





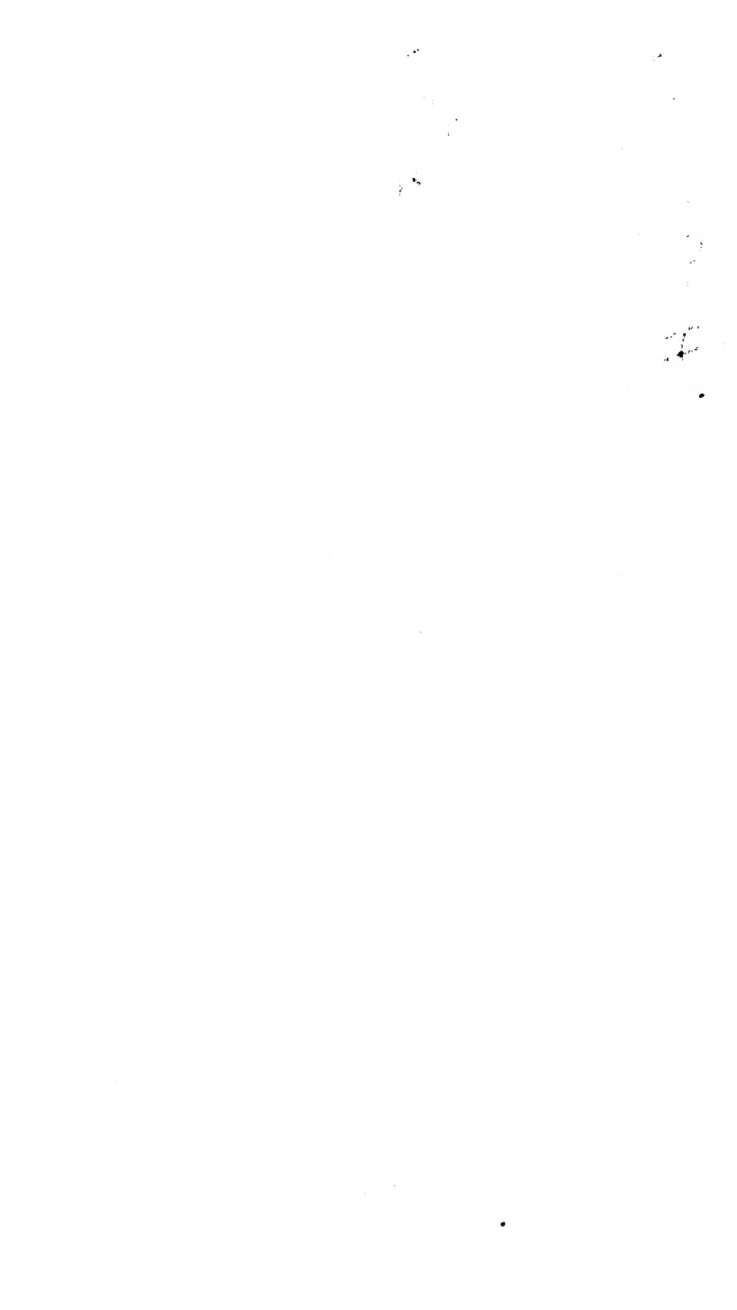
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G. Musgrave Giger,

August, 1863
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G. W. Musgrave

S E R M O N S

PREACHED IN

TRINITY CHURCH, UPPER CHELSEA.

BY THE

REV. HENRY BLUNT, A.M.,

RECTOR OF STREATHAM, SURREY;

LATE FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND DOMESTIC
CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.

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PREFACE.

IN compliance with the wish of many of the Author's late congregation, to possess some of those discourses, which they heard from time to time, during his residence of nearly twelve years among them, he has selected the contents of the present volume. His desire while with them, was, as far as he knew himself, to come "not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto them the testimony of God. For he determined not to know any thing among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified." "That their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power

of God." In presenting them with these reminiscences of his ministry, his intention is still the same, and the highest praise he covets is, that there should not be a sentence that is not entirely in unison with the revealed Word of God, and perfectly intelligible to the most uneducated of those, to whom it was his privilege originally to address it.

To any thing beyond this, the present discourses have no claim; written as they were amidst the unceasing cares and harassing labors of a large parish, they contain as might be expected, no traces of finished composition, or of profound thought, or of originality of conception. Such as they are, they have been selected simply as appearing among the most useful of the author's pulpit ministra-

tions; and as usefulness has always been his highest aim, his prayer is, that He who “possesseth the residue of the Spirit,” may enable these discourses, in their present shape, to become a hundred-fold more useful than when first delivered; that, feeble as they are, they may be made mighty, through God, to awaken the sleeper, to direct the inquirer, to convince the doubtful, to comfort the afflicted, to establish the believer, and, above all, to promote the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Streatham Rectory, Surrey,

29th March, 1837.

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SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE INVITATION OF THE SAVIOUR.

ST. MATTHEW XI, 28.

“COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.” .

THERE appears to be in the very construction of the human mind, a peculiar adaptation to the overtures of affection and kindness; so that while we almost instinctively recoil from the language of harshness, our feelings are often subdued into acquiescence, even before our reason is convinced, when we are solicited by the voice of tenderness and mercy.

That powerful and gracious Being, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is intimately acquainted with

all these peculiarities of our nature, had been, in the chapter from which the text is taken, upbraiding the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Listen for a moment to His solemn denunciations—"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee." St. Matt. xi, 21-24. Such was the language of Him, who was love itself, who never broke the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax; see Isaiah xlii, 3; who never willingly inflicted pain for one single moment upon any human being. We are not therefore surprised, that glad to turn his thoughts from so distressing a subject as the irrevocable

condemnation of any of his creatures, rejoicing to point out a refuge from the impending storm, and to exchange the language of threatening for the message of salvation and peace, he turns to those around him, and exclaims, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

It was necessary thus briefly to call to our recollection the former part of our Lord's conversation, that we might enter more fully into the additional value which these words derive from their locality, and from the circumstances under which they were spoken.

In all probability, our Lord was surrounded not only by his disciples, but by some of the inhabitants of those devoted cities whose sentence he had pronounced, and who, like Noah and Lot, were anxious to fly from the wrath to come. They had stood in trembling silence during the denunciations of these inevitable woes, and shuddered at every fresh name which fell beneath the malediction of our Lord, lest their own region or their own city should come next in that black catalogue; and at last their worst forebodings were fulfilled, and they heard his threatening vengeance fall upon the town of

their nativity, which at that moment enclosed within its walls their wives, their children—all that their hearts held dear on this side heaven. To hearers such as these, what must have been the incalculable value of the invitation of the text? What must have been the unutterable feelings of hope and joy at the instant it was spoken, with which they must have applied it to themselves. They had just been told, that on the day of judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah would fare better than the city which they loved; but now a refuge was proclaimed—a hope held out even for them—and we can almost hear them say, Thank God, there is then a way to escape; thank God, there is a refuge from the storm, a covert from the tempest; there is One to whom even we, the miserable inhabitants of a country worse than Sodom, and more depraved than Gomorrah, may come and find rest for our souls.

Let us, then, enter into these feelings, and imagine ourselves, for a few moments, a portion of that little group which surrounded the Saviour of the world, when the words before us were spoken, and then we shall be the better qualified to listen to them as they deserve to be heard, to

value them as they deserve to be valued, not as the words of the minister, not even of the Church, but of the Saviour himself; not as addressed generally and vaguely to all, but to each and every one among us, who is at this moment anxious to hear and to profit by them.

Bearing this in mind, I shall request you to consider, first, the persons to whom they were delivered. Our Lord addresses "all who labor and are heavy laden." He did not apply himself to those, therefore, who were living a life of ease and unconcern in the ill-fated cities of which he had spoken; who, while his denunciations were thundering at their gates, were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," without a fear or a hope beyond the trifles with which their hearts were filled. These could not be the people to whom the Saviour spake; his words were fitted for far other ears and hearts than theirs, for they could not be said to be among the weary and heavy laden.

Let us, then, look round us, for men are alike in all ages and in every clime, and inquire what denomination of persons among ourselves might be imagined to be included here. We observe

one class, very numerous and respectable, rising early and retiring late to rest, and eating the bread of carefulness, every hour of every day engaged in the natural and praiseworthy occupation, of providing for themselves, and those dependent upon them, the necessaries or the comforts of life, laboring in the most indefatigable manner for the bread which perisheth, and often weary and heavy laden with the burden of those cares and anxieties of life, which an active mind and an industrious habit have heaped upon them.

You, then, we should say, addressing ourselves to these, must be precisely the objects of our Lord's invitation. How delighted will you be to learn, that while you are wasting your strength, your energies, in pursuing that which, after all, is but the shadow of happiness and rest, the glorious substance is offered you, "without money and without price." Feeling thus, we address you in the words of the servants, who carried forth the king's invitation to his wedding feast, and we say "Come, for all things are now ready." Here are peace, and quiet, and rest, and a cessation from labor and trouble—enjoyments which you evidently prize most

highly, since you are sacrificing every hour of every day to obtain them—freely offered you for time and for eternity.

Now, brethren, how many among you will accept the offer? Alas! shall we not find, that perhaps, “with one consent,” certainly with few exceptions, you will begin to make excuse—that one departs, as the parable expresses it, to his farm, another to his merchandize? that all, though “laboring and heavy laden,” and professedly seeking rest, have no desire for that kind of rest which Christ would offer them?

It is clear to a demonstration, then, that you cannot be the people to whom our Lord applies himself. We do not say, that you are not the persons who need the invitation before us; God knows there are very few who need it more. The man, devoted heart and soul to his worldly business, and temporary profits, laying up treasure where rust and moth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, is an object of as deep concern, and as tender compassion to that gracious Saviour, who is touched with a feeling of all our infirmities, as any of those blinded Israelites who bowed the knee to Baal, or sacrificed to the golden calf. But before such

men will receive the invitation of the text, they must be led to feel and appreciate this commandment of our Lord, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." St. Matt. vi, 33. They must learn experimentally to know that there is something more desirable than this world, and the fairest portion it can offer them. May God, the Holy Ghost, who can alone impart this feeling, pour it into the hearts of those who need it!

Disappointed thus in our search, again we look around us, and behold a class of persons bowed down under the burden of formal observances, valuing highly the externals of religion, but neglecting to seek a new heart, a change of nature, a change of life, and that interest in the pardoning blood of a Redeemer, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God; toiling to work out for themselves, a righteousness by which they may be justified in the sight of the Almighty; striving to satisfy all his demands by their own imperfect performances, and toiling, laboring, heavy laden, but in vain; "Who being ignorant," as the Apostle expresses it, "of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have

not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." Rom. x, 3. To you, then, we next propose the invitation of the text, thinking that you at least will be delighted to find, what you have so long been vainly seeking, that rest which can alone arise from being reconciled to God. But here, again, we are in error; you assure us that we have grossly overrated your deficiencies, and mistaken your wants; that you are "not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and though you cannot add, with the Pharisee, that you "fast twice in the week," you take comfort from feeling that you shall one day find this rest, in the satisfying nature of outward duties and formal observances. You are, in fact, seeking that in ordinances, which is only to be found in the God of ordinances, and thus are wearing life away, as the Christian poet has well expressed it—

"By dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up."

We have, therefore, still to discover the class to whom our Lord alludes in the invitation before us; and may God grant that our search be not totally in vain!

Is there here any individual among us, whose

conscience has revived within his breast the memory of sins long since committed and forgotten, who begins to feel that he has lived too much in neglect of the great end of his existence, and amidst the honorable employments of time, has grievously forgotten the requirements of an approaching eternity; who may address his heart as Job addressed his friend, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth:" who, when he reflects upon the many known and intentional violations of the law of God; the unnumbered multitudes of unknown and unthought-of derelictions of that sacred law, with which his life has teemed, is utterly at a loss how to justify himself before God, or where to look for rest; and, instead of attempting to derive consolation from the purity of his intentions, or the sincerity of his obedience, or the regularity of his outward observances, feels too well assured of the inefficiency and unprofitableness of them all, and is content, with the repentant Publican, to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner?"

To every such individual we would say, "Thou art the man." You are laboring under a weight, which all the devices of all the wis-

dom of men never have been able to remove: you are heavy laden with a burden, from which the power of ten thousand worlds cannot relieve you. You, then, are one to whom our Lord expressly speaks, when he says, in what our Church rightly denominates "those comfortable words," "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." To you are the offers of this salvation sent, and may the Holy Spirit of God convey them this day in all the riches of their abundant blessedness to your soul! The invitation is, as if the Lord of heaven and earth should look down from the throne of his glory, and reading your inmost heart, seeing all its misery and all its woe, seeing that you grieve not merely for the dreaded punishment of your sins, but for the sense of your ingratitude and disobedience to your best of benefactors, should say to you, I know all that you have been, all that you now are, all that you need and wish to be; I have seen every open sin which you have committed; I was present at every secret act which you thought no eye had ever glanced upon; I have heard every unholy word, and, more than this,

have witnessed every thought of guilt, every imagination of impurity, every wish of sin which has ever been kindled by a corrupt heart within your bosom: but only "Come unto me," deeply, truly, earnestly repenting of them, and there is pardon for them all. Come to that blood of sprinkling which I have so freely shed, and wash, and be clean. You need a better righteousness than your own, and this is the name whereby I am called, "The Lord your Righteousness." You desire "that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," and I am made unto my people "sanctification." You want "grace to help in every time of need," and out of my fulness do they all receive, and grace for grace. You require an assurance that these promises shall not fail you, and all the promises of God in me are yea, and in me amen, to the glory of God, and all are yours, for you are mine, and I am God's. Are you still fearful lest I should one day change, and all that you are now invited to receive, to live upon, to build upon, should change with me; I am "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and whom I love, I love unto the end, for my

people shall "never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Come unto me, and you shall find rest for your souls.

But, perhaps, you are still disposed to doubt; you cannot feel, as you know you ought, that this invitation is for you, for no one sinner upon earth more than for you. Be assured, that this is wronging your best, your dearest friend; but He will take compassion upon you even here; He will give the courage, which he expects; He will bestow the faith, which he requires. Say from your heart, if you can truly say so, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief," and He will do this even for you; He will not only, as he has this day done, call you to himself, but He will do more, He will draw you to himself; He will so influence your heart, by the sweet attractions of his grace, that you shall feel you cannot stay away from your Redeemer; and yet, that you are not forced contrary to your will; that there is nothing coercive, but that, being "willing in the day of his power," Psalm cx, 3, you come, and rejoice to come, nay, could not but come, to the Lord of all your mercies, even though, as of old, the fires of mar-

tyrdom itself, lay between you, and the God of your salvation.

We proceed, from urging the invitation, to consider the nature of the promise so closely connected with it in the text, "I will give you rest." The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Being who makes this gratifying offer; Satan, also, well knowing the tendency of the human mind, bids equally high for your allegiance and your hearts; he commands pleasures, profits, honors, all, to promise you the same blessing; but mark how they perform their promise; what is the nature of the rest they bestow upon the sin-awakened soul? Do you remember the rest which Sisera found when he ventured to repose himself, after the battle and the flight, in the tent of Jael? Do you recollect how "she brought him forth butter in a lordly dish," Judges v, 26, and covered him with a mantle, and when he was weary and fast asleep, "put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer," and "smote the nail into his temples," that he died? Such, brethren, is the rest which sinful pleasures offer you: short, treacherous, deadly, they teach you to forget your misery, to suppress the rising conflict in your

breast, to lull to sleep the pangs of conscience, but if you listen to the delusive invitations, if you follow them into the tents of ungodliness, you sleep to wake no more. Who can number the souls now banished from the sight of God, who have been thus beguiled into perdition? Far different from such a rest as this, is the object of the invitation of our text.

To you, whose lives are made up of labors and weariness, daily toiling for your daily bread, how refreshing are these Sabbath hours of quiet and repose. To those who have undergone the toils of a long and fatiguing journey, how sweet is the approach of home. Surely, then, to him who knows the burden of a wounded conscience, the torment of unforgiven sin, there can be no gift in the treasury of heaven so sweet, so comforting, as rest. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;" "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," were among the latest blessings bestowed by the departing Saviour upon his sorrowing disciples: a peace which flows, not merely from the conviction of his power to forgive sin, but from the sense that he has done so; that being justified freely by his blood, every sin is washed

away, every transgression is already pardoned, blotted for ever from the book of his remembrance, and to appear no more against us. Well may such a consciousness, when grounded on scriptural authority, work in us that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," that temporary rest on earth, most blessed foretaste of an everlasting rest in heaven. That will be the consummation of the promise; we have now only a single beam of light to cheer us on our way, then will be the full shining of the Sun of Righteousness. "There remaineth, therefore," says the Apostle, "a rest for the people of God." Earth cannot yield it you, for it does not possess it; its sun has never yet, in all his unwearied journeys, shone upon that region where lasting peace is found. There is not that spot upon the wide world's surface, on which you can set your foot with any hope of its stability, at the dreadful day when all shall slide from beneath your tread, except it be upon the rock of your salvation, and "that rock is Christ." There is not even now, whatever be your station and its advantages, whatever be your present domestic enjoyments, or your anticipation of approaching happiness, however

bright, however well founded those hopes may be, believe me, there is not even now one resting place of which you can with certainty declare, Here will I enjoy days and years of tranquillity and repose; here will I find rest during the remainder of my pilgrimage, except it be, with the beloved Apostle, upon the bosom of your Saviour and your God. Hear then, again, my Christian brethren, his own most gracious, most affectionate invitation, and may His Holy Spirit write it upon the tablets of your hearts, enabling you to accept it, and to bring forth daily, more and more, the blessed and certain fruits which flow from it: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

SERMON II.

FORGIVENESS A PRESENT MERCY.

ISAIAH XLIV, 22.

“I HAVE BLOTTED OUT, AS A THICK CLOUD, THY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND, AS A CLOUD, THY SINS: RETURN UNTO ME; FOR I HAVE REDEEMED THEE.”

No subject can be of greater importance to the babe in Christ, the young man in Christ, the father in Christ, than that which these words illustrate, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins;” more especially when viewed in the remarkable connection in which they stand to those that follow them, “return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” May God grant, that our consideration of them be not without a blessing upon any soul by whom they are this day heard!

We shall first consider the beautiful propriety

of the Prophet's simile, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." The comparison is remarkable, but peculiarly just. Our sins may well be likened unto clouds, as to their number. Who can count the clouds which chase each other across the winter sky? And has not one of the holiest men who ever lived, left upon record the humiliating confession, that his sins were not less numerous? "They are more in number, than the hairs of my head." Psalm xl, 15. Then as to their nature: are not the clouds all exhalations from the land and sea, the earthly portion of the universe; and are not our sins, in like manner, the produce of our corrupt and earthly nature; do they not all ascend out of the soil of the natural heart, in which every transgression and every sin has its foul and polluted origin? Then, again, as to their effects: do not the clouds hang between us and the sun, and shut out from us the clear and cheering light, and the bright blue sky; and when they greatly thicken, do they not augur storms and tempests? and are not our sins, as we have already seen, and as God has expressly declared, the wall which separates between us and our God, and

hides, as it were, his face from us; and are they not as sure a token of his coming wrath, and of the vengeance from his judgment-seat, as ever the darkest cloud that warned us of the approaching thunder-storm?

Still further, as to their situation: are not the clouds hung out in mid heaven, high above our heads; and although it appears the simplest thing in nature to dissolve and dissipate them, for oftentimes while we look, the rays of the sun are melting them away, so that the figure which we have just delighted to trace in them, is, even while we gaze, changed, and loosened, and scattered, and then gone for ever; yet are they so placed, that weak and transient as they are, not all the united efforts of all the men that ever dwelt upon the wide world's surface, could avail to blot one cloud out of existence. So is it with our sins; from the instant they are committed, from the very moment that the cloud is formed, it hangs out far beyond our reach; no mortal hand can ever touch that sin, no mortal power avail to pardon it. For take it even at its lowest estimate, it may be what we term some trifling offence, it matters not, man cannot pardon it; man may avenge his broken law, he

may punish the sin, but he cannot pardon it. He may indeed pardon the crime, for that is the portion of the sin which affects himself, but he can never pardon the sin: he can never, with all the tenderness, and compassion, and forgiving love, that the most affectionate of human hearts is capable of containing, he can never dissipate the smallest cloud that hangs between us and our Maker, so that he must let that alone for ever, for there is but one Being in the universe who has ever said, who can ever say, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own name's sake, and will not remember thy sins."

We see, then, with what peculiar propriety the Prophet has adopted the simile of the text. But we must follow up his idea still further, as the best and clearest method of distinctly setting before you the great doctrine which it contains.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." The idea of blotting out a cloud, seems to be an allusion to that dissolving of these vapors which is continually taking place in the atmosphere, when the heat of the summer sun draws up the moisture of the cloud, and renders it completely

invisible. How accurately, and how instructively, does this portray the constant operation of the Divine grace with regard to the sins of every believing penitent. The Sun of Righteousness arises upon them "with healing in its wings," bringing pardon and peace to the soul; a full and free forgiveness is at once, and for ever, made our own; the sin is as completely absorbed, if we may so say, by the Sun of Righteousness, as the clouds, and fogs, and mists of earth are by the sun of nature. It is as impossible to find the former, to bring it forth again to judgment, as it would be to reconstruct the clouds, with all their varied shapes, and hues, and tints, which we looked upon last summer, and which never outlived the day we gazed upon them.

Blessed consideration, for the souls of God's believing and pardoned people. Doubly blessed for you, who having long, and deeply, and penitently felt the burden and the weight of sin, have also felt the beams of the Sun of Righteousness burst forth and shine upon it with all their splendor; and while you looked, and, it may be, wept to look upon so foul a thing, so fearful an offence against the God of all your

mercies, it was for ever hidden from your eyes, no more to be seen, no more to be remembered, except with gratitude for its entire and complete removal, while a voice was heard, which spake even to your soul, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins."

Beloved brethren, learn then but one last lesson of comfort, and of peace, from the Prophet's simile. Never cast a glance at that stupendous vault, which the mighty Maker of the universe has hung above us and around us; never, while as you behold the clouds passing rapidly across it, think these are fit emblems of my many, my daily, my dark, and desperate sins; without at the same time thinking, If the clouds portray my sins, thanks be to God, the blue vault of heaven, through which they sail, portrays his mercy, even the mercy of Him who pardons them, immeasurable in height, and length, and depth, and breadth, all infinite in love. Why should I then despond?—why should I fear?—why should I for a moment doubt? As easy, that one vast cloud should shroud both hemispheres, should occupy the universe, should shut out for ever and for ever,

sun, moon, and stars, and all the glories of the created heaven, as that my sins, however great, however numerous, should surpass in magnitude God's pardoning love, God's abounding grace, God's infinite forgiveness, treasured up for me in Christ Jesus, my adorable Redeemer.

We mentioned in the early part of this discourse, that one great object in bringing forward the passage upon which we have been commenting, was for the sake of illustrating its remarkable connection with the words which follow.

We say remarkable, because it would so appear, to those who are not in the habit of searching the Word of God, and because, in truth, it must even be remarkable to those who are best acquainted with the depravity of man.

The text is, as you have seen, an invitation to backsliding Israel to return unto the Lord. Now, the manner in which the generality even of those who are not absolutely ignorant of God's dealing with his fallen and rebellious creatures, would have expected this invitation to have been made, or, at least the order of it, would be the very reverse of that which God has adopted. You would, perhaps, have ex-

pected the Almighty to have said, Return unto me, love me, serve me, prove yourselves to be indeed, in heart and in life, as well as in name and in profession, my people, and I will blot out your transgressions and your sins. Instead of this—and I pray you to remark the important distinction—the Almighty, who sees the heart, and had no doubt witnessed there, even in the hearts of his people, that sorrow, that contrition, and deep and earnest penitence, which are his own blessed work, begins by telling his backsliding people, I have pardoned, I have forgiven, I have utterly blotted out; now therefore, “return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.”

When will men be content to learn their theology from God’s own lips, instead of applying first to human systems, and then endeavoring to receive God’s Word just so long, and just so far, as it agrees with those systems; and the moment they find the two to be at variance, with the most unexampled audacity and absurdity, adhering closely to the system of man’s invention, and explaining away the word of God’s delivery? But, brethren, “we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accom-

pany salvation, though we thus speak." All we then ask of those among you, who have not yet found the way of pardon, and peace, and holiness, is to dwell prayerfully and thoughtfully for a few moments upon the words before us. Hear them, as addressed to you individually, for not one word did your Heavenly Father ever address to backsliding Israel, which he does not address as affectionately and as earnestly to the backsliding Christian. Hear him, then, saying, Why do you hesitate to return to me, the God of all your mercies? is it because you have sinned against me, sinned often, sinned grievously, sinned wilfully? Is this the cloud which hangs between us, is this the wall that separates us? Is this the cause for which you mourn, and do you oftentimes feel that thought of sin so hateful to you, that you loathe and abhor yourself for its committal? Know, then, that this wall is broken down, this cloud is dispelled, this cause for ever taken away; I have forgiven every act of rebellion, every sin of omission and of commission of which you ever have been guilty, all are cleansed in the blood of the great Sacrifice, and shall never trouble or molest you more; for I

have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgression, and, as a cloud, your sin; and now "return unto me."

Can you stand out, brethren, against such an invitation? Can you refuse such terms? Some among you will, perhaps, reply, If I knew that I were pardoned, if I were conscious that my sins were forgiven, I would this instant close with the offers of my God, and begin such a life of holy devotedness to him as earth has seldom witnessed; but this is a thing to be known not here, but hereafter; this is a privilege to be enjoyed not now, but in heaven. We reply, What can convince you of the contrary, if such declarations as you have heard are unable? Who can satisfy you upon this point, if God himself cannot? Are you still in uncertainty and doubt? What more do you desire? Would it tend to the establishment of your mind upon this subject if you could have examples of persons actually forgiven while here below? Life is replete with such examples; the Bible is full of them. Could we call forth the living testimonies to this blessed truth, we might indeed adopt the language of the Apostle, and point you to the "great cloud of witnesses" by which

we are encompassed; but though this is forbidden us, the page of Scripture is before us, and who can desire a stronger body of evidence than it contains?

Look only at David, the man after God's own heart, and yet a heinous sinner; no sooner had he felt and expressed contrition, than the very same prophet, who was commissioned to convict him of his sin, was in that self-same hour commanded to assure him of his forgiveness—"the Lord hath put away thy sin." Look, again, at Isaiah; no sooner had he confessed, in the bitterness of his soul, "I am a man of unclean lips," than the seraphim was ordered to say to him, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Turn, again, to Hezekiah; no sooner had he declared that he mourned for his sins, even "as a dove, that his eyes failed with looking upward," than he was enabled to reply, "Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." While, so far is this from forming a peculiar feature in the old dispensation, and confined to prophets and kings, that it meets us at every portion of the new, and forms the burden of

most of those messages of compassion and love, with which the Lord Jesus Christ greeted his sinning and suffering people, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven." Again, in the Epistles, the same great truth is written, as with a sunbeam, for we find St. Paul, not hesitating to say to the whole Ephesian Church, to every one who was a sincere believer, "God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." And St. John, to prove to us, that this high privilege was not reserved for "the young men" and "fathers in Christ," but was equally the blessed prerogative of the weakest believer, says at once, to the least child in the family of Christ, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you, for His name's sake."

We derive, then, from all this accumulated evidence, a weighty corroboration of the great truth so directly deducible from the text, that the pardon of sin, instead of taking place at the great day of account, takes place during the present life, that it is God's work on earth, and not in heaven. The forgiveness of all that is past, of every sin that you have mourned and forsaken, and brought to the blood of sprinkling, is even here most freely and irrevocably made

your own; from the hour of this most merciful pardon, you start afresh in your journey of life, having, like the fabled pilgrim, dropt your burden at the foot of the cross; then you are really enabled to return to Him who has “redeemed you and all mankind,” and feeling that grateful love which none but pardoned sinners can ever feel, you begin “to love God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength,” and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. To a heart thus filled with love, no commandment can be grievous: love and obedience, therefore, go hand in hand, and you, the happy possessor of them both, go on your way believing, pardoned, loving, obeying, and rejoicing.

To every soul, then, among you, this day, who has never yet sought and found God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus—to every soul, who, having once found him, has backslidden from him, and is now suffering deeply from the hidings of God’s countenance—to each and all of both these classes, who are deeply penitent for sin, anxiously desiring, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, its full and entire remission; and to each and all of every class here present, feel-

ing and desiring thus, we address the words of God himself, "I have blotted out thy transgressions, and thy sins;" no transgression too small, no sin too large, for thou art cleansed in the blood, and pardoned by the love, of an infinite Redeemer, and now "return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

The way is clear for you to God's throne of Grace, and it shall be so for you, persevering in the course upon which you have entered, to his throne of Glory. Now, therefore, as the Apostle says, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." "We beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," this day to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and may God grant that there be not one heart among us, which shall not make the prayer of repentant Israel its own: "Turn thou us, good Lord, and so shall we be turned;" and may each receive, as each unquestionably will receive, if this prayer flow from a broken, and a contrite,

and a believing heart, an answer of peace unto his soul.

