracy anything that is contained in it, without being convinced that God is good to all, and that his tender mercy is over all his works [Psalm 145:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20145.9)." But to the humble suppliant he manifests his goodness in a more especial manner, as we are informed in the words before us: from which we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The character here given of the Deity—

The humble suppliant is an object of his peculiar regard. To him he will pay attention,

1. In a way of merciful acceptance—

He may have sinned grievously, and for a long season; yes, he may have equaled even Manasseh himself in his iniquities, and yet find mercy with the Lord, provided he seek for it in humble, earnest, and believing prayer [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%2033.12-13); He may have even backslidden from God, and fallen grievously, after having long professed himself a servant of God; and yet, on his repentance, God will heal his backslidings, and love him freely [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%203.22). [Psalm 32:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2032.5); There are no bounds to the mercy of God towards returning penitents [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%201.18).

2. In a way of friendly communication—

Let any soul "draw near to God, and God will draw near unto him [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%204.8);" and let him "open his mouth ever so wide, God will fill it [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2081.10)." Does he need direction in difficulties? God will cause him to "hear a voice behind him, saying, This is the way; walk you in it [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2030.21)." Is he in deep affliction? God will afford him such a measure of support and consolation as his necessities shall require [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2051.3). Does he need peculiar supplies of grace and strength? God will give him "grace sufficient for him [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2012.9)," and "strength according to his day [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%2033.25)."

3. In a way of gracious recompense—

Not a sigh or groan shall pass unheeded by Almighty God [Psalm 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2012.5), nor a tear fall without being treasured up in his vials [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2056.8). And at the last day he will bear testimony to all the efforts which the contrite soul has made [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2066.2), and will compensate it with an eternal weight of glory; not indeed as a reward of debt, but as a reward of grace, which he has promised to all who seek him in his Son's name [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%206.37). [Romans 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%204.5).

And now what language will be sufficient to express,

II. The encouragement afforded by it—

To enter fully into this would occupy us too long. I will confine myself therefore to the hints suggested in my text. Surely this view of the Deity may encourage all of us,

1. To seek him with earnestness—

Were God regardless of the prayers of the poor destitute, we night well sit down in despair. But "he invites to him the weary and heavy-laden;" and says, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will bear you, and you shall glorify me [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2050.15)." We may well therefore go to him, and "pour out our hearts before him," and plead with him, yes, and "wrestle with him," as Jacob did, determining "not to let him go until he bless us." This, so far from offending him, will rather be most acceptable to his Divine Majesty; because he bids us "seek him with our whole hearts" and with our whole souls [1 Chronicles 22:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Chron%2022.19). [Psalm 119:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.2).

2. To wait for him with patience—

God may have many wise and gracious reasons for deferring his answers to our prayers: he may wish to embitter sin to us; to humble our souls move deeply; to make us more sensible of our need of mercy, and of our entire dependence on his grace. He may choose this way of weaning us from the world, of quickening us in all our duties, of advancing our attainments in the divine life, and of fitting us for greater usefulness to our fellow-sinners. He may delay his answers, so long as to make us doubt whether he has not "forgotten to be gracious unto us, and shut up his loving-kindness from us in displeasure." But, knowing his character, we should never abandon ourselves to despair, but "tarry his leisure;" and determine, if we perish, to perish at the foot of the cross, crying for mercy in Jesus' name. However long "the vision may tarry, we should wait for it," in a full and perfect confidence that "it shall not tarry" one single moment beyond what God in his wisdom sees to be the fittest time [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab%202.3). Of this we may assure ourselves, that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."

APPLICATION—

1. Let none of us, then, neglect the duty of prayer—

Prayer is indispensably required, in order to our obtaining of the Divine favor [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%207.7-8); And "if we have not, it is either because we ask not, or because we ask amiss [James 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%204.2-3). Brethren, remember, I pray you, what you have at stake; and trifle not in your approaches to the Most High God, as if he could be deceived by formal and heartless petitions. Could it once be said of you, "Behold, he prays!" we should have a good hope respecting you: but if you live not near to God, in the exercise of fervent prayer, we must declare to you, that God's goodness, so far as it respects you, will speedily come to an end, and be turned into wrathful indignation: for he has said, that "he will pour out his fury upon all who restrain prayer before him, and call not on his name [Jeremiah 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2010.25)."

2. Let us, in particular, exercise faith in prayer—

A man "who asks with a wavering mind, can receive nothing of the Lord [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.6-7)." Believe that "he is good," according as he has said, to all who "call upon him in spirit and in truth." You are authorized to expect at his hands whatever you ask, provided the conferring of it will tend to your welfare, and to the honor of his name [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%205.14-15). His promise to you is, "All things, whatever you shall ask, believing, you shall receive [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2021.22)." "Be strong, then, in faith, giving glory to him;" and "never be straitened in yourselves, since you need never fear that you shall be straitened in him:" for, as he is able, so is he also willing, to give you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or even think."

[Lamentations 3:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.27-29)

DISCOURSE 1093

THE BENEFIT OF EARLY AFFLICTIONS

[Lamentations 3:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.27-29). It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sits alone, and keeps silence, because he has borne it upon him. He puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope.

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many passages which appear strange and paradoxical, but which do indeed contain the most important truths. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting," says Solomon: and again, "Sorrow is better than laughter [Ecclesiastes 7:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles%207.2-3)." These, taken in conjunction with our text, "It is good for a man that be bear the yoke in his youth," are as much opposed to the general sense of mankind, as any assertions can be: yet, the more they are considered, the more just and important will they be found. The truth is, that men judge of things only by their reference to time; but God's estimate is formed with a more; immediate reference to eternity. If we consider only the operation of natural causes, we may see that the declaration in our text is just: for it is a common proverb, that 'practice makes easy;' and the earlier we are initiated into any are or science, the greater progress in it may be expected: but trials are indispensably necessary for the exercise of many of the Christian virtues: faith is called forth by difficulties; meekness and patience by provocations; forgiveness by injuries: so that a growth in these graces may be considered as materially advanced by early and long-continued occasions for their exercise. But, such is the corruption of our nature, that we need trials to purge it away: it is by fire that even good men must be refined from their dross: and, if we are called to experience afflictions in early life, we may hope our improvement will be proportionably great. In confirmation of this sentiment, we propose to show the benefit of early afflictions.

I. In a general point of view—

David, who had had a long and early experience of troubles, confessed "it was good for him that he had been afflicted [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.71)." And beyond a doubt, much benefit may be reaped,

1. From temporal afflictions—

The loss of health, of friends, of property, are heavy afflictions: yet, if duly improved, they may become real blessings to the soul. Illness in early life, though in many respects to be lamented and deprecated, tends exceedingly to counteract the vanity of the youthful mind, and the ardor of youthful passions. It renders a person sober, thoughtful, temperate, and willing to listen to subjects of a more serious cast; and keeps him from innumerable snares and difficulties, to which a buoyant spirit and a vigorous constitution would have exposed him.

Bereavements also (whether of friends or property), and disappointments in life, give us an early taste of the emptiness of the world, and the vanity of all created enjoyments. They have a tendency to direct the mind to higher pursuits, and to make us seek satisfaction, where alone it can be found, in the knowledge, the service, and the enjoyment, of God. The more we are made to feel that the creature is only a broken cistern, the more shall we be disposed to seek our consolation in the fountain of living waters.

2. From spiritual afflictions—

These are far heavier than any which mere temporal things can ever produce. "A man may sustain any trial respecting earthly things; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Yet are the groans and mournings of a deserted soul far preferable to the mirth and gaiety of a thoughtless sinner. A fear of God's wrath, though so distressing to the soul, has indeed a kindly influence upon us. How does it embitter to us the remembrance of former sins! How does it dispose us to desire true repentance, and to long for an interest in the Savior! What a different aspect does the sacred volume bear under such a state of mind! and how tremendous its threatenings; how glorious its promises! how happy they to whom those promises are made! In a word, an apprehension of God's wrath assimilates the mind thus far to the mind of God himself; since it invariably inspires this thought, "Happy are you, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!"

3. From afflictions for righteousness' sake—

These are often very deeply felt. A person who has embraced the Gospel feels in himself a change that should rather recommend him to the favor of the world: his tempera, his dispositions, his habits, his conduct, are all greatly improved; and yet he finds, that he is become an object of dislike, perhaps too of indignation and abhorrence. This is painful to the young disciple: when he begins to love his fellow-creatures, then he himself begins to be hated by then. His former habits, if ever so licentious, exposed him to a little blame perhaps, but not to hatred: but his love to the Gospel exposes him to all manner of hatred and contempt. This, I say, is painful; but yet it is very beneficial to his soul. He would be ready, like Lot, to linger in Sodom; but these persecutions tend to drive him out. They serve in a very peculiar manner to confirm in his mind the principles of the Gospel; because he is taught in that very Gospel to expect the treatment which he has received, and to bear his cross after Christ. He find too in the Gospel, that to suffer for righteousness' sake is a matter for self-congratulation; that he is to "rejoice in it, and leap for joy;" to account it the highest honor; and to expect from it the richest reward. Thus a new set of feelings are brought into his soul; a set of feelings as far superior to any that he ever before experienced, as the most reined sensations of the soul are above the lowest appetites of a beast.

But we will proceed to notice this subject,

II. In that particular view which is specified in the text—

There are two things in particular to which our attention is called, and which are of the greatest possible advantage to the soul;

1. Seclusion from the world—

When there is nothing to oppress the mind, we are apt to be off our guard, and to degenerate into a dead and worldly name. We too easily mix with worldly company, and are thereby led to adopt their sentiments, and to drink into their spirit. But when trouble comes upon us, we lose our relish for society: we affect retirement rather, that we may muse over the subjects of our grief; or, as our text expresses it, "We sit alone, and keep silence [Jeremiah 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2015.17)." O, who can estimate the benefits arising from this source? By communing with our own hearts in their secret chamber, we attain a knowledge, which is not to be gained either from men or books,—the knowledge of our own hearts. In these seasons too we gain such views of God, of his goodness, his mercy, his power, his grace, as are acquired only in the school of affliction. It is on these occasions also that the Lord Jesus Christ particularly endears himself to our souls, and communicates to us the abundance of his grace. In persons thus instructed there is for the most part a maturity of wisdom and of spiritual understanding that is rarely found among those who have never experienced the discipline of adversity. In comparison of others, they manifest the beauty and sweetness of religion in a high degree; excelling others as much as the experienced mariner does the man who has never combated a storm.

2. Submission to God—

"Tribulation works patience, experience, and hope." By directing the thoughts inwards, it leads us to see, what abundant occasion there is within us for Divine chastisements, and how much more lenient they are than we deserve; and they dispose us to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah%207.9)." At first, perhaps, nature revolts, and is impatient; but after a season, when we have "listened to the rod, and to Him that has appointed it," we become desirous only that it may drive out the folly that is hound up in our hearts. Then "we put our mouths in the dust," as penitents that are "dumb before God;" and we wait God's time, "if so be there may be hope," and his purpose may be ultimately accomplished, and the trials be sanctified to our eternal good. What a blessed state is this! like Aaron," to hold our peace;" like Eli, to say, "Let him do what seems him good;" like Job, to bless the Lord; and, like David, to say, "You in very faithfulness have afflicted me!" Surely to learn such lessons as these in early life is most desirable: and, if they cannot be learned without affliction, there is no affliction so severe, but that it will be richly recompensed by such an attainment.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have experienced no particular affliction—

While, on account of God's forbearance towards you, you have reason to be thankful, you have great reason also to fear: for, "if we are without chastisement, we are bastards, and not sons." At all events, there is much danger lest you become sad witnesses of that truth, "The prosperity of fools destroys them." Be watchful against the vanity of your deceitful hearts, and beg of God to augment towards you the Communications of his grace in proportion to your peculiar necessities.

2. Those who are called to bear the yoke—

Remember that your trials are the fruit of God's love to your souls: for "whom he loves, he chastens:" and, instead of thinking your lot hard, learn to "glory in your tribulations." and to "take pleasure in your distresses [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.3). [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2012.10)." It was not an ignorant or enthusiastic man that said, "We count them happy that endure;" and who from that conviction exhorts us, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations [Psalm 94:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2094.12) with [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.2); [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.12); [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%205.11)." Only take eternity into the account, and all your trials will appear light and momentary in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which they are working out for you [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%204.17-18).

[Lamentations 3:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.31-33)

DISCOURSE 1094

COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED

[Lamentations 3:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.31-33). The Lord will not cast off forever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

THE Prophet Jeremiah was, perhaps, above all other prophets, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It is possible, indeed, that in this chapter he may speak in part as a representative of the Hebrew nation; but still there is so much which has an immediate reference to himself, that we cannot but consider it as a record of his own experience verse 1–20. At all events, the consolations which he administers, whether they refer to himself in his individual capacity, or to the people collectively, are suited to every person under Heaven, while under the pressure of any trouble. To enlarge upon all the various topics which he adduces, would lead me too far, and would be the work of a large volume rather than of a single discourse. I shall content myself with noticing the subject so far only as it presents itself to us in the words which I have read: wherein you see,

Beyond a doubt, it is "God who causes grief"—

It is remarkable that the prophet does not merely affirm this (though that would be an ample security for the truth of the position); but he takes it for granted; "Though he cause grief (which it must be acknowledged he does), yet will he have compassion." To this truth the whole Scripture bears record. God expressly asserts it: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things [Isaiah 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2045.7)." Yes, so plain and undeniable is this truth, that the Prophet Amos appeals to us respecting it: "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it [Amos. 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos.%203.6)." Whatever we may imagine, "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring from the ground [Job 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%205.6);" but, whoever be the instrument that brings it upon us, God is in reality the Author of it; all creatures being only "as the axe or saw in the hands of Him that uses it," for the effecting of his own purposes [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2010.15).

It is no less our duty than our privilege to acknowledge this—

It is our duty: for we are not to conceive of anything as left to chance. This would be no better than Atheism. In fact, no man can for a moment indulge such a conceit, but through a total ignorance of God; leading him to imagine, that to attend to such numerous and minute concerns would be a trouble to God: whereas, He is as able to order everything in Heaven and earth, as he was to create the universe at first. And surely to have such a view of him, is an inestimable privilege; because, if nothing be done but by a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, nothing can be done which shall not issue in his glory and his people's good. Whoever, then, be the immediate agent, it is our wisdom to trace everything to the first great Cause of all; even as Job did, when, under all his complicated afflictions, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%201.21)."!

On this truth depends,

II. The consolation that is provided for us under it—

This is stated, as it were,

1. In answer to our fears—

When our trials are heavy and accumulated, we are ready to fear that they are sent in anger and will issue in our destruction. But God assures us, that "he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men" without necessity. There is, if I may so speak, a "needs be" for them [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%201.6); some evil to be corrected, or some good to be administered. Earthly parents are sometimes led by caprice, and "correct their children for their pleasure:" but God never does it but "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2012.10)."

As for our trials issuing in our destruction, the very reverse is God's intent in sending them: he sends them "to humble us, and to prove us, and to do us good at our latter end [Deuteronomy 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%208.16)." Did he intend "to cast us off forever," he would rather say, "They are joined to idols: let them alone [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos%204.17)." But it is not so that God deals with his people. "He will not cast off his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%2012.22)." "He will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: for once has he sworn, by his holiness, that he will not lie unto David," the great Head and Representative of all his people [Psalm 89:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2089.32-35).

2. In accordance with our hopes—

What does the afflicted soul desire but this, that "though God cause grief, yet will he have compassion?" This is what God does in the midst of the very chastisements he inflicts. "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel," even when for their iniquities he had delivered them into the hand of their enemies [Judges. 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg.%2010.16). Nor will he measure out his compassion according to our merits, but "according to the multitude of his own mercies." Nothing less than this, indeed, will satisfy the afflicted soul: nor, indeed, will anything less satisfy our compassionate God, who "in all our afflictions is himself afflicted; and who, in his love and in his pity, will effect our complete redemption [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2063.9)." The entire view of his dealings with us may be seen in his conduct towards his people of old: "Many times did he deliver them: but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies [Psalm 106:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20106.43-45)." "In a little wrath, he may hide his face from us for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2054.7-10)."

APPLICATION—

Let us endeavor,

1. To get just views of the Divine character—

There can be no comfort to the soul while we new God as a vindictive Judge. As long as a we are really desiring his favor, we are authorized to regard him as a loving Father, who seeks only the welfare of our souls. If we see a gardener prune his vine, or a workman chisel his stone, or a goldsmith put his gold into the fire, we are at no loss to account for their conduct, even though, to the eye of sense, it may appear severe: to improve the vine, to beautify the stone, to purify the gold, to bring forth from the furnace a vessel meet for the Master's use, are, in our minds, an ample vindication of the apparent severity. Let us, then, conceive of God as wise, and good, and gracious, and as personally interested in our welfare; and then we shall never murmur at any of his dispensations; but shall say, under the most painful trials, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good."

2. To make a suitable improvement of afflictive dispensations—

Every "rod has a voice, which we ought to hear, as well as Him also that has appointed it [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah%206.9)." Would we but listen attentively to God speaking to us in the night-season of affliction [Psalm 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2016.7), truly, we should learn many invaluable lessons. We often acquire a more just and comprehensive and endearing knowledge of God in one hour of adversity, than we had previously gained in whole years of prosperity [Job 36:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2036.8-10). Those who are accustomed to behold fine paintings, know that there is a point of view, in which if we are placed, we shall see every figure, as it were, standing out of the canvass. Now God is sometimes pleased to call us to this point, that we may have richer views of his Divine character. The ascent to the place may be difficult, and attended with pain; but the subsequent views will richly repay all our labor. Let us then especially seek to improve in our knowledge of God, and in an admiration of his adorable perfections. And if there be in us any evil, which God has discovered to our view, let us put it away, though it be dear to us as a right eye, or apparently necessary to us as a right hand. If our afflictions do but "yield us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, we shall never have reason to complain, however much we may have been exercised by them [Hebrews 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2012.11)." Only let them "purge away our dross and our tin [Isaiah 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%201.25)," and we shall bless God for the furnace by which this blessed change has been effected. "The trials that have been productive of so great a blessing will issue in praise and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ 1 Peter 1:6-7," and through the countless ages of eternity [Revelation 7:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%207.13-17).

[Lamentations 3:54-57](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.54-57)

DISCOURSE 1095

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

[Lamentations 3:54-57](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.54-57). Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You have heard my voice: hide not your ear at my breathing, at my cry. You drew near in the day that I called upon you: you said, Fear not.

THE Prophet Jeremiah was inferior to none in a compassionate regard for his country, whose calamities he bitterly deplored: yet was there no one more injuriously treated than he. He might well say of himself, "I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath verse 1." Of his grief, on account of his country's sufferings, and of the sad returns which his enemies made to him, he speaks in the preceding context, and in terms peculiarly tender and pathetic: "My eye runs down with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eye trickles down, and ceases not, without any intermission, until the Lord look down from Heaven. My eye afflicted mine heart, because of all the daughters of my city. Yet my enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me." The working of his mind, in this afflictive situation, he delineates in the words of our text: from which we may notice,

I. To what a state God's most favored servants may be reduced—

Jeremiah, for his fidelity in declaring God's purposes respecting that rebellious people, was cast into a dungeon, where he sunk in the mire, and was left to perish [Jeremiah 38:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2038.4-6). And in this situation he altogether despaired of life, and said, "I am cut off," "I am cut off out of the land of the living!" Distressing as this situation was, it may yet be expected to be endured by the faithful ministers of God in every age. Peter, in his day, was laden with chains in an inner prison, without the slightest hope of surviving the day appointed for his execution [Acts 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2012.6). Paul and Silas also, with their backs lacerated with scourges, and their feet made fast in the stocks, "had the sentence of death in themselves," and expected nothing but a speedy and a cruel death [Acts 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.23-24). And we, too, are warned by our blessed Lord, that we must be ready to lay down our lives for him; and that on no other condition can we hope for a favorable acceptance with him in the last day.

But there are other troubles yet more afflictive than these, to which every child of God is exposed, and under which he may be brought into the depths of despondency. There are seasons of temptation and spiritual desertion, in which the soul is led to say, with Heman, "My soul is full of troubles; my life draws near unto the grave. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Your wrath lies hard upon me; you have afflicted me with all your waves. Lord, Why castes you off my soul? why hides you your face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die. While I suffer your terrors, I am distracted. Your fierce wrath goes over me; your terrors have cut me off [Psalm 88:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2088.3); [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2088.6-7); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2088.14-16)." Here was a man of consummate piety, and yet thus bereft of consolation, and almost of hope. And such afflictive visitations are experienced by many at the present day. When the spirits have been broken by a long train of misfortunes, and disease of body has still further enfeebled the mind, it is not uncommon for Satan to make a fierce assault upon the soul, and, by his fiery darts, to inflict on it a deadly wound, such as causes it to despair even of life. The Savior himself, in the depths of dereliction, cried, "My God, my God! why have you forsaken me?" It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if his followers also be called to taste of that cup which he drank even to the dregs.

In the Prophet's experience, however, we see,

II. What remedy is open to them—

"I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon: hide not your ear at my breathing and my cry." Affliction drove him not from God, but to him: and though his overwhelming calamities disqualified him for that kind of orderly address which, in a season of calm reflection, he might have presented at the throne of grace, yet, by sighs and cries, he made known his desires to the Lord, who understands the language of the heart, though not expressed in clear and appropriate terms by the lips. To the same effect David says, "I opened my mouth and panted; for I longed for your commandments [Psalm 119:131](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.131);" by which I understand, that his desire to fulfill the commands of God was too great for utterance; so that he was constrained to express it only by deep sighs and ardent aspirations. Thus it was with the prophet at this time, when looking to his God with humble breathings and with fervent cries. Like Jonah at the bottom of the sea, he cried, "I am cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple [Jon. 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah.%202.4)."

Now, this is our proper remedy at all seasons: "Call upon me in the time of trouble, says the Lord; and I will hear you; and you shall glorify me." Nor need we be discouraged because we are not able so to compose our minds as to pour out our hearts in fluent and connected petitions. Abrupt cries are fitly suited to occasions of great extremity. Our blessed Lord himself, when in an agony in the garden of Gethsemane, cried thrice to his heavenly Father, repeating the same words [Matthew 26:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2026.44). It is not the fluency of our expressions that God regards, but the sincerity of our hearts: and, for the most part, when "his blessed Spirit makes intercession in us" with more than ordinary power, it is not by diversified and rhetorical language, but "by groans which cannot be uttered [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.26)." Whatever therefore our trouble be, and however desperate our condition, let us "give ourselves unto prayer [Psalm 109:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20109.4);" and not doubt but that God, who "hears the ravens," will "hear the voice of our weeping [Psalm 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%206.8)," and "fulfill the desire of our hearts [Psalm 145:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20145.19)." If we do but "look unto him, we shall be lightened [Psalm 34:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2034.5)."

The answer he received will lead us to contemplate,

III. The efficacy of that remedy, whenever applied—

In his despondency, the prophet had said, "You have covered yourself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through verse 44." But he found to his joy, that nothing could intercept either his communion with God, or his communications from God: for "God drew near to him, and said, Fear not." What marvelous condescension was here! While man was treating him as "the off-scouring and refuse of the people verse 45," God regarded him with all the tenderness of a Father, and bade him to fear nothing that man could do against him. And will God be less gracious to us, in our extremities? No: "he will surely hear the cry of the poor destitute, and will not despise their prayer [Psalm 102:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20102.17)." Hear the experience of David, and in him of the Messiah also: "Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dry: mine eves fail while I wait for my God. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. I am poor and sorrowful: let your salvation, O God, set me up on high." Having thus pleaded with God, and obtained an answer of peace, he adds, for the encouragement of all future suppliants, "The humble shall see this, and be glad; and your heart shall live that seek God: for the Lord hears the poor, and despises not his prisoners [Psalm 69:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2069.1-3); [Psalm 69:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2069.14-15); [Psalm 69:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2069.29); [Psalm 69:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2069.32-33)." "Hear you this," then, all you who, from whatever circumstances, are brought into deep waters! "Call upon the Lord out of the depths [Psalm 130:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20130.1);" and you shall soon he able to adopt the grateful recollections of David, and say, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of Hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears."

But let me more particularly call your attention to the consolatory voice of God in my text: "Fear not." Were you really in the hands of your enemies, you might well fear: but they, as well as you, are in the hands of God, who can "make even the wrath of man to praise him." Here is "a weapon formed against you," and "a waster" ready to wield it for your destruction: but they can effect nothing without God; since the very smith who formed the weapon, and the waster that threatens your destruction, are the work of his hands, and owe to him all the skill and power of which they are possessed. What then can they do against Him; or against those who are under his protection [Isaiah 54:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2054.15-17). Know, that to every soul that trusts in him is this word addressed; "Fear you not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness."

EZEKIEL

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

Ezekiel 2:4

DISCOURSE 1096

COMMISSION GIVEN TO MINISTERS

Ezekiel 2:4. You shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord God.

ASTONISHING is the patience which God has exercised in all ages towards his rebellious creatures. After their wickedness had attained such an height that he was constrained to pour out his indignation upon them at the Deluge, he still deferred his judgments an hundred and twenty years, that, if possible, he might reclaim the world by the ministrations of Noah. At a later period, when he had chosen to himself a peculiar people, and with mighty signs and wonders had brought them forth out of Egypt, and they requited all his kindness with nothing but murmurings and disobedience; though their provocations were beyond all conception great, he bore with them for the space of forty years, and would not utterly take away his loving-kindness from them. Again, when he had sent his people into captivity for the multitude of their iniquities, and especially for despising all his reproofs, and persecuting all his prophets 2 Chronicles 36:16, he still would not altogether abandon them, but sent his servant Ezekiel to preach to them in the land where they were carried captive. In the words of our text we are informed what Ezekiel was commissioned to say unto them: it was emphatically this; "Thus says the Lord God." We do not suppose that this was the whole of Ezekiel's message; but it was a peculiarly important and emphatic part of it: it was that which above all other things characterized the end and object of his mission. It is particularly to be noticed, that no specific message is annexed to these words; and that they occur twice also in the following chapter precisely in the same way Ezekiel 3:11; Ezekiel 3:27. Can we suppose that so peculiar a commission should contain in it no more than what appears upon the surface? Surely it must be acknowledged to be either very defective, or very comprehensive. To say that it was defective, would be to arraign the wisdom of God himself: we shall do well therefore to search into its real and extensive import. Three things then were evidently implied in it (which indeed are implied also in the commission given to ministers at this day); namely,

I. To declare God's will—

God has declared it unto us: And we are to declare it unto others with fidelity and affection: When objections are made to the word delivered, we must produce our warrant from the Holy Scriptures, and remind them whose word it is; "Thus says the Lord God." With this we ourselves are to be satisfied; and we must require others to regulate their views by the infallible dictates of inspiration.

II. To assert His authority—

We find men in a state of rebellion against God: We, as his ambassadors, are to offer them terms of reconciliation: If our terms be thought too humiliating, we must declare that God will never offer them any other; and that unless they accept these, they must inevitably perish: While we encourage them by representations of God's mercy and love, we must also intimidate them with exhibitions of his justice, his power, and his truth.

III. To seek, notwithstanding all our discouragements, the salvation of their souls—

We must expect, that, if we discharge our duty aright, we shall meet with many and great discouragements: "briers and thorns will be with us; yes, we shall dwell among scorpions." But "nothing is to move us," "nor should we account even our lives dear unto us, so that we may but fulfill our ministry," and be "pure from the blood of all men": The saving of souls is the work committed to us; and we must prosecute that work, "whether men will bear, or whether they will forbear".

Learn from hence,

1. The importance of the ministry—

God has ceased to impart his mind to men in a way of immediate revelation. His written word is that by which he now instructs the world: and he has set apart an order of men, whose duty it is to make known his revealed will. They are "not to teach for doctrines the commandments of men," but simply to declare what God himself has spoken. In the execution of their office they are God's ambassadors, yes, if we may so speak, his representatives: they speak to men "in Christ's stead;" and the word they deliver, is "not theirs, but God's." While then, on the one hand, we magnify our office, we ought, on the other hand, to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

2. The duty of those who are ministered unto—

When a minister is proclaiming, "Thus says the Lord God," the people should "tremble at the word;" and, while he "declares the whole counsel of God," it becomes them to "receive it with meekness" and simplicity. They should not be offended at his fidelity, but be thankful for it. They would nut commend a watchman, who should leave a family to be burnt in their beds, rather than alarm them with the cry of fire; or a sentinel, who should suffer a camp to be surprised by their enemy, because he would not alarm them by giving notice of their approach: much less then should they approve of those who "prophesy smooth things," and "speak peace unto them, when there is no peace." "Those who have God's word, must speak God's word faithfully;" and those who hear it, should obey it cheerfully, and without reserve.

Ezekiel 7:5-9

DISCOURSE 1097

APPROACHING END OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE

Ezekiel 7:5-9. Thus says the Lord God: An evil, an only evil, behold, income. An end income; the end is come: it watches for you; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto you, O you that dwell in the land: the time is come; the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon you, and accomplish mine anger upon you; and I will judge you according to your ways, and will recompense you for all you abominations. And my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense you according to your ways, and your abominations that are in the midst of you; and you shall know that I am the Lord that smites.

EZEKIEL is perhaps the most terrific writer of all the prophets: there is a force and energy in his denunciations which can find no parallel: his repetitions are so frequent, as to present before the view of the reader the very judgments which he predicts. In the chapter before us we are made to see, as it were, the Chaldean army in the very act of desolating the city and temple of Jerusalem, and of carrying into captivity all who should survive the mortality occasioned by pestilence, by famine, by the sword See the foregoing chapter. In fact, the siege commenced within three years of these predictions, and terminated in their most exact accomplishment. It is not our intention to enter into the consideration of this prophecy as it relates to the Jews: we shall rather take occasion from it to observe in general,

I. That the final execution of God's judgments is fast approaching—

The period for the execution of them is certainly fixed in the Divine counsels—

"Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world." Nothing is left to chance: everything takes place "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." We are ready to consider things as depending altogether on those by whose agency, or whose authority, they are done. But men are only instruments in God's hands: they are his sword, and the staff of his indignation; and they only carry into effect what "his hand and his counsel have determined before to be done." The elements in like manner all "fulfill his will." It was at the precise time that he had ordained, that the waters deluged the earth, and that fire and brimstone consumed the cities of the plain. As in the self-same night that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, God brought his people out of Egypt; so at the precise period fixed by him were they carried captive to Babylon, and dispersed all over the world at the destruction of their ecclesiastical and civil polity by the Romans. The time also for the day of judgment is fixed, though it is still hid in the bosom of the Father: and "the times," whether of communities or individuals, are altogether "in his hands."

When that period is arrived, they will be executed to the uttermost—

At present there is mercy mixed with judgment; but in the last day there will be "judgment without mercy." Wrath now comes on offenders with measured severity; but then without any other measure than their own deserts. Then the cup of God's indignation will be poured out for them without mixture, and they shall drink it to the very dregs Revelation 14:10-11. Terrible is that name whereby the day of judgment is designated, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men 2 Peter 3:7." This present time may, even in reference to the ungodly, be called "The day of salvation;" because salvation is freely offered to every one of them: but that is "the day of wrath," against which an accumulated and daily augmenting treasure of wrath is laid up for them, and shall "come upon them to the uttermost."

This view of the day of judgment sufficiently shows,

II. That that time should be much and deeply contemplated—

Let us then contemplate,

1. Its gradual approach—

Every day and every hour is bringing it nearer to us. The delay to us indeed may appear long: but it is nothing when compared with eternity: "A thousand years are in God's sight as one day, and one day as a thousand years." Profane persons and infidels will ask, as it were, in derision, "Where is the promise of his coming 2 Peter 3:4." But "their judgment lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not 2 Peter 2:3. Let those who are advanced in life consider this. Their days must of necessity be few; and consequently every hour should appear to them as it does to criminals under sentence of death; even the striking of the clock should remind them, that the hour for their departure is rapidly advancing, and must soon arrive. And young persons too should remember, that they also are liable to be cut off in the midst of their days; and that, even if they live to the age of man, their time will soon have passed away, and appear as a dream in the night. But our text informs us, that "the end watches for us:" yes, it may come as a thief in the night." Who then should not stand on his watch-tower, that he may be prepared for it?

2. Its actual arrival—

The day of judgment, whenever it shall arrive, will find men as much unprepared for it as at this moment. In the days of Noah, persons of every description engaged in their respective occupations with the same confidence as if nothing had been spoken respecting a deluge; "they ate, they drank, they planted, they built, they married and were given in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came: thus will it be also in the day of judgment; persons of every age and condition will be as secure as at any period of their existence, until the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge shall summon them to his tribunal. What a sound will this then be, "An end, the end, is come!" Then will be an end of all that now renders life desirable; an end of all pleasures, whatever be their kind or quality; an end of all means of grace, no opportunity now remaining for prayer and seeking after God: there will be an end of all hope of mercy, the door of Heaven being closed, as Noah's ark was, by the hand of God himself. Then will be "evil, an only evil," such as will have no mixture of good in it. O what "a morning" will that be, when the voice shall sound, "Awake, you dead, and come to judgment!" This will not be a mere echo, a delusion, "a sound reverberated from the mountains;" but a fearful reality. Let us for a moment contemplate the state of the antediluvian world, when they saw the face of the earth gradually disappearing, and the loftiest mountains sinking into the waters of the great deep: O what fear, what terror, what distraction would be visible on every side! Thus will millions, in the last day, be "calling upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." Would to God that men would now endeavor to realize that scene; and that they would "prepare," while yet there is time afforded them, "to meet their God!"

That time being the commencement of a never-ending eternity, it is obvious,

III. That we should spend our whole lives in preparation for it—

What is the preparation that becomes us?

1. We should humble ourselves before God for all our sins—

When Nineveh was warned that in forty days it should be overthrown, the inhabitants, from the highest to the lowest, repented of their sins in sackcloth and ashes; yes, they, though heathens, and warned only respecting the death of the body, made this improvement of their time. How much more then should we do it, who are warned respecting the death of our souls, and know not that we have forty hours to live! If God will "judge us according to our ways," and "pour out his fury" upon all in proportion to their sins, methinks we should mourn over our sins day and night, and get them washed away in "the fountain opened for sin and for impurity," even in "the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin."

2. We should get our souls renewed by Divine grace—

The foolish virgins, as well as the wise, expected the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom: but the foolish were not careful to have oil in their vessels with their lamps: hence, when the cry was made, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes!" they had their oil to seek, and were therefore excluded from the marriage-feast Matthew 25:1-13. This shows us what should be now our one concern. If we have not the Spirit of God dwelling in us, in vain will be all our profession, in vain the flame which arises only from our natural spirits: the distinction between us and others will speedily appear, and a corresponding judgment be passed upon us. How long he may delay his coming, or how soon he may arrive, we know not; and therefore we should not lose an hour in seeking that unction of the Holy One, which alone can fit us for the possession and enjoyment of the heavenly bliss.

3. We should be watching against everything that may unfit us for the Divine presence—

This is the instruction which the Apostles uniformly give us: "The end of all things is at hand: be therefore sober, and watch unto prayer 1 Peter 4:7;" and again, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand Philippians 4:5." There are dangers and temptations all around us: not only do evil things solicit our regard, but things that are most innocent often become a snare to us. Surely then it becomes "those who have wives to be as though they had none, and those who weep to be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not 1 Corinthians 7:29-31;." "The fashion of this world is passing rapidly away;" and "then comes the end." O! happy they who are prepared for it! Happy they "whose loins are girt, and whose lamps are trimmed, and whom the Lord, when he comes, shall find watching for him!" "What I say then unto one, I say unto all, Watch."

4. We should be intent on finishing the work which God has given us to do—

Our Lord cautions us to "work while it is day, for the night is coming, wherein no man can work." When the end comes, there is no more scope for exertion, no further opportunity to supply what is defective, or to remedy what is amiss: "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave." "Whatever then our hand finds to do, let us do it with our might".

Ezekiel 8:15

DISCOURSE 1098

HIDDEN ABOMINATIONS EXPOSED

Ezekiel 8:15. Then he said unto me, Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn you yet again, and you shall see greater abominations than these.

MAN is ready to complain of God's judgments, as though they were unmerited or severe. But "God will be justified in his sayings, and will overcome when he is judged Romans 3:4." The captives in Babylon thought that God had dealt hardly with them. God therefore gave to the Prophet Ezekiel, who was among the captives there, a vision of what was at that very time transacting in the temple at Jerusalem, notwithstanding the judgments that had been inflicted on them. This was the sixth year of king Jehoiakim's captivity; and yet did the remnant of the people in Jerusalem continue as impenitent as ever. It was on account of their idolatries that God had given them over into the hands of the Chaldeans: yet was idolatry practiced at Jerusalem in all its most hateful and abominable forms, even by the priests and elders, who ought to have exerted their authority to repress it. They labored, indeed, to conceal their impiety from common observation; and therefore they built a wall to obstruct the common entrance into the place where they assembled: but the prophet, in his vision, spied a hole in the wall, which he was directed to enlarge, so as to get access to the door; and then on entering at the door, "he saw every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about, and seventy elders, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan at their head, offering clouds of incense to them verse 7–11." Being directed then to go to another part of the temple, he saw "still greater abominations," even a multitude of "women sitting, weeping for Tammuz," some deified monster of iniquity verse 13, 14." Then, in the passage which I have read, he was told, that, on going to another part of the temple, he should "see greater abominations still." Accordingly, he went into the inner court of the temple, and there saw about five-and-twenty men, "with their backs towards that part of the temple" where the holy of holies was, and which was the more immediate residence of the Deity, and "worshiping the sun towards the east verse 15, 16." The Lord then appeals to the prophet, whether there was not abundant reason for the judgments which he had inflicted on the nation; and declares his determination to chastise them with yet greater severity; "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? Therefore will I deal with them in fury: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and, though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them verse 17, 18."

In its primary sense, this passage doubtless refers only to the Jews; and to them at the period here specified. But, when we consider that the deportation of the Jewish people into captivity, their subsequent deliverance from that captivity, and their restoration to their own land, were all typical of what yet passes in the world, and in the Church, and in the heart, we feel authorized so far to accommodate the words of our text to existing circumstances, as to take occasion from them to point out the hidden abominations which may be discovered from a closer inspection of,

I. The world—

The abominations that are visible to all are exceeding great—

It is not possible to have the least fellowship with the world, and not see that iniquity abounds on every side. In truth, "the whole world lies in wickedness," or under the power of the Wicked one 1 John 5:19.

But the more we know of the world, the more wicked will it appear—

A person who looks only on the outward appearance of things would be ready to think that Paul's description of mankind is a libel on human nature. But the picture which he draws is indeed but too accurate. "Men like not to retain God in their knowledge; and therefore he gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them Romans 1:27-32." There is no abomination that was ever practiced among the most abandoned of mankind in former ages, but may still be found, nearly, if not altogether, to the same extent as ever. Where Christianity has diffused its light, these deeds of darkness are kept from common observation: but human nature is the same in every age; and "the God of this world" exercises over it the same despotic sway as ever Ephesians 2:2.

The same humiliating truth may be applied also to,

II. The Church—

The outward-court worshipers are, for the most part, exceedingly corrupt—

Let any one dispassionately survey the principles and practices of the Church of Rome; and then say, whether the abominations of that Church will not be found abundant, in proportion as the scrutiny is minute. What is the very foundation of the whole edifice of Popery, but a compound of pride, ambition, covetousness, fraud, cruelty? The doctrine of merit is at the root of all. The heads of that Church have no object in view but to promote their own secular interests and power. They draw from the votaries of their religion all which they can by any means exact. A system of lying wonders is maintained, to delude their followers: and the most horrible cruelties are exercised towards those who submit not to their impious ordinances and institutions. The Heathen themselves are not more flagrant in their idolatries, than they who exalt the Virgin Mother above their Incarnate God.

I say these things in reference to the Romish Church, because the ear of Protestants is open to receive the truth in relation to a Church from which they have separated. But, if Protestant Churches are freed from some of the grosser abominations of Popery, are they not on a par with Papists themselves in relation to the evils from which Popery has sprung? Do we not find Protestants, whether priests or people, as secularized as any of the votaries of Popery can be? Do we not find them as full of pride, ambition, covetousness, fraud, cruelty, as Papists themselves, only not exercising these dispositions exactly in the same way? The truth is, that, among the generality of Christians, there is little found except the name: and that, if they had been brought up as heathens, they would have occupied much the same place in the scale of morals, as they do at this hour.

Would to God we could except from this censure the worshipers of the inner court!

On the two first occasions, the prophet was directed to the outer court of the temple; but, on the last, God himself, in his vision, "brought him to the inner court of the Lord's house verse 16." Come we, then, to inspect that part of the Church which professes more of sanctity, and boasts of greater nearness to God. Are there no abominations to be found there? Are there no evil practices indulged by those who would be thought to excel in piety? It is well, perhaps, that the world do not know all that passes in the secret inclosures of the temple: for they would be far more stumbled than they are by the inconsistencies and impieties which would there be found. They do wrong, indeed, in casting reflections on religion, on account of the faults of those who profess it. "To speak evil of the way of truth 2 Peter 2:2," and to "blaspheme the name of God Romans 2:24," on account of the falls of professors, is absurd in the extreme: for religion discountenances evil of every kind; and, as far as it prevails in the soul, it restrains evil. And therefore while I open the abominations of the inner court, I solemnly guard all against imputing them to religion, or thinking less favorably of religion on account of them. But it must be confessed, that, among religious professors, there are multitudes who walk unworthy of their holy profession; multitudes, who are as worldly and as covetous in their desires, as destitute of truth and honesty in their dealings: yes, and as corrupt and vicious in their practices, as the ungodly world. Those who have seen the interior of religious societies, and witnessed the proud domineering spirit of some, the conceit and forwardness of others, the bigotry of others, the hypocrisies, envyings, evil-speakings of others, the lying and dishonesty of others, the lewdness and impurity of others; in a word, those who know the most of what is called the religious world, will have seen, to their grief and shame, that the evils of the seven Asiatic Churches are far from being yet excluded from the fold of Christ: there are yet "wolves in sheep's clothing," many who "say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;" and, though professedly of the Church of Christ, are yet, in truth, "of the synagogue of Satan Revelation 3:9." God knows, that, in declaring these things, we would be glad to be found false witnesses, and to retract our assertions, if the truth of them were not unhappily established beyond all possibility of doubt.

It is yet further applicable to,

III. The heart—

This, as the prophet tells us, is superlatively deceitful—

There is not anything which we greatly affect, but the heart will find out some special reason for doing it: nor are we called to anything that will thwart our inclinations, and obstruct our interests, but it will furnish us with some convenient pretext for declining to make the sacrifice. It has a great deal of ingenuity, in covering the malignity of what is evil, and in discharging us from the obligation of what is good Isaiah 5:20. By the substitution of a name, it operates a change in our views of any action, as much as if it changed the quality of the action itself. Under its guidance, covetousness becomes a just regard for one's family; bigotry, a holy zeal; cowardice, a prudential care. Peter thought with himself, perhaps, to benefit the circumcision, when he constrained the Gentiles to submit to Jewish ordinances; whereas he was beguiled by a fear of that resentment which the Judaizing teachers were likely to manifest, if he did not comply with their wishes: and Barnabas too, and other holy Jews, were carried away by his dissimulation Galatians 2:12-13. There is no man who is not at times betrayed by it into some line of conduct, which, on a more calm and unselfish view of it, is found to have been injudicious: and we often find that the motives for which we gave ourselves credit were only a delusion of Satan, operating under the semblance of an angel of light 2 Corinthians 11:14.

It is also, as the same prophet informs us, unsearchably wicked Jeremiah 17:9.—

The corruptions of it are, for depth, unfathomable; for number, countless; for enormity, surpassing all conception. None but the heart-searching God himself can know it. Let any one mark, for one single day, the workings of his heart, and the thoughts which pass through it; and he will be perfectly amazed, that a creature, sensible in some measure of his obligations to God, and desirous to serve him, should, in despite of all his endeavors to purify himself, be so corrupt. But, after having accomplished the most diligent search, and renewed it ever so often, he will be very far from having attained a perfect self-knowledge; and circumstances will still arise, that shall bring fresh corruptions to light, or place their workings in a new point of view: so that, on turning again to view some corner unexplored, he shall find more and greater abominations than before.

Behold then here—

1. The folly of man—

The Jews in the temple, having concealed themselves by a wall from the eyes of men, and practicing their abominations; in the dark chambers of their imagery," supposed that they were hidden from the eyes of God also. "They said, The Lord sees us not; the Lord has forsaken the earth verse 12." But God saw them, and directed the prophet how to get a sight of them also. And can we suppose that God does not see us, or that he will not record our ways in the book of his remembrance? Be it known to you, my brethren, that "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves Job 34:22." "God knows the things that come into our mind, every one of them Ezekiel 11:5;" and "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart 1 Corinthians 4:5.""Settle it then in your minds, that God's eye is over you; and never presume to do that in darkness which you would be ashamed to have proclaimed upon the house-tops.

2. The forbearance of God—

What does God behold! All the iniquity that is committed upon the face of the whole earth is seen by him completely, in all its bearings, and with all its aggravations. How wonderful must be his patience, that he can bear thus with us, under such an accumulated load of guilt! We wonder not that he once destroyed the earth with a deluge, or once poured fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain: the wonder is, that these judgments have not been so repeated, as utterly to destroy the whole human race. To go no further than to our own individual state: that man can know little of himself, who is not utterly amazed that he is at this moment an inhabitant of earth, and not doomed, long since, to endure all the pains and miseries of Hell. Let then "this patience and long-suffering and forbearance no longer be despised; but let the goodness of our God lead us to repentance Romans 2:4."

3. The wonders of redeeming love—

This is the world for which God has given his only-begotten Son. This is the world for which the Lord Jesus Christ left the bosom of his Father, and came down to earth, that he might bleed and die. Nor in this whole world is there a single individual, who, if he repent and believe in Jesus, shall not find acceptance with his God. Not one should be cast out; no, not one: "Though his sins were red as crimson, they should be white as snow." What wonders of love are here! Who can ever comprehend their height and depth, their length and breadth? Search into them ever so deeply, and contemplate them ever so minutely, and we will say without hesitation, "Turn again, and you shall see greater wonders than these." Indeed, to all eternity will they be unfolding to us, with ever-augmented light and evidence; and to all eternity will they be to us an ever-increasing source of joy and blessedness. To contemplate them here, is the way to be filled with all the fullness of grace Ephesians 3:18-19; and to contemplate them in Heaven, will be to us a fullness of glory for evermore Revelation 5:8-13.

Ezekiel 9:4

DISCOURSE 1099

DUTY AND BENEFIT OF MOURNING FOR SIN

Ezekiel 9:4. And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

THERE is in the minds of ungodly men an atheistical idea, that God "does not regard" the actions of men; and that, as to any interference in their concerns, "he has forsaken the earth." This was a common sentiment among the Jews Ezekiel 8:12; Ezekiel 9:9; and it practically obtains to a vast extent among us. To imagine that God notices such trifling matters as those which occupy our minds, is supposed to derogate from his honor. But God is omnipresent and omniscient; the minutest as well as the greatest things are all equally present to his all-seeing eye; and everything is noticed by him with an especial view to a future day of retribution. This is particularly stated in the whole of the preceding chapter. The elders of Israel who were at Jerusalem were given to idolatry; but they were extremely anxious to conceal their practices from the eyes of men: hence they performed their idolatrous rites in some secret chambers of the temple, which they had enclosed with a wall in order to a more effectual concealment. But God in a vision pointed out to his prophet, who was at Babylon, everything that was transacted in the temple at Jerusalem: and, after having given him many successive and more enlarged views of the abominations that were committed there, issued an order to the angels who had charge over the city, "to go forth and slay" the offenders; but strictly prohibited them from coming near to any person to whom these abominations had been a source of grief, and who had, in consequence of that, been "marked in the forehead" by a person expressly commissioned for that purpose Read the whole preceding chapter, as connected with the text.

Though the whole of this was a vision, it was, in fact, a just representation of the distinction which God would make between the persons who were guilty of idolatry, and those who lamented its prevalence among them: and it may serve to show us, in a very instructive way,

I. The character of the Lord's people—

Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates:" and, as it prevailed to an awful extent at that day, so abominations of every kind yet prevail—

They prevail in the world at large. We speak not now of the evils that are visible to all, but of those which are of a more hidden nature. In every order of society there are peculiar and appropriate evils, justified perhaps by those who commit them, yes possibly dignified with the name of virtues, which yet are an utter "abomination in the sight of God." Were all the intrigues of the ambitious, the wantonness of the licentious, the deceits of the covetous, the characteristic arts of every class of sinners, exposed to view, what a mass of iniquity should we behold! Yet God beholds it all; a mass which infinitely exceeds our highest conceptions, and which none but God himself could endure to behold.

They prevail also, we regret to say it, even in the Church of God. It was among those who professed the worship of the true God, that all those abominations were practiced in the Temple at Jerusalem: and we know that many lamentable evils were found in the Churches that were planted by the Apostles themselves. Can we wonder, then, if at this time tares be growing up with the wheat? It were vain to deny that there are many who dishonor their holy profession, and give sad occasion to the enemies of religion to blaspheme that name whereby we are named. The pride, intolerance, and overbearing conceit of Diotrephes may yet be found, amidst high professions of superior zeal and sanctity. Who has ever looked into the interior of religious societies, and not seen the same undue preference to some preachers, and contempt of others, as disgraced the Corinthian Church in the days of Paul? Who has not discovered many a Demas, who "loves this present world," and foregoes his spiritual advantages with a view to increase his gains 2 Timothy 4:10. It would be well if even the base crimes of falsehood, and overreaching, and dishonesty were not sometimes found in the skirts of those who would be thought to have kept their garments clean; yes, if intemperance also and impurity did not give the lie to their profession. But the more we inspect the sanctuary of God, the more we shall see occasion for humiliation and grief on account of many, who "have a name to live, but are dead;" and who, through their misconduct, "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." And such may well expect that "judgment shall begin with them Compare verse 6 with 1 Peter 4:17." We need scarcely add, that evils prevail also in the heart even of true believers. Paul himself confessed, that there was "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and sometimes bringing him into captivity to the law of sin in his members:" and the more conversant we are with our own hearts, the more we shall bewail our innumerable short-comings and defects. Our impatience, our distrust of God, our unbelief, our obduracy, our sloth, our coldness in duties, our sad mixture of principle even in our better actions; our want of love to the Savior, our want of compassion for our fellow-creatures, our want of zeal for God; alas! alas! our want of everything that is good, may well make the very best of us "sigh and cry," and, like Paul, to account ourselves "less than the least of all saints," or rather as "the chief of sinners."