Now “unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

SERMON III.

SINS OF BELIEVERS ARE PRESUMPTUOUS SINS.

PSALM XIX, 13. (Part.)

“KEEP BACK THY SERVANT ALSO FROM PRESUMPTUOUS SINS.”

THERE is probably not an individual here present before God this day, who would not acknowledge himself to be a sinner. Not an individual who does not know that the Word of God has said, “There is no man that liveth, and sinneth not.” That “if we say, We have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Yet, were we to take each individual separately, upon his own acknowledgment, and say to him, You have confessed yourself to be a sinner, you cannot possibly doubt it, your sins are most grievous, most heinous, most degrading; how undeniable, how certain is it, that, like the men in the parable, with one con-

sent, you would “begin to make excuse;” all would acknowledge themselves sinners, but, probably, scarcely any but would endeavor to extenuate every sin. It is by this general admission of sinfulness, and this particular ignorance of sin, that Satan often quiets the mind, satisfying us that our view of our own state is perfectly scriptural, because we do not attempt to deny our guilt, and at the same time, by closing our eyes to any, and to every individual instance of it, he succeeds in keeping us entirely free from all real and heart-felt contrition, and therefore—which is indeed his grand object and aim—in keeping us from the Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only remedy.

The object of the present discourse, then, shall be to endeavor, by God’s grace, not to convince you that you are sinners—this we are fully justified in taking for granted, as you have all professed to join this day in the petition—“Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners”—but to show you that there are many, very many, who in God’s sight are presumptuous sinners, and yet are, perhaps, so perfectly satisfied with their spiritual state, so utterly unaware of their delinquencies, that they would

indignantly repel the charge, if brought against them, believing it to have originated in fanaticism or uncharitableness, and to be entirely groundless.

One great object of Christian preaching must always be, that, as the Apostle expresses it, "Every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." May the Spirit of God bless the observations that shall be made, to the furtherance of an end so unpalatable to the natural heart, and yet so essential to the well-doing of our souls, and the glory of the Saviour. And may this great end be obtained, not merely as regards the hitherto unawakened and indifferent, but even the people of God, to whom, as we shall afterwards show, the words of the text, in a peculiar manner, appear to apply.

First, then, and for the purpose of correcting a very common misapprehension of the subject, let us consider the nature of those sins to which David has here applied the appellation of presumptuous sins. The words of the context are, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant, also, from presumptuous sins; let them not have

dominion over me.” Presumptuous sins, therefore, are clearly put in opposition to secret sins. By the inquiry, “Who can understand his errors?” we apprehend the secret sins to mean, not merely those that are hidden from our fellow-men, but those that are scarcely known or understood even by ourselves. For it seems, especially with reference to those secret sins, that David asks, “Who can understand them?” who can know and number them? By presumptuous sins, therefore, will be implied, all those sins which are not thus secret, but are well known to be sins, at the time of their committal. They will, therefore, no doubt, include, but they certainly will not be limited, by those open and gross criminalities, which are chiefly confined to the unrenewed and impenitent, and which all men range under the title of presumptuous transgressions—murder, adultery, theft, fornication, Sabbath-breaking, profaneness, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of which, says the Apostle, “I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

We say, that though they include, they will by no means be limited to these flagrant and

gross enormities, and we proceed to show the nature of those sins, which while they are too often found to disgrace the Christian calling, even of God's own people, must, however seldom they are so contemplated, we fear, be reckoned among presumptuous sins now, as they will most certainly, if unrepented of, unforsaken, and therefore unforgiven, be visited as presumptuous sins hereafter.

The first of these, to which we shall call your attention, as among the most frequent and the most destructive, is this:—

I. To sin against an enlightened conscience.

In the natural man, the conscience, although sufficient guide to him on many and great occasions as to his conduct towards his fellow-men, is a most inadequate counsellor as to his duty towards God; because, like every other faculty of the human mind, it has most grievously suffered by the effects of the fall of our first parents. In the renewed or spiritual man, as the Bible denominates the Christian, the conscience has regained its powers, and reassumed its office, and, being instructed by the Spirit of God, speaks as the representative of God himself within the soul. The consequence is, that it is

scarcely possible for the sins of a child of God to be sins of ignorance, and this greatly enhances their turpitude, and at once makes them sins of presumption.

To sin, therefore, against the conviction of an enlightened conscience, is certainly, presumptuous; but more than this, it is, unquestionably, one of the worst features of a presumptuous sin. We have a remarkable instance of this in the example of Pilate, in whose history we are told, that "he knew that for envy they had delivered Jesus;" and again, that he distinctly said, "I find no fault in this man." His condemnation of our Lord after this confession, was, perhaps, as distinct a proof of even a natural man sinning against the light of conscience, against the most entire conviction, and, therefore, also as certain a proof of the most open and presumptuous rebellion against God, as any to be met with in Scripture history.

Now let us apply this test of that which constitutes presumptuous sin, to ourselves, and how many are there among us, who have perhaps scarcely felt themselves to be in any degree sinners before God, who must return from the investigation, if it be conducted only with com-

mon honesty, with the heartfelt assurance, that they are not only sinners, but open sinners, flagrant sinners, presumptuous sinners; sinners whom nothing but the blood of Christ can ever cleanse, and the infinite love of God in Christ Jesus can ever pardon. Take the events of a single day, or of the week that has just passed over us, and examine, with even the slightest degree of carefulness and sincerity, so far as you can recollect them, your thoughts, words, and actions. Then answer to yourself and to God, in how many cases you have sinned against the convictions and remonstrances of an enlightened conscience. Examine yourself, first of all, with regard to duties, only bearing in mind that God himself has said, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." St. James iv, 17. In how many cases, then, have you sinned wilfully, sinned against conviction, sinned presumptuously, simply by "knowing to do good and doing it not?" Do you live, for instance, in the partial neglect of private prayer, self-examination, reading the Word of God, family prayer? Have you no doubt in your conscience as to the propriety of your course? Have you never heard it clearly demonstrated

from the Word of God that these things are duties? Do you attempt to deny that they are duties?—No! You are unable; you may profess that you are not convinced; but there is one within who contradicts you to your face, who charges home the unblushing falsehood upon your heart, and who says, Profess what you please, assert what you choose, but I shall one day declare before assembled worlds that it was false; that at the very time you neglected these duties, you “knew to do good, and did it not;” I was convinced that they were duties, and perpetually urged them upon you until you had almost silenced my cry, and stifled my voice. This is the language of your conscience. Again, we will suppose—and, as we are speaking to the professing people of God, we trust the supposition is not only probable, but true—that you do not live in any gross or outward transgressions; your situation, your character, your fears, and, above all, the restraining influence of God’s grace, prevent you; but are the sins of the mind equally avoided—self-righteousness, hypocrisy, worldliness, ambition, covetousness, pride of birth, of station, of intellectual superiority, vanity—are the lusts and devices of

the heart as effectually shunned, as the more visible lusts of the flesh? Or do you hope that these, at least, will never be ranged among presumptuous sins? then bring them to the test we have proposed. What is the verdict which a spiritually enlightened conscience passes on those sins at the moment of their transgression, or as soon as time is given you to reflect? Is there a single instance in which it has not warned, and counselled, and threatened you?—No: again you are compelled to confess that you never cherished one of the unnumbered sins of the mind, or one unclean or unholy desire, one unkind or uncharitable temper, one unsanctified imagination, one of the untold sins of the heart, that your conscience did not do its duty by remonstrating, expostulating and warning; and therefore that you never yielded to any one of these temptations, without deserving to be classed among presumptuous sinners, without being guilty of presumptuous sins.

Nor are these delinquencies confined to sinning against an enlightened conscience, there are still other considerations which change what the world would term little sins, or common sins, into presumptuous sins, in the case of you

to whom I am speaking. Among these, perhaps, may be especially enumerated,

II. The sinning after great afflictions, or great mercies.

1. After great afflictions. It is urged in the book of Chronicles, as one of the heaviest charges ever brought by God against the King of Israel, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord, this is that King Ahaz," with an air of scorn seldom to be met with in the inspired writers. To continue to wander from God, even when he is smiting us, when health is decaying, when property is departing, when friends are gone; to feel these trials as natural sorrows, but to reap no spiritual benefit from them; to go into the furnace of God's wrath, not like the metal to be softened and purified, until it is so bright as to reflect the image of the refiner, but like the clay which comes forth out of the furnace more hard and more dull, and less pliable than it went in, this is, indeed, a sin of sins, and is a presumptuous sin.

As after great afflictions, so also

2. After great mercies.

In cases such as these, God has, perhaps, in

his own expressive language, made you "hear the rod and Who hath appointed it." Micah vi, 9. You have been laid upon a bed of sickness, and days and weeks have seen you looking, but in vain, for returning health. Then you felt sin to be bitter: then you read your sin in your punishment. How many were the resolutions, how solemn were the vows, with which you voluntarily offered to bind yourself to God, to devote yourself more closely to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be more than ever earnest, devoted, consistent in every after-business of life, if you were once again restored to health and happiness. Or further, while you watched, in trembling anxiety, at the bed-side of some dear friend, or some beloved child, when the chastenings of God were poured forth upon you, you thought nothing too dear, even to the right hand, or the right eye, to be sacrificed at God's bidding, if this cup might pass from you. And now these trials have passed away, and God did not, in your hour of need, forget to be gracious, and prayers were heard, and mercies given, and promises accepted. But was there nothing more than this? Do you think that he

who recorded your prayers forgot to register your resolutions? Do you think that when God showered down his mercies, he obliterated your vows?—No: be assured that the book of God's remembrance is a large volume, there is room for all the records of his creatures; not a prayer, not a vow, not a promise, entered there, shall be forgotten; the stream of time for ever rolling over it, cannot efface a single syllable. All your momentary expressions of gratitude are there, as well as all your forgetfulness, and all your sins; and the consequence is, that out of your own mouth shall you be judged; that you shall see in that book, that you have added an emphasis to your sins which nothing else could have done—that underneath every sin which you have committed, you have yourself drawn the deep, dark line of a cold, and selfish, and heartless ingratitude, which blood, and only blood, even the blood of Jesus, can efface.

The catalogue of presumptuous sins might, without any difficulty, be greatly increased; but we would rather suggest these few instances, that are among the most obvious, and leave you to exercise your own reflection and self-

examination; to ascertain how many more delinquencies there are of the same family, with which you are too closely acquainted.

I have, as you will have observed, chiefly addressed myself to the people of God, and my reason is this, that it is obvious of such only the text is speaking. However improbable we might have thought it, had we conceived presumptuous sins to refer only to gross sins, it is sufficiently clear, both from the person who offered the petition and the words of the petition itself, that God's people are the people alluded to. The prayer is a prayer of David, and the tenor of it is, "Keep back THY SERVANT."

Yes, brethren, none more need to be kept back, even from presumptuous sin, than God's servants; even you who have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever;" 1 St. Peter i, 23; even you of whom St. John declares, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God;" 1 St. John iii, 9; whose habit of mind, therefore, is essentially opposed to sin; even you need keeping back, daily, hourly, constantly

keeping back, by the restraining hand of God's grace, from the worst and most presumptuous sins. Nothing, be assured, but daily grace can keep even the most advanced of God's people in any thing approaching to daily holiness; and nothing is more likely to deter you from seeking this daily grace, than thinking lightly, which is too much the case of some religionists of the present day, thinking lightly of the sins of God's people.

However man may estimate them, it is impossible for any, who draw their opinions directly from the Word of God, not to perceive, as we have now demonstrated, that the sins of God's people are really the "presumptuous sins," and, as we shall proceed shortly to show, that God is even far more provoked by the sins of his people, than by the sins of the world. The sins of the world anger God, the sins of his people grieve him. There are aggravations in them, of which the worst sins of worldly men, are entirely innocent.

I. For instance, you never commit a sin, however small, that you do not resist the restraining principle of grace within the renewed heart, which the unconverted cannot feel. You

never commit a sin, that you do not, if we may so say, break through the boundary of “mercies countless as the sand,” with which God has environed you, and which form a safeguard that the unconverted man possesses not; how much more violent, then, must be the sin which overleaps it! how much stronger the passions which uproot and destroy that boundary! Why do we all feel that Peter’s denial was a sin far more grievous in the sight of God than Pilate’s condemnation of our Lord?—because Pilate had never been chosen from among the children of men to be one of the twelve followers of the Saviour; because Pilate had never stood with him on the mount of transfiguration and seen his glory; because Pilate had never sat with him at the same table and witnessed his love. I need not assist you further in drawing the parallel, between your transgressions and those of an ungodly world.

II. Again, your sins are worse than others, because you sin against your adoption into God’s family. Other men sin against a command; you do more—you sin against a privilege. We take it ill when a servant deceives us, but what do we feel when the delinquent is

a child, a child whom we love, a child for whom we have done, and are even now doing much, and have pledged ourselves to do more?

III. Your sins are worse than others, because they invariably bring a greater reproach upon religion than the sins of the openly ungodly. Thus said the Prophet to David, after his great and heinous sin, "Because, by this deed, thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." 2 Sam. xii, 14. This peculiar feature of the sin was selected by God above all others as the reason why, although pardoned, it should not remain, in this world, unpunished.

What child of God, then, will refuse to unite in the supplication of the text, "Keep back **THY SERVANT** from presumptuous sins?"

Lastly, I need not remind you that, as exertion without prayer, is itself among the very sins of which we are speaking, so prayer without exertion, is the veriest mockery ever offered to God.

Watch, then, over your passions, watch over your temptations, but, above all, watch over your thoughts. All sins commence in the

thoughts; the most presumptuous sin ever committed, commenced in a small and secret thought; the woman thought that "the tree was good for food, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." There is no sin which may not, by the strength of Christ, be successfully resisted in the narrow channel of the thoughts; but there are many, which when they have passed that Rubicon, become invincible; so St. James, "When lust hath conceived (i. e. in the thoughts), it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." St. James i, 15. It is, then, in the egg that you must crush the viper, before he has started into life and armed him with his sting. And let the habit of daily watchfulness be accompanied by the daily prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;" "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." Depend upon no former conquests over sin, however decisive; rely upon no present grace, however powerful; but as each new temptation arises, as each fresh sin presents itself, go again and again to the throne of mercy, draw near again and again to the Saviour who has undertaken for you; plead his promises, remind him of his covenant, ask all that

you need, as earnestly, and as completely in the spirit of child-like dependence, and child-like helplessness, as you did in the first hours of your conversion to God. The infant is safe only in the nurse's arms; throughout the longest course of the most advanced Christian, he is, as regards himself, but an infant in strength, an infant in wisdom, an infant in his utter helplessness, and only secure from falling into the most hateful and presumptuous of sins, so long as he is held up in the arms of Christ, and of his free and sovereign grace. "I can do all things," saith St. Paul, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." Phil. iv, 13.

As it is, then, by being complete in Christ, that you are alone looking for your justification before God, so must it be by the daily and hourly aids of his good Spirit, sought continually from him, given continually by him, and employed on your part continually for him, that you must alone look for your sanctification, that you can alone be kept back from presumptuous sins, that you can alone be made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

SERMON IV.

THE CHRISTIAN NOT YET ARRIVED AT
HIS JOURNEY'S END.

DEUT. XII, 9.

“FOR YE ARE NOT AS YET COME TO THE REST AND TO THE INHERITANCE, WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD GIVETH YOU.”

IN the history of the Israelites, as every attentive reader of God's Word is aware, the sojourn in the wilderness represented, typically, the Christian's pilgrimage; and the promised land of Canaan, the Christian's home. How much additional interest the knowledge of this fact imparts to the mind of the believer, in every perusal of this portion of the Word of God, we need not say. As a proof of it, all will agree, that there is scarcely a book in the Bible, which, when opened, as it were, with this key, affords a higher gratification to the people of God, or is more rich in encourage-

ments, warnings, and consolations to them, than the book of Deuteronomy.

Let us then, take the passage before us, and passing over its primary intention as sufficiently obvious, let us consider it in its typical and accommodated sense, and cherish the lessons which it may please the Spirit of God to enable us to deduce from it, not as conveying any new or striking illustration of Scripture, but simply to warm our affections and elevate our hearts.

That we may not, in this endeavor, be supposed to strain the literal meaning of Holy Writ, it may perhaps be necessary to remind you that both the terms in the text, the "rest" and the "inheritance," are distinctly applied, in other portions of the Word of God, to the kingdom of heaven. The first, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in that well-known passage, "There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God;" Ch. iv; and the second, in the beautiful description of St. Peter, "An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." 1 St. Peter i, 4.

There is a peculiar propriety in these terms as applied to the heavenly Canaan, which nothing but the experimental knowledge of the

Christian can fully appreciate. There is, if we may so say, a practical beauty in the first, and a doctrinal beauty in the second, which the Christian cannot overlook.

First, observe the doctrinal propriety of the expression, "inheritance," as applied to the heavenly Canaan.

How marked is the distinction between an inheritance and a payment, or an inheritance and a reward. A payment is bestowed for works done, for services received; a reward is bestowed as a recompense for good performed, for exploits achieved. Neither of these, therefore, could be awarded until these works, or services, or exploits had been fulfilled. Again, each of these argues merit in the recipient, as well as liberality or kindness in the bestower. Now an inheritance presupposes neither works performed, nor merit in the receiver. An inheritance comes simply by birth; it is that possession which a man is heir to. The eldest son, for instance, is an heir the instant he is born; at the first moment he enters life, he enters also upon the right to the estate which he inherits. The analogy holds good in a peculiar manner, with regard to the heavenly kingdom. It is

strictly an inheritance entailed upon every child of God, every heir to the promises, as soon as he is spiritually born of God; for, says the revealed Word, "If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

We see, then, the doctrinal propriety with which heaven is described to us as the "*inheritance*" of God's people; now let us for a moment contemplate the practical propriety of its description as their "*rest*."

To the man immersed in business or pleasure, whose heart is so deeply engaged in his occupation, that let him be removed from it even for a single day, and no enjoyment will compensate for the privation, there is indeed nothing attractive in the anticipation of a world of "*rest*." Again, to you, my poorer brethren, who labor for the bread which perisheth, and yet have no taste, no desire for that which endureth unto everlasting life, it is vain to talk of a "*rest*" for which you neither long nor pray. To all, in fact, whatever be their station or their rank, who are engaged in seeking their peace, their enjoyment here below, who know not the happiness of serving Him, "whose service is perfect freedom," it would be a hopeless and an unpro-

fitable task to speak of a "rest" which to them would be the worst of weariness, or of an "inheritance" which to them would be the most painful of privations. No! until we are indeed renewed by the Spirit of God, until we have put off the old man, which is corrupt, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, until we are at least earnestly seeking, and anxiously striving for, a real and vital appropriation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all his benefits, we cannot feel an interest in such a subject.

Thanks be to God, however, there are at all times, many to whom the very sound of rest is unspeakably comforting. The godly poor, for instance, whose days are devoted to toil, whose lot it is to eat "the bread of carefulness," whose every hour brings with it its necessary and praiseworthy occupations, how gladly do they behold the lengthened shadows of evening; how cheerful to them is the dawn of the Sabbath morning! And why is this? because each of these are signals of repose; the one brings on the comfortable sleep of night, the other the quiet rest and calm enjoyment of this hallowed day. How exactly, then, does such a heaven,

as the Word of God describes, meet their necessities and their desires—"That rest which remaineth for the people of God." To know that they are daily preparing for, and daily drawing nearer to a state of existence, upon which the curse that first inflicted labor has never fallen, to know that God has condescended to reveal an attribute of that heavenly kingdom which peculiarly endears it even to them, to be assured that yet a little more of toil, a little more of labor, and this probation-state shall finish, and the Saviour, whom they are now delighting to serve, shall come again and receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also.

And again, the godly men of business, engaged, as they are in duty bound to be, in laboring mentally, while those to whom we have just referred, are laboring corporally, for the bread which perisheth—has the promise of rest no charms for them? Is it no delight to them to think that there is a state preparing, where they shall, without limit and without end, enjoy those spiritual pleasures of which they must now content themselves with a hasty draught, and then away again? We believe that many

of this large and important class are fully sensible of all the blessedness which that short word includes, and that when they hear of "rest," they long for the day when the noise of this busy world shall be heard no more, when the office and the counting-house shall be for ever closed, and the crowded resort of men, and the all-engrossing subjects of this world's occupations shall be silenced, and they shall have entered into that rest, from which they shall go no more out for ever.

But is there not still a third class to whom also the description of the text may bring a word of consolation, when it presents to them the Christian's heaven as a place of rest? The godly rich, those members of the higher classes in society, to whom pleasure is a toil, and amusement an occupation, do they never sigh for rest? a rest more substantial, a calm more perfect, than the happiest lot on earth can ever bring. Yes, we doubt not, that those among them, and there are many such, whom circumstances have placed where, perhaps, their hearts would have never placed them, amidst the labors of gaiety, and the disappointments of gratification, and the weariness and emptiness of

what is miscalled a life of pleasure, even these often feel, with the Psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest."

There is, then, one common ground upon which all the three classes to whom I have alluded, separate and distinct as they are in their stations, feelings, and occupations, meet in perfect harmony, and in complete equality, namely, in hailing the rest of which we speak, as a rest from toil or labor, and still more than this, from the struggles and conflicts of sin. This is, unquestionably, the feature which most endears the rest of heaven to the true believer, be his station what it may. The highest and lowest among ourselves can here completely sympathise; the evil heart of unbelief is common to us all; the up-risings of pride, and of vanity, of selfishness, of covetousness, however refined and subtle may be their workings in the one, and however coarse and disgusting in the other, are still common to us all, differing in nothing to the eye of God, and differing as little, in the dangers and pains of the conflict, to ourselves. We can then all, and if we are the children of God we shall, most highly appreciate this quali-

fication of our promised home. Who can describe the blessedness of a state in which these daily, hourly, ceaseless struggles shall be unknown? Here, no sooner is one temptation vanquished, than another presents itself; no sooner is one evil device driven out of the heart, than there appears to be almost a conflict among those that remain, for its vacant place; nay, even the very victory itself over some besetting sin, too often brings with it defeat and disgrace, by inducing us to disregard the next encounter. How indescribably comforting then to look forward to a time when the last battle shall have been fought, and to a place where toils and conflicts, such as these, are utterly unknown. Perhaps of all the attributes of heaven, this single one of rest, is the only one which could, with our present limited faculties, thus have met the wants and satisfied the longings of all classes, from the highest to the lowest, and of all and each of the persons in those classes. How merciful is our Heavenly Father, thus to present before the eyes of every child in his redeemed family, just that qualification of his future abode, which every one would have selected for himself—rest. Rest from sin, rest

from labor, rest from suffering, rest from sorrow, rest from every thing but from those blessed, delightful, heart-elevating praises and worship and services of our God, in which the glorified inhabitants of the heavenly inheritance "rest not day nor night," but are for ever and for ever, engaged in one unwearied round of everlasting ministrations.

Such is a faint and shadowy outline of the glorious inheritance, the blessed rest, to which the true Israel of God, are, in this world, continually upon their journey. We address you, then, as Moses did the Israel of old, and we say, Remember, brethren, "Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you;" and are your feet already weary? Are the first strong feelings of resolution with which you commenced the journey, already past? Did you not, as the Lord of the way directed you, "sit down first, and count the cost?" There has no strange thing happened unto you; nothing which He who brought you into the way, and is now employed in guiding you, and keeping you in the way, did not fully anticipate, when you entered upon the heavenward path. Therefore,

be not discouraged even by the most frequent failures; the Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, and willeth not that any should perish, his strength, his wisdom, his love, are all engaged for you at this moment, as fully as they were for Israel; not a fall which you have experienced since you commenced upon the path, not a pollution which you have contracted by the way, that he has not provided for; the fountain which he opened for you is for ever flowing; a stream runs from it for ever beside your path, and the voice of the Great Lord of the fountain is for ever sounding in your ears, as to him of old, "Wash, and be clean." No defilement, no pollution too deep for those cleansing waters; only, lose no time in your application; after every fall, as soon as you regain your footing, away to the living stream, leave not one spot without renewing your visit there, where every humble, every way-worn traveller finds cleansing, refreshment, and consolation. And as you wind along the devious path, the same good Lord has stationed his ministers at every turning, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." So that, unknowingly to wander far away from it, is impossible. While he has

again commissioned us to address you, as Moses did the Israelites of old, with many of these encouraging and strengthening directions, "Behold, the Lord thy God has set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee. Fear not, neither be discouraged." "It is a good land which the Lord our God doth give us." "In the wilderness thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place."

Surely here is encouragement sufficient, fully sufficient for the necessities of every individual among you. You have seen that it is indeed a good land, well worthy of every effort, every toil and labor here; and you have seen, moreover, as Israel saw, and was desired to bear in mind, that "the Lord your God doth GIVE it you," a free gift, an unpurchased inheritance, purchased indeed for you, but unquestionably not purchased by you. You have seen, moreover, in your own experience, how the Lord has borne you up, as a man beareth his son, "as an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh

her young and beareth them upon her wings, so the Lord alone has led you even until this day;" Deut. xxxii, 11; and, as Moses says, "unto this place." Yes, brethren, from the first hour of your spiritual birth, until the hour that he brought you within these walls, to hear a message of peace this day, even to the present moment and the present place, has your God directed your footsteps, and strengthened your hands, and encouraged your hearts. Could we read aloud the history of every child of God here present, what a commentary, what a corroboration would it afford to this assertion; might we not say to one, 'Through how many trials and temptations has the Lord safely conducted you, when you were compelled almost to say with David, "as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped?"' even then the everlasting arms were beneath you, and brought you safely through, and, with the temptation, sent a way to escape, that you might be able to bear it. Might we not say to another, When your afflictions increased upon you, so that their dark waters went, as David says, "even over your soul," and you thought that there was none that cared for you, how

wonderfully did the Lord support you, and raised you up friends, or was himself better than all friends to you, and cheered your heart and sanctified your sorrow, and brought some of the brightest flashes of his love, out of the darkest clouds of his visitations! Might we not say to each, there are passages in your history, known only to God and your own soul, which ought to make you ashamed that you should even for one moment, doubt either his power or his will to bring you, in his own good time, in safety to your rest, and to give you an inheritance with all them that are sanctified. "O ye of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?"

But are there any of you who think that your encouragements and consolations have fallen short of what the Lord had led you to expect when you cast in your lot with his people? then bear in mind, that "ye are not as yet come to the rest," and is it therefore wise, or grateful, or reasonable, that you should repine at the toils and trials of the way? If you had indeed arrived at the inheritance, and found it unworthy of you, unequal to your expectations, unsatisfactory to your soul, we can well imagine your repinings; but you are still on the road,

you are at present but a way-faring man, and will you complain that God gives you not the same entertainment on the journey which he has pledged himself to give you at the journey's end? Ought it not in all reason to be enough, that he has made the way so plain, that "the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein?" That he has so carried you over its rough and stony places, and through its dark forests, and across its rapid streams, and away out of the reach of its lowering tempests, that you escaped, uninjured, even to the present hour? Do you complain that although you have been indeed carried, you have not been comforted, that you have been kept upon the road, but not as others have, in the fulness of assurance and joy? Be not dissatisfied though it be thus with you: there may be, and doubtless there are, fully sufficient reasons that some of God's strongest consolations should be withheld from you for the present, perhaps your very stability depends on this privation; were you to enjoy all of comfort and encouragement which some enjoy, it might be your ruin, by rendering you a careless, confident, and even an unholy walker. Be content that he who appor-

tions your afflictions and your trials, apportions also your consolations and your strength, that the one will always be regulated by the other, and that he withholds his consolations in love, quite as certainly as that he vouchsafes them in love; leave it, therefore, to him who has chosen your inheritance for you, to choose also the way by which, and the manner in which, you shall travel to it. Only rest calmly and unhesitatingly upon the promises of him, "who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten you again to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." St. Peter i, 4. You have not yet approached the land of your inheritance; you have not yet descended to the brink of the dark waters of Jordan, which divide Canaan from the wilderness; you have not yet, therefore, needed the largest of the promises—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;" Isaiah xliii, 2; you have never yet required the strongest of his consolations, and God acts as carefully in the spiritual world, as in the world of his provi-

dence; there is no waste, no unnecessary outlay, there is just so much bestowed, as you actually require, and no more. But, remember that all the consolations of God are yours, when you need them, as certainly as that they shall not be yours, before you need them. They are all "yea and amen in Christ Jesus," purchased for you by him, given to you through him, and laid up for you in him. As surely as that "in the world ye shall have tribulation," St. John xvi, 33, so certainly in that tribulation you shall have comfort, from Him who hath said to you, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Ibid. As surely as that a day of trouble awaits you, so certainly in that trouble, shall you have peace, from Him who hath said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." As surely as he has promised you an inheritance, so certainly will he keep it for you, and you for it. As surely as that your eyes shall be closed in darkness, that you shall lie down in the grave, that your heart and your flesh shall fail you, so unquestionably shall God be the "strength of your heart, and your portion for ever."

SERMON V.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

JOB XXII, 21. (Part.)

“ACQUAINT THYSELF NOW WITH GOD.”

THAT the advice given in these words was sound and judicious, no one who believes in the existence of a God, will venture to deny. If there be a God, and if that God is the Being, who regulates every thing which can affect us now, and who arbitrates our portion throughout eternity, then, most assuredly, it is of the very first importance, that we should be acquainted rightly, intimately, savingly acquainted, with this great, and good, and wonderful Being.

Perhaps, however, an objection, which must be met and answered, may arise in the minds of some, even before the subject is entered upon, that this is a strange topic to select for the consideration of professed believers. Acquaint-

ance with God!—are we not all acquainted with God? are we not at rest to-day from our labors, because this is God's Sabbath? Are we not assembled here, because this is God's house? Are we not now disposed to listen to the voice of the preacher, simply because he is proclaiming God's Word? and shall we be told to acquaint ourselves with God, when we thus demonstrate that we already both know and obey him? In the first ages of Christianity, such an argument would doubtless have been unanswerable; when all the world was in utter ignorance, or in avowed hostility to the God of the Bible, you would not have ventured to have risked all which you must have risked by hallowing God's Sabbath, and attending his temple, and listening to his Word, unless you had indeed been among the number of those who were willing to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord;" Philip. iii, 8; in other words, unless you had been truly and vitally acquainted with God. At the present day, however, things are far otherwise: you may do all that I have enumerated; nay, you may do a great deal more than I shall or can enumerate, and yet be vir-

tually as ignorant of the God of the Christian, as far from the saving knowledge of Him, as the poor Indian, who “sees Him in clouds, and hears Him in the winds.”

May then God himself be present with us this morning, by the promised power of his eternal Spirit, while we endeavor, with the light of his revealed Word, to point out to you two considerations, connected with this important subject viz.,

I. The means; and

II. The season, for attaining to a true, a Scriptural, and a saving acquaintance with the true Jehovah.

In considering the means, I shall chiefly confine myself to the two great and prominent means revealed to us in Scripture, viz., through Christ, by the Spirit; only briefly alluding to the other more subordinate methods of forming this acquaintance.

The first means, then, of obtaining this knowledge, is through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we would ask those among you who might feel disposed to acquiesce in the objection, with which this discourse commenced, viz., that

you were already acquainted with God, are you acquainted with him thus? Do you know God as in Christ Jesus, “reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them?” And do you so know him—not historically and generally, as all, at least in some degree, know him who are born and educated in a Christian country, but experimentally and individually, as none can know him, unless taught by the influence of his own good Spirit; as reconciling you to himself, and not imputing your trespasses unto you; as accepting, pardoning, and loving you, for the sake of his dear Son? If you can answer in the affirmative, then, blessed be God, you have indeed entered upon an acquaintance with the great Jehovah, which time shall not interrupt, nor eternity itself destroy; you who are already thus taught, and thus acquainted, will assuredly bear with me, while I endeavor to lead others to the still waters, and the green pastures, where you have found refreshment and repose; for while you need this instruction least, you will probably be among the number of those, who will tolerate it, and love it most.

I proceed, however, to address myself more

especially to you who are conscious of no such blessed acquaintance, and I would endeavor shortly to show you, from testimony which cannot be refuted, because it is the testimony of God himself, that the very first step to acquaint yourself with God, is by a simple coming to, or believing in, Christ Jesus. "No man hath seen God at any time," said our blessed Lord, "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Your acquaintance, then, with God, must be commenced at the foot of the cross! This is the prominent truth of the Bible; the truth, without which, all other truths are folly. Seek an acquaintance with God, as a God of creation; search for him among the wondrous structures of his almighty hand; amidst those bright luminaries which he has hung on high, as trophies of his majesty and power; amidst the beauteous scenes which he has spread abroad over the surface of the earth which we inhabit, as testimonies to his benevolence and goodness; amidst

the beatings of a tempestuous sea, or the glare of the lightning, and the roar of thunder; amidst the elements which he has awakened as the voice of his terrors and his wrath; and what will be the result? you will return from the contemplation, with minds only baffled and confounded by the glories you have beheld; you may have made acquaintance with nature, but, in spite of the poet's assertion, you will have made none with "Nature's God." You may, indeed, in this manner, have formed some indistinct notions of the power, the majesty, the terrors of the Almighty; but all his other attributes, so peculiarly affecting to the human soul, his forbearance, his long-suffering with sin, his unwillingness that any should perish, his mercy, and his love, will be hidden from you in a darkness which no human eye can penetrate, until that darkness is illuminated by the rays which flow from the cross of the Redeemer.

This is the reason, the plain, intelligible reason, why, as God's own Word has declared, "the world by wisdom knew not God." 1 Cor. i, 21. Strange, indeed, say the undue exalters of human wisdom, that if revelation be true, men of learning and science should so often be

unbelievers; strange that we should have infidel historians, infidel mathematicians, and above all infidel astronomers, and infidel anatomists; stranger far, replies the Christian, if they were not so, when the unerring Word of God has proclaimed this everlasting truth, that no man can come to the Father, but by Christ; See St. John, xiv, 6. The men of whom we speak have never attempted so to approach God; and the consequence is; precisely, what the Christian is assured by God that it should be, they are utterly and altogether unacquainted with God, and take their puny revenge by ridiculing and discrediting his revelation and his Word.

* I would, then, address every individual among you who is conscious that he is not, at the present moment, savingly acquainted with God, and I would say to him, Do you really desire to know God, to know him in such a manner that you shall at once be freed from all slavish fear of him, and shall love him, and serve him, and delight to love and serve him now, and shall dwell with him throughout eternity? Surely many of you will reply from the ground of your hearts, God knows that I do. Then, mark well the road to that blessed acquaintance—make

Jesus Christ, as revealed to you in the Gospel, the first step in your approaches to the Father; make his atonement the basis of your friendship with God. He freely offers to reconcile you to God; do you as freely accept it? Believe that he is in earnest when he thus offers; and plead his merits, and his righteousness before God as a reason why your sins should be forgiven, and your persons accepted. It is thus that your acquaintance must commence. God cannot be acquainted with sinners. Two cannot walk together, says the Scriptures of truth, unless they be agreed; See Amos, iii, 3; and no method of agreement has ever yet been offered to fallen man, but that which is written in the blood of Christ. This is the plea which God will not, nay, in humility be it spoken, which he cannot reject, because it is the plea of his own appointment. God has declared that the blood of his own dear Son alone cleanseth from all sin, that his righteousness is “unto all, and upon all them that believe.” If you, therefore, thus believe, God views you no longer as you are by nature, but as you have become by grace. He sees you as washed in the blood of the Lamb—as clothed in the righteousness of the Redeemer.

His perfect obedience spread over you as a garment, hiding your deformities, veiling your sins. He receives you as a pardoned sinner; nay, more, as an adopted child; as one whom he loves with an everlasting love, and has bound to him by an everlasting covenant. He has, it is true, from all eternity been acquainted with you, but now, by his free and sovereign grace, he has enabled you to acquaint yourself with him, and be at peace.

We proceed to the second means of becoming acquainted with God. "Through Him" (i. e. Christ), says the inspired Word, "we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father; Eph. ii, 18.

It has been shown, that it is only by coming to Christ that you can approach God; but the work would be left unfinished if we were to suffer you to depart with the misapprehension that you could even thus come to Christ of yourselves. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness must shine into your hearts," to give you the light of the knowledge of "his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." Before, therefore, you can thus come to Christ, you must be influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit. "No man

can come to me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him." St. John vi, 44. So far from even desiring to acquaint yourself with God until this be done, you will prefer every body and every thing to God and his salvation. In the depraved and vitiated state of your natural affections, you will prefer the pleasures of religion, and the acquaintance of the men of the world, to the pleasures of religion, and the acquaintance of your Maker;—and I put it to your own personal experience whether you do not so. Until the stony heart be taken away, and the heart of flesh be given, you will have no desire, no inclination, to draw near to God; the clearest statements of divine truth will be unheard; the greatest blessings will be unimproved; the heaviest afflictions will be unsanctified. But when this blessed work of the Divine Spirit is done; when the heart is truly converted from the world, and turned to God; then, indeed, are you enabled to close with the gracious offers of your Redeemer, and to be brought by Him, as one of his purchased people, to the footstool of his Father's throne. Then will such an acquaintance be established with the High and Holy One which inhabiteth eternity, as no change of

outward circumstances, no tumult of inward anxieties, shall be able lastingly to interrupt, while the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

These, brethren, are the two essential means of acquainting ourselves with God by Christ, through the Spirit; time would fail me, were I at all to dwell upon the many and valuable subordinate means by which this acquaintance is best promoted and enjoyed; such, for example, as the daily careful searching of the Word of God, with holy meditation and prayer; the frequent society and conversation of those who are already best acquainted with God, among your neighbors and friends; the constant and devout participation in that holy Sacrament which Christ has ordained in his Church, and which is an especial means of “the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine;” private and secret prayer, together with contemplation of God’s goodness, and long-suffering, and love to each of you individually in all the important features of your lives; and,

though last, by no means of the slightest importance, holy walking with God according to the light which you possess, which will tend more than almost any other means to increase your acquaintance, and to heighten your intimacy, with our most holy and heart searching God.

II. Leaving these suggestions to your own private consideration, I proceed in the second place to bring before you from the words of the text, the proper season for making this acquaintance. What, then, you will perhaps inquire, are not all seasons equally proper for this great work? No, brethren, be assured that they are not. If you doubt me, consider well the words of the text. "Acquaint thyself now with God," is His own specific message. It is not in general terms, "acquaint thyself with God;" neither does it point to any of those peculiar seasons which we might have anticipated. "Acquaint thyself with God" in the time of trouble, in the day of sorrow, in the hour of sickness; or when old age advances, and other acquaintances fall away. It simply says, "Acquaint thyself now with God," to-day, as soon as you hear the message; before the words of the preacher die upon your ear; before you

leave this house, commence upon this great and blessed, but still arduous and difficult, undertaking.

It is remarkable how imperative, how undeviating the Word of God is upon this head of our discourse, the season of forming our acquaintance with Him. It never, that I am aware of, in a single instance throughout the whole book of inspiration, speaks of any season for this great work, but the present. It has, indeed, threatenings which regard the future, and the future only; it has also promises which regard the future, and the future only; it has joys and sorrows which regard the future only, but it has no such invitations; it has not a single invitation which even hints at any other season than the present; most plainly intimating, that while you are perfectly at liberty to reject the invitation of the passing hour, God Almighty holds himself equally at liberty never to repeat it.

Observe, only, how strikingly this fact is illustrated by the language of Scripture: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Wherefore," as the Holy Ghost saith, "To-day if you will hear his voice,

harden not your hearts.” “Choose you this day whom you will serve.” And perhaps more remarkably than any other, in a text which you all know, but which is generally misquoted, “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” There is no such text in the Bible; the words are, and you may find them at the opening of the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth;” showing, that even in youth, to which the largest promises are made, the same remarkable limitation is still awarded. Remember God in thy youth; but it must be now, to-day.

These authorities, and it would be easy to multiply them, are fully sufficient to demonstrate what has been asserted, that the only season spoken of in God’s Word, for the return and conversion of a sinner, is the present. God invariably says, Come to me to-day; it is the unrenewed heart of stubborn man which alone dares to reply, “I shall wait until to-morrow.”

Is it not, then, a fearful thing to reflect how many there may be among us, who are virtually making this reply at the present moment. The young—you who are thinking, When I am

a little older, when I have left school, when I am married and settled in the world, I will really endeavor to acquaint myself with God, but not to-day. Men of business—you who are resolving, when you are able to retire from this incessant occupation, or when you have rather less of worldly callings to attend to, that you will acquaint yourselves with God, but not to-day. Parents—you who are anticipating the period when your children shall have grown up, and no longer form the great impediment which they do at present, while engaging so much of your time and attention, and who are fully resolved then really to acquaint yourselves with God. The aged—you who are thinking that a sick bed and a dying hour, will be fully sufficient for these things, and that then you will in earnest seek them. How many are thus looking to some future and far distant period, how few are saying, TO-DAY! At your own time, and your own leisure, you imagine that you will all seek after God, and devote yourselves far more earnestly, and unreservedly to the great work of salvation that you have ever yet found the time or the inclination to do.

My brethren, do not, I beseech you, deceive

yourselves thus; such resolutions as these are as nothing, and worse than nothing, in the sight of God. There is only one Being in the whole universe who can approve them, for, be assured, there is only one being who will ever profit by them—in the language of Scripture—“your adversary, the devil, who walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” If you desire to please him, these are the resolutions which delight him most. Yes, we firmly believe that nothing can more rejoice that prince of darkness, while he sits at the door of your heart, watching its secret workings, and ready to catch the seed sown, than to observe these earnest resolutions of a future repentance, a future acquaintance with God, a future devotedness of life and soul to the Redeemer. He cares not how earnest you are in these promises of future services. He would rather you were in earnest, for you will be the less likely to suspect, that such resolutions should be fruitless. He will himself aid you in them, and volunteer all the strength and the solemnity that he can throw into the transaction; and he is well content to do so. If you remain his bondsman for the present, you may choose your own master for the future; for he

well knows that the future will one day become the present, and that when it does, it will be as easy for him again to teach you to postpone and procrastinate, aye, every additional time far more easy for him thus to cheat and to delude you than it is to-day. Satan himself, therefore, would not object to enforce the words of my text upon you, if he might but change one little syllable; if he might but expunge the word "now," and read it, 'Acquaint thyself with God to-morrow,' it would forward his dreadful cause more effectually than a thousand common-place delusions. O how that juggling fiend is laughing to scorn the man, wise in his own conceit, who is now engaged in suppressing the desire, which has been just awakened for an immediate change of heart and life, and is most gravely resolving that nothing shall prevent a *future* reformation.

Upon this point, then, the minister of Christ must take his stand. We say to every one among you who is not at present devoted to the service of his God, acquaint thyself with Him now; to-day, seek access to God by Christ through the Spirit;—to-morrow may not be yours, or if it be, you may have neither the will,

nor the power to improve it. Suffer no worldly pleasure, no worldly profits, no worldly ridicule or opinion, to keep you back from this most important work. Cleave closely to God, and you may defy the world; its voice will soon be quenched in silence, and all its mockeries be forgotten in the grave; when the voice of Him whom you serve, will be heard in the accents of commendation and love, loud as the trumpet of the archangel.

And if there be any one among you "whose heart the Lord hath opened to attend to the things spoken" this morning, and who is saying, Would that I could believe that this invitation were addressed to me; would that I might hope that God would admit me to the blessedness of his acquaintance, and to the enjoyment of his pardoning love; I would not wait for a tomorrow, which may never come; I would indeed go this day, this hour, this instant, and throw myself in penitence and faith at the foot of the cross, and there seek acquaintance with the God of all consolation. My brother, if such an one there be, to you are the words of this salvation sent. Have you grievously sinned and fallen away from God? He is ready to

heal the breach this day. Are you yet in darkness? He is willing this day to say, "Let there be light." Are your offences so numerous that you are ashamed to look up, and have you rejected so many invitations that you have no hope you should to-day be accepted? hear the word of the Lord: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah i, 18. Cast yourself, therefore, unreservedly, on the love of God to you in Christ Jesus; offer a single faithful fervent prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and you shall speedily experience the soul-satisfying reply, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." St. John, vi, 37.

SERMON VI.

GOD MARKING INIQUITY.

PSALM CXXX 3, 4.

“IF THOU, LORD, SHOULDEST MARK INIQUITIES, O LORD,
WHO SHALL STAND? BUT THERE IS FORGIVENESS
WITH THEE.”

THERE are seasons when every man, whose heart has been in any degree convinced of sin, beholds his iniquities with feelings of regret and consternation peculiarly vivid. Times of trial, times of affliction, but above all, times of prayer, when he is led into closer communion with his God, are pre-eminently among those seasons. Sins, which at other periods but little affect him, which he can pass over almost without a sigh or a thought, are then brought up in terrible array before the soul, and for a few moments the man is almost lost in astonishment at his own audacity and blindness. While, if he carry on the

feeling, if he turn from looking inward to looking upward, from thinking of what he knows of himself to what God knows of him, he is unable to find expressions sufficiently strong with which to describe his own perversity and worthlessness. He feels as if such a being as himself could have no right to pray; as if one who had sinned so often, so long, so wilfully, were adding to his guilt, by presuming thus to come before God; and he is almost tempted to doubt whether utter silence, utter neglect of all prayer, would not more become him, than any language, however contrite or however humble.

Reflections of a very similar nature to these, appear to have been passing through the mind of the Psalmist when he penned the words of the text. He was evidently, in the opening verses of the psalm, addressing the Almighty, during some period of deep affliction, in earnest, fervent supplication; he says, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication:" and then, as if oppressed by the weight of his numberless transgressions, borne down by the burden of his many sins, he exclaims, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniqui-

ties, O Lord, who shall stand?" Then, again, recovering himself from this overwhelming consciousness of guilt, he adds, his very prayer, as it were, gasping for breath, "But there is forgiveness with thee."

The deep feeling of utter sinfulness and worthlessness, so strikingly displayed by the Psalmist, does not merely mark a particular stage of religious feeling, it lies at the very root of religion itself; there is no vital godliness without it, it is its universal accompaniment. Let us then meditate, for a short time, upon the expressions before us, in the hope, and with the prayer, that by God's grace they may work that in us, which they so clearly and so touchingly evidenced in the holy and devoted David.

I. First, then, let us learn what is implied in the words before us, viz:—That the Lord is a God who marks iniquity; and,

II. What is directly asserted, "But there is forgiveness with thee."

I. There is not a more awful consideration than that which we learn by implication from the text. Whether we consider God as a Being of infinite power, or of infinite purity, the thought is equally solemn, equally appalling.—

That there has been One, standing over us, ever since we were born, and marking in pages, which we cannot obliterate, every sinful action, every unholy word, every false, and profane, and unchaste, and uncharitable thought; and that as time goes on, this marking goes on also; that there is an eye never closed, an ear never dull, a hand never wearied, all engaged in this great work. We look backward, perhaps, through a long vista of departed years, and although we have a certain undenied, and indistinct consciousness, that many sins are mingling there, we have forgotten most of their peculiarities, and much that added inconceivably to their guilt, while HE who marks iniquity, has forgotten nothing; He sees every trace and every lineament as clearly and as distinctly, as, in the first hour of their commission, they were seen and felt by ourselves, and the effect of this knowledge of the Most High is, that it is impossible for man, sinful, helpless man, to stand before God. For although the Psalmist makes a question of it, asking, "Who shall stand?" it is just one of those questions which imply the strongest, and the surest assertion; it is as if he had said, "Lord, thou dost so mark iniquities,

that I am utterly unable to stand;” or, as the same man elsewhere expresses it, “ My iniquities have taken such hold of me, that I am unable to look up.” And shall any one venture to assert, that this is too deep a view to take of our iniquities?—is it a deeper view than God is at this moment taking of every unrepented sin, which he has recorded against every individual now present before him?

No, brethren, where we all fail, is not in setting these things in too dark, but in too faint a light; not in painting them with too strong, but with too weak and feeble a touch. Could we see our own sins as God sees them, we verily believe that the sight would instantaneously be productive of one or other of these two consequences—it would either drive us to desperation, or it would send us to a Saviour. There could be no middle course, no resting place short of this would allay the agony of our souls. Men may talk lightly, and think lightly, and carelessly of sin, who have never felt the anguish of remorse, the pangs of a convicted conscience, or have never seen the dreadful cost of a Saviour’s tear, and of a Saviour’s blood, at which its pardon was purchased; but let the Spirit of God

only for one hour, set home upon the heart the true and scriptural sight of sin unrepented, and sin unforgiven, and the longest day to which your mortal life may be extended, will never cast the vail of forgetfulness over that hour of suffering.

Think only of the anguish, the bitter anguish, which you feel when you reflect upon any single act, by which you have offended an earthly relative, a father, a mother, a wife, or child, over whom the grave has darkened, and who is now past hearing your regrets, and past forgiving them. It is in vain you reason with yourself, that were they here, they would kindly re-assure you of their pardon, they would affectionately convince you that you never willingly injured them, never wilfully grieved them. It is in vain; the regret will follow you, and reason itself is insufficient to quiet or to dismiss it. Such, then, is a faint, faint emblem of the suffering, which the soul, when once really awakened to a sense of its having offended a departed God, even here often endures. It is not the consciousness of its danger which oppresses it, but its ingratitude, its unworthiness, the hateful return it has been making for love, so true, so

tender, so unbounded. This it is which makes the awakened sinner, in the first hours of thoughtfulness and reflection, the wretched, suffering being, we sometimes see him. When it pleases a merciful God that this effect is wrought, while time, and grace, and opportunity are all his own, it is but the "light affliction" which is working for him the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But when reflection, when anguish for sin, for the first time come upon a dying bed, when they add their pangs to the hour of nature's suffering; when the poor, bewildered, and frightened soul gazes wildly around, its eye opening at once to all the fearful prospects that surround it; the grave before it, an existence unknown, unfathomed, stretching away into the infinity that lies beyond it; and all behind, sin unrepented, sin unthought of, sin unforgiven, who can recount the sufferings, who can come back to tell, the anguish of that hour.

If by agreeing to pass over these things in silence, if by leaving the mind free and undisturbed, we could make a compromise with God, and obtain from him the assurance that your sins should never be mentioned to you, never

thus brought so painfully to mind, it might be more humane to do so, and be assured we would not draw aside the veil which hides them from your sight. Far pleasanter would it be to us, as ministers, as men, to help you to forget, than thus to compel you to remember; for, believe me, there are few things so painful to a Christian minister, feeling, as he does, that every word which condemns another, condemns also himself, as thus to force your long-forgotten transgressions back upon your recollection, and oblige you to retrace the characters of shame, and guilt, in which they stand recorded against you. But, brethren, sooner or later it must be done; take this for a truth as certain as the being of a God, or the existence of an universe, that you, and your unrepented sins, must one day meet, and the longer that day is delayed, the sadder will be the meeting, the more terrible the hour, when you and they shall come together. The only choice which God has given you in this solemn matter is this—the time and the place of your meeting. Your sins must be met now, during the day of God's pardoning mercy, or hereafter, during the day of God's uncompromising judgment.

Raise, then, we beseech you, one heartfelt prayer to God, that to-day may be the time, and this the hour, and this the place, in which you and your unrepented sins may meet for the last time. "Quit you like men," fly not now from enemies, with which you must one day meet in deadly struggle. Call them up now as spectres in the memory, the long, long list of those worst enemies of your soul, and of your God. The many years of thoughtless, God-forgetting youth, the sad additions of licentious manhood, the forgotten prayers, the broken Sabbaths, the neglected commands of Him, who ought to have had your best obedience. The meeting, be it when it may, can never be a peaceful one, the conflict cannot be a slight one; there is no compromise, it must be war even to the death: either your sins, or you, must perish. The question, then, we ask you, as in the presence and in the name of God, is this—You behold your unrepented sins drawn up in terrible array before you, are you willing to sacrifice them at God's bidding, to slay them at his altar, to renounce every lingering desire after them, and to, for ever, cast them from you?

Flesh and blood cannot answer this in the

affirmative; of yourself you cannot do it, but you can do all things through Christ strengthening you. He is as near you at this moment, as your sins are. He stands beside the ranks of those your worst and most appalling enemies, and one heartfelt, earnest, faithful prayer to him, one strong resolution, the effort of his own grace, to cast yourself at once upon Him, and the victory is insured. His own right hand shall bring deliverance, and like the Israelites of old, "the enemies which you have seen to-day, you shall see them again no more for ever." Do you hesitate? Do you feel—I am willing to do this with some, with many, but not with all; I am desirous to repent of much, to give up much, to forego and abstain from much, but I must still retain my favorite sin, my heart sin, my besetting lust; all else I will surrender, all else I will immolate, but my pride, my vanity, my covetousness, or my worldliness, I cannot, and I will not utterly forsake. Then, brethren—and let not that seem harsh which a God of love commands us to declare—all else will be in vain; the same long train of evil spirits, which, spectre like, are now passing from before you, and fast fading from your memory, will all

one day return; you shall see them, and recognise them again; but not as at this hour, when by God's promised aid, yours might be the mastery, but on a day when theirs shall be the victory and the triumph, yours the humiliation and the defeat. When next you meet, it shall be before the tribunal of your Judge, they to accuse and to condemn you, and you unable to disavow them; united together, the sinner and his sins, in bonds of iron, from which even the fires of eternity shall never separate you.

But God forbid that this should be applicable to any soul amongst us. Rather let us hope that but one feeling pervades your hearts, the feeling of inextinguishable hate, of unceasing warfare, against those worst and deadliest enemies. That although you know you have sinned grievously, and continually; you do, from your very souls lament these sins, and abhor yourself for their committal. We trust that by the grace of God's good Spirit, the feeling with which many are this day hearing of their transgressions, assumes something of this character. Deep and numerous although my sins have been, I have desired, and I do, above all earthly things, desire their absence and their pardon.

No slave condemned to toil in fetters in the mine, no chained wretch devoted to the ceaseless labors of the galley, ever more ardently longed for his deliverance, or prayed more fervently for freedom, than I to be separated from my sins, to burst asunder their chains, and to be freed from them for ever. I hate them because they have injured me, but I hate them tenfold more because they have injured God, the God of all my mercies, the Saviour who died for me, the Holy Spirit who has striven unceasingly with me, through years of opposing ingratitude, and who is even now pleading and struggling for God within my bosom. To be freed from such enemies, from such a burden, what is there upon earth, I would not willingly and cheerfully resign?

To all, the language of whose hearts is such, we are, thanks be to God, not only permitted, but commanded, to testify of that blessed truth conveyed to us in the conclusion of the text. "But there is forgiveness with thee." Yes, brethren, there is forgiveness with God, the power to forgive, the readiness to forgive, nay more, the strong desire to forgive; for his own Word declares that "He willeth not the death of

a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." Who can describe the unspeakable comfort which is imparted to the penitent sinner's heart, by the reflection that he has to do with one, who is anxious to forgive, yea, far more anxious, than the most heart-broken and imploring sinner is, to be forgiven.

You may, perhaps, remember, in the history of one of the kings of our own country, that when some guilty man, who had joined in rebellion against him, was brought into his presence, he endeavored to prevail upon him to communicate the intentions of his accomplices, by reminding him of the prospect which lay before him, in these words:—"Remember it is in my power to forgive." "Yes," answered the unhappy man, who knew the character of him to whom he spake, "It is in your power to forgive, but it is not in your nature to do so." How different when you look at the King of kings, against whom, even the best amongst us has rebelled for years and years in succession. Had it merely been revealed to us that it was in God's power to forgive, small would be the comfort of the desponding sinner's heart; but the same Word which assures us that there is

forgiveness in God's power, assures also that there is forgiveness in his nature, for does it not declare, that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?" All he asks, and all you need, to enable you to be a partaker of this forgiveness, is simply to apply for it, in the way which he himself has pointed out; that "new and living way," as the Apostle calls it, "by the blood of Jesus."