To bewail these abominations is characteristic of every child of God—

Hear how Moses lamented them in his day Deuteronomy 9:18-19; how David also Psalm 119:53; Psalm 119:136, and Ezra, bewailed them Ezra. 9:3; Ezra. 9:5; what extreme heaviness the Apostle Paul felt in his soul on this account Romans 9:1-2; and especially in relation to those very evils which we have specified as obtaining among the professing people of God Philippians 3:18-19. And where is the saint in all the Bible who did not "groan within himself" on account of the burden of his own in-dwelling corruptions Romans 8:23. The more any person knows of God and of his own soul, the more disposed he is to say with Job, "Behold, I am vile Job 40:4."

Before we proceed to the second point for our consideration, let us examine ourselves, whether these things are a burden to us, yes, our chief burden Zephaniah 3:18. Jeremiah 13:17. Romans 7:24.: We have no pretensions to true religion, any farther than we answer to this character of mourners on account of sin.

From marking thus minutely the character of the Lord's people, we proceed to notice,

II. Their privilege—

God sets a mark on every one of his people, a mark on their foreheads, whereby they are infallibly known to him, and shall assuredly be screened from the destroying angels. They shall be protected,

1. Here—

The deliverance of Noah from the Deluge, and of Lot from Sodom, shows not only what deliverances God can grant to his chosen people, but what may be expected by all who mourn over, and labor to counteract, the abominations that are around them 2 Peter 2:5-9. In Babylon, God interposed to effect a literal accomplishment of this prophetic vision; obtaining liberty for Jeremiah, and others of his believing people, while the unbelieving part were visited with the heaviest calamities Jeremiah 15:11; Jeremiah 39:11-12. And at the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the disciples of Christ were rescued, as it were by miracle, from all the horrors of the siege, while their unhappy and devoted brethren were left to experience such troubles as never came upon any other nation under Heaven.

But, if God do not see fit to exempt his people from the calamities that fall on others, he will so support them under their trials, and so sanctify to them their afflictions, that they shall be constrained to say, "It was good for them to have been afflicted." He will enable them to "glory in tribulations," and to "take pleasure in distresses," as fruits of his paternal love, and as means of furthering in their souls the purposes of his grace.

2. Hereafter—

The seal which God has set in their foreheads will distinguish them from all others, as clearly as sheep are distinguished from goats. Nor will there be any danger of mistake in any instance whatever. In Egypt the destroying angel did not smite one house whereon the blood of the Paschal lamb was sprinkled; nor will the judgments of God fall on one individual, who has laid to heart the abominations of Israel. "God has set them apart for himself;" and for him they shall be preserved. No evil shall be "come near to him who has the mark in his forehead." While "fire and brimstone are rained" down upon all others without distinction, these will be safely lodged in God's holy mountain, beyond the reach or possibility of harm.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think lightly of sin—

By many it is thought a mark of weakness to sigh and cry for the sins of others, or even for our own See their character drawn: Amos. 6:1; Amos. 6:3; Amos. 6:5-6. But let those who have such light thoughts of sin, consider what sin has done, in this world, and especially in the world to come. What innumerable evils have existed, and do yet exist, throughout the world! yet is there not one in the whole creation, which is not the fruit of sin. And if we could obtain one sight of those dreary mansions, where fallen angels, together with all who have perished in their sins, abide; or could hear but one groan of a damned soul; we should no more account sin a light matter: no indeed, it is "fools only, who make a mock at sin." If this do not suffice, let such an one consider, what has been done to expiate sin. Go, sinner, to Gethsemane, go to Calvary, and contemplate the agonies and death of your incarnate God; and then say, Whether sin be not a tremendous evil, for which no sighs or tears can ever be sufficient? But, without extending our thoughts to subjects so much beyond our reach, let us only observe what have been the feelings of persons when once they were brought to a just sense of their sins: let us hear the bitter lamentations of Peter, or the heart-rending cries of the converts on the day of Pentecost; and we shall no longer doubt what ought to be our views of sin, by whoever it may have been committed, whether by ourselves or others. Sure we are, that in the last day there will be no diversity of sentiment respecting this: the glorified saints, and the condemned sinners, will have but one view of this matter, O that now, even now, the judgment of every one among us might be rectified; and that, before another day, God might see reason to set his mark upon us, as "mourners in Zion!"

2. To those who answer to the character described in our text—

Persons who sigh and cry on account of sin, are apt to yield too much to desponding fears. But they have in reality abundant cause for joy and gratitude: for if, on the one hand, they be greatly burdened on account of sin, they have, on the other hand, reason to rejoice that sin is their burden. Instead of being in so deplorable a state as they imagine, they are in a state most pleasing to God, and most profitable to themselves. So pleased is God with those "who are poor and of a contrite spirit," that his eyes are fixed upon them with the utmost delight and delight Isaiah 66:2; and the Lord Jesus, the Judge of quick and dead, repeatedly declares them blessed Matthew 5:3-4. Let not any one therefore be dejected because of the depths of depravity which he sees within him; but let him rather conclude, that God has discovered to him these hidden abominations; and let him beg of God to give him a clearer and fuller insight into them; that so his humiliation may he more deep, his faith more simple, his gratitude more lively, and his devotedness to God more entire. Nor let any one be afraid of seeing thus the corruptions of his heart: for, if only our self-knowledge drive us to Christ, and endear him to our souls, it will prove a source of every virtue; of contrition, of fear, of dependence on Christ, of love to his name, and of zeal for his glory. A sense of our necessities will make us cry unto him for the gift of his Spirit; and by that Spirit we shall be "sealed unto the day of redemption," and "rendered meet for our heavenly inheritance."

Ezekiel 11:5

DISCOURSE 1100

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

Ezekiel 11:5. I know the things which come into your mind, every one of them.

THERE is much of atheism in the heart of man. The language of every one, in the secret of his own bosom, is, "The Lord does not see, neither will the Almighty regard it Psalm 94:7." Doubtless this argues more than brutish stupidity Psalm 94:8-9; but still it prevails to an awful extent, even over those who have the best means of instruction. The Prophet Ezekiel had reason to complain of it in his day; and, for the purpose of counteracting it, he declared from God to all the rulers of the Jewish people, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them."

That we may all be suitably affected with this thought, I will,

I. Establish the assertion in our text—

There is no man who does not consider God as approving or disapproving of his conduct according to the testimony which his conscience gives respecting it 1 John 3:20-21; and this universal conviction respecting the omniscience of the Deity is, though not a demonstration, yet certainly a strong presumptive proof, that God is omniscient. But his omniscience may be certainly inferred,

1. From the law he has given us—

The law, not by construction only Matthew 5:28, but in plain terms Romans 7:7, takes cognizance of the secrets of the heart. But to what purpose is such a law given, if God be not able to enforce it? Or how can he enforce it, if any motion of the heart be hid from him?

2. From the plain declarations of Holy Writ—

These are numberless. Hear in what terms God himself appeals to the whole world respecting it: "Am I a God at hand, and not afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? says the Lord. Do not I fill Heaven and earth? says the Lord Jeremiah 23:23-24." The whole of the 139th Psalm is written for the confirmation and illustration of this truth; which Job also was persuaded of in his inmost soul: "I know that you can do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from you Job 42:2." But we have an illustration of it in the New Testament which is worthy of more particular notice: "All things," says the Apostle, "are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do Hebrews 4:13." Here the writer refers to a fact well known to the Hebrews. When a sacrifice was to be offered, not only was it examined externally, to see whether there were any blemish in it, but it was flayed, and cut down the back-bone, and laid open, that so its inward parts might be inspected by the priest. Thus are the inmost recesses of our soul both naked and opened before our God, and not an "imagination of the thoughts of our heart" concealed from him.

3. From the appointment of a day of judgment to judge the world—

To what purpose can such an appointment be, if God do not behold every secret of the heart? The true quality of our actions depends chiefly on the motives and principles from which they spring. But nothing short of omniscience can discover these: and hence God asserts his omniscience in reference to this very day: "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings Jeremiah 17:10."

Not to multiply proofs of so clear a point, let me proceed to,

II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it—

The subject being as important as any that can occupy the human mind, I will endeavor to improve it,

1. In a way of general reflections—

In the contemplation of God's omniscience, we cannot but be struck with the thought of God's wonderful patience and forbearance. If only the actions of men were discerned by him, there were abundantly sufficient every day and hour to provoke him to wrath, and to bring down on the whole world the judgments which desolated the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But he sees all the motives and principles of men, and all the hidden abominations which are indulged in their hearts: and yet he bears with us, and waits to be gracious to every returning penitent. O let us be sensible of our obligations to him, and "let his goodness lead us to repentance Romans 2:4."

Nor shall we be less struck with the erroneousness of the judgment which many form of their state before him. Many judge of themselves only by their acts, while in their hearts, if they would but watch the motions of them, they might find abominations without number. Well does Solomon say, "There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness Proverbs 30:12." But let it be remembered that an angry thought is murder, and an impure look adultery, and the only contention among us will be, who shall take the lowest place.

Nearly connected with this is the thought of the awful disclosures which will be made in the day of judgment. If we look back only upon our own lives we shall see enough to fill us with shame and confusion of face: What then will be the feelings of the whole assembled universe, when the thoughts of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the whole aggregate of iniquity that has ever been either acted or conceived be made to appear in one collective mass! Ah! the whited sepulchers that will then be opened, and the loathsome abominations that will be exposed to view! In those indeed who have obtained mercy of the Lord, the exposure will only call forth songs of praise and thanksgiving: but to those who have died in their sins, the anguish will be inconceivable: and glad would they be if rocks or mountains could fall upon them, to hide them from the shame with which they will be overwhelmed Daniel 12:2.

2. In a way of more particular ADDRESS—

Tremble, my beloved brethren, for your past sins: for not one shall be concealed in that day, unless indeed through the tender mercy of our God it have been blotted out of the book of God's remembrance: The evil of our thoughts, no less than of our acts, must be accounted for Acts 8:22. Wash too in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood. If so much as one sin be left for you to answer for, it were better for you that you had never been born. Nor ever imagine that the tears of penitence can wash away sin: there is no fountain for you but that which was once opened on the cross for sin and for impurity. It is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from sin: but "that can cleanse from all sin." At the same time guard against the incursion of sin in future, even in thought. Already are our sins more in number than the sands upon the sea-shore; and shall we yet be adding to the mighty load? Have we not rendered ourselves sufficiently loathsome in the eyes of a holy God? Let us never forget that "his very name is, You God see me Genesis 16:13." But not to act from a mere servile fear, labor to approve yourselves to God in the whole course of your lives. Let your actions, words, and thoughts be such as the heart-searching God will approve Proverbs 4:23. Then will he bear testimony to you as "Israelites indeed in whom was no deceit;" and he who has beheld your most secret thoughts will, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, applaud and "reward you openly."

Ezekiel 11:23

DISCOURSE 1101

DEPARTURE OF GOD FROM HIS TEMPLE

Ezekiel 11:23. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.

THE vision with which the Prophet Ezekiel was favored, and which he records in the first chapter, is of very difficult interpretation. In it there were represented to his view four living creatures, all moved and actuated by the Spirit of God Ezekiel 1:4-14; there were also wheels moved by them Ezekiel 1:15-21, and the glory of God was enthroned above them Ezekiel 1:26-28. The general import of this vision we apprehend to be, that the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministration of angels and holy men devoted to his service, manages everything for the good of his Church. But from the eighth chapter God shows, that when his people shall provoke him by their impieties, he will withdraw from them, and give them up to all those judgments which their iniquities have deserved. This is at first but slightly intimated Ezekiel 8:6; but in our text it is actually carried into effect. The manner in which his departure took place, is deserving of particular attention. It was by several successive steps; the bright cloud, which was the symbol of his presence, and which is here called "his glory," left the accustomed place of its residence between the cherubim, and descended "to the threshold of the house Ezekiel 9:3." From thence it moved to the court of the temple, which was on the north side, where the cherubim had already moved Ezekiel 10:3-4; Ezekiel 10:18. The word "went," verse 4. should rather be, "had gone." After that, it went to the door of the last gate, attended both by the cherubim and the wheels Ezekiel 10:19. Then, lastly, with the cherubim and the wheels, it deserted the city altogether, and went to the mountain on the east side of the city Ezekiel 11:22-23. What was the design of God in all these gradual removes, but to manifest the reluctance with which he yields to the necessity imposed upon him, of leaving his people to the ruin they have merited?

Hence then we take occasion to show,

I. How averse God is to forsake his people—

Look we to his declarations?

What can be more express than his assertion, yes, his oath, that he "has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live Ezekiel 33:11." How pathetically does he lament the obstinacy of those who withstand all the influences, and defeat all the purposes of his grace: "How long shall it be before you attain to innocency?" "Will you not be made clean? when shall it once be Jeremiah 13:27." The idea of abandoning his people seems almost to overwhelm him: "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you up, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim Hosea 11:8. See also Psalm 81:13-16." But of all the passages in Holy Writ in which the Divine compassion towards obstinate offenders shines forth, there is none that exceeds the lamentation of our blessed Lord over Jerusalem; "O that you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things belonging to your peace!" "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not!"

Look we to examples?

What more astonishing than the forbearance of God towards the antediluvian world during the space of one hundred and twenty years? Mark his patience also towards his people in the wilderness, where for forty years their conduct was one continued scene of murmuring and rebellion. Even towards the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Messiah, he commanded his messages of mercy to be delivered in the first place: that city which had exceeded all others in iniquity was to be the most favored of any in the whole universe, by the united labors of all the Apostles. But we need no further proof of God's backwardness to cast off his people, than what we may all find in our own bosoms. We all are living monuments of his patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance. If his compassions bad not been infinite, not one of us would have been here this day, to speak or hear of them.

True it is, that "his Spirit will not always strive with men:" but yet he does not abandon them at once; as will appear, while we show,

II. What are the different steps by which his approaching departure may be discovered.

God "has pleasure in the prosperity of his people:" but, when constrained to leave them, he manifests his anger gradually, in order to awaken them to repentance, and to prevent the execution of his severer judgments. He withholds,

1. The manifestations of his love—

While his people conduct themselves in a becoming manner, he delights in every possible exercise of mercy towards them. He "draws near to them," and "lifts up the light of his countenance upon them," and "sheds abroad his love in their hearts," and testifies to them of their adoption, and "witnesses with their spirits that they are his." But when they draw back from him, he withholds from them these gracious communications. They now pray indeed, but find not a present and prayer-answering God: they read also, but feel not that power and sweetness in the word which they once did: they attend ordinances, but find them not, as once, to be "the gate of Heaven." The sun is hid behind a cloud; and they are no longer animated with his cheering rays: "I hid me," says God, "and was wroth, because they went on frowardly in the way of their hearts."

Inquire, then, beloved, whether any such calamity as this is come upon you? If it be, know that this is God's first step towards a final departure; and if you do not arrest his progress by penitence and a renewal of your first works Revelation 2:5; Revelation 3:3, he will go yet farther from you, and be brought back again to you with ten-fold difficulty. If you have lost the cheering presence of your God, know that he has already gone "to the threshold of the house."

2. The influences of his grace—

God is pleased to strengthen his people with might by his Spirit in their inward man, so that they are enabled to overcome the world, to mortify the flesh, and to with stand all the principalities and powers of Hell. He endues them with grace sufficient for them: but, if they are unfaithful to the grace received, he will withdraw it, and leave them to the unassisted efforts of their own arm. Then, like Samson with his locks shorn, they will become weak as other men: the world will regain its ascendant over them: their natural propensities will return with renewed force: and Satan will be able so to practice his former wiles, as to gain the most fatal advantage over them. They are like Israel before Ai, because of the Achan in their camp Joshua 7:11-12.

Here then is another subject of inquiry for us. Do we find that we are less able than formerly to resist our besetting sins? that we have less power to repress the workings of evil tempers, and of corrupt affections? Do we find that duty is more difficult than in former times, and sin more easy and pleasant?: Then we may know that God has gone, not to the threshold only, but even to the court. O fearful state! What cries, and tears, and labors, become the person that is reduced to it! He has not a moment to spare: if he would not lose God speedily and forever, he must humble himself before God in dust and ashes; he must "repent and turn himself from all his transgressions, else his iniquity will become his ruin."

3. The warnings of his Spirit—

The conscience of one that lives near to God is made tender, as the apple of his eye: and if by any means he be betrayed into sin, he mourns, and weeps, and never finds a moment's rest, until he has "washed it away in the fountain opened for sin and for impurity." But this sensibility is soon lost: it is God's presence only that preserves it: and if God's "Holy Spirit be quenched by us, he will give us over to a hardness of heart," so that the things which once would have occasioned the deepest humiliation, shall now scarcely produce a sigh.

And can it be, that any one is so far left, as to have his eyes blinded as to the malignity of sin, and his conscience seared as to the commission of it?: Yes: there are many who are thus beguiled by Satan from the simplicity that is in Christ;" and they have reason to fear that God will speedily take his flight, and execute that threat, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." Truly, "there is but a step between them and death."

This leads us to set before you,

III. The dreadful state of those who are forsaken by him—

"Woe unto them," says God, "when I depart from them Hosea 9:12." yes, woe unto them indeed; for,

1. They are delivered up into the hands of their spiritual enemies—

As, when Jesus had departed from Mount Olivet (the very mountain on which the glory of God abode, when it had forsaken the temple and city) that began to be fulfilled, "Your house is left unto you desolate:" and when, "by grieving and vexing the Holy Spirit we have provoked him to become our enemy," our case is become altogether desperate: he says concerning us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone." Then "the evil spirit that had been driven out, takes to him seven other spirits to occupy our hearts;" and our "last state becomes worse than the first." Not that such a person must necessarily be given over to gross and open vice: he may be left under the power of pride and infidelity, or of terror and despondency, or of hardness and obduracy: but, to whatever he is left a prey, "God swears in his wrath, that he shall never enter into his rest."

2. They live only to increase their guilt and misery—

Every day they live, they only augment the measure of their iniquities: and, strange as it may seem, immediate death, though attended with immediate damnation, would be to them a mercy. In one view indeed, the shortest respite from death may appear a blessing: and so it would be, if they were not sealed up under condemnation: but, being "given over to a reprobate mind," they live only "to heap up misery against the last days," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Unhappy soul, whoever you are, when thus forsaken by your God! "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."

We will conclude this subject with answering two questions—

1. How are we to reconcile this doctrine with other parts of Scripture?

It is certain that the Scriptures speak much respecting the determination of God never to forsake his people 1 Samuel 12:22. Isaiah 54:9-10. Jeremiah 32:40. Hebrews 13:5; And we believe that God will fulfill his promises, and that not one of them shall ever fail. But there are passages equally strong on the other side 2 Chronicles 15:2. 1 Corinthians 9:27. 2 Peter 2:20-22; and they in their place need equally to be enforced. The former are necessary to encourage hope: the latter, to excite our fear. The truth is, we apprehend, that no person is warranted in believing himself a child of God, any farther than he has an evidence of it in the conformity of his soul to the will of his heavenly Father. With the progress of sanctification his confidence may well increase; but with a declension in sanctity there ought to be a proportionable relaxation of his confidence. When therefore he is in a truly spiritual state, he may fitly he carried forward on the wings of hope, and love, and peace, and joy: but when he declines from that state, he needs the quickening influence of jealousy and fear: and, if any "turn back unto perdition," they then prove to the world, that their former confidence was delusive; and we must say of them, as John does, "They went out from us; but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us 1 John 2:19."

If men would receive the whole word of God, without contending for human systems, they would find no such contradictions as they are apt to imagine: or, if they found some expressions which they knew not how to reconcile with others, they would at least learn to exercise candor towards those who differed from them, and to leave the full explanation of these hidden mysteries until the day when God himself shall cast the true light upon them. Our concern is, not so much to reconcile the difficulties of Scripture, as to learn from every part its appropriate instruction, and its legitimate use.

2. How are we to avert this awful calamity?

We should mark with extreme care the very first motions of the Deity that indicate his displeasure. The occasional hidings of his face should lead us to inquire, what there has been amiss within us, what neglects or miscarriages that have grieved his Holy Spirit. We should instantly betake ourselves to fasting and prayer, entreating him to "show us, why he contends with us?" Like Jacob, we should "wrestle with him all the night, and say, I will not let you go until you bless me:" and, having regained his presence, we should labor constantly to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." Were we thus to exert ourselves in the first instance, we should walk continually, as it were, in the light of his countenance: but if we disregard the first intimations of his displeasure, and suffer him to depart, from his throne to the threshold, from the threshold to the court, from the court to the gate, we shall find it no easy matter to recover the testimonies of his love, and the influences of his grace. "Be instructed then, (says the Lord,) lest my soul depart from you Jeremiah 6:8." Be instructed in the necessity of unintermitted watchfulness and prayer. Be instructed to "guard against the very appearance of evil," on your own part, and against the smallest withdrawment on the part of God. Thus will your whole life be a continual feast; and God will be greatly glorified in the whole of your conversation.

Ezekiel 12:23

DISCOURSE 1102

DEATH AND ETERNITY NEAR AT HAND

Ezekiel 12:23. The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.

EXCEEDINGLY diversified were the ways by which God communicated his mind to his ancient people. At Mount Sinai he spoke to them by an audible voice, and by legible characters engraved on tables of stone. To the high-priest he imparted the knowledge of his will, by means of the Urim and Thummim, which constituted his breast-plate. To the prophets he revealed himself by dreams, and visions, and inward inspiration. The Prophet Ezekiel was favored with many and most extraordinary visions; some of which were very obscure; while others were either manifest in themselves, or were made clear by a special revelation of their import. On many occasions the prophets were directed to make use of some significant actions, which were to convey to the people knowledge of the events which awaited them. Of this last kind was the revelation now made to them by the Prophet Ezekiel. Many of the Jews had been carried captive to Babylon. But, because there yet remained in Judea a king of their own nation, the people who lived under him thought that he would protect them from any fresh invasion, and even liberate their captive brethren also from the Chaldean yoke. But they continued to rebel against God as much as ever; and God therefore warned them, that all of them, both king and people, should go into captivity. Such warnings they had often received from the mouths of other prophets; and because God had exercised forbearance towards them, they thought that the threatened judgments should never be executed, or, at all events, not be executed in their day. This even passed into a proverb among them; so that it became a common saying among them, "The days are prolonged, and every vision fails verse 22." But, in opposition to this, the prophet was ordered to exhibit before them, in his own person, a representation of the impending judgments; and to announce to them God's determination to inflict them speedily: "Say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision."

In improving this subject, there are two things to be noticed:

I. The tidings here announced—

These, as I have observed, were, that "the proverb which they had used should cease;" and that all the judgments which God's servants had from time to time denounced against that people should speedily be accomplished.

Now, similar tidings I have to announce to you. Concerning you, also, have many visions been revealed—

You have been warned, times without number, that God hates, and will punish, sin. You have been told, that death will arrest you, and carry you into the presence of your God; that, according to your state before him, God will deal with you in a way of judgment or of mercy; and that the state in which you will then be fixed, will abide forever.

But you have disregarded them, even as the Jews of old did—

Some will go so far as to say, that "these visions will fail," and never be accomplished. Others of a less daring habit, who would not venture thus flatly to contradict the word of God, will yet divest it of all its power, by supposing that it refers to other times and other persons, rather than to themselves at this time: "The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of the times that are afar off verse 27." If a man, duly authorized, were to come and arrest us for any crime, we should feel a personal interest in all that he said: but when the plainest and most pointed truths are spoken to us from the Lord, we hear them as if we had no personal concern in them whatever; and are no more affected with them, than we should be with a relation of some events which had occurred, or were about to occur, in some foreign nation with which we were personally unconnected.

I must however declare to you, that "the days are at hand, for every vision of God's word to take effect"—

Death and judgment are not far off from any of us: for what is the longest life, when viewed in connection with eternity? But how few, in comparison, live to an advanced age? yes, what multitudes are cut off in the very prime of life! And what a change in a congregation does a few years effect! and, when "our day is come, has not every vision its full effect?" Go, and see whether God's word was not verified towards the Jews in Babylon. God himself put it to their descendants, in a way of solemn appeal, "My words, and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? To which they were constrained to reply, "Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so has he dealt with us Zechariah 1:6." And so also shall his every word take hold of you, and be fulfilled in you. Think what you will of his long-suffering and forbearance, if you continue to disregard his warnings, know of a surety, that "your judgment lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not 2 Peter 2:3; 2 Peter 3:9-10."

But these tidings will appear in all their force, if we mark,

II. The sign by which they were confirmed—

The prophet was commanded to dig through the wall of his house, and carry out his furniture upon his shoulders in their sight, and, as through excess of grief, to cover his face, so as not to see the ground; in order to show the people what should be done by them, both king and people, in their approaching siege and captivity ver 3–12. Thus "he was to them as a sign verse 6, 11."

And have we no sign, confirming God's word to us?

Yes, (the departed year is a sign to us; or our departed brother is a sign to us;) every person who dies around us, and every sound of his funeral knell, is a sign to us, that the visions of God are taking effect, and that soon they shall take effect with respect to us. We may, in our imagination, "put the evil day far from us;" but every day and hour brings it nearer to us: and when "the day is fully come," not all the universe can arrest the hand of death, or protract our existence here one single moment. Then, whatever be our age, whatever our rank, or whatever interest the whole nation may have in our life It was preached in Jan. 1827, on account of the death of the Duke of York; we must obey our summons, and go into the presence of our God. Prepared or unprepared, we must stand naked before him, and receive from him that doom which his word has taught us to expect: I say again, therefore, to you, that every person that is called into the eternal world is precisely such a sign to you as Ezekiel was to the Jews—a sign that the visions of God are true, and that "every one of them, in due season, shall take effect."

And now, what encouragement had the prophet to discharge his painful office? It was but a perhaps: "It may be they will consider ver 3." With that humble, but feeble hope 2 Timothy 2:25-26, I address you, my Brethren.

1. It may be that some of you will consider—

O that God would incline your hearts to consider all the visions which from time to time are set before you! Truly, not one has ever been kept back from you: no; "I have declared unto you, as far as I have been able, the whole counsel of God." Your lost estate has been set before you with all fidelity; and the way of salvation proclaimed to you, in all its freeness, in all its fullness, in all its excellency: and that record has been explained to you in an infinite diversity of ways, that "He who has the Son, has life, and he who has not the Son of God, has not life 1 John 5:11-12." "The effects, too, of these visions" have been set before you, by an exhibition, so far as I was able, of all the blessedness of Heaven, and of all the misery of Hell. Now, then, consider these things, I pray you. Consider your own personal interest in them. Consider in what light you will view them the very instant that your soul is separated from your body: and now, so lay them to heart, that they may prove effectual for your conversion to God, and for the everlasting salvation of your souls.

2. It may be, however, and I fear will be, that the great mass of you will not consider—

When I look back, and see how little fruit all my past instructions have produced, I cannot but fear that this will share the same fate as they; and in the space of one hour, or, at all events of one day, be altogether forgotten. Not that they will be forgotten by God, in whose name they are delivered: for they are all recorded in the book of his remembrance, and will rise up in judgment against those who have failed to improve them. Why, my Brethren, will you make so light of these things, which yet you believe to be of everlasting moment, and which God makes known to you by me for the eternal welfare of your souls? I tremble to think, that, at this very instant, while I am addressing these things to you for your good, I am eventually only sinking many of you into deeper perdition. O that God would awaken you to a sense of your condition, before it be too late See Zephaniah 1:12 with Ezekiel 7:5-9. which, though primarily applicable to temporal judgments, may be addressed to a soul in this state. O that so much as one of you would arise from his stupor, and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will!" Let me not, my Brethren, be disappointed of this hope: but go home, and fall upon your knees before God, and pray to him, that, whatever other "rebels" may do, you may "be wise, and consider your latter end."

Ezekiel 13:10-12

DISCOURSE 1103

DELUSIVE CONFIDENCE REPROVED

Ezekiel 13:10-12. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an over-flowing shower; and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing with which you have daubed it?

SO deeply is unbelief rooted in the heart of man, that scarcely any testimony from God is ever received with the confidence it deserves. This appears throughout all the sacred history: and our own lives are one continued exemplification of it. To his people of old God was pleased to give many repeated warnings of the judgments that were coming upon them: but the assertions of false prophets were always credited, in opposition to the declarations of God himself. By the Prophet Ezekiel God forewarned the people of the captivity to which they would soon be reduced by their Chaldean invaders. He directed the prophet to set before their eyes symbolic representations of the calamities that awaited them; to dig through the wall of his house, and carry forth his goods by night, and to eat bread, and drink water, with quaking and trembling See the whole preceding chapter. But false prophets persuaded the people that they had no cause for alarm; for that these signs related to distant times; and that there would soon be an end of the impending dangers. It seems that some, women, as well as men, conspired thus to counteract the influence of God's word upon the people; and that they sewed pillows to the armholes, or elbows, of persons, and covered their heads with kerchiefs, in order to intimate to them, that they might repose themselves in perfect ease and safety. To reprove these persons, and to confirm his former assertions, is the prophet's object in the chapter before us. He compares the men to persons building an ill-constructed wall, and daubing it with untempered mortar, which would be washed away by the first shower; and to the women he declares, that God would soon tear from the arms of their deluded followers the emblems of their delusion, and undeceive those whom they had so fatally led astray See the whole chapter.

But it is not our intention to confine our remarks to that particular occasion. Similar conduct obtains among us at this day; and it calls for similar reproof. We propose therefore to consider,

I. Who are obnoxious to this reproof—

All ranks and orders of men who attempt to invalidate the messages of the Most High, are guilty of the evil here spoken of. It is justly imputable to

1. Unfaithful ministers—

Not only among the Jews, but even in the Christian Church, there were many, who, professing themselves to be ambassadors of Heaven, were only deceivers of the people 2 Corinthians 11:13. Galatians 1:6-8. 1 Timothy 4:1. 2 Peter 2:1-2. Their habit has at all times been, to "say, Peace, peace, when there was no peace verse 10 with Jeremiah 6:14. Would to God that none of this character yet existed in the world! But are there not still some who keep out of view the desperate depravity of the human heart, the absolute necessity of a new birth, the impossibility of being saved by any righteousness of our own, and the duty of giving up ourselves wholly and unreservedly to God as his redeemed people?: Are there not those who decry these things as enthusiasm; and who tell their hearers, that there is a smoother and an easier way to Heaven than what the Scriptures have marked out?: If then such persons exist, say whether they do not resemble the prophets and the prophetesses spoken of in our text?.

2. Unbelieving people—

Whether seduced by others or not, all are prone of themselves to speak peace unto their own souls: they will not receive the declarations of God concerning them: they cannot endure to think that they are in such danger as God's word declares them to be; or that the way to Heaven is so strait and narrow as his Gospel represents it. They substitute some terms of their own in the place of those which God has prescribed; and they persuade themselves that they shall be saved at last, though they conform themselves in no respect either to the principles or practice of the Christian code: Are not these then daubing their wall with untempered mortar, and sewing to their arms pillows which shall he rent away?.

Let us then proceed to notice,

II. The warning here given them—

Their labor is, alas! and must ever be, in vain: it will end,

1. In certain and bitter disappointment—

Their wall will surely fall: and shall it not then be said to them, "Where is the daubing with which you have daubed it?" Sad indeed will be the reproaches which both the deceivers and the deceived will cast on each other: the one will say, Why did you mislead me? the others will say, Why did you believe me in preference to the word of God? Sad reflections too will all cast upon themselves: Why did I set up my own opinion against the most express declarations of my God?: The very disappointment which the Jews experienced, when Ezekiel's prophecies were verified in the destruction of their city, and in their own captivity, will before long be realized by all who now buoy themselves up with their own delusions. If they should entreat their God to give them an opportunity of undeceiving their surviving relatives, the answer will be, No: they have Moses and the Prophets; and if they will not attend to their voice, they must receive their deserved recompense.

2. In irremediable and endless ruin—

No further means of salvation will be afforded them. Their day of grace is irrecoverably gone: their state is fixed forever. O to what anguish of heart are they now a prey! What weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth do they now experience, under a sense of God's wrath, and in the prospect of its everlasting duration! This must assuredly be the end of all our self-deception. As "Ezekiel was a sign to the Jews Ezekiel 12:14," so have we signs in plenty, that the threatened vengeance shall come 1 Corinthians 10:5-11. 2 Peter 2:4-9. Jude, verse 6, 7. "Set forth for an example.", and that they who will not believe God's word shall find it true at the last Jeremiah 44:28.

ADDRESS—

1. To careless sinners—

You will persuade yourselves that no evil consequence shall arise to you from your neglect of God and of your own souls. But will God falsify his word to save you? Do not entertain so vain, so impious, a thought. He will not, he cannot, deny himself: nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail.

2. To self-complacent formalists—

You profess to reverence the word of God, and to comply with its commands: but, while you rest in mere forms and ceremonies of religion, you greatly err. God requires the religion of the heart: you must have "the power of godliness as well as its form." The wall that you are constructing may look fair to the eye; but it will not stand: it is raised on a sandy foundation: it is formed of bad materials: it wants the cement of the Spirit: the showers shall soon wash off its external covering; and the stormy wind shall scatter the loose materials: in the name of God we declare to you, that "it shall fall." Nothing will ever stand, but that which is laid on Christ as the foundation, and has all the graces of the Spirit for its superstructure.

3. To inconsistent professors—

Be it granted, that, as far as relates to your views of the Gospel, you are right: still we must look to the effects of the Gospel on your heart and life; and must declare unto you, that, if you do not manifest by your life and conversation that you have "the same mind as was in Christ," you only deceive your own souls: you may have a faith indeed; but it is no better than the faith of devils. From this point we cannot recede a hair's breadth. We do not say that you must possess sinless perfection; for then who could be saved? But we say, that no sin must have allowed, or habitual, dominion over you: the right eye, or right hand, if knowingly retained contrary to the will of God, will as effectually cast you into perdition, as any number of sins whatever: your condemnation indeed may be increased by a multitude of sins; but it will not be rendered more certain, than it is by one reigning sin. O that those who are worldly-minded, or covetous, or proud, or passionate, or impure, or slothful, or addicted to any one sinful disposition, would consider this! God says, By their fruits you shall know them: and by their fruits they shall be known. If ever we would be Christ's, we must "walk as Christ walked."

Ezekiel 14:4

DISCOURSE 1104

HEART IDOLATRY CONDEMNED

Ezekiel 14:4. Thus says the Lord God: Every man of the house of Israel that sets tip his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that comes according to the multitude of his idols.

IT is gratifying to see the ordinances of religion well attended: but it is painful to reflect how few there are who derive any saving benefit from them; or rather, how many there are who find them, not a savor of life unto life, but rather a savor of death unto their deeper condemnation: If we inquire into the reason of this, we must trace it, not to the word itself, (for that, if dispensed aright, is quick and powerful, as in the days of old,) but to the manner in which the ordinances are attended. Men come up to the House of God, just as the Elders of Israel came before the Prophet Ezekiel, with idols in their hearts; and, being unwilling to part with them, they provoke God to withhold from them his blessing, without which not the ministry of Paul himself could be of any avail.

In the case of Ezekiel's hearers, we see,

I. What inconsistencies are found in the Church of God—

One would have supposed that these Elders of Israel would either have renounced Jehovah altogether, or have put away the idols which estranged their hearts from him. But they wished to keep up an appearance of godliness in the midst of all their impiety; and therefore came to the prophet for instruction, at the very time that they addicted themselves to the worship of their idols.

Thus it is that men come up to the house of God at this day: they cannot altogether renounce their profession of regard for God; but,

1. They set up idols in their hearts—

The cares and pleasures of this world are as dominant in the hearts of the generality as in the heathen themselves. And a love to these is declared by God himself to he idolatry Colossians 3:5 and Philippians 3:19; And shall I say that these "idols are set up in their hearts?" Yes, truly, and in their houses also: for you may live for years in the houses of the generality of Christians, and hear nothing, and see nothing, but what tends to exalt the creature above the Creator, and proves, that Mammon, rather than Jehovah, is the God whom they serve.

Yet they wish to be thought the Lord's people—

They would be indignant if they were accounted heathens. They suppose themselves to be Christians, notwithstanding they have not one real mark of Christianity about them. If a mere attendance on public ordinances would suffice, all were well: but if an inquiry be made, who or what stands highest in their regards, not the worshipers of Baal, with their vestments on, can show more clearly "whose they are, and whom they serve." The inconsistency of the elders who came to Ezekiel, is apparent to all; but, if candidly examined, it is a perfect representation of that which is found in the great mass of Christians at the present day. In truth, the prophet himself marks the correspondence, when he says, "They came to him, as Gods people came; and sat before him as God's people, and heard his words, but would not do them: for with their mouth they showed much love; but their heart went after their covetousness Ezekiel 33:31-32." A juster description of the great mass, even of the better sort of Christians, is not to be found in all the book of God.

That we may guard you against these inconsistencies, we proceed to show,

II. The fearful disappointment in which they will surely issue—

They cannot but be highly displeasing to a God of truth and holiness. Indeed he tells us, in our text, how such inquirers shall fare. He will answer them,

1. In a way of silent contempt—

Among men, silence is often the severest answer: and such an answer shall all such worshipers receive. God even puts the question to us, "Shall I be inquired of by them? As I live, says the Lord, I will not be inquired of by them verse 3 with Ezekiel 20:3." Of this indignant contempt we see an instance in Saul; whom "God answered not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets 1 Samuel 28:6." And this exactly accords with the experience of multitudes, who, though they have attended the house of God ten thousand times, have never received one answer to their prayers; and, though they have as often sat before the prophets of the Lord, have never found any efficacy in the word, to convert and save their souls.

2. In a way of infatuating delusion—

They come with their prejudices and vain conceits, no one of which do they desire to have rectified and removed. God therefore gives them over to blindness and hardness of heart, and to the very delusions which they have chosen Isaiah 66:4. He has plainly declared, that he will do this "to those who love not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness: he will give them over to strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, and perish in their sins 2 Thessalonians. 2:10-12." In fact, these people prefer the prophets that will deceive them Isaiah 30:9-11. Jeremiah 5:31; and they will either be given up to the guidance which they affect verse 9 with Jeremiah 23:17-18, or be left under the influence of eyes that cannot see, and ears that cannot hear Isaiah 6:9-10. 2 Corinthians 4:4.

3. In a way of just and indignant reprehension—

Against persons of this description, our blessed Lord himself, meek and lowly as he was, spoke in the severest terms Matthew 23:13-33. And, truly, God will answer them "according to the multitude of their idols;" "setting his face against them, and consigning them over to the judgments which their hypocrisy has deserved verse 8. Matthew 24:31. His word to them is the very reverse of that which will be uttered to his obedient people: "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: but woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given unto him Isaiah 3:10-11."

And now,

1. Examine, I pray you, with what dispositions you have come hither at this time—

In coming hither, to inquire of the Lord, have you been sincerely desirous to know his will; and fully determined, through grace, to obey it without reserve? O! judge yourselves; for God knows your hearts, and his judgment will be according to truth.

2. Look to it, that this message from God produce in your hearts its due effect—

If you will approve yourselves to God, you must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls James 1:22-25."

Ezekiel 16:62-63

DISCOURSE 1105

THE EFFECT OF GOD'S MERCY ON THE RENEWED SOUL

Ezekiel 16:62-63. I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall know that I am the Lord: that you may remember, and be confounded, and never of en your mouth any more because of your shame, when I am pacified towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord God.

WHOEVER attentively reads the writings of the prophets, will observe, that there is one image in particular which predominates, as it were, above all others, in representing and characterizing the departure of the soul from God; it is that of the violation of the nuptial vows. God has been pleased to speak of himself as the Husband of his Church: and hence, when his people have turned aside to idols, they are said to have "committed adultery with stocks and stones." Sometimes that idea is prosecuted with a minuteness, which, though proper for the time and occasion on which it was written, would not be suitable for an audience differently circumstanced. The Prophet Ezekiel in particular, who seems to have been a man of a severer cast, and to have been intent only on communicating his sentiments as strongly and forcibly as he could, has given himself great latitude in this respect. He is not content with using here and there a metaphorical expression; he occupies a whole chapter in drawing, as it were, a parallel between a supposed adulteress, and the Jewish people. Certainly this gives great force to his reproofs; because the minds of all are open to conviction, when truth is stated to them in a way which commends itself to their feelings and judgment. We shall not however follow him any farther than will be necessary for the elucidation of our main subject.

We should not, in the general, take occasion from the single word "you" to investigate largely the character and conduct of the persons addressed: but here our subject absolutely requires that we should do so; since the whole chapter is occupied in delineating it; and a full consideration of it is necessary, in order to the obtaining of a right understanding of our text. We propose then, from a view of our text as connected with the whole chapter, to set before you,

I. The extent of man's wickedness—

We will give, in the first place, a brief summary of the chapter—

It is here supposed that a child, from the moment of its birth, is left exposed in an open field, without any one to pay the least attention to it; and that in that situation, where it must speedily have perished, it is noticed by Jehovah, who instantly administers to all its wants, and thus preserves its life. It is then supposed, that, after this child has been brought up by him to a mature age, she is espoused to him and becomes his wife. He, in the character of her husband, loads her with benefits, so as to make her the admiration and the envy of all who behold her. She however, instead of requiting him with that love, and honor, and fidelity that become her, abandons herself to open prostitution, and that too, not through the solicitations of others, but through the willful depravity of her own heart; she herself being the tempter of all her paramours, and bestowing on them the gifts which her husband had conferred on her. By this licentious and infamous conduct she has compelled her husband to put her away, and to withdraw from her the means of exciting and compensating any more these iniquitous proceedings.

Let us now mark how this image was applicable to Judah and Jerusalem—

The Jews had been originally chosen in Abraham, their common father, when he himself was an idolater: and as soon as his posterity were multiplied in Egypt, they were reduced to such a state of destitution and misery, that they must have perished, if God himself had not miraculously interposed for them. But God had compassion on them, and brought them out with a high hand, and took them for his own peculiar people, and gave them an inheritance in the land of Canaan. There he elevated them to a high rank among the nations, insomuch that they were the envy and admiration of all who knew them; so great was their power, their opulence, their prosperity in every respect. But in time they turned from the worship of God to idols, and from confidence in God to a dependence on foreign alliances, which they sought and maintained at vast expense. "Your renown," says the prophet, (verse 14, 15.) "went forth among the heathen for your beauty; for it was perfect through my loveliness which I had put upon you, says the Lord God. But you did trust in your own beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown." All manner of corruptions at length overspread the land, and provoked God, who was jealous for his own honor, to give them up to the desolations and miseries which they had so justly merited.

But to us also, as well as to them, all this may be applied—

View us as men: how helpless were we in our early infancy! yet through the goodness of God, who has been a father to us, we have been placed in situations of ease and honor, far beyond what, if left to ourselves without his paternal care, we could ever have obtained. God, having formed us for himself, has given us many rich endowments, such as were necessary for the filling of the situation to which he has advanced us. But what use have we made of all his gifts? Have we improved them in obedience to his will, and for the promotion of his glory? Have not our various talents, of mental energy, of bodily strength, of worldly property, been employed solely for our own personal gratification, without any regard for Him to whom they properly belonged, and for whose honor they should have been employed? Truly there has not been any idol, however base, to whose service we have not devoted these things, rather than to the service of our God.

View us as Christians also, and the same wickedness may justly be laid to our charge. In our natural state we were altogether guilty and polluted, yes, helpless and hopeless. But the advantages which Almighty God has conferred upon us have been exceeding great: all the ordinances of his worship, all the offers of his grace, all the hopes of his glory, have been given to us from time to time, in order to convince us of his love, and to stimulate us to an unreserved surrender of ourselves to him. But these things, instead of having been improved aright, have actually been made the means and occasions of our departure from him. We have rested in the ordinances, without any concern whether we enjoyed God in them or not: his offers of mercy have been brought to justify the idea, that we might sin against him with impunity: and the prospects of the eternal world have been considered as little affected by our present conduct. "This has been our way from our youth;" and it is equally prevalent in every class of the community.

Would an earthly husband be satisfied with such conduct in his wife? What wonder then is it if our heavenly Husband regard these our adulteries with grief and wrathful indignation?

But if, on the one hand, these things show the greatness of our depravity, they serve, on the other hand, most strikingly to illustrate,

II. The exceeding riches of God's grace—

Vile as the Jews had been, he promises in our text to restore them to his favor—

That the same persons are addressed as have been described in all the preceding context, is evident from the two verses before our text. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin having followed the Canaanites in their abominations, it is said, that "their father was an Amorite, and their mother a Hittite." Their character is then compared with that of Samaria and of Sodom (who are called their sisters), and is said to have been worse than either ver, 45–48, 51, 52. Yet, says God, I will restore "Sodom and her daughters (I. e. the heathen world at large), and Samaria and her daughters (I. e. the ten tribes of Israel), to their former estate;" and then, "when you shall receive your sisters, your elder and your younger, I will give them to you for daughters, but not by your covenant verse 53, 55, 61, 62; and I will establish my covenant with you."

Here it is distinctly stated, that there shall be a restoration of the whole Jewish nation, together with a general conversion of the Gentiles: and that they shall be all united, not on the footing of the covenant made with the Jews on Mount Sinai, ("not by your covenant,") but on the footing of the new "covenant made with them in the days of their youth," even with Abraham their father: this is the covenant which he would reestablish with them; and according to the tenor of it he would freely forgive all their past iniquities, and restore them to the everlasting enjoyment of his favor. By this wonderful exhibition of mercy to them, "they should know assuredly that He, even Jehovah, is the only true God;" yes moreover, that He is their God forever and ever.

This was so very partially fulfilled at the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, that we cannot but look for a more complete fulfillment of it at a period yet future, but, we trust, not very remote.

The promise however is, no doubt, to be extended to us also—

However vile we may have been, God, if we seek him, will remember his holy covenant, and will accept us according to the tenor of it. In that covenant, provision is made for our every want. "It is ordered in all things and sure:" and it is therefore sure, because by it God gives all, and we receive all: God gives the new heart as well as pardon for past offences; and engages to make us his people, at the time that he gives himself to us as our God. Hear how plainly all this is declared in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 8:8-12; The very distinction is there made between the Jewish covenant that was made on Mount Sinai, and the covenant of grace which was made four hundred and thirty years before with Abraham: and the knowledge of the Lord will be universally diffused, not in theory only, but in the experience of every individual: "for," says God, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." This then is the promise which we now make known to you; that however you may have alienated your affections from God in times past, if you will but now return to him, your former iniquities shall no more be remembered, but God will be your God forever and ever. O hear the very invitations of God himself Jeremiah 3:1; Jeremiah 3:12; and implore help from God to comply with them!

But is not this a dangerous doctrine? Surely not, if we consider,

III. The effect of this grace upon every soul of man—

It is thought by those who have never experienced this grace themselves, that it must of necessity puff up with pride and conceit all who receive it. But,

This is contrary to reason—

If we maintain that man by nature is in the situation of this outcast child; that God, purely of his own mercy and grace, "looks upon us" in that situation, and "bids us live;" if, after all our innumerable transgressions, he invites us to repent of our iniquities, and to embrace his holy covenant; we should think that there is no possible scope for pride and self-conceit; since the very mercy which God exercises towards us is not founded in any actual, or foreseen, goodness in us, but wholly in the free and sovereign exercise of God's holy will It is the man that arrogates some goodness to himself, and makes the superior worth of the individual to be the ground of God's peculiar favor to him, this is the man that is proud, and that puts the very crown of Jehovah upon his own head. Even in Heaven itself, if such a man were ever to reach that blessed place, he would be robbing God of his glory, and ascribing his salvation, in part at least, to his own superior goodness, which was the first moving cause of God's mercy towards him.

It is contrary to fact also—

"Then shall you remember your ways, and be ashamed:" yes, "I will establish with you my covenant, that you may (what? be lifted up with pride? No: that you may) remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I am pacified towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord God." Here is the true state of every pardoned soul: the mercy of God towards him humbles him in the dust, and makes him to abhor himself in dust and ashes.

It would be thought by the generality, that the spirit of a loving, faithful and obedient wife would be proper for the spouse of Christ: and so it would if that spouse had never violated her nuptial vows. But we are all like this adulterous woman: and, as an adulteress, who had been precisely circumstanced like her in the chapter before us, would, after being restored to the favor of her husband, never forgive herself, however freely he may have forgiven her, so will a gracious soul when restored to the Divine favor: yes, the very favor of God, in proportion as it is exercised towards him, will only create in the soul a deeper self-abhorrence forever having sinned against so gracious a God. An admiration of God's goodness, and a loathing of its own vileness, will never cease to occupy the soul that has been thus restored.

We call you then, in conclusion, to remember,

1. Your covenant mercies—

How unspeakable are these! The very vilest of the human race may become the spouse of Christ, and be invested with all the honors and privileges of that relation. Will any of you be indifferent towards your God and Savior, and reject the overtures which he now sends you by me? O remember, that as man and wife are one flesh, so "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." Let all of you seek to be partakers of this honor. It is by faith in Christ that you become one with him; and by the exercise of the same faith shall all the blessings of the everlasting covenant flow down into your souls.

2. Your covenant engagements—

You all know what engagements a wife enters into, when she is taking upon her the vows of the marriage-covenant. She is thenceforward to live altogether for him with whom she has contracted this solemn bond. O let every Believer know what he has undertaken, and consider what is to be his constant aim. You must not be contented with some few services; you must be aspiring after such measures of love and purity, as may render you more lovely in the eyes of your blessed Lord, and may cause his very name to be glorified in you. In the world that is approaching, when the Lamb will publicly take home his Bride, you will be clothed in fine white linen, suited to the occasion. Be preparing those robes, while yet you are here; and by the richest unctions of Divine grace be daily becoming meet for the bridal chamber: and then shall the nuptials soon arrive; and you shall be forever happy in the bosom of your God.