How great and how numerous are the errors of Christians, yes, even partially enlightened Christians, upon this important point! Some among you, are in all probability carrying about with you a burden of unforgiven sin, checked and frustrated in all your approaches to God, because you will not believe Him upon his Word, will not accept his promises; it is in vain that he assures you, in language which nothing can strengthen, of his willingness to forgive; in vain he multiplies and re-multiplies terms to convey the fact of the entireness, as well as the freeness of this forgiveness, speaking of it at one time as a "blotting out of sin," at another, as a "covering of sin," and again, "as casting it behind his back," and "into the depths of the sea." Still you are hard to learn the gracious

lesson, "slow of heart to believe" the fulness and the completeness of the forgiveness of God, treasured up for every penitent and believing sinner in Christ Jesus. You deeply repent, you pray earnestly for pardon, you seek the atoning blood of Christ, you forsake those things that you have repented of, and yet you feel no complete reliance, no perfect assurance, that all has been forgiven, and that you are at this hour, for Christ's sake, a pardoned sinner, an accepted child. Surely this is acting ungratefully by God; what is the desire of his heart? to see his children happy. Well then, instead of honoring God by a mock humility, you frustrate his desire, you grieve his Spirit, when you refuse to accept, as freely as God offers. Forgiveness, instead of lying, as too many imagine, at the end of the Christian course, lies at the very beginning. It is the first step in the walk of the new-born child of God. The real course of the Christian commences from the day when he is made one with Christ, and Christ with him, and when he becomes partaker of God's pardoning love. At that hour you are a forgiven sinner, your sentence of condemnation is reversed; God is at peace with you, and you with him,

and every thing that has gone before, is blotted from his book for ever; as the Apostle to the Ephesians expresses it, "God, for Christ's sake HATH forgiven you."

May God grant that if we address one who has hitherto lived practically ignorant of these great and blessed truths, they may this day be fastened upon his heart, that he may leave the house of his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, a holier and a happier being than he entered it; that he may be enabled to say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee;" and may that blessedness be his abiding portion, to which the Psalmist alludes when he says, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin" now, and upon whom, for the sake of our adorable Redeemer, he shall visit no sin hereafter.

SERMON VII.

THE SAINT'S CONFESSION.

HEBREWS XI, 13.

“THESE ALL CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS
AND PILGRIMS ON THE EARTH.”

How brief, yet how remarkable a confession! and to whom does it apply? To Abel, to Enoch, to Noah, and to Abraham, and to Sarah, and to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to all the family of the faithful. Yes, my brethren, “these all confessed,” says the Apostle, after having enumerated a goodly number of the family of God, “that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” It was then the confession, and we can show that it ever has been, and ever must be, the confession of the children of God, in all places and at all times. Throughout the large and blessed family of the Redeemer, one characteristic, one distinguishing feature is ever visi-

ble. They are not of the world, even as he was not of the world. Whatever be their ages, whatever be their circumstances, this is true of them all. If there ever had been an individual, who might have felt himself in some degree at home upon earth, it certainly was Abraham, when in the country which was given to him, and to his heirs for ever, by God himself; yet in what terms does the inspired writer speak of him in this country, thus supernaturally made over to him, "Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country." Hebrews, xi, 9. Even in the land of his inheritance, he never felt himself at home. The same, also, was the confession of Moses: "I have been a stranger in a strange land;" Exodus, ii, 22; so again, David, in the midst of the most ample possessions, reigning over a wealthy and populous kingdom, anointed to the government, and established in it by the visible appointment of God himself, expressed precisely the same feeling: "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were," Psalm, xxxix, 12; is the confession of his heart; whilst, as a last example, the highest and the best, we find even our blessed Saviour himself, the Lord of heaven and

earth, during his visit in the flesh to this land of sin and sorrow, exclaiming, "I am not of this world," St. John, xvii, 16; realising what the Psalmist had before declared of him, that he should be a "stranger among his brethren, and an alien among his mother's children." He indeed passed through the world, but it was only to sanctify it as the place of his people's service; his heart and his constant residence were not here, to fix it as their place of rest. We see, then, that the declaration of the text is not an isolated passage, uncorroborated by the general tenor of Holy Writ, but a truth which the experience and the confessions of the people of God, of every age, fully establish and confirm.

Let us earnestly implore the Divine blessing, and the Divine presence, while we meditate upon those peculiar terms by which the children of God are here portrayed.

I. They confessed themselves to be "strangers upon earth." For the sake of confining ourselves more closely to the immediate subject before us, let us examine the simple definition of the term;—a stranger is a foreigner, a person born in some other country, and who is for the

present separated from his kindred, his inheritance, and his home.

Observe, then, at once, the reason for the application of the name; observe the Apostle's motive for recording the simple fact, that all the good and holy men of whom he had been speaking, unite in the confession of the text. The people of God confess themselves strangers, because, speaking in a spiritual sense, they are not born here; this is not their native country. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," are the words of our Lord. From the moment that they are born of God, created anew by the Spirit, they take up the confession of the text, because from that moment, their hearts have taken up the feelings from which it flowed. They have become "partakers of the Divine nature," and the renewed heart turns constantly, unceasingly turns, to the land of its nativity, and the man becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus," becomes also a stranger and a foreigner upon earth, a sincere aspirant after the joys of heaven.

Again, as the people of God are strangers

upon earth, because it is not the land of their nativity, so also are they strangers, because their inheritance is not here.

“Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” Our Heavenly father, therefore, has chosen to give us our inheritance “where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” He might have made the present world, and the present order of things, available, had he so pleased, to his people’s happiness; but so far is this from being the fact, that an apostle has asserted, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” At the very best, the present world is a mere place of common entertainment, an inn where friends and enemies, kindred and aliens all partake of the same cheer. Very different will be our Father’s house; into that, none but his children, his purchased, pardoned children will be admitted, and all who are admitted, will receive the

fulness of blessedness, and an eternal weight of glory, and happiness, and joy.

Further, the people of God are strangers upon earth, because their kindred are not here.—Where the child's father is, there is his country, and there is his home; and what is your daily acknowledgment?—"Our Father, which art in heaven." That blessed Being then, whom the Spirit of God has taught us to call Abba, Father, is not here. That blessed Being, whom the Word of God has called our Elder Brother, "the first born among many brethren," Rom. viii, 29, is not here; "I go," said he, "to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also." St. John xiv, 2. The spirits of just men made perfect, whom the Word of God has denominated members of that blessed family to which we even now belong, are not here.—"They shall sit down," said our Lord, "with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." They have, therefore, already taken their seats in some holier and happier country than the present scene, and we cannot think ourselves at home, while separated from our Father, our Brother, our family, our friends.

II. If it be evident, from these outward circumstances of their lives, that the people of God are strangers upon earth, and ought in every individual case so to feel, and to confess themselves, it is, in the second place, equally evident from the inward workings of their hearts, that they are "pilgrims" also.

A pilgrim is, literally, a traveller, a wanderer. Now, in one sense, the term may be applied to all the inhabitants of the earth; we are all pilgrims, because we are all continually moving onward, like the inmates of a vessel, willing or unwilling, to the termination of their voyage. All things here are sliding from beneath us; do what we will, we cannot bind them to us; our closest relationships, our plighted vows, our marriage contracts, are daily rent asunder by the strong hands of time and death. Every thing proves that we are on a journey, in which we may not linger, even for an hour. In this all will agree, it is a mere truism to which we should not refer, were it not for the purpose of making an important distinction. Every man born into the world is, by his condition, a pilgrim. This is a truism, but this is the distinction—that it is reserved for the child of God, in

sincerity to feel and to confess himself a pilgrim, and to live a pilgrim in his affections and hopes.

If no changes were hourly taking place around him, if no graves were daily opening at his feet, if time had closed his wings, and were for ever standing motionless upon this lower sphere, and all vicissitudes had ceased, the confession of a child of God would be still the same—I am a pilgrim upon earth. It is true I see no evidence of change around me, I observe nothing transitory without me, but I feel the certainty of this great truth in the very exercise of the graces which God has given me; I feel it in my own soul, I experience its uncertainty in my own heart; so long as my faith, and hope, and love remain the poor imperfect graces, which the Word of God has described them, and which, alas! I find them to be within my breast—they are sufficient to convince me, that I am a wanderer and a traveller here. My faith is weak, and I must travel on until I reach far higher regions in the spiritual life, where my faith shall be matured and strengthened. My hope is dull, and I must hasten forward to brighter, and nearer manifestations of the glory that shall be revealed in me, that my hope may

shine clear, and strong, and steadily. My love, even at the best, is poor, and cold, and profitless, to the Being whom I adore, and I must quicken my pace, and finish my pilgrimage, and get within the walls of my Father's house, where my love shall be perfected, and where it shall have the largest exercise, and the fullest scope, and be for ever engaged in the service of Him I love, and for ever casting the crown of its gratitude before His throne.

The very imperfection of my graces, then, proves me to be a pilgrim, and teaches me that my rest cannot be here, that I must look for a more advanced and holier state of spiritual existence; that I must "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus," and run the race, and fight the fight, and hasten onward to the incorruptible crown, which cannot be worn on earth, but which is laid up for me in the kingdom of my Father.

Proceed we now to a more personal application of the words of the text.

Anxiety respecting the unrevealed future, is by no means an uncommon state of mind; indeed we believe it to be a state, of which all

who are in the least degree really awakened to any serious feeling in religion, at times are sensible; the heartfelt desire to ascertain whether they have a well-grounded hope of a participation in that infinity of blessedness which, as Christians, they profess to anticipate. The subject before us, then, offers some valuable tests for determining this important point. We have seen that the words of the text describe the feelings of the real people of God in every age; we have detailed the reasons that they do so; we would, then, urge you to inquire whether they can be considered as in any manner descriptive of yourselves. Are you able truly to confess, that you are living, acting, thinking, as if you were a stranger and a pilgrim here? The man of business, who sacrifices every thing future for the claims of the present hour, giving up all his thoughts, his time, his heart, to the one great object of his earthly calling—let me address one word to him. You believe the Bible to be the Word of God, you believe in a coming eternity, a certain judgment, and yet you have no heart for these things. You must, the claims of your family demand that you should, at least so you imagine, give up every

thing at present for the one great object of this world's advantages. Now we desire to pass no sentence upon you; we simply remind you of this striking fact:—you have heard the confession of all God's people in every age; you have seen the truth; you cannot deny the propriety of it; that while they have lived in the world, they have known, and felt, and acted as those who never for a moment were identified with its followers. Is, then, their experience yours? Is yours the life of a pilgrim and a traveller? Do you reply, that you know not to what peculiarities in the conduct of such persons we allude? Then take up any book of travels, and as you read it, mark the conduct and the feelings of the writer. It never enters into his thoughts, to exhaust his strength, his time, his energies, in acquiring possessions in a land, that he is in hourly expectation of leaving, and for ever. He passes cursorily through the country, but never dreams of establishing himself among the natives of it. He endeavors to procure a sufficiency of the good things of the land to supply the exigencies of his journey, but certainly nothing that shall impede his onward passage. By the very nature of the things he

seeks, you may in a moment discover the difference between a native and a traveller. He does not, for instance, seek for houses, or land, because, however valuable to the residents, they are worthless, utterly worthless, to the pilgrim; he cannot carry them away with him, neither can they follow him; if he purchase any thing beyond his mere sustenance, it will be the jewels, the pearls, the valuables which he can take away to that far country whither he is going. Mark the application to yourselves. Could you be so over anxious for the riches, the distinctions, the perishable possessions of this world, if you were speaking the language of truth, when you professed yourself a pilgrim? It is impossible; you would seek nothing with a whole heart that you could not carry with you; you would seek the jewels of the land, the graces of the Spirit, the ornaments of a meek and quiet disposition, a humble heart, a kind and affectionate temper, all those endowments which are disregarded here, but of which you have learnt the value; and while you saw the breathless anxiety, the deadly struggle going forward among the men of this world for the honors and riches of earth, you would feel as travellers

feel in eastern climes, when they see the simple and ignorant natives contesting vehemently for a looking-glass or a bead, but permitting them to carry away unquestioned the most precious things which the land produces. You would, in fact, in all things, feel as a pilgrim feels, and live as a pilgrim lives, using the world as not abusing it, and where your treasure is, there would your heart be also; not in the land of your travels, not in the inn, which you are making a transient resting-place, but there, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."

But there is yet another test which we would offer you, for ascertaining this important fact. A foreigner is easily distinguished, in every country through which he passes, to be a foreigner. However perfectly he may have learned the language, however accurately he may, through courtesy, adopt the innocent customs of those among whom he is for a short time, tarrying, there is a certain something which, to the eye of a native, stamps him for a stranger and a foreigner, something to excite the observation of the thoughtless, or the ridicule of the vulgar. They see he is unlike themselves, and this is

always sufficient to occasion animadversion. Now, my brethren, let me again ask, are you willing to be thus characterized, thus distinguished? to be remarked, and sometimes, perhaps, unkindly remarked, as those whose chief object in life is different from the persons around you? who have imbibed different tastes, motives, and opinions, and who demonstrate this by a different manner of life, and tenor of conduct? and this even at the risk, or rather certainty, of being frequently misunderstood and occasionally misrepresented, the inevitable result of appearing in the world as a citizen of another and a better country?—or, are you so conformed to this world, its pleasures, its fashions, and its follies, that none among whom you live, would ever suspect you to be either a stranger, or a foreigner? Have you so entirely domesticated yourselves among the people of this transitory state, that you can pass hours and days, and weeks in their society, and never betray, by your language or your actions, that you are the natives of another country in which are your inheritance and your kindred? If so, we fear you are deluding yourself in the belief that you are really born of God. All his children, as we

have seen, can unite in the confession of the text, but you cannot honestly adopt it. You are neither a stranger nor a pilgrim here; it is, in fact, we fear, only here that you are at home. When you attempt to speak of heaven and heavenly things, if you ever do attempt it, or to enter into communion with God, if you know any thing of such communion, then it is that you are essentially a stranger and a foreigner; you have so little relish and so little love for these things, that it is sufficiently evident, you are habitually strange to them; you are of the earth, earthy; you are not observed to differ, simply because in heart you do not differ; you have the same views, the same objects, the same pursuits, as the world, which is at "enmity with God," St. James iv, 4, and if you continue thus, what can preserve you from the same lamentable end?

One word to those among you who really are living as strangers and pilgrims here, and I have done.

My Christian brethren, we have been endeavoring to point out some few, although but few, of the shades of difference by which the children of God may be distinguished here on earth,

and your own experience will, in many cases, we trust, have convinced you, that by the grace of God, these are visible in your life and conversation. Suffer me, however, to add a word of caution to those among you, who are willing, heartily to confess that this is not their home, and who are desirous of living as the citizens of a better country, even an heavenly. You are not conformed to the habits and pleasures, the follies and sins of the world through which you are passing; this is well, but it is not enough to despise and to abjure the follies of earth, you must also endeavor to recommend the joys of heaven. One thing is almost invariably found in the conduct of every foreigner, come from what land he may, namely, that he is most anxious to impart to those among whom he journeys, a favorable impression of the land of his nativity. It is impossible to take up a book of travels without being struck with this peculiarity. Such, then, should be your feelings in every transaction of your lives, with regard to the good land whither you are going. In all your words, and in all your actions, the desire to elevate that land, and to extol the glory of Him who reigns there, should have the paramount

place. Shall the worldly traveller be for ever endeavoring to advance the interests of his native country, and shall the Christian pilgrim not endeavor so to live, as shall best recommend heaven? Shall the worldly traveller prefer every thing that reminds him of his home, and love every thing in proportion as it resembles that which he has left, and to which he is returning, and shall the Christian pilgrim have no thoughts, no heart, no feelings, for those persons, occupations, or enjoyments, which speak the most plainly of the land whither he is going? It cannot be; if you are really travelling heavenwards, your heart, your thoughts, your words, will not be destitute of all feeling, all mention of that blissful place. Your preference for heaven must begin on earth, your preparation for heaven must be completed here, or you will never be amidst the number of those happy and blissful pilgrims, their journey over, their toils forgotten, who have now for ever sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Be then increasingly in earnest, in cultivating this taste, by prayer which brings you before God's throne of grace; by meditation which, as it were, lifts up your head above the clouds, even into his immediate presence; by the com-

munion of saints, which warms the heart with love to God, and for his sake to every member of his family in heaven and earth. And for your comfort during the miles of your pilgrimage, which may yet remain to you, as well as to excite you to industry by the way, remember that "the time is short," and that the "fashion of this world passeth away." To some among us the journey may be well nigh over; the road we have passed can be trodden no more, and but a small portion of the pilgrimage probably remains. The towers of the celestial city are already visible in the horizon; yet a little while, and we shall be standing at the gate, and presenting our credentials for admittance. That will be indeed a blessed day, to all who are truly reconciled to God, by the blood of his Son, to all who shall stand before Him complete in Christ, when the everlasting doors shall be lifted up, and "an entrance ministered abundantly," into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The first hour in heaven, will more, infinitely more, than compensate for the longest and weariest pilgrimage ever passed on earth. You will scarcely have entered there, before the toils and the labors of the way will be forgotten.

and every other thought absorbed in this one blissful feeling—Thank God, I have, at length, in safety reached my native land; I am in the presence of my Father, my Brother, my family, my friends; I am in possession of my long-expected inheritance, no more a stranger, no more a pilgrim, but now in the land of my nativity—in the house of my Father—at home for ever.

SERMON VIII.

THE SAINTS ON EARTH.



1 COR. III, 21, 22, 23.

“ALL THINGS ARE YOURS; WHETHER THE WORLD, OR LIEE OR DEATH, OR THINGS PRESENT, OR THINGS TO COME; ALL ARE YOURS, AND YE ARE CHRIST’S; AND CHRIST IS GOD’S.”

THE privileges of a Christian form a subject intelligible only to the Christian. Speak of them to the man of the world, and they excite his astonishment or his contempt. The more you endeavor to enlighten his mind upon so mysterious a topic, the deeper you enter into its details, and dwell upon all its high, and holy, and heart-cheering realities, the greater danger do you run of increasing the sin of your hearer by increasing his scorn; and instead of winning his attention or his sympathy, of driving him still further from the possession of delights, for which at present he is not prepared. How truly

and affectingly has the Word of God announced, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." 1 Ep. Cor. ii, 14.

Such being the case, in our addresses to a mixed congregation, we often feel, to a certain degree, restrained from dwelling upon the many rich and precious discoveries of the Christian privileges bequeathed to us in the Word of our God; we dare not offer indiscriminately "the children's bread," lest it be taken by those whom it could not nourish, and we be charged in the great day, with wrongly dividing the word of truth.

There are seasons, nevertheless, the present is one,* when we feel especially called upon to address those among you to whom we might say, with the Apostle in the text, "Ye are Christ's;" and to endeavor to offer the words of encouragement and consolation to your hearts, in the manner and in the language, which St. Paul there offered them to his hearers, by declaring, "All things are yours."

It is unquestionably an astonishing assertion!

* Preached on a Sacrament Sunday.

“All things are yours!” What, all things the property of the poor, despised, afflicted, ignorant followers of the crucified Nazarene; of those who, at the time the Apostle wrote, were a by-word and a proverb, the “offscouring of all things;” 1 Ep. Cor. iv, 13, of those who, in every succeeding age, even at the present day, with all its pretensions to a liberality unknown to its predecessors, are as completely the object of the worldly-wise man’s scorn, and the worldly-prudent man’s contempt, as they have ever been in any portion of the Church’s eventful history. Nevertheless, such is the privilege of your high calling, “All things are yours.” “Fear not, little flock,” said he who calleth you, and who also will do it, “fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” St. Luke xii, 32. And with the kingdom, “all things” thereto pertaining, all that can render life happy, death peaceful, time comfortable, eternity glorious.

Let us, then, employ our thoughts this morning, in dwelling upon some of the great and unspeakable blessings, which must necessarily be involved, in this inspired declaration. The mind which, if not insensible, is still, perhaps,

but slightly and partially affected by this general proposition, may, under the teaching of God's grace, be roused to far higher feelings of gratitude, and far more delightful returns of devotedness, obedience, and love, by a closer contemplation of some of the covenanted blessings contained in the general and widely-extended promise.

The Apostle commences, then by the assertion, "The world" is yours.

This is, perhaps, the most astonishing proposition of the text. The world, the property of God's people! That very world, of which they are so plainly told, "Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" that very world which has so often driven them, as it were, as outcasts from its surface. Yes, brethren, the whole tenor of God's Word, reveals to us the fact, that it is for the sake of the people of God, and of them alone, that the Almighty tolerates the mass of iniquity and rebellion against himself, with which the world that we inhabit is for ever teeming. If God's people were at once entirely removed from its surface, if the voice of prayer

were for ever silenced, if the sacrifice of praise were for ever at an end, and the world was peopled only with the dreadful remnant that remained—the God-forgetting idler, the drunkard, the swearer, the murderer, the profane; and all the voices of men that ascended up to the throne of grace, were, as they would then unquestionably be, but as the dark, black smoke of the bottomless pit, who can doubt that the language of our God would be again, as it was of old, to Moses, “Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven?” Deut. ix, 14. Who can question but that the first hour of such an awful state of things, would be the last hour of this world’s guilty existence; and that either the winds of heaven, or the fires of hell, would blot out all traces of our miserable abode?

If, then, you are indeed the believing, obeying, praying people of God, “the world is yours,” although you never may possess an acre upon its surface; it is far more truly yours, than it has ever been the property of the most widely-reigning autocrat, who has held its millions in subjection. Its blessings are yours, for all the good things of the world are not only enjoyed

by the people of God, but enjoyed in a peculiar manner; they come to you with a sweetness and a pleasantness that they can come to none besides, for they are to you the covenanted mercies of a Father, while to others they are but as the chance and promiscuous gifts, flung from the indiscriminating hand of some unknown and unregarded stranger.

While others, therefore, enjoy the transient sweetness of the passing hour, you possess the double relish, the sweetness of the blessing, and the love of Him from whom it flows. He who knew the heart of man, far more accurately than most of its erring possessors, was inspired to say, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Prov. xv, 17. If this be true—and true it unquestionably is—of poor, frail, perishing human love, what is it of the love of God in Christ Jesus? That dinner of herbs, that dinner of dry bread, is sweet indeed, when sweetened with a Saviour's love, with a sense of his presence, a consciousness of his approbation, a knowledge of himself. Possessing this, God "gives you all things richly to enjoy;" and there is not an

innocent pleasure upon earth, of which you will not partake with a keenness of enjoyment, and an exquisiteness of relish, unknown to grosser appetites, and never experienced by the unrenewed and worldly mind.

We pass from the pleasures of the world, to its trials and afflictions. Even these are yours; none so heavy; none so grievous, that you do not feel from your inmost heart—I would not have been deprived of this, I would not have gone without this token of my Father's love, for any blessing that the world could offer me. I feel my very trials among my privileges, and would bless God for these my necessary medicines, as well as for my daily bread. Doubtless some will say that this is exaggeration, that this is more than even the best of men can realize; that it is enough to bear afflictions—it is too much to rejoice in them. But there is reason to believe, that if the heart of every true Christian in this assembly were laid open to the inspection of his fellow-men, as it is to Him from whom no secrets are hid, we should be justified in the declaration, that the sorrows and trials of earth are as entirely yours, yours to benefit and to

profit by, yours to be content with, and, in some cases, even to rejoice in, as its brightest pleasures, and most delightful gratifications.

Yes, my Christian brethren, “the world” is yours, and all that are in the world; the devil and his worst designs, evil men and their worst enormities, are not beyond the reach of that arm, which overrules every event for the good of God’s people. This is the very hell of hell to Satan, that “as his malice is limited by his power, his power is limited by God’s sovereignty,” so that every effort of that guilty spirit, for the ruin of God’s Church, is overturned for its positive benefit, for the profit of every—even the lowest—member of that Church. How must this daily, hourly discomfiture, and disappointment, add even to the pangs of Satan, whatever be their intensity and bitterness; every hour that passes over him, only convincing him the more fully of his own utter impotency, and the triumph of our God; showing him, that even the world, the one vast bait with which he ruins thousands, is made subservient to the eternal interests of God’s redeemed people; and that world, of which, in the garden of Eden, he believed he had for ever deprived the eternal

Architect, is still Messiah's world, and shall witness the last great triumph of the Redeemer, when he shall place his foot upon the serpent's head, and consign him to the blackness of darkness for ever.

Again; but "life" also is yours, says the Apostle, and "things present."

Temporal life and spiritual life. How much, then, is embraced in the declaration that life is yours! The seed of immortality, the first bright dawn of an eternal day. And all "things present," whether spiritual or temporal, which accompany it.

I. Spiritual things.

The grace of justification, by which you have received a full and sufficient pardon for every repented sin; the grace of acceptance, by which you are accepted of God, in Him who is the "Lord our righteousness;" the grace of sanctification, by which your blessed Redeemer has not only torn off the chains of your bondage, but replaced them by the jewels of holiness; not only taken away much that was polluted, and vile, and guilty, but clothed you with the robes which angels wear, making you partakers of the Divine nature, that your hearts may be

made "after God's own heart;" the grace of adoption, "Behold, what love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Can a mother forget her child, a parent his offspring? And is not our heavenly Father's love far greater than that of any earthly parent? will he not, therefore, bear with your weakness, hear your prayers, provide for your necessities, prepare you for your inheritance? The grace of perseverance, by which, having been made one with God, and God with you, you are strengthened against temptation, supported when weak, restored when fallen, and finally, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." These are "things present," these are among the spiritual blessings which are your portion here; but the promise even of the present, goes farther than this; it does not exclude things temporal. "He who has given to us his Son," said the Apostle, "how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?" And in reference to these very blessings, our Lord has himself declared, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." This is, however, a point of so much

importance to my poorer hearers, that I shall dwell a little longer upon it. I address some among you, perhaps, who are indeed among the true followers of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and poor and destitute though ye be, are yet the children of the King of kings, and the undoubted objects of his compassion, and consideration, and love. Now, when you read such declarations as those of the Psalmist, "I have been young and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, and his seed begging their bread," Psalm xxxvii, 25, the effect upon your minds may be—I believe to some it has been—rather of a painful than an encouraging nature. You may reasonably feel, if this be true, I fear I have little share in the covenant, for I have often needed not only the luxuries and comforts of life, but even bread itself.

However opposed, then, the opinion may be to the sentiments of many religious persons in the present day, we confess that we do not believe such declarations of freedom from temporal need and temporal misery, to belong to the dispensation under which we live. So far from it, that the very want of the good things of this

world, which would hinder you in your course to heaven, is a part of the promise: it is positively a part of your portion not to have those things, the possession of which, God, in your particular case, sees must be prejudicial to you. Therefore, be assured, and let not your hearts be troubled, while I tell you, if poverty be good for you, you shall have it; if disgrace be good, you shall have it; if contracted circumstances and evil report shall help you towards heaven, you shall not be without them; there is not, in fact, a greater mistake than believing that God's dearest children do not share, and share largely, in the troubles and sorrows, the poverty and necessities of earth, for "if in this life only we have hope in Christ," said a poor and afflicted disciple, "we are of all men most miserable." 1 Ep. Cor. xv, 19. While, perhaps, it was our Lord's express intention to convey this to his followers, when he delivered his beautiful and instructive parable of the rich man and Lazarus; for was not Lazarus a believer? Was he not as sincere a child of God as our Lord ever portrayed? and do we find him preserved from temporal sufferings and distress? Far from it. He lay unpitied at the rich man's gate, refused

even the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

When, therefore, we say, "things present" are yours, we believe that such a portion of them as shall really be for your eternal welfare, shall not be withheld from you; but we believe, at the same time, that that portion may be a very small one; that while God knows it to be not only sufficient for you, but the very best and the fittest you could receive, nothing but his grace enlightening your heart, and making God's will your will, can possibly reconcile it to yourselves. Take a familiar illustration of this;—you do not manifest your love to your children by giving all a large, or all an equal portion, either of food or raiment. The garment of the full-grown boy would ill become the babe in the mother's arms. It is the fittest, not the largest, which you esteem the best for each. And so is it with your heavenly Father. If you are his children, he invariably, whether it be great or small, gives you that portion which is, under every circumstance, as known only to himself, the fittest for you; and though you understand it not, and cannot perceive it now, a day will arrive, either in time or in eternity, when you

will fully acknowledge this great truth, and would not for worlds, have had one blessing more, or one reverse or trouble less, in your earthly lot, than those which He who loves you, has appointed for you.

The Christian's joy, therefore, with regard to "things present," is this—that he has precisely that allotment which comes proportioned by a Father's wisdom, and accompanied by the blessing of a Father's love; and this, to the grateful heart of the true child of God, is better, infinitely better, than all the surfeiting abundance of him who could cry, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." St. Luke, xii, 19.

The Apostle, however, in the text, does not limit the Christian's possession to "life and things present," but he declares that "death and things to come," are yours.

This is indeed a striking peculiarity of the believer's lot. The man of the world may say, Things past have been mine, things present are mine, but we defy him to add—none but the Christian can add—the triumphant conclusion, Things to come shall be mine. How blessed a prerogative of every real follower of God.