Ezekiel 17:22-24

DISCOURSE 1106

PARABLE OF THE TWIG OF A CEDAR PLANTED IN THE HEIGHT OF ISRAEL

Ezekiel 17:22-24. Thus says the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all bird of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know, that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it.

THE promises of God to his Church are not unfrequently connected with, and, as it were, made to arise out of, his judgments denounced against his enemies. Of this we have a very striking example in the chapter before us, where the very images which are used to represent the guilt and punishment of the king of Judah are employed to prefigure the establishment and increase of the Church of Christ.

To understand the text aright, the preceding context should be considered.

The prophet was commanded to deliver a riddle, or parable, that should set forth the conduct of the Jewish people in a mysterious, but just, light: and then, lest it should not be fully understood, he was to give them the true interpretation of it. Nebuchadnezzar, having taken Jeconiah king of Judah and all his princes captive to Babylon, would not entirely destroy Jerusalem, but made Mattaniah (whom he named Zedekiah) king in the place of Jeconiah his uncle, and suffered him to enjoy all the rights and honors of royalty, on the express condition of his holding them, not as an independent sovereign, but as tributary to the king of Babylon. All this was quite a gratuitous act; and it lay Zedekiah under the strongest obligations to fulfill towards his benefactor all the engagements that he had entered into, more especially as they were confirmed by a solemn oath. But Zedekiah, unmindful of his oaths, sought the aid of the king of Egypt, that so he might be delivered from what he considered as a disgraceful vassalage, and enjoy a sovereignty independent and uncontrolled. This treachery is represented by God under the image of a twig, cropped off a lofty cedar by a great eagle, and planted by him in a fruitful field, and growing so as to be highly respectable, though inferior in grandeur to the parent stock. This young cedar, dissatisfied with its state, spreads its roots towards another great eagle, (the king of Egypt,) in hopes that through his influence it shall attain a far greater eminence and fertility. But God, whose oath was thereby violated, declared, that the attempt should not prosper, but that, on the contrary, the perjured monarch, who was thus described, should bring ruin, irreparable ruin, on his own head This was preached within about three weeks of Bonaparte being sent to Helena. The extraordinary resemblance between his fate and Zedekiah's, as well as of the grounds and occasions of it, cannot fail to strike the attentive reader, who compares them together. See verse 18–21. From hence it might be supposed, that David's throne should never be re-established; but God promises, under precisely the same figure that had been employed to represent these things, that he will restore the kingdom of David, partly under Zerubbabel, but principally under the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ; and that, instead of being ever subverted, like the Jewish polity, or the kingdoms of this world, it shall stand forever and ever, a glorious monument of his power and truth.

We propose to consider this prophecy,

I. As already accomplished—

The Church, though low in its origin, is become exceeding great—

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Founder of it, was brought into the world when the family of David was reduced to a very low and abject state. He is fitly called "A rod out of the stem of Jesse Isaiah 11:1," that "grew up as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground Isaiah 53:2." During the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he existed in a state of the deepest humiliation: and his Church which he established, consisted only of himself and a few poor fishermen. However, this twig, being planted in the height of Israel, grew, and "brought forth boughs, and bare fruit, and speedily became a goodly cedar." Great and vehement were the storms which menaced its existence; but it withstood them all; and in a little time it spread its branches throughout all the Roman empire. Then "birds of every wing (that is, Jews and Gentiles) came to dwell under its shadow," and to be nourished by its fruits. At this hour its growth is visible from year to year: and in due season it will fill the whole earth, and be the one center of union, and source of happiness, to all mankind.

And thus far God is greatly glorified in it—

"Every tree of the field must know" whose work this is, and to whom all the glory of it belongs. Who can survey the Church in its infancy, and not wonder that it was not rooted up as soon as ever it was planted? Every arm was lifted up against it: all the powers of the world combined for its destruction; and not one friend or ally was found for it on the face of the whole earth. The great empires of the world, the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, Roman, all successively fell to ruin, notwithstanding the efforts made for their preservation: but the Church, without any sword but the word of God, or any shield that was visible to human eyes, stood, and stands to this day, deriding all the efforts of men or devils to subvert it. Who then, we would ask, Who is it that has thus "brought down the high tree, and exalted the low? Who is it that has thus dried up the green tree, and made the dry tree to flourish?" Is not all this the work of God? Truly, the burning bush has been a just and lively exhibition of the Church in every age: God was in it, and therefore it was not consumed. In like manner we may speak of every individual branch or twig that grows upon this tree; Who is it that has preserved even the meanest of the saints, in the midst of all the difficulties and trials he has had to contend with? Must it not be said of all, "He who has wrought us to the self-same thing is God?" Yes, in every tree of righteousness which is the planting of the Lord, God, and God alone, must be glorified Isaiah 60:21; Isaiah 61:3. If Paul himself was constrained to say, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me," it will scarcely be thought that any one else can arrogate to himself the honor of his own growth, stability, or fruitfulness."

Gloriously as this prophecy has been already fulfilled, it should be contemplated by us,

II. As yet further to be accomplished—

The Church will doubtless be yet more widely extended through the earth—

In truth, this cedar has attained at present but a small measure of its destined growth. It is but in a small part of the world that even the name of Christ is known: and, where his religion is professed, there are but few, very few indeed, who experience its renovating power. But it shall not be always thus: the time is coming when "he will multiply them that they shall not be few, and will glorify them that they shall not be small Jeremiah 30:18-19. Then, in a far different sense from what can be affixed to the words at this time, shall it be said, that "bird of every wing come to dwell under the shadow of this goodly cedar;" for "all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest:" "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him:" "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Then shall God be more abundantly glorified in it—

The whole Church, and every individual in it, is to God "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." It is in his hands "a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty Isaiah 62:3." But how greatly will his power and goodness appear, when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," yes, and actually enjoy it! If now, when the attainments of his people are so low, he is honored, how will he be glorified when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days!" And how will he be exalted in that day, when all his saints from the beginning of the world shall be gathered in one bright assembly, and shall join together in one general chorus; how, I say, will he then "be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe!".

Viewing now the Lord Jesus Christ, or rather his holy religion, as this goodly cedar, let us, in conclusion,

1. Come and rest under his shadow—

Truly there is no rest for us any where else: we are like "the dove which Noah sent forth from the ark, and which could find no rest for the sole of her foot but in the ark itself." But if we feel our need of a Savior, if we are sensible that without an interest in him we must forever perish, then let us attend to his inviting voice, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!".

2. Give him the glory of all the rest we enjoy—

Nothing can be more offensive to God than "the sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." This is a provocation which God will not endure: he will not give his glory to another, nor will he suffer "any flesh to glory in his presence." Let us in particular remember, that by the law of faith, that is, by the Gospel, "boasting is, and must forever be, excluded." For the Savior that he has given, for the inclination and ability which we have to trust in him, and for all the grace that we have derived from him, we must say, "Not unto me, O Lord, but unto your name be the praise." Let us remember, that by covenant and by oath we are bound to trust in him alone: let us not then, like Zedekiah, be bending our roots towards any other, or be looking to any other confidence; but let us seek to please him only whose servants we are, and to glorify him only who has done so great things for us.

Ezekiel 18:25-30

DISCOURSE 1107

EQUITY OF GOD IN HIS JUDGMENTS

Ezekiel 18:25-30. You say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and dies in them; for his iniquity that he has done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considers, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet says the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, 0 house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

THERE is a general disposition in man to reply against God; and rather to arraign his justice, than to condemn himself. Occasion was taken for this by the Jews of old, even from the declarations of the law and the prophets. The law had said, that God would "visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation;" and the prophets had frequently declared, that the iniquities of Jeroboam, Manasseh, and others, should be visited on their descendants. From hence the Jews profanely characterized the Divine procedure by this proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge verse 2." They did not consider, that they themselves were sinners like unto their fathers, and merited for their own iniquities every judgment which God had threatened to lay upon them; nor did they ever consider, that if God was pleased to exercise forbearance towards some, he was not necessitated to continue it towards all, when he saw that the very exercise of it emboldened men the more to sin against him: nor did they ever consider, that the menaces, which were uttered in reference to temporal judgments, were erroneously interpreted, when they were applied to the judgments of the eternal world. The prophet therefore was instructed to expostulate with them on their misinterpretation of God's word; and to declare to them, that though in this world children must unavoidably participate in the judgments of their fathers, it should not be so in the world to come: there the son should not bear in any respect the iniquity of the father, nor the father of the son; but "the soul that sinned, it should die." In confirmation of this truth, the prophet argues with them in this chapter, wherein the whole plan of the Divine proceedings, in reference to the different characters of mankind, is stated, vindicated, and improved. It is,

I. Stated—

If the righteous man turn away from his righteousness, and die in his sins, he shall perish—

This is a solemn truth, which men strive by every possible method to evade. When Christian principles are insisted on, they will speak of practice: but here, when practice is spoken of, they will recur to principles, and deny that a righteous man can so turn away from his righteousness as to perish in his sins. They are like the Samaritan woman, who, when our Lord reproved her for her adulteries, had recourse immediately to controversial matters, and inquired, who were right, the Samaritans, or the Jews, as to the place where Divine worship ought to be performed? Ungodly professors of religion now fly off from what comes home to their own bosoms, and enter on controversy in order to avoid the awful truth that is brought to their ears. But it is a fact, that a righteous man may depart from his righteousness: Demas did 2 Timothy 4:10; Paul was constrained to use the utmost possible care, lest he should 1 Corinthians 9:27; and all are commanded to take heed to themselves, lest they should do so too 1 Corinthians 10:12. Hebrews 3:12-13. As to God's secret decrees, no man knows what they are, as relating to his own person, or to the person of any individual whatever: nor is there a man in the whole universe that is warranted in saying, I never can fall; at least, can never so fall as to perish. David, and Solomon, and Peter, display sufficiently the instability of man; and, if they were restored, their restoration does not show that they could not have perished, but only, that God, for the magnifying of his own grace and mercy, did not leave them to perish. They might have perished, and would have perished, as much as Judas, if they had been left to themselves: it was not any gracious principle which they had in them, and that was in itself indefectible, that recovered them, but God's unbounded grace and mercy, given to them according to the good pleasure of his own will.

Hear this then, you professors of religion, you who are accounted righteous, and who think yourselves righteous; you may turn away from your righteousness, and perish. O let this consideration lead you to the utmost vigilance, and stimulate you to the most unremitting exertions in the path of duty!

On the other hand, if the wicked man turn from his iniquity, and do what is lawful and right, he shall live—

Delightful reflection! Hear it, you sinners of every description: it is the declaration of the Most High God. You must turn indeed from your iniquities, and especially from your besetting sin, mourning over it, fighting against it, bringing it into subjection. You must also be doing all that God requires of you in his blessed word. You must flee to Christ for refuge from the wrath of an avenging God: you must trust altogether in his meritorious death and passion: you must renounce every other hope; and must seek "to be found in Him, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." You must also, in dependence on his Holy Spirit, endeavor to fulfill the whole will of God, and to "walk in everything as Christ walked." And if indeed you act thus, we declare, in the name of Almighty God, that "you shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." As the foregoing characters entertain too little fear, so you are apt to indulge too much; and, because things have been ill, you are ready to suppose they never can be such as to warrant an expectation of the Divine favor. To remove these apprehensions, God repeats his gracious assertions respecting you, and declares that you, if you turn to him in the way before specified, "shall surely live; you shall not die." Whatever your sins may have been, they shall all be blotted out as a morning cloud; nor shall so much as one of them ever be remembered against you: though they may have been of a crimson dye, you shall, in the sight of God himself, be white as snow. As the righteousness of the righteous shall never be remembered, when once he departs from it; so neither shall the wickedness of the wicked, when once he turns from it. The present character of every individual is that which shall determine his eternal state.

One would think that such a procedure as this should not stand in any need of vindication: but men, not with standing the obvious and undoubted equity of it, will complain of it as unjust.

In our text however it is,

II. Vindicated—

Inequality indeed there is in abundance on the part of men—

Every description of sinners is chargeable with injustice towards God. The profane sinner accounts it very hard that his sins are to be visited with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. What has he done that deserves such a sentence as this? Why did God give him passions, if he is to be punished to all eternity for the indulgence of them? and, supposing his conduct to be sinful, what proportion do the sins of a few days or years bear to the everlasting torments of Hell? He cannot believe that God will ever be so unmerciful and unjust as to execute on men the threatenings of his word. The proud formalist thinks it strange indeed that he is to perish. What! must he, who has been so sober, so moral, so regular, so observant of all his duties to God and man, must he perish, because he does not adopt the principles, and imitate the practice, of a few wild enthusiasts? No: he hates fanaticism; and will never believe that God requires all that strictness which some enthusiasts speak of; and much less that he will ever banish from his presence those whose whole lives have been so blameless as theirs. The hypocritical professor, who can talk of Christ, and exert himself zealously to promote the Gospel, cannot imagine, that he should be obnoxious to the Divine displeasure, or that God could be at all just in condemning him. True indeed, he does not always adhere to truth, and perhaps is not very strictly just in his dealings: his cares about the world too engross almost all his thoughts; nor has he any pleasure in the duties of the closet: evil dispositions too are unhappily very prevalent in him; pride, anger, envy, hatred, malice, evil-speaking, uncharitableness, retain more or less the ascendant over him; perhaps too intemperance and impurity, if not indulged to such an extent as to expose him to public disgrace, are far from being mortified so as to give way to the habitual exercise of the opposite virtues. But can it be that God should reject him, when all his confidence is in Christ, and in the covenant which God has made with us in Christ?

Such are their modes of arguing on the subject of God's final judgment. But we ask, What equity is there in such expectations as these? Is it equitable that a man who lives altogether without God in the world, should be placed on the same footing with one who devotes himself entirely to God? Is it equitable that a man who possesses no more than a form of godliness, should find the same favor with God as one who lives under the continued influence of its power? Is it equitable that a professor of religion who in no respect adorns his holy profession, should be honored of God like one who is a bright pattern of every virtue, and daily increasing in a conformity to his Lord and Savior? We ask, Is there any equity in such things? Will any reasonable being venture to say, that such a procedure is becoming a God of holiness and truth?

But on the part of God there is no such inequality—

The moral and religious character of men will be the one ground of all his decisions in the day of judgment: "According to your ways and according to your doings will he judge you, O house of Israel." "Say you to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: but woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hand shall be given him Isaiah 3:10-11." This is what in God's name we are authorized and commanded to declare. Respect indeed will be had to the means and opportunities which different persons enjoyed; and on this principle, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for the Jews, who rejected the ministry of our Lord: but still there will be one test to which every man will be brought, namely, How did you improve the privileges you enjoyed, and how did you act up to the principles you professed? No favor will be shown to any man because he was a Jew, nor will any man be despised because he was a Gentile: "the uncircumcision of the Gentile will be reckoned to him for circumcision, if he keep the law; and the circumcision of the Jew be reckoned for uncircumcision, if he break the law." The conformity of every man to the mind and will of God, as far as he had an opportunity of knowing it, will be the object of inquiry; much or little being required of him in proportion to what has been committed to him: and according as he has neglected or improved his talent, shall be the sentence passed upon him; regard being had, not to the state of a man at any former period of his life, but to his state at the time that he is summoned to the judgment-seat. Now can any man condemn this as unequal or unjust? Twice does God appeal even to the very people that presumed to accuse him; and twice does he challenge them to say, on whose part inequality is chargeable, their own, or his?

The prophet, assuming that after this statement there must be an end of the controversy, shows how these determinations of God should be,

III. Improved—

It is to no purpose that God has declared these truths, if they have not a practical operation on our minds.

The prophet therefore improves the subject for us, by a word,

1. Of direction; "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions"—

Repentance is necessary for every child of man: "God commands all men everywhere to repent." But it is not a partial repentance that will suffice: we must "turn from all our transgressions: there must be no exceptions, no reserves; no right eye, which we will not pluck out; no right hand, which we will not cut off. The profane sinner must abandon all his evil ways, and turn unto God with his whole heart. The proud formalist must renounce all his self-dependence, and must live a life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of entire devotedness of heart to God. The inconsistent professor also must be brought to a sense of his peculiar guilt and danger; and must become like his blessed Lord and Savior in all his tempers and dispositions, in all his spirit and deportment towards God and man.

True it is, that these things cannot be done by any power of our own: but this is no reason that we should not address ourselves to the work; nor will it be any excuse for not accomplishing the work, since God has promised to give his Holy Spirit unto all that ask him, and has assured us that his grace shall be sufficient for us. This then is the direction which all must follow; and the foregoing statement clearly shows how important it is that we should follow it earnestly and without delay.

2. Of encouragement; "So iniquity shall not be your ruin"—

Iniquity must be our ruin, if we do not thus repent: nothing can save us: God himself, if we may so speak, cannot save us; because he cannot depart from the rules which he has prescribed to himself for his procedure in the last day. However much he may desire to extend mercy to us, he will not do it to the dishonor of his own perfections, and to the destruction of all the established principles of his moral government. No: "except we repent, we must all" inevitably and eternally "perish." But if we thus repent, all will be well: our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall all be put away from us, as far as the east is from the west. Hear the declaration of the Most High God: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon Isaiah 55:7." O let this sink down into our ears: let it encourage us to put away all our hard thoughts of God, and to seek him with our whole hearts. Let us search and try our ways: let us bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's unerring word: let us now so "judge ourselves, that we may not hereafter be judged of the Lord:" and, if a fear arise in our minds that our sins are too great to be forgiven, let this thought comfort us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound; and that, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Ezekiel 20:37

DISCOURSE 1108

CONVERSION, IN ITS COMMENCEMENT AND PROGRESS

Ezekiel 20:37. I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.

THE precise import of these words is not clear at first sight. If we take them in connection with the preceding context, they must be considered as a continuation of the threatening denounced against the Jews for their abominable idolatries. Then their meaning will be, 'I will inflict upon you the judgments which your violations of my covenant demand:' or, as God had said by Moses, "I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant Leviticus 26:25." If, on the other hand, the words be taken in connection with the following context, then they must be regarded as a promise, that, notwithstanding the judgments that should be inflicted on them, God had mercies in reserve for them, and would, at a future period, restore them to his favor. And this is the sense to which I rather incline. The obstinately rebellious among them, indeed, he would give up to their own lusts, and utterly destroy them verse 38, 39; but he would take out a chosen people from among them, and bring them to his holy mountain, and accept all their offerings, and make himself known to them as their reconciled God and Father, and give them repentance to salvation, not to be repented of verse 40–44. This exactly accords with what the prophet had spoken in a preceding chapter: "Thus says the Lord God: I will even deal with you as you have done, which have despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth; and I will establish unto you an everlasting covenant Ezekiel 16:59-60." In this view the words have a singular beauty; and will lead us to some extremely profitable reflections.

It was customary with shepherds, as it is also at this day, to make their flocks pass under their pastoral rod, in order that he might number them, or separate some from the rest Leviticus 27:32. Jeremiah 33:13. In this way God promises to make Israel pass before him, in order to select from them a people unto himself, and to bring them into the bonds of his everlasting covenant. And, in conformity with this view, we might well direct your attention to the future conversion of the Jews, who shall assuredly be restored to the favor of their God. But, waving this part of the subject, I will rather speak of conversion generally; the process of which is the same, whether in them or in us. We may notice, then, this work of conversion, as here described,

I. In its commencement—

"The Lord," we are told, "has set apart him that is godly for himself Psalm 4:3." This he accomplishes in a variety of ways:

1. By the dispensations of his Providence—

Sometimes things which, humanly speaking, we should call accidental, are ordered with a special view to the awakening of immortal souls, and leading them to the knowledge of himself. In our Savior's progress from Judea to Galilee, "he must needs go through Samaria; and, being wearied with his journey, he stopped at a city called Sychar, and seated himself by a well called Jacob's well. While he was there, a woman of Samaria came thither to draw water." In all this there appears nothing but an ordinary occurrence: but it was God's appointed way of bringing her, together with many others, under the rod, and eventually into the bond of his covenant John 4:3-7; John 4:25-26. Not unfrequently he is pleased to make use of some afflictive dispensation; as in the case of Manasseh, upon whom "God brought the armies of the king of Assyria, who, as his instruments, took him among the thorns, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon:" the effect of all which was, that, "when he was in affliction, this monster of impiety besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers 2 Chronicles 33:11-13," and obtained mercy at his hands. Multitudes of others also, in every age, have found reason to say, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept your law."

2. By the conversion of some pious friend—

We see not, in general, anything remarkable in an accidental interview with a pious person; while yet it may, perhaps, have been as particularly ordained of God for a special end, as the meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. God especially directed Philip to join himself to the eunuch's chariot, and to explain to him a passage of Scripture which he was not able to comprehend. By this was the eunuch guided to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and made a partaker of everlasting salvation. Thus, persons sent to us, though they received not their commission in so plain and direct a way, have come to us under the same Divine guidance, and have been made alike successful in their efforts for our good. For similar benefits was Peter indebted to his brother Andrew, and Nathanael to his friend Philip John 1:40; John 1:45; and perhaps many among ourselves must trace our first awakenings to some event of this kind, even to a friendly suggestion from some pious or benevolent instructor.

3. By the public ministry of the word—

It is by this, for the most part, that God is pleased to separate, and seal us up, for his own. He sends home his word with power to the heart of one and another, just as he did to the heart of Lydia; and causes them to surrender up themselves to him, as his redeemed people. A whole assembly is present: but a discrimination is made by God, according to his sovereign will and pleasure; who makes "the same word to be to some a savor of life unto life, while to others it becomes only a savor of death unto death 2 Corinthians 2:16."

4. By the secret operation of his Spirit upon the soul—

We see not the rod in the hand of the great Shepherd; but he is using it every moment, for the purpose of separating a people for himself. By his good Spirit he imparts a sensation to the soul, a heavenly touch, of which the person himself perhaps, at first, is scarcely conscious. By that he enlightens the eyes, and draws the heart; and prepares a person for fuller discoveries of his power and grace. Job says, "God speaks once, yes, twice; yet man perceives it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man Job 33:14-17." Doubtless, whatever is done by the Holy Spirit, is, and must ever be, in perfect accordance with the word: but his motions are not confined to means or instruments of any kind: yet, in his operations, he always deals with us as rational creatures; drawing us, not by force, as inanimate beings, but "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love John 6:44 with Hosea 11:4."

This, then, is the preparatory work, whereby "God causes us to pass under the rod:" and this is the commencement of that conversion, which we are next to mark,

II. In its progress—

God's ultimate view, in these diversified dispensations, is, to bring us into the bond of his covenant, because it is only by virtue of that covenant, and through an interest in it, that sinful man can be saved. When, therefore, he has made us to pass under the rod,

1. He reveals that covenant to us—

Previous to a work of grace upon our souls, we are altogether ignorant of the covenant which God has made with us, and with his only-begotten Son in our behalf. We have, perhaps, some general notions about repentance and faith; but we have no distinct view of the Savior undertaking for us to expiate our guilt by the sacrifice of himself, and to work out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death. We see not our need of such a covenant: much less do we so behold its excellency, as to "comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of his love" displayed in it. But, when God, in tender mercy, arrests us in our course, and directs our attention to eternal things, he opens and unfolds to us this covenant, in all its merciful provisions: he shown us, that in this covenant there is abundant security, both for the honor of God and the happiness of man; inasmuch as, by the provisions of it, all his perfections are glorified, and every want of man is supplied. Thus "his secret is with us, and he shows us his covenant Psalm 25:14."

2. He enables us to lay hold on it—

There is much reluctance in us, at first, to embrace this covenant. It is too humiliating for us; in that it requires us to abandon all self-dependence, and to look for acceptance with God solely through the merits of his dear Son. But when once we have passed under the rod of our divine Shepherd, and been set apart for him, then comes "the day of his power; and we are made willing" to be saved on any terms which it has pleased God to prescribe. The salvation of our souls is then, in our estimation, "the one thing needful:" and, without any wish to stipulate for ourselves, we cry, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" Then, as the man-slayer sought a city of refuge, and fled to it with all earnestness from the pursuer of blood, so do we most thankfully lay hold on this covenant, and "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us." In truth, this way of salvation appears precisely such as our necessities require. The covenant makes over to us everything, as the free gift of God for Christ's sake: and, deeply conscious that we have nothing, and can do nothing, whereby to merit even the smallest of its blessings, we are glad to receive them all "without money and without price."

3. He confers upon us all the blessings—

"This covenant is ordered in all things, and sure:" it makes over to us all that we can ever need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity. Accordingly, from the time that we are brought to "lay hold upon it," God showers forth his blessings upon us in rich abundance; "he blots out all our iniquities, as a morning cloud;" and pours down upon us the riches of his grace, whereby we are enabled to mortify all our corrupt affections, and to walk before him in newness of heart and life. He makes known himself to us as a Covenant God, that is engaged to fulfill to us all his promises, and to "perfect in us the work he has begun." In short, he gives us to see that Heaven itself is our inheritance; and that, while "that is reserved for us, we also are kept by his mighty power for it 1 Peter 1:4-5." His faithfulness then becomes no less an object of our affiance than his mercy; and we are enabled, with confidence, to say, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me," at the great day of his appearing.

We cannot but remark from hence,

1. How sovereign God is, in the dispensations of his mercy—

If a shepherd separate any sheep for his own peculiar use, it is probable that he has some reference to their intrinsic worth, as the ground of his preference. But our heavenly Shepherd has respect to nothing but his own sovereign will and pleasure. This remarkably appears in the passage before us; where the promise of God's mercy is so interwoven with the denunciations of his wrath, as to involve a doubt in which of the two lights it is to be viewed. And in this way it is that God's promises are frequently introduced. By the Prophet Isaiah, God says of his Church, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth; and yet he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." Now, what might we expect to follow this? What, but some heavy denunciation of his wrath? Yet, behold, he adds, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him, and will restore comfort to him and to his mourners Isaiah 57:17-18." It was in this sovereign way that Saul was "made a chosen vessel to the Lord:" and I doubt not but that every individual among you, who has ever experienced conversion in his own soul, will trace it altogether to the same source, and say, "By the grace of God I am what I am 1 Corinthians 15:10."

2. How mysterious are his dealings with the children of men—

Sheep, when undergoing the process referred to in my text, are usually full of fear and terror, expecting nothing but evil, while their shepherd designs them nothing but good. So it is also, most generally, with the children of men, at their first awakening: they apprehend nothing but vengeance at the hands of an offended God; and regard the rod as held over them only for their ruin. But at no distant period their fears are turned into joy: and it is delightful to contemplate what shall soon be the issue of those convictions which perhaps at this time may be filling the souls of some among you with terror and dismay. Could you but see what is really passing in reference to you at this moment, you would behold, perhaps, your heavenly Shepherd standing over you, and by his word and Spirit marking you for his own. O, beloved, lift up your hearts to him in earnest prayer, and say, "Take me, Lord, even me, the least and meanest of your flock!" and learn to regard all his dispensations as means to this blessed end.

3. How you may best answer all the purposes of his grace—

You have heard what God's gracious purpose is towards all the objects of his love: he seeks "to bring them into the bond of his covenant." Trouble not then ourselves about the abstruse doctrines of election; but seek to have the ends of electing love accomplished in you. Lay hold on God's covenant; embrace the salvation there offered you; go to the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ; and seek all the blessings of it, in and through him. Then shall you have in yourselves an evidence of that, which you never can discover but by its fruits. It was "from their works of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope," that Paul knew the election of his Thessalonian converts 1 Thessalonians. 1:3-4; and from our laying hold of God's covenant, we may assuredly ascertain that he has "chosen us to salvation," and loved us with an everlasting love. Again, therefore, I say, perplex not yourselves about what no man can know, except from its effects; but do that which will at once ensure all the blessings of salvation, and demonstrate that God is your God forever and ever.

Ezekiel 20:40-44

DISCOURSE 1109

RESTORATION OF THE JEWS, AND THE CONVERSION OF A SOUL, COMPARED

Ezekiel 20:40-44. In mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will. I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first-fruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall you remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein you have been defiled; and you shall loath yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord God.

THE history of the Jews, whether retrospective or prospective, is extremely interesting; not only as abounding in events more wonderful than all the histories of the whole world beside, but particularly as illustrating the dealings of God with the souls of men, at the present day, and in all ages, to the very end of time. Of the retrospective part, such as their bringing out of Egypt, and their sojourning in the wilderness, and their introduction into the promised land, we shall have no occasion to speak at this time: but to the things predicted concerning them, all of which are as certain as if they were already past, and which therefore may be called their prospective history, we would now direct your attention, and especially with a view to illustrate from them the conversion of our souls to God.

Let me, then, point out,

I. The effect which the restoration of the Jews will hereafter produce on them—

They shall assuredly be restored to God, and to their own land, in due season—

"From all the countries, where they have been driven, shall they be gathered:" and they shall, in their own land, be restored to the worship, and the favor, of their God: The terms in which their services are foretold, correspond with the ordinances which are prescribed by the Mosaic Law: But they are intended to express only that spiritual worship, which, under the Christian dispensation, we render unto God. These they will render from their inmost souls; and from God will they receive, as formerly, the most favorable tokens of his acceptance.

The effects produced on them by their restoration will be truly blessed—

They have been the most stiff-necked of any people; and even at this day are remarkable for the hardness of their hearts: but at that day they will be broken-hearted, and contrite in a very extraordinary degree. The recollection of their having "crucified the Lord of Glory" will pre-eminently lead to this Zechariah 12:10; and their views of their own extreme baseness will be exceeding deep Compare Ezekiel 16:63; Ezekiel 36:31 with verse 43.

Their knowledge of God, too, will be proportionably enlarged. Their opportunities of knowing God have been hitherto most unprofitably employed: but in that day, when they shall see all the predictions concerning them so wonderfully fulfilled, they will be made to acknowledge, with more genuine feeling than ever, that God's grace has been magnified towards them; and that they themselves are, above all people upon earth, the most wonderful monuments of his grace.

In all this are shadowed forth,

II. The effects which the conversion of our souls will infallibly produce on us—

There is a considerable resemblance between the restoration of the Jews, and the conversion of a soul to God—

From a dark and wicked world is every soul brought in its conversion to God John 15:19; John 17:14; And from that moment it enjoys sweet communion with God, in all the exercises of prayer and praise 1 John 1:3; Then does "God manifest himself unto the soul as he does not unto the world John 14:22," and communicates unto it all the blessings both of grace and glory 1 John 5:14-15.

And in the effects produced on them is there also a very strict resemblance—

From conversion flows such a deep humiliation of soul as was never experienced before. The need of a broken and contrite spirit may have been long acknowledged; but the reality of it is never felt, until the soul is brought to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Then the wonders of redeeming love are seen; and all the evils of the heart and life are felt as heightened and aggravated by the consideration of them: so that the soul actually loathes and abhors itself as a very mass of iniquity Job 40:4; Job 42:6.

From it also is derived such a knowledge of God as the soul never before had any conception of. The perfections of God may have all been acknowledged before, in a speculative way; but now the soul realizes them, and feels itself a living witness and monument of them all: Especially does it then see the sovereignty of God, as exercised in the communications of his grace to men. Once, perhaps, the idea of God's sovereignty was painful to the mind: but now it comes with a power and sweetness that cannot be described. The believer needs not now be told that he has not been dealt with according to his deserts: he knows full well where he should have been, if God had not been exceeding abundant in mercy towards him: and from his inmost soul he gives all the glory of his salvation to God alone: The one subject of thanks giving among the heavenly hosts is the continued subject of his song on earth Revelation 1:5-6.

Let me, then, urge you all to seek this conversion:

1. It is that by which God is to be glorified on earth—

To the Jews, God says, "I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." They, when converted to God, will be most distinguished monuments of God's power and grace; yes, and of his truth and faithfulness also. And such, brethren, are you to be, at this time: you are to be "as lights shining in a dark world." And such should be the change visible in you, as persons turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that all who behold you may "glorify God in you." Especially let them see, that the mercies given to you, so far from puffing you up with pride, are the means of humbling you in the dust before God, and of filling you with the most self-denying love to man: You are to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men 2 Corinthians 3:2-3;" and so is your light to shine before men, that all who behold you may glorify your Father who is in Heaven Matthew 5:16."

2. It is that by which alone your souls can be saved—

There must be in you a separation from the world, from worldly maxims, worldly habits, and worldly company. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world; and is utterly to be renounced; since, if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you 1 John 2:15-16." To God, also, must you be brought: so as to "walk before him," and to seek all your happiness in communion with him. You must also, to your latest hour, be abased before him in dust and ashes; and maintain upon your souls such a sense of his excellency, as must be to you a very foretaste of Heaven itself. True, indeed, all this is not learned at once: but, as a child, at its first coming into the world, possesses all the parts of a man, so must all these things be begun in you, if ever you would approve yourselves as children of the living God: O, seek of God that grace that shall be sufficient for you; and know, that, as his future mercies to the Jews will not be obstructed by their past obduracy, so neither shall the descent of his grace on you be prevented by any unworthiness of yours, if only you will cry to God in his Son's name, and "flee to Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before you." "Of those who come to God in the name of Christ, not one shall ever be cast out."

Ezekiel 20:49

DISCOURSE 1110

MEN'S TREATMENT OF THE GOSPEL

Ezekiel 20:49. Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Does he not speak parables?

THE word of God, by whoever spoken, should be received with reverence and godly fear. Great care indeed should be taken to examine whether the word which is spoken in his name be agreeable to the sacred oracles; but when that point is ascertained, then we should bow before it, and submit ourselves wholly and cheerfully to its directions. This is the plain dictate of reason and common sense: but yet it is far from being the regulating principle of men's actions; for at the very time that men acknowledge the divine authority of the word delivered, they set themselves in a variety of ways to invalidate its force, and to withstand its influence. The Jews who came to inquire of Ezekiel had no doubt of his being a prophet, inspired of God to declare unto them his holy will. Yet when he did deliver to them the messages sent by his divine Master, they poured contempt upon them, and said, "Does he not speak parables?"

From hence we shall take occasion to show,

I. How the messages of God are treated—

The import of the observation made by the Jews on Ezekiel's ministrations seems to have been, that his word was altogether so figurative and unintelligible as to be unworthy of any serious attention. It may be thought perhaps that this was a singular case; but it is, in fact, a just specimen of the way in which the messages of God have been treated from the beginning of the world—

When Noah preached to the antediluvian world, he was regarded as a weak alarmist, who merited only their pity and their scorn. When Lot warned his family of the impending judgments that would soon fall on Sodom and Gomorrah, "he seemed," we are told, "as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." When Jehu was informed by a prophet that God had destined him to assume the royal authority, the messenger was designated by the title, that mad fellow; "What said that mad fellow unto you?" If we come to the New-Testament dispensation, we find our blessed Lord himself, who "spoke as never man spoke," treated in the same contemptuous manner: many of the Jews said of him, "He has a devil, and is mad: why hear you him John 10:20." and again, "Say we not well that you are a Samaritan, and have a devil John 8:48." The name, "that deceiver," seems to have been given him by his enemies as a common appellation Matthew 27:63. His Apostles met with precisely the same reception. Paul was accounted a babbler; and when speaking most unquestionably "the words of truth and sober ness," was thus reviled; "Paul, you are beside yourself; much learning has made you mad Acts 17:18; Acts 26:24." And is it not thus at the present day? Is not every one who delivers the word of God with fidelity and boldness represented as a fanatic, and a deceiver? Some condemn the matter of his discourses, as visionary, as erroneous, as unnecessarily strict, or as lax even to licentiousness. Others condemn the manner: if it be firm, it is harsh; if affectionate, it is canting; if written, it is dull; if unwritten, it is enthusiastic, and devoid of sense. In a word, it is now as in the days of old: when John came, neither eating nor drinking, it was said he had a devil; and when our Lord came with condescending freedom, "eating and drinking," it was said of him, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners:" and in like manner we, "whether we pipe or mourn," are equally unacceptable to our hearers, and obnoxious to their censure Matthew 11:16-19.

It is worthy of observation too, that the opposers of the Gospel seem never to entertain a doubt but that they are quite correct in all the censures which they pass upon those who minister the word unto them. "Does he not speak parables?" was in the apprehension of Ezekiel's hearers an obvious fact; and the inference which they drew from it, namely, That he was unworthy to be regarded, was in their estimate perfectly legitimate and undeniable. So now the folly of all who preach the Gospel, and the consequent propriety of disregarding everything they say, are considered as so plain, that none but persons equally weak with themselves can entertain a doubt upon the subject.

If such be indeed the treatment generally given to the Lord's messages, it will be useful to inquire,

II. Whence it is they are so treated—

Doubtless persons who mean well may both speak and act with considerable indiscretion, and may by their injudicious conduct cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. But as the treatment of God's messages is the same by whoever they are delivered, we must look for the reason of it, not so much in the messengers, as in those to whom they are sent. There are then in the hearers of the Gospel many obstacles to a just reception of it;

1. A pride of understanding—

Men think themselves qualified to sit in judgment upon the word of God, just as much as upon any human composition; and, when it accords not with their pre-conceived opinions, they do not hesitate to pronounce it foolishness 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14. To receive it with the docility of little children they would consider as a degradation to them. They account it not indeed a degradation to children to receive instruction from their parents, or their authorized instructors; but they see not any such distance between the mind of God and theirs, as to call for any such submission to him on their part, though "they are born like a wild ass's colt." Hence it must necessarily arise that they will stumble, and be offended, at the great mysteries of redemption.

2. An independent spirit—

"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" is the reply, which, not Pharaoh only, but the whole host of rebels, make to the commands of God. It is awful to observe how little weight the authority of God has in influencing the conduct of the world. Tell them how much their interest will be affected by this or that line of conduct, and they will give a patient attention to your advice: but speak of God's judgments, and they will "puff at them" with sovereign contempt Psalm 10:5. Such treatment they themselves would not endure, for a moment, from a child or servant of their own: but they offer it to God without any self-reproach, or any fear of his displeasure. They will not indeed confess that they thus oppose themselves to their Maker: they will maintain, that the word spoken to them is no just expression of his will: but this is a mere cover to their rebellion: they will not comply with his commands, and therefore they will deny altogether that they proceed from him, or else wall so interpret them as altogether to change their import, and evade their force.

3. An inveterate aversion to holiness—

To a formal and external righteousness many are not at all averse; they rather love it, as a substitute for spiritual obedience. But bring to their view the requisitions of God's law, and they cry out against them, as unreasonably severe, yes, as utterly impracticable and absurd. Our Lord himself informs us, that this is the true source of their rejection of his word: "They love darkness rather than light: they even hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." No wonder that they cry, "Does he not speak parables?" when they are determined beforehand not to understand the plainest declarations.

Before any determine thus to reject the messages of Heaven, it will be well for them to consider,

III. What consequences must ensue from this treatment of them—

Certainly,

1. All the ends of our ministry among them must be defeated—

It is in vain to speak to those who will not hear: the invitations, the promises, the threatenings of Scripture can be of no avail to those who will not acknowledge the authority of God in them. What a melancholy reflection is this, that God should send ambassadors to men with messages of peace and love, and that men should "make light of them," and recompense with hatred and contempt every effort that is made for their salvation. Well might Paul "have continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart," when he reflected on the state of such persons, and that, instead of having to present them to God as his joy and crown, he should have to appear as a swift witness against them in the day of judgment,

2. Their guilt and condemnation must be greatly aggravated—

No man leaves the house of God as he came into it: the ordinance which he has attended has either brought him nearer to Heaven, or prepared him more as fuel for the tire of Hell. If the word be not "a savor of life unto life, it is savor of death unto death." Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that "if he had never come and spoken unto them, they would comparatively have had no sin:" but that in consequence of their rejection of his offered mercies, "the state of Sodom and Gomorrah would be more tolerable in the day of judgment than theirs." In like manner we must say to our hearers, that every opportunity of instruction which they have enjoyed is a talent to be accounted for; and that their hiding of it in a napkin will be a ground of their condemnation John 3:19.

APPLICATION—

And now what account must we carry to our God concerning you? He has sent us to deliver his messages; and he will require of us some account of the manner in which they have been received among you. And what shall we say? Must we not, in reference to the greater part of you, say, "Ah! Lord God," we come with a painful report: we would have rejoiced to have told you, that your word had had "a free course, and been glorified among them;" but we are constrained to declare, that, if not in word, yet at least in spirit, they say of us, "Does he not speak parables?" Some do really think that the message we deliver is no other than "a cunningly-devised fable;" while others, acquiescing in it as coming from you, are too busy, or too careless, to pay any respect to it. Some, it is true, take a pleasure in hearing your word, just as Ezekiel's hearers did; but, like them, they will not comply with any one of your commands: their cares, their pleasures, their desire of earthly things, carry them away, and entirely engross their minds: they are hearers of your word, but not doers of it: and though they sometimes are made to see their face as in a glass, they go away, and presently forget what manner of men they are. Thus, though they differ from one another in many things, they agree in this, namely, to refuse subjection to your blessed word, and to follow the imaginations of their own hearts.

This however is not the case with all: there are some who receive the word, "not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." Some there are that say of us, We have been messengers of glad tidings to their souls, and instruments in your hands for their eternal welfare. The Savior whom we have announced to them is precious to their souls; they look to him; they trust in him; they rejoice and glory in his salvation; and they show forth their faith by their works. "O Lord God, what thanks can we render unto you for all the joy where with we joy before you on their account!" truly "they are our glory and joy." O blessed Lord, increase their number a hundred fold; and "establish all their hearts unblamably in holiness unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!" that when we shall be summoned to your judgment-seat to give up our account to you, we may do it with joy and not with grief. Let not one of them turn back again to perdition; but keep them all steadfast in faith and love and holiness, that we may have the joy of presenting them perfect before you in that day, saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me!"

Ezekiel 33:8

DISCOURSE 1111

OFFICE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS

Ezekiel 33:8. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die! if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand.

THE office of a minister is the most important and most difficult of any that we can be called to sustain. It is the most important, because the salvation of multitudes depends upon it: and it is the most difficult, because it requires such self-denying habits, and spiritual affections. The responsibility also that attaches to it is such, that no man would dare to take it upon himself, if he had not a promise of peculiar assistance in the discharge of it. Ministers are the messengers of God to men: to them they must faithfully declare his whole counsel: however painful the truths may be which they are to deliver, and however averse men may be to hear them, they must execute their commission at the peril of their souls. To this effect God speaks in the words before us: in which we may notice,

I. What God says to the wicked—

It is scarcely possible to conceive a more solemn declaration than that before us; "I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die!" Consider,

1. Who are the people addressed—

These are all who do not sincerely turn from sin to God. It matters not whether they be rich or poor, old or young, learned or unlearned. In some sense, it matters not whether their sins have been more or less heinous: for though there certainly are degrees of guilt, and some are more wicked than others, yet all are wicked, who are not following after God in righteousness and true holiness; and consequently, all such persons, however their characters may vary in other respects, are addressed in the text.

2. The declaration of God unto them—

Death is here denounced as the judgment to be inflicted on all who turn not to their God: and to the same effect the inspired writers uniformly speak Isaiah 3:11. Romans 6:23. James 1:14-15. Nor are we at a loss to determine what is meant by "death:" it is the wrath of God Romans 1:18, the misery of Hell Revelation 21:8. This is the judgment that will come upon every individual who shall be found in the state before described. God may be considered as addressing himself to every individual of the human race: "O wicked man!" Nor is this fatal result of wickedness expressed in doubtful terms: there is no perhaps; the decree is fixed; "You shall surely die!" Who can reflect on these words as proceeding from a God of infinite power and of inviolable truth, and not tremble?

3. The condition implied in that declaration—

If there were no condition implied in the declaration, it would have been to no purpose to make known the declaration itself; since it could have no other effect than to torment men before their time. But as in the message to Nineveh, "that in forty days Nineveh should be overthrown," there was an implied condition, that, if they repented, the threatened vengeance should be withheld; so, in this case, there is an implied assurance, that the wicked, if they will repent, shall not die. And this is expressly stated in the following context verse 14–16; so that, awful as this passage is, it is no less encouraging than it is awful; because it assures the contrite and believing sinner that he shall never perish.

Together with this warning, we see in the text,

II. The necessity imposed on ministers to proclaim it—

Ministers are described as watchmen, or sentinels, placed at a distance from the camp to give notice of the enemy's approach. Now this very character marks both their duty and their responsibility. But the consequences of neglect in any minister are declared in two respects:

1. The person whom he neglects to warn, will perish—

If through the sloth or treachery of the sentinels a camp be surprised at midnight, nothing but confusion and ruin can ensue. Thus, if a person appointed to warn the wicked, neglect to do so, the wicked will continue regardless of their impending doom, until it is too late to avert it. And when the hour of vengeance is come, it will be to no purpose to say, "I was not aware of my danger; my minister has betrayed me." No; the wicked have means of information within their own reach, independent of their ministers; and they have secret intimations in their own consciences that they ought to repent: and therefore they must take the consequences of their own wickedness; "they must die in their iniquity." How awful is this effect of one minister's supineness! Alas! that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, should perish eternally, when, if he had warned them faithfully, they might have been saved forever!

2. He himself also will be dealt with as the author of that sinner's destruction—

As a sentinel who, by neglecting to give notice of the enemy's approach, occasioned the overthrow of the army to which he belonged, would be chargeable with all the consequences of his neglect, so will the blood of all that perish through the minister's neglect "be required at his hand." When they shall all stand before God, he will ask of the minister, Why did you not warn that man, and him, and him, and him? It will be to no purpose to say, "Lord, he was rich, and I was afraid of his displeasure;" or, "Lord, he was poor, and I overlooked him;" or, "Lord, I was so engaged in business or pleasure, that I never thought about the souls committed to my charge." No: he must answer for every soul that perishes through his means, and must sink ten-fold deeper into the bottomless abyss than the most guilty of the people whom he has neglected and betrayed.

APPLICATION—

After stating these reasons for ministerial fidelity, we need make no apology for "warning the wicked from their way:" or rather, we need apologize for not using far greater plainness of speech that we have ever yet done.

Hear then, you wicked, with solemn awe, the voice of God to you. "O wicked drunkard, you shall surely die!" "O wicked whoremonger, you shall surely die!" "O wicked swearer, or Sabbath-breaker, you shall surely die!" Is there any one here that, though free from gross sins, lives in a neglect of secret prayer; "O wicked man, you shall surely die This may be easily extended to the formalist, the hypocritical professor, etc."

But while we declare these things, we would not be unmindful of the compassion which is expressed in the very mode in which God has denounced his judgments; "O wicked man!" This seems to intimate, that God is grieved for the misery of the wicked, even while he declares the doom that awaits them. So would we be; and the rather, because we ourselves are involved in the same condemnation, if we do not repent and turn to God.

O then, brethren, whether you have committed gross sins or not, remember that you all need to humble yourselves before God as condemned sinners: you all need to wash in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood: you all need to "turn from your transgressions, that so iniquity may not be your ruin." O that God may enable you to accept this warning with all thankfulness! We have striven, as it became us, to "deliver our own souls:" the Lord grant that, in thus endeavoring to "save ourselves, we may be instrumental to save also those that hear us 1 Timothy 4:16."

Ezekiel 33:11

DISCOURSE 1112

GOD EXPOSTULATING WITH SINNERS

Ezekiel 33:11. Say unto them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

THE excuses which men offer for not turning unto God, are, for the most part, reflections cast on the Deity himself. One man deems the service of God unnecessary; another thinks it impracticable in his particular situation; another says, I can do nothing without grace, and if God do not bestow his grace upon me, how can I help myself? Such was the disposition manifested by the Jews of old, when they were invited and commanded to repent: they complained, that it was to no purpose to repent, since they were already pining away under their transgressions; and that the promises of life, which were held forth to them in God's name, were delusive, since God, so far from wishing to pardon them, had shown a pleasure in executing his vengeance upon them This seems to be implied in verse 10. as connected with the text. Against such unrighteous accusations, God vindicates himself by an oath, and by the most pressing and affectionate exhortation renews his calls to repentance. In the message which he sent by the prophet to the Jews, we have his message to sinners of every age and nation: and in delivering it to you at this time we would call your attention to two things contained in it:

I. A solemn oath—

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord speaks," yes, swears; and, "because he can swear by no greater, he swears by himself," even by his own life and immortal perfections. But what is it which Jehovah condescends to confirm in this solemn manner?

1. That he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner—

What? was this a matter so doubtful, that it was necessary to remove our doubts in such a way? Methinks, we need no further proof of this than our own continuance in the land of the living. Should we, should any of us, have been here, if God had taken pleasure in our death? Have we not provoked God in ten thousand instances to cut us off, and would he not long since have consigned us over to perdition, if he had not been slow to anger, and rich in mercy?: Would God moreover have given his only dear Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to convert and sanctify us, yes, would he wait so long to be gracious unto us, and, notwithstanding our obstinacy, follow us every day with invitations, entreaties, promises, and expostulations; would he act thus, I say, if he had pleasure in our death?: Surely it was not any uncertainty respecting this truth itself, but our backwardness to believe it, that gave occasion for such an astonishing vindication of it.

2. That he has pleasure in the conversion and salvation of sinners—

This is not at all less obvious than the foregoing truth: and the same observations which confirm the one, will establish the other also. But we may farther refer both to existing facts, and most explicit declarations, in support of this assertion. We cannot conceive more atrocious guilt than that which David had contracted, guilt aggravated a hundred-fold by his past professions and experience. But no sooner did he acknowledge his transgression, than the prophet who had been commissioned to denounce the heaviest judgments against him, was inspired to reply, The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die 2 Samuel 12:13. In what beautiful colors is the mercy of our God painted in the parable of the lost sheep, and the returning prodigal! Is it possible for words more fully to describe how much "he delights in mercy?" Let us marvel then at the condescension of our God in confirming such declarations by an oath. Had he "sworn in his wrath that we should not enter into his rest," we might easily have accounted for it; because, however merited such a judgment might be, he is never brought, but with extreme reluctance, to execute it Isaiah 28:21. "His strange act." But to establish his character for mercy in such a way, was altogether superfluous, except for the more abundant display of his own goodness, and the richer consolation of our minds.