How marked the superiority of the Christian. Are you, through grace, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? and do you ever ask, What will the coming times bring with them? How much of moral evil, how much of physical evil, how much of spiritual evil, lies brooding, dark and lowering, beneath their wings? I know not, I cannot know, what will happen, but of this I am assured, with a certainty which nothing can affect, with an assurance which nothing can destroy, that He in whom I trust, is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, that he can and will control the last acts of his providence, as surely and as mercifully as he has already done the first acts of his grace, and that He, even He, has declared, that "things to come" are mine; arranged for my happiness, sanctified to my service, blessed to my present and eternal welfare. Why then should I despond? why should I even perplex myself? "Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth;" Isaiah, xlv, 9; "let the dead bury their dead." I will rest calmly and securely in the promises, in the power of my Almighty Saviour, "for all power is given to him in heaven and in earth," and what he has said, he can, and

therefore he will assuredly bring to pass, and overrule the mightiest events which can ever happen in the world, for the benefit even of me, the poorest and most insignificant of his children. Things past have not injured me, things present do not injure me, things to come cannot injure me; this is the cool and dispassionate conviction of my soul. How unspeakably great are the privileges, how strong, therefore, should be the confidence of the Christian.

Are any among you, however, disposed to add—It is true, for I believe my Redeemer's promise; things present, and things to come, however threatening and disastrous, are, and by the wonderful workings of his providence and grace, shall be my own; but there is yet one enemy I dare not face, there is one hour for which my faithless heart still quakes: that hour is the hour which shall, for ever, call me hence—that enemy is death. Be of good courage, brethren, this constant infirmity of our nature has not been forgotten in our promised privileges. It might have been sufficient to have included it in the "all things" which are ours; it might have contented our hearts to know and to feel that if "things to come" be ours, death must

necessarily be one, and therefore needed no separate enumeration, but "He who came" expressly, "to destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage," Hebrews, ii, 15; has not failed to speak, even to our very weaknesses and our fears, upon this deeply interesting point. He tells us, distinctly, by the mouth of this holy Apostle, that even "death" is ours—ours not indeed to escape from, that would be a faithless and a coward wish, but ours to meet, ours to oppose, and ours to conquer, in the strength and through the merits of our Redeemer. Yes, the time must arrive when what has happened to all, shall happen to you, "when the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; when the silver cord shall be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken; when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Eccles. xii, 5. What is not the assurance worth, which can stand against that hour? which shall be calm, when all around are agitated, peaceful, when all around are anxious, and enable you to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to

keep that which I have committed unto him, against that day;" 2 Tim. i, 12; "my flesh and my heart faileth," there is no promise that they shall do otherwise, 'for they are of the earth, earthy; "my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Psalm, lxxiii, 26. Thus, through the grace of your conquering Redeemer, death will be yours, its sting drawn out, its terrors quelled, its power for ever broken. And this to the faintest and weakest believer among you, as certainly and unquestionably, as to the strongest and most advanced. If you are indeed placed upon a rock, though you stand but a single foot above the highest limit of the waves, you are as secure as he who stands ten thousand feet above your head, and that rock must fall, before your life be perilled. So is it with the Rock of Ages! Whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, if you are Christ's, for Christ is God's.

Such is a faint outline of the incalculable privileges of the saints on earth! Ought not every one among us, then, to ask his heart in sincerity, the great question upon which an eternity will depend—Am I the Lord Jesus Christ's? have I

fled to Him for refuge, for pardon, for grace, for strength? Is all my trust, all my righteousness, all my hope, in Him, and in Him alone? If you possess a belief, a reasonable, a scriptural, a well-grounded belief that it is, not a word which we have spoken this day, not a promise, not a privilege, which does not belong to yourself. "All are yours;" grace which the world cannot take away, peace which the world cannot understand, promises which the world cannot appreciate; "All are yours." Live daily more and more in the belief and in the enjoyment of them, then shall life, with all its trials, be to you but a season of preparation for joys which shall never end; and death, with all its agonies, but the gate through which you shall pass from your prison to your palace; and "things to come," with all the infinity of their blessedness, shall be your purchased portion, your enduring inheritance, when "things present" shall have passed away for ever.

SERMON IX.

THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

REV. VII, 13-15.

“AND ONE OF THE ELDERS ANSWERED, SAYING UNTO ME, WHAT ARE THESE WHICH ARE ARRAYED IN WHITE ROBES? AND WHENCE CAME THEY? AND I SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, THOU KNOWEST. AND HE SAID TO ME, THESE ARE THEY WHICH CAME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION, AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES, AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB. THEREFORE ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, AND SERVE HIM DAY AND NIGHT IN HIS TEMPLE.”

SINCE we last assembled in this house of prayer, our Church has celebrated the return of one of the most important festivals in the Christian year—the ascension into heaven of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All that remained to set the seal of Omnipotence to the great and glorious work of man’s redemption, was on that day achieved; when He, who was

more than conqueror over Satan, sin, and death, returned to the bosom of the Father, from whence he came, again to receive blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, of which, as we are told, the ten thousand times ten thousand of the hosts of heaven pronounced him "worthy."

Our Church, well knowing how little disposed the hearts and minds of her members would be to dwell upon these high and elevating subjects; how much we are all bound down to earth, by the world, its duties and its entanglements; most wisely does not content herself with the beautifully appropriate services which she selects for the anniversary of the ascension, but again, by her Collect and Scriptures for to-day, endeavors to maintain and strengthen the feeling which she hopes her former efforts may have enkindled. She is unwilling to suffer the blessed theme to depart from our memories, and she uses all her holy influence to retain it there. It is as though she had stood with the disciples on the Mount of the Ascension, and with them had "looked steadfastly towards heaven as He went up," and was still, like those same disciples, unable to withdraw her gaze from the stream of light and glory which had broken in upon her,

when the everlasting doors were opened, and the King of Glory re-entered the celestial abodes.

While, then, the parting beams of the ascending Saviour, like the last rays of sun-set, thus gleam upon us, let us strive to promote the designs of our Church, and by God's grace, give, if it be but for this Sabbath hour, some thought, and enjoy some foretaste of higher feelings than those of earth, by endeavoring, in imagination, but imagination sanctified and chastened by the revealed Word of God, to follow in the train of our Lord, and to take one transient gaze even within the portals of heaven itself.

For our guide in this blissful meditation, let us adopt that portion of Holy Writ which forms the context to the passage we have selected. Let us endeavor to see, with the eye of faith, what John, the beloved Apostle, saw by actual vision. Hear his own description: "After this," that is, after, in obedience to the invitation, "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter," he had stood, as it were, upon the threshold of heaven, and after he had seen the Jewish Church, the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the remnant that should be saved with an everlasting salvation,

and who were for ever received into the mansions of the blessed, all sealed by the angel of the living God. "After this," he continues, "I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

Here, by the light of prophetic vision, we see the whole Gentile Church, as it is partially gathered even now, as it shall be most abundantly filled up, when, in the language of our burial service, it shall "please God, of his gracious goodness, to accomplish the number of his elect, and to hasten his kingdom." Let us, then, dwell for a moment upon this first sight in that country "whither our Saviour Christ is gone before." Of the unutterable glories and mysteries of the throne, and of Him who sits upon it, we dare not speak; that must be reserved for the day when we shall have dropped the body of sin and death which now encumbers us, and when the veil shall be removed from our hearts. But concerning those before the throne, that great and blessed multitude, as both their place and their employment are revealed to us, we

need not be silent. First, then, we shall observe their place—they stand “before the throne and before the Lamb.” Their post is evidently the highest in honor, and glory, and happiness of all the hosts of heaven, for they are immediately in front of the throne, upon which is the High and Holy One, who “inhabiteth the praises of eternity.”

Now, observe the next order of Beings who encircle that throne of “light which no man may approach unto;” “And all the angels,” says the Word of God, “stood round about the throne, and about the elders,” i. e. the angels, the host of heaven, are there, but they stand “round about” that countless multitude who are admitted the nearest and the closest to the Eternal One. Thus much for their places; with regard to their employments, they are essentially the same, for they are all, as the Divine Word expresses it, the “ministers of God who do his pleasure,” occupied in the scene before us in praising and glorifying the One great object of their adoration and their love, and doubtless employed throughout all time, and throughout all space, in carrying forward the wonderful

designs of the wisdom, and the power, and the love of Deity, in regions at present utterly inscrutable to mortal eye, and entirely inaccessible to human inquiry.

Still, though the employment of the heavenly host, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, be, as we have seen, essentially the same in the scene before us, viz. the ascription of praise and glory to the triune Jehovah, the language in which it is conveyed is as different, and as remarkably different, as these two orders of beings are themselves. This is the hymn of angels—"Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever;" Rev. vii, 11, 12; a simple and beautiful chorus, an ascription of praise to the Lord God Omnipotent. Now, mark the distinctive feature in the hymn of that unnumbered multitude who stand next and nearest to the throne of God—"They cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb;" Rev. vii, 10; or as the praises of the same worshippers are given still more at length in the 5th chapter, "Thou art worthy,

for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Rev. v, 9.

You observe the difference. In the hymn of the angels, there is no reference to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, no mention of the great work of redemption, which for them was never needed, for they kept their first estate, and are still the pure and spotless beings they were created.

In the hymn of the countless multitude of the spirits of the just, the one great theme of saints in heaven and saints on earth, forms the burden of their song, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." How striking a peculiarity! Throughout the ages of eternity, the saints shall never sing the angels' song; the angels can never be partakers of the peculiar feelings of the gratitude of the saints; that feeling which must, for ever and for ever, fill the hearts, and engage the voices of those who have once been lost, and ruined, and sin-polluted upon earth.— Yes, when unnumbered ages shall have passed away, the heart of every glorified spirit in the kingdom of our Father, will still be occupied even to overflowing with one great, and blessed,

and overpowering recollection: heaven was once closed against me by my own sins; hell was prepared for me by my own obduracy and impenitence; but thanks be to God, I was redeemed by the blood of Him who sits upon the throne, and rescued by his power from sin, from Satan, and from self, and brought hither, an everlasting monument of the love of my Redeemer.

No sooner had St. John heard those heavenly strains, and seen this glorious company, than one of the elders answered saying unto him, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" speaking evidently of the multitude which stood the nearest to the throne, because, as we have seen, they only were so attired. St. John answered, "Sir, thou knowest;" then the elder replied, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore they are before the throne of God." Wonderful and instructive truth! Of all that have entered heaven from this world of sin and misery, one universal characteristic is, that they have come "out of great tribulation."

The multitude whom, by the eye of faith, we now see standing before the throne, although so numerous that no man can number them, so diverse that all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, have there, their representatives; comprising, therefore, those of the highest refinement, and those of the lowest barbarism; those who, while on earth, fared sumptuously every day, and those who lay unheeded at many a rich man's gate; this multitude contains not an individual who has not come out of great tribulation, who has not once labored, and travailed, and mourned, and suffered upon earth. It is the description, not of one, but of all. It is not that there is here and there, in that vast multitude, a poor and wretched creature, whose lot on earth was filled with misery and woe, and to whom, in compensation for all he then had undergone, the Almighty has now vouchsafed an eternal weight of glory; no, of that unnumbered number, this is universally, unexceptionably true, All came "out of great tribulation." Sorrow once had set its seal on the heart of each, and whatever was his station, there were griefs known, probably only to God and to him-

self, and for which God alone provided the alleviation and the cure.

How improbable is such a statement! Is heaven filled only with those who once were mourners here? What, then, becomes of the happy? of those for whom the world has never had a cross? Brethren, if this be your difficulty, it is easily answered. Where will you find such? Where live these invariably happy ones? Where is the lot, however high, and noble, and joyous, in which grief and suffering, at some period, do not plant a thorn? But it is of more than this, that the passage before us speaks.

Let us then, in imagination, draw near that happy throng who surround the throne, and let us question some among them, upon whose countenances, care has left no trace, and sorrow apparently has never imprinted a single furrow. Is it true, can it be possible, that in the world you suffered tribulation? Yes, blessed be God, mine was a lot of trial, of poverty, and of disappointment; of the good things of the world, as we thought them while on earth, I never was partaker, but by the grace of my God, my poverty led me to strive after the true riches, even the unsearchable riches of Christ, and they were

mine: free, sovereign, undeserved mercy, made them mine, and kept them mine, until it brought me here; and in me the Word of my God has been abundantly fulfilled, that he hath "chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." St. James, ii, 5.

And you, again, were you also thus wretched, and miserable, and poverty-stricken upon earth? No, it was my lot to say with David, "the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage," Psalm, xvi, 6; for God hath given me all things richly to enjoy. You, then, escaped the tribulation from which all around you suffered? Far from it; I had those to whom my heart was tenderly attached, taken from me at the moment when my love was strongest, and my need of them, most urgent. I wept many a bitter tear, I mourned through many an hour of sorrow; but the trial was from my heavenly Father's hand; and by his grace those tears of sorrow were converted into tears of joy, and my tribulation was made the means of winning me to himself. I had heard much, read much, and thought much of this blessed place, but never should I have been here, had not these precious

trials taught me the emptiness of all, I then possessed, and brought me to the Saviour's feet.

But yet once more. Were you also among the poor and the desolate? or among the bereaved, and the widowed, and the stricken ones? No! mine was yet a different lot. The arrow of conviction of sin, struck me in my career of worldliness and mirth, and brought me at once to that point which many have attained only by years of sickness, or days of sorrow. The sight of my own heart, the knowledge of its plague and its pollution, sent home upon me by the Spirit of God, was my "great tribulation." I could truly say with David, "My sin was ever before me;" "I went heavily as one that mourneth for his mother," until it pleased my heavenly Father to turn my mourning into joy, by revealing his Son in me, and fulfilling to me, the chief of sinners, his own most blessed promise, "He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him." Psalm, cxxvi, 6.

Were we thus to search through all the ranks of that vast multitude, and speak thus, one by

one, with every individual of whom it is composed, each would assuredly tell us the same truth, that some trial, some trouble, some sorrow, some privation, some sickness, some anxiety, was needed in most cases, before he was made deeply conscious of, and penitent for his sins, and became united in heart and soul to the Redeemer; but, certainly, in all cases, yes, in every particular instance, before he attained to “the stature of the fulness of Christ,” and was “made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

And is this the truth of Scripture, brethren? Do you really believe it? Then ought it not to change your views, and moderate your grief under every disappointment, and trial, and affliction? Whatever be the nature of the sorrow under which you suffer, it is your privilege, if you are a child of God, to consider—this is a portion of the “tribulation,” which my Lord promised to each, and all his followers here below, when he said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation;” can I follow him in sincerity, and yet escape it? This is a portion of the “great tribulation,” by which every saint in glory was once exercised, and out of which he was trium-

phantly delivered; I could never join that happy throng, if I travelled not the road, by which they journeyed, and suffered not by those sanctifying and purifying fires, through which they passed. Let this, then, be your consolation—“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” 1 St. Peter iv, 12. While on the other hand, to those among you who may feel—I am preserved from all these sorrows, my lot is a happy and an unclouded one; surely if I were a child of God, I should experience something at least of the tribulations of his people. Be patient, brethren, we have often heard this language, and have marked well the speakers, and as years have passed away, we have seen them all, without exception, sooner or later, under the chastening hand of their heavenly Father, brightening in the furnace, the fires of which have been kindled by his love. Only bear in mind, that it is not the trial, but the effect of the trial, which must form the subject of your anxiety. It is

not, Have you suffered? or how long, or how greatly suffered? but, Has it wrought the work for which it was in mercy sent—the bringing to Christ, or the building up in Christ Jesus, of your immortal souls?

The consideration leads us, in conclusion, to one other characteristic, equally striking, and equally universal, with that upon which we have been meditating. We have seen that all those who stand before the throne of God, have travelled by the same road, in having come out of much tribulation; but all are likewise clothed in similar vestments, for, as we have read, “they stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes.” Whence was this? Listen again to the Elder, who explained it to St. John: “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God.”

How does this correct one of the most common misapprehensions of the natural heart? How many would have pronounced that the trials, and the troubles, the sicknesses, and sorrows of the Saints on earth, were the cause of

their being now, the Saints in heaven. How entirely the misapprehension is corrected here, I need not tell. It is not, they labored, they suffered, they agonized on earth, and therefore are they here. But, "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—**THEREFORE** are they before the throne of God." In every individual case, then, the affliction had been a sanctified affliction, i. e., in the language of the Apostle, the tribulation had worked "patience," patience under God's chastening hand, "and patience, experience," experience of the saving love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, "and experience, hope," hope of the salvation which Christ has purchased, the good hope, through grace, of his everlasting kingdom. It was not until this was done, until each had fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel, until each had for himself washed his robe and made it white in the blood of the Lamb, that he possessed the smallest title to the inheritance which he now enjoys.

Brethren, is it possible that with such a truth as this, so clearly proclaimed as it is in all the doctrinal portions of Scripture; so wonderfully, because, if we may so express it, so incidentally

exemplified in this, which may almost be called an historical portion of Holy Writ, there should be one among us, looking to any thing else which the world can offer, for his admittance into the heavenly abodes?

No! brethren, the single word "THEREFORE" would prevent you, for it preaches far plainer than a thousand homilies. It contracts the whole Gospel into a single line. Observe its force. You have not sought the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ. But you have suffered much—we allow it. You have given much—we grant it. You have known and practised much of high and honorable dealing, in all your intercourse with your fellow-men—we acknowledge it. You have come out of great tribulation—we deny it not. The hour of death is over, and you stand at heaven's gate, seeking for admittance. It does not open. All within, are clothed in the white robe which they put on, on earth, "therefore they are before the throne of God." You cannot enter there, you are unclothed with this garment, you rejected it, like the ungrateful guest at the marriage supper, when it was freely offered you; "THEREFORE," you are for ever excluded.

Will you complain of this? It is impossible. You will be speechless. Or, if you speak, it will only be to acknowledge the justice, the propriety, nay, the absolute necessity, of the sentence, "I never knew you, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Need we, then, urge you, this day, this hour, to seek a place with the ascended Saviour; to lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset you, and to run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith; asking, and asking as the only boon that heaven itself holds, worth your seeking, for His blood to pardon, His Spirit to cleanse, His righteousness to clothe you; that, having even now put on the garments of a Saviour's righteousness, the robes of purity and peace, of those who are before the throne, you may, on the day of your departure hence, "have right," as the Word of God strongly expresses it, a right, not of merit, but of fitness, "to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city," Rev. xxii, 14, and take your place among that unnumbered multitude, who, having once been admitted there, shall go no more out for ever.

SERMON X.

PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN.

ST. LUKE XXI, 31.

“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NIGH AT HAND.”

It is the wise and benevolent intention of our Church, at this season* of the Christian year, to draw the thoughts and feelings of her people towards some of the highest mysteries, and the most elevating promises, of the religion they profess. Thus, at one time, she leads us, by her appropriate selections of Scripture, to look forward to the holy anniversary of our Lord's first coming in the flesh; at another, by the same judicious arrangement, to his second coming to judge the world. She intermingles these great and solemn truths, with many fair, and blessed, and soul-encouraging visions of future

* Advent.

glory, which God has prepared for those who love him.

Among the portions of Scripture to which we allude, and which the Church has selected for these valuable and important purposes, the Gospel of this day* deserves the serious consideration of her people. There is little doubt, that it refers primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem, and that, in the language of Eastern metaphor, "the sun, and the moon, and the stars" represented, and were well understood, by our Lord's hearers, to represent, the different powers and dignities of earth. Thus, when these same terms are adopted in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Jewish commentators upon the text, declare, that by the sun, they understand "the kingdom of the house of David;" by the moon, the "Sanhedrin;" and by the stars, "the Rabbies."—There is little doubt, therefore, that however perplexing such a description, as we have read this morning, may be to us, it was, to those to whom it was primarily addressed, perfectly intelligible, perfectly clear; and that the Jews entered as fully into all the warnings and all the threatenings of the prophecy, as they did into

* The Second Sunday in Advent.

those of the parable of the vineyard and the husbandmen, when, notwithstanding the veil of metaphor beneath which it was shrouded, they so feelingly exclaimed—"God forbid."

Thus, when they heard, in the language of the text, that "the kingdom of God was nigh at hand," and that that "generation should not pass away till all were fulfilled," they perfectly understood, not merely that this was a prediction of the end of the world, and the final close of all things, and the revelation of the everlasting kingdom of God; but that, in its primary sense, it foretold a more visible and glorious display of the kingdom of the Messiah, in the destruction of his enemies, in the overthrow of their nation, their rulers, and themselves.

This primary sense of the prophecy, has been most undeniably fulfilled. The Son of man came, as he had promised, with power and great glory, and "the kingdom of God, which was nigh at hand," when he spake the words of the text, shortly afterwards actually arrived; and before that generation passed away, the Roman eagle had fleshed his beak within their crowded city, and had flapped his wings over the smoking ruins of their temple.

But there is, as all revelation assures us, yet another fulfilment of the text, awaiting the people of God, one in which you, and I, and all must bear a part; the day on which this kingdom of God, which even now "is nigh at hand" to every individual among us—for who will say that death, before another sun hath set, shall not introduce him there?—the day on which that world of mystery shall be laid open to us, and we shall find that, as expected visitors, as invited guests, its riches and its pleasures, its delights and its enjoyments, shall be for ever made our own; or, as banished and degraded outcasts, the things belonging to our peace, shall be for ever hidden from our eyes; while the remembrance that they once were freely offered, presented to us, pressed upon us, will remain only to add bitterness to our pangs, and fuel to our fires, throughout eternity.

It is, then, of this future and glorious kingdom that we would this day speak; of a city of which the Word of God assures us, that all the ideas, that man has ever formed of splendor and magnificence, are but as the mere tinsel of a toy, when compared with its ineffable realities; of which the same word has said, "The city had

no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof;" and again, "I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it;" Rev. xxi, 22; a city, of which, after all the magnificence which language can portray, has this reserved for its last, its best, its highest commendation—"There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. xxi, 27. Such is the "kingdom of God," of which we speak, a kingdom which God has promised; for has not our Lord declared, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" a kingdom which Christ himself has purchased and bequeathed, and settled upon his children; for was not his latest prayer on earth, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am;" a kingdom, to which, every true Christian is anxiously looking; for which, by the influences of God's Holy Spirit, he is daily preparing; and in which, through the merits of God's dear Son, he is hoping to take up his everlasting abode.

Probably, there is not an individual now present who does not desire, and even more than this, who does not expect, to enter into this heavenly kingdom. But, then, a mistake upon this subject would be fatal; let us therefore, consider, with all plainness, some few practical points, which may materially aid us in determining, whether we have a sure and scriptural ground for this expectation.

I. To be partakers of the heavenly kingdom, it must be clear to every man of common understanding and common reflection, that we must possess such qualifications as shall render us, in the language of Scripture, "meet to be partakers." The work of Christ would, with humility be it spoken, be a most imperfect work, if heaven were not a prepared place, and its inhabitants a prepared people.

It is not enough, then, that heaven is purchased and prepared for us, but we must be prepared for it. This is the point upon which the whole inquiry before us hinges; for if we are not preparing for heaven, it is obvious to a demonstration, that heaven is not, and cannot be prepared for us.

Let me, then, urge you to inquire, Have you

reason to think that you are the possessors of such thoughts, feelings, affections, habits, manner of life, as can afford you a well-grounded hope that you are daily becoming more and more “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?” In other words, Have you reason to hope that you are heavenly in your thoughts and conversation, and heavenly in your lives and conduct?

First, as regards your thoughts and conversation.

It is impossible, that you should be really in earnest in this great business of life, the preparation for eternity, without its engaging a portion, and a very large portion of your consideration; where there is nothing of Christ, nothing of heaven, in the thoughts, it is utterly impossible that there should be any thing of Christ in the soul. It is easy for men to say, and men will say, that they are so occupied by the necessary business and pursuits of life, that they have no time, no opportunity, to think frequently, and converse occasionally, upon these high themes, that they have scarcely the power, even if they possessed the inclination, to recall their thoughts from the bustle of the world, to the preparation

for heaven. Here, then, is a point upon which we are distinctly at issue, and let us try the question by one of daily occurrence, you yourselves being the judges. We would say to the man most engaged among you, in the self-same all-absorbing duties, which will not allow him to think of heaven; had you ever a truly beloved and affectionate friend, or child, or wife, suffering from dangerous and perhaps fatal illness, every hour expecting to bring with it some fearful change, or some important crisis? and if so, when you were compelled to leave this object of your tenderest affection, to pursue the accustomed duties of your daily calling, did no thought of her whom you had left upon a sick and dying bed, ever force its way and struggle upward in the mind, through all the mass of opposing elements with which that mind was filled? did the rising sigh, or even the starting tear, never remind you, amid your busiest hours, and most engrossing occupations, of her whom you had left suffering at home upon a bed of anguish? did you never allude to her situation, never speak upon the subject, never mention her name; in short, did she never once throughout the busy day, so much as cross your mind, and steal a

few moments from the pressing occupations around you? Surely, there are few, perhaps there are none, whose hearts are not devoid of the common sympathies of our nature, who will deny that such things have been, that such things are. Nay, more, is there one among you, who would not despise the man who should confess that there is no person, no subject of sufficient interest, to divide within his breast, the sovereignty of this world's business, and pursuits?

Then, brethren, if this be so, why is it otherwise with regard to heaven? Why has that high subject no prominent place in your reflections, no interest in your thoughts, no place in your conversation? Why does your mind never revert with anxious solicitude to that happy kingdom, and inquire, whether you are walking in the road which leads to it? The answer is obvious; because it has no strong, no real hold upon your heart; every worldly duty, and pleasure, and person, and pursuit, has a larger portion of your affections than this one, this great, this all-important subject; and, therefore, while all partake, according to their respective places in your estimation, of your time, of your thoughts

and your conversation, this, and this alone, is overlooked and forgotten.

But we must pass on to our second and still more important inquiry. Have you good reason to hope that you are heavenly in your lives and conduct?

There are, indeed, most grievous mistakes upon this point, even in the Christian world. The man who is continually occupied in the pursuits of his daily calling, is apt to reply to such an inquiry, How is it possible for me to be heavenly in my life and conduct? If I were a minister of religion, or if my time were my own, and I could devote it to spiritual research, or spiritual occupations, then, indeed, I might be heavenly in my daily conduct, but now it is not to be expected, it is impossible.

There cannot, brethren, be a grosser misapprehension; for observe, every portion of God's providential arrangements, proves that it was his intention that men should be employed, as men are employed, when innocently engaged in the duties of their worldly calling; and therefore, it is evident, that if God ever intended that we should be heavenly while on earth, he intended

we should be so while in those callings. If, therefore, the belief that “the kingdom of God is nigh at hand,” be an influential principle, be assured it will accompany you to the office, and to the exchange, as certainly as to the house of prayer, or to the sacramental table. And what will be the effect?—that you will be as superior to the mere man of the world in the uprightness of your conduct, the honor and integrity of your transactions, the fairness and honesty of your dealings, as you are in spiritual knowledge and in heavenly anticipations; because you will be constantly living as on the borders of an unseen world, into which you are conscious you may at any one moment be summoned, and the joys, the hopes, and anticipations of which, mingle with every feeling of your heart.

If you are not thus influenced, be assured that you are not, in the scriptural sense of the phrase, heavenly in your lives and conduct, you are not, as the true people of God have always been, “a peculiar people,” forming, in the midst of the world in which they are placed, a living testimony to the existence of another world, infinitely higher, infinitely better, to which their hearts and hopes are tending.

Bear this in mind, then, and avoid the misapprehension to which we have referred. Remember, that we are not advocating the absurdity, sometimes unjustly attributed to us, that the intelligent man of business, is to give up the counting-house for the closet, or the active tradesman, resign the ledger for the Bible, the lives of useful members of society, for the existence of useless ascetics; but that both are to carry from the closet, and from the Bible, those invaluable principles, which exalt and dignify, and, I might almost say, sanctify the common relationships, and the every-day pursuits, of the most humble walks of life, and that both will thus be enabled to glorify God the most abundantly in the station to which it has pleased Him to call them.