That this testimony of God, respecting his own delight in mercy, may not fail of producing its proper effect on our minds, it is enforced by,

II. An affectionate exhortation—

Had we not already seen such condescension as almost exceeds our belief, we might well be filled with wonder at the further proofs of it which are exhibited in the text—

The Creator and Judge of all stoops to use the language of entreaty towards perishing sinners—

He does not simply issue his command, but repeats it with all the tenderness and solicitude of the most affectionate parent. He sees with deep concern how "all like sheep are gone astray, every one to his own way:" one is wandering in the paths of open sensuality and profaneness; another has involved himself in the labyrinths of worldly care; another is pleasing himself with the idea that he belongs to the fold of God, while he has nothing but "the form of godliness without any of its power." But God would have all return to him, to walk in his ways, and to enjoy his blessings. He longs to see the sensualist, the worldling, and the formal professor of religion, all truly and thoroughly awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, and all seeking after the salvation of their souls as the one thing needful. He would not that one of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live. Hence his earnestness in urging their immediate and effectual return.

He further enforces his request with a most animated expostulation—

Sin and death are inseparably connected: there is no alternative but to flee from sin or perish forever; we must turn or die. This is evidently implied in the expostulation which God uses; and the certainty of it is far more strongly marked, than if it had been asserted in the plainest terms. Let sinners then answer the question which God puts to them, "Why will you die?" Is death, eternal death so light a matter, that you will subject yourselves to it for the fleeting gratifications of sin? Is it a light thing "to fall into the hands of the living God," and to have "both body and soul cast into Hell" forever? Or is a life of godliness so painful, that the labors of it will not be repaid by all the felicity of Heaven? If we were to ask you, Why will you seek after God? Why will you regard your souls? Why will you forsake the beaten paths of sin, and walk in the unfrequented ways of righteousness? your answers would be plain; the most ignorant might give such a reply, as not all the wisdom of man could gainsay or resist. But what will you answer to the interrogation in the text? And if you are constrained now, notwithstanding your habits of self-vindication, to acknowledge the folly and madness of your conduct, how much more will you be speechless in the day of judgment, when the enormity of such conduct will appear without any palliation or disguise! Let not God then reason with you in vain: but turn from those ways, which you are not able to justify, or, with any shadow of propriety, to excuse.

APPLICATION—

1. To those who are now at length desirous of returning to God—

It is not from profaneness to morality, or from morality to an outward observance of religious duties, that God calls us; but from all sin whatever to a sound and thorough conversion. Be sure then that you do not mistake in a matter of such infinite importance; but turn to God in the ways which he has appointed. Go with penitence and contrition to the Lord Jesus, that you may be washed in the fountain of his blood: and pray to God for the influences of his Spirit, that you may be "sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit, and be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." Rest in nothing short of this, for it is to this only that the promise of life is annexed; "you must be converted, and become as little children (simple, teachable, dependent, obedient in all things) if ever you would enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

2. To those who are still determined to withstand the entreaties of God—

Go on in sin, until you have filled up the measure of your iniquities: but remember, you will not have to cast the blame on God in that day when your calamities shall come upon you. God has at this very hour testified with an oath, that it is his desire to save your souls; yes, he at this moment expostulates with you, and beseeches you to seek his face. Nor shall you have to accuse your minister in that day. We are told indeed, in the very chapter before us, that the blood of those who perish, shall be required at the hands of negligent and unfaithful ministers verse 7–9; but, even though your blood were to be required at the hands of your minister, it would be no alleviation of your misery, since you also would die in your iniquity, and be condemned together with him. We hope, however, and are determined, God helping us, to be "pure from your blood:" we have warned you, and do warn you yet again, that you must turn or die; "if you live after the flesh you shall die; but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." Whatever others therefore may plead, you have, and shall have, none but yourselves to blame; and it will be a bitter reflection in the day of judgment, to think, that "God called, and you refused;" and that "Christ would often have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not." May God prevent those reflections by giving you repentance unto life, for his dear Son's sake: Amen, and Amen.

Ezekiel 33:31-32

DISCOURSE 1113

THE SELF-DECEPTION OF COVETOUS PROFESSORS

Ezekiel 33:31-32. And they come unto you as the people comes, and they sit before you as my people, and they healthy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you are unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant, voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not.

NONE can be religious without appearing so; because religion must of necessity regulate our outward conduct. But persons may appear religious, while they are wholly destitute of vital godliness. Such were they, who talked of "So the word "against" should be read in verse 30. as the whole context evidently shows; and it is so rendered in the margin of the Bibles. the prophet in their houses, and expressed so much solicitude to hear from him the word of the Lord—

We propose to consider,

I. The characters here described—

If we look at their profession only, all is well: they unite themselves to the Lord's people, and account themselves to be of their number. They pay great attention to the ordinances; they feel peculiar delight in the ministration of the word; they express a very high regard for those who labor in the word and doctrine; they are not offended even with the most searching discourses; nor are the sons and daughters of pleasure more gratified with musical entertainments, than they are with the fluent, fervent, eloquent harangues of a faithful minister.

But, alas! their practice ill accords with their profession: it is amusement rather than real edification that they seek. Their hearts are set upon the world, and riveted to their earthly possessions. In the pursuit of gain they will be guilty of falsehood or dishonesty; they will commend their goods, when they know them to be bad; they will impose on the ignorance or the necessities of those who deal with them; they will take advantage of the confidence reposed in them to overreach their neighbor; and will condescend to meannesses, of which an honest heathen would be ashamed. They may be generous where their own inclination is strongly concerned, or where a liberal donation will advance their reputation; hut at other times they will be as penurious and niggardly as the most unfeeling miser. It may be indeed that a principle of honor keeps them tolerably observant of truth and justice; but they give abundant evidence that their hearts are set upon things below rather than on things above, and show, that they are more solicitous to be rich in this world, than to be rich towards God.

Such there have been in every age; nor are there wanting many such characters among the professors of the present day The characters of a proud and passionate professor, and of a censorious and uncharitable professor, might here be drawn, as being equally common, and equally hateful. They hear the duties of a Christian opened and enforced; but they remain as much under the dominion of their lusts as ever.

II. The light in which they are viewed by God—

In their own eyes they are as good as any. Whatever be their besetting sin, they have reasons enough to extenuate and excuse it. Their covetousness is nothing more than prudence and diligence; their fretfulness and fiery passions are the mere infirmities of nature, the trifling ebullitions of a warm and hasty temper, that are far more than counterbalanced by a proportionable zeal for what is good. When they hear the contrary dispositions recommended from the pulpit, they acknowledge the directions to be exceeding proper; but they scarcely ever feel their own conduct condemned by them. They are eagle-eyed in spying out the faults of others; but they are almost utter strangers to their own. Their zeal for the Gospel, and their attachment to those who preach or profess it, is to them a decisive evidence of their own conversion; and nothing that God or man can say to the contrary is suffered for one moment to shake their confidence.

In the estimation of the Church these persons often pass for eminent saints. Their faults are not generally known, and the best construction is put upon all they say or do. Godly men are afraid of judging harshly, and have learned to exercise the "love that hopes all things," and that "covers a multitude of sins." Hence they give the right hand of fellowship to those who show a love to the Gospel; and, even when they fear that all is not right, they are content to "let the tares grow up with the wheat until the harvest, lest through their ignorance they should pluck up the wheat with the tares."

But in the sight of God, who searches the heart, these men appear in their proper colors. Are they covetous? "he abhors them Psalm 10:3." Are they proud, passionate, contentious? they are actuated by an infernal spirit James 3:14-15. Have they no government of their tongue? their religion is vain James 1:26. Are they hearers of the word, and not doers of it also? they only deceive their own souls James 1:22. Are they habitually and allowedly under the dominion of any sin whatever? they are children of the devil 1 John 3:8, and not of God 1 John 3:9; not with standing all their profession, they have no part in the Gospel salvation 1 John 3:6 and Romans 6:14, no acceptance in their prayers Psalm 66:18, nor any portion but eternal misery in Hell Mark 9:43-48. They may have a name to live; but they are really dead before God Revelation 3:1.

INFERENCES—

1. How far must they be from a Christian state, who feel no delight in divine ordinances!

It has already appeared that men may be extremely fond of the offices, the ministers, and the professors of religion, and yet perish forever, for want of that conformity to the Divine will, which is essential to the Christian character. How much more then must they be destitute of religion, who have not even the outward appearance of sanctity, but live in an open contempt of God's word and ordinances! Let not any one imagine that the naming the name of Christ is sufficient to constitute us Christians. The tree must be judged of by its fruits: and according to our works will be the sentence that shall be upon us in the last day.

2. What need have the professors of religion to examine well their own hearts!

Love to the word and people of God, if accompanied with an unreserved obedience to his commandments, is an excellent evidence of our conversion: but, if there be a reigning inconsistency in our conduct, our love to the one or to the other of these is mere hypocrisy Matthew 15:7-8. Psalm 78:34-37. Isaiah 58:2-3. Let us then inquire diligently, and beg of God to try us, whether there be any wickedness practiced in our lives, or harbored in our bosoms Psalm 139:23-24. Let us not be content to "honor God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him." Let us rather entreat him to "put truth in our inward parts," that, while we profess to be interested in the promises, we may "purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God 1 Corinthians 7:1."

Ezekiel 34:16

DISCOURSE 1114

CHRIST'S EXECUTION OF HIS PASTORAL OFFICE

Ezekiel 34:16. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and. the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

THERE is no office under Heaven so important as that of ministering unto men the Gospel of Christ. But, alas! its importance is but too little felt, and its duties are too negligently performed See verse 2–10. There is, however, one Shepherd, whose care and vigilance are without intermission. He it is, who, many hundred years before he came into the world, spoke by the prophet, and declared the manner in which he would execute his office verse 23.

In the words before us we see,

I. The different states of Christ's sheep—

All are considered as the sheep of Christ, who by name and profession belong to him, as well "the fat and the strong, who shall be destroyed," as those who shall be saved John 10:16.

All without exception, while in their natural state, are "lost," straying from God, and ignorant of the way in which alone they can return to his fold Isaiah 53:6. Some feel an inclination to enjoy his benefits, and at times resolve that they will turn from their evil ways: but they are "driven away" by the violence of their passions or the fear of man.

Of those that have been brought home to the fold, many, like David, are complaining of griefs and sorrows, more painful than a "broken" bone Psalm 51:8. And all are "sick" of sin, that loathsome malady which pervades all their powers both of body and soul, and incapacitates them for serving God as they would wish to do Romans 7:18-19; Romans 7:21; Romans 7:23-24. Galatians 5:17.

There are too many, alas! who are "fat and strong," in their own conceit It is in this sense that our Lord speaks of "the whole," and "the righteous." Matthew 9:12-13. Were they really in good condition, they should not be "destroyed." But, like the Laodiceans of old Revelation 3:17, they deceive themselves; being really destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength, in exact proportion as they fancy themselves possessed of these things.

II. The correspondent dealings of Christ with them—

Though in many instances our Lord displays his sovereignty in stopping the progress of most grievous sinners, while he suffers persons of more amiable deportment to wander further from him Acts 9:1-6. Mark 10:21-22, yet all are to expect that he will deal with them in a perfect correspondence with their character.

He came from Heaven in human flesh, and still comes in the preaching of his Gospel, to "seek" and save "that which was lost." And if any, who have been "driven away" by the force of temptation or persecution, are desirous to put themselves under his care, he will gladly bring them to his fold, and protect them from every inward or outward foe verse 11–15, with John 10:10-11; John 10:28.

As for those who are already in his fold, he will administer to all their wants, "binding up" the broken-hearted Isaiah 61:1; Isaiah 61:3, and "renewing the strength" of those who are ready to faint Isaiah 40:29-31. By the efficacy of his word, and the consolations of his Spirit, he will turn their sorrows into joy Isaiah 35:1-2; Isaiah 35:10; and his grace shall be sufficient for them under all the trials they may be called to endure 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Willing as he is to pardon the very chief of sinners on their repentance, he will awfully punish the impenitent. The proud and self-sufficient, who despise his offers of mercy, shall surely feel his awful displeasure. He will "destroy" them as enemies both to himself and his flock: and, in order to their destruction, he will "feed them with judgment," giving them up to follow their own delusions, until they shall have completed the measure of their iniquities, and fattened themselves for the sword of his indignation Psalm 81:11-12. Yes; to eternity shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways Proverbs 1:31, and feel the judgments which they would not deprecate Isaiah 50:10-11.

APPLICATION—

1. Let us put ourselves under the care of this good Shepherd—

The more we consider our state the more shall we see, that we are straying, or, at best, diseased sheep. But here is our comfort, that we have a tender and faithful Shepherd that will forgive our wanderings, and supply our wants Isaiah 40:11. Let us then return to him, if we are afar off 1 Peter 2:25; or, if he have brought us to his fold, let us rely upon his care and faithfulness Psalm 23:1-3.

2. Let us imitate him to the utmost of our power—

Doubtless it is in the first place the duty of ministers to follow the steps of this great Shepherd, because his flock is more immediately committed to their care If this were the subject of a Visitation or Ordination Sermon, this thought should be prosecuted at some length, in reference to the whole preceding part of the chapter. But it is also the duty of every one in his place and station to exert himself to the utmost to enlarge and edify the flock of Christ. And, if we were more diligent in our respective spheres, how many might be reduced from their wanderings, or strengthened in their difficulties, or comforted in their troubles! We know not how useful a word in season might prove. "Let us then, as the elect of God, put on affections of mercies," and show our relation to Christ by our conformity to his image.

Ezekiel 34:23-24

DISCOURSE 1115

DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST

Ezekiel 34:23-24. I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.

THERE is nothing so comforting to an afflicted soul, as to contemplate the promises of God: indeed they were given to us for this very purpose, that they might be our support and consolation in the time of trouble. The same may be observed with respect to the prophecies that relate to Christ; they were delivered to the Church in seasons of peculiar trial, as encouragements to the saints to hold fast their profession. It was under circumstances of this nature, that the glorious prophecy before us was revealed. Both the ecclesiastical and civil governors of Israel had greatly oppressed the poor, and especially the godly: but God afforded them seasonable support, by declaring, that he would not only espouse their cause, but would raise up to them a Shepherd, and a Governor of a very different description, even the Messiah himself, who should redress all their wrongs, and bring them into the possession of perfect happiness.

Such being the occasion of the words, we proceed to consider them,

I. As fulfilled at the first coming of our Lord—

It is undoubtedly the Messiah that is here called "David"—

David himself had been dead many hundred years; nor has there been any other person after him, to whom this appellation was ever given. But Christ is frequently spoken of in the prophets by the name of David Jeremiah 30:9. Ezekiel 37:24-25; and to him the characters, here annexed to that name, most eminently belong. He is called by that name, because David was a very distinguished type of him. David was chosen by God from a very low state, and was anointed to be king over Israel. He was also made a prophet of the Most High God; and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, often spoke as actually personating the Messiah himself. Many parts of his heavenly compositions, though apparently intended respecting himself, have indeed no reference to himself at all, except as he was a type of Christ, in whom the very things predicted were literally fulfilled Psalm 22:18; Psalm 69:21. And so exact was the correspondence between the type and antitype, that Christ, springing "from the root of Jesse," "as a root out of the dry ground Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2," and "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows Psalm 45:7," was born (according to the predictions) in the very place of David's nativity Micah 5:2 with Matthew 2:5-6, was constituted a prophet like unto him, and was raised to "the throne of his father David Luke 1:32.

He sustains the offices that are here assigned him—

Like his honored representative, he was to be a shepherd. David, in his early youth, followed the occupation of a shepherd, and repeatedly exposed his life to most imminent danger in defense of the flock entrusted to him 1 Samuel 17:34-35. And, after he became a king, he still figuratively at least sustained the same office, "feeding his people, according to the integrity of his heart, and guiding them by the skilfulness of his hands Psalm 78:70-72." But he, whom David typified, was in a far more exalted sense, "the great Shepherd of the sheep Hebrews 13:20." He not only exposed, but willingly sacrificed, his life for his sheep John 10:11; nor can a juster description of him be conveyed in words, than that which is given us in the preceding context Ezekiel 34:11-16; He is incessantly "seeking the lost, bringing back that which has been driven away, binding up the broken, strengthening the sick," and administering to the necessities of all. He is also, like David, a prince. The promises of David's exaltation were at last fulfilled, and he was seated on the throne, to which he had been appointed. He did indeed meet with innumerable conflicts in his way to it: at one time, we see him encountering Goliath; at another, fleeing from the murderous attacks of Saul: yes, he was even driven from his kingdom by his own nearest relative, and treasonably sacrificed by his most familiar friend; in consequence of which, he fled weeping over that very brook Kidron, over which his Lord passed afterwards to crucifixion. But God preserved him from every danger, and made him "Head over Israel," and "the heathen" too Psalm 18:43. Thus it was also that Christ was raised to his throne: He had scarcely made his appearance in the world before he became an object of Herod's jealousy, and was forced to seek an asylum in a heathen land Matthew 2:14-15. On many occasions he escaped only by a miraculous exertion of his own almighty power Luke 4:29-30. When his time was come, he was betrayed by one of his own disciples, who, like David's treacherous friend, speedily went and hanged himself Psalm 69:25; Psalm 109:8 with Acts 1:20. show Ahithophel to be in this a type of Judas. But, infinitely beyond David, was Christ "a man of sorrows;" "his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Yet, after all, "the stone which the builders refused, was made the head-stone of the corner." He was "exalted to be a Prince and a Savior Acts 4:11; Acts 5:31," "the utmost ends of the earth were given him for his dominion;" and "of his kingdom there shall be no end Psalm 2:8. Luke 1:33."

For his people also he secures the blessings that are here accorded to them—

"God is made their God:" and this comprehends all that men or angels can receive. It is not possible for a finite imagination to conceive the full import of such an expression as this. It must certainly imply, that he will protect us from all kinds of evil, and fill us with the richest consolation both in this world, and the world to come: every perfection, which God himself possesses, shall be improved for our present benefit, and all his glory shall be enjoyed for our eternal happiness. Yet shall his most assuredly be our portion, if we be numbered among the flock of Christ. To such indeed it is that the promise in the text must be confined. As for the ungodly world, they have no prospect whatever of such a blessing: there is not one word in all the holy oracles, that warrants such a hope. But to those who believe in Christ the promises are made: to those, who have been brought into his fold, who feed in his pastures, and yield up themselves sincerely to his dominion, God has pledged himself to be their God. Nor shall any who seek him in his appointed way, fail to be partakers of it Ezekiel 37:24-28.

But we must view this prophecy,

II. As waiting for a fuller and more glorious accomplishment—

We cannot doubt but it shall be yet more abundantly fulfilled—

Its completion in the apostolic age was very partial. The Jews themselves yet look for its accomplishment in their Messiah. Nor is the time far distant when it shall be fulfilled in all its glorious extent Isaiah 29:17; The Lord Jesus will gather his people from every quarter of the globe Hosea 3:5. Jeremiah 32:37-41; He will feed them in green pastures, and rule over them in Zion Isaiah 24:23; And God will manifest himself to be "their God," with such displays of his glory, as shall far transcend any which he ever given to his people in the days of old Isaiah 60:19-20.

ADDRESS—

Receive now the Savior under the characters in which he is here offered to you—

Could we obtain mercy with God in any other way, there were the less reason for concerning ourselves about an interest in Christ. But in vain shall we attempt to ingratiate ourselves in the divine favor by any other means: we must obey the voice of that good Shepherd, and follow him: we must submit ourselves to the government of that Prince, and become his faithful subjects: then, and then only, will God acknowledge us as his people, and give himself to us as our God. Let us not then neglect the Savior any more: let us rather go to him with one accord: let us entreat him to take us under his charge. Then, whatever may be the fate of those who are at a distance from him, we shall be delivered from our spiritual enemies; and, having suffered awhile with him, shall in due time be glorified together Romans 8:17. You may safely trust the promises of God.

Many hundred years before the coming of Christ was this prophecy delivered: and how exactly was it accomplished in everything that respected Him! He was appointed our Shepherd; he was exalted to be our Prince; and to this very hour has he executed these offices in their fullest extent. Shall we doubt then whether the prophecy shall be fulfilled as it respects us? Will God refuse to be our God, when we desire to be his people? Or will he be only nominally our God, and withhold from us the blessings that are implied in that relation? Has he done what is so infinitely greater, and will he decline to do the less? Has he not "delivered up for us his only Son, and will he not with him also freely give us all things Romans 8:32." We cannot doubt. He says, "I the Lord have spoken it:" we may be certain, therefore, that he will perform; since "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let us trust then, and not be afraid; and in due season we shall enjoy, "according to his covenant, the sure mercies of David Isaiah 55:3."

Ezekiel 34:29

DISCOURSE 1116

CHRIST THE PLANT OF RENOWN

Ezekiel 34:29. I will raise up for them a plant of renown.

THE names by which our blessed Lord is designated in the Scriptures are exceeding various. Every one of them illustrates some part of his character, and leads us, as it were, one step towards the knowledge of him; though, as the light of all the stars combined would give but a very faint idea of the sun, so the luster reflected from every image in the creation conveys a very inadequate notion of the beauty, the excellency, the fullness of Christ.

That the image in the text refers to him, is clear from the whole context. God, having severely reproved the negligence of those whom he had appointed to watch over his flock verse 2–10, promises that he will raise them up a Shepherd, who shall faithfully discharge all his duties, and execute for their good the trust reposed in him verse 11–16. This, without any further explanation, would have been sufficient to point out to us "that good Shepherd," the Lord Jesus Christ: but the subsequent verses mark the name and offices of this Shepherd in such plain terms, that there is not a possibility of doubt respecting the person to whom the prophecy immediately and exclusively relates verse 23, 24. In the text, the same person is spoken of, only under a different metaphor: in considering which we shall notice,

I. The representation that is here given of Christ—

Christ is often spoken of by the prophets under the figure of a branch Jeremiah 33:15. Zechariah 6:12-13, or rod, growing out of a stem Isaiah 11:1; and in this view he is represented as contemptible in the eyes of a blind and ungodly world Isaiah 53:2. But he is deservedly called, "A plant of renown,"

1. On account of his mysterious nature—

Never did such a plant as this exist before. Never could the highest archangel have conceived it possible that such a plant should exist, unless God had expressly revealed it to him. Nothing in the whole creation has any resemblance to it, or could convey the smallest idea of it. This plant has two perfectly distinct natures, and each of those natures complete in all its attributes: it is both divine and human: it unites in itself the fullness of the Godhead with all the sinless infirmities of manhood. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is "God manifest in the flesh:" and a most stupendous mystery it is 1 Timothy 3:16. The manner also in which he assumed our nature was most mysterious. He was not born like other men, but formed in the womb of a pure virgin through the intervention and agency of the Holy Spirit. And in this view, "as a child born, and a son given," it was expressly declared that "his name should be called, Wonderful Isaiah 9:6."

2. On account of his transcendent qualities—

Other trees have one species of fruit, and are useful chiefly, if not entirely, in one view only. But behold, this plant bears twelve manner of fruits; fruit for every season, whether of prosperity or adversity; fruit for every occasion that can possibly arise; and suited to every person who desires to partake of it Revelation 22:2. Moreover, the leaves of this tree are as salubrious as its fruit; and are an infallible remedy for all the maladies to which our souls are exposed. Its virtues have been proved in every age. Its fame has been spread throughout the whole universe: and the more it has been tried, the more, without one single exception, has it been valued. The tree cast into the waters of Marah, was but a faint shadow of this, which, if properly used, would heal the fountains of iniquity that diffuse their deadly poison through the whole world Exodus 15:23-25. This branch is of yet further use to build the temple of the Lord Zechariah 6:12-13; well then might the prophet say of it, that it should be "excellent and glorious Isaiah 4:2."

3. On account of the estimation in which he is held—

See in what light he is viewed by his heavenly Father: "Behold my servant whom I uphold: mine elect, in whom my soul delights Isaiah 42:1. Proverbs 8:30. Matthew 3:17." See what the angels think of him: no sooner did they see him planted in the earth, than they came down from Heaven to announce the glad tidings, and ascribed "Glory to God in the highest Luke 2:7-14." Shall I need to tell you how he is regarded by man?" By those who know him not, "he is despised and rejected:" but "to them that know him, he is precious 1 Peter 2:7." What joy was excited in Abraham's heart, when he only got a glimpse of him, two thousand years before his incarnation John 8:56. With what ecstatic fervor did the prophets call upon the whole creation to rejoice in the prospect of his advent Isaiah 44:23. When he was come, and his excellencies were more fully known, his disciples "counted all things but dung for the knowledge of him Philippians 3:8," and were ready, at all times, and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him Acts 20:24. There are multitudes also in the present day, in whose eyes he is "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely Son. 5:10; Son. 5:16." But how will they express their admiration of him in the day when "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe 2 Thessalonians. 1:10." In Heaven too, when all that have eaten of his fruits, and felt the healing efficacy of his leaves, shall surround that "tree of life," and unite in ascribing to it their whole salvation; what "a plant of renown" will it then appear!

As God has fulfilled to us this gracious promise, and raised up for us this plant of renown, let us consider,

II. Our duty towards him—

In allusion to the metaphor, of which we ought not to lose sight, it may he observed, that we should,

1. Abide under his shadow—

Many are the storms and tempests to which we are exposed, and from which nothing but this tree can shelter us. It is planted on purpose that it may be "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land Isaiah 32:2." If we flee to him, we are as safe as the Israelites were in their blood-sprinkled houses, from the sword of the destroying angel Exodus 12:21-23. When "God shall rain down fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest on the wicked Psalm 11:6," we shall have no cause for fear; for "though a thousand shall fall on our side, and ten thousand at our right hand Psalm 91:1; Psalm 91:4; Psalm 91:7; Psalm 91:10," "no evil whatever shall befall us;" "he will cover us with his foliage; and his truth shall be our shield and buckler." Let us then draw near to him; and we shall experience the blessedness of the Church of old, who "sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto her taste Son. 2:3."

2. Live upon his fruits—

We have before observed, that every kind of fruit is to be found in him: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, peace, and whatever else we can desire, are to be obtained from him in rich abundance Ezekiel 34:30. And every one may get access to him. We need not go up to Heaven, or down to Hell, or travel to a remote country: he is near to us: he is in the Church; he is in our closet; he is in our very hearts Romans 10:6-8; wherever we go, there he is, ever present with us, ever ready to supply our wants. No fiery sword prohibits our approach to him Genesis 3:24; on the contrary, he invites us to come to him, to cease from "feeding upon ashes," and to take of his fruits freely Isaiah 55:2. None are shut out from this right. There is no wall about him, no exclusive privilege to those who by national, or even personal, relation may be considered as near to him: but "all who are afar off," whether they be old or young, rich or poor, moral or immoral, are invited to partake of all his benefits Acts 2:39 with Romans 10:12-13. Moreover, there is no price required, as there is for the fruits of other trees: we are told to "eat abundantly Son. 5:1," and to take it all "without money and without price Isaiah 55:1."

Let us then accept this gracious invitation, and "eat, and live forever Isaiah 55:3."

3. Bless God for him—

What a mercy would the fallen angels account it, if such a plant were to be raised up for them! And how thankful would they be, who are now out of the reach of this tree, if they might return to this world for a single hour with a permission to gather its fruits! Surely then we who have liberty of access to it, and especially those of us who are daily eating its fruits, should bless and adore our God for "his unspeakable gift 2 Corinthians 9:15." If, only on the eve of its being planted in this world, the pious Elizabeth, the blessed Virgin, and the divinely inspired Zachariah brake forth into such exalted strains of praise and thanksgiving Luke 1:68-69, surely we should not be silent, but should call upon "our souls, and all that is within us, to bless his holy name Psalm 103:1."

4. Commend him to others—

The lepers who found abundance in the Syrian camp, could not forbear going to acquaint their famished countrymen with the good tidings 2 Kings 7:9; and shall we be backward to inform our neighbors respecting this tree, whereby all their diseases may be healed, and all their wants supplied? The moment that Andrew and Philip had discovered it, they endeavored to bring their friends to a participation of their bliss John 1:40-41; John 1:43; John 1:45. Let us do the same. Our enjoyment of its fruits will be enhanced, rather than diminished, by a communication of them to others. Let us, I say, in compliance with the direction given us, exert ourselves to the uttermost, if perhaps we may introduce them to the knowledge of Christ, and be instrumental to the salvation of their souls Isaiah 12:4-6.

Ezekiel 36:24-28

DISCOURSE 1117

OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT ON THE JEWS

Ezekiel 36:24-28. I will take you from among the. Heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes: and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

IT will appear strange to say to a Christian assembly, that the true nature of Christianity is but little understood: but it is even so: for almost all persons regard it only as a code of laws, or a system of restraints: whereas, in truth, it is a mine of promises, of "exceeding great and precious promises," which are made to every one who feels his need of them, and desires to embrace them. I say not that it does not also contain precepts; for no doubt it enjoins a total surrender of ourselves to God: but there is not anything which it requires, which it does not also make over to us as a free gift of God for Christ's sake. Take, for example, the passage before us. It is delivered to the Jews in their present dispersed state: and it provides for them all the blessings which they stand in need of, both in this world and in the world to come.

Let us consider these promises,

I. As delivered more immediately to the Jewish people—

Whatever reference these promises might have to the period of their return from Babylon, it is manifest that they did not receive at that time a full accomplishment; and, consequently, that we must look forward to the future restoration of the Jews as the period fixed for their final completion.

The Jews are destined to be restored to their own land—

Of this, I conceive, there can be no reasonable doubt. The prophets speak so fully and so plainly on this subject, that we must divest language of all force and certainty before we can set aside the hope of their restoration to their own land. Whether that event shall precede or follow their conversion, I presume not to determine.

It should seem, from the writings of Moses, that the conversion of some, at least, will precede their return to Palestine: "When you shall return unto the Lord your God, and obey his voice, then the Lord your God will turn your captivity Deuteronomy 30:1-3." The Prophet Jeremiah, on the other hand, represents both events as simultaneous: "They shall come with weeping; and with supplications will I lead them Jeremiah 31:8-9." But in the passage before us, the prophet speaks of their conversion as subsequent to their restoration: "I will bring you into your own land: then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean." All of these testimonies doubtless are true; and they are easily reconciled, by only referring them to the different stages of their conversion, as viewed in its commencement, its progress, and its consummation. But, whatever be determined with respect to this, their future restoration to the land of their fathers is as certain as any event which yet remains to be fulfilled.

It is, however, not to this, but to the conversion of their souls, that I would chiefly draw your attention—

This is indisputably promised to them in the words of my text. And it is surprising how universally this view of the passage has been overlooked by the Christian world. There are few passages of Holy Scripture that are more frequently cited by the preachers of the everlasting Gospel than this: but, as though we were determined to rob the Jews of their interest in them, we have always omitted the first and last verses of the text, and applied the remainder altogether to ourselves: thus cutting off, as it were, the head and the feet, which marked the promise as belonging to the Jews, that we might seize upon the body as our own exclusive property. It is surprising that benevolence, which certainly is characteristic of the Christian world, should never have led us to contemplate and delight in the prospects here set forth for the comfort of God's ancient people. But we have been as unmindful of their spiritual interests as if no such promise had been ever made to them, yes, and as if no such people existed in the world. And this is the more remarkable, because the same connection between their conversion to God and their restoration to their own land is generally marked in the prophetic writings, and especially in places where these peculiar promises are made to them See Ezekiel 11:17-20 and Jeremiah 32:37-39. But it is certain that God will bestow upon them all the blessings which are here specified; sanctifying them wholly to himself, and making them, as in the days of old, his own peculiar people. The gift of God's Holy Spirit was declared, upon the day of Pentecost, to be reserved, not for the Jews of that day only, but "for them, and for their children, and for all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord their God should call Acts 2:39."

In the promise which is made to them in my text, there is an especial reference to the consecration of the Levites under the Mosaic Law. They were separated from all the other tribes, to wait upon God in the more immediate services of his sanctuary: and for this purpose they were consecrated to the Lord with peculiar solemnity: "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shall you do unto them, to cleanse them: sprinkle water of purifying upon them.…Then let them a young bullock with his meat-offering.…and another young bullock shall you take for a sin-offering and the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and you shall offer the one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering, unto the Lord, to make an atonement for the Levites Numbers 8:6-8; Numbers 8:12." Thus will God take that whole people for priests and for Levites Isaiah 66:21." in the latter day, and sanctify them wholly to himself as his peculiar people. He will, by the atoning blood of Christ, and by the influence of his Holy Spirit, cleanse them from all their filthiness, and from all their idols: he will altogether renew them, also, in the spirit of their minds, and cause them to walk as holily as any of their most eminent ancestors in the days of old. In the presence of the whole world shall they be thus exalted: and whereas their name is now "Lo-ruhamah, arid Lo-ammi," as disowned, and cast off from God; they shall again be recognized as "Ammi, and Ruhamah;" that is, as his people who have obtained mercy at his hands; and "God will say unto them, You are my people, and I am your God Hosea 1:6-8; Hosea 2:1; Hosea 2:23." Would you see them in the very act of returning; and behold their reception with their reconciled God, the Prophet Jeremiah, in a fore-cited passage, exhibits them before you, "coming to their God with weeping and with supplications;" and God, with paternal tenderness, declaring to them, "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born Jeremiah 31:8-9."

The Jews, it is true, think but little of these prospects; (they, alas! are occupied rather with expectations of a temporal Messiah, under whom they shall attain the summit of worldly aggrandizement:) but it becomes us to look forward to far higher things in their behalf, and to anticipate with delight their actual enjoyment of them.

While we rejoice in the prospects held forth in this prophecy to the Jewish people, let us consider it also,

II. As applicable to the Church of God in all ages—

The promises here given are those of the new covenant Hebrews 8:8-10; and all who lay hold on that covenant, whether Jews or Gentiles, and whether now or in the millennial age, are alike interested in them. From the time that the Holy Spirit was sent forth by our ascended Savior, have these blessings been poured out, in the richest abundance, on Gods Church and people; and, to every contrite and believing soul, God here promises his Holy Spirit,

1. To cleanse from sin—

To cleanse from the guilt of sin is, in the first instance, the office of Christ, by the sprinkling of his blood. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit also; because it is he who reveals Christ to the soul, and enables us to apply to ourselves his precious blood. And, in fact, it is by implanting in our hearts the principle of faith, that he renews and sanctifies us after the Divine image: "He purifies our hearts by faith Acts 15:9." To what an extent we need his gracious influences, it is scarcely in the power of language to declare. Both "the flesh and the spirit of man" are altogether polluted and corrupt; as the Psalmist expresses it, "Our inward parts are very wickedness Psalm 5:9." Were all the thoughts and workings of our hearts as visible to men as they are to God, who is there among us that would not often be constrained to hide his face with shame and confusion? The idols, too, which we set up in the secret recesses of our hearts, alas! how numerous they are, and how fearfully have they provoked the Most High God to jealousy! But "from all our filthiness, and from all our idols, shall we be cleansed," through the operation of the Spirit of God upon our souls; according as it is said by the Apostle, "Christ has loved the Church, and given himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish Ephesians 5:25-27." O! hear this, all you who are weary and heavy laden with the guilt and burden of your sins; and know assuredly, that if this is promised to the Jews in the Millennial age, it is no less promised to the Christian Church, and shall be fulfilled to all who will believe in Christ.

2. To renew the heart—

Truly, in every unregenerate man is "an heart of stone." Who does not feel this? Who has ever addressed himself to the work of repentance, and not found how insensible his heart is of sorrow. or of shame, even on a review of a whole life of sin? With earthly concerns we are easily moved; but not with the concerns of the soul, even though we know that the wrath of Almighty God is revealed against us, and that we are justly obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. But God promises to "take away from us the heart of stone, and to give us an heart of flesh," tender, contrite, abased before God in dust and ashes. Shall the Jews, on their restoration, "look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born Zechariah 12:10." Shall they, in the day to which my text refers, "remember their own evil ways, and their doings which were not good, and loath themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and abominations verse 31." And shall not such be the effects wrought on our souls, if the Spirit of God be truly poured forth upon us? Our hearts shall be altogether renewed; so that we shall be, as it were, "a new creation:" "old things shall pass away, and all things become new." Our dark understanding shall be enlightened; our rebellious will be subdued; our earthly and sensual affections be "purified, even as God is pure." Together with our views, our desires shall be renovated; and all our hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, be brought into an accordance with them. In a word, we shall "be renewed, after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness." O! what a blessed change! Who will not from this hour seek to be a partaker of it, through the abounding mercy of our promise-keeping God?

3. To sanctify the life—

What has been before spoken metaphorically, is here delivered in plain terms: "God will put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes, and do them." Adverse as we are by nature to God, and ready to complain of "his commandments as grievous," we shall be made to "delight in his law after our inward man," as soon as he has put his Holy Spirit within us: for "his law will then be written on the fleshy tables of our hearts." There will be a constraining influence of our souls, which shall overcome all our natural reluctance, and make us the willing servants of our God. To state precisely how this work shall be wrought in us, is beyond our power: but methinks there is some analogy between the first creation of all things and this new creation which takes place in the soul of man. As an impulse was given to all the heavenly bodies, which are kept in their respective orbits by the attractive influence of the sun, around which they move, and whose radiance they reflect; so is there a divine impulse given to the soul of the regenerate man, who, from the first commencement of his course, yields to the attractions of "the Sun of Righteousness," and fulfills his destined offices, to the praise and glory of his God. It is by his circuit only that the laws by which he acts are discovered; and they are known to proceed from God, because they lead him invariably to God: the effects produced upon his heart and life are decisive evidences that God is with him of a truth: they show, that "He who has wrought him to this self-same thing is God, who has given unto him of his Spirit 2 Corinthians 5:5."

APPLICATION—

1. Lay hold on these promises yourselves—

You see how freely, and with what sovereign grace, God makes these promises unto you: for, if they are made to the Jews under their present state of degradation and wickedness, there is no one so debased or sinful, but that he may well appropriate them to himself, and seek an interest in them. You will take especial notice, that here are no conditions imposed in order to obtain an interest in them: nothing is required, but that we seek for these blessings in humble and fervent prayer verse 37. As to the blessings themselves, every part proceeds from the unmerited love and mercy of God: in every clause, God's will is pointed out as the one source of all the benefits. And when God is thus saying, "I will," "I will," "I will," do these things for you, shall there be any reluctance shown on our part? Shall it be said of us, as of the Jews of old, "How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not?" O, brethren, let me rather entreat you, in reference to every clause, to add your hearty "Amen," "So be it unto me, O Lord, according to your will." And I the rather urge this; because, without an experience of the things here promised, no soul from among you can ever behold the face of God in peace. Say, I pray you, can you "be the Lord's people, and Jehovah be your God," while these things are disregarded by you? Can you ever be exalted to thrones of glory, if you be not first cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ from all your filthiness, and from all your idols? Must not your heart of stone be changed, and your ungodly life be rectified, before you can enjoy the felicity of Heaven? Your own consciences will attest, that this change is necessary: and therefore let all of you, whatever your present character may be, lay hold on these promises, as the one ground of your hopes, and as the only means of securing the blessedness to which they lead.

2. Endeavor to promote the acceptance of them among the Jews—

It is a shame and a scandal to the Christian world, that they have shown such indifference to the welfare of the Jews for so many centuries. And surely it is high time that we awake at last to some sense of our duty. Remember, I pray you, what is the object which you are called to effect: it is not the restoration of the Jews to their own land: that you may well leave to the providence of God to accomplish in his own time and way: it is rather the conversion of their souls to God which calls for your aid; and I appeal to you, whether that do not deserve your most active cooperation. You may say, perhaps, That is God's work, and may also be left to him. But it was not thus that the Apostles judged, in reference to us Gentiles. They could not, by any power of their own, convert a single soul: but did they therefore decline to use the means which God himself had appointed? No: they preached Christ to all to whom they could gain access: and it was in confirmation of their word that the Spirit of God descended on their hearers. Peter, when speaking to Cornelius and his company, said, "To Christ give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whoever believes on him shall receive remission of sins." And then it is particularly said, "While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word Acts 10:43-44." Thus, in concurrence with your efforts, God in his mercy will return to his deserted people; and again "take them as his people, and be their God." Surely, the very hope of this is sufficient to animate you in your exertions: and if only in a few instances you may be instrumental in effecting this blessed end, it will richly repay you for all the liberality that you can exercise, and all the labor you can bestow.

Ezekiel 36:31

DISCOURSE 1118

THE DUTY OF SELF-LOATHING

Ezekiel 36:31. Then shall you remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.

IT should seem, that the more excellent any man became, the higher thoughts he would have of his own excellence: and the more he was conformed to the will of God, the more he would be filled with self-delight. But the very reverse of this is the truth. Men's humiliation will always increase in proportion as they know the extent of their duty, and are made sensible of their defects; and consequently, the more they advance in holiness, the more they will lament their past, and remaining, iniquities. The words of our text confirm this. They are addressed, not to persons living in willful and deliberate sin, but to persons "cleansed from their filthiness," and possessed of "a new spirit, whereby they are enabled to walk in God's statutes:" even to them is the injunction given, to "loath themselves for their abominations."

We shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

Repentance, though an universally acknowledged duty, is but little understood. It implies,

1. A calling of our evil ways to remembrance—

However tenacious our memory may be of evils committed by others against us, we are very forgetful of the evils which we ourselves commit against God. But we should go back to the earliest periods of our life, and review the transactions which then took place: we should then prosecute our inquiries through each successive year, until our reason was expanded, and our judgment informed with respect to the nature and consequences of sin: we should advance in this way through the different stages of our existence, until we arrive at the present time. Much evil will doubtless have passed away, and left no trace behind: but much may be recalled to our minds, sufficient to show, that the whole bias of our souls has been towards wickedness, and that, in proportion as our faculties of body and mind have been enlarged, we have devoted them to the service of sin and Satan.

Having brought our examination down to the present time, we should enter more deeply into the qualities even of our best actions: we should search into the motives from which they sprang; the manner in which they were performed; and the end at which we aimed in the performance of them: we should do this, not with a view to find our good deeds, but "our doings that were not good:" not to furnish ourselves with grounds of self-approbation and self-delight, but rather of humiliation and contrition.

2. A loathing of ourselves on account of them—

The calling of our ways to remembrance is only preparatory to that more essential part of true penitence, "the loathing of ourselves on account of them." To this it must lead: if it stop short of this, it is of no avail. It is in vain that we are alarmed and terrified with a sense of our guilt; for Pharaoh Exodus 10:16-17, and Judas Matthew 27:3-5, confessed their sins under a sudden impression of fear and remorse: nor will it suffice to express a considerable degree of sorrow on account of our state; for even in Ahab's humiliation this was found 1 Kings 21:27; we must be brought to self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

The Scriptures illustrate sin by "a dog returning to his own vomit," "and a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire 2 Peter 2:22. "It must be confessed that the former of these metaphors is most disgusting: but the more disgusting it is, the more suited is it to the occasion; since the conduct of the sinner, like that of the dog, argues an unspeakably filthy and depraved appetite. Let us apply this metaphor, not to gross sins only, but to sin in general; and then consider, that sin has been, not merely a morsel swallowed under some violent temptation, but our daily food, yes, the only thing towards which he had any real appetite: and what filthy creatures shall we then appear! What disgusting objects must we be in the sight of God; and how ought we to loath and abhor ourselves! The latter metaphor also is a just representation of our conduct; and shows, that no terms are too degrading, no images too disgusting, to represent the filthiness of our habits, and the depravity of our hearts.

Nor let it be thought that this representation is too strong; for it accords, not only with the text, which is frequently repeated Ezekiel 6:9; Ezekiel 20:43, but with the confessions of the most eminent saint Genesis 18:27. Isaiah 6:5, and justifies fully that declaration of Job, "Behold, I am vile! I repent, therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes Job 40:4; Job 42:6."

That this is the duty of all, without exception, will appear by considering,

II. When it is to be performed—

We must not limit this repentance to the time of conversion merely; we must, as the context shows us "Then." See verse 25–27, continue it after our conversion: indeed the period subsequent to our conversion is that wherein this duty is more particularly required. For,

1. Conversion qualifies us for it—

Until we are converted, we see but very few of our sins; because we have very defective views of the law of God. Being ignorant of the demands of the law, we must of necessity be ignorant of the multitude of our transgressions against it. Moreover we see but little of the malignity of sin; because we are unacquainted with the immense obligations which we owe to God, against whom our sins are committed. An act of unkindness in a fellow-creature, though trifling in itself, may be an exceedingly heinous offence, if done in return for many and great favors. What then must sin be, when committed against God, who has not only loaded us with temporal blessings, but has given his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to instruct us; yes, and has followed us all our days with entreaties, expostulations, promises, seeking nothing so much as our eternal welfare! This is the view of sin which conversion gives us; and it is this alone which can ever dispose and induce us to loath ourselves.

2. We need it as much after conversion as before—

A converted person will certainly not indulge sin: but he still carries about him a sinful nature, that is bent to backslide from God, and that still operates to the wounding of his conscience, and the offending of his Maker. Now every sin committed in this state is incomparably more heinous than it would have been in his unrenewed state, because it is committed against more light and knowledge, more mercies and obligations, more vows and professions. Even smaller sins involve him now in deeper guilt than his more heinous trespasses before; and therefore they demand a suitable humiliation and contrition. Hence then it is evident, that, while we carry about with us a body of sin and death, we ought incessantly to loath ourselves, and to be crying with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me Romans 7:24." Indeed this is the very frame to which God's pardoning mercy is designed to bring us. And the more we abase ourselves before him, the more evidence we have of our acceptance with him Psalm 51:17.

INFERENCES—

1. How opposite to a Christian state is self-righteousness!

If contrition be a state pleasing to God, and self-loathing be a necessary constituent of it, then self-righteousness must be most hateful to God, and most injurious to our souls; because it necessarily leads to self-approbation and self-delight, which are as opposite to self-loathing as darkness is to light. Would to God that this were duly considered! Men profess to repent, and yet make a righteousness of their repentance! a manifest proof that they know not what repentance is! Know, my Brethren, that "all our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags Isaiah 64:6;" that our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of; and, that we must disclaim our best deeds in point of dependence, as much as the vilest sins we ever committed. We may indeed "rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience:" but we shall find cause for self-abhorrence, even in our best frames, and our holiest actions.

2. How dear must Christ be to every true penitent!

A certain kind and degree of repentance may arise from fear: but that which is spiritual and saving, partakes richly of love. Nothing advances it so much as a sight of the love of Christ in dying for us Zechariah 12:10. Now exactly as a sense of the Savior's love causes us to loath ourselves, so does a sense of our own vileness cause us to admire him. Let not any imagine that self-loathing will lead us to despondency: the viler we see ourselves to be, the more will Christ be exalted and magnified in our eyes. Our vileness, as well as our weakness, will only illustrate the riches of his grace, and render him unspeakably precious to our souls.

Ezekiel 36:32

DISCOURSE 1119

GOD'S MERCIES NOT GIVEN FOR OUR MERITS

Ezekiel 36:32. Not for your sakes do I this, says the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

THERE is not any gift, whether of nature or of grace, from which the pride of man will not take occasion to exalt itself. But the design of God in his Gospel is, to counteract this propensity, and to make his creatures sensible of their obligations to him, and their entire dependence upon him. Hence, having declared, in the preceding context, what he intended to do for his Church and people, he particularly cautions them not to imagine, that he was influenced by any goodness which he saw in them; or that, after having received his blessings, they would have anything to boast of: for to their latest hour they would have in themselves cause for nothing but shame and confusion.

From this caution the following observations naturally arise:

I. God, in imparting his blessings to us, has not respect to any good in us—

There is not in us anything meritorious, to which he can have respect—

Let our actions be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and every one of them will be found wanting. If we had done all that is required of us, we should still be only unprofitable servants Luke 17:10. But we have not done all; nor have we done any part as we ought: and therefore instead of having any merit whereon to found a claim of blessings from God, we have need of mercy and forgiveness for our very best actions Isaiah 64:6.

Nor would it consist with his honor to make our goodness the ground of dispensing his favors—

Whatever the measure of our goodness were, if it were considered in any degree as founding a claim for the Divine blessing, or as inducing God to impart his benefits to us, it would instantly become a ground of glorying before God. The possessor of that goodness might ascribe to himself some portion of the honor, instead of giving the glory of his salvation to God alone. But this would be to subvert the whole design of the Gospel, which is, to exclude boasting Romans 3:27. See also Ezekiel 36:21-23, and not to give God's glory to another.

Experience alone sufficiently shows that God is influenced by no such motive—

If God had respect to anything that is good in us, the most moral people would always be stirred up to embrace the Gospel, and the most profligate be left to reject it. But this is by no means the case: yes, the very reverse is more generally true, namely, that "publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom, before the more decent Scribes, or self-righteous Pharisees Matthew 21:31." God is indeed sometimes said to do things for the sake of Abraham, David, and others: but it was not for their righteousness' sake, considered as meritorious, that God given blessings to them or their posterity; but either to testify his love to obedience, or to manifest the immutability of his counsel Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Deuteronomy 9:4-6.

The text goes yet further, and shows that,

II. There is in us nothing which is not a ground rather for shame and confusion—

Doubtless the Jews were a peculiarly "stiff-necked people:" yet, if we have not the same sins to deplore, we have enough to justify the application of this passage to ourselves.

The sins of our unregenerate state may well fill us with confusion—

Time may efface many things from our remembrance; but it cannot alter the nature of them, or blot them out of the book of God. Our sins are all in his sight, as if they were transacted but yesterday: and whatever degree of malignity they had formerly, that they retain at this moment: and consequently we should feel on their account all the shame, and sorrow, and confusion that they either did occasion, or ought to have occasioned, at the time they were committed. Yes, the whole mass of evil that ever passed through our minds ought to lie with a weight upon our consciences, so far at least as to produce an abiding sense of our extreme sinfulness.