And now, brethren, having before us, plain and practical definitions of these things, let us proceed to that personal application, that heart-searching view of them, which can alone render this subject profitable to our souls. No doubt I am addressing many, in whose conduct, as far as man is the judge, there is, perhaps, nothing to condemn, in whose character, little to disapprove, to whose daily intercourse with their

fellow-men, no reasonable exception can be taken, and yet, were they to speak truly, they would be compelled to confess, that they have fallen short of every test which has this day been applied to them. A man seldom rises above his principles, and such men are perfectly conscious that there is nothing heavenly, nothing spiritual, in any of the thoughts of their mind, the affections of their heart, the principles of their lives. They have, in fact, never desired that there should be; they have, throughout life, regulated their conduct by that which, perhaps, may be deemed even a high standard among the honorable and upright men of the world, but which, in the sight of God, and when seen in the light of eternity, is so low a standard, that it finds no place in the Word, or in the mind of the holy and heart-searching Jehovah. And they are satisfied with this; but, brethren, do not deceive yourselves, God is not satisfied; if his Word be true, he cannot be satisfied. He has said, "My son, give me thy heart;" and while you have given him the mere profession of the lips, you have, perhaps, given your heart to any, or to every one, of his creatures, in preference to Himself. He has

declared that there is a kingdom nigh unto you, which he calls "the kingdom of God," and into which a day, an hour, a moment, is sufficient to introduce you: and He has urged upon you the necessity of seeking first this kingdom, that you may stand always ready, always prepared, for your great and solemn change. You acknowledge, that this has never formed the subject of your efforts, and your desires, but you are contented, in the place of it, to point to your relative duties, and to your honest and honorable dealings, and to expect that these, which have reference only to the world which now is, to the kingdom in which you are now dwelling, should be accepted of God as a meet and fitting preparation, for the kingdom of eternity. Surely, upon every other subject, the absurdity of such a mode of reasoning would be sufficiently apparent. You may, for instance, have been a most conscientious man of business, your habits of bartering and exchange, of buying and selling, quite unexceptionable, but, then, in heaven there is neither buying nor selling; what, therefore, can this profit you in the way of preparation? You may have been a most intellectual man of science, have dived into all its secrets,

and have searched all causes and all effects, but what comparison will the profoundest discoveries of science, bear to the knowledge, with which the first moment in heaven, will endow the enlightened soul of the poorest and most ignorant peasant? You may have spoken all languages, but what will the most perfect acquirement of all the languages of the world, profit you in that kingdom, which the confusion of tongues has never reached, and where but one tongue is ever heard? You may have been a most excellent parent, or dutiful child, but in heaven there is but one parent and one family, and the only virtues you have ever cultivated, will there find no employment. You may have been a most admirable husband, or most affectionate wife, but in heaven "there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage." All these things, then, praiseworthy as they are—for do not mistake me, I am not underrating their value, God forbid—but all these things of themselves, and practised without any reference to God's will, and God's Word, can form no preparation for that kingdom, upon the very brink of which, your foot is at this moment standing; and if your next step were to be within the

veil, if the next moment were to find you in eternity, I do not scruple to say that any, and that all these virtues and endowments, would be utterly unavailing, to secure you one hour's participation in the joys of that glorious inheritance.

Be warned, then, brethren, if this be the path which you are treading, it cannot lead you to our Father's kingdom. It may lead to honor, respectability and wealth; you may be loved, and applauded, and admired, but then, as our Lord himself said, "Ye have received your consolation;" St. Luke, vi, 24; you must not, you cannot complain, that while you have guided your conduct by the opinions and manners of one kingdom, you have missed, how widely and irrevocably missed the other. The only way to the kingdom of which I speak, lies through the close, and intimate, and personal union with that blessed Redeemer who hath declared, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The only preparation for that kingdom, must commence in that change of heart, that renewal of heart, that preparation of heart, which the Word of God assures us is "from the Lord." The only acquirements which can fit you for a participa-

tion in that kingdom, is the acquirement of those feelings of a sincere and fervent love to God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, which regulates the conduct, influences the affections, conforms the whole mind, and temper, and disposition, and man, to the mind which was in Christ Jesus, and to the image of our God. The only habits which, even while on earth, can promote the same blessed end, are the habits of a holy obedience to the will of our God, of frequent and intimate communion with Him, and of the delightful exercise of praising His glorious name. Duties and occupations which, by anticipating, even while on earth, in some measure, the duties and occupations, and pursuits of heaven, will indeed qualify you for its eternal and infinitely blessed abodes—those abodes which the most perfect performance of duties could never merit, but which the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for his believing and obeying followers, and in which he is even now awaiting the hour, when the “everlasting doors” shall be lifted up, and his redeemed people shall enter in.

SERMON XI.

AIDS TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

2 KINGS, VIII, 13.

“AND HAZAEL SAID, BUT WHAT! IS THY SERVANT A DOG, THAT HE SHOULD DO THIS GREAT THING?”

OF all knowledge, that which we learn with the greatest difficulty, and dwell upon the most reluctantly, and forget the most readily, is the knowledge of our own hearts. The man of the world never, in the Christian's meaning of the phrase, knows himself; he has no line to fathom, no gauge to measure, no eye to see, no heart to conceive, the undiscovered depths of iniquity which lie within. Even the child of God is oft-times ignorant of this important knowledge, or learns it not, except by “line upon line, precept upon precept,” failure upon failure, sin upon sin, it is taught him by the unerring spirit of wisdom and truth.

The striking incident from which the text is taken, will well illustrate the truth of these remarks, and at the same time by God's grace, afford us an opportunity of offering a few practical lessons for the attainment of one of the most desirable objects which can interest the true Christian—the knowledge of himself.

We read at the seventh verse of the chapter before us, that Benhadad, the king of Syria, was sick, and it was told him that Elisha, the prophet, was come down to Damascus. Benhadad although an idolater, had probably often heard Naaman, his captain of the host, whose leprosy had been miraculously cured by Elisha, speak of the wonder-working powers of this man of God; he had himself suffered by the supernatural knowledge of the prophet, and had, not long before, tried, although unsuccessfully, to destroy him; but feeling anxious to ascertain the result of his present sickness, he determines to inquire of this prophet of the God of Israel. Accordingly, “The king said to Hazael, Take a present in thine hand and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord, by him saying, Shall I recover of this disease?” “So Hazael went to meet the prophet, with a present of

every good thing in Damascus, forty camels burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son, Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" We will not stay to comment upon the difference of the feelings, with which the people of God are regarded in the days of affliction, from those with which they are beheld in the unclouded hour of health and happiness. You, who like to follow up the reflection, will find in the sixth chapter, this same king, Benhadad, sending an armed force to bring the prophet of the Lord to him, either dead or alive, as one of his most formidable opponents; but, now from the bed of sickness, he cannot send too humbly, or too kindly, "Thy son, Benhadad," to secure the good offices of one who has the Lord for his God.

As soon as Hazael had made the inquiry, with which his master had charged him, the prophet replies, "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest surely recover; howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die;" obviously inferring, that there was nothing mortal in the malady, with which the King was afflicted, and that therefore, as regarded natural causes, he

might unquestionably recover; but that, notwithstanding this, the prophet foresaw that he should die. And Hazael "settled his countenance steadfastly," i. e. attempted to look grave and sorrowful at this mournful intelligence, until, from the man of God gazing calmly in his face, and seeing through his hypocrisy, "he was ashamed." We do not apprehend that there was any intention at that moment in the heart of Hazael, of engaging in those sins, of which he was afterwards guilty, but that there was a degree of satisfaction at the predicted death of his master, which he found it difficult to repress.

Then, we are told, "the man of God wept." "And Hazael said, Why weepest my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do to the children of Israel; their strong-holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child." "And Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." The prophet enters into no particulars; he does not predict the atrocious means by

which he should succeed to the sovereign power: he says nothing that could instigate Hazael to those deeds which he had foretold, and thus cause the prediction to work its own fulfilment; he simply tells him, that he knows he shall be king, and that the day of prosperity will decide, whether he be indeed capable of the enormities, which the prophet had foretold. The subsequent events are very briefly recounted. Hazael returned to his master, and carried with him a false report of what the prophet had said, assuring him not that he *might* recover, which Elisha had really declared, but that he certainly should recover, which Elisha had as distinctly denied. Within four-and twenty hours of his arrival, Hazael commences upon his work of blood, by the murder of his benefactor; for we are told, that “He took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it over Benhadad’s face,” while lying either asleep or helpless through the debilitating effects of his sickness, “so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his stead.” 2 Kings viii, 15.

It is not my intention, to dwell upon the particulars of this remarkable history; the only point to which I wish to direct your attention, is

the utter ignorance, the absolute incredulity of Hazael with regard to those things that were in his heart, and which, in so short a period, were developed in his conduct.

When the prophet foretells his guilt, Hazael appears absolutely lost in astonishment at the improbability of such a charge; he does not think it enough to deny the possibility in the strongest and plainest manner, but he asks, almost scoffingly, "But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?" Have I changed my nature, am I become a wild beast, that you should consider me even capable of actions such as these? Yet, as you have seen, within four-and-twenty hours, he fully verified all that the prophet had spoken; and by the means which he adopted to obtain the throne, gave fearful promise of what might be expected when he had secured it. While, from his subsequent history, we learn that such were his cruelties and his oppressions of the house of Israel, so widely depopulating, and so effectually destructive, that he left them but "fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand foot-men," for, to use the expressive language of the inspired his-

torian, "he had made them like the dust by threshing." 2 Kings xiii, 3—7.

Now, my brethern, to apply this instructive narrative to ourselves.

May we not, first, deduce at least this important lesson from it, that there are the germs of sins in the heart of man, of which he has himself, perhaps, no conception, but which require only the day of temptation, to nurture them up into the most frightful and prolific fruitfulness. It was well said, by one of old, that, "It is the hot sun which draws out the adder." When Hazael declares himself incapable of the atrocities which Elisha had predicted, the prophet contents himself with the reply, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king." The prophet knew enough of human nature to know, that if these things were in the heart of Hazael, the day of prosperity would develop them; and, in this single sentence, gave him warning enough, had Hazael been a follower of the God of Israel, to send him to his own heart, in the way of self-examination, and to a throne of mercy, where he might have found grace to help him in his hour of need, and strength to with-

stand the fearful assault of the evil one, which was awaiting him.

Such, doubtless, was the prophet's intention, and such shall be my endeavor, in the remaining portion of this discourse, in which I shall attempt to offer you some plain and practical rules, by which you may be assisted in discovering the sins which are in your heart, before, like Hazael, you are taught them, by the fearful exhibition of them, in actual practice and positive transgression.

First, then, establish it as a principle in your own mind, that you are not beyond the reach of any temptation, however degrading, of any sin, however debasing, by which the fallen children of Adam can be led astray. It is from an overweening, an unscriptural security, that men are more often ruined, than from almost any other weakness of our fallen nature. Let the Word of God, or the preacher of that Word, describe the depravity, or the deceits of the human heart in what terms he may; let him prove it by argument; let him illustrate it by experience; let him establish it by the express declaration of the living God, it matters not; a large portion of his hearers will always rebel against it, will consi-

der it derogatory to the boasted dignity of human nature, and disparaging to themselves; and when warned of their danger, when cautioned against those sins which do so easily beset them, such is their blindness, that the first impulse of their hearts is, "Am I a dog, that I should do this?"

But, brethren, we trust that many among you have not so learned Christ; we trust you do not imagine that, if God's grace were withheld, there is any height of impiety to which you might not soar, any depth of iniquity to which you might not sink; for, be assured, that it is a peculiar feature in God's children, to be thoroughly convinced of this great truth. The belief of it, is perfectly consistent with the fullest dependence upon God, for grace to enable them to resist these evils, and the fullest assurance that, thus assisted, they shall resist them. Yet is it a delightful testimony to the true humility of their hearts, when they feel every day and every hour, their liability even to the widest departures from God, and their sense of this liability increasing, even while the probability of it is daily diminishing. How beautifully was this evidenced in the Apostles; although only

one of the twelve could have imagined himself capable of betraying his Master, every one of the twelve, asked in sincerity, "Lord, is it I?" knowing that there were depths in his heart, which Christ alone could fathom. So fully impressed was the martyr Bradford with the important truth of which we are speaking, that according to a well-known anecdote, while seeing a criminal carried past to execution, he could not help crying aloud, "There, but for Divine grace, goes John Bradford." He felt that it was God, and God alone, who, as he had at first made him to differ, so was he daily keeping him by his restraining grace, from those sins to which the flesh was continually lusting. How remarkable a contrast does this form, to the unhappy man of whose history we have been speaking. The one, blinded by the spirit of the world, believing that his very nature must be changed, before he could be guilty of such enormities as had been predicted; the other, enlightened by the Spirit of God, knowing that there was no iniquity too great, no sin too heinous, for his fallen nature to commit, if he were not "kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

But, important as it is to establish this principle in your minds, that it may lead you the more earnestly to watchfulness and prayer; if you are really desirous to know your own hearts in this matter, it will not content you to attain to this kind of general knowledge of yourselves. You will desire something more specific, you will not be satisfied with knowing that there is no part of the fortress which is absolutely impregnable; but you will be anxious, like a skilful general, to ascertain, in your own individual case, which are the weakest points, where the assaults of the enemy shall be most effectual, and the fiery darts of the wicked one take the most fatal effect.

This is sometimes a very difficult matter to determine, even for those who are the most sincerely and conscientiously desirous to ascertain it. You are, perhaps, externally at least, a good deal under the restraining power of religion, your most besetting sins are so cut, and pruned, and clipped, and kept down by different motives, some worldly and some religious, which, in the present state of Christian society, are more or less brought to bear upon all men, that it may not be easy, even for yourselves to deter-

mine, what those sins are which are in your hearts, and through which your spiritual enemy can make his most successful attacks. The Apostle to the Hebrews, seems to have an especial reference to this state of mind, when he says, "Looking diligently, **** lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Heb. xii, 15. Search carefully, lest although the branches have been cut off, and even the stem has been levelled, the root may remain in the ground uneradicated; and, lest this "root of bitterness" should, if it lie undiscovered in the heart, one day again spring up, and bear a fearful and a deadly harvest.

We proceed, then, to assist you to ascertain, in your own particular case—for this will greatly vary—what is this "root of bitterness," and what the class to which it belongs.

First, if you have at different times, while under the preaching of the Word of God, or in trouble or difficulty, or in any other of the circumstances of life, felt a desire to know more of God, to close with his offers of salvation, or, in the language of Scripture, to come to Christ, recollect what was that sin, or what were those

sins—for there may have been more than one, although there is usually one, especially prominent upon such occasions—which prevented you from closing with the offers of salvation, and being made one with Christ, and Christ with you. Why did you not at that time come? What was it which kept you back? Was it, as with the young man whom Jesus loved, your worldliness? Was it, as with Judas, your covetousness? Was it, as with Herod, your licentiousness? Was it, as with Pilate, your fear of the world? Was it, as with Hazael, your ambition? Was it, as with thousands, your immoral habits, or your worldly companions? Be assured, that whatever that sin was, which, when God was reasoning with your soul, was effectual in keeping you back from Christ, the temptation to that sin, however repressed and kept under, forms one of your greatest present dangers, is still lying hidden as a root underground, and is one of the points from which the devil most successfully urges his attacks.

Again; to learn still more distinctly what these roots of bitterness are in your heart, observe these two criteria:—Remark upon what subjects are your thoughts the most frequently

engaged, while in the midst of your occupations. Your thoughts are the immediate issues of your soul; as his thoughts are, so is the man; and as the first crush of the grape gives its strongest and sweetest flavor, so the first gush of thought, close to the fountain-head, before it has had time for mingling, or diluting, or diverting from external circumstances, or habits of self-control, will, more than anything else, tend to discover to you the nature of the fount from which it flows. The thoughts of the trifler, let him be employed how he may, are for ever breaking forth upon his dress, his furniture, his equipage, his follies; the thoughts of the covetous, are, in the same manner, continually returning to his profits, his wealth, his accumulations; of the licentious, to his past enjoyments or coming delights; of the designing, to his future schemes. Mark, then, to what subject your thoughts, when disentangled from immediate occupation, most instinctively turn, or most naturally and quickly fly, and, by God's grace, you will not long remain in ignorance of what is in your heart. You will ascertain, if you examine honestly, the state of the fountain, by the incipient state of the stream which gushes from it.—

If that be clear and pellucid, or if that be muddied and troubled, you cannot remain long in doubt of the state of the fountain-head.

But again; let me offer another criterion.— Observe what sin most interrupts you when engaged in holy duties, in prayer, in reading, in hearing the Word of God. Many a sin, the root of which lies concealed in the recesses of the heart, and of which, at other times, we never think, springs up at moments such as these, by the nurturing influences of our spiritual enemy; while that enemy obtains a temporary triumph, by the very unexpectedness, and improbability of the attack. Learn, therefore, to turn even these temptations of Satan, to the spiritual good of your soul; let them teach you how much of evil, even of the worst of evils, of actual profaneness and blasphemy, of atheism and hypocrisy, of insincerity and uncleanness, of ambition and worldliness, remains in the heart, or can find entrance into the mind, even of the renewed children of God, and let this humble you, and send you again and again, to the blood of sprinkling for pardon, and to the throne of grace for strength.

Lastly, brethren, having discovered by such

means as have now been pointed out, or by the still more painful method of actual transgression, what are those secret roots of bitterness which lie beneath the soil, always watching a favorable moment to shoot forth and spring up, let us inquire what should be our conduct with regard to them, how may we best hope, by God's grace, to succeed in utterly eradicating them.

Let us, to help us in the inquiry, look at the examples of the holy men of old. The great sin to which St. Paul, in the days of his spiritual darkness, had been tempted, and by which he had so fearfully been led away captive, was the sin of persecution; now you will observe, that in his after-life, he never forgot this; in all his confessions, the persecuting spirit which had once led him astray, finds a prominent place.— Thus we hear him at one time say, “When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death?” Acts xii, 20; at another, “who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor.” 1 Tim. i, 13. And again, on two different occasions, “who am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.” 1 Cor. xv, 9; Gal. i, 13. Whatever other sins he omit-

ted to enumerate, this was never forgotten, proving how prominent a situation it held in his recollection and thoughts. It had, no doubt, been long since repented of, long since blotted out in the pardoning blood of Jesus, expunged from the book of God's remembrance; but it was never eradicated from his own heart. So let it be with yourselves; the best preservative against the future inroads of sin, is to retain in the memory, and in the heart, a humbling, penitent, soul-abasing recollection of former transgressions. While rejoicing in the fullest assurance, for that is what St. Paul did, that you have obtained mercy, that you are actually and undoubtedly pardoned, let the recollection teach you, with a daily increasing gratitude to God, a daily increasing distrust of self; let it lead you to the duty of obeying the Apostolical injunction, "See that ye walk circumspectly;" Ephes. v, 15; and there are few ways of doing this more effectually, than by cultivating this recollectedness of mind with regard to former sins, for it will teach you to fly, as from a pestilence, every place, every person, every pleasure, every employment, which has, on past occasions, been to you a cause, or an encouragement of evil. Re-

member, as a fact which cannot be questioned, that many a sin, the very apprehension of which you would ridicule to-day, may, if God permit, be committed by you to-morrow. Therefore, "be not high-minded, but fear." Not only keep this humbling recollection of your past transgressions in your mind, but dread every approach to those sins which have so easily beset you, and the roots of which may, perhaps, still lie undiscovered in your heart. How strikingly was this state of mind exhibited by the Apostle Peter, after his repentance. Before his fall, his great temptation appears to have been, a false and carnal security; so confident was he of his own strength, so certain that he should never desert his Master, that his answer, when warned of his danger, was, in presumption and certainty, little short of that of Hazael, "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I." But after his fall and his recovery, even the thrice-repeated inquiry of our Lord, "Lovest thou me more than these?" almost, as it were, inviting him to a comparison between others and himself, could draw from him not one word that savored of his former sin; he had learnt, painfully learnt, to

make no more comparisons; so circumspect, so careful, so humble had he now become, and so anxious to keep at the greatest possible distance, from all that had once been his peril and his ruin.

Follow, then, these great examples, and though the flesh will still, even in the most advanced Christian, war against the Spirit, it shall no longer overcome. Stronger, far stronger is He that is with you, than all who are against you; and as you go forward in the Christian life, walking closely with your God, holding, as it were, by the hand, your guiding and compassionate Saviour, who has already taken away the condemning power of your sin, the reigning power of it shall be daily weakened, the roots of bitterness daily dug up and cast out, and the good seed shall bring forth daily, more and more abundantly, to the glory of your heavenly Father. Until, when the journey draws to a close, you shall find, to your unutterable and everlasting happiness, that every sin is vanquished, every enemy overcome, and that your place is appointed you among that "glorious Church, not having spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing;

but holy and without blemish," Ephes. v, 27; which the Redeemer, having purchased with his blood, shall present unto himself, as the partner both of his perfections and his joys, throughout eternity.

SERMON XII.

THE PENITENT THIEF.



ST. LUKE XXIII, 42.

“AND HE SAID UNTO JESUS, LORD, REMEMBER ME WHEN
THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM.”

THE chapter from which the text is taken, presents us with the most concise, yet affecting detail, of our Lord's sufferings and death to be met with in Holy Writ. We behold him in the presence of Pilate and of Herod, when, “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” We see him, after the unjust sentence had been passed upon him, so regardless of his own approaching agonies, that, while led “as a lamb to the slaughter;” he was able to warn, to exhort, to counsel, and to comfort others, as if their woes, and theirs alone, were the pangs that pierced his heart. But the most triumphant act of our Lord's earthly sojourn,

the act in which his mercy and love, his divinity and power, shone out with the richest lustre, as the last rays of the setting sun, surpass in loveliness all its mid-day splendor, was the act which fulfilled, and abundantly more than fulfilled, the petition of the text.

May the same Spirit who inspired the faith and dictated the language of that petition, be with us while considering it, and enable us to feel something of that holy love and confidence which, under such different and far less encouraging circumstances, possessed the heart of him who offered it.

In meditating, however, upon this remarkable incident, we must bear in mind, that perhaps, no circumstance of our Lord's life, has been so much misinterpreted and abused, as the conversion and pardon of the thief on the cross. Persons living a life of idleness and thoughtlessness, when for a passing moment troubled by the apprehensions of death and eternity, comfort themselves with the recollection of this dying malefactor, and believe that, because he so readily obtained mercy, they shall experience no difficulty in securing it. Others, again, who have sunk still deeper into sin, who have har-

dened their hearts against conviction, and are living in utter hostility to the Saviour of whom we speak, if ever they are disturbed by compunctious visitings of conscience, quiet these intrusions by the narrative before us, vainly hoping that what our Lord once did, and but once, under circumstances the most peculiar and remarkable that ever occurred since the foundation of the world, he is equally ready, at all times, and under any circumstances, to do again. While even the habitual formalist, the man who for years in succession attends the means of grace, and the ordinances of God, without deriving or attempting to derive the benefits they are intended to impart, without knowing more, or loving more, or obeying more, than he did when first he heard the name of Christ, still derives confidence from the pardon of the dying malefactor; and should he think at all upon the peril and uncertainty in which he lives, consoles himself with the idea, that if the last hours of the cross were sufficiently early for the penitent thief, the first hours of sickness, the first intimation of danger, will assuredly be sufficiently early for himself.

It is, then, as much with the desire of disa-

busing your minds of all such misappropriations of this instructive incident, as of bringing peace to the troubled soul, and comfort to the heart of the truly contrite, humble, believing penitent, that we have selected the case in question.

Our endeavor shall be,

I. To point out that, so far from the example before us, tending to encourage delay in the great work of repentance, and of turning the heart to God, if we attentively analyse the penitence of the dying thief, we shall discover in it all those component parts of a sincere and scriptural repentance, which, under ordinary circumstances, require the whole heart and soul, and mind, and strength, and which are scarcely ever manifested, when this great work is left to be achieved in the few short, dark, and delirious hours of mortal sickness.

II. We shall attempt to show, what lessons of comfort may legitimately be derived from it.

I. Observe carefully the very first words which are recorded of the dying malefactor. His companion in iniquity and in suffering, had been reviling Christ, even from the cross, and had united with the Chief Priests and Pharisees

in the last and most bitter taunts, by which they had added the "trial of cruel mockings," to the other agonies of the crucifixion, "He saved others, himself he cannot save;" "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." The penitent thief, "answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss."

Here are almost as many evidences of the operation of the Divine grace upon the heart of the speaker, as there are words in the sentence.

First, the knowledge of himself, and the conviction of his own sinfulness, "We suffer justly." He does not say, "You suffer justly," but we; acknowledging at once his own guilt, his own utter worthlessness and depravity; that he deserved, justly deserved, even the lingering and horrible death which he was then enduring.— Under whatever circumstances, a true repentance is exhibited, be assured that this will always form a distinguished characteristic, the deep conviction of our own sinfulness, and of the unquestionable justice of God, as manifested in our punishment. Tried by these tests, how

seldom will what is called a death-bed repentance, satisfy an impartial and candid inquirer.

It has been my painful duty, as a minister, to witness many such scenes, where, after a life of sin, or a course of forgetfulness of God, contempt of his Word, indifference to all his offers of mercy, through the appointed Mediator, a near view of eternity, “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,” have taken possession of the mind, and deeply affected the heart. But what has been the consequence? There has been indeed a most distressing development of the weakness of our nature, when unsupported by Divine grace, a most sensitive shrinking from death, and all that is to happen after death; but there has seldom been a single trace of that feeling of sinfulness and misery, that acknowledgment of the justice of God, that filial fear of God, which marked the penitence of the dying malefactor. So far from it, that in cases such as I allude to, the language is more frequently of a nature rather reflecting upon the injustice, than acknowledging the justice of what the Almighty has ordained; too often the dying man consoles himself with the retrospect of what he has not done amiss, the

reflection that he has not gone very widely astray, that he has injured no one, that he has been no man's enemy, that he shall not be punished, having "done nothing amiss;" or else he satisfies himself with a sort of general acknowledgment that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and then feels some degree of complacency that he does not except himself.

How different, how widely different, were the meekness, the contrition, the self-condemnation, the heartfelt bitterness of this confession, "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Though the nails had pierced his hands and feet, though bleeding at every pore, he felt it all too little for his deservings. Who could doubt the sincerity of such a man's repentance?

But there is far more even than this in the case before us; this indeed marked a godly sorrow, a true "repentance towards God," but there was that also, which evidenced a genuine "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" a faith so remarkable, originating at such a moment, and exercised in such a manner, that we may safely challenge the whole world to produce its parallel. The dying malefactor, having testified his sense

of his own unworthiness and guilt, and having declared, that the fear of God restrained him from adding yet another sin to his already deeply-laden account; having reproved the obduracy and profaneness of his companion, and having publicly acknowledged his conviction of the perfect innocency of Him whom he had beheld, scourged as a slave, and now hanging disgraced upon the cross as a criminal, "this man hath done nothing amiss," turns to that apparently helpless and expiring sufferer, and in one single sentence acknowledges his kingly power, and his unquestionable divinity, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Is it possible, under all the circumstances, to conceive an exercise of faith more satisfactory or more complete? At a time when the disciples had forsaken their divine Master, and fled from the dreadful scene; when even the women, those who loved him best, and clung to him the most closely, "stood afar off beholding these things;" when, upon this world's surface, there appeared not another human being, to exchange even one word of common sympathy with the helpless sufferer; here was a man who addressed him in the language of humble, faithful prayer;

acknowledging him as his king, his friend, his God. Not a trace of doubt is visible in that remarkable petition, "when thou comest." He was as confident of the Saviour's reign, and of the Saviour's kingdom, as if, with Stephen, he had seen the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

How wonderful must have been the influence of the Spirit of the Most High upon that man's heart, to have produced such a prayer, at such a moment! so much faith, so much importunity, so much humility. He does not ask to sit on the right hand of Christ, or on his left, as James and John had asked, although he had indeed done what they at that time had never done—he had drunk of the same cup of agony, and been baptized with the same baptism of suffering, as his Saviour and Redeemer—but all he asks is, to be remembered; to have a place in his Lord's recollection, a portion in his Redeemer's heart. He seeks no diminution of those protracted and indescribable agonies, through which he was passing, and it is worthy of observation that he received none; his miseries were lengthened out, as those of the impenitent and hardened malefactor; his legs also were

broken by the Roman soldiers; he died the common death, with pains unmitigated and sufferings undiminished, but there was no syllable of repining, no murmur of discontent; though he lived on through those dark hours of agony, his voice was heard no more; all his hopes and his desires were for eternity; "when thou comest into thy kingdom, remember me;" that will be time sufficient; I am content to be forgotten now, if I may but be remembered then.

Who can be surprised that such a petition was most amply granted: "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

If, brethren, you ever are inclined to strengthen yourselves in a false security, or in worldly indifference, by the example before us, and to think that faith and repentance cannot come too late; we would entreat you, honestly and carefully to examine all these particulars of the incident, from which you draw encouragements for your delay, and we firmly believe that the impression left upon your minds would be, that if you are ever to attain to the blessed assurance vouchsafed to the dying malefactor, you cannot begin too soon: that there is a holy hatred of sin to be attained; a recognition of the Divine

justice; a simple, confiding trust in the Redeemer; an earnest desire, as the fruits of this faith, to benefit our fellow-creatures; a calm and peaceful looking to eternity; and an indifference not only to the honors, and pleasures, and advantages, but to the ills, the miseries, and the sufferings of this world; each and all of which, were most eminently manifested by the dying thief, and to attain which, you will find, that the fullest powers of the mind, the warmest affections of the heart, and the earliest and most anxious solicitude, will not be too powerful, too ardent, too early, for the great work to be achieved.

Perhaps, from the view which we have taken of this deeply instructive narrative, some may be led to inquire—are there, then no encouragements to be drawn, no consolations to be derived by the sinner, even at the eleventh hour, from so glorious a display of his Redeemer's power and mercy as this affords him? We will not reply, that there are none; but, we candidly confess, that, as faithful interpreters of Divine truth, we cannot venture to assert, that there are many. When all the circumstances which were combined, are taken into consideration, although

we will not say, as one of the older writers of our Church upon this subject has beautifully said, "Christ must die again, and thou must be crucified with him, before such a day as that shall come again; for, although on the days of coronations, and great espousals, the streets be hung with tapestry, and the prisoners be let loose, and the conduits run with wine, yet if a man be cast into prison, at any other time, he will be left to be executed, and if a man go to the conduits at any other time, he will find only water." Although we will not presume thus to limit the infinite grace of our Redeemer to that tremendous day, and to that solemn hour; we would most earnestly entreat you not to trust to such another day, and such another instance. We grant that a true repentance cannot come too late, but who is to ascertain that a late repentance is a true, and therefore an acceptable repentance? Who is even to insure to you the opportunity of this late repentance? Doubtless the bed of sickness has often been made the blessed scene of a total change of heart and affections, and some most eminent instances might be given of repentance vouchsafed, of grace offered and accepted, of pardon most mer-

cifully bestowed within the walls of the chamber, from which the sinner is to go no more out again, into the follies and the allurements of the world; but we ask, Who will insure to you the certainty even of a bed of sickness, much less the certainty that Divine grace, so frequently neglected in health, shall be at that season forced upon your acceptance? Are there no sudden deaths? Are there no instances of a few hours', or a few days' illness, during the whole of which the sufferer is absolutely incapacitated from every degree of mental exertion, by bodily languor or by bodily pain? And will you run the hazard of an eternity of happiness, against such a probability as this? Could any thing short of mental aberration, induce you deliberately to make such a choice? Imagine even the very best alternative that can await you, and how little comfort does the prospect hold forth. Perhaps, after living a life of sinful forgetfulness of God, you may be brought during the few painful and melancholy hours, which mark the close of such a life, to a knowledge of the Redeemer, to a deep conviction of sin, and to some degree of love to God, and of meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. How difficult, in such a

case, to ascertain what is really the effect of Divine grace, and what the specious counterfeit produced by the dread of death, the terrors of approaching judgment. As the ministers of Christ, we may leave you in hope of the never-failing mercies of an infinitely merciful Redeemer; but seldom indeed can we, in instances such as these, assure your own minds; seldom can we comfort your weeping friends by any thing beyond a hope, a faint and doubtful hope, which the heart indeed, in every case, loves to cherish, even while the mind and judgment stand tremblingly aloof, and refuse all share in the decision. While even the language of hope itself, loses much of its hilarity and joy, from the recollection, How many similar instances we have witnessed, in which returning health has brought back returning worldliness and sin; while every trace of faith and penitence, which we had so highly valued on the bed of sickness, and from which, if the sinner had died, we should have ventured to deduce our hope of his salvation, has utterly and for ever disappeared.

Do you then ask, brethren, what comfort you may derive from the narrative we have been considering? One important lesson to be de-

rived from it, is this—That if our gracious Redeemer could thus readily, pardon the dying malefactor, who had never, probably, until those hours of agony, heard of the name of Christ, and who at such an hour might be glad to cling to any hope, much more will He accept and pardon you, whatever be your sins, however great, or however habitual and confirmed, if you now come in the days of health and happiness, with the same penitence, and the same faith, offering, from a broken and contrite heart the same petition, “Lord, remember me.”

This is a lesson which the incident we have been considering, well may teach us; this is the consolation which it may really impart; but if you will only look to it for future succor, for pardon at the eleventh hour, for acceptance when the few remaining sands of life are quickly ebbing from the glass, be assured that you are leaning upon a broken reed; and that, if you persist in the delusion, the sin, the misery, the disappointment must be your own.

The present moment, then, is the only time at which we can insure to you the fulfilment of the petition in the text. Make it your earnest, faithful, heartfelt petition now, and it will

not, cannot be denied you. Say, Lord, behold my sinfulness, behold the hardness of my heart, the coldness of my affections, the waywardness of my will; behold all my poverty, all my necessity; see my utter inability to help myself, and “remember me.” “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mightest be feared;” O bestow it upon me. There is grace with thee, that thou mightest be loved; O deny it not to me. There is pleasure at thy right hand for ever; O give me my portion there, and I will ask no more; only, “Lord remember me,” now thou art in thy kingdom. The answer to such a prayer will be, for these are the words of Him to whom you pray, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” I have gone to prepare a place for thee, that where I am, there may also my servants be; Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. For all that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. Cleave to me with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy strength; and when

thy heart and thy flesh fail thee, I will be the strength of thine heart, and thy portion for ever. Such, in effect, is the gracious answer which our Lord has vouchsafed to thousands of his praying people, and such will he this day vouchsafe to you, if you, from a contrite and believing heart, present the petition of the text.

That you may be enabled by Divine grace, so to do, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XIII.

SIGNS THAT WE ARE "IN CHRIST JESUS."



1 ST. JOHN II, 5. (Part.)

"HEREBY KNOW WE THAT WE ARE IN HIM."

To be, what in Scripture phraseology is termed "in Christ Jesus," i. e. to be a partaker, by faith, of that union with the Saviour, which the Word of God continually presents, and for which the Church of England continually prays, is the one great and leading anxiety of every truly enlightened mind. The reason for this anxiety is obvious, it is in Him alone that we can possess that righteousness which will satisfy God, for the Apostle says, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God, in Him." 2 Ep. Cor. v, 21. It is in Him alone that we can stand the scrutinising eye of our Judge, and be secured

against the vengeance of a broken law; for, the Word of God says again, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Rom. viii, 1. It is in Him alone that we can be preserved from the devices of our spiritual adversaries, the iniquity of our own hearts, and the fiery darts of the wicked one, for the same inspired Word has said, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." Prov. xviii, 10.

This being, then, to the spiritual reader of Holy Writ, an unquestionable truth, a truth most merciful and most consolatory, a truth which the renewed mind receives without hesitation, and without distrust, it is not my intention to endeavor to demonstrate it upon the present occasion, but to apply myself more immediately to the direct purport of the text—"Hereby KNOW WE that we are in Him." The consideration, therefore, not of the great, and unspeakable, and inestimable benefits of being in Christ, but of the method whereby we may *ascertain* that we are ourselves, individually, partakers of it, is what I desire especially to bring before you.

May the Holy Spirit of God accompany these

reflections to every soul among us, with his especial blessing; to you who are really "in Christ Jesus," and know it not, and therefore enjoy but a very small portion of that peace, and happiness, and abiding consolation, which ought to be your own, by making you sensible that you are even now partakers of this indescribable mercy, which shall, by God's grace, issue in your infinite and eternal felicity; and on the other hand, to you who are not in Christ Jesus, that you may learn the important truth, that there is far, far more in religion, than you have ever yet experienced, and that, while you are contenting yourselves with the mere outward form and ceremonial observance, with the mere shell of the imperishable fruit of Paradise, there is that within which you have never tasted, a reality and a sweetness, a consolation and a joy, which you have never found, of which you have at present no experience, and in your present state can form no conception.

The method in which we propose to investigate this subject is, by bringing forward certain evidences, with which the word of God has furnished us, upon this peculiarly difficult, and yet important question; hoping, thus, that we may

be enabled to expose the false professor to his own heart, while we trust we may be permitted at the same time, to establish and comfort the true.

I. There is a very common mistake, which greatly increases the difficulty of the subject before us, viz., that the visible Church of Christ, and the invisible Church, are one and the same thing. The truth is, that although the visible Church includes the invisible, they are by no means synonymous, since, while many are "in Christ," by an outward profession many of these same persons are not in Christ by a true, and living, and obeying faith; are not, therefore, partakers of that spiritual union which binds the real believer to the Saviour, as the living branch to the living vine, to which our Lord so beautifully compared himself. St. John xv, 5. Indeed, were it otherwise, the words of the text—and there are many of a similar tendency—could never occur, since the very fact, that all to whom St. John wrote, were baptised and professing Christians, would establish, beyond question, that they were all "in Christ," as spiritual Christians, and therefore would render every evidence of such a fact, useless and unnecessary.

So far from this being the case, the Epistle before us is full of these evidences. For instance, "We know that we have passed from death unto life," not because we have been partakers of the Sacrament of Baptism, but, "because we love the brethren." Again, "Hereby know we that we are in Him, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

Taking, then, these declarations of the Word of God for our guide, we would commence, by asking each individual among you, **WHEREBY** know you that you are "in Christ?" What reason have you for thinking so? Are you satisfied of the fact, because you have been made a partaker of the Holy Sacrament of Christian Baptism? or because you have joined a Christian congregation, or been partaker, with them, of Christian ordinances? Alas! a moment's reflection will convince you that this is insufficient; have we not reason to fear, that some of the most deeply ruined, of those who have perished everlastingly, have done the same? Let us, then, advance a little further into the inquiry.—Do you imagine that you have been in Christ from your earliest infancy; or, have you any

just ground for hoping that you have become so, within your own recollection?

We do not say, that there are none who can reasonably believe that they have been "in Christ," using the phrase, as the Apostle uses it in the text, in its highest spiritual meaning, even from the hour of their baptism, because we firmly believe that there are such instances, in which the grace bestowed at the baptismal font, has remained, shedding its blessed influence throughout the years of the future man. But these, we fear, form the rare exception, not the general rule; and, therefore, we rather address ourselves in this discourse to the great mass of Christian hearers, than to the few who have been thus highly favored; and we would ask you, who are not conscious of this early renewal unto holiness, and the consequent sanctification which attend it, whereby, know ye that ye are in Christ? Or, which is the same thing, that you possess a true, a living, a saving faith in Him? The first sign, which we would propose to you, to assist you in answering the inquiry, is this—

I. The manner in which you became possessed of this faith.

II. The preparation of heart which went before, or accompanied it; and

III. Some of the features of this faith.

I. We would inquire, was your faith wrought in you, or confirmed in you, by reading the Word of God, or by hearing it faithfully preached? Did this convince, and humble, and incline you to seek Christ as a Saviour? or, if it was not the primary instrument, employed by God in this great work, has the revealed Word tended to confirm and establish your faith? We mention this, first, because it is God's usual method of bringing his people within the blessed relationship, of which we are speaking. Afflictions, trials, sorrows, are all made subservient by God, to the preparation, and promotion of this faith; but his Word emphatically says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God;" Rom. x, 17; and again, "Of his own will begat he us, with the WORD OF TRUTH." St. James i, 18. So, faith was wrought in the three thousand converts, on the day of Pentecost, by the preaching of Peter; so St. Paul's faith was confirmed by the preaching of Ananias; so, Lydia's by the instructions of St. Paul; so, the Eunuch's was wrought in him

by the teaching of Philip; and the same of many others. Now, if you think that you are "in Christ," i. e., that you possess this saving, justifying faith, and yet have no recollection how, or when, or where you obtained it, we have almost as much reason to suspect its genuineness as we have, when a person possesses goods of which he can give no probable account, to suspect that they do not rightly belong to him. While, therefore, we most certainly would not say, that you must necessarily remember the day and the hour when, or the preacher by whom, this great work was wrought in you, you must, if it be a genuine work, know something, either of its origin, or its confirmation. There must be a distinctive feeling in your mind, that whereas you were blind, now you see; that old things have passed away, that all things have become new; that you are now enabled to discover something of your own heart, with which you were not always acquainted; to know something of the heinousness of sin, of which you were formerly ignorant; and to feel something of that Scriptural love to God, as revealed in the person of his Son, something of the unspeakable preciousness of a Saviour,

which you could not always appreciate; and that the Word of God, either read, and meditated upon with prayer in private, or heard and attended to, Acts xvi. 16, in the public ministrations, was the instrument blessed to this great end.— This, then, is the first sign upon which, with a confidence proportioned to its clearness and certainty, you may lay your hand, and say, “Hereby, I know that I am in him.”

Most earnestly would we beseech you to consider, after you leave this house, the sign of which we are now speaking. If you have never read the Word of God with serious and devout attention, and fervent prayer, to find what is the mind of the Spirit; if you have never dwelt frequently upon those truths, which you have heard in the house of God, is it not evident that you cannot really, savingly be “in Christ?” You have obviously cut yourself off, from the only two means, which God has vouchsafed for communicating to man, His will. You cannot suppose, for a moment, that God has vouchsafed you a distinct and separate revelation, and therefore there is no alternative; it is undeniable that you have no share, at present, in that mercy of which you have, perhaps, been fully persuaded,

that you were in complete and undisturbed possession.

II. The second sign to which we shall advert as an evidence, by which you may know whether you are "in Christ," or, whether Christ be truly yours—for in Scripture, the phrases are synonymous—is, if your heart were ever prepared for receiving Him, as the stones were prepared for Solomon's Temple, or as a palace is prepared for the residence of a king. It was prophesied of our Lord, that at his coming, "Every valley should be exalted, and every mountain and hill should be made low;" Isaiah xl, 4; metaphorical language indeed, expressive of the manner in which the roads, over which the ancient monarchs were about to travel, used in those days to be prepared for their passage. But, however metaphorical, no doubt strictly applicable, not only to the coming of Christ in the flesh, but to his coming by faith into the heart of every believer. The way must be prepared for him, by that blessed Spirit, from whom alone, as the Word of God assures us the preparations of the heart," Prov. xvi, 1, proceed. Every mountain must still be laid low at the Saviour's approach; every high thing, and every

haughty thought, which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, must be cast down.

For instance, you once, perhaps, esteemed yourself sufficiently holy, sufficiently righteous, from the honesty of your intentions, and the integrity of your life; perhaps, like the Pharisee, you thanked God that you were not as other men are; these swellings of self-righteousness, then, are the mountains which must be laid low, so low that they must be completely levelled, that not a single thought of your own worth, or merits, or righteousness, may raise its head against the entrance of your Lord; so low, that instead of saying, or even thinking, that you "are rich and increased with goods," you must feel in your inmost soul, that you are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" Rev. iii, 17; ready to say with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, which thou hast showed unto thy servant;" Gen. xxxii, 10; with David, "I am a worm, and no man;" Psalm xxii, 6; with the Prodigal, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son;" St. Luke xv, 19; with St. Paul, "of sinners I am chief;" 1 Ep. Tim. i, 15. Has this, then, been in any degree the case with yourselves? Are you

conscious of any such "preparations of heart" as we are describing? or, while imagining that you are "in Christ," are you still of a high look, and of a haughty carriage before God; still satisfied with your own righteousness, of which you have never yet seen the emptiness and insufficiency, never yet trampled it into the dust, beneath the cross of your Redeemer? And do you imagine that Christ has passed over these mountains and taken possession of your heart? Be not deceived, it cannot be; wherever he comes, he levels all before him; remember his own words, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children,"—pride and self-righteousness are no infant sins—"ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." St. Matt. xviii, 3. Again, while every mountain must be brought down, every valley must be exalted, all low and despairing thoughts, so dishonorable to God, must be eradicated, that these low places, to carry on the metaphor, may be filled up with the "unsearchable riches of Christ."

These "preparations of heart" do not usually stand alone, they are often strongly mingled with grievous and trying visitations of spiritual sorrow, and the fears of eternal condemnation, the

dread of not being accepted, with which God frequently penetrates the heart before he bestows Christ upon us, as the plough is driven through the hardened land, before the corn is sown. For be assured that a broken and a bleeding Saviour will enter only into a broken and a bleeding heart; broken for its sins and from its sins; bleeding with pain and anguish, at its long hostility and alienation from God.

The evidence of which we are now speaking, is a very important one, and one which we cannot but fear, is much neglected at the present day. There is no doubt, that a certain class of religionists were in the habit of dwelling too exclusively and too systematically upon it; and this is probably the reason, that the natural reaction in the human mind has taken place, and that it is now so much overlooked and undervalued.

And what is the consequence?—that the work of grace in too many instances, is no longer the deep, heart-searching work of the Spirit of God, which it used to be, in the best days of the Church of Christ, and which it must be, in every case that shall survive, but a slight, superficial, notional thing, if not wholly seated in the ima-

gination and the head, floating only on the surface of the affections, and not going down into the recesses of a prepared and softened, and therefore "an honest and good heart." It is thus, that there never was a time when persons professing religion, were so carried about by every wind of doctrine, so unsettled in their creed, and so unstable, consequently, in their practice, as at the present moment. Never, therefore, was there a time when it was more essential to look well to the ground-work of religion in the mind; to examine its foundation in the heart; to see whether, in our own case, there has been this preparing work, of which we are speaking, or whether, like too many around us, we have shot up at once, with an unnatural precocity, into the heights of its privileges, or the depths of its mysteries, or the mazes of its speculations, embracing its consolations and its joys, but knowing little, very little, of those preparatory feelings of deep compunction and godly sorrowing for sin, of self-loathing, and self-abasement, and self-distrust, of which, to a greater or less degree, every true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must be partaker. Of this, then—not indeed when standing alone, for there

may be all these convictions of sin, without a true and scriptural conversion—but of this, if it be found in us in conjunction with the other signs of which we are now speaking, we may safely predicate, in the language of the text, “HEREBY we know that we are in Him.”

III. Proceed we to the consideration of the third sign, which we have mentioned, as enabling us to adopt the declaration of the text, viz.,

From some of the peculiar characteristics of our faith. True faith, generally speaking, has a time of infancy as well as maturity. It is not born a perfect man. In the natural world, such a sight would be as monstrous as unnatural;—in the spiritual world it would be little less.

The fabled goddess of the heathens sprung into life perfect in every point, and even armed from head to foot, but this is not the case with the faith of the Christian. Be careful, then, of an error, not very uncommon at the present day, that the only true and desirable faith is that which is perfect and complete at once, attaining to as full an assurance, the moment it is born, as after years of Christian practice and Christian experience. That such a faith, so full and com-

plete, in its maturest fruit, may occasionally be vouchsafed, we will not dispute; but that it is not the usual method in which it is described in Scripture, we are equally certain. It is there likened to the grain of mustard seed, which our Lord tells us is among the smallest of all seeds, so that you can scarcely discern it, and that thus it is with faith, the believer being scarcely able, at first, to ascertain whether he possesses it. That, as the minute seed becomes, in time, the strong and flourishing plant, so the feeble faith becomes, in due time, under the fertilizing effects of the Spirit of God, the strong, and stable, and durable tree. Like the new-born infant, which can neither speak nor stand alone, but is carried in the arms of others, and lives upon nothing but the simplest aliment, feeding and crying occupying the first and earliest hours of life; such is, generally speaking, the true and genuine faith of the infant believer; an alternate state of hungering for the Word of God, and of sorrowing for sin; unable to stand alone, looking for the aid of stronger Christians, to bear it up, glad of every little help to carry it forward on its infant course. It is often, also, a weeping faith, full of doubtings, temptations, and fears,

as the poor man in the Gospel cried, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." St. Mark ix, 24. This is, in fact, the manner in which our Lord perpetually speaks of it. He does not compare it to the "burning flax," but to the "smoking flax," smoking with the desire after God, but the fire not strong enough to flame with comforts. He does not compare it even to the reed in its natural state, which, at the very best, is so weak a thing that a bird can scarcely settle upon it, but to the "bruised reed," the very feeblest thing we can imagine. But while this is the infancy of faith, if it be a true faith, every day, and every hour, is giving it strength, and bringing it forward into manhood; it does not lie in the heart like a stone, unchanged and unchangeable, but like a prolific seed in the fertile earth, realising what St. Paul expresses, when he says, "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Rom i, 17. from one degree of faith to another, and well exemplified in the spiritual life of Nicodemus, whose faith was at first so small, and timid, and shrinking, that he dared not visit Christ, until the darkness of night could shroud him from the eye of the scoffer; and yet we find, that this

same trembling disciple, could, but a short time afterwards, go openly to the Roman Governor, with Joseph of Arimathea, in the hour of our Lord's greatest humiliation, and of his disciple's greatest danger, and boldly beg the body of his Saviour. What a remarkable proof that his faith had not been stationary! Does, then, your own experience, testify to any thing resembling this, in your Christian life? Do you remember the time when your faith was so weak, that you dreaded to be thought more in earnest, or more anxious for the salvation of your soul, than those around you; and are you now, through grace, comparatively indifferent to human opinion, and ready, cost what it may, to confess Christ before men? Be thankful to Him from whom this increase comes; it is the Lord's own work; to him be all the glory!

‡However possible, then, it is for faith to grow with such rapidity, that the hour of its birth, and of its maturity, may be too closely allied to be distinguished, we believe *that* faith to be the safest evidence, as it usually is the most permanent grace, which increases gradually to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Ephes. iv, 13, producing "first the blade, then

the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear.” St. Mark iv, 28. While the faith, which, like the gourd of Jonah, springs up in a night, like that same gourd, too often perishes in a night; unnatural and early ripeness bringing with it unnatural and early rottenness.

The faith of which we are speaking, has usually its infancy and its increase, but in both of them, before it can form a satisfactory evidence, it must possess this unfailing characteristic; it must be perfectly simple in its object. It must look to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to Him alone, for all it seeks for here, for all it hopes for hereafter. The very weakest faith will realise, and, if genuine, must realise, this as surely, and as savingly, as the very strongest. But do not deceive yourselves, my beloved brethren, nothing is so easy to describe, nothing so difficult to possess, as this child-like, simple grace, of which we are speaking—the direct act of the Spirit of God upon the heart. Examine yourselves most carefully upon this head, pray to God to probe your hearts, and to lay them open to your own apprehension. See that there be nothing mingled with the only object of the Christian faith—a suffering, a crucified, a

risen, and a returning Redeemer. See that while one eye is fixed upon Him, the other be not turned inward upon yourself, to unite any, however small a portion, of your own work to his great, and perfect, and finished sacrifice. If, after diligent and prayerful self-examination, you are enabled to say, I desire to trust in none but Christ; I desire to be taught by none but Christ; I desire to be ruled by none but Christ; I desire none but Christ for my consolation here, I desire none but Christ for my security, and my happiness hereafter. However faint these feelings may be, however weak or minute be their apparent hold upon your heart, be not cast down; they are the "seed of mustard," they are the "smoking flax," they are the "bruised reed;" and you may say of the weakest, and the frailest faith like this, "HEREBY I know that I am in Him," even in Christ Jesus, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher. I trust, that I shall not be in Him to-day, as a dear and pardoned child, and out of Him to-morrow, as a cast-off and ruined reprobate; surely He who has sown in me the seed, will not forsake me before that seed be a tree, and has brought forth fruit to

life everlasting: He will complete that which he has committed to me, He will keep that which I have committed to Him, against that day.

SERMON XIV.

(CONTINUATION.)

SIGNS THAT WE ARE "IN CHRIST
JESUS."

1 ST. JOHN II, 5. (Part.)

"HEREBY WE KNOW THAT WE ARE IN HIM."

IT was my endeavor, at the opening of the last discourse from these words, to demonstrate, first, from Holy Writ, that to be "in Christ Jesus," i. e., to be united to him by a living and saving faith, evidencing itself in all holy conversation and godliness, was the highest privilege of man. Next, to show, that it was an unquestionable scriptural truth, that every such believer in Christ Jesus, or, in Bible phraseology, all who are "in Him," may arrive at the comfortable and blessed knowledge that they are in Him; and lastly, from different evidences

with which the Word of God has furnished us, to assist you in determining, each for himself, this great and unutterably important point. Our object, in selecting the subject, was not only the obvious one, to which we alluded in the last discourse, viz., the conviction of the false professor to his own heart, and the comfort of the true; but still further, to endeavor to meet the objections, first, of that large class of sincere, but ill-instructed persons, who imagine, that no presumption is so great, as that of endeavoring, while on earth, to ascertain, with any degree of certainty their state as regards eternity, by showing these persons, from the Word of God, that it is the direct intention of the Spirit of God that all true Christians should arrive at this most comfortable conclusion; and next to endeavor to disabuse the minds of another and very different class among our hearers, of an error extremely prevalent, that no evidences must be sought, to prove that we are in Christ Jesus: that the very search is a strong criterion of a legal spirit, and shows that we are yet mere babes in the knowledge of Divine truth.

The evidences which we have already brought before you to establish the important fact that you are "in Christ," are these:

I. Have you any recollection of the time when, or the manner in which, you were first led to seek Him, or have since been confirmed and strengthened in your knowledge of Him?

II. Are you conscious of any "preparations of heart," any compunctious visitings for sin, and godly sorrow for it, any reduction of self-righteousness and bringing down of the high look and haughty carriage of the natural heart, as preceding and accompanying the reception of the Saviour? And,

III. Are the features of your faith such, as the Bible always attributes to that grace, when it is the genuine work of the Spirit of God; for instance, its original weakness and feebleness; its perceptible increase; and the undivided oneness, the complete singleness of its object, desiring to "know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

We proceed now to offer two more features, by which the genuineness of your faith may be determined, forming, therefore, two more evi-

dences whereby you may know that you are "in Christ Jesus." These are, obedience and love.

I. Obedience. "Hereby we do know, that we know Him," says St. John, "if we keep his commandments." 1 St. John ii, 3. And again, "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him." 1 St. John iii, 24. Obedience, then, may be considered as a very satisfactory evidence that you are "in Christ." But you will observe that the obedience, which can alone be considered as a feature of that faith, which demonstrates that you are in Christ, is of this nature; it is an universal obedience; it has respect to all God's commandments; it consists in a settled resolution in the strength of the Lord, to forsake all sin, and a settled purpose, and determination to please God in all things. You will, perhaps, ask, Is then the possessor of this obedience expected to attain perfection? We reply, certainly not! There is no man, that liveth and sinneth not, and if we say, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But, perfection, although not to be attained here below, is to be perpetually aimed at, and striven for, in obedience to our Lord's

command, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." St. Matt. v, 48. The obedience of which we speak, differs from all other obedience in this respect, that it does not willingly tolerate a single sin; God has expressly said of all his spiritual children, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts;" Heb. viii, 10; i. e., I will implant in them a spiritual knowledge of my laws, and a hearty desire and inclination to fulfil even the least of them; it is in reference to this that St. James says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." St. James ii, 10. Where he evidently does not and cannot mean, that he who breaks a single commandment, is guilty of breaking all, but he who allows himself in the willing and habitual transgression of a single command, proves by this fact, that although he does not actually break the whole law, his heart is not upright before God, and that there is no security against his breaking every other command, if the temptation and opportunity were afforded him. You will, therefore, at once perceive the nature of your obedience, if you are in Christ, and if you are not in Christ. If you

are not in Christ, you may make many resolutions against those sins which have injured your property, your health, your character, and we believe there is scarcely an individual living, who has not made some such, yea, many such resolutions; but even as respects these, your resolutions will not be so much against the sins, as against the disgrace and punishment of them. But it will never be an universal resolution, there will always be a reservation in favor of some secret, and most endeared lust, there will be some sin, which, even when most in earnest, you do not intend really and for ever to give up; and if you examine your own heart strictly, and probe it thoroughly, you will be conscious, even at the time, that there is some cherished sin, of which you say, as Jacob said of Benjamin, "This shall not go." Some sin, to which you will cling as Herod, who, although we are told that he heard John gladly, and did many things, still had one beloved lust in reserve, which he never intended to give up, and which was ultimately the ruin of his soul; as Judas, and the young man in the Gospel, clung to their covetousness, and Demas to the present world; until each of these persons, all professors of re-

ligion to a certain extent perished in his iniquity. Wherever this is the case, it is not the obedience of which we are speaking, it is no evidence at all that you are "in Christ;" and however you may deceive yourself with the idea, that God will accept this partial obedience, be assured his Word is true, when it declares that though the sinner "bless himself in his heart; saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." Deut. xxix, 19, 20.

How different is the obedience of a child of God; although there is much weakness, there is no intentional reservation; there is a holy resolution, made in the strength of God's good Spirit, to give up all sin, however dear, and however cherished, at his command. The sins which have been most favored, and have hitherto led you captive the most willingly, will be the most dreaded, and the most denied; yes, they will be the very first, which you will devote as a thank-offering to your God. You will pray against all sin, but you will watch daily, hourly, momentarily against these, with an unceasing

watch, and an unsparing warfare. If unholy tempers have most easily beset you, you will earnestly watch against the first hasty word, or uncharitable expression. If sins of licentiousness have polluted you, you will dread even an unchaste thought, and shrink from all approaches to an immoral word or action. You will, even, as Job declares that he did, "make a covenant with your eyes," that you may avoid the poison which so quickly passes from the eye to the heart. Thus it will be in all things; if you are "in Christ," while trusting to His righteousness, and to that alone, wherein to stand before God, you will be as anxious in the work of your sanctification, as if you were absolutely dependent upon its tattered shreds, for your wedding garment. Yet, in all this, you will be so far from any thing like self-righteousness of spirit, that there will be no one who can hold your obedience of so little value, in point of merit, as yourself. No one who can more truly say, than you will yourself humbly acknowledge that you are still but "an unprofitable servant."