The infirmities of our regenerate state also should humble us in the dust before God—

Who is not conscious of innumerable evils working in his heart? Who does not at some time feel the workings of pride, anger, worldliness, impurity, and various other corruptions? Who does not feel that these are properly "his own ways," and that the exercise of contrary dispositions is the fruit of divine grace?

But let us take the best actions of our lives, and the holiest dispositions of our hearts: what are our prayers and our praises, when compared with the importance of the blessings we have received, or that we desire at God's hands? What is our repentance, when compared with the number and heinousness of our transgressions? What is our trust in God? What our love to the blessed Savior? What our zeal in his service? Do they bear any proportion to the occasions that call for them? We know that a godly person would be utterly ashamed of such services as a mere formalist makes the ground of his boast and confidence: and would not a perfect Being, if sent down to serve his God on earth, loath himself, if he were to render no better services than ours? Surely then we ought to blush and be confounded before God, not only for the remains of evil that are within us, but for the very best actions we have ever performed.

The emphatic manner in which these things are delivered, leads us to notice,

III. The importance of being reminded of these things, and of having them deeply fixed in our hearts—

We are apt to take credit to ourselves, and to think ourselves as high in God's estimation as we are in our own. But God would have us know, that there is no just ground for our vain conceit: it is even with considerable indignation that he reminds us of it in the words before us. We need to be well instructed in this matter,

1. That we may be led to humility—

The knowledge of ourselves is indispensably necessary to the attainment of humility: but we must be ignorant indeed of ourselves, if we imagine that there either is, or can be, anything in us to merit the Divine favor. The truth is, that no words can adequately express the unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness, of our hearts Jeremiah 17:9. If we know anything of ourselves, we cannot but loath and "abhor ourselves," as Job did, "in dust and ashes Job 42:6." And we need to have our extreme vileness and baseness frequently set before us, in order that we may know what we are, and "not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think Romans 12:3."

2. That we may be excited to thankfulness—

While we entertain the idea of having purchased, as it were, or merited, the blessings we enjoy, we cannot possibly feel any lively gratitude for them in our hearts: instead of admiring the goodness of our God, we shall be ready to think hardly of him, if at any time his bounties are withdrawn from us. But let us once be convinced of our deep depravity, and we shall wonder that we have not long since been made monuments of divine vengeance. It will then appear no small mercy that we are on praying ground; that we have a covenant-God to flee unto; and that there is a Mediator, through whom we may approach him with an assurance of acceptance. Yes; these things, which are so little regarded by the generality, will make our hearts to overflow with gratitude, and our tongues to sing aloud for joy.

APPLICATION—

1. Let us concede to God the liberty of dispensing his favors according to his own sovereign will—

To dispute this is needless; for he will not ask our permission Job 33:13, nor consult our inclination; but "will have mercy on whom he will have mercy Romans 9:18.": Moreover, it is ruinous; for we cannot hope to participate his blessings, if we will not condescend to accept them as they are offered. We must "buy them" indeed, as the Scripture speaks; but it must be "without money and without price Isaiah 55:1." Let us then acknowledge God's right to "do what he will with his own Matthew 20:15;" and abase ourselves before him, as "less than the least of all his mercies Genesis 32:10."

2. Let us be thankful that, however unworthy we are, there is a Savior whose worthiness we may plead before him—

Though God will not do anything for our sake, yet he will for his dear Son's sake. There is nothing that he will refuse us, if we go to him in the name of Jesus Christ John 14:13-14. See a pattern for prayer; Daniel 9:17-19. Nor will our unworthiness be any bar to our acceptance with him. On the contrary, the more we humble and abase ourselves, the more ready will he be to accept and bless us.

Ezekiel 37:1-6

DISCOURSE 1120

UNIVERSAL RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

Ezekiel 37:1-6. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which teas full of bones, and caused vie to pass by them, round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you knottiest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

WHILE the Jews at large, and the generality of Christians also, believe that the dispersed of Israel will one day be restored to their own land, there is an assured expectation, both among the one and the other, that the Messiah will in due time reign over the face of the whole earth. But, while this blessed event is expected by all, there lurks in the minds of the generality a persuasion, that in the present state of the Jews their conversion to Christ is impracticable; and that, whenever it shall be effected, it will be by some miraculous interposition, like that which took place at their deliverance from Egypt: and hence all attempts to convert them to Christianity are thought nugatory at least, if not presumptuous. In opposition to these discouraging apprehensions, which would paralyze all exertions in their behalf, I have selected this portion of Holy Writ, which meets the objections in the fullest possible manner, and shows, beyond all doubt, that we are bound to use the means which God has appointed for their conversion, and that in the diligent use of those means we may reasonably hope for God's blessing on our labors.

In the preceding chapter are plain and express promises relative to the restoration and conversion of the Jews. In the chapter before us, the same subject is continued in an emblematic form. The Jews in Babylon despaired of ever being restored to their native land. To counteract these desponding fears, there was given to the Prophet Ezekiel a vision, in which the extreme improbability of such an event is acknowledged, while the certainty of it is expressly declared. And, lest the import of the vision should be mistaken, it is explained by God himself, and the event predicted in it is foretold in plain and direct terms: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, says the Lord verse 11–14."

We cannot but admire the goodness and condescension of God, in so accommodating himself to the weaknesses and wants of men. His people were slow of heart to understand his word; and therefore he "gave them line upon line, and precept upon precept," and exhibited truth to them under every form, if so be they might be able to receive it at last, and to obtain the blessings which he held forth to them in his Gospel.

The restoration promised in the chapter before us does not merely relate to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon. To that indeed is its primary reference; but it manifestly has respect to a recovery from their present state of dispersion, and to a spiritual deliverance from their bondage to sin and Satan: for, not only are the expressions too strong to be confined to a mere temporal deliverance, but the emblem mentioned in the subsequent part of this chapter, of uniting two sticks in the prophet's hand, shows that the whole is to be accomplished, when all the tribes of Israel, as well those which were carried captive to Assyria as those of Judah and Benjamin, shall be reunited under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That this period is yet future, you cannot doubt, when you hear the words of God to the prophet: "Son of man, take you one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in your hand. And when the children of your people shall speak unto you, saying, Will you not show us what you meanest by these? say unto them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen where they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all……And David my servant shall be king over them; and they shall have one Shepherd verse 16–25." These things have never yet been fulfilled; but they shall be fulfilled in their season. What though the Jews be like dry bones scattered over the face of the whole earth? Shall any word that God has spoken respecting them fall to the ground? No: the scattered bones shall be reunited, each to its kindred bone, and they shall rise up an exceeding great array, as the Lord has said.

In explanation of this vision, I will endeavor to set before you,

I. The present state of the Jews;

II. Our duty towards them; and

III. Our encouragement to perform it.

Let us consider, First, The present state of the Jews—

Certainly nothing can be well conceived more unpromising than this. The obstacles to their conversion do indeed appear almost insurmountable. One most formidable barrier in their way is, the extraordinary blindness and hardness of their hearts. From the very beginning they were, as Moses himself tells them, a stiff-necked people: and their whole history is one continued confirmation of the truth of Ins assertion; insomuch that any one who is conversant with the sacred records, but unacquainted with the plague of his own heart, would be ready to imagine, that their very blood had received a deeper taint than that of others. Certainly we should have scarcely supposed it possible that human nature should be so corrupt, as they have shown it to be. We should never have conceived that persons who had witnessed all the wonders which were wrought in their behalf in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, should be so murmuring, so rebellious, so atheistical as they were during their forty years' continuance in the wilderness; and indeed, with the exception of some occasional and partial reformations, even until their final dispersion by the Romans. It really appears incredible, that, with the Holy Scriptures in their hands, and with the life and miracles of our blessed Lord exhibited before their eyes, they could evince such malignant dispositions towards him, and with such deliberate cruelty imbrue their hands in his blood. Yet such is their state at this hour, that I can have no doubt but that they would reject him again with all the same virulence as before, if he were again to descend from Heaven, and to place himself within the reach of their power. His meek and holy conduct would not be sufficient to disarm their malice; nor could all his benevolent miracles conciliate their regard: they would still, as before, cry, "Away with him! crucify him! crucify him!" The same veil is upon their hearts at this day as there was then: and, as far as they can, they actually repeat all the iniquities of their fathers, sanctioning and approving all which they did towards him, and in their hearts transacting it afresh. Such being almost universally the predominant features of their minds, we must acknowledge, that their restoration to life is as improbable as any event that can be contemplated. But while I say this, let it not be thought that I mean to cast any uncharitable reflections upon them, or needlessly to asperse their character: for I well know that by nature they are no worse than others. They labor under peculiar disadvantages. From their earliest infancy they are filled with prejudice against the religion of Jesus: they hear him designated by the most opprobrious titles; and are taught to regard him as a vile impostor. This constitutes the chief difference between them, and multitudes who bear the Christian name: ungodly Christians are as averse to real piety as they; but having been taught to reverence the name of Christ, they can hear of it without disgust; while the Jews, who have been educated in the most envenomed hatred of it, spurn at it with indignation and abhorrence; and consequently, are proportionably hardened against all his overtures of love and mercy.

Another obstacle in their way is the contempt in which they are held. It had been foretold by Moses concerning them, that they should "become an astonishment and a proverb, and a bye-word among all nations Deuteronomy 28:37;" and such they have been ever since their dispersion by the Romans. There is not a quarter of the globe where this prediction is not verified. Muhammadans and Heathens of every description pour contempt upon them, and load them with all manner of indignities. Nor have Christians been at all more kindly disposed towards them: on the contrary, we have been foremost in executing upon them the Divine vengeance, just as if our religion, instead of prescribing acts of mercy and love, had dictated nothing but cruelty and oppression. To this hour, the very name of a Jew is among us a term of reproach, a symbol of everything that is odious and contemptible. And what is the natural effect of this? Can we wonder that it should excite resentment in their breasts? Has it not a necessary tendency to embitter them against us, and to make them detest the principles we profess? What can they think of Christianity, when they see such conduct universally practiced by its professors? We complain of their blindness and obduracy; but can we wonder at their state, when we ourselves have done, and are yet continually doing, so much to produce it? And what effect has it on ourselves, but to weaken any kind dispositions which may be cherished in the hearts of a few towards them, and to make us despair of ever effecting anything in their behalf? This effect, I say, it does produce: for, while we make extensive efforts for the conversion and salvation of the Heathen, we pass by the Jew with utter disdain, and deride as visionary all endeavors for his welfare. If we saw but a beast fallen into a pit, our affections of compassion would move towards him, and we should make some efforts for his deliverance: but we behold millions of Jews perishing in their sins, and we never sigh over their lamentable condition, nor use any means for the salvation of their souls. They are not allowed even the contingent benefits of social fellowship with us: the wall of partition which God has broken down in his Gospel, is built up by us; as if by general consent they were proscribed, and debarred all access to the light that we enjoy. Their fathers, in the apostolic age, labored and died for us, when we were sunk in the depths of sin and misery: but we will not stretch out a hand for them, or point them to the rock, on which they may be saved from the overwhelming surge. Thus they are left to famish, while the heavenly manna lies around our tents; and they are immured in darkness, while we are enjoying all the blessings of the noon-day sun. Say, then, whether this be not a formidable barrier in their way, so as to render their access to the true Messiah beyond measure difficult?

But a yet further obstacle to their conversion arises from the efforts which they themselves use to prevent the introduction of Christianity among them. The Rulers of their Church exercise authority over them with a strong hand: and the first appearance among them of an inclination to embrace the Gospel of Christ is checked with great severity. Every species of threatening is used to intimidate those who have begun to ask the way to Zion, and to deter them from prosecuting their inquiries: and, if a person yield to his convictions, and embrace the Gospel, he is instantly loaded with all the odium that can be heaped upon him: every kind of employment is withheld from him; and he would be left to perish with hunger, if he were not aided by those whose principles he has embraced. An apprehension of those evils deters vast multitudes from free inquiry; and constrains not a few to stifle their convictions, because they cannot prevail on themselves to sacrifice their all for Christ.

Such being the present state of the Jews, it may well be asked, "Can these bones live?" Can it be hoped that the feeble efforts which we are using should succeed? If, when in Babylon, they despaired, saying, "Our bones are dried; our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts:" may they not with far greater propriety adopt the same language now? and may not we regard all attempts for their conversion as altogether hopeless, even as hopeless as the resuscitation of dry bones, that have been for ages crumbled into dust?

Yet hopeless as their state appears, we should not be discouraged from performing,

II. Our duty towards them—

The command which God gave to the prophet in my text was not personal to him, but general to all who are partakers of superior light and liberty. The whole was not a real transaction, but a vision, intended for the instruction of the Church of God in all ages, and especially for those who should be alive at the period destined for the accomplishment of the prophecy. We may consider therefore the directions here given as applicable to ourselves, and as comprising our duty towards the house of Israel. It consists in these two things, The communicating of instruction to them, and The praying unto God for them.

We should, as far as lies in our power, communicate instruction to them. The word "prophecy" does not necessarily import an utterance of predictions; it is often used for the conveying of instruction in the name of God: and this is what we are bound to do to the Jewish people, each of us according to the abilities we possess, and the opportunities that are afforded us. We are not all called to exercise the ministerial office; but we are to impart in conversation the knowledge we have received. No Christian whatever is to put his light under a bushel or a bed, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to those who are within the sphere of its influence. If we have but one talent, we are to use it for the honor of our God, and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

But here it is to be regretted, that the generality of Christians are themselves destitute of the information which they are called upon to communicate. Nor is this true of the laity only: even those who bear the ministerial office are by no means so well instructed in the points at issue between the Jews and us, as to be competent to the task of entering into controversy with the more learned Jews. Even those ministers who have somewhat of a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, are for the most part but ill furnished with that species of knowledge which qualifies them for instructing the Jews. They are not aware of the principal objections of the Jews to Christianity, nor of the answers which ought to be given to them. Even the peculiar excellencies of the Christian system, as contradistinguished from Judaism, are not so familiar to them as they ought to be. With Heathens they can argue, and with different sects of Christians they can maintain their stand: but so utterly have they disregarded and despised the Jew, that they have thought it not worth their while to furnish themselves with knowledge suited to his case. This is greatly to the shame of Christians in general, and of Christian Ministers in particular. Nor does it offer any just excuse for our continuing to neglect the Jews, since we ought instantly to make ourselves acquainted with all that is necessary for the conviction of our Jewish Brother; and in the mean time should procure for him, from others, the instruction which we ourselves are unable to impart. This is what we should do, if we saw a brother perishing of wounds that had been inflicted on him: we should not account our want of medical skill as any reason for neglecting his case; but we should endeavor to procure for him from others the aid he stood in need of. And this is what we should do for his soul, procuring for him such books as are suited to his capacity, and bringing him into contact with such persons as are better qualified than ourselves to enlighten and instruct his soul.

To withhold these efforts under an idea that God will convert them without the instrumentality of man, is to belie our consciences, and to deceive our own souls. Such an excuse is nothing but a veil to cover our own supineness. Where has God told us that he will convert them without means? He did not do so even on the day of Pentecost. He has commanded that "his Gospel should be preached in all the world, to every creature." Where has he made them an exception? This I say, then, that our duty towards them is, to use all possible means for the illumination of their minds, and for the conversion of their souls to the faith of Christ.

But it is our duty at the same time to pray for them. The prophet was not only to prophesy to the dry bones, but to "say, Thus says the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath! (O eternal Spirit!) and breathe upon these slain, that they may live verse 9." Whoever may attempt to convey instruction, it will be attended with little benefit, if God do not accompany the word with power from on high. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone that can give the increase." If we set about anything in our own strength, and expect anything from the means, without looking directly to God in and through the means, we shall be rebuked, and left without success; just as Elisha was, when he expected his staff to raise to life the widow's child 2 Kings 4:29-31. Like the prophet in our text, we are to pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit to give efficacy to the word. To this effect we are taught by God himself; "I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: You that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, until he establish, and until he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth Isaiah 62:6-7." If we conscientiously combine our personal exertions with fervent prayer, there is not anything which we may not hope for. Wonderful is the efficacy of fervent and believing prayer: and, if we employ it diligently in behalf of the Jews, desperate as their condition to all appearance is, it shall prevail, to the bringing forth of their souls from the prison in which they are immured, and for the introducing of them into the light and liberty of God's dear children.

True it is, we may without any saving influences of the Spirit effect a previous work, like that of bringing together the kindred bones, and causing the flesh and skin to come upon them: but God alone can breathe life into them. We may bring them possibly to "a form of godliness; but God alone can give the power:" and it is only when our "word comes to men in demonstration of the Spirit," that it ever proves "the power of God to the salvation" of their souls.

Such is our duty towards them: and that we may not draw back from it through despondency, let us consider,

III. Our encouragement to perform it—

We have the express promise of God to render it effectual. What can we want more? The promise is repeated again and again; "You shall live;" "You shall live;" "I will bring you up out of your graves, and you shall live ver 5, 6, 12, 14." And is not God able to do it? Look at the heavens and the earth: Has he created all these out of nothing? has he spoken them into existence by the word of his mouth, and is he not able to effect the conversion of the Jews? Has he declared that he will raise the dead at the last day, and bring into judgment every child of man; and cannot he, who shall accomplish that in its season, effect this also at the appointed time? True, the bones are, as he has said, "dry, very dry" but they are not beyond the reach of his power. What if the resuscitation of them be "marvelous in our eyes, must it therefore be marvelous in God's eyes?" (Zechariah 8:6.) His word in the mouth of Jews has been effectual for the conversion of the Gentiles; and that same word in the mouth of Gentiles shall be effectual for the conversion of the Jews: for "his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." "Has he said, and shall he not do it? has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Tell me, Did he not bring out his people from Egypt at the appointed time? Yes, "at the self-same hour did he bring them forth, with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm." In like manner he delivered them also in due season from Babylon, according to his word: and these are sure pledges, that he will in due season fulfill all his promises towards them, and not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail.

In dependence on his promise, then, we should address ourselves to the work assigned us. We should go forth feeling the utter hopelessness of our task, and say, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" The greater the difficulty appears, the more should we hold fast our confidence in God, with whom nothing is impossible. We should go, as it were, into the midst of that vast theater, and lift up our voice with-out either distrust or fear. If the means already used have proved ineffectual, we should, like Elisha, exert ourselves with the more earnestness, and labor more fervently in prayer with God for his blessing on our endeavors. In order to raise the son of the Shunamite, he cried mightily to the Lord, and went in and stretched himself upon the child, applying his mouth, his eyes, his hands, to the mouth, the eyes, the hands of the child 2 Kings 4:33-35; and thus should we go in to our Jewish Brethren: we should address ourselves to the work in the length and breadth of all our powers, accommodating ourselves to the measure and capacity of every individual among them, and laboring in every possible way to inspire them with love to Christ: and, if we see as yet but little effect, (as was at first the case with that holy prophet,) let us "not despise the day of small things," but let us look upon the smallest success as a pledge of greater things, as the first-fruits before the harvest, and as the drop before the shower. Two things in particular I wish you to notice in the text: the one is that God wrought nothing until the prophet used the appointed means; and the other is, that he wrought effectually as soon as the means were used. This is twice noticed by the prophet in the verses following my text: "So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, the bones came together:" and again, "So I prophesied as he commanded me; and the breath carne into them, and they lived verse 7, 10." Let this, I pray you, sink down into your ears: only let this be understood and felt, and acted upon; and I shall have gained a point of the utmost importance to the Jewish cause: for, however inadequate to the end our efforts be, God requires us to put them forth; and when they are put forth in humility and faith, he will bless them to the desired end. To expect the blessing without using the means, or to despair of success in the use of them, is equally wrong. What he has commanded, we must do: and what he has promised, we must expect. Be the difficulties ever so great, we must not stagger at the promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Our blessed Lord, when Mary imagined that her brother was gone beyond a possibility of recovery, said to her, "Said I not unto you, that, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?" so to you I say, Be not discouraged by thinking how long our brother has been dead, or how corrupt he is; but expect assuredly, that at the sound of Jesus' voice he shall rise out of his grave and come forth to life.

Permit me now to address myself to you in a more particular manner: and,

1. To those whose exertions are paralyzed by despondency.

I object not to a full consideration of all the difficulties that obstruct the conversion of the Jews. I wish them to be viewed in their utmost extent: but then they should be viewed, not as grounds for relaxing our efforts, but as motives to the most strenuous exertion. With the generality, these desponding fears are only excuses for their own supineness: they have no compassion for their perishing fellow-creatures, no zeal for the honor of their God, and therefore they cry, "A lion is in the way." But this is a very unworthy recompense for all the exertions which the Jews of former ages made for us. What if they had said respecting the Gentiles, "They are bowing down to stocks and stones, and it is in vain to attempt their conversion?" we should have continued in our ignorance and guilt to the present hour. It was by their unremitting labors that the Gospel was spread; and to them we owe all the light and peace that we at this moment enjoy. Let us then imitate them: let us employ our talents and our influence in their service: let us combine together for the purpose of promoting their welfare more extensively than we could do by individual exertion: and while we go forward in dependence on the promises of our God, let us remember, that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform."

As for the idea that the Lord's time is not come, who is authorized to declare that? The great events that are going forward in the world give us reason to think that the time is come, or at least is very near at hand. The prophecies themselves, in the judgment of many wise and sober interpreters, appear to point to the present times, as the season for their approaching accomplishment. And certainly the attention now paid to the subject by the Christian world, and the success that has hitherto attended their efforts, are encouraging circumstances to confirm our hopes, and stimulate our exertions. We may add too, that the zeal that has been manifested of late for the universal diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, and for the conversion of the heathen, is a call from God to the Christian world, to consider the wants of his ancient people: and the general expectation of the Jews at this time, that their Messiah will soon appear, is a still further call to us to point out the Savior to them. Nor can I pass by without notice two most astonishing events; one of which has lately occurred in a foreign country, and the other is at this moment arising in our own. In Russia, God has raised up a friend for his people, another Cyrus, in the head of that vast empire; who has assigned one, if not more places in his dominions, where the Jews who shall embrace Christianity may find a safe asylum, and enjoy all necessary means of providing for themselves, agreeably to their former habits. In our own land, an unprecedented concern begins to manifest itself in behalf of all the nations of the earth who are lying in darkness and the shadow of death. The duty of sending forth missionaries to instruct them, is now publicly acknowledged by all our governors in Church and State; and in a short time will the whole community, from the highest to the lowest, be invited to unite in this blessed work In the Prince Regent's Letter, read in all the Churches through the kingdom, in 1815. And in this ebullition of religious zeal, can we suppose that the Jew shall be forgotten? Shall those to whom we ourselves are indebted for all the light that we enjoy, be overlooked? Will it not be remembered, that our blessed Lord and Savior was a Jew; and that it is a Jew who is at this moment interceding for us at the right hand of God? Shall not our obligations to him and his Apostles be requited by a due attention to those who were the first in his estimation, and are yet "beloved by him for their fathers' sakes?" We must on no account overlook them: we must consider them as comprehended in the general commission: and let us hope that there will be a simultaneous effort through the land, to carry into effect the pious and benevolent designs of our governors.

An erroneous idea has obtained, that because it is said by Paul, "that blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in Romans 11:25," the great harvest of the Gentiles must be reaped before the sickle is put to the Jewish field. But this is directly contrary to what the same Apostle says in the very same chapter, where he represents "the fullness of the Jews as being the riches of the Gentiles Romans 11:12." It is the commencement, and not the completion, of the in-gathering of the Gentiles, that marks the season for the conversion of the Jews: and therefore the stir which there is at this moment among the Gentile world, is, among other signs of the times, a proof, that the time for the conversion of the Jews is near at hand. Away then with all desponding fears; and to every obstruction that presents itself in your way, say, "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain Zechariah 4:6-7."

Let me next address myself,

2. To those who desire to be accomplishing this great work.

You will reasonably ask, What shall we do in order to advance this blessed cause? To this I answer, Be much in prayer to God for them. Were the Christian world more earnest in prayer to God for the restoration and salvation of his people, I feel no doubt but that God would arise and have mercy upon Zion, and that a great work would speedily be wrought among them. When the angel interceded for Jerusalem, saying, "O Lord God, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem?" Jehovah, we are told, answered him with good and comfortable words Zechariah 1:12-13. And, if a spirit of intercession for them prevailed among us, God would answer, not by good and comfortable words only, but by great and powerful acts, even by the displays of his pardoning grace, and the manifestations of his long-suspended love. United prayer brought Peter out of his prison: and united prayer would bring the Jews also out of their graves; and they should arise before us "an exceeding great army."

Still however, as human means also are to be used, I would say, Form yourselves into societies and associations for the advancement of this work. Much may be done by united and systematic exertion, which cannot possibly be done without it: funds will be raised; and many will be stirred up to join with you, who would neither have inclination nor ability to do much in a way of solitary effort: and, if God has given to any one a talent of wealth or influence, let him improve it to the uttermost. It is scarcely to be conceived how much a single individual may effect, provided he set himself diligently to the work. God has said he will "bring his people one of a city and two of a family," yes, that "he will bring them to Zion one by one." And if only one be brought from darkness unto light, and from death to life, it is worth all our efforts: for one single soul is of greater value than the whole world. Let us up then, and be doing; for the Lord is with us: and if we see not immediately all the effect we could wish, we have the satisfaction of knowing that God approves of the desire, and that, like David, we are gathering stones which our successors shall erect into a temple of the Lord.

But let it not content us to proselyte the Jews to mere nominal Christianity. It is to no purpose to bring their bones together, and cover them with flesh, unless their souls be made alive to God, and they become living members of Christ's mystical body. In the close of the chapter from whence our text is taken, God informs us what is to characterize the conversion of the Jews to Christ: "David, my servant, (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ,) shall be King over them; and they shall all have one Shepherd: my servant David shall be their Prince forever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and my tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. verse 24–27." Yes, this is vital Christianity; this is the only true religion that can benefit us; and therefore it is that to which we must endeavor to convert them. I ask of you, my Brethren, What is it that comforts you, but a view of the everlasting covenant, "ordered in all things and sure?" What is it that enables you to live above the things of time and sense, and to look forward with joy to the eternal world; what is it, I say, but a hope, that you stand in this near relation to a reconciled God, and a persuasion, that that Savior, whose you are and whom you serve, will bruise Satan under your feet, and make you more than conquerors over all your enemies? Bear this in mind then, I pray you, in all your conversations with Jews, and in all your efforts for their good. Aim at nothing short of this. To convince them by argument is nothing, unless you bring them to a life of faith upon the Son of God, and to a life of entire devotedness to his service. This you must first experience in your own souls, else you can never hope to effect it in theirs. Let them see in you how truly blessed a life of faith is; and what a sanctifying efficacy it has on your hearts and lives. Let them see, that it is not a merely speculative opinion about the Lord Jesus Christ, to which you would convert them, but to the enjoyment of his love, to a participation of his image, and to a possession of his glory. In a word, be yourselves among them as living epistles of Christ, that in you they may read the excellency of his salvation: then may you hope to prevail with them; and that they will gladly unite themselves to you, when they shall see that God is with you of a truth.

Ezekiel 37:11-13

DISCOURSE 1121

SOULS QUICKENED BY THE GOSPEL

Ezekiel 37:11-13. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts. Therefore. prophesy, and say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.

THE writings both of the Old and New Testament abound with allegories; but the interpretation of them is generally given by the writers themselves. Many of our Lord's discourses were of this nature: they are admirably calculated to convey instruction. We have a very remarkable allegory in this chapter. The prophet sees in a vision a valley of dry bones; he is interrogated with respect to the possibility of their living; he is commanded to bid them live in the name of the Lord. On issuing the proclamation he perceived a noise among the bones; the bones shook, and carne, each to its kindred bone; the sinews, flesh, and skin, then came upon them: lastly, in answer to his prayer, life was communicated to them. This allegory is then interpreted by God himself. It describes the state of the Jews in Babylon, and their unexpected deliverance from it. But it may be properly considered as relating to the deliverance of God's people from the sorer bondage of sin.

We shall take occasion from the text to consider,

I. The state of unregenerate men—

The Jews in Babylon were as unlikely to return to a state of political existence, as dry bones are to the functions of animal life. They themselves despaired of such an event (verse 11). Their condition fitly represents that of the unregenerate—

The unregenerate are dead, even as dry bones—

In this light they are represented by the Apostle Ephesians 2:1;. They are destitute of all inclination or ability to serve God Philippians 2:13; they have not a sufficiency even for the smallest good 2 Corinthians 3:5."

They not unfrequently despair of ever obtaining deliverance—

Despondency is far more common than is generally supposed. Many imagine, like Job, that they are given over by God Compare Lamentations 3:18 and Job 19:10; hence they express themselves like the desponding Jews Jeremiah 2:25.

They are not, however, beyond the reach of mercy—

This will appear by considering,

II. The means by which God delivers them from it—

God can work by the meanest and most contemptible means—

By the sound of rams' horns he overthrew Jericho: by the stroke of Elijah's mantle he parted the waters of Jordan: so, by the preaching of his Gospel he quickens the dead.

He commands his power and grace to be proclaimed—

He is an almighty, all-sufficient God. He promises pardon to all who seek it in his appointed way. He offers his Spirit to renew all who call upon him. He assures the believing soul that it shall never perish Isaiah 41:10. Thus he encourages the weakest and the vilest to look unto him Isaiah 45:22.

In this way he accomplishes the deliverance of his people—

A gradual change is made in the most obdurate sinners. There is a "great army," of whom it may be said as of the prodigal Luke 15:24; they go forth immediately to "the promised land."

Nor does any one remain ignorant of his benefactor—

This leads us to consider,

III. The effects which this deliverance produces—

While dead in sin we imagine we must quicken ourselves—

We know not the depth of misery into which we are fallen. We little think how great a change must take place upon us; nor are we aware how entirely destitute we are of strength.

But when once we are quickened, we see whence our deliverance came—

We feel by experience the truth of Jeremiah's assertion Jeremiah 13:23. We see that the Apostles themselves were only God's instruments 1 Corinthians 3:6-7. Then we know God to be the Lord, the source of every good. We learn also to commit all our ways to him.

INFERENCES—

1. How valuable are the ordinances of religion!

God makes use of his ordinances for the most glorious purposes. He works principally in and by them Romans 10:17. They who neglect them are generally left in darkness; but sincere worshipers reap the greatest benefit from them. Let us never then grow weary of attending them: let us use them with a dependence on God for his blessing.

2. What care has God taken to encourage desponding sinners!

No state can be worse than this represented in the text verse 2. "very dry."; yet God has shown how he could overrule the heart of Cyrus to proclaim liberty, and of his own people to accept it. He displayed also his mighty power in re-establishing his people; what then can he not do for those who are dead in sin? Let none say, "My hope is lost, I am cut off." Let it he remembered that the power and grace of Christ are sufficient John 11:25. Let every one hear in faith the Apostle's exhortation Ephesians 5:14.

Ezekiel 37:15-22

DISCOURSE 1122

THE STICKS OF JUDAH AND OF EPHRAIM JOINED

Ezekiel 37:15-22. The word of the Lord carne again unto me, saying, Moreover, you son of man, take you one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in your hand. And when the children of your people shall speak unto you, saying, Will you not show us what you meanest by these? say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick; and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, where they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountain of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

THE restoration of the whole Jewish people, to their own land, and to the favor of their God, is a subject on which all the prophets dwell with great delight; and not with delight only, but with the strongest confidence and assurance. There were indeed then, and there are still, in that nation, circumstances which, if viewed only after the manner of men, render the accomplishment of these predictions highly improbable. For instance; the whole people of Israel, of the ten tribes which were carried captive to Assyria, and of the two tribes in their present dispersion, are scattered, like dry bones, over the face of the whole earth: and we might as well expect a restoration of such scattered bones to life, as the return of that people to their own land. Moreover, from the period of their separation in the time of Rehoboam, to the latest hour of their existence as different states, there existed between them such inveterate hatred, as precludes a hope that they can ever be united into one people again. But the Prophet Ezekiel was inspired to declare, that both these difficulties should be overcome. The resuscitation of the dry bones he has foretold in the preceding part of the chapter; and the reunion of the two nations he foretells in the words which we have just read. He was commanded to represent this to his hearers by a very appropriate sign. He was to take two sticks; and, writing on each of them the nation which it was intended to represent, he was to cause them to become one stick in his hand; and then to explain to them the figure, by a full declaration of God's purpose relative to their reunion in the latter-day.

His words will lead us to contemplate,

I. The event predicted—

The sign itself, just like the blossoming of Aaron's rod, while all the others retained their own proper form without any such alteration, was a convincing proof, that the prophet both spoke and acted under a divine commission. The causing of two sticks, without any previous process, in an instant to become one in his hand, was a pledge to the spectators that the prediction, however improbable, should certainly be fulfilled. Accustomed to be taught by signs, the spectators desired an explanation of that which was now before their eyes. And the prophet informed them, that it imported and prefigured,

1. The restoration of all the tribes to their own land—

The names inscribed upon the two different sticks clearly showed that the ten tribes which had been carried captive to Assyria, no less than the two who were then in Babylon, should at a future period be restored; and that all of them together should form one nation, as they had done in the days of David and of Solomon: and that they should never be divided into two nations again ver 22, 25. This has never yet been fulfilled; and therefore we know it shall receive its accomplishment at a period yet future. To confirm this from many passages of Scripture would be quite superfluous: for if the return of all the tribes to their own land at a future period be questioned, there is not any prediction of a future event that can be depended on. It is not necessary that the whole mass of the Jewish people should return: for there were but forty thousand that returned from Babylon; yet was that deemed a sufficient accomplishment of the prophecies relating to that event. So, if there be only a few millions that return to their own land in the latter-day, it will amply suffice to verify the predictions respecting it. But return they shall, as surely as ever the two sticks became one in the prophet's hand. And to this effect speaks the Prophet Isaiah, whose words I record as illustrating and confirming, beyond a possibility of doubt, the declarations in my text: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up his ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly, upon the shoulders of the Philistines, toward the west: they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian Sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria; like as it was to Israel, in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt Isaiah 11:11-16."

2. The union of them all under Christ as their common Head—

Never have they been all under the government of one king since the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam: much less has there been any king of the name of David that could lay claim to this dominion. But, at the period referred to, they shall all, even the whole twelve tribes, become one nation again; and that too under the government of the Messiah, who is frequently foretold under the name of David, and who in the New Testament also is recognized as raised up of David's house, and as sitting upon David's throne Luke 1:31-33; Luke 1:69. They will all form one flock under him, as their "Shepherd," as, both in a preceding chapter and in that before us, is fully declared verse 22, 24, 25 and Ezekiel 34:23-24. They will be deeply sensible of their error, in having so long rejected him; and will then "look on Him whom they, no less than their fathers, have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, even as one that mourns for his first-born son." And no longer will they cast off his light and easy yoke: yes rather, they will delight in him, and glory in him, as "all their salvation and all their desire." To this effect the Prophet Hosea also most plainly speaks: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter-days Hosea 3:4-5."

3. Their enjoyment of God, as their covenant-God and portion—

A new covenant will God make with them in that day, widely different from that which he made with their fathers, when he brought them forth out of Egypt Jeremiah 31:31-34. In the new covenant, provision shall be made for the remission of all their sins, for the mortification of all their lusts, and for their entire restoration both to the favor and to the image of their God verse 23–26. In former days, God dwelt with them visibly, by the bright Shechinah, the symbol of his presence; and in his tabernacle he revealed himself in a way that he never had done to any people from the foundation of the world; pledging himself to be their God, and them to be his peculiar people verse 27 with Revelation 21:2-3. And again, at the latter-day will his manifestations of himself to them be not a whit less bright and glorious, insomuch that all the nations of the world shall be constrained to acknowledge them as the people whom, above all others upon earth, Jehovah has been pleased to bless and honor verse 28. Their holiness and happiness will far transcend anything experienced by their forefathers; "the light of the moon will become as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound Isaiah 30:26."

Now, from these things will be seen what is the true character of the Millennium. It is not in their external state that the Jews will be changed, more than in the state of their souls before God. In truth, it is the spiritual change which will chiefly mark the glory of their latter-day: it will consist not so much in any political revolution, like that of the restoration of the Jews to their own land, as in the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and the subjugation of the whole world to the obedience of Christ.

The sign intimated by the prophet having been realized before the eyes of his people, having assured to us the accomplishment of his prophecy, we will proceed to contemplate,

II. The prediction verified—

Let us place ourselves on an eminence, and behold it, as st were, accomplishing before our eyes. Behold in it,

1. What a display of God's power!

The Scriptures speak highly of God's power in raising up such an innumerable seed from Abraham and Sarah, at a time when, according to the course of nature, they could have no hope of any progeny. Greatly also is his power magnified in bringing out that nation from their bondage in Egypt. The deliverance also of the Jews from Babylon is marked, as illustrating in no ordinary degree the boundless power of Jehovah. But all of these together are nothing, in comparison of that power which he will display, when he shall, in every quarter of the globe, convert the souls of his ancient people, and restore them in safety to their former inheritance. We are particularly told, that the redemption from Egypt will then no longer be mentioned, by reason of the more glorious deliverance which will be given unto them.

2. What a proof of his veracity!

God promised to Abraham and his descendants the full and entire possession of the land of Canaan: yet it was four hundred and thirty years, before either he or his posterity possessed, with the exception of a burial-place, so much ground as to set his foot upon. Their deliverance from Egypt had been predicted; but their deliverance was delayed so long, that if it had continued one day longer, God's promise to Abraham would have been broken. But behold, on the self-same day he brought them forth; and thereby he showed himself mindful of the promise which he had given above four hundred years before. At the expiration, too, of seventy years, the time fixed for their captivity in Babylon, God brought them forth from thence also. As to the time fixed for their return from their present dispersion, we are unable with certainty to declare precisely when it shall arrive: but, according to every calculation, we have reason to believe it fast approaching; and at the appointed period the event shall assuredly be accomplished. And how wonderfully will it attest the unchangeableness of God, "not one jot or tittle of whose word can ever fail!"

3. What an exhibition of his grace!

The sovereignty of God was clearly shown, in his choice of Abraham from the midst of an idolatrous family and nation: nor less so in limiting his blessings to the lines of Isaac and Jacob, to the exclusion of the eider branches of Ishmael and Esau. Every part of the Divine administration towards the people of Israel gives, in like manner, ample demonstration of the sovereignty of his grace. The preservation, too, of that people, as distinct from all the nations of the earth, proves, that nothing shall, or ever can, defeat the purposes of his grace. Certainly, if anything could prevail on God to annul his covenant, the conduct of that people must have done it. From the very beginning, they were a disobedient and stiff-necked people. In the wilderness itself, yes, and even at the Red Sea, where such a wonderful interposition had appeared in their favor, they rebelled against their God. At all times were they ready to cast off their allegiance to God, and to place their confidence on stocks and stones. And at last they filled up the measure of their iniquities, by rejecting their Messiah, and crucifying the Lord of glory. To all this we may add their long impenitence, during eighteen centuries, notwithstanding they know and acknowledge that they are cast off from God on account of their impieties. How astonishing, then, will the freeness and richness of God's grace appear, when he shall take these persons from their dispersion, revealing himself to them, bringing them forth from every corner of the earth, manifesting the Savior to them, and returning himself to them as their covenant God and portion! If, in the election of them at first, the grace of God was eminently displayed, much more will it be glorified in such mercies given to them after such heinous and manifold transgressions.

4. What a call to the whole world to serve and obey him!

God has spoken in his works; but his voice is not heard. He has also spoken by his word; but that word is known to a very small part of mankind. But in that day he will speak to all the whole world at once; and in such terms, that it will be impossible for any to misapprehend his meaning. In the chapter before us he has said, "The heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore verse 28." The Jews are spread in almost every part of the world. Their conversion to God being simultaneous in every country, it will attract the attention of all, and create a vast sensation through the whole world. The victories, too, which they will gain over all who shall oppose their establishment in their own land will yet further demonstrate, not only that God is with them, but that there is no other God but He. They will be struck, as Baal's worshipers were by the fire which descended from Heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice; and will exclaim, with wonder and amazement, "The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!" Instantly will multitudes, in every place, "lay hold on the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we see that God is with you of a truth Zechariah 8:23." In truth, it will be a signal to all mankind to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Savior; and it will "be as life from the dead Romans 11:15." to the whole world.

ADDRESS—

And now, brethren, be all as one stick in my hand: and let every one among you, whatever be the diversity of his age or station, submit to Christ as your King, and live in dependence on him as your Shepherd. Enter now into "God's covenant of peace," that you may be partakers of all its privileges and blessings. Let God himself dwell in you, as in his temple of old: be altogether a people unto him, and let him be your God and portion forever. These blessings will characterize the Millennial age, and be given in a more abundant measure to his people that shall hereafter return unto him: yet are they to be enjoyed at this present hour by all who truly believe in Christ. Why then should so much as one of you remain destitute of these blessings? May God of his infinite mercy make you all like-minded in relation to them! and may the time quickly arrive, when God's ancient people shall experience them in their souls, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God!"

DANIEL

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%202.44)

DISCOURSE 1123

THE STONE THAT BECAME A MOUNTAIN

[Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%202.44). In the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in. pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

THE various revolutions of kingdoms, however casual and contingent they may appear, all are fore-ordained in the inscrutable counsels of the Deity, and made subservient to the accomplishment of his eternal purpose; indeed they seem to be marked in Scripture solely in reference to the Church of God; as though the rise and fall of empires were scarcely worth a mention, except as they accelerate or retard the progress of true religion. In the time of the Babylonish captivity God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a very remarkable dream, and interpreted it to him by the Prophet Daniel. There appeared to him an image, whose head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet of iron and clay; on the feet of which a stone fell, that utterly demolished the whole. This foretold the succession of four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom upon the ruins of them all.

For the elucidation of this subject, it will be proper to consider,

I. The prophecy itself—

In which we notice,

1. The time and manner of its establishment—

The time of its establishment is here clearly marked. The Babylonish, Persian, and Grecian monarchies, were to rise in succession, each on the ruins of that which preceded it; and at last the Roman empire was to swallow up, as it were, and comprehend them all. And "in the time of the kings" belonging to this last kingdom, even while they should enjoy the utmost plenitude of their power, another kingdom was to arise, the kingdom of the Messiah. This was accurately accomplished; for Christ was born in the reign of Augustus Caesar, when the Roman empire was at the summit of its strength and grandeur: and, within the space of about fifty years from that time, his kingdom was spread, not only over Judea, but over a great part of the known world.

The manner of it is also plainly declared. It was foretold that a "stone which should he cut out without hands, should break in pieces this vast image;" that "the God of Heaven should set up a kingdom" solely by his own power, without the intervention of human force or policy; or, to use the words of another prophet, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." This also was remarkably fulfilled in the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world. The persons who were his principal agents, were a few illiterate fishermen, alike untutored in philosophy, and unassisted by the authority of earthly magistrates. They were expressly forbidden to use the sword [Matthew 26:52](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2026.52); and the most learned of all the apostles suppressed everything that savored of carnal wisdom, lest he should make the cross of Christ of none effect [1 Corinthians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%201.17); [1 Corinthians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%202.1). Yet, notwithstanding their weapons were not carnal, they were mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin and Satan [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2010.4-5). And indeed the heavenly treasure was committed thus to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power might more evidently appear to be of God [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%204.7).

2. The extent and duration of its power—

It was to have the pre-eminence above all other kingdoms in respect of its extent. All the monarchies referred to by the prophet were great and powerful; but this far excelled them all. The stone cut out without hands fell upon the feet of the image which were of iron and clay, and broke the whole image in pieces; intimating that the kingdom of Christ should prevail over the Roman empire together with the other monarchies which were comprehended in it: all the powers of the world were to be as nothing before it. This was represented in the vision by "the stone becoming a mountain, and this mountain filling the earth." Christianity is to prevail over the whole earth. The idolatries of Pagan Rome yielded to the sublimer principles of the Gospel; and the superstitions of antichrist, which for a long season obscured divine truth, have in a measure fallen, and shall in due time vanish before its light and influence. Nor shall the authority of Christ extend, like that of earthly monarchs, merely over the bodies of men: it shall reach unto their souls, and "bring into subjection the very thoughts and desires of their hearts." There shall not be one disaffected subject in his whole empire: the happiness of all his people shall be bound up in their Prince, whose will shall be their only law, and whose honor their only aim.

It was to excel all others also in its duration. All other kingdoms have fallen, and shall fall; nor can the best constituted governments maintain their stability beyond the time allotted them in the Divine counsels. But the kingdom of Christ "shall stand forever;" his power shall "never be transferred to other hands;" nor shall any revolutions shake the foundations of his throne. "He shall put down all rule and all authority and power, and reign until all his enemies are become his footstool 1 Corinthians 15:24-25." The precise mode of administering his kingdom will indeed terminate when there shall be no more subjects upon earth to govern: but the kingdom itself will exist in Heaven to all eternity, when it shall be delivered up into the Father's hands, and God shall be all in all The perpetuity of this kingdom was afterwards revealed to Daniel, with some additional circumstances, in a vision similar to that before us. The four great monarchies appeared to him as four great beasts, the last of which had ten horns, corresponding with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and intimating that ten smaller powers should grow out of that fourth monarchy, all of which should in due season fall before the kingdom of Christ, which was then to become universal in its extent, and everlasting in its continuance. [Daniel 7:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.3-7); [Daniel 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.14).

To improve this subject aright, we must distinctly mark,

II. The practical use of the prediction—

While it prepares us to expect the perfect triumph of Christianity, to the enemies of Christ's kingdom it speaks terror—

Persons may be enemies of Christ's kingdom either by denying the truth of Christianity, or by resisting its influence. But whether we be professed infidels or merely nominal Christians, the subject before us is highly proper for our consideration. Whence carne this marvelous correspondence between the predictions and the accomplishment of them, if Christianity be not of divine original? was it not established at the very time that was fixed in this prophecy? And has it not prevailed, not only without the aid of human authority, but in direct opposition to all the power and policy of the confederate world? And if it have broken in pieces so many adverse powers, and "made them even as the chaff of the summer threshing-floors," shall any of us withstand it with impunity? Our Lord, in reference to this very passage, has assured us, that "on whoever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powder [Matthew 21:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2021.43-44). See also [Isaiah 60:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2060.12)." But remember, it is not a feigned or forced sub-mission that is required of us: Christ reigns over a willing people, and must be enthroned in their hearts. Let such be his influence over you, my Brethren: Let "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ be put down." Let his law be your only rule, his honor your highest aim, and his service your supreme delight.

To the friends and subjects of Christ, on the other hand, it is replete with comfort—

As Christianity has not prevailed in the world without much opposition, so neither will it gain a complete ascendency over the heart without many conflicts. But should any one despond because his adversaries are mighty? We need only look at the prevalence of Christianity in the world, and we may see what shall be accomplished in our hearts. Are we destitute of any power in ourselves? Be it so: yet the stone which was cut out without hands, and became a great mountain, shall crush our enemies, and bring our inmost souls into subjection to Christ. If the gates of Hell have not been able to prevail against the Church at large, neither shall they against the weakest member of it. If the greatest empires have yielded to the influence of the Gospel, so shall also the most inveterate lusts. Let Christians then lift up their heads with joy: their conflicts may be severe, but victory is assured to them by the promise and oath of an unchanging God [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%206.17-18).

[Daniel 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%203.28)

DISCOURSE 1124

THE HEBREW YOUTHS IN THE FIERY FURNACE

[Daniel 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%203.28). Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego, who has sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any God, except their own God.

A BRIGHTER example of fidelity to God than that before us is not to be found in all the records of antiquity. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, full of pride and vain-glory, determined to erect an image of gold that should be worshiped as a God. The image was above thirty yards in height, and three in breadth; and all covered over with plates of solid gold. The expense of making this image must have been immense; and it puts to shame the worshipers of Jehovah, who grudge to expend their money for the promotion of his glory. The image being erected, the chief men in all the provinces of the empire were summoned to attend at the dedication of it, and, at a given signal, to how down and worship it. The three Hebrew youths mentioned in our test, having been set over different provinces, were necessitated to be present at the ceremony; but, being convinced of the sinfulness of idolatry, they would not them-selves be guilty of it. As far as they could conscientiously obey their king, they would: but where there remained no alternative but to disobey him, or offend their God, they determined to "obey God rather than man."

To bring their history more fully under our view, let us notice,

I. Their fidelity—

They were certainly under great temptation to comply with the wishes of the king—

They were under far different circumstances from the rest of the governors that were assembled on this occasion. They were not merely subjects, but captives, who were entirely at the king's mercy. They were also under peculiar obligations to the king, who had educated them at his own expense, and had even invested them with authority over whole provinces of his native subjects. These considerations were calculated to operate strongly on their minds, and to render them somewhat less scrupulous than they would otherwise have been about a single infringement of the Divine law. A sense of duty to their king, and of gratitude to their benefactor, might seem to justify a small deviation from the stricter path of duty. They might possibly compare the act required of them with the con-duct of the whole Jewish nation, both priests and people: the Jews had erected idols of their own, and, of their own free-will, had worshiped them in preference to Jehovah: but these youths were brought into the situation against their will, and in their own minds intended no disrespect to the God of Heaven. Were they to act as their own priests and people had done, they would doubtless be highly criminal; but could there then be any great harm in merely bowing their heads, as an act of obedience to their prince? Moreover, when every governor in the empire complied with the edict, why should they refuse; more especially since their refusal would subject them to the most cruel death, and rob them of all opportunity of benefitting their respective provinces in future?

They who know how the mind and conscience are apt to be biased by such reasonings as these, will see, that they must of necessity present a very formidable obstacle to the preservation of integrity under such circumstances.

But they manfully withstood the royal edict—

They would not for a moment confer with flesh and blood. No regard to their own ease or safety, no, nor to their eventual usefulness in the world, could induce them to swerve from the plain path of duty. They were offered by the king to reconsider their determination: but their minds were made up, rather to suffer anything, than to sin against their God. The king had exultingly said, "Who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hand?" But they told him, that their God was able, yes, moreover, that he would deliver them out of his hand: but that, whether he would or not, they were fixed in their purpose, never to violate their conscience in bowing down to this golden idol [Daniel 3:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%203.16-18).

In the midst of all this firmness, we observe not one indecorous expression; no invectives, no complaints, but simply a declaration of their affiance in God, and of their determination never to sin against him.

How God appreciated their fidelity, we may judge from,

II. Their recompense—

The judgment threatened was, that they should be cast into a burning fiery furnace: and the command was instantly given, that it should be executed upon them. But behold how God interposed for them!

1. While it was executing—

The mightiest men in all the army were selected to execute this judgment, and to cast the offenders into the furnace, now heated seven times more than usual for their reception. The youths were bound in their clothes, that nothing belonging to them might be preserved; and they were cast into the furnace, according to the king's commandment. But, behold! the flames burst forth, and consumed every one of the executioners. This, taken in connection with the mercy given to these faithful youths, marked indisputably the indignation of God against the persecutors, and his approbation of those who had braved death for his sake.

Had the Hebrews died, this destruction of the soldiers would have appeared an accident: but as God appeared, during the execution, to punish his enemies, so he appeared still more visibly in behalf of his friends.

2. After it was executed—

The youths fell down bound into the midst of the fire: but the fire had no power to hurt them. It burned the bands by which they were tied, so that, being loosed, they could walk about; but it could not so much as singe a hair of their heads, or incommode them in the least: they could breathe, and walk, and converse as easily as in the open air. Behold too, now "one like unto the Son of God," "an angel," (who, I doubt not, was "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, who had often assumed the form of an angel before,) came into the furnace, and walked with them. This Nebuchadnezzar and his courtiers saw, and were beyond measure astonished at it. And how different now were the feelings of the oppressed and their oppressors! The oppressed had such communion with their Lord as they had never enjoyed before, such as was a foretaste of Heaven itself: but their oppressors were filled with shame and confusion of face.

Still further did God appear for his servants,

3. After it was reversed—

The king himself, who had sent them into the furnace, carne to call them thence; and was constrained, in the presence of all his people, to commend their constancy, and to acknowledge the supreme dominion and power of the God of Israel. On examination of the persons of these youths, it was found, that not so much as the smell of fire had passed on them. The fire that had consumed their bands, and destroyed their persecutors, had had no power at all over them; so that the king, who had just before persecuted unto death the adherents of Jehovah, now forbade, under the severest penalties, that a single word should be spoken against him.

What a triumph was here; and how gloriously attested! and what a report must now be carried into all the provinces of the empire, by those who had been summoned to attend the ceremony!

But further, these very Hebrews were not only restored to their respective governments, but were promoted to yet higher honors, as a recompense of their fidelity to God. And how they have since been rewarded in a better world, no tongue can express, no human imagination can conceive.

Among the numerous and important reflections which this subject suggests, consider,

1. What a mercy it is that we enjoy civil and religious liberty!

We have no power over us to make such cruel edicts: we are not subject to the decrees of a capricious tyrant: we all can worship God according to our conscience, without restraint. There are, it is true, some small sacrifices made by those who choose to dissent from the established mode of worship; but they are small indeed, and required only with a view to the welfare of the State: they are such as no man who is of a spiritual and heavenly mind feels in the least burdensome. These are now put aside by the repeal of the Test Act in 1828. In fact, there is no sacrifice at all, except of a negative kind: all are at liberty to serve God in their own way: the infidel, the Socinian, and the idolatrous Papist, are as free to follow the dictates of their conscience, as the servant and worshiper of our Incarnate God. Let us be thankful for this inestimable privilege. It is not universally so even in what is called the Christian world: there is yet in existence the Popish Inquisition, which is little else than a repetition of Nebuchadnezzar's edict; and which shows us, how necessary those very tests are, to which we have before alluded: for, were the Papists once to regain the ascendant in this country, we should yet again be subjected to all the bloody edicts of former days. O let us bless our God, that the rights of conscience are respected among us; and that, in relation to the object or manner of our worship, we are left to stand or fall to our own Master!

2. What a mercy it is, if we are under the influence of divine grace—

The whole mass of the Babylonish courtiers, being under no divine influence, complied at once with the order that was issued. So it is with men among ourselves. Whatever has the sanction of the great, whether it be good or bad, is followed; and no one dares to stem the torrent of iniquity which overflows the land. But men who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, will "not be conformed to this present evil world:" on the contrary, "they are transformed in the renewing of their minds, and they prove in their conduct what is the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God." What the principle is by which they are actuated, may be seen in the history before us: "By faith it was, that these pious youths were enabled to "quench the violence of fire [Hebrews 11:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2011.33-34)." And if faith was so powerful under that dispensation, when the object of faith was so indistinctly and partially revealed, what shall it not effect, now that the Sun of Righteousness is shining in its meridian splendor, and the full "glory of God is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ?" Seek then to have this grace formed in your hearts: it is the root from whence all other graces proceed: it is faith that "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world." Live in the exercise of this grace, and all the persuasions or terrors of the world will lose their force.

3. What a mercy it is to have God for our God!

If once we possess this blessing, we need never fear what either men or devils can do against us. If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, we need not be concerned about it; for our God will come and walk with us in the fire, and make the wrath of our enemies the occasions of richer Communications of his love. He has said, "When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon you; for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior [Isaiah 43:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2043.2-3)." "If our afflictions for his sake abound, our consolations through him shall much more abound:" and in due season he will bring us forth "out of the furnace, purified as gold." But oh! what a furnace awaits our impenitent persecutors! Who can conceive what "a lake that is which burns with fire and brimstone," into which all the ungodly shall be cast; and what it will be to "dwell with ever-lasting burnings?" But for the faithful servants of Jehovah there is reserved "an eternal weight of glory proportioned to the light and momentary afflictions" which they here endured. Fear not then, any of you, to give yourselves up to God, or to encounter the wrath of man for his sake; for "them that honor him, he will honor." Only "be faithful unto death, and lie will give you a crown of life."

[Daniel 4:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%204.34-37)

DISCOURSE 1125

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM VERIFIED AND IMPROVED

[Daniel 4:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%204.34-37). And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto Heaven, and my understanding returned unto me: and I blessed the Most High; and I praised and honored him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he does according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and, for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom; and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

A MORE remarkable history than this is not found in the annals of the world. Never was such a transition ever heard of, from such an elevation to a state of such extraordinary degradation, as that which is recorded in this chapter. The account is written by Nebuchadnezzar himself; and, doubtless by divine direction, it was incorporated with the writings of Daniel, and made a part of the inspired volume. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch then living in the world: he had subjugated many countries to his yoke; and he ruled over them with despotic sway. But on account of his excessive pride, God determined to humble him, and to make him an example to all future ages. Previously however to the execution of the judgment which he had decreed to inflict upon him, it pleased God to reveal to him, in a dream or vision, the judgment that should be executed. The vision was of a large and fruitful tree cut down; but the stump thereof was left in the ground: that stump however being intended to represent a man, who should be left exposed, like the beasts of the earth, to all varieties of weather, for the space of seven years, when he should again be restored to his former state of magnificence and power. The Chaldean magicians being unable to interpret this dream, Daniel was sent for; and he interpreted it to the king, in all its parts. The import of it was, that the king was to be reduced to the state of a beast for seven years; and then, being brought to a just knowledge of the one true God, he was to be restored with augmented power and splendor to his throne. Whatever impression was made by the dream, and the interpretation of it, at the time, it soon wore off; and the haughty monarch swelled with pride as much as ever. At the end of twelve months, when walking in his palace and surveying the extent and grandeur of the city Babylon, he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty verse 29, 30." And instantly, while the words were yet in his mouth, the wrath of God fell upon him, and he was reduced to the state of a beast, according to the vision that he had before seen. At the end of seven years the vision was yet further verified, in his restoration: and, in the words which we have read, we see the improvement which he made of the dispensation.

I. He acknowledges God as the Sovereign Disposer of all events—

He had throughout all his former life left out of his contemplation the thoughts of an over-ruling Providence, and had ascribed all his victories to his own wisdom and prowess. If he had given any honor to another, it was to his idol, Bel. But now he saw, that Jehovah was the God of all the earth: that, however men might appear to effect great changes upon earth, they were in reality "nothing;" they were mere instruments in God's hands; the axe, or saw, with which he executed his own designs [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2010.15). This was clearly proved to him in the dispensation that had taken place; for, both in the judgment that he had suffered, and in the mercy he had experienced, God alone had wrought; "nor could any stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you?"

Now it would be well if all the professed worshipers of Jehovah acknowledged his uncontrollable sovereignty, and his universal agency, in like manner. But we, almost like the heathen themselves, are ready to ascribe everything, whether great or small, to the wisdom and power of man. We lose sight of the first great cause, and fix our minds only on the second causes; and rather than speak of Jehovah as determining events, we will ascribe them to luck, or chance, or accident; and will thus run into atheism itself, rather than give the glory to Him to whom it is due. But let it be remembered, that there is not anything in the universe which is not done by the express permission of God, and in accordance with his eternal counsels. Men indeed are free agents in all that they do; but still they "do only what God's hand and counsel have determined before to be done [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%204.28);" not the falling of a sparrow takes place but "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This, while it does not in the least diminish the responsibility of men as moral agents [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.23), tends greatly to compose the mind under all the variety of dispensations that succeed each other; and to impress us with the idea, that whatever may be designed or done by men, God will "get himself honor," as he did on Pharaoh, and will eventually be glorified.

II. He adores God for his dispensations towards himself—

These had been beyond measure humiliating: yet he speaks of them in the beginning of this chapter with wonder and admiration: "I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the High God has wrought toward me: how great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders [Daniel 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%204.2-3)." So also at the close of the chapter; "I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment The text." Here he shows indeed that he was restored, not only to the possession of his throne, but to the best possible use of his faculties. The end of the dispensation was now completely answered. In truth, painful as the dispensation was, it was richly compensated, yes, infinitely overbalanced, by the effect it produced. No suffering can be accounted great, that is over-ruled for such good to the soul. To bless and adore God for our afflictions is one of the highest exercises of faith and love. Who does not admire Job, when, under the pressure of his accumulated calamities, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord?" This is to be done, not merely when, as in Nebuchadnezzar's case, we see the termination of them; but in the very midst of them all, while they are yet lying heavy upon us, and we see no way for our escape: then, I say, we should give glory unto our God, convinced that "He does all things well," and saying, with Hezekiah, "Good is the word of the Lord concerning me." To kiss the rod in this manner, "O! how lovely a spirit does it manifest!" How much better is it than murmuring, and complaining, and fretting under our troubles "like a wild bull in a net!" Let us imitate Nebuchadnezzar then, in this respect; and however afflictive the dispensation with which we are visited may be, let us say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good."

III. He warns others to avoid that sin which brought this calamity upon him—

He had "walked in pride," and been abased for it below the meanest of the children of men. Secure as he had imagined himself from any calamity, God had inflicted in a moment a punishment, which might well deter all who heard of it from the commission of a similar offence. God is never at a loss for means to accomplish his righteous will: in the judgment inflicted on this haughty monarch, he has sufficiently shown, that He is both able and determined to "abase all who walk in pride."

Now this consideration is of infinite importance, not to kings only, but to all the human race. Pride is natural to man: there is not a more powerful principle in our fallen nature than pride. The ungodly world are full of it. There is not any distinction, natural or acquired, which is not made an occasion of self-preference and self-delight. If a man be born of high parentage, or have acquired rank or fortune by his own exertions, how will he be puffed up with his honors, and almost conceive himself to be made of a finer clay than his less-distinguished neighbor! 'My might and my wisdom have procured me all these things:' and on the same endowments they rest for a continued enjoyment of them. Thus "they sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag." Nor is this confined to the ungodly world: there are among those who profess godliness, many, who are as full of pride and conceit as those who are altogether ignorant of religion: the object in which they pride themselves is changed; but the principle is the same as ever. Some, like the Pharisee in the Gospel, "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others:" they say in their hearts, "Stand by yourself; come not near to me; I am holier than you." Of these says God, "They are a smoke in my nose [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2065.5)." Others, like Diotrephes, "love to have the pre-eminence;" and are never so happy as when they are setting forth their gifts, and passing judgment upon all that they see and hear. Self-sufficiency and self-conceit, self-seeking, and self-applause, are their characteristic features; and so far from adorning the Gospel as they would be thought to do, they actually make it stink in the nostrils of all who have judgment to discriminate between good and evil. Not a few of such "novices," it is to be feared, "being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil." Even truly good men are by no means so holy, but that they are in continual danger of being drawn into the indulgence of this evil principle. Hezekiah, even after his most extraordinary deliverances from enemies without, and illness within, so far forgot himself as to be lifted up with pride; and thereby provoked God to withdraw from his descendants the mercies that had been given to him. And Paul himself was visited with a thorn in his flesh, to keep him low, "lest he should be exalted above measure Twice mentioned, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2012.7)."

Be it known then to all, that they need to watch and pray against this malignant evil; for God will most abase all in whom it is found. Man cannot abase them: to do this is a work far above the power of any created being [Job 40:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2040.11-12),: but God is able to do it; and he will do it. He is at no loss for means whereby to effect it [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%2011.30). Some, like Manasseh, he will take among the thorns: others, like Peter, he will leave to fall, and to disgrace their holy profession: and others, like Pharaoh, or Herod, he will plunge into the bottomless abyss of Hell. "Wherein soever they deal proudly, he will show himself above them." Let us never then forget, that "the proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord:" that "while he gives grace to the humble, he will resist them:" and while he fills the hungry with good things, he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

We exhort all, then,

1. To search their hearts, in reference to this sin—

Men who are under the influence of this sin, always find means to hide it from their own eyes. But it is to no purpose to deceive ourselves: God will not be imposed upon by specious names: he sees the evil, wherever it exists; and he hates it with a perfect hatred. Let us then endeavor to find out even the most hidden workings of this abominable evil, and implore help from God to mortify and subdue it.

2. To be thankful for that fidelity that strives to put them on their guard against it—

Nebuchadnezzar, though be did not reform his life, was not angry with Daniel for interpreting to him faithfully the vision he had seen. This is not always the case, especially when the sin of pride is pointed out: we are then in danger of being accounted "enemies for telling men the truth." But "let our counsel be acceptable unto you." We are constrained to "speak God's word faithfully," even if we were speaking to the greatest monarchs upon earth. Let none then, of whatever rank or class, be offended. Indeed, to take offence at a faithful ministration of the word, would prove the very point which it was a man's object to deny, namely, that he was under the dominion of pride. The humble will be thankful for every hint that can be afforded them for the discovery of their most secret sins, because they will be led thereby to a deeper humiliation before God, and to a more simple affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. To humble themselves for it as Nebuchadnezzar did—

Nebuchadnezzar not only wrote this whole account, but circulated it throughout the whole extent of his dominions. He thought he could never take shame enough to himself for all his former pride! What a glorious evidence was this of the transforming efficacy of Divine grace! It is no easy matter for any man to acknowledge and confess his pride: but to confess it openly, to take shame to himself for it publicly before all, this is a work of grace indeed! and it is the true and proper operation of grace upon the soul. We do not mean that it is necessary to publish our sins to all the world; but it is necessary to confess our faults unto those who have been more particularly affected by them. At all events, we must make confession before our God; for on that depends our present and everlasting acceptance with him: it is impossible, "if we harden ourselves against him, to prosper:" yes, "we shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." "Whoever exalts himself shall be abased; but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

[Daniel 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.5-6)

DISCOURSE 1126

BELSHAZZAR WARNED OF HIS IMPENDING RUIN

[Daniel 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.5-6). In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

IN former days, God was pleased to reveal his mind and will to men by dreams, and visions, and signs of different kinds; and this he did, not to his friends only, but also to his enemies. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed his purposes towards the world at large, in the successive establishment and ruin of four mighty empires, and of the final erection of the Messiah's kingdom, which should stand forever. His purposes also towards this monarch in particular he was pleased to make known through the same medium of communication. In like manner, to the impious Belshazzar he here in a miraculous manner foretold the impending destinies of himself and of his falling empire. The effect of this revelation upon the mind of Belshazzar is described in the words which we have just read; and it will give occasion to many useful reflections, while we consider,

I. His overwhelming fears—

That the sight of a hand-writing upon the wall of his room should surprise him, we may well expect. But why should it create in him such terror as is described in our text? What though he did not understand the writing? he need not on that account to be dismayed, if he had no inward reason to interpret the sign itself as auguring ill of him. But conscience, which had long been silenced by him, now lifted up its voice, and spoke to him in the language of keen remonstrance, and of dire foreboding: and this it was that made "his loins to shake, and his knees to smite one against the other."

Now this is a striking and instructive incident. We may, by carelessness and dissipation, drown for a season the voice of conscience; (unhappily for them, many succeed in this too well!) but sooner or later it will speak, and that too in such an authoritative tone as will make the stoutest sinner tremble. Every one, whether willingly or not, must listen to it at last: and the longer our attention to it is delayed, the more poignant and terrible will its reproaches be. Behold the convictions of the converts on the day of Pentecost, or the desponding and self-destroying attitude of the jailor! Yet these were the kindlier offices of conscience for their good [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.37); [Acts 16:26-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.26-30). In many who continue to withstand its dictates, it stings, it rankles, it corrodes, it fills with gloom and melancholy, destroying all their peace, and leaving them nothing but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them." And oh! with what horrors does it fill them at the instant of their departure from the body, and will fill them in the day when they shall be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ! What "fearfulness will then surprise the hypocrites, when they see nothing before them but dwelling with devouring fire and in everlasting burnings [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2033.14)." How will they then "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of that Lamb" of God, whom here they have neglected and despised! Brethren, listen to the voice of this faithful monitor: let not its slightest whispers be unheeded by you: cherish it; consult it on all occasions; labor to the uttermost to "keep it pure; attend to it, and it will prove your kindest friend: neglect it, and it will be to all eternity your bitterest enemy.

Consequent on these terrors were,

II. His anxious inquiries—

"He cried aloud to bring in all the magicians," that he might inquire of them the import of what was written: and when they were unable to give a satisfactory reply, he was induced to send for Daniel, who on former occasions had expounded the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, but had since been neglected by the weak ungrateful prince who now sat upon the Chaldean throne: now was he glad to learn, even from him, a just interpretation of the words before him.

Here again then we see what sinners will be driven to, when Conscience summons them to its bar, and constrains them to call their former ways to remembrance. Then they will be glad to be instructed in the written word of God: yes, they will request instruction even from a neglected and despised Daniel, in whose judgment and fidelity they can trust, when they have seen, that those on whom they before relied were "physicians of no value." But let not these inquiries be delayed. There is a hand-writing against us all; a writing so plain and intelligible, that "he who runs may read it." It requires no Daniel, no person of extraordinary wisdom, to expound it. We may see in the sacred volume, which lies open before our eyes, "the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." You need not go to men to interpret this to you: go to God; and he will expound it to you, and by his Spirit will "give you an understanding to understand it." But it is not a sentence of condemnation only that is written there: no; blessed be God! there are many glorious sentences which proclaim pardon and peace through the atoning blood of Christ: Read these; meditate on these: and your fears shall speedily be dispelled, and your sorrows be turned into joy. Mark the answers given to those whose terrors we have before spoken of, and the effect of those answers on their souls; and then you will see what you may assuredly expect as the result of your inquiries, if only they be made in sincerity and truth [Acts 2:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.37-38); [Acts 2:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.46-47); [Acts 16:26-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.26-30); [Acts 16:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.34).

The instruction given him was however unavailing: it had no effect on,

III. His confirmed obduracy—

He listened not only to the instructions, but also to the reproofs of Daniel, who set before him the guilt lie had contracted, by his misimprovement of those judgments which had been inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar for his pride; as also by his utter neglect of Jehovah, "in whose hand his life was;" and particularly in so heinously insulting God, as to take the sacred vessels of the sanctuary and profane them in his drunken revels, and make them an occasion of exalting his gods of wood and stone above him. Having set before him these grounds of God's displeasure, Daniel proceeded to explain the writing, and to tell him from God, that his life and kingdom were just ready to be delivered over to his enemies. All this he heard without offence; and he even gave orders, that the promised rewards should instantly be conferred on this faithful servant. But we hear not one word of humiliation on account of all his wickedness: he does not, like Ahab, humble himself in sackcloth and ashes [1 Kings 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2021.27); he does not, like the Ninevites, proclaim a fast; he does not even, like Pharaoh, say, I have sinned; nor does he even, like Simon Magus, desire Daniel's intercession, that these judgments might not fall upon him [Acts 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%208.24). He seems altogether insensible, given over to a reprobate mind and an obdurate heart.

And do we not often see a similar result from all the most faithful expositions of God's word? A momentary fear perhaps may be excited, even to terror; but no solid improvement follows it; no godly sorrow is produced in the soul; no humiliation before God; no cries for mercy; no departure from iniquity. But, if we thus "harden ourselves against God, can we prosper?" No: "he who being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without a remedy."

In reading this account, we cannot but observe,

1. The vanity of all earthly enjoyments—

What can we conceive more gratifying to flesh and blood, than to be entertaining, as Belshazzar did, such multitudes of his nobles, together with all his wives and concubines? Yet, behold, how in an instant all his pleasure vanished, and was turned into insupportable agony of mind! Nor is such a change uncommon: many in the midst of the most licentious scenes have been struck with horror, and made to anticipate their final doom: even a thought passing through the mind has been sufficient to cast a damp over the spirits, and to rob the soul of all its gaiety. What folly then to seek our happiness in things which are so unsatisfactory at best, and which may so speedily become an occasion of our more aggravated woe! Let us remember, that all which the world can afford is "vanity and vexation of spirit." As for "laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, it may be asked, What does it?" Yes, even in "laughter, the soul is often sorrowful; and the end of all such mirth is heaviness."

2. The comfort of a good conscience—

Daniel was not alarmed, notwithstanding his life was in jeopardy, as well as the life of all who dwelt in Babylon. But Daniel enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience, and therefore had confidence towards God. He knew that the enemy could only kill the body; and that the death of the body would translate his soul into the more immediate presence of his God. Thus Paul, when ready to be offered up a sacrifice, contemplated his departure with joy, assured, that the Lord, the righteous Judge, had prepared for him a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory. And Peter also, when on the very eve of expected martyrdom, and chained to two soldiers, was sleeping as sweetly, as if he had known that God had decreed to liberate him from his prison. Such are the effects of peace with God, and peace in our own conscience. Let us but maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and man," and nothing shall have power to disturb our rest. Assured that "nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," we shall smile at all the storms that encompass us around, and "commit ourselves with confidence into the hands of a faithful Creator."

3. The blessedness of an interest in Christ—

Whatever "hand-writing there is against us" in the Scriptures of truth, Christ has "blotted it out, and taken it out of the way, nailing it, as a cancelled bond, unto his cross [Colossians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%202.14)." Search the sacred volume from one end to the other, and not one word will be found menacing to a believing penitent. The very moment we believe in Christ, all our iniquities, of whatever kind, are blotted out as a morning cloud, and shall never more be remembered against us. Is there then any one among us that "trembles at God's word?" let him know, that the more he trembles, the less reason he has to tremble; since God looks upon him with delight [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2066.2), and engages "in no wise to cast him out." Suppose that such an one beheld at this moment written on the wall before him, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin;" and that we were authorized to expound it to him, "Your days are numbered; you are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting; and all that you have shall now be divided by your surviving relatives, your soul being summoned into the presence of its God;" even were this so, he need not fear, because Christ, being apprehended by faith, shall be put into the scale, and make it preponderate in his favor. We do not mean by this, that Christ and his merits are to be added to something of our own; (for He alone must be put into the scale against our sins;) but this we mean; that if there were the sins of the whole world lying on the soul of a single individual, the blood of Christ, applied by faith, should cleanse him from it, and the righteousness of Christ be a sufficient plea for his acceptance with God. Seek then, Beloved, to be united unto Christ by faith; and then, instead of trembling at his approach, you shall "rejoice before him at his coming."

[Daniel 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.22)

DISCOURSE 1127

IMPENITENCE REPROVED

[Daniel 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.22). And you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this.

AMONG the endowments of a pious minister, two of the most important are, unselfishness and fidelity. A man who is "looking to his own gain," or is afraid to "declare the whole counsel of God," is unworthy of the sacred office: nor can he hope to be either profitable to man, or accepted of God. The example of the Prophet Daniel is worthy of universal imitation. He, having been sent for by king Belshazzar to interpret a writing which God had caused to be inscribed upon the walls of the room where the impious monarch was feasting, declined with scorn all the offered rewards; and reproved, to his very face, the sovereign, whom no other person in the empire would have dared to offend: "Your gifts be to yourself," says he; "and give your rewards to another." 'God has here written your doom, because of your impiety. He has borne with you long, and given you singular advantages for repentance, if you had had a heart to improve them: he has made known to you all his dispensations towards your father, Nebuchadnezzar:' "but you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this."

The reproof here given to Belshazzar is not a whit less applicable to ourselves. Permit me, then, to stand to you in the place of Daniel, and to show you,

I. What advantages we have enjoyed for the humiliation of our souls—

It was certainly a great advantage to Belshazzar, that he had seen God's dealings with his father, (his grandfather,) both in the judgments inflicted on him, and in the mercies given unto him. God had in these dispensations clearly marked his indignation against sin, and his readiness to show mercy to returning penitents. The judgment inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest monarch in the universe, was the depriving him of his reason; and causing him, for the space of seven years, to resemble a beast, and to be treated as a beast; being turned out to eat grass like an ox, and to be exposed, like any common beast, to all the changes and inclemencies of the weather, without shelter, and without a friend to compassionate his forlorn condition. Having, however, by this humiliating dispensation, effected his gracious purpose towards him, God restored him to soundness of mind again, and to the exercise of his regal functions; yes, and brought him, also, to the possession of real piety, and ultimately to the enjoyment of a far nobler kingdom.

And has he not given to us the same advantage? Yes, and one far greater: for he has made known to us,

1. His indignation against sin; not in one instance only, but in all ages—

We may go back to the very first introduction of sin into the world; and there we shall see the indignation of God against it, written in the most tremendous colors. Not only was our first parent banished from Paradise; but a sentence of death was pronounced against him; and the whole earth, and all his posterity, were cursed for his sake. Hell, indeed, had been previously created, as a receptacle for the fallen angels: but it was henceforth to be peopled with millions of the human race, who, having received from Adam a corrupt nature, would follow his bad example, and perish in their sins.

As we descend further in the history of the world, we see again the displeasure of God against sin, as manifested at the Deluge; by which judgment every creature upon the face of the whole earth perished, except the few which were admitted into Noah's ark.

Nor was his abhorrence of sin less strongly marked by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the cities of the plain, by fire from Heaven. In this terrible judgment were involved the infant and the suckling, no less than the most daring offender in the land. Surely, after contemplating such events as these, we cannot doubt but that sin must, in the Divine mind, be an object of the deepest abhorrence.

But we need not go back to distant ages. We need only look around us, and within us, and we shall behold the same awful truth exhibited to our view on every side. Whence is it that storms and tempests desolate the earth, and plagues of every kind are inflicted on the human race? Whence is it that pains, and sorrows, and death assault, not the aged sinner only, but the new-born innocent? Whence is it that there is not a man upon earth, the godly alone excepted, that possesses peace in his soul, in the prospect of death and judgment? How comes it that all are "like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt?" There may, it is true, be found, in sad abundance, men as thoughtless as the beasts: but, of anything like solid peace, in the contemplation of eternity, there is not to be found one atom upon the face of the globe, except in those whose iniquities have been purged in the blood of our Incarnate God. We need only consult our own experience, and we must bear testimony to this distressing fact. And what does all this declare? It declares that sin, in whoever it exists, is an object of God's abhorrence, and has already stamped upon it the most unquestionable tokens of his displeasure.

2. His mercy to repenting sinners—

Here also we may go back to the period, when, unsolicited and unsought, God revealed a Savior to offending man, and promised that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." What a demonstration was this of mercy struggling, as it were, for vent in the Divine bosom; and exulting, I had almost said, in the discovery of an object needing it, and of means whereby it might be exercised towards him! See the myriads to whom this Savior was revealed in types and shadows, previous to his arrival. See the work of redemption, as carried on, to its completion, throughout the whole process of the Savior's incarnation, life and death, and resurrection and ascension; and his full investiture with all power, to accomplish in us what he had already in his own person prepared for us. See the out-pouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; whereby thousands, as far from God as ever Nebuchadnezzar was, were brought to God, and made partakers of God's kingdom and glory. Do not all these things speak to us as loudly as Nebuchadnezzar's conversion spoke to his son Belshazzar?

But of this, also, we have strong intimations, in what we see around us, and in what we feel within our own bosoms. We rind, even among the most savage barbarians, one general sentiment—that the Being to whom they are responsible will show mercy to those who, in a becoming manner, implore it at his hands. Among ourselves, there is universally prevalent a hope, that, on the repentance of a sinner, God will have mercy on him. But for this thought, the most careless sinner would give himself up to utter despair. In what way mercy shall be exercised towards him, he knows not: but of the readiness of God to show mercy, he has no doubt. And of this persuasion all of us are conscious: yes, so strongly is it impressed on all our minds, that it is the one source of all the comfort we enjoy.

If, then, we admit, as we must, that Belshazzar's advantages were great, much more are those with which we have been favored.

But we have reason to be ashamed, when we reflect,

II. How little improvement we have made of them—

What effect Belshazzar's knowledge ought to have produced upon him is here plainly declared. It should have led him to humble his soul before God. But it had been unproductive of any good: "he had not humbled his heart, though he knew all this." The revels, in which he was indulging at this moment, showed that he was as much under the influence of pride, dissipation, and impiety, as if no such warning had been ever given him. And what, I would ask, is the state of our hearts before God?

Are we not addicted to the same evils as he?

There may not be in us the same bold defiance of God as in him; but there is practically the same pride of heart which exalts itself against God, the same surrender of ourselves to the cares and pleasures of life, and the same actual preference of created confidences before Him who is the Creator of Heaven and earth. The Psalmist's description of the wicked too justly represents our state: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts: his ways are always grievous: your judgments are far above, out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffs at them [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2010.4-5)." Here is the same principle of pride as that by which Belshazzar was actuated. Here is God altogether banished from our thoughts, as much as from his; and utter contempt poured upon his authority and on his every word, whether of judgment or of mercy. Look around, and see if this be not the state of all around us. If the luxurious feasting of Belshazzar be unattainable by us, still it is that which is regarded as the very summit of happiness; and which is mimicked by persons, according to their ability, in every rank of life. From what we know of God's displeasure against such carnal proceedings, it might be supposed that they should long since have been banished from the world: but the world is as full of them as ever, and the heart of sinful man as much addicted to them as ever.

Have we "humbled our hearts," any more than he?

One might expect, from all that we have read of God's dealings with the world, that we should all be like the Ninevites, humbling ourselves before God in sackcloth and ashes. But where do we see anything of humiliation and contrition? Where do we hear persons bewailing their past iniquities, and crying mightily unto God for mercy? Say, is this common? Say, is it not uncommon? Is it not very rare? If you hear of two or three awakened to a sense of their undone condition, you are ready to congratulate the minister and the Church of God on an event so truly wonderful, and so replete with mercy; a sure proof, that the instances are very few, and that the knowledge of the generality is awfully unproductive.

Is not our sin then, in this point of view, greatly aggravated?

Daniel spoke of Belshazzar's knowledge as an aggravation of his guilt: "You have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this." And is not our knowledge also a fearful aggravation of our guilt? Our blessed Lord said of the Jews, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2015.22)." And, in like manner, I may say to you, that had you been less instructed in the mind of God, you would have had less to answer for, on account of your departures from it. This is placed in a very striking point of view by the Prophet Jeremiah. He speaks of the ten tribes of Israel as having abandoned themselves to idolatry, and as having been discarded of God on account of their wickedness: yet, when the other two tribes saw this, so far from improving it for their own spiritual good, they "turned not to the Lord with their whole heart, but insincerely." Upon which, the Lord himself said concerning them, "The backsliding Israel has justified herself more than treacherous Judah [Jeremiah 3:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%203.6-11);" that is, great as Israel's guilt is, it is not equal to that of Judah; because Judah has had an advantage not possessed by Israel: Judah has seen the judgments inflicted upon Israel, and yet has gone on impenitent: and therefore his guilt is great in proportion to the advantages which he has neglected to improve. And to the same effect our blessed Lord also has told us, that "the servant who knew not his lord's will, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but the servant who knew his lord's will, and yet violated it, shall be beaten with many stripes [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2012.47-48)."

That I may still adhere to the character of my text, let me address you, finally, in a few words,

1. Of warning—

I would not unduly magnify any advantages which have been enjoyed by you: but I may with truth say, that, according to the ability which God has given me, I have "ministered unto you faithfully the Gospel of Christ," "not keeping back any one thing that would have been profitable unto you." You therefore have much to answer for. And the words which have been spoken to you, "if they be not unto you a savor of life unto life, will be unto you a savor of death unto death." Yes, much as I have desired to save your souls, I shall be "a swift witness against you in the day of judgment," if you do not truly turn to God, and devote yourselves sincerely to his service. I pray you let not our meeting at the judgment-seat of Christ be so fraught with sorrow to our souls; but now make a suitable improvement of what you hear, that I may have you as "my joy, and crown of rejoicing, in that day."

2. Of advice—

Let the dealings of God with mankind be treasured up in your minds. They are designed to teach you what you yourselves may expect at his hands. You may see in his judgments, what the impenitent shall endure; and you may see in his mercies what the penitent shall enjoy. Belshazzar himself may be a lesson to you, if you will not attend to other and more encouraging instructions. He was a powerful monarch; yet his greatness could not screen him from the wrath of an avenging God. "That very night was king Belshazzar slain." Had he humbled himself at that moment, who can tell but that he, like his father, might have been spared to be a monument of God's saving grace to all eternity? Delay not you, my beloved Brethren, to obey the heavenly calling; lest death arrest you also, and it be too late. "Today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts; but now that you know all this, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and seek for mercy through him, as the atoning sacrifice for your sins." "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%204.17)." But, "if you know these things, then happy are you, and happy shall you be, if you do them [John 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2013.17)."

[Daniel 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.23)

DISCOURSE 1128

BELSHAZZAR'S IMPIETY AND OURS COMPARED

[Daniel 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.23). The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all your ways, have you not glorified.

WHEN we look around us, and see what iniquity prevails in the earth, we are ready to imagine that God does not notice the affairs of men, or take any interest in their conduct. But, when we open the inspired volume, we find that, on many occasions, the sins of men have been so strongly marked in their punishment, as to bear ample testimony to a superintending Providence, and to constrain us to say, "Truly, there is a God that judges in the earth [Psalm 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2058.11)." The judgment inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar so exactly accorded with the prediction which had been uttered respecting it, that no doubt can be entertained of the hand from whence it came. Nor was the hand of God less visible in the punishment of the impious Belshazzar. In the midst of his drunken revels, "there came forth, as it were, the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote on the plaster of the wall where the king was sitting." The words he could not understand: nor could any of his astrologers or soothsayers interpret them. But, on his application to Daniel, the import of them was declared unto him. The prophet first set before him, and reproved, his impiety: and then denounced the impending destruction of himself and his whole empire; which accordingly took place that very night.

The charge which is here exhibited against Belshazzar is more or less applicable to all the children of men, even to ourselves, as well as others; and will give me occasion to show,

I. How far our conduct has resembled his—

Belshazzar was as dependent upon God as any of his subjects could be—

He received his breath from God; by whom also "his sold was upheld in life [Psalm 66:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2066.9)." His times were altogether in God's hands [Psalm 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2031.15)," who could prolong or cut them short, as he saw fit. Nor was Belshazzar ignorant of this. He could not but feel his dependence on a Superior Being: and he had an evidence, in the dispensations with which his father (his grandfather) had been visited, that this Being was God.

Yet had he not glorified God, in any part of his conduct—

He had not acknowledged his supremacy, or regarded his authority, or rendered thanks to him for his mercies, or dreaded his displeasure. On the contrary, he had, with daring impiety, profaned the vessels of God's sanctuary, "drinking out of them, together with his wives and concubines; and praising his gods of gold and silver, of brass and iron, of wood and stone verse 3, 4." and thus provoking the Most High to jealousy, and setting him at defiance. In this, he not only "had not glorified God," but had greatly and impiously dishonored him.

And we, too, like Belshazzar, are dependent on God—

"In him we live and move and have our being [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2017.28)." "In his hand," says Job, "is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind [Job 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2012.10);" and, "if he take away our breath, we die, and return again to our dust [Psalm 104:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20104.29). So jealous of his own honor is God, in this respect, that he characterizes himself as much by the preservation of all things, as by their first creation: "Thus says the Lord, he who created the heavens, and stretched them out; he who spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; he who gives breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein [Isaiah 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2042.6)." "He sees our ways, and counts all our steps [Job 31:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2031.4)." Nor does he leave man to walk at large without control: "I know, O Lord," says the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2010.23)." In a word, it is as true of us, as it was of Belshazzar, that "our breath is in God's hands;" and "his, even under his governance, are all our ways."

Yet, like him, have we also forgotten to "glorify our God"—

Though "we have known God, yet have we not glorified him as God [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%201.21)." We have not a "given him glory by repentance": though that would have honored him in a very especial manner [Joshua 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh%207.19). [Jeremiah 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2013.15-16). Nor have we honored him by the exercise of faith: though that also would have greatly redounded to his glory [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%204.20). Nor have we endeavored to honor him in a way of holy obedience: though our blessed Lord has so expressly told us, that by our fruitfulness in good works "his Father would be glorified [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2015.8)." Had we acted, in any respect, as we ought to have done, we should have labored that "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in us [John 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017.10). [2 Thessalonians. 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Thess.%201.12)." But, in having altogether neglected this, we are obnoxious to the very same charge as the impious Belshazzar.

But as our opportunities of instruction have greatly surpassed any that that unhappy monarch ever possessed, I shall go on to show,

II. How far our guilt has exceeded his—

"To whoever God has committed much, of him will much be required:" and our demerits are aggravated in proportion to the advantages which we have enjoyed. As a heavier condemnation was denounced against the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, because of the special mercies which they had abused, so will God regard us as more guilty than Belshazzar himself; because,

1. Our knowledge of him has been more clear—

It was but little that Belshazzar knew of God. He did know that Jehovah was above all gods, and that he was able either to save or to destroy, He had seen this, in the degradation to which his grandfather had been reduced, and in the mercy that had been given unto him verse 20–22; and he knew it, from the testimony which that restored monarch had borne to the honor of Jehovah [Daniel 4:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%204.34-37). But we have a revelation from God himself; a revelation, wherein he has made known to us his nature and perfections, his works and purposes. There is not anything respecting him which we are concerned to know, which he has not clearly revealed unto us: so that it is not an unknown God that we are called to serve, but one "with whom we may acquaint ourselves, and be at peace [Job 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job%2022.21)." The precise nature of Ins will, too, he has declared unto us; so that we are informed respecting everything which he would wish us either to forbear or do. We cannot plead ignorance in any respect: and therefore "knowing, as we have done, our Master's will," we have contracted greater guilt by our disobedience; and deserved a heavier punishment than he ever did, who knew it not [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2012.47-48)."

2. Our obligations to him are more abundant—

Belshazzar was indebted to God for all the blessings both of creation and providence: but we are made partakers of the infinitely higher blessings of redemption. O! what tongue can declare the obligations we owe him for the gift of his only dear Son to die for us, and to redeem us to God by his blood?: This as far exceeds all other mercies, as the radiance of the noon-day sun exceeds the glimmering of a twinkling star. By the consideration of this, we should have been impelled to the most strenuous efforts in his service. The surrender of our whole selves to him, in body, soul, and spirit, has been our reasonable service. Yet have we not given to him the glory due unto his name; but have "set up idols in our hearts;" and in the whole course of our lives have "worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for evermore [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%201.25)." What then do not we deserve at his hands? we, who "have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace?" If by this we have incurred a far sorer punishment than they did who "despised the law of Moses [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2010.28-29)." much more must our guilt and punishment exceed that of the impious Belshazzar.

3. Our responsibility to him is more manifest—

Of a resurrection from the dead, and a future judgment, that unhappy monarch must have had a very indistinct notion. But we are as assured of these things as if they were at this moment exhibited before our eyes. We know that God has appointed a day "wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained," even by the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has raised from the dead. We know that he will then call, not our overt acts only, but "every secret thing, into judgment;" and recompense us "according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil." Hence we have been concerned to take especial care to our ways; and so to order them before him, that we may find acceptance with him in that day. What guilt, then, must attach to us, for our neglect of him, and for our numberless violations of his holy laws! What excuse shall we have, when we stand at his judgment-seat? Belshazzar, though he can never excuse, may palliate, his guilt, by saying, 'Lord, I knew not what a judgment would await me:' but we must stand self-condemned, as having set at nothing our God and Judge, and, in defiance of his justice, have "treasured up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%202.5).

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are insensible of all the guilt they have contracted—

The greater part of mankind, though they live altogether as without God in the world, are as unconcerned about their state as if there were no God to call them into judgment: But, Brethren, this is a most awful infatuation. You do not wonder that King Belshazzar trembled, so that "the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another, when he saw the hand-writing upon the wall: but do you not wonder at your own insensibility, when ten thousand heavier judgments are written against you in this book? And what is written against you, there is no need of a prophet to interpret: it is expressed in terms plain and intelligible to the meanest capacity. Take but that one sentence: "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%209.17)." Will you not tremble at such a word as this? Know you assuredly. that, whether you will believe it or not, it shall be fulfilled in its season; and that, if it ever be executed upon you, it would have been "better for you that you had never been born." You may possibly be distinguished among men for rank; and learning: but, if you were as great as ever Belshazzar was, yet should you find no protection from your greatness: for God's declaration is, that "though hand join in hand," and there were a confederacy of the whole world to protect you, "the wicked shall not pass unpunished."

2. Those who are trembling for fear of the Divine judgments—

Others may pity you because of the terror that has seized your mind: but I will congratulate you from my inmost soul. Not that terror constitutes repentance: for, in truth, it is no part of true repentance; but it is often introductory to it: and the man that is "pricked to the heart," and led to cry out, "What shall I do?" is "not far from the kingdom of Heaven." Only let your sorrow for sin become more sincere, so as to feel like those of old: "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covers us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%203.25);" and you need not fear but that "the handwriting that is against you shall be blotted out [Colossians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%202.14)," and "your iniquities also be blotted out as a morning cloud [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2044.22)." Hear what God himself has spoken for your encouragement: "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a broken and contrite spirit, and that trembles at my word [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2066.2)." Yes, God himself will look upon you with delight, and "all the angels around his throne rejoice in your behalf." Be of good comfort, then: and look to that Savior "whose blood will cleanse you from all sin:" and fear not, but that in Him you shall be justified from all the iniquities that you have ever committed [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.39).

[Daniel 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.27)

DISCOURSE 1129

SCRIPTURE BALANCES

[Daniel 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.27). You are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting.

THE words before us were uttered in reference to a single individual, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, whose open acts most fully attested the truth of the allegation contained in them. But God discerns the heart, and weighs every man in his unerring balance; and, though he do not now declare the result of his examination, as he then did, by a written testimony that shall be seen of men, he records it in the book of his remembrance, and will make it known, concerning every one of us, in the last day. Now, as upon this testimony our eternal happiness will depend, it becomes us to ascertain beforehand what the state of our souls really is. And this we may do, if we weigh ourselves in the balances to which we have access. Let me then show you,

I. In what balances we should weigh ourselves—

Certainly we must not take the scales by which the world forms its estimate of men and things. They are so deceitful, that we can never by them attain any just knowledge of ourselves. They are so constructed, that sin, unless it be of a very enormous character, scarcely affects them at all: and virtue, of however low a character it be, produces a vast preponderance in the scale of merit. Those which I would recommend for your use, are,

1. The balance of God's perfect law—

The law of God requires that we love God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and that we love our neighbor, even every child of man, altogether as ourselves. It admits of no departure from this; no, not so much as in thought. Anything short of the obedience of Christ himself is a violation of it, and renders us obnoxious to its curse.

Now, if we try ourselves by this standard, who among us will not be found wanting? or rather I should say, who among us has ever, for one single moment, come up to it? The light of a glow-worm actually approaches nearer to the splendor of the sun in the firmament, than our obedience has done to that which is required of us. To say that "we are found wanting," is to say nothing. Truly, if weighed in this balance, the best man upon the face of the whole earth will be found "lighter than vanity itself." To us it may appear, that in this respect there is at least a great difference between the states of different men: but, if viewed aright, the goodness of any natural man would really be found to weigh as little before God as the dust upon the balance; so grievously wanting are we all, insomuch that "every mouth must be alike stopped, and all the world become guilty before God [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%203.19)."

2. The balance of his blessed Gospel—

Persons greatly mistake respecting the nature of the Gospel: they suppose it to be a kind of remedial law, lowered to the standard of human infirmity. But this is a fatal error. The Gospel does not dispense with any one duty that was enjoined by the Law, or lower it in any respect. To suppose that it did, would be to imagine that God at first required more of us than was necessary, or that now he requires less than is necessary; or that some change has taken place in the relation that exists between him and his creatures; so that that which was necessary in the first instance, is now no longer necessary. The Gospel makes no change whatever in the law: but it prescribes duties, of which the law gave no intimation, and could take no cognizance. It prescribes repentance. For this the law made no provision t but the Gospel commands "all men everywhere to repent:" its language is, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%204.9-10)." In addition to this, it enjoins faith; even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the appointed Savior of the world. Of this the law spoke nothing: it knew not of a Savior for fallen man: it simply said, "Do this, and live." But the Gospel reveals a Savior, who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" and preaches through him the forgiveness of sins, assuring us, that "all who believe shall be justified from all things [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.39)." Once more, the Gospel calls us to obedience; even to such an obedience as a poor fallen sinner, when aided by the Holy Spirit, is able to render. Such obedience as this the law could not accept: hut the Gospel declares, that it shall be accepted of God through Jesus Christ [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%202.5). If only we serve God with a willing mind, he will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" but will be "well pleased with our sacrifices," notwithstanding the imperfection of them, and will grant to confer upon us a recompense of reward [Hebrews 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2013.15-16).

Now, then, let us inquire how far we comply with the gracious terms of the Gospel. What know we of repentance, even of "that broken and contrite heart which God will not despise?" Have we not still found "a heart of stone" within us, even while we have desired "an heart of flesh?": And how have we exercised faith? Have our souls gone forth to the Savior, to lay hold on him, and trust in him, and glory in him? Have we not found a most astonishing backwardness towards this holy exercise, insomuch that we seem to have accounted the Gospel a cunningly-devised fable, rather than a divine reality?: Then, as to the surrender of ourselves to God, how has it been with us? Has there been that entire devotion of our souls to him, which his love and mercy have so justly demanded? Have we not rather been amazed at our own insensibility and ingratitude, so far exceeding all that we could ever have conceived?

If, then, we weigh ourselves in this balance, what shall we find, but sad occasion for grief and shame?.

3. The balance even of our own conscience—

This, I must confess, is a very inadequate mode of estimating our real character. Conscience is blind. Its views of duty are very imperfect: its observation of our conduct also is extremely partial; and its judgment very erroneous. Yet even in this balance, unduly favorable as it is, we shall be found sadly wanting. We all know that God ought to be loved and served: that the Lord Jesus Christ also ought to be precious to our souls. We know that sin should be mortified; and that holiness of heart and life should be cultivated. We know, that, as immortal beings, we should rise superior to the things of time and sense, and seek chiefly the happiness and glory of eternity. Now, then, how far have we corresponded even with our own standard of duty? Are we not sensible that the interests of the soul, and the concerns of eternity, have not been of such paramount value in our estimation, as their real importance has required? Defective as our own standard of duty has been, have we not fallen greatly and shamefully below it?.

Let me. then, proceed to show you,

II. What lessons we should learn from our defects—

There is no reason for us to despond: on the contrary, the more sensible we are of our defects, the more hopeful is our state before God. Let us then search out our defects to the uttermost; and then learn from them,

1. To be thankful for the Gospel—

O! what glad tidings does the Gospel proclaim! Salvation! Salvation for sinners, even the chief! Salvation for those who have broken the law! yes, and have despised the Gospel also! and have lived hitherto only for themselves!—What thanks can we render to God, that we are permitted to hear this joyful sound, before the curses of the broken law come down upon us, and we are shut up in that place of torment, where the voice of mercy never sounds, nor one ray of hope can ever enter! Truly, Brethren, if you will not now bless your God, "the very stones will cry out against you." What, if king Belshazzar could have a proclamation of mercy to his soul, what feelings would it excite in him? But it is observable, that no call to repentance was given to him; for his day of grace was past. This, however, is not your state: to you the Savior says, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden! and you shall find rest unto your souls." Rejoice then, and leap for joy; for in Christ you have your every defect cancelled, and your every want supplied.

2. To walk humbly before God—

Be it so, that your iniquities are pardoned, and your sins are covered:" still, how can you do otherwise than loath and abhor yourselves, when you contemplate your daily walk before God? What might not be expected of one who has been redeemed from death by the blood of God's only dear Son? What admiration, and love, and gratitude would you suppose must fill the soul of one who has been bought with such a price, and, from a child of Satan, been made a child of God, from an heir of wrath, an heir of everlasting glory? You would naturally suppose that he would not have so much as a thought but how to praise and glorify his Benefactor. But, alas! not even the wonders of redeeming love can produce upon us all the effect that might be wished. We still are in a great measure carnal, looking too much to the things which are visible and temporal, and too little to the things which are invisible and eternal. In truth, our very best services furnish us with but too just occasion for penitence; our very tears needing to be washed in the blood of Christ, and our repentances to be repented of. Let this lesson then be learned; To walk softly before God, in the remembrance of your sins; and, when you have done all that is commanded, still to say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that only which it was our duty to do."