From obedience, we pass to the second feature which we have enumerated, even love.—That this is a sure and certain sign of a true and

living faith, is distinctly proved by St. Paul, when he declares that "faith worketh by love." That it is also a scriptural evidence of our being in Christ, is stated by St. John, when he says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." 1 St. John iii, 14. And again, "Every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God." Ibid. iv, 7.

We shall consider love, then, as the next evidence that you are "in Christ," and although St. John, in the words just quoted, speaks exclusively of the love of the brethren, it is obvious that this must be preceded by the grateful love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, for he says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God;" speaking, therefore, of love to God, as essentially necessary before we can love his children. Are you, then, at all conscious of this love to God? Loving him, or rather desiring to love him, with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength? Delighting to dwell upon all his mercies to you, especially those of redemption, with continual thankfulness and joy? Able to say, with the Psalmist, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God?" And again, "Whom have I in heaven but thee,

and there is none upon earth whom I desire in comparison of thee?" Realising, in fact, the declaration of St. Peter, "To you who believe, He is precious?" This is a test most trying, even to the deeply-spiritual and renewed mind. Who can answer satisfactorily to his own feelings upon this point? Who does not feel that his love to God is the coldest, weakest, most humiliating portion of his Christian life? We have all an abundance of love, for every poor, frail, undeserving object who approaches us; but how little, how less than little, for Him who deserves all we have ever felt, or ever can feel? How does the excess of our affection for earthly objects, condemn the defects of our love to Christ, because it so clearly proves that it is not the want of the power to love which precludes us, for we can all love strongly, deeply, permanently when any of the works of his own hand are the subjects of it, and yet we cannot warm our hearts to any thing which deserves the name of love, when God himself, in the person of his dear Son, offers himself to our affections and our heart.

But, let us pass from the love of God, to the love of his ordinances. How will you answer

to this test? Are you able, instead of thinking the worship of God a weariness, or his service a restraint, to long for it, and delight in it, to hail the Sabbath morn with pleasure, not because it ushers in a day of idleness, but a day of holy communion with your God? Considering, not how small a portion of this day will satisfy Him, but how large a portion you can render him; loving the sound of the Sabbath-bells above all other music, and the courts of the house of our God, above all other assemblies.

When this love of ordinances accompanies the love of Him who is the Lord of ordinances, it is a valuable test; it is one to the faithfulness and truth of which ten thousand hearts, blessed be God, are on this sacred day responding throughout our Christian land, and to the reality of which, not a few among yourselves, no doubt, are at this moment testifying.

But the love of which we speak is, as we have seen, not confined to the love of God, or of his day, or of his ordinances; it regards, especially when spoken of as an evidence by St. John, the love of the brethren, for, as he again declares, "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." 1 St. John v,

1. This sign, from the frequent reference made to it by St. John, we believe to be a very important one, a mark which is often to be found in the true child of God, when other evidences are, for a time, clouded and indistinct. The reason, probably, that this sign is so prominent, in the epistle before us is, that it was the evidence peculiarly manifested in St. John's own life and conversation, for we know, from the earliest Church history which has been bequeathed to us, that his single monition, whenever in extreme old age, he entered the society of his brother Christians, was this reiterated expression of affectionate good will—"Little children, love one another." That, as an evidence, it is as important, as it is obligatory as a duty, is clear from this reflection, that it is utterly impossible, to love the grace of God in the heart of another, unless the grace of God be shed abroad in your own. It is, therefore, a remarkably conclusive test; you will never see a man of the world who can stand this test. Observe, generally speaking, the open and undisguised hostility, the ill-concealed sneer, the bitter sarcasm, with which such men speak of the people of God. The very thought of them is wormwood

and gall; and although the men of the world may, in some companies, be compelled to listen to their praises, or even to add their own faint approbation to the heartfelt commendation of others, it is too evident by the pleasure with which they hear of the real or imaginary delinquencies of God's people, that, as David said, "Though the words of their mouth be smoother than oil, there is war in their hearts;" war, which, unless the usages of society controlled it, and the power of God kept it within its present boundaries, would even now break out, as of old, into acts of persecution, as well as words of bitterness, against the peace and happiness of God's Church. The love, therefore, of the brethren, is an evidence of spiritual life, continually referred to in Holy Writ, and upon which the most humble-minded believer may look, with thanksgiving and gratitude, to Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.

Remember, however, that before you can with any degree of safety, say of this love in your own case, "HEREBY I know that I am in Him," it must possess these two qualifications: It must be a spiritual love, arising from the image of Christ reflected by those you love: and it must

be an universal love, not to one, but to all our Lord's redeemed family. The reason is obvious. You may love the brethren because they are amiable, or clever, or entertaining, or useful to you, or because they are strongly attached to yourself, and able and willing to promote your worldly interests; but this can form no evidence that you are "in Christ;" for our Lord has expressly declared, that it is only when you receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, that you may hope for a prophet's reward; it is only when you receive a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, that you can look for a righteous man's reward; this, therefore, must be a spiritual love. It must also be an universal love, since if you love the people of Christ, because they are the people of Christ, the same reason which exists for loving one, exists for loving all; for the Apostle to the Corinthians says, "We have been all made to drink into one spirit." You will, therefore, love the people of God under all circumstances; for instance, though they be hated and despised of others, as much as if they were the objects of universal regard and esteem; you will love them, though they be poor in this world's goods, though they have

many infirmities, though you have never even seen them, and have only heard of them by the reports of others. If they are in necessity, you will supply their wants to the very utmost of your power, yea, and even beyond your power, as St. Paul declared the Macedonian Churches, 2 Cor. viii, 2, 3, had done. You will delight in their society, infinitely more than in the society of the great or the wealthy, or the learned, or the entertaining; you will endeavor to unite yourself to them, as David to Jonathan, in a friendship which neither time nor eternity shall sever. With regard to all other society, you may tolerate it, but you will be unable to love it; you may endure it, but you will not seek it; for "what communion hath light with darkness? and what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" says the Prophet Amos. You will, indeed, love all men with a natural love, and in your necessary communion with them, you will exercise kindness and urbanity towards them. You will manifest your religion to them, under as agreeable a garb as it can wear, consistently with strict integrity and uprightness;

remembering that the corn and the tares must grow together till the harvest, that the iron and clay must be side by side, although they never can incorporate; and, therefore, in all your intercourse with the world, you will act like men who are guided by this affecting consideration—if these tares remain tares, they must inevitably be burnt up—if this clay remain clay, it must one day be ground to powder. For the sake of the Lord our God, I will therefore seek to do them good; but I will have no part or lot in them, lest when the destroying angel come, he see not the blood sprinkled on the door-posts, and I be destroyed with the Egyptians. Such a reflection as this, while it makes you walk most anxiously yourself, in your Redeemer's footsteps, will fill you with a strong feeling of tenderness and pity, "towards them that are without." Col. iv, 5. You will imitate the example of St. Paul, who evinced his deep and earnest desire for the conversion of his bitterest enemies, when he exclaimed before Agrippa, "Would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am." And could he feel thus for his greatest enemies and persecutors, and can

you, if you are in Christ, be indifferent as to the religious state of your friends? Are you daily and hourly, it may be, closely and intimately associating, from necessity, with those whom you fear have no saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, and does this excite no feeling of sorrow in your heart? is there no secret prayer for them? no effort to bring them within the fold, in which you have partaken of the green pastures, and sat beside the still waters? and is your wife, or your husband, or your child, or your parent, or your friend, in such a state? Then, brethren, mourn for your want of love to a tenderly beseeching God, to a crucified Saviour, to a perishing soul. Can you endure the thought, that any with whom you are now in habits of necessary and perhaps affectionate intercourse, should dwell amidst everlasting burnings? They cannot feel for themselves, they are blinded by the god of this world, but cannot you feel for them? Be assured, all is not right in your own heart if you do not; if it be thus hard, thus callous, to the fate of others, surely it is not the same "mind which was also in Christ Jesus;" Philip. ii, 5; who expostulated, and entreated, and wept, and prayed for those who were without, even to the last

hour of his mortal existence; and, in the overflowings of His own sufferings and woes, felt as acutely, as tenderly, as He had ever felt, for the souls of others. If this, therefore, be wanting, be assured that one test, one very striking test, is absent, of which to say, "HEREBY I know that I am in Him."

The last sign of which we shall speak, and of which we must speak briefly, is that declared by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." There are, we believe, at the present day, those who maintain that this is the only evidence to which we can truly refer, for the knowledge of our interest in Christ; thus denying every sign which can be drawn from the fruits of the Spirit. Surely this is, as if they were to aver that the fruit, when hanging in large and living clusters from the growing vine, could still form no sufficient evidence that the tree was alive. The whole of this Epistle is far too complete a refutation of this error, to render it needful for me to do more than to allude to it.

The sign of which we are now speaking, is distinctly referred to in the sixth chapter of this

Epistle, "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

You will, perhaps, ask, If the Spirit of God is to bear witness with my spirit, how am I to ascertain that it is indeed the witness of God's Spirit, and not a delusion of Satan?

We answer, by these marks following:—

I. The Holy Spirit of God witnesses only by, and according to, the revealed and written Word of God.

His method of witnessing to you that you are "in Christ," is simply by discovering the promises in the Word to your consciences; persuading you that they belong, not merely to the Church in general, but to you individually; convincing you, that your sorrow for sin has been real, your love to the brethren sincere. Whenever he bears his witness, he fills your heart with love and thankfulness to God, and a desire after more holiness of life, and more consistency of obedience. But on the contrary, if you are made more bold and presumptuous, by what you consider the witness of the Spirit; if you allow yourself, with less anxiety, in the commission of any secret sin; if you grow more

careless and remiss in your secret duties, more indifferent in your prayers, more cold in your love, more regardless of your temper, less conscientious in your dealings with your fellow-men, more anxious to be thought the favorite of God, than to secure, and to enjoy, and to live upon His favor; we do not scruple to say, that the witness within you is a false witness, a messenger of him who was a liar from the beginning, and that you are listening to your ruin.

If any are still of opinion that notwithstanding these marks, there must always be some difficulty in ascertaining the genuineness of the evidence in question, we would rest the matter upon this single consideration:—Can you for a moment suppose that God would promise you such an evidence as that of his Spirit, witnessing with your spirit, that you are in Christ, and yet should not possess the power, or the inclination to convince you when the promise was fulfilled? No; be assured, that the witness of the Spirit always brings with it its own witness, even a secret manifestation and assurance to the conscience, that it is the Spirit of God, and not a delusion of Satan.

Upon this, therefore, you may rely, without hesitation, and without reserve, for doubting the possibility of such an evidence, is as dishonorable to God, as it is prejudicial to your own spiritual peace and comfort.

My Christian brethren, the evidences whereby you may know that you are "in Christ," deduced, as we believe, simply from the Word of God, are now before you. All that is required of you is, to take these evidences home to your secret meditations and prayers. Try them, not by human systems, however highly approved, but bring them to the test of God's written Word; if they speak not according to that, reject them at once—there is no truth in them. Make this search, not in your own strength; "ask of Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not," to reveal these things to you. You are each and all, either in Christ, or you are out of Christ; there is no third position in which any human being can stand. If you are not in Him, we need not tell you that your baptism has been fruitless, your religious profession an empty name, as empty as the sounding brass, or the tinkling cymbal; a worthless counterfeit, which may deceive and satisfy you

here, but which will utterly fail you on the great day, and leave you the helpless object of God's inextinguishable justice.

Would to God that something which has now been said, might strike home upon the hearts of such among you, and convince them that they are at present destitute of all which can make their death peaceful, and their eternity happy: that they are sowing to the wind, and must inevitably reap the whirlwind. While, to you whose hearts can answer to all, or to any of these evidences, what peace, what consolation, what unspeakable joy may be your own, while saying, under the teaching of God's good Spirit, "Hereby I KNOW that I am in him." Knowing this, you know that secret of contentment and comfort here, which the world can neither bestow nor value. Let "the potsherd's strive with the potsherd's of the earth," as the Prophet says: while in the sea of politics, or in the troubled waters of worldly ambition, whether it be of power or of wealth, they are wasting their little hour, and vainly imagining they are seeking all that is worth attaining, He who sits in the heaven laughs them to scorn; the Lord has them in derision. One poor peni-

tent sinner, received into Christ's holy and happy fold, is of more account in the sight of the God of heaven, than all the bustling, intriguing, worldly-wise, and worldly-prudent men, who are stirring heaven and earth for some poor perishing object, which is, when seen in the light of eternity, of as little value as the child's bauble, or the school-boy's rattle. While the object which you are seeking, and which many of you have doubtless found, is daily and hourly increasing in interest and in value, as life and time, and all belonging to them, are wearing fast away. Every day is strengthening your hold of this object, and increasing your joy, and bringing nearer its complete and final consummation. You are "in Christ" now, one of his mystical body, his redeemed people, his first-born Church. Where shall you be, what shall you be, when the earth, and all that is therein, shall be burnt up? Where shall you be, and what shall you be, when millions upon millions of unnumbered ages shall have rolled away? Blessed be the name and promises of our God, "in Christ," still perfected and glorified, but still a member of the same Church, and rejoicing even for ever, and for ever, in the presence

of the same Saviour. And will you now go away and be as careless, and as thoughtless, and as worldly as those around you? God forbid! If you know that you are in Christ, live to Him, honor Him, glorify Him, long for the day when that, which the Spirit of God has now revealed to your own heart, shall be revealed by the voice of Christ himself, to assembled worlds, and he shall say of you, while heaven and earth are passing away, and all that hath been is no more, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

SERMON XV.

THE MINISTER'S LAST WISH FOR HIS
PEOPLE.

1 COR. 1, 3.

“GRACE BE UNTO YOU, AND PEACE, FROM GOD OUR
FATHER, AND FROM THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

It is a custom sanctioned by antiquity, and endeared by the earliest and fondest recollections of the human heart, that relatives and friends, upon the different joyous anniversaries which mark their lives, should meet with mutual expressions of affection and good-will. In youth, these congratulations partake of the thoughtlessness and joyousness of all around us, and are generally limited to the many wished-for returns of the festive day, or to many years of health and prosperity. As we advance in life, especially if we advance also in Christian knowledge, and Christian love, these anniversaries

partake, if not of a solemn, at least of a more sober and subdued character, while our former vague expressions of good-will, become gradually moulded into benedictions and prayers; and we meet on such occasions, with the feelings of persons, who hoping to dwell together throughout eternity, cannot be satisfied to limit their good wishes, to the transitory scenes of this mortal life, but are anxious to carry them forward to that blissful and boundless state which lies beyond it. That such was the feeling of the Apostle towards those to whom he was writing, the benediction of the text abundantly testifies; he was evidently anxious, from the overflowings of a warm and affectionate heart, to convey to those he loved, so far as his sincere aspirations could convey them, the same spiritual gifts and graces, and anticipations of happiness, which he himself possessed, and delighted in, “with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”

Upon this day, then, beloved brethren, the tenth anniversary of our union as minister and people, it is not unnatural that our thoughts should be mutually occupied with feelings and wishes such as these. That, as your minister, appointed by God, and as one who “must give

account," Hebrews xiii, 17, I should, from the very ground of my heart, humbly, yet fervently desire, that this aspiration, for all and every one among you, should be heard, and for the sake of our blessed Mediator, registered for fulfilment in the courts of the heavenly temple—"Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

To some, perhaps, it might, on such an occasion as the present appear more appropriate, that I should revert to the many failures and shortcomings, the infirmities, disappointments, and sins, which have marked my ministry among you, rather than permit my feelings to take the shape of a benediction: but deeply penetrated as I trust I am by the recollection, and pained by the sense of these things, I feel that they are not the subjects to bring before a congregation; they are indeed of the highest interest, and of the deepest import to my own soul; but as it is "with me a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment," for "He that judgeth me is the Lord," so it is with me a very solemn conviction, that these topics are not calculated for the pulpit, but should be confined strictly to the secret intercourse between God

and our own souls. It is enough, upon this head, that I have been "with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," but that we serve a Master who is touched with a feeling of all our infirmities, and whose blood cleanseth from all sin; a Shepherd full of tenderness, and full of love, to whom we must one day give an account of our ministry; and, blessed be God, to whom we would rather render that account than to the kindest, dearest, most sympathising of earthly friends, with whom God has ever blessed us.

Upon the present occasion, then, I shall confine myself to desiring for you those abundant blessings, to which I have already adverted, and which are so concisely, yet fully, comprised in the text.

Let us commence by considering, generally, what is implied in the language of the Apostle.

I. "Grace be unto you."

Who can correctly define, who can adequately expatiate upon that word, so sweet, so endeared, so comprehensive—the grace of God! It is not health, it is not honor, it is not fame, it is not riches, but it is something which as infinitely outweighs, and as immeasurably excels them

all, as the soul outvalues the body, and as eternity outmeasures time. For, if the Word of God be true, Divine grace is the very life of the soul; we are utterly lost, until grace seeks and finds us; we are entirely dead, until grace raises and quickens us; we are irrevocably ruined, until grace redeems and saves us. All mercies, all duties, meet and are concentrated in this little word; and, in wishing you the fulness of grace, we desire for you, on the part of God, the largest abundance of His love to you, filling your heart, and, on the part of man, the largest returns of your love to Him, filling your life, and exemplifying itself in your daily walk and conversation.

II. "Grace be unto you, and peace."

These blessings, the Apostle knew were sometimes separated. There are many who, in seasons of spiritual desertion or temptation, possess grace, but have no peace; and again, there are many living in carelessness and indifference, with hearts unchanged and minds unrenewed, who possess peace, such peace as the world can bestow, although they have no grace. In the benediction of the text, both are united, that it may at once be visible, that the grace, which St. Paul

desired for his converts, was that grace which would sooner or later, bring peace with her into the heart, as her holy and happy handmaid; and the peace which he desired for them, that peace which could not exist long in a state of separation from her mistress, but wherever grace entered, would unquestionably enter in her train.

This double blessing, the Apostle speaks of, as flowing from a double spring, "Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." From God the Father, because he bestows them upon us of His own free will, and from God the Son, because He works them in us, by his own free Spirit.

Having observed thus much generally upon the different portions of the Apostle's benediction, let us proceed to consider them a little more in detail.

I. In saying, "Grace be unto you," we would desire from God our Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would render you by the power of His Spirit, partakers of that grace of God, which justifies you, or enables you to be accounted holy before God; that grace which brings you at once to the Lord

Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, the curse of sin being removed, the guilt of sin washed away, the power of sin and the predominancy of sin in your heart, being for ever broken.

We trust that as regards many to whom we are now speaking, the object of this benediction has been already accomplished, but must we not at the same time fear, that there are still some in every Christian congregation, to whom it is experimentally known?

Do I address none among you, who are yet at a distance from Him, who said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me," and, therefore, are still at a distance from God? None who are content if they perform the external duties of religion, and avoid all gross and crying immoralities, and yet cannot for a moment imagine that they have ever received the offers of a crucified Saviour, and entered into close and intimate communion with Him? You have, it may be, constantly attended a house of prayer, you have, therefore, offered many petitions, you have heard many discourses, in which the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, to accept and justify your persons, has been clearly

pointed out to you; you have even, perhaps, approved of what you have heard, pronounced it to be agreeable to the revealed Word of God, and yet it has effected no solid and substantial lodging-place in your heart. Your affections are unrenewed, your temper unimproved, your lusts unconquered. What good then has been wrought by all the ministrations at which you have been present? Have you reason to hope, that you have been rendered, in any degree, more meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light? More conformed to the will of God, more likened to the image of Christ Jesus our Lord? No! yourselves being the judges, you confess that you are not. You may, indeed have attained to a greater knowledge of God's Word and God's will, but the Bible assures us, that "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness," and your heart remains unchanged.

Surely, then, as the "Helpers of your joy," 1 Cor. i, 24, we have great and pressing reasons for offering, as we do this day from our inmost heart, the benediction of the text, "Grace be unto you."

Brethren, however lightly the world may

regard the connection between minister and people, however lowly it may estimate the ministerial office, we cannot but feel the connection to be one of the most solemn, most endearing relationships which can occupy the heart of man, and the office the most sublime which can engage his powers. The revealed Word of God is the foundation of this feeling, for it has placed the ministerial office in a point of view the most exalted and the most impressive. It does not indeed tell us, as a new, and, as we believe, an erring party in our own Church, is at present telling us, that we are "intrusted with the awful and mysterious gift of making the bread and wine, Christ's body and blood," and that we "have power over the gifts of the Holy Ghost," with many other assumptions more worthy of the darkest days of Popery, than of the Gospel light in which we live, but it does tell us, that "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us;" 2 Cor. v, 20; and it does commission us to "pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." It urges us, as "Workers together with Him, to beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." 2 Cor. vi, 1. Surely,

then, it is an especial portion of our duty, as the minister of God, to endeavor to impress upon you your need of the blessing in the text. For can there be a more affecting feeling to the heart of a minister, than the thought that he speaks, week after week, to some who do not hear, to some who will not hear; while he knows that the day may come, and deeply fears that it must come, when God shall say, judicially, of all such, "They shall not hear." Is it not sufficient most deeply to pain our hearts, to know that he who stands before you, as the ambassador of Christ, bringing his offers of grace and peace freely to every soul among you, may hereafter be compelled to confront you as your accuser; to prove that you were plainly warned, that you were strongly counselled, that you were affectionately entreated to receive the grace of God, and that you listened, agreed to the propriety, confessed your necessity, and then calmly and deliberately put these offers from you, and waited for a more "convenient season."

If you are conscious that this describes your own state at the present moment, how earnestly would we beseech the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ, that you might no longer hesitate, no longer procrastinate, but to-day, while it is called to-day, be united to Him in a bond which shall never be broken, and be made the recipient of his renewing, justifying, sanctifying grace.

But, the Apostle, as we have seen, did not confine his good wishes to his converts, merely to an abundance of grace, valuable as is that blessing; he also desired for them "Peace:" "Grace be unto you, and peace." Here, however, we must for a moment pause; we have besought of God for you all, without distinction and without reserve, a large portion of His grace; to the ungodly, converting and renewing grace; to the godly, sanctifying and supporting grace; but we dare not be thus general, in our petitions for the blessing, of which we are now about to speak. We cannot venture to desire "Peace," indiscriminately for all. Were we to wish, "Peace," for any of you, brethren, who are still separated from God, still unrenewed, and unjustified, living in the world and to the world, it would be to ask for you the heaviest of ills, the most bitter of all maledictions. Such a peace the prophet Isaiah has not scrupled to designate

as a "covenant with death, an agreement with hell;" the strongest mark of displeasure with which an offended God can visit you, is to establish this covenant, to respect this agreement, to perpetuate this peace. No, my brethren, to you who have not been made the subjects of God's justifying and sanctifying grace, we wish any thing, every thing, but peace. We do so with the sincerest feelings of affection and love, and this, not merely to your perishing bodies, but to your undying souls; we desire for you, every cross, every sorrow, every trial, every disappointment, every arrow with which the quiver of God is charged, until some one may pierce your heart, and the hand which holds the bow may pluck you as a brand from the burning, and place you in safety upon the Rock, where alone to be at peace, is to be eternally and unspeakably happy.

We charge you, above all things, beware of the peace of the world; it is a dying, fading, transitory thing; nay, it is worse than this, it is a betraying, deluding, eternally-destroying thing. We do not tell you that the world can give no peace; the lives, and even the deaths, of many of its most devoted followers would contradict

us; it can give a temporary repose, as even our Lord himself acknowledged, when he said, speaking of the "peace" which he bequeaths his people, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." It does continually give it; it presents it as one of the most common, as well as the most noxious of its immunities; it holds the poisoned chalice to the lips of all its votaries, and if you have not drunk it, the grace of God has alone prevented you. This peace of the world, although but temporary, lasts often to the very verge of time, so that even inspiration itself has declared, that "the wicked have no bands in their death." Lide the bird, of which travelers tell, that fans its victims with its pinions, until their sleep be sound, while it draws the life-blood from their body, and gives them no waking moment, until their temporary slumbers are made perpetual, by the cold hand of death; so does the world lull into slumber the poor deceived soul, and keep it thus, in an unbroken calm, even to the solemn moment, when it awakes in eternity, and its peace is for the first time broken, by the worm which shall never die, and the fire which shall never be quenched. May God, in his infinite mercy, preserve us from

such a peace as this: so far from wishing it to be the portion of any among you, we most earnestly pray God that you may never be the objects of it, or, if you are for a time soothed by the spirit of the world in which you live, into slumbers such as these, that you may be aroused, awakened, and for ever disenthralled from its dreadful fascinations.

When we say, "Peace be unto you," then, we address those only who have been the subjects of that justifying and sanctifying grace of which we have already spoken. The desire of our hearts for you this day, is "peace." Peace in life, peace in death, peace throughout eternity; we believe that we can ask for you, from the treasury of God, no higher, richer, or more satisfying portion.

Peace in life, we pray may be yours; peace in all the increasingly difficult duties, with which as we advance in years, life must abound. May every duty to which you are called, however difficult, or however harassing, reflect, in passing, such peace upon your conscience, that you may find, as David found, that "IN KEEPING God's commandments there is great reward," and that, at the close of your course, you may be enabled

to say with St. Paul, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."— Again, peace be yours, peace in all the trials, and sorrows, and disappointments of life, that peace "with which a stranger intermeddleth not," which flows from the sense of God's pardoning love, of your union with Christ, of your promised and approaching felicity. A peace which the heaviest storms shall not disperse, nor the wildest tempests terrify. A peace which shall outlive all trials, all sorrows, all disappointments, which shall gain fresh strength from every visitation, and shall become more firm, and solid, and unchangeable, as all earthly props are taken from you, and all worldly comforts fail.

Peace in death, we pray may be yours. Dying grace for a dying hour. We shall all greatly need it, for we shall have that to do which we have never done, and which our finite powers are but little calculated to achieve; to meet the last enemy, to fight, to conquer, yea, to be more than conqueror through Him that loved us. Then will be seen, as Moses said, "Who are the Lord's, and who is holy;" Numbers xvi, 5;

who have received the offers of a Saviour, and been clothed in the garments of salvation, and made meet to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Many of you, who have never before known peace, shall know it then; and some, perhaps, be permitted to feel such happiness at that solemn hour, as one who has now departed to his rest, felt, when he thus expressed himself on the eve of nature's dissolution, "Is this dying? would that it might last for ever!" For be assured, that however great your dread of the last enemy may now be, his terrors shall lose their power as he approaches, and you shall find, that as Satan is but a chained lion, so death is but a stingless serpent, to you who are "in Christ Jesus." For has He not revealed that He came to "Deliver them who, through fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage?" Heb. ii, 15.

Lastly, Peace throughout eternity, we pray may be yours. Yes, beloved brethren, this is the consummation, and nothing short of this is the consummation of our desires and prayers for all, and for each of you, peace throughout eternity. Having enjoyed peace in the perform-

ance of all duties; in the endurance of all trials; in the resistance of all temptations: and having experienced its solace on the bed of sickness, and at the hour of death may you enter upon that eternal and unbroken "rest which remaineth for the people of God:" that peace which no sin shall interrupt, no sorrow sully; that peace which has existed through all eternity, and shall exist through all eternity, in the immediate presence of the Triune Jehovah, in the Church of the First-born, for which all church-membership on earth, is the preparation, and of which it is the faint and imperfect type. That will be, indeed a glorious day, when prayer shall be exchanged for praise; when discourses, dark and imperfect discourses, concerning God and his Christ, shall give place to the open vision of Him, to seeing with our own eyes, the "King in his beauty," to hearing with our own ears, the blissful accents of his voice; when sacramental recollections of Him shall cease, and we shall sit down at His table, and be partakers of his throne; when these earthly temples, in which we have so often and so long delighted to meet together for the worship of God, yea, when all temples shall

have passed away, no longer needed; for we shall "see no temple there, for God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

May these holy services which we have been permitted to commence together, be perpetuated in the far more perfect and blessed services above. May many among you be then "our joy and crown of rejoicing;" and may we be yours, when ministers and people shall meet in the presence of Him, whose name we bear, and whose love shall be the everlasting subject of our song; when that grace, which we now desire for you and for ourselves, shall be exchanged for glory, and that peace, for ever perfected in the eternal mansions of our Father's house.

THE END.