3. To be preparing daily for the scrutiny that awaits you at the last-day—

God will come shortly to judge the world; and will call every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil. Then will innumerable defects, which here you overlooked, be brought to light; and every counsel of the heart, whether good or evil, be made manifest. Should you not, then, be preparing for that day? Should you not get every evil of your heart mortified, and every good thing matured within you? Belshazzar, when he received his warning, had but a few hours to live: for that very night was his soul required of him. And may it not be so with you also? And if it should, in what a pitiable state will you be, as unprepared for your great account! Yet, go you must, and be weighed also in the balance of God's sanctuary; and, if found wanting, like light or reprobate silver, be cast away. Think, I pray you, of the representations given of that period by our blessed Lord: some, as wheat, will be treasured up in the granary of Heaven; but others, as chaff, be cast into the fire of Hell, even the fire that never shall be quenched. "The net, at present, drags to land both good fish and refuse: but then the good will be gathered into vessels, and the bad be cast away." Well, thanks be to God! there is yet time to prepare for that day; and time to have every defect of your souls supplied. The Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to accomplish in you his good work: and if you truly and sincerely commit yourselves to him, he will "perfect in you the work he has begun," and "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."

[Daniel 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.30)

DISCOURSE 1130

BELSHAZZAR'S DEATH

[Daniel 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.30). In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

"KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." We speak of things as fortuitous and contingent, because we see not the hand by which they are directed; but, in reality, there is nothing contingent, not even the falling of a sparrow: "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Sometimes it has pleased God to make known, beforehand, events, which depended entirely upon the free will of man; while at the same time they were as infallibly foreseen by him as if man had been a mere machine, without the smallest exercise of choice or inclination. Such were the events which facilitated or attended the destruction of the Babylonish empire. It was optional with Belshazzar whether he would make a feast for his lords, and drink to excess: and it was optional with Cyrus what moment he should seize for making his attack upon the city: but all was foretold by God, with a minuteness and precision which proclaim at once the omniscience of the Deity, and the dependence of all things upon his sovereign will [Jeremiah 51:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2051.11); [Jeremiah 51:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2051.39); [Jeremiah 51:57](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2051.57). The event before us had long before been proclaimed by the voice of inspiration: and it will be profitable for us to consider,

I. The time of Belshazzar's death—

In the words, "that night," there is an emphasis which must not be overlooked. It was the night,

1. Of his feasting—

He had "made a feast for a thousand of his lords." We mean not to condemn all feasts: for our blessed Lord himself repeatedly given to be present at a feast. But the generality of "banquetings," and "ravelings, and such like" are among those works of the flesh, "which they who do, shall not inherit the kingdom of God [Galatians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%205.21)." Of this kind was Belshazzar's feast; at which he gave himself up to mirth, and banished all thoughts of death from his mind.

What an awful thing to be taken at such a moment! Yet how many are there, who, if not slain like him, yet are called away from the midst of the cares or pleasures of this life as unprepared as he! It was so at the time of the Deluge: it will be so at the end of the world: and it is so yet daily and hourly [Matthew 24:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2024.37-39). "The foolish virgins" greatly out-number those who are wise; and have their oil to seek when the Bridegroom's arrival is announced. "They are saying, Peace, peace; until sudden destruction comes upon them as a thief in the night, or as travail on a woman with child [1 Thessalonians. 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess.%205.2-3)." The Lord grant it may never be so with us!

2. Of his impiety—

Feasting and impiety are not unfrequently associated. The generality of men seem to think that they cannot enjoy any comfort in social converse, unless they give way to excess, and banish decency and religion from their presence. Belshazzar could not be content with the pleasure which this feast afforded, but he must openly pour contempt on God, and set him at defiance. Accordingly, he ordered the sacred vessels, which his grandfather had taken from the temple at Jerusalem, to be brought forth for the use of himself and his wives and concubines; and then celebrated his gods as superior to Jehovah, over whom (as it should seem) they had triumphed. This completed the measure of his iniquities, and drew down upon him "the vengeance of the Lord." Perhaps we may think the crime and the punishment uncommon: but neither the one nor the other is at all uncommon. What are the songs that are usually sung at feasts, but songs in honor of Bacchus and Venus, the heathen patrons of riot and debauchery? What are the toasts or sentiments, in commendation of which the wine is poured out and drunk? what, but a tissue of lewdness and profaneness? And how often do they who engage in such scenes, come to an untimely end! One falls from his horse; another is overturned in a carriage; another run over by a cart; another is drowned; another is killed in an affray. We call these things accidents: but if an inspired prophet were sent to declare the truth, we should find them "the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of his temple."

And may not we look back to some day, or some night, when God might have cut us off as it were, to advantage, if not in a state of riot and intoxication, yet in some other state equally displeasing to him? O let us call to mind those seasons; and adore his name, that "in that night" we were not summoned, with all our iniquities upon us, to give account of ourselves at his judgment-seat!

3. Of his warning—

While Belshazzar was indulging in his impious revels, he saw a hand writing upon the wall of the room wherein he sat. Terrified beyond measure at so strange a sight, he called for all his magicians and astrologers to read and explain the words. None of them being able to explain the writing, Daniel was sent for: and he, by Divine inspiration, declared the sentence which God had thus visibly proclaimed. On any other occasion, if we may judge from the neglect into which Daniel had fallen, Belshazzar would have fiercely resented the faithfulness with which this prophet of the Lord had denounced his doom: but his terror had softened him for a moment; yet not so softened him as to produce any genuine repentance in his heart. He ordered the promised reward to be given to Daniel; but we do not find that he humbled himself before God, or uttered one prayer for mercy. Scarcely was the warning explained to him, but it was executed on him, and on all his dissolute companions. Yes; "in that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain." As his royalty did not save him, so neither did his terror obtain for him one moment's respite. He heard, he trembled, he died. He had seen (as Daniel told him) the judgments that had been executed on Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather; and yet had not profited by that warning, or humbled himself before the God of Heaven: now therefore the warning and the judgment came together: nor was any further space given him for repentance.

How differently has God acted hitherto towards us! Many are the warnings which we have slighted; and yet, behold, we live!: But how soon his patience may come to an end, and a termination be put to our day of grace, who can tell?.

Such was the season when this unhappy monarch was called into the presence of his Judge. Let us next consider,

II. The instruction to he gathered from it—

Surely we may learn from this,

1. Not to provoke the Lord to jealousy—

It matters not whether, with Belshazzar, we "praise gods of wood and stone," or whether we "set up idols in our hearts:" in either case, God is dethroned; and "other lords besides him have dominion over us." And shall we think lightly of our guilt, while in such a state as this? or shall we imagine that God regards it with indifference? No: "he is a jealous God: his very name is Jealous [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod%2034.14);" and "his glory will he not give," or allow to be given "to another." Look then within your own bosoms, you who are so addicted to the pursuits of this life as scarcely to have any time or inclination for reading the Scriptures and for secret prayer; you whose feelings are quickly roused when your honor or your interest are at stake, and yet are unconcerned about the honor of God or the interests of your souls; look, I say, within, and see whether God has not reason to be jealous of you; and whether he might not justly destroy you instantly with fire, as he did Nadab and Abihu; or cause the earth to swallow you up quick, as he did to Korah and his rebellious associates? Do not imagine that you are innocent, because you do not follow the practices of Belshazzar: see whether you be not living in his spirit; and whether you are not despising God in your heart, as much as he did in his actions; and idolizing the world in your heart, as much as he did his fictitious deities in his drunken carousals? And know, that though your idolatry is less gross than his, it involves you in deeper guilt, in proportion as the meridian light of the Gospel transcends the darkness of Heathen superstition.

2. Not to despise the warnings you receive—

You have not a hand-writing visibly on the wall: but have you not other warnings, equally legible, on every side? How many are cut off around you, some old, some young, and some in the prime of life! How many sudden deaths take place, or, if not sudden in respect of time, yet unexpected by the persons themselves If this be preached as a New-Year's Discourse, the last year may be represented as dead, or as cut off from our short span of life, which therefore is proportionably contracted. Are the disorders which you see or feel, no warnings? But you have a hand-writing, yes, the hand-writing of God himself; you may see it in the Scriptures of truth: there you may see written, as with a sun-beam, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin:" to you it speaks: your days are numbered, and nearly finished: you are weighed in a balance, and found wanting: and all hope of enjoying the kingdom of Heaven will be quickly taken from you, if you do not turn unto God with your whole hearts. God says to you, "My son, give me your heart:" anything short of this will be to no purpose. O that you would now "open unto Him that knocks at the door of your hearts;" and that "the long-suffering of God might now at last lead you to repentance!"

3. Not to delay the great work you have to do—

While you are living at your ease, and putting the thoughts of death far from you, God may be saying, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you." And O, how terrible would this be to the generality! To some indeed sudden death would be sudden glory: but to others how different! Herod made a feast; and, in compliance with his daughter's request, gave her John Baptist's head in a charger: yes, that night was John the Baptist slain. But how different was that night to John the Baptist and Belshazzar! The one went from a prison to a crown; the other from a palace to a lake of fire. Inquire, I pray you, how death would find you, if it should come this night: and if you are unprepared to meet it, O delay not one hour; give not sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, until you have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Converted you must be; or you can never enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Your "conscience must be sprinkled with the atoning blood of Jesus," or your sins will infallibly plunge you into everlasting perdition. Seize then the fleeting hour. Adore your God that you have not been taken away, as thousands of your fellow-creatures have been, with all your sins upon you: and "today, while it is called today, harden not your heart;" lest like them you perish in impenitence and unbelief.

[Daniel 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.5)

DISCOURSE 1131

CHARACTER OF DANIEL

[Daniel 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.5). Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

AMONG the numberless things which Solomon denounces as "vanity and vexation of spirit," is this, that "for every right work a man is envied of his neighbor [Ecclesiastes 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles%204.4)." No consideration, either of the intrinsic excellency of virtue, or of the benefits resulting from it to the world, will abate the malignant workings of an envious mind. For many years had Daniel, as a minister of state, conferred great blessings on the Babylonish empire [Daniel 2:48-49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%202.48-49). And now, after the conquest of Babylon, Darius, the Medo-Persian monarch, from a conviction of his pre-eminent attainments, had placed him next to himself in power and authority in his empire also. And such had been the wisdom and integrity of Daniel in the discharge of his high duties, that the persons most capable of discovering any fault in his administration, and most intent on making such a discovery, if any could be found, were incapable of alleging any one thing to his disadvantage. But were they grateful to him for his services? No: they were envious of his talents, his virtues, and his honors, and labored with all their might to destroy him. "Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom: but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him verse 4." This they were constrained to acknowledge, at the very time that they conspired to take away his life. "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Here they not only acknowledge the astonishing excellence of his character, but they actually found upon it their hope of prevailing against him; since it was only by placing in direct opposition to each other the commands of God and the commands of man, that they could involve him in anything which should furnish them with an occasion of complaint against him.

As for their envious malignity, I shall wave all further notice of it. It is the character of Daniel on which I would now fix your attention; a character the more remarkable, as being drawn, not by friends, but by foes; and not for the sake of commendation, but for the sake only of finding out the most successful method of directing their efforts for his destruction.

For the establishment of such a character as this, there must have been in Daniel a very rare assemblage of virtues; which, therefore, it will be proper for us distinctly to consider, in order that we may clearly understand the character itself, and be stirred up to seek, each of us for himself, the attainment of it. Let me,

I. Open to you the constituent parts of this character—

Here we behold, in combined and unintermitted exercise,

1. Piety—

This, beyond a doubt, was at the root of all. And how deeply-rooted it was in him, his enemies themselves proclaimed, when they grounded upon that their hopes of prevailing against him; since, if his piety was not sufficient to bear him up under his present difficulties, their plot, so far at least as a violation of human laws was concerned, would be defeated.

And it is from this principle alone that any real good can flow. Nothing but piety can produce a perfect uniformity of conduct. The corruptions of human nature are too strong to be overcome by anything but the grace of God. A man may indeed be a wise and experienced statesman, though he fail in the practice of religion and virtue. But no man can maintain, for a long course of years, and under every possible complication of difficulties, a conduct which shall not be open to some degree of censure, especially from those who "watch and wait for his halting;" unless he be assisted from on high, and be in the habit of walking as in the presence of the omniscient God. To this, then, I would call you in the first instance, since without it all human efforts will be in vain. Let your hearts be right with God. Come to him as sinners, in the name of his dear Son. Obtain from him a sense of acceptance with him, and a confidence in him as your reconciled God and Father. Beg of him to write his law upon your hearts, so that you may have an unerring standard, to which to refer every motion of your minds. Look to him for the assistance of his good Spirit under all difficulties; and make it your constant aim to please him. Then will you have within your own bosoms a compass, by which you may find your path in safety through this trackless wilderness; while your eye is directed to his law as your rule, and his glory as your end.

2. Wisdom—

In this he must have excelled in a very extraordinary degree; else he never could have conducted himself so unexceptionably as he did, for many years together, in circumstances so intricate and arduous as his. The Queen of Babylon's account of him to King Belshazzar was, "There is a man in your kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and, in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him [Daniel 5:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%205.10-11)." And Ezekiel, in the very life-time of Daniel, spoke of him as eminently distinguished in this respect [Ezekiel 28:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek%2028.3). Indeed, this was the chief ground of the preference given to him by the King of Persia above all the native princes: "He was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him verse 3."

In us, too, should this be found; nor can we without it hope to be held in estimation by any, except a few kind and partial friends. To those who are enemies of religion, we shall only give disgust, if our piety be not under the direction and control of wisdom. It is certain that many well-meaning people give very great offence by their injudicious proceedings; yes, and involve themselves, too, in many troubles, which they might, by a greater exercise of wisdom, have avoided. Our blessed Lord cautions us on this head: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%207.6)." There may, indeed, be a carnal wisdom, to whose dictates we ought not to listen; for flesh and blood are but blind counselors to confer with [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%201.16); but there is a sound wisdom and discretion, which is highly commendable, and greatly conducive to good. Hence Paul says, "Walk in wisdom towards them that are without [Colossians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%204.5)." I cannot but recommend, therefore, to all who are possessed of piety, to take heed how they exercise it; lest, by their weaknesses and follies, they make religion itself to be accounted foolishness, and involve in one common reproach all who profess to serve their God. The resolution of David should be that of every one among us: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20101.2)."

3. Consistency—

It is clear that Daniel attended to all his duties; as well those which concerned his fellowship with men, as those which had a more immediate reference to God. Happy would it be if the same care prevailed among the religious professors of our day! But, in too many instances, religious people set the two tables of the law in opposition to each other; as though a fulfillment of the one necessarily precluded an observance of the other. How common is it for young people to set at nothing parental authority, under an idea that obedience to God must swallow up every other consideration. It must, doubtless, swallow up all regard for authority that is directly opposed to it; but many concessions may be made, and should be made too, in relation to matters which involve in them no moral guilt, no direct opposition to a divine command: and where the path of duty is clear, the greatest tenderness should be shown to the feelings and prejudices of a parent, in the prosecution of it. Filial obedience stands, in God's estimation, second only to that which we owe to him. There is frequently a great fault in servants also, who, from a pretended regard for God, neglect the duties of their station; and, instead of exercising a becoming respect for their masters, are petulant, and impatient of reproof, and ready on every occasion to "answer again Here the case of Students was adverted to; and a conscientious observance of academic discipline, together with a diligent prosecution of their academic studies, was strongly enforced." In the conduct of superiors, too, there is often much to blame: for it is but too true, that religious duties, as they are called, often induce a carelessness in those which are personal and domestic. But all this gives just occasion of offence; and must be sedulously avoided by all who would maintain a consistent conduct, and adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

4. Firmness—

On this the enemies of Daniel especially relied. They gave him credit for piety; and they believed that not even the terror of a den of lions would induce him to violate his conscience, and offend his God. In matters relating to the kingdom they could find no occasion against him: but, in what concerned the law of his God, they assured themselves that they should find the desired ground of accusation against him. In this they judged right. He not only would not withhold from God his accustomed sacrifices of prayer and praise, but he would not even appear to do so. He would not even shut his window; lest he should, though in appearance only, give them a ground of triumph over him. He therefore persisted, as before, to worship God in his accustomed way, and publicly to avow his determined adherence to the dictates of reason and religion.

In this he affords to us an admirable example. We must expect "persecution from men, if we will live godly in Christ Jesus." No piety, no wisdom, no consistency, can disarm prejudice, or suppress the workings of envy. Rather, we must expect opposition in proportion as we make our light to shine before men. No one was ever so blameless as our blessed Lord; yet no one was ever persecuted with such general and unrelenting animosity. But our hearts must be fixed: we must be determined to sacrifice all that we have, not excepting even life itself, rather than dishonor God, or violate his commands. Persons in this respect should know beforehand where to find us, even in the path of duty: nor should the whole earth combined be able to turn us from it. This is the state to which we should all attain; and, under circumstances of whatever kind, we should have that reply upon our lips, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you."

This character approving itself to every considerate mind, let me,

II. Urge you all to the attainment of it—

Let me invite you to consider,

1. How it honors God—

Truly, such a conduct as Daniel's never was seen on earth, except among the servants of Jehovah. Nothing but God's grace can possibly produce it. But, wherever his grace operates, there, in proportion to the measure of that grace, this character is found. No one can ever "behold such light" as Daniel reflected, but he will be instantly constrained to "glorify our Father which is in Heaven." Man could as soon create a world, as form this new creation. Wherever it is found, that acknowledgment must be made: "He who has wrought us to the self-same thing, is God."

2. How it disarms prejudice—

A want of piety, or wisdom, or consistency, in a professor of religion, causes "the way of truth to be evil spoken of," and "God himself to be blasphemed." But a pious and consistent conduct wrests from the very enemies of God a confession, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." Hence Paul, exhorting Titus to "show himself in all things a pattern of good works," adds, "that he who is on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you [Titus 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%202.7-8)." I well know that no blamelessness of conduct can conciliate the regards of an ungodly man; for, as long as he loves darkness rather than light, he must hate you: but you may at least hope to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men [1 Peter 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%202.12); [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%202.15)," and to "make those ashamed who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ [1 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%203.16)."

3. How it tends to the welfare of your own soul—

Beyond all doubt your everlasting reward will be proportioned to your present attainments. As he who "builds on the good foundation nothing but wood, hay, stubble, will suffer loss, and, if saved at all, be saved only so as by fire [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%203.12-15);" so he who embraces in his mind, and illustrates in his life, the whole circle of his duties to God and man, will have an entrance ministered unto him abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [2 Peter 1:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet%201.5-11)." The more we have improved our talents, the richer will be the recompense of our fidelity. We may not in this world have such an interposition in our behalf as Daniel had in the den of lions; or see, as he did, the vengeance of God executed on our adversaries: but we shall have strength given us to sustain our trials, and a weight of glory awarded to us in proportion to them. Go forward, then, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:" and "hold fast your confidence firm unto the end:" then "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%2015.58);" for "if you surfer with him, you shall also be glorified together [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.17)."

[Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.10)

DISCOURSE 1132

DANIEL'S UNDAUNTED PIETY

[Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.10). Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

SUCH is the hatred which ungodly men bear to real piety, that it is not possible to serve our God aright without incurring their displeasure. Neither eminence in station, nor prudence of conduct, will screen us from the assaults of their envy and malice. If anything could have secured the favor of mankind, the wise and benevolent deportment of Jesus must have gained him universal approbation. But he was as much distinguished by the virulence of men's hatred, as he was by the unrivaled excellence of his own character.

Of all the persons whose history is recorded in the Old Testament, we know not one who surpassed Daniel in wisdom, in integrity, or in a firm adherence to practical religion. His bitterest enemies, who were very desirous of finding in him some fault or error, were constrained to acknowledge, that they should not be able to attain their wishes, unless they should find it concerning the law of his God. Would one not have thought, that a person who could conduct the affairs of a large empire with such skill, as that no error could be imputed to him; and whose piety was so consistent, that not the smallest flaw could be found in his whole conduct, should be universally beloved? Yet, so far was he from being an object of universal regard, that a conspiracy was formed against him by all the great men of the kingdom, and a law was framed, that rendered it criminal to pray unto his God. By this law he had no alternative, but to violate the law and incur its penalties, or to violate his conscience and offend his God.

Daniel, without hesitation, chose the better part: and, "when he knew that the writing (which doomed him to the den of lions) was signed," he openly worshiped God, precisely as he had done aforetime.

To encourage all who are oppressed and persecuted, to follow his example, we shall,

I. Make some remarks on his conduct—

It might be said of Daniel continually, "Behold, he prays!": But why, in praying, did he look "towards Jerusalem?" Canaan was the land, Jerusalem the city, and the temple the house, in which God more particularly dwelt. And at the dedication of the temple, Solomon repeatedly entreated that God would hear the supplications of his people which should be offered towards that land, that city, that temple [1 Kings 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%208.29-30); 1 Kings 8:35; [1 Kings 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%208.38); [1 Kings 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%208.42); [1 Kings 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%208.44), but especially 46–50, which specifies what was to be done in a state of captivity, as Daniel now was. This had been before practiced by David [Psalm 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%205.7), as it was afterwards by Jonah when at the bottom of the sea [Jon. 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah.%202.4); and it may be considered as a typical ordinance, directing us to pray unto God, as our covenant-God in Christ, as dwelling with man, yes, as dwelling in our very nature [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201.14). óêÞíùóåí suggests the precise idea, which the type was intended to convey; even to Him, "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%202.9)."

In this manner he prayed "three times a day." It seems to have been the habit of all pious Jews to observe stated seasons of worship three times a day. David practiced it in his day [Psalm 55:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2055.17); and in the Apostolic age the practice was continued [Acts 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.2); [Acts 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.15); [Acts 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%203.1); [Acts 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2010.9). The third, sixth, and ninth hours answered to nine, twelve, and three with us. One would have thought that a person who had so much secular business upon his hands as Daniel had, should have found it almost impossible to maintain such a practice with any degree of regularity, or indeed with any spirituality of mind: but, if the heart be thoroughly imbued with Divine grace, it will be found neither difficult nor irksome to lift it up to God in prayer, even in the midst of the most urgent business.

Nor was Daniel inattentive to his posture in prayer: "he kneeled upon his knees and prayed." We do not say that this posture is indispensably necessary to the acceptance of our prayers; because we find instances in Scripture of persons standing when they prayed: but it is sanctioned by the example of the most eminent saints Thus did David; [Psalm 95:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2095.6). Solomon; [2 Chronicles 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%206.13). [Ezra. 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra.%209.5). Stephen; [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%207.60). Peter; 9:40. Paul; 20:36. a large assembly on the sea shore; 21:5, and even by our blessed Lord himself [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2022.44). As for the idle slothful posture of sitting during the time of prayer (as is the habit of too many), we do not hesitate to say, that it is most irreverent, unscriptural, and offensive. But what shall we say to those who defer their prayers until they have lain down in their beds, and then offer some petitions, in the midst of which they fall asleep? Surely it is scarcely needful to tell them what acceptance such services must meet with: they may account it a mercy, if their solemn mockery of God be not visited with some signal judgments: to hope for any favorable answer to such prayers, were folly and impiety. Daniel would not yield to such indolent habits, though he was above ninety years of age; because he knew that the deepest prostration of body should accompany the devotions of the soul, and that nothing but extreme weakness could justify us in dispensing with it.

With all his prayers, Daniel offered also a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: "he prayed and gave thanks." This argued the sincerity of his heart. They can feel but little gratitude to God, who do not acknowledge the mercies they have received, as well as ask for the continuance and increase of them. The direction given us by God himself is, "that in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we should make our requests known to him [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%204.6);" yes, it is his express will and command that we should abound in thanksgiving as much, and as constantly, as in prayer itself [1 Thessalonians. 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess.%205.16-18).

Perhaps it may surprise us, that Daniel offered these his devotions always "with his windows open." Was this from ostentation? Was Daniel like those Pharisees who "prayed standing in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen and admired of men?" No: Daniel was in a heathen land, where the established religion was idolatry; and where Jehovah was not worshiped or acknowledged. He therefore felt it incumbent on him to let it be universally known, that he was a worshiper of the one true God: he wished to be a witness for God, and against idolatry; and to lead men, by his example, to inquire after the God of the Hebrews, in whom alone they could obtain peace and salvation. And though this habit rendered him singular, and excited the odium of his ungodly neighbors, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," and persevered in the performance of his duty without any regard to the opinions of men.

The most extraordinary thing is, that Daniel persisted in this habit "when he knew that the writing was signed." The writing was the law which had been recently enacted, condemning to the den of lions every person, who, for the space of thirty days, should presume to ask any petition of any God or man, except of the king only. This writing was signed by the king; and the law was thereby rendered (according to the absurd custom of the Medes and Persians) unchangeable. But this could not deter Daniel from serving God, or induce him for one moment to change his mode of serving him. He was willing to die for the Lord's sake; and was determined to suffer all the penalties of the law rather than violate his duty to his God.

But as there are various other modes in which Daniel might have proceeded, we shall consider his conduct more minutely, and,

II. State the reasons of it—

Daniel persisted in this open acknowledgment of Jehovah,

1. From a sense of duty—

He knew that it was his duty to pray unto his God, and to confess him before men. Had the laws of the realm enjoined nothing contrary to the laws of God, he would have felt it his duty to comply with them: "he would have obeyed every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." But when man took upon him to supersede the laws of God, he felt that he had a paramount obligation to serve the Lord. In this respect he resembled the holy Apostles, when they were forbidden to preach in the name of Christ: they answered the magistrates who laid a similar injunction on them, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you: for we cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%204.19-20);" "we must obey God rather than men [Acts 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%205.28-29)."

2. From a regard for God's honor—

We will suppose that Daniel had withdrawn from his place of abode, or shut his window and contented himself with worshiping God in secret; he might still have performed his duty as far as respected the mere act of prayer: but what would have been the consequence with respect to God's honor? Would not the framers of the Law have boasted, that they had triumphed over Jehovah; that they had set up a God superior to him; and that his most devoted servant dared not to confess him? Would they not have said, that the worshipers of Jehovah were as devoid of principle as any other people in the world; for that, with all their professed regard for him, they did not believe him able to rescue or support them; and that they loved their own safety in preference to their God? No doubt, they would have gloried thus, and have despised both Jehovah and all his servants. But would Daniel give occasion for such profane triumph? He abhorred the thought; and therefore he would not relax, or intermit so much as once, his accustomed mode of worship. Similar to his was the conduct of Nehemiah, when Sanballat and Tobiah wanted to intimidate him, and to lead him into an act which should betray a want of confidence in his God: "Shall such a man as I flee? said he: and who is there, that being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in [Nehemiah 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh%206.10-11)." Thus, whatever specious arguments might have suggested themselves to him for the preservation of his life, Daniel determined to die rather than dishonor God; being anxious only that "God should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%201.20)."

3. For the encouragement of his own people—

Suppose that Daniel had not thus openly maintained his steadfastness, what would all the rest of his captive brethren have done? Would not they have caught the infection? would not they have dissembled with him, just as Barnabas and others were led away with Peter's dissimulation [Galatians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.12-13). It would have been to little purpose that he prayed in secret, if he had been so shamefully regardless of the influence of his example. On the other hand, by boldly confessing his God before men, and offering himself up as a sacrifice for him, the rest of his nation must be emboldened to maintain a similar fidelity, and to brave all the threatenings of their idolatrous oppressors. This was the effect produced by Paul's submission to bonds and imprisonment for the Gospel's sake: "Many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to preach the word without fear [Philippians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%201.14)." Daniel, being at the head of the kingdom, knew the vast importance of his example; and therefore on this account, as well as for the foregoing reasons, "would not give place, no, not for an hour [Galatians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.5);" yes, we doubt not but that in offering himself upon the sacrifice and service of his people's faith, he joyed and rejoiced with them all; and (in his heart) called on them to joy and rejoice with him [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.17-18).

ADDRESS—

1. Those who live in the neglect of prayer—

We see in the example of Daniel how a child of God will act: he will pray with frequency, with fervor, with an especial regard to God as his Covenant-God in Christ Jesus: and he will confess his God openly, determining to die for him rather than deny him [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2021.13). Now what resemblance have you to Daniel? He could not be kept from prayer; you cannot be prevailed on to pray: he could not be kept from prayer, though he knew that, for continuing it, he should be cast into the den of lions; and you cannot be prevailed on to pray, though your neglect of it will infallibly bring you into the depths of Hell. Not all the terrors of death could induce him to omit so much as one single opportunity of praying; and not all the terrors of damnation can instigate you to pray even once with real fervor and devotion. Only ask yourselves, How often have you prayed like Daniel? how often in the day? in the week? in the year? how often even in your whole life? This question will give you an insight into your state before God. O that it may be the means of bringing you to his footstool, and of forming in you those habits which are altogether necessary to your salvation.

2. Those who are habituated to serve their God—

Be not surprised if you are called to suffer for righteousness' sake, "nor think it strange if you be tried with a fiery trial." Should this be the case, we congratulate you upon the honor conferred upon you; and we exhort you to "rejoice and leap for joy; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you [Matthew 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%205.11-12)." Our Lord's direction is, "Be not afraid of man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into Hell; yes, I say unto you, Fear Him."

But while we exhort you to "be faithful unto death," and, like Daniel, to withstand all the powers of earth and Hell, we would particularly entreat you to imitate his spirit. In the first place, let your enemies "find nothing against you, except concerning the law of God." In the next place, conduct yourselves with meekness under your sufferings. You read not of his exciting clamor and rebellion in the state, but of his submitting patiently to the cruelty of his oppressors. We mean not to condemn such an opposition to tyranny, as the law itself admits; but such as is unconstitutional, turbulent, and factious: and we cannot but recommend a cheerful submission to persecution, as, on the whole, most profitable to ourselves, and most honorable to our God [1 Corinthians 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%204.12-13). Indeed, when suffering for righteousness' sake, we may expect extraordinary interpositions for our deliverance or support, and may hope to win those who have been the authors of all our troubles See a most encouraging and well-authenticated instance in Benson's Life of Mr. Fletcher, p. 309. first edition.

[Daniel 6:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.25-27)

DISCOURSE 1133

THE DECREE OF DARIUS

[Daniel 6:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.25-27). Then King Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and steadfast forever; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed; and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivers and rescues, and he works signs and wonders in Heaven and in earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

IT is the prerogative of God, not only to defeat all the designs of men or devils against him, but to advance his own glory by the very means which his enemies use to obstruct it. The wisdom and fidelity of Daniel had secured for him at the court of Persia the same influence as he had been honored with by the kings of Babylon; but the princes of that empire sought his destruction, and, together with that, the subversion of all the influence of Daniel's God. They devised a plan, in which they too fatally succeeded, to establish a law, by which Daniel must of necessity, if faithful to his God, be condemned. King Darius, when lie saw into what a snare he had been drawn, sought to deliver Daniel from the sentence which the law, so inconsiderately enacted, denounced against him: but he could not prevail; and therefore at last consented to the execution of it on his faithful and unoffending servant. Daniel was cast into the den of lions: and with him, the hope of further protection to the Jewish captives must cease. But behold, God, as Darius himself had hoped, interposed for the preservation of Daniel; and thereby showed to the conviction of Darius, that he was the One omnipotent and only true God. Darius now ordered the very punishment which Daniel's enemies had sought to inflict on him, to be executed on them; and immediately issued throughout the whole extent of his dominions the decree contained in our text.

We propose to consider,

I. His views of Daniel's God—

We are quite surprised that a heathen, who had so impiously exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, should have such just views, as he shows himself to have had, of the God of Israel. In describing Jehovah, he speaks of,

1. His essential perfection—

Darius had hitherto known only the gods of gold and silver, or of wood and stone, which had no existence until they were formed into an image by the hands of man; and which, when formed, were lifeless and motionless as the materials of which they were made. But of Jehovah he had far different views: he saw him to be the eternal self-existent God, who, while he alone had life in himself, was the one only source of life and being to all his creatures. Him too he saw to be an unchangeable God, "steadfast forever" in all his purposes, and immutable in all his counsels.

This is such a view of God as all of us should have: if we see not his self-sufficiency, we shall never feel persuaded of his all-sufficiency for our help [Isaiah 26:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2026.4); and if we be not convinced, that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.17)." we shall never know whence our own stability arises [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal%203.6), or enjoy the consolation which God himself designs that we should derive from this never-failing source [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%206.17-18).

2. His universal dominion—

Here, we apprehend, this heathen monarch did not limit his views to the providential government of Jehovah over all the works of his hands; but that, he spoke also of that spiritual kingdom which should be erected by the Messiah, and which was to be both universal in its extent and everlasting in its duration. The dream and vision of Nebuchadnezzar were well known throughout all the Babylonish empire. In this vision the destruction of Babylon was expressly foretold; and, after the establishment and ruin of three successive kingdoms, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman, a fifth kingdom was to arise, namely, that of the Messiah, which should break in pieces all other kingdoms, and stand forever. The first part of this dream had now recently been fulfilled; and fulfilled by the very person who had been foretold by name three hundred years before he was brought into the world; and in the precise manner also that had been circumstantially foretold at the same distant period. These prophecies, beyond all doubt, were shown to Cyrus and Darius, as soon as they became masters of Babylon: and the miracle just wrought by Jehovah in favor of Daniel, brought additional conviction to the mind of Darius, that the Messiah's reign should be such as had been predicted.

This is a glorious view, of which we should never lose sight. It was this which Abraham delighted to contemplate [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%208.56), and which has filled the saints of all succeeding ages with unutterable joy. To us, no less than to those of former ages, it yet remains as an object of hope. The predicted kingdom is indeed established; but it is as yet but very limited in its extent: nevertheless we believe that the word of God respecting it shall stand, and that "all the kingdoms of the world shall in due time become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ".

3. His miracles of love and mercy towards his believing people—

Here also Darius speaks in general terms: the deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den is considered by him as a single instance only of the innumerable interpositions which God vouchsafes to his people, and of the wonders which he works in their behalf. The whole history of the Jewish people, from their departure out of Egypt to their final dispersion by the Romans, is one continued record of stupendous miracles and gracious deliverances.

True it is, that miracles are ceased: but wonders, if we may so speak, are quite as common as in the days of old. Wherein is the deliverance of a soul from death and Hell inferior to the deliverance of the Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace; or the preservation of Daniel in the lions' den, to the preservation of believers from the assaults of that roaring lion that is ever seeking to devour them? This view then of the Deity is still to be ever kept in mind, in order that we may never give way to fear, or doubt a moment but that He who has hitherto delivered us, will go on to deliver, and will preserve us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

Such being his views of the Deity, we are no longer surprised at,

II. His decree founded upon them—

An external worship was deemed sufficient for senseless idols; but not so for the God of Heaven and earth: the decree before us required much more than that. Let us distinctly notice,

1. Its import—

The terms "fear and tremble" seem to import only a dread of God, as a terrible being whom it was dangerous to provoke: but the meaning of them is widely different from this. Throughout all the New Testament these words express rather a holy reverential regard, blended with love to Him who is the object of it. Paul, when at Corinth, was among his converts "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling [1 Corinthians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%202.3);" not surely with a slavish dread of their wrath, but with a holy anxiety to fulfill his ministry to their greatest advantage. He exhorts servants to "obey their masters with fear and trembling [Ephesians 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%206.5)," that is, with a tender conscience, and an affectionate regard to their will. He bids us also to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling [Philippians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.12)," that is, with the utmost watchfulness and care. Thus we understand the decree of Darius as enjoining to all his subjects, that they should serve God with a holy and affectionate regard to his revealed will. We conceive that the terms of the decree do in effect enjoin all that worship which is required of us under the Gospel: for David, speaking expressly of the worship to be paid to the Messiah, says, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%202.11);" which shows that "fear and trembling," properly understood, does not expel, but only moderates and tempers, our joy. Indeed, "the angel that is represented as carrying the everlasting Gospel throughout all the earth," proclaims it in terms of similar import, "Fear God, and give glory to him [Revelation 14:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2014.6-7)." We see then, that the decree did go, in fact, to the abolition of idolatry, and to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout that vast empire: only, not being followed up by similar enactments, and a practical exhibition of its import by those who were at the head of the empire, it fell to the ground; as all precepts must do, if not followed up by constant exertions and corresponding examples. One effect however necessarily followed from it, namely, to procure more favor to the Jews throughout the empire, and ultimately to facilitate the reception of Christianity throughout the world.

2. The reasonableness of it—

Who can contemplate the foregoing views of the Deity, and not confess the reasonableness of the decree founded upon them?

Consider the power and authority of God; consider him as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; and can a doubt be entertained whether we ought to fear and serve Him? Consider also the love and mercy of God, particularly as manifested in the redemption of men by the blood of his only dear Son, and the blessings given to them through his all-sufficient grace; can any one who adverts to this subject question the propriety of surrendering ourselves up, in body, soul, and spirit, to his service?: It matters not what rank in society we hold, or what office we may fill; the decree is equally applicable to all, and equally reasonable for all; kings and princes are no more exempt from these duties than the meanest of their subjects: as long as subordination to rulers is enjoined, much more must a duteous regard to the God of Heaven be held sacred: and, as long as gratitude is esteemed a becoming principle in relation to men, so long must its exercise be obligatory on all towards the Redeemer of the world.

Behold then in this decree,

1. The effect which God's mercies should have upon us—

Darius felt the deliverance of Daniel to be in fact as great a mercy to himself as it was to Daniel: and a sense of this penetrated his soul with a desire to honor that God by whom the mercy had been given. This was right. And is it not right that mercies and deliverances should have the same effect on us? Consider what mercies we have received; some public and national, and others private and personal Here any public or private mercies may be glanced at; Should no improvement be made of these? Should we not say, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" Surely these things, and especially the mercies given to our souls: are calls from God himself to glorify him with all our faculties and all our powers The particular objects of the Society may here be stated at large.

2. What use we should make of our influence—

To serve God ourselves is right and necessary: but it is far from comprehending the whole of what is required of us in return for the mercies given unto us. We all have influence, which it is our bounden duty to exert: if that influence reach only to a very small circle, we should not on that account think ourselves at liberty to leave it unimproved: nor if it extend over a vast empire, should we be backward to encounter the opposition and obloquy which the exercise of it may bring upon us. Whatever it be, whether more or less, we should regard it as a talent to be employed for God. Even a heathen, and he, we fear, not truly converted, felt this obligation: how much more then should we, who profess to embrace the Christian faith, and to enjoy all the blessings of the Gospel salvation! But we greatly mistake, if we imagine that the influence of any among us is small: for if we unite our efforts together, and act in concert with each other, we may do far more than Darius could with all his power. Let any one contemplate the Bible Society, in which the poor, strange as it may seem, do far more than the rich; and see what wonders are doing by means of it throughout the world: Let any one contemplate Mission Societies, which are in fact forwarding, as it were, the very decree of Darius, and calling on "all people, nations, and languages to fear and tremble before the God of Israel verse 25, 26.": Let us then rise to the occasion: let us unite as one man: let us not merely issue the decree, but do the thing; providing all the means for it, and carrying into effect the objects we profess to aim at. Thus shall we indeed approve ourselves good and faithful servants to our God, and be rewarded by him according to our improvement of our respective talents.

[Daniel 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.9-10)

DISCOURSE 1134

THE DESTRUCTION OF POPERY

[Daniel 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.9-10). I beheld until the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued, and came forth from, before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

WHILE God exercises his sovereignty, he displays also his wisdom, in revealing his mind to man. As we may trace on many occasions a peculiar propriety in the time and manner of making known his will, so we may observe a kind of suitableness in the revelations themselves to those to whom they were made. The succession of four great empires had been made known to Nebuchadnezzar under the figure of a colossal image composed of various metals [Daniel 2:31-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%202.31-45); and the same is revealed to Daniel by a vision of four dreadful beasts: the propriety of these different representations is evident; for the mind of that haughty monarch was engrossed with the love of earthly grandeur; whereas the humbler mind of Daniel would view great conquerors rather in the light of ferocious beasts, eager to gratify their own appetites, though it be by the desolation of the human race. In Daniel's vision also many things were added relative to the church of God, which, though of infinite importance in his eyes, would have been of small moment to the king of Babylon—

If we notice the terms themselves, nothing can be conceived more majestic than this description of God's coming to judgment. First, "the thrones are set down So the words "cast down" should rather be rendered, and "the Ancient of days," the eternal incomprehensible Jehovah, with Christ as his assessor, takes his seat. The august appearance of the Judge, "clothed in a garment white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool," denotes his unsearchable wisdom that penetrates the deepest secrets, and his unsullied integrity as discoverable in all his decisions. His throne is compared to a triumphal chariot, whose seat and wheels are of fire, and from which issues a stream of fire, to destroy those whom his justice shall condemn. "Myriads of angels minister to him" as the willing executioners of his decrees, and "innumerable multitudes stand before him" to receive their sentence from his mouth. "The judgment being thus set, the books are opened;" as well the book of his remembrance, wherein the actions of all were written, as the book of his law, whereby they are to be judged.

This is a prophecy; in considering which we shall show,

I. To what it refers—

The destruction of Antichrist is the first event to which this description refers. The prophet directs our attention, not to the general judgment, but to a particular judgment which shall be instituted for the punishment of a blasphemous, persecuting, and presumptuous power. Who that power is we cannot reasonably doubt. The little horn spoken of in the context will appear evidently to be the Papal Hierarchy, if we consider how exactly the characters of that anti-Christian power are described by the prophet. It arose after that the Roman empire had been divided into ten smaller kingdoms: it reduced under its dominion three of those kingdoms The Exarchate of Ravenna, the kingdom of the Lombards, and the state of Rome; and from the time that it had gained this ascendency, has never ceased to persecute the saints, and to assume to itself the unalienable prerogatives of the most high God Who is ignorant of their claims to infallibility, and of power to dispense both pardons and indulgences? Who knows not how they have set up their authority above that of God himself, changed the institutions of his sacramental supper, prohibited to their clergy the very first ordinance of God and nature, and dispensed with every obligation human and divine?. Paul's account also of the man of sin corresponds exactly with this, and confirms this application of the prophecy in the strongest manner [2 Thessalonians. 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Thess.%202.3-4); [2 Thessalonians. 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Thess.%202.8-9).

The enlargement of Christ's kingdom is another event, to which the judgment before us has respect. The connection between this and the destruction of popery is very strongly marked by the prophet. Repeatedly in this chapter does he unite two events [Daniel 7:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.11-14); [Daniel 7:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.26-27); teaching us thereby to expect assuredly, that, as they are united in God's purpose, so shall they be also in their accomplishment.

As to the time when these things shall come to pass, we know that it shall be one thousand two hundred and sixty years from the time of Antichrist; but we must wait for the event, before we can positively say from what precise period the numeration of those years must commence. Partial checks has popery already received, as at the Reformation. So was there then a correspondent increase of zeal to spread the knowledge of Christ. But when the time shall arrive, and that idolatrous power shall be destroyed, then shall "the kingdoms of the world speedily become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."

That we may make a just improvement of this prophecy, let us consider,

II. What should be the state of our minds in reference to it,

1. We should look forward to its accomplishment with holy confidence—

There is a state of mind peculiarly proper for the investigation of unfulfilled prophecy. To treat any part of divine revelation with indifference, as though it were an unprofitable task to search into it, would argue a very criminal disregard of Him from whom that revelation proceeds. On the other hand, to be stirring up ourselves to a state of feverish excitement, as though we could already discern every minute particular which shall take place when the period that has been predicted shall have arrived, is to dive into futurity with an unhallowed boldness, and to pervert the true end of prophecy. Prophecy is not intended to make us prophets, but to show us, after that the predictions shall have been fulfilled, that the events so predicted were both foreseen and fore-ordained by the Most High God. The true medium is that which the prophets themselves. observed: "They searched diligently what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%201.11)." The Prophet Daniel, when he understood from books that the time for the delivery of his people from the Babylonish captivity was drawing near, "set himself by prayer and supplication and fasting," to attain a more perfect knowledge of God's purpose respecting it. And the saints who lived near the time of our Lord's advent in the flesh, engaged in constant prayer, "looking for him as the consolation of Israel," and waiting for his promised redemption. Now, if we would attend upon God in such a spirit as this, we should never sustain any injury to our souls from such holy exercises. But, when we so engage in searching into future events as almost to overlook what is past; and so please ourselves with our own imagined discoveries, as to place almost on the back ground all the wonders of redeeming love; we betray a very depraved appetite, and foster both in ourselves and others a spirit the very reverse of humility and love. In relation to future events, we stand in the same predicament with the saints who lived before the coining of our Lord. If we presume to pry into them with unhallowed curiosity, and to dogmatize respecting them as if they were already open to our view, we shall both suffer loss ourselves and inflict an injury on others: but, if we explore them with the modesty that becomes us, we shall find the contemplation of them profitable to our own minds, and the development of them, so far as they are revealed to us, truly beneficial to the Church of God. Take, for instance, what is spoken in Scripture respecting the destruction of Popery, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom throughout the world, we should be content with asserting only what the Scriptures have asserted, and with stating as conjecture whatever has not Divine authority for its support. If we go beyond this, we render the record itself questionable, by adding to it our own conceits, and loading it with circumstances not clearly revealed. It is sufficient for us to know, that both the one event and the other shall assuredly take place, and that when the Lamb has vanquished that idolatrous and bloody power, he will reign over the whole world [Revelation 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2017.14), "there being throughout the whole earth but one Lord, and his name One [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech%2014.9)."

2. We should look forward to great events to which God's present dispensations are only a prelude—

The time is surely coming, when the whole world shall be judged, all the wicked being cast down, and all the righteous exalted, in strict accordance with the prophecy before us. For so has John informed us: "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the Heaven fled away: and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.…And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire [Revelation 20:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2020.11-15)." On that occasion will all the pomp described in our text be fully realized: "for the Son of Man will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; and he shall sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.…And of these, some shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal [Matthew 25:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2025.31-32); [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2025.46)." To the same effect Paul also says, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe [2 Thessalonians. 1:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Thess.%201.7-10)." About this event no diversity of sentiment can arise. It is fast approaching to us all: for though the day of the general judgment is distant, the time for our being individually summoned into the Divine presence is near to every one of us. Disease or accident may at any moment carry us to the judgment-seat of Christ, and fix our eternal destinies either in Heaven or Hell, according as we are prepared or unprepared to meet our God. Let us then ask ourselves, What is recorded concerning us in the book of God's remembrance, and what evidence we possess that our names are written in the book of life? When that hour shall arrive, it will be of small moment to us, what judgments have been executed on the Church of Rome, or what blessings have been given to God's elect. We are all of us chiefly interested about our own eternal state: and therefore, though I would by no means discourage an inquiry into the general designs of Providence, I would most earnestly entreat every one to look to his own ways, and to judge himself now, that he may not hereafter be judged of the Lord.

[Daniel 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.18)

DISCOURSE 1135

THE REIGN OF THE SAINTS

[Daniel 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%207.18). The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.

THE vision of Daniel contained in this chapter accords with that which had before been given to Nebuchadnezzar, and interpreted by Daniel himself [Daniel 2:31-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%202.31-45). To Nebuchadnezzar it had appeared as a great image, the various materials of which denoted four successive kingdoms, which would yield at last to one universal empire established on their ruins. To Daniel it appeared as four wild beasts, which would successively prevail; until at last the kingdom of the Messiah should be erected, and reduce every adverse power to a state of complete subjection. To Nebuchadnezzar, who saw nothing but glory in the rise and fall of empires, the idea of a glorious image was most suited: but to Daniel, who viewed the malignant dispositions which produced such revolutions, and the miseries that were occasioned by them, they were more fitly represented under the notion of wild beasts, tearing and devouring one another. But in the vision of Daniel there were revealed many additional circumstances, which very greatly interested him, and which he earnestly desired to have explained. The last of the four kingdoms was to be broken into ten smaller kingdoms, represented by ten horns; among which "a little horn, that had eyes, and a mouth speaking very great things," grew up. This little horn (which seems evidently to denote the Papal power) was to make war with the saints; and, after grievously afflicting them for one thousand two hundred and sixty years, to be itself destroyed, and the kingdom to be given to the saints.

On that part of the subject that relates to the little horn, we shall be silent; because the stating of different opinions respecting it would be unprofitable to those who are hungering for the bread of life: but that part which is contained in our text will be edifying to us all: we shall proceed therefore to consider,

I. The event predicted—

The establishment of the Redeemer's empire upon earth is that which is foretold in the preceding verses verse 13, 14, and which in reality is meant in the passage now before us. But the kingdom is called the kingdom of the saints, because it will be entirely composed of saints, and altogether under their government verse 22, 27. That they shall possess it we can have no doubt; and when the time shall arrive, so universal will the reign of piety be, that it will appear as if all the saints who have ever lived upon the earth had risen again, and as if Christ himself had come down again from Heaven to reign over them [Revelation 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%205.10); [Revelation 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2020.4). Some contend for a literal accomplishment of these predictions: but the view here given of them is greatly to be preferred. But respecting the saints there are two things which it will be proper to show,

1. How they will take possession of the kingdom—

They will not do this by force, unless indeed by the holy violence of faith and prayer: in that respect "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force:" but in respect of any exertion on their part to usurp dominion, it will not so much as enter into their minds. Divine grace will have taught them to "be subject to the powers that be; and that not only for wrath, but for conscience sake." If they lived even under a Nero, they would, notwithstanding all his cruelty, regard him as God's minister, whom, by any other means than those which the law itself admits, they are bound not to resist [Romans 13:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2013.1-5). No man can act as becomes a saint, if he be not found among those that are "quiet in the land."

It is through the intervention only of God's power that they are exalted to posts of honor, and invested with authority over their fellow-creatures. In the days of old, the enemies of God were overruled to execute his will, in the elevation of a Joseph and a Daniel to the command of mighty empires, and of the Hebrew youths to the government of extensive provinces: but at the time to which our text refers, the subjects, as well as the governors, shall all be converted to the faith of Christ; and kings, no less than others, shall submit to the authority of Christ; yes, "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." There will not need any human efforts to subvert the government of the ungodly: God himself will change, not the persons, but the principles, of those who are in the seat of judgment; and will press into his own service all their faculties and all their powers. Thus without any public commotions will the work be effected: "The stone that will break in pieces all adverse powers will be cut out without hands;" and the kingdom will be erected, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

2. How they will administer it—

In this they will differ widely from the monarchs of this world: they will consult, not their own will, but the will of their heavenly Father; and seek, not their own glory, but his. Every nation will have a theocracy, such as obtained in the days of Moses, and of the Judges. Men will be invested with authority indeed; but the Lord Jesus Christ will be the one Head over all: his laws will be the ground-work of every law that shall be enacted, and his glory the end of every ordinance that shall be administered. "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers." Judges and magistrates will distribute justice with the utmost possible fidelity, all in their several places "fearing God and working righteousness." All the minor offices in the State shall be executed in like manner with the strictest integrity: "officers of every description will be peace, and exactors righteousness:" "no violence of any kind will be heard [Isaiah 60:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2060.17-18)." in any of the departments of civil government; nor will any interest be consulted but that of the whole community.

Such is the event which in God's own time we assuredly expect: and from the description already given it is easy to anticipate,

II. The advantages that will accrue from it—

Let us notice,

1. Those of a temporal nature—

The first that occurs to our minds is this, that there will be no more foreign wars. The history of the world for four thousand years has been little else than a recital of murderous and desolating wars: but in that day, we are told, that "swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not rise against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." What a blessing this will be, can scarcely be estimated by us, who have for so long a period been exempt from the horrors of war; but in those countries where its desolating progress has been felt, this will appear a blessing of no small moment. As "wars will cease among the nations of the earth," so in the different nations there will be no domestic feuds. "Judah will no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah." "The wolf and the lamb shall dwell together" in perfect harmony: the noxious qualities of the human heart shall be universally restrained: love alone will reign in every circle: "they shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, because the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2011.6-9)." We may further add, that in that day there will he no personal wants. Now a great portion of the human race are oppressed with want, so as scarcely to know how they shall provide bread for the morrow: but in that day it will be as on the day of Pentecost, not literally indeed, but in effect, all delighting to supply the necessities of their fellow-saints. As in the wilderness "he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack," so in that day will "the abundance of some be a supply for the want of others, that, as far as will conduce to the welfare of the whole, there may be equality [2 Corinthians 8:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%208.13-15)."

2. Those of a spiritual nature—

Vast will be the increase of light in that day: "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Hitherto the greatest part of the world have sat in darkness and the shadow of death: but then "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" and such shall be the fruit of their exertions, that "all men shall be made to know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." The diffusion of Divine knowledge will then be a national object: men shall not then be "put into the ministry to supply them with a piece of bread," but "to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers:" and patrons will exercise their power for God, to provide the people with "pastors after God's heart." The people also, while flocking to the church "as doves to their windows," will so receive the word, that it will universally "have free course and be glorified among them."

Together with light, there will be among all classes a great augmentation of peace and joy. "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory." Nor shall their joy be so variable as at present: "their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light; and the days of their mourning shall be ended [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2060.19-20)." To this happy state of the Church shall the reign of the saints essentially contribute: for the zeal of the pastors, the spirituality of the people, and the more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, will all conspire to "turn the wilderness into a garden, and to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose: yes, it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing [Isaiah 35:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2035.1-6); [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2035.10)."

There will also be a far larger measure of holiness pervading the world. The Canaanite will then "be no more in the land." "The people will be all righteous [Isaiah 60:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2060.21) and [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech%2014.20-21);" and surprising will be the beauty and fertility of every plant which the Lord has planted [Hosea 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos%2014.5-7). To this also will the reign of the saints greatly contribute. Sin of every kind will be discountenanced, and iniquity, if any still exist, will be constrained to hide its head.

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of being accounted saints—

This name, which God so highly honors, is with many a term of reproach. But happy are they who are "counted worthy of this shame." The day will before long arrive, when they shall have far higher honors than man can bestow. We who are now alive may not live to see the day predicted in our text; but, if not, we shall see a happier day, when, "having suffered with Christ, we shall reign, and be glorified together with him." Truly for all the saints there is a kingdom provided; and they who look forward to it shall not be disappointed of their hope [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Tim%204.8). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%203.21).

2. Let all endeavor to help forward the expected day—

God will make use of instruments, just as he did in the apostolic age: and we apprehend he is evidently preparing the way for the fuller diffusion of his Gospel by the various efforts which his people are now making in every quarter of the globe. He is causing his word to be translated into the different languages of the world, that all may be able to "read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God." He is sending forth missionaries into different and distant parts; and is uniting myriads of people in the blessed work of instructing the benighted heathens. Let all these works then be dear to you; and help them forward to the utmost of your power: so may we hope that before long "the crooked places may be made straight, and the rough places plain, and that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

[Daniel 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3)

DISCOURSE 1136

FASTING AND PRAYER

[Daniel 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3). I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

THE season of Lent has been long observed in the Church, as a time for peculiar fasting and prayer. By our Church has the appointment of it been adopted, as well suited to promote the eternal interests of her members. But, in the present day, and among Protestants in particular, the subject of fasting is but rarely and lightly touched upon in our public addresses. Yet it ought to be considered: and I will therefore take occasion, at the present time, to state,

I. How far it is our duty to observe seasons of fasting and prayer—

Loaded as the Jewish Law was with burdensome enactments, there was but one fast appointed in the whole Mosaic ritual—

This was on the great day of annual expiation [Leviticus 23:27-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev%2023.27-32); and it was the only fast that was fully recognized in the Apostolic age [Acts 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2027.9). Yet were there many fasts afterwards enjoined on particular occasions. Joshua, when repulsed by the men of Ai [Joshua 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh%207.6); the whole eleven tribes, after their repeated defeats by the tribe of Benjamin [Judges. 20:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg.%2020.26); all Israel, when oppressed by the Philistines; and Jehoshaphat, when invaded by the united armies of Moab and Ammon [1 Samuel 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%207.6-8); all had recourse to fasting, as the means of obtaining favor from the Lord, and support in the hour of their necessity [2 Chronicles 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chron%2020.3). Nor were these national fasts only observed; but, in private the most eminent saints adopted this measure, for the purpose of deepening their humiliation, and of quickening their devotion [2 Samuel 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Sam%2012.16). [Psalm 119:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.24). [Luke 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%202.37). In fact, the case of Esther alone will suffice to show how important a measure this was esteemed, for the obtaining of relief from God in any great extremity [Esther 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther%204.16).

Nor, under the Christian dispensation, was there any stated fast appointed by the Lord—

Our Lord indeed intimated, that there would arise occasions which would call for solemn fasts [Luke 5:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%205.33-35); and he gave directions for the acceptable observance of them [Matthew 6:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%206.16-18). We find, too, that on some particular occasions, such as the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas to a special work, and the ordaining of elders for the service of their God, fasts were observed in the Christian Church [Acts 13:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.2-3); [Acts 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2014.23).

Hence, then, I should say of such observances, that they are approved of the Lord, rather than absolutely ordained; and proper for seasons of peculiar emergency, rather than fixed to any precise time or measure. Paul, who was exposed to far more severe trials than any other of the Apostles, tells us, that he served God "in labors, and watchings, and fastings [2 Corinthians 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%206.4-5);" and therefore we cannot doubt the expediency of such observances, while we admit that they are not imposed on us as rites of indispensable necessity. Yet, indeed, considering all that has been said, we think that no person, who truly desires to attain any eminence in the divine life, will judge it either prudent or proper wholly to neglect them.

Having spoken thus candidly respecting the necessity of such observances, I proceed to show,

II. What benefit we may hope to derive from them—

Beyond all doubt, such seasons are truly beneficial to the soul—

In a man's first entrance on the divine life, he cannot do better than to address himself to God in fasting and prayer. At such a time, he has to humble himself for all the sins of his former life, and to implore pardon of God for all the guilt he has ever contracted. And can this be done too solemnly, too earnestly, too devoutly? It was in this way that Cornelius obtained favor of the Lord [Acts 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2010.30); and he is a fit example to all who desire to find mercy at the hands of God.

But, in all his future progress through life, also, the Christian has need of the same means, in order to the preservation and advancement of his spiritual welfare. Who is not conscious of some particular propensity, of which it may be said, as of the spirit which the Apostles were not able to eject, "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting [Matthew 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2017.21)." In every living man there are corruptions, which may be greatly weakened and subdued by means of setting aside times for fasting and prayer. They who are united together in the bonds of wedlock, are of course exposed to feel the sad effects of human infirmity, each in their partner: and hence Paul recommends to married persons a short occasional separation from each other, for the purpose of "giving themselves to fasting and prayer [1 Corinthians 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%207.5);" nor can we doubt, but that, if that expedient were more frequently resorted to, incomparably greater happiness would be found in wedded life, and a far wider diffusion of blessedness among all the successive generations of mankind. In fact, a far higher standard of piety would be established in the world, if, like the holy Apostle, Christians of the present day were "in fastings often [2 Corinthians 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2011.27)." If he, with all his high attainments, "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%209.27)," methinks no one of us can presume to think such a discipline either unnecessary for himself, or ineffectual for his good.

But the whole efficacy of them depends on the manner in which they are observed—

If men have recourse to fasting, under a superstitious notion that they can thereby expiate their sins or propitiate the Deity, they err most fatally, and rivet on their own souls the guilt of all their sins. In fact, what is this but to punish the body for the sin of the soul, and to substitute their own self-imposed sufferings for the atoning sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ? Yet this error, to a vast extent, obtains in the Church of Rome; which inculcates the observance of fasts and penances, and pilgrimages, as meritorious before God, and as the most effectual means of conciliating the Divine favor. As for ostentation, however it prevailed among the Pharisees of old, or still abounds in the Romish Church, there is little danger of it among us Protestants, who have ran into a contrary extreme, and despise these observances as much as the Papists idolize and abuse them. Yet, as a ground of confidence before God, we, no less than they, are in danger of founding our hopes upon them. But this error, I again say, will render them, not only not beneficial, but absolutely pernicious. Fasting is only a means to an end. We want to have the soul more deeply engaged in prayer, and more fixed in devotedness to God; and fasting greatly contributes to these ends. But if it be made itself a ground of hope before God, God will say to us, as to the hypocrites of old, "When you did fast, did you fast unto me, even unto me? Was it not to yourselves rather that you fasted [Zechariah 7:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech%207.5-6)," 'that you might have in yourselves a ground of self-righteousness and self-delight, instead of relying solely on the obedience and sufferings of my dear Son?' To have our fasts accepted, they must be accompanied with a determined mortification of all sin, and an unreserved performance of every known duty. "Such is the fast that God chooses;" and such alone will ever bring his blessing on our souls [Isaiah 58:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2058.6-8). Any other than this will be despised by him [Jeremiah 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2014.12); nor will any other accord with the example set us in my text.

APPLICATION—

Let none of you, then, think this an unnecessary labor, or imagine that it will interfere with your other duties in life. Of all the holiest men recorded in the Old Testament, there was not one more eminent than Daniel; nor was there one who had a greater weight of business upon him than he; yet even he found time for solemn fasting and prayer. Let none, therefore, decline this service, either as unprofitable or needless. As for those who have ever set themselves like him to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, I will ask whether they did not find the exercise truly beneficial to their souls? And, if they have afterwards laid aside that holy service, I will ask them whether they have not suffered loss in their souls? I can have no doubt what must be the testimony of every living man respecting this. To every man, therefore, I commend the practice as most beneficial and beneficial: nor have I any doubt but that those who, like Daniel, approach the Deity with fastings and prayer, shall, like him, receive speedy answers to their prayer, and signal manifestations to their souls, that they are "greatly beloved of their God verse 20–23.

[Daniel 9:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3-7)

DISCOURSE 1137

DANIEL'S CONFESSION

[Daniel 9:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3-7). And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts and from your judgments: neither have we hearkened unto your servants the prophets, which spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto you, but unto us, confusion of faces, as at this day.

FROM the earliest period, even from the time that God first had a visible Church in the world, there have been particular seasons set apart for humiliation, and fasting, and prayer. In the Christian Church, the appointment of forty days at this part of the year (Lent) for that purpose is of great antiquity The number of days for fasting was not always precisely the same as now: but the appointment itself may be traced almost to the times of the Apostles. The two days with which this season commenced were observed with peculiar solemnity: the one (Shrove Tuesday) was spent in recollecting and confessing The word "shrove" is from the old English word "shrive," which signifies, to confess. their sins; the other (Ash Wednesday) in fasting and supplication. That these institutions were carried to a very foolish excess, and that they degenerated into many absurd superstitions, under the reign of Popery, is readily acknowledged: but they were good in their origin; and our Church has wisely retained such a portion of them as might tend to the real edification of her members: and if we were more observant of them than we are, we should find substantial benefit to our souls. But, alas! we have run into an opposite extreme, insomuch that not only the observances are laid aside, but the very intention of them is almost forgotten: and instead of complying with the design which is intimated in the names given to the days, we render them perfectly ridiculous, by substituting a trifling change in our food for the most solemn acts of devotion before God.

Hoping however that on this day we are disposed to humble ourselves before God, we shall,

I. Illustrate this confession of Daniel—

The manner in which he made his supplications is deserving of particular attention—

He "set his face unto the Lord God:" he did not rush into the Divine presence without any previous meditation, but endeavored to have his mind impressed with reverence and godly fear, that he might "not offer to his God the sacrifice of fools."

He "sought God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." By mortifying the body, he endeavored to aid the labors of his soul. Both the one and the other had been defiled by sin; and therefore he strove to make them partners in humiliation before God. Nor can we doubt but that the fervor of his prayers was greatly assisted by the bodily privations which God himself has so often prescribed for this very end.

Nor must we overlook the remarkable representation which he gave of the Divine character on this occasion—

He mentions in very expressive terms both the majesty and the goodness of God; the one for the abasing, the other for the encouraging, of his soul.

What words can more strongly paint the majesty of God? In various other passages, God is called "the great and terrible" God [Nehemiah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh%201.5); [Nehemiah 9:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh%209.32) and [Deuteronomy 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%207.21); and well may he be addressed in such terms; for "who knows the power of his anger?" Let us only call to mind the judgments he has executed on sinners; on the rebel angels; on the antediluvian world; on Sodom and Gomorrah; on the Egyptian first-born; on Pharaoh and his hosts; yes, on the Jews in Babylon, which was the point referred to in the text; and we shall confess that "God is very greatly to be feared."

Yet he was not unmindful of the Divine goodness. Notwithstanding God is angry with the wicked, he has "made a covenant" with his Son, wherein he engages to "show mercy unto all who love him and keep his commandments." Now this covenant he has never violated; this mercy he has never refused to one who by faith laid hold on that covenant, and showed forth his faith by his works. And Daniel mentions this, in his address to God, as the ground on which he presumed to approach him, and ventured to hope for acceptance with him.

His confession before him is also worthy of notice, as being expressive of the deepest humility and contrition—

So deeply did he bewail his own sins and the iniquities of his people, that he strove by the most diversified expressions to make known his hatred of them: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts, and from your judgments; neither have we hearkened to your servants the prophets, which spoke in your name."

Here he distinctly acknowledges to God their transgression of his commandments, and their contempt of his reproofs. These were indeed a just ground for his humiliation; since to no other nation had such a revelation of God's will been given, or such messages of mercy sent. Happy was it for him, and happy for the nation, that the reason of their chastisements was thus discovered; and that, by knowing wherein they had erred, they had learned wherein they were to amend their conduct!

There is yet one thing more on which we must make our remarks, namely, his justification of God in all his dealings with them—

Nothing but equity is ascribed to God; nothing but shame is taken to themselves: "O Lord! righteousness belongs unto you; but unto us confusion of face." He does not utter one word in extenuation of their guilt, or one complaint against the Divine judgments: he declares rather, that, to whatever extremities God might proceed, he could not but be righteous; and that, whatever mercies they might experience at his hands, nothing but the deepest self-abasement could ever become them. Thus he gives the most decisive evidence of true repentance, and exhibits an admirable pattern for penitents in all ages.

Having briefly illustrated this confession of Daniel, we shall,

II. Found upon it some suitable and appropriate observations—

1. We have the same sins to confess—

Without entering into any distinctions founded on the different terms which are hero accumulated, let us only take the general division before mentioned, and call to mind our transgression of God's commandments, and our contempt of his reproofs.

Which of the commandments have we not broken? We may perhaps imagine, that, though we may have violated some, we are guiltless respecting others. But, alas! if we take our Savior's exposition of them, and remember, that an angry word is murder, and an impure look adultery, we shall find reason to bemoan our transgression of them all.

Nor is it any small aggravation of our guilt that we have despised those warnings and invitations which he has sent us in the Gospel. The ministers of Christ have testified against our ways from Sabbath to Sabbath, and from year to year: yet how few have hearkened to their voice!" how few have turned from their evil ways! how few have heartily embraced his salvation, or devoted themselves sincerely to his service! Let us in particular enter into our own bosoms, and consider what improvement WE have made of the truths delivered to us: If we do this in sincerity, we shall be at no loss for matter of humiliation before God.

2. We have the same God to go unto—

We do not like to think of God's majesty; but he is, as much as ever, "a great and terrible God:" the Apostle justly observes, "Our God is a consuming fire." Let us not dream of a God all mercy: the Deity is just as well as merciful; and it will be found "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".

On the other hand, the goodness of God is unalterable. He is still merciful to all who lay hold on his covenant; and will assuredly fulfill to them all the promises of that covenant. Heaven and earth may fail; but not a jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail.

Let us entertain just conceptions of the Divine character; and we shall have a frame of mind suited to our condition; we shall be under the joint influence of hope and fear; of hope without presumption, and of fear without despondency.

3. We ought to approach him in the same manner—

We should carefully prepare our minds for communion with God. The neglect of this is the reason that we so seldom obtain real fellowship with him. We should not lay aside, as it is to be feared we do, the duty of fasting: we should set apart seasons for more than ordinary humiliation; and more especially improve those seasons which are set apart by public authority.

We should search out our iniquities with diligence: and, instead of leaning to the side of self-vindication, should learn to justify God and to condemn ourselves. Nor shall we ever have our hearts right with him, until we can say, 'God will be righteous, though he should cast me into Hell; and nothing but confusion of face will become me, even though I were as holy as Daniel himself.'

Let us then begin the employment this day, under a full assurance, that "he who thus humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, shall in due time be lifted up."

4. If we approach him in the same manner, we shall assuredly obtain the same success—

That which Daniel desired on this occasion was, to obtain an insight into the prophecy of Jeremiah relative to the return of the Jews from Babylon, and the mystery which was prefigured by it, the redemption of the world by the promised Messiah. And behold, here was the angel Gabriel sent to give him the desired information, and to inform him, that "at the very beginning of his supplication, God, in answer to his prayer, had sent him" this gracious message verse 20–23.

Now, if this nation at large engaged in the services of this day with any good measure of that spirit with which we profess to have approached our God, there can be no doubt but that a blessing would be poured out upon the whole land; and that the mercies we more immediately need would be given unto us, or the judgments which we deprecated would be averted This, of course, must be accommodated to existing circumstances.

But if only in our individual capacity we improved this season aright, I can have no hesitation in saying, that we should have the Scriptures more fully unfolded to us by the Spirit of God; yes, and special manifestations of God's love to us by that same Spirit witnessing to our souls, "You are greatly beloved." Did Daniel gain by prayer such discoveries of Christ verse 24–26, and shall not we? Yes assuredly; and, if we will dedicate this very day truly and diligently to its peculiar and appropriate use, we shall before the close of it add our testimony to that before us, that "God has not said to any, Seek you my face in vain."

[Daniel 9:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3-10)

DISCOURSE 1138

HUMILIATION EXEMPLIFIED AND ENFORCED

[Daniel 9:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.3-10). And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have re-belled, even by departing from your precepts, and from your judgment: neither have we hearkened unto your servants the prophets, which spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto you, bat unto us confusion of faces, as at this day: to the men of Judah, and. to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries where you have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against you. O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have ice obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before its by his servants the prophets.

THE time for the captivity of the Jews in Babylon was fixed in the prophetic writings: yet, through the incredulity of all who had any influence among them, it was not known. Daniel, however, who at an early age had been carried captive, and who believed the word of God, studied the prophecies of Jeremiah, and understood from them, that the time of deliverance was near at hand; since about sixty-nine years out of the seventy, which was the appointed duration of their bondage, had now elapsed [Jeremiah 25:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2025.11-12); [Jeremiah 29:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2029.10). Encouraged by this discovery, and well knowing that the deliverance was only to be obtained by prayer [Jeremiah 29:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2029.12-14) with [1 Kings 8:46-50](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%208.46-50), he set himself with all humility and earnestness to seek the Lord. To himself, at all events, this solemn exercise of fasting and prayer was of great service: for, beyond all doubt, it was the means of strengthening his soul for the trial which he speedily afterwards sustained, when cast into the den of lions Compare verse 1 with [Daniel 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.1); [Daniel 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.4); [Daniel 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%206.16). There is reason to suppose, too, that it prevailed in no small degree to bring down upon the whole nation the promised blessing.

The account here given us, will lead me to show,

I. The concern which he manifested for the welfare of his own brethren—

Though himself placed in a situation of great honor, he was not unmindful of his Jewish brethren. He longed for their deliverance from their sore bondage; and he sought help for them from Him who alone was able to turn the hearts of kings. Let us mark,

1. The way in which he sought the Lord—

"He set his face unto the Lord his God;" doubtless turning towards Jerusalem, according to the direction given by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. In this we see his faith in the Lord Jehovah, whom, by this very act, he acknowledged, in the most appropriate manner, as Israel's God. To him he turned "in fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Though exalted to the highest station in the court of Darius, and though now at an advanced period of life, considerably above eighty years of age, he not only sought the Lord in prayer, but imposed on himself these austerities, for the purpose of deepening his humiliation before God, and of obtaining a nearer access to him in his supplications. In this he showed the sincerity of his heart, and the ardor of his soul; and has set an example to all future generations, of the way in which God is to be sought in behalf of a suffering people, and of the way in which national blessings are to be obtained.

2. The views which he had of the Deity whom he addressed—

He contemplated the Deity in all his diversified perfections, as a God of infinite majesty and holiness, and at the same time of unchanging mercy and truth. "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments!" God had shown himself "great and terrible" in the judgments he had executed upon them; and to all who shall continue to offend him he will prove "a consuming fire [Deuteronomy 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%204.24)." Yet "to those who should love him, and obey his commandments," he would show mercy, according to the full extent of his covenant which he had made with them in Horeb. It must however be remembered, that the attainment of this character was necessary to justify their claim on him for any one of these mercies: nor did he ever venture to implore these blessings for his people on any other condition than that which God had imposed, and which it became his Divine majesty to require.

3. The particulars of the prayer which he presented before him—

Here we notice his humble confession, and his penitential acknowledgment. In his confession, he reiterates the same idea, in a great diversity of terms: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled." He goes on to recapitulate particulars: "We have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts, and from your judgments; neither have we hearkened unto your servants the prophets, which spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land." Now, in this he showed how deeply he laid to heart the iniquities of the nation. Had his sense of it been light, a single expression of it would have sufficed: but it is of the very nature of deep contrition to abase ourselves, and to feel as if no words could ever express the enormity of our guilt. In like manner, while he fully justifies God in all the judgments he had inflicted, be takes to himself all imaginable shame, as the proper portion to every individual of his nation, from the highest to the lowest. And, this also he repeats verse 7, 8, as from the fullest conviction of his soul.

4. The grounds on which alone he ventured to hope for mercy—

It was from God's mercy alone that he could entertain a hope. In himself, or in his people, he could find nothing wherein to ground a plea: but in God he saw every tiling that could justify an assurance of acceptance for all who should come to him aright. "To God belonged mercy and forgiveness," as being essential to his nature, and the very delight of his soul [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah%207.18). And, though the greatness of their guilt might seem to preclude them from a hope of mercy, and the severity of God's judgments might appear to indicate that he was implacably offended with them, he particularly declares, that on neither of these grounds had they any reason to despond; for that mercies and forgiveness, to the utmost extent of their necessities, still belonged to him, notwithstanding they had so grievously rebelled against him."

In all of this we see, with most unquestionable evidence,

II. The concern which we should manifest for our own souls—

For our nation we ought most assuredly to feel as Daniel felt, and to act in their behalf as he acted This idea should be opened at some length on a Fast-day, in reference to the particular state of the nation at the time; And now that the time for the restoration and conversion of the Jews is so near approaching, ought not we to make our supplication to God for them in the very way that Daniel did?: I hesitate not to say, that our obligation to seek their spiritual and eternal welfare is not a whit inferior to that by which Daniel was impelled to seek their temporal deliverance This, if it were preached on the subject of the Jews, must, of course, be greatly amplified; if not, it may be altogether omitted.

The salvation of our souls is at all times, and under all circumstances, an object worthy to be sought with our whole hearts. Let me then urge upon you,

1. The study of the Scriptures in reference to the great work of redemption—

Daniel, though immersed in business of the most important nature, found time, yes, made time, for the study of God's blessed word; and by study he ascertained the period fixed for the Jews' deliverance from bondage. And should not we, however occupied, find time for the study of the Scriptures, that we may know all that God has spoken respecting that infinitely greater deliverance, the redemption of our souls? The object of his inquiry was nothing in comparison of that to which our attention should be turned. Shall we, then, plead as an excuse, that we have not time? Shall anything under Heaven be suffered to stand in competition with that in which all the glory of God is displayed, and on which the everlasting salvation of our souls depends? I say, it is a shame that the sacred volume, which contains all these mysteries, is so neglected by us, or so superficially and negligently perused. And I call on all of you to lay this matter to heart; and now with all diligence to "search the Scriptures," in which you think you have, and in which assuredly you have, eternal life revealed to you.

2. An application to God for mercy with all humility and earnestness—

Daniel was considerably above eighty years of age when he arrayed himself "in sackcloth and ashes," and betook himself, in the most solemn manner, to fasting and prayer. Shall we then account this service too self-denying for us? Did he mourn so deeply for the sins of others, and shall we not mourn for our own? Shall a short ejaculation be thought sufficient for us, when scarcely invention itself could furnish terms sufficient to express his sense of their guilt? Shall we offer excuses for ourselves, when he, the holiest man that day on earth, was filled with shame and confusion of face? Think with yourselves, what would be your feeling, if God now, by revelation, made known to tins assembly all that had ever passed in your hearts? Would you not be filled with contusion? Would you not be glad to hide your heads, yes, and to spend the remainder of your days in solitude, unknowing and unknown? Why then do you not abase yourselves before God? He views you, not as we do, but as you really are: and if your eyes be opened to discern your real character, I hesitate not to say that you will "loath yourselves," yes, and "abhor yourselves in dust and ashes." Nor will you account a whole life of prayer and supplication too much to obtain the mercy of your God.

3. An entire casting of yourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus—

Remember, that God must be sought as he is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. The temple, towards which Daniel turned his face, was a type of Christ, "in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells," and through whom alone the Father is accessible to sinful man. "There is no way to the Father, but through Christ [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2014.6);" "but of those who come to God through him, not one shall ever be cast out [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%206.37)."

You must be especially careful to renounce every other plea. It you rely in any measure whatever on your own righteousness, you never can find acceptance with him verse 18. If Daniel relied entirely on the mercy of his God, so must you. The Apostle Paul "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, hut the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%203.9)." Be assured that you must do the same: and if you resemble him in this, you shall, like him, experience the mercy of your God abounding towards you, yes, and super-abounding in proportion as your iniquities have abounded. In particular, guard against limiting the mercy of your God, or accounting the greatness of your sins any ground for despondency: for "mercy belongs to God, notwithstanding you have rebelled against him [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Tim%201.16). [Romans 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.20-21), and notwithstanding you have so long slighted the offers of mercy which he has "sent you by his servants the prophets." This is, indeed, a great aggravation of your guilt: but still, in the view of all the guilt you have ever contracted, I declare to you this day, that, provided only you will believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, "though your sins have been as scarlet, or of a crimson dye, they shall become white as wool, and white as the spotless snow."

[Daniel 9:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.17-23)

DISCOURSE 1139

THE ANSWER TO DANIEL'S PRAYER

[Daniel 9:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.17-23). O our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and his supplications, and cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by your name: for we do not present our supplications before you for our righteous nesses, but for your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken, and do; defer not, for your own sake, O my God: for your city and your people are called by your name. And whiles I was speaking, and. praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yes, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give you skill and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show you; for you are greatly beloved; therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

AN inquiry into prophecy is highly commendable; and more especially now that so many prophecies are on the very eve of their accomplishment. But it is not by study alone that we shall be able to attain the true interpretation of the prophetic writings. We must pray to God to reflect the true light upon them, and to enable us by his good Spirit rightly to apprehend them. This was the way which Daniel took, when he saw, by the writings of Jeremiah, that the seventy years of captivity were drawing to a close [Jeremiah 29:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2029.10); he could not tell the precise time from which they should be numbered; and consequently could not ascertain the period for their termination: but he was anxious to know when the happy time was to commence. He set himself therefore to study the prophecies of Jeremiah, and to seek instructions from God in a way of humiliation, and fasting, and prayer verse 2, 3. The success which he met with deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it affords an encouragement to all to follow his example. Let us consider,

I. The record here given—

In this are two things to be noticed;

1. The prayer of Daniel—

To enter into this aright, the whole chapter should be attentively perused. The first thing that strikes us in this prayer is, his just view of the Deity; of his majesty, as a "great and dreadful" God; his unchanging faithfulness, in "keeping covenant and mercy to his loving and obedient people verse 4;" his justice, in all the judgments that he inflicts on the disobedient verse 7;" his mercy, in pardoning those who have rebelled against him verse 9; and his truth, in executing every word that he has ever spoken verse 11, 12. From this comprehensive view of the Divine perfections arose that just mixture of humility and confidence which is visible throughout the whole of his address.

The next thing to be observed in Daniel's prayer is, his deep humiliation before God. On the subject of his own and his people's sins, he so accumulates expressions as to show that he thought he could never sufficiently abase himself before his God verse 5, 6. In a Word, nothing but shame and "confusion of face" seemed to him to be suited to his condition as a sinner; though of all the saints in the Old Testament he seems to have been the most perfect; not one thing during the course of a long, and public, and laborious life being laid to his charge, either by God or man.

His earnest pleadings with God are vet further deserving of especial regard. He seems as if he would take no denial, yes, as if his spirit could brook no delay verse 19. Everything that might be supposed to influence the Deity is brought forward as a plea, to incline him to have mercy on his afflicted people: the consideration of God's former mercies to them in Egypt verse 15; a regard for his own honor, since they still bare the same relation to him as ever verse 19; and a love to the promised Messiah, whose glory would ultimately be promoted by it verse 17. All these pleas show how earnest and importunate he was, even like Jacob when wrestling with the Angel, "I will not let you go, except you bless me."

2. The answer given him—

How marvelous was the condescension of God, in sending the angel Gabriel to give unto his servant an answer of peace! But here it will be peculiarly profitable to compare the answer with the prayer:—"O Lord, hear! O Lord, defer not!"—' Go Gabriel; fly with all possible expedition: do not so much as look back to behold my glory: mind nothing but your errand: tell him, in answer to what he is saying, "To me belongs shame and confusion of face," "O Daniel, you are greatly beloved." In answer to his request, that "I would not defer," tell him that at the very beginning of his supplications the commandment was given you to go and answer them from me: and, whereas he has only prayed for information respecting the redemption of my people from Babylon, which Jeremiah predicted to be wrought in the space of seventy years from the time of his prophecy; tell him of that infinitely greater redemption which that typifies, and which is now to be accomplished in seventy weeks of years; explain to him everything relating to the vicarious sufferings of the Messiah, and the righteousness which He will bring in thereby for the deliverance and salvation of a ruined world verse 24–27. And let this answer be to all the future generations of mankind a memorial of my grace, and a pledge of my condescension to all my praying people.'

Instead of dilating much on the circumstances of this instructive history, we have merely glanced at them, that we may more largely dwell upon,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Behold then here,

1. The nature of prayer—

Prayer is an application of the soul to God for some desired blessing. But it will be proper distinctly to notice its constituent parts.

There must be, in the first place, a just apprehension of the Divine perfections. If we view not God as a Being of infinite majesty, and holiness and power, we shall not approach him with that reverential fear that becomes us: and if his goodness, and mercy, and truth, and faithfulness be not borne in mind, we shall be destitute of all those encouragements that are necessary for the support of our souls. The greatest of men must never for a moment forget the former, nor the vilest of men the latter. Abraham, Moses, Job, Isaiah, were all abased, as it were, in dust and ashes, by their discoveries of God; while, on the other hand, the very murderers of the Lord of Glory had in one moment their terrors dissipated, and their souls revived, by a single glimpse of God, as reconciled to them in Christ Jesus. A partial view of God will lead either to despondency or presumption; but a just view of him will call into exercise all the best feelings of the heart, combining activity with confidence, and fear with love Here a distinct view may be taken of all the perfections before mentioned.

Next, there must be a contrite sense of our own extreme tin unworthiness. No prayer can come up with acceptance before God, which docs not proceed from a broken and contrite spirit, Angels who have never fallen may offer praises without any other kind of humiliation than that which proceeds from a sense of their utter baseness and insignificance; but a sinner, though redeemed, must never forget that he is a sinner, or neglect to blend contrition even with his most exalted services. In Heaven itself the redeemed cast their crowns before the Savior's feet, in acknowledgment that they receive them altogether from him, and that they desire to wear them only for the advancement of his glory Here the nature of real humiliation maybe more fully traced, in reference to that of Daniel.

Connected with our contrition there must be a pledge pleading with God. This is the very soul of prayer. True it is, that God does not need to be prevailed upon by our importunity, as though he were of his own nature backward to assist us; for to exercise mercy is his delight: but he requires importunity in us, as the means of exciting in our hearts, and of evidencing in our prayers, a deep sense of our need of mercy This also may be briefly illustrated.

But that which gives to prayer its chief efficacy is, a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our blessed Lord tells us, that "whatever we ask in his name we shall receive." It is his mediation alone that procures acceptance for our prayers: and then only do they come up with a sweet odor before God, when they are presented in his censer, and are perfumed with the incense of his prevailing intercession Here it may be shown what attention is paid to this throughout our whole Liturgy.

2. Its efficacy when duly offered—

God will not cast out the prayer of faith: hut his answers to it shall be sure, speedy, and effectual. "Never said he to any, Seek you my face, in vain:" and the accumulation of promises which he has given us on this subject, leaves us no room to doubt, but that he will grant us, in answer to our prayers, such blessings as he knows to be best for us [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%207.7-8). If he give us not the thing we asked for, he will give us that which on the whole is far better, and which, if we had known what was best for us as he does, we should have asked. The time previous to his answer may appear to our impatient minds long: but his answers shall not be protracted beyond the fittest season. The parable of the unjust judge shows us how the importunate widow prevailed at last: and the instruction which God founds upon it is this: "Shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily," I. e. as speedily as will conduce to their greatest benefit. Moreover, his answers shall be commensurate with all our necessities. However "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it." David says, "I cried to the Lord; and the Lord heard me at large:" thus will he hear us at large, "supplying all our wants according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," and "giving us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

ADDRESS—

Let every one in his place and station be as Daniel, a man of prayer. Others besides Daniel have had immediate answers to prayer [Acts 10:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2010.30-31); and God promises that we also shall be answered as speedily as ever Daniel was, if it will really be for our good [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2065.24). If any one be discouraged for want of an answer to his prayers, let him remember that God may have answered them already, though unperceived, and in a way not contemplated by the suppliant himself. An angel is mentioned by the prophet Zechariah as answered, not in the way that lie had desired, but "with good and comfortable words [Zechariah 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech%201.12-13)." And Paul, when praying for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, had it not removed, but sanctified, and grace given to him to improve it aright [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2012.9). Know then, whether you see it or not, that God both does, and will, answer your petitions. Only let them be humble, and believing, and they shall never go forth in vain.

[Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.24)

DISCOURSE 1140

THE TIME AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT

[Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.24). Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

IT has pleased God on many occasions to manifest his regard to prayer; and to give such speedy and gracious answers to it as should encourage all his people to pour out their hearts before him. Daniel, having understood by books that the seventy years' captivity in Babylon were drawing to a close, set himself by fasting and prayer to implore mercy for himself and his captive nation: and God instantly sent an angel to testify the acceptance of his prayers, and to reveal to him the period fixed for that far greater deliverance, which should in due time be effected by the Messiah. "Seventy weeks," according to the prophetic language, mean seventy weeks of years, that is, four hundred and ninety years, a day for a year [Ezekiel 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek%204.6). There is a remarkable coincidence between the seventy years at the end of which this temporal deliverance was to take place, and the seventy weeks of years when the great Deliverer was to come. That space of time (four hundred and ninety years) includes ten Jubilees; at the last of which, not one nation only, but all the nations of the world should hear the sound of the gospel-trumpet, and be restored to their forfeited inheritance. Commentators are not agreed respecting the precise year from which the numeration of them begins The more approved calculations are those which are dated from the seventh, or from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and the latter by lunar years; but, according to any calculation, the Messiah must have long since come into the world; and the Jews are inexcusable in rejecting so decisive a testimony. The ends of the Messiah's advent, which are here set forth in a rich variety of expression, will form the subject of our present discourse.

God sent him,

I. To open a way for our salvation—

There were two great obstacles to the salvation of man, namely, guilt and corruption: And

For the removal of these the law made no adequate provision—

There were sacrifices and various other services appointed for the removal of guilt: and the person who complied with the ordinances prescribed, was considered as absolved from his sin. But in the nature of things "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin." Indeed the annual repetition of the same offerings on the great day of atonement showed, that the transgressions, which had been before atoned for, were not fully and finally forgiven: these repeated sacrifices were so many "remembrances of sins," intended to lead the minds of men to that greater sacrifice, which alone could "make them perfect as pertaining to the conscience," or procure to them a complete and "eternal redemption [Hebrews 9:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%209.9-12); [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2010.1-4)."

But what the law could not do, God sent his only dear Son to effect [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.3).—

"The Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself [Daniel 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.27);" by him Divine justice was to be satisfied, and the hand-writing that was against us, being nailed to his cross, was to be forever cancelled [Colossians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%202.14); he was so to "finish transgression, and make an end of sin" that no further sacrifice for it should ever be necessary: by his one offering he was to perfect forever them that are sanctified [Hebrews 10:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2010.11-14). All this has been done: through the blood of his cross, reconciliation is made between God and man [Colossians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%201.21-22); God no more abhors the sinner, seeing that he is cleansed from sin in the Redeemer's blood, and is clothed in that spotless righteousness which Jesus has brought in [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%205.21); nor does the sinner any longer hate God, because he is enabled to behold him as his God and Father in Christ. Thus is the breach completely closed: thus is man restored to the favor and love of God: thus are all typical sacrifices abrogated and annulled [Daniel 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%209.27); and thus are men delivered, no less from the love and practice of sin than from the curse and condemnation due to it [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%202.14). Sin is no more remembered on the part of God, nor any more practiced on the part of man.

Thus far the subject is plain. What remains of our text is more difficult to be understood. But I conceive that the true sense of it will be marked, if we consider it as exhibiting yet farther the way devised for our salvation, and the sending of the Messiah,

II. To complete all that was necessary for its full accomplishment—

Two things were necessary to be effected by him:

1. He was to fulfill for us all that had been predicted—

There were a great variety of types and prophecies which designated the Messiah's work and character. The first promise, given immediately after the fall, represented him as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head." In process of time other prophecies declared the family from which he should spring, the time and place of his birth, the minutest circumstances of his life and death, together with his subsequent exaltation and glory: moreover the whole nature of his undertaking, the various offices he was to sustain, with all the effects of his mission, were exactly delineated. Besides these, there were also many figurative representations instituted of God for the purpose of exhibiting to the world, as in a shadow, those things which were afterwards to be realized and substantially effected. Our first parents were clothed by God himself with the skins of beasts, which they had before been directed to otter in sacrifice; that, in that type, they might see the only true way of atoning for their sin, or covering their shame from the eyes of God. The various ordinances that were appointed under the Mosaic dispensation, the paschal lamb, whose sprinkled blood averted from the Israelites the sword of the destroying angel, while its flesh, eaten with bitter herbs, nourished their bodies; the daily and annual sacrifices, with all the sprinklings and other ceremonies; the habits and services of the priests, the form and furniture of the tabernacle, with many other things, which it would be tedious to enumerate, declared in ten thousand forms the work and offices of the promised Messiah.

All of these Christ was in the exactest manner to fulfill. Some parts of the inspired volume represented him as God, others as a man, yes, as "a worm and no man;" some as victorious, others as suffering; some as living forever, others as dying; some as the priest, others as the sacrifice; some as a sanctuary, and others as a stumbling-block: all manner of opposites were to unite in him as lines in their center, in order that, when he should appear, there should not exist a doubt in any unprejudiced mind, but that he was the person foretold; and that everything respecting him had been fore-ordained in the Divine counsels. Accordingly when he came, he showed himself to be that very Messiah, who, like a seal, engraved with strokes infinitely diversified, corresponded exactly with the impression which had been given of it to the Church two thousand years before. Thus did he "seal up the vision and prophecy," completing it in all its parts, and leaving no further occasion for such methods of instruction.

2. He was to impart to us all that had been promised—

"The anointing of the most Holy" is generally thought to import, that Christ himself should receive the Spirit; but we apprehend that it imports also his communicating of the Spirit to his Church.

Christ is certainly "the Holy One and the Just," to whom the character of "The Most Holy" eminently belongs. It is certain also that he was anointed with the Spirit from his very first designation to preach the glad tidings of salvation [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2061.1); and that lie received a further unction when the Spirit descended upon him in a bodily shape like a dove [Matthew 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%203.16). But these do not appear to be the seasons alluded to in the text: the unction there spoken of seems to follow the other ends of his mission; and consequently to relate to something which took place after his ascension to Heaven. The Psalmist speaks of Christ after his ascension, and consequent inauguration, when lie says, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2045.7)," In another psalm he declares the same truth in still plainer terms; "You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive; you have received gifts for men, yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2068.18)." By consulting the Apostle Paul, we shall find that this gift which Jesus then received, was the Holy Spirit; and that he received it in order that he might communicate it to his Church; for, quoting this very passage, he alters one word in it, and says, "he gave gifts unto men;" and then adds, that he gave these "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%204.8); [Ephesians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%204.11-12)." But the testimony of another Apostle is absolutely decisive on this point: while Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon all the Apostles, and abode on each of them in the shape of cloven tongues of fire: the Apostle then declared that this was an accomplishment of Joel's prophecy respecting "the pouring out of God's Spirit;" and referred them to Jesus as the author of it, and as having received, at this time, the gift of the Spirit for this very end; "therefore," says he, "being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has shed forth this which you now see and hear [Acts 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.3); [Acts 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.16); [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202.33)." Thus was this holy oil poured out upon the head of our great High Priest, that it might flow down to the skirts of his garments, and reach to the meanest of his members [Psalm 133:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20133.2).

The ends of the Messiah's advent being so clearly and so fully declared, I wish you to observe—

1. What abundant provision God has made for our salvation—

What can we conceive either as necessary or desirable beyond what our blessed Redeemer has done for us? What could the most guilty and abandoned sinner upon earth desire more of Christ, than that he should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, bring in for him an everlasting righteousness, and anoint him" with that same Spirit with which he himself is "anointed without measure [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.34)." Or what evidence of his ability and willingness to do these things would any man have, beyond what the accomplishment of so many types and prophecies affords him? And shall God freely offer us this glorious salvation, and we not deign to receive it? O let us open our eyes, and behold our truest interest: let us not perish in the midst of mercy: let us not be famished when so rich a feast is set before us [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2025.6); but let us comply with the Savior's invitation, "Eat, O friends, drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved Son. 5:1."

2. How deeply we are interested in obtaining the knowledge of Christ—

When the Apostles were asked by our Lord whether they also intended to forsake him, Peter well replied, "Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Thus must we say; for assuredly "there is salvation in no other; there is no other name given under Heaven whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%204.12)." In vain will be all our self-righteous endeavors to reconcile ourselves to God, or to renew our polluted hearts. "If Christ wash us not, we have no part with him [John 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2013.8);" if he put not away our sins, they must abide upon us forever: if he do not impart to us that "unction of the Holy One, whereby we know all things [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%202.20)," and "can do all things [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%204.13)," we must perish in our impotency, even as new-born infants that are left to themselves. Shall we then be regardless of the Savior, and "perish for lack of knowledge," when God is thus laboring to instruct us? Shall we not rather, like Daniel, pray day and night that we may obtain a clearer knowledge of his will? Our neglect of this is the true reason why, with the Bible in our hands, we understand so little of this subject, and feel so little its sanctifying and saving efficacy. Would to God there were more Daniels in the midst of us! O let us henceforth "give more earnest heed to the things that are spoken;" and treasure up in our minds that truth of God, which alone can sanctify us, which alone can save us.

[Daniel 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%2012.2-3)

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DIFFERENT STATES OF MEN IN THE LAST JUDGMENT

[Daniel 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan%2012.2-3). And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever.

THE immediate connection of the text would lead us to expect something which shall take place when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to destroy all anti-Christian powers, and to establish his kingdom throughout the world. Of that period John speaks, as "the first resurrection [Revelation 20:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2020.5-6)." But at that time the saints alone shall rise (whether really or mystically, we stop not to inquire): but at the time of which my text speaks, the wicked shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt. The prophet, therefore, must be understood as passing over the intermediate space between the destruction of Antichrist and the final judgment; and as speaking of what shall take place at that awful day, when Christ shall come to judge the world. In this way our blessed Lord introduces his description of the same awful period. He predicts the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and then almost blends with that the general judgment; so that it is not easy to determine with accuracy the precise point of his transition from the one event to the other. In truth, he seems in one place to quote the words of my text as referring to the last day; saying, "The hour is coming, when all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation [John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%205.28-29)." Nor can we doubt but that the Jews in general understood Daniel as speaking of that period; and grounded chiefly upon his authority the belief, that "there should be a resurrection both of the just and unjust [Acts 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2024.15)."

Assuming this, then, to be the import of my text, I shall proceed to consider,

1. The different states of men in that great decisive day—

It cannot be, that all should receive the same doom at the hands of a righteous Judge—

Some will awake to everlasting life and honor—

To the souls of men there is no death. The very instant they are separated from the body, they are transmitted to a place of happiness or misery, and receive a portion at least of that recompense which awaits them at the final judgment. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus this is strongly intimated. It appears also, from the promise made to the penitent thief, that on the very day of his crucifixion he should be with his Lord in Paradise. The body, in the mean time, will sleep in the dust. But at the sound of the trumpet in the last day, that also shall be raised; and, in a state of union with the soul, be made a partaker of the doom which the soul had before experienced. It once bore its part on all that was transacted by the soul: and all its powers shall at that day be so strengthened, that it shall be able to sustain its part also in all the blessedness or misery to which the soul has previously been consigned. The body will then be a spiritual body: and in it, no less than in his soul, shall every saint enjoy an eternity of bliss.

Some, on the other hand, will arise to everlasting shame and contempt—

The wicked, while in this world, so resembled the righteous, that there could not be a separation made between them. But at the last day, the tares and the wheat will be as easily distinguished from each other as goats from the sheep; and no longer will they grow together. "The ungodly will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." The wicked will then be disowned by all. The Savior, who once laid down his life for them, and, during a long course of years, followed them with invitations and entreaties to accept of mercy, will then turn from them with disgust, and say, "Depart from me: I never knew you, you workers of iniquity." The angels too, those benevolent spirits who once would have been glad to minister unto them as their attendants, will engage in dragging them from their retreats, and will "bind them up in bundles, to burn them." To all their former friends also, who once labored for their welfare, will they be objects of abhorrence [Isaiah 66:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2066.24); yes, to the devils themselves will they be objects of malignant triumph and reproachful exultation, as doubtless our first parents were after their fall; in that they were so foolish as to believe the lies of Satan, in preference to the truth of God.

But let us mark especially what is spoken of,

II. The peculiar felicity of the saints—

They are here characterized as wise in their conduct, and as useful in their generation—

"They were once perhaps derided and despised as fools." But "they chose the better part," and therein approved themselves truly wise. "The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom:" and all are wise in proportion as they are regulated by it. But those who are "wise for themselves" will not be content to leave others in their folly, or to go to Heaven alone. They say to God, "Draw me, and we will run after you:" that is, Draw me, and I will bring all I can along with me. This will be the endeavor of every soul that truly turns to God; and God will bless these labors of love, in whoever they may be found. If all are not called to speak in public, all have a sphere in which they may exert themselves to advantage: and all who are upright before God will employ their talents, whether in visiting the sick, or in the education of children, or at all events in instructing their own households and their more immediate friends. Activity in the cause of God is inseparable from true piety.

And inconceivable will be their bliss—

Perhaps the idea of our Lord's transfiguration may assist us a little in forming some faint conception of the appearance of the righteous in that day. We know that "their bodies shall then be changed like unto Christ's glorious body;" and in their souls also "they shall be like him:" and in all their powers, whether of soul or body, shall they be "filled with all the fullness of their God." The souls also, to whom in their day and generation they were useful, shall then be as jewels in their crown, and sources of augmented bliss and honor to all eternity.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are regardless of that day—

Think, I pray you, what your feelings would now be, if all the evil that has ever passed in your hearts were made known to your fellow-creatures, I fear there would be very few of us that would not veil our faces with conscious shame, and be glad to hide ourselves in any distant retreat where we might escape the eyes of those who knew our guilt. What then will be your feelings in that day, when every abomination, with all its attendant aggravations, shall be exposed before the whole assembled universe? Now you may be able to glory in your shame; or may possibly be hardened into utter insensibility: but it will not be so then. Your sensibilities will be as quick and vivid, after millions of years, as at the first moment of your exposure; and your conscious desert of all the shame and contempt be as pungent as ever: Oh that I could prevail on you now to humble yourselves [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%203.25), that then you may be exalted; and now to clothe yourselves in the robe of Christ's righteousness, that then "the shame of your nakedness may not appear [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%203.18)."

2. Those who are living in a state of preparation for it—

Possibly at this time you are objects of reproach to an ungodly world. But this, methinks, should be a small matter in your eyes. O, think what a change will take place in that day, and how the very people who now pour contempt upon you will envy your state! Think how God is now glorified in you; and how he will be glorified in you in that day, when all your sins, "if sought for, will not be found;" and glory, and honor, and immortality will be awarded to you, as your portion in the immediate presence of your God. Be daily preparing for that day; and in the full expectation of all this blessedness yourselves, be laboring with all your might to bring as many as possible to a participation of it.